

Pure Dog Talk 451 – Your Pandemic Puppy

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Laura Reeves:

Welcome to Pure Dog Talk. I am your host, Laura Reeves, and one of our very favorite returning guests, Dr. Marty Greer is here today, and we're going to talk about a holiday gift options, including, I'm very excited to say, her very brand new book, Pandemic Puppies, which I just think is so incredibly timely and so cool. So welcome, Marty. How you doing?

Dr. Marty Greer:

I'm doing great. Thank you so much for having me today.

Laura Reeves:

So this is a project that you and I actually talked about early on. So I am so thrilled that it is actually here and happening.

Dr. Marty Greer:

Yeah, it's quite fortuitous. Back in March or April, when my travel got curtailed with Revival Animal Health and everybody else's travel got curtailed. And we were in our veterinary clinic only allowed to see sick patients. We weren't allowed to do any routines, spays and neuters or routine vaccinations. If your dog was due for rabies, you could come in. If your dog was due for distemper, you couldn't. So that significantly changed our flow of patient care and my travel changed. So I thought, "Well, I've got a little time on my hands. So I need to rewrite the puppy materials that we use in our exam room. So I'm going to ride a little 20 page doodad little booklet that we can use for our clients." It needs to be updated because flea and tick medications are new and vaccine protocols have changed and spay and neuter information is different.

So there's been enough changes, I thought, "Yeah, it's time to do this." So I sat down and started writing it. And then one day I was talking to Laura and I said, "I have this really neat idea for a book that would be targeted at generations of dog owners. Because millennials own dogs differently and select dogs differently than boomers and boomers are different than gen Xers. So I would like to write a book." And she said, "Well, let me get you in touch with Denise Flame, who can help you with a publisher." Well, I talked to Denise and she's like, "No, no, no, no, no. We're going to do this as the Pandemic Puppy." So it is now published. Officially came out on Wednesday as Your Pandemic Puppy. So I'm super excited about it because it's not only a book on how to select a dog, but how to raise a dog based on behavioral and veterinary up-to-date information. And in dealing with the COVID changes, that it incorporates those as well. So it's pretty comprehensive.

Laura Reeves:

I love that. So talk to us about some of the things that you incorporated into this that are specifically pandemic puppy? Some of the things that we've all talked about, the socialization is different. All of that.

Dr. Marty Greer:

Right. Socialization is different. But at the beginning, we have a different way that we're selecting dogs. So we can start there. It's different selecting a dog right now because the rescues are wiped out. Nobody has any dogs. If the shelters had dogs, they put them into foster care. So the foster homes are full, but the pets are not available at the shelter

because they were trying to cut down on traffic through there. And the breeders cannot possibly keep up with the demand. Everybody that has been putting off, having a puppy with their kids or their spouses, or maybe they're a single person living by themselves. And they're like, "No, I don't really have time for this right now."

Everybody has time now because their work schedules have changed. Their school schedules have changed. They're working from home. Things are completely different. So getting a dog right now, puppy or adult dog is really difficult, because the demand has skyrocketed at a time that people weren't prepared for that. It takes four months from the time of dog comes into heat until the puppy is ready to read the breeder. And the females only cycle twice a year, maybe once a year. So it's not like you can just say, "I'm going to put semen and a dog and miraculously a puppy is going to pop out and be ready to leave." So it's a 63 day pregnancy and another, typically eight to 10 weeks before the puppies leave. So it's a long process.

Laura Reeves:

And so finding people who are in a position that have bred letters, just finding dogs is more challenging and sourcing responsible breeders, more challenging. All of those things, definitely.

Dr. Marty Greer:

Right. And the travel to get ... there's limits on travel too. People used to hop on an airplane and just go get a puppy. It doesn't work that way anymore.

Laura Reeves:

You can't do it. And in some cases, even driving. Driving across the country can be really challenging depending on where you're going to and coming from. Because of different levels of state restrictions in different areas of the country. So some of these places say, you have to quarantine if you come in or when you get back or what have you.

Dr. Marty Greer:

Right. So it's made it a lot more difficult. People are met with some challenges that they weren't foreseeing back in January and February. It's a lot different. So selection is different. And then socialization absolutely has changed. It's a lot more difficult to get into a dog training class. Many of our states are restricting the number of people in a gathering. So dog training classes are out or limited. It's a lot harder to socialize your puppy with other puppies and other people, if you can't get into an in-person class. So there are some options and we'll talk about those, but it's different. So it does require some creativity and some inventiveness to come up with some solutions.

Laura Reeves:

So Marty, do you talk at all? I know this has been sort of discussed within some of the circles that I'm involved with, the concept that is it necessarily a good thing that everybody wants a puppy during a pandemic. That maybe your life is going to change back, and then what happens to those puppies? Is that something you talk about?

Dr. Marty Greer:

It is. Because that's another concern that a lot of people who are heavily in the dog community are concerned about is what happens when people go back to work or to school and their lifestyle changes or their job disappears, and they don't have the income, or they get transferred across the country because now the job that they had before isn't happening in their homes. So they've got to relocate. So we do talk about that in the book, and it is a real concern because we don't want these dogs ending up in mass numbers, going into rescue, going back to shelters or going back to breeders.

So yes, we've talked about that in the book as well and how you can arrange your lifestyle with someone coming into the home to help take care of dogs. If you start to go back to work and you need a middle of the day dog walker, or your schedule changes and you have evening events. So there's a lot of different activities that need to be addressed. And yes, those are discussed in the book for some options for people to come up with for solutions. Because the last thing anyone in the dog community wants is for this beautiful generation of dogs to end up as a glut back in the shelters.

Laura Reeves:

Right? Exactly. And so, one of the things I found most interesting when you and I were first talking about this is your observation as a, what is it? 30, some odd year practicing veterinarian, about the different habits of different generations of puppy buyers. So can you talk a little bit about that, sort of what you see and how those differ specifically?

Dr. Marty Greer:

Sure. One of them starts with obtaining a dog. I see a lot more boomers selecting a specific breed of dog, saying that they want to know what their dog is going to be predictably. They may tend to select a purebred dog or a purpose bred dog, a dog that was deliberately bred, even if it's doodle of some type or some other combination. Because the predictability, when you're a boomer is really important, especially for size activity and coat care. You get to an age when you're 70 and you pick out a dog that you thought was going to weigh 40 pounds as an adult and it turns out to weigh 120 pounds. So you get the dog when you're 70, by the time you're 80, the dog is 10 years old and now the dog needs physical help moving around the house and you're 80 years old and you physically cannot help a 120 pound dog up the stairs or into the car to go to the vet.

So I think predictability is important to the boomers and in a way that has not been appreciated fully outside the veterinary community, because this is the discussion that we see frequently. The millennials tend to be a little more likely to get a rescue dog. And part of it is that's a generation, and I'm not trying to lump everybody together, but this is sort of trends that we see. A generation that feels warm and fuzzy about saving a life.

Their impression is that if they take a dog from a rescue, instead of from a breeder, that a dog won't die in place of the dog, that they just adopted from a breeder. And their ability to manage a dog that has some unpredictability for behavior, size, coat care, activity level, those types of things, is a little bit better because if you're getting a dog when you're 35 and the dog turns 10, and you're 45, you've still got the physical ability to take care of a larger dog or manage a dog that might be a little bit more rowdy or a little more hard to leash train and things like that, then you could do as a boomer, especially in the ends of those boomer age ranges.

I'm smack dab in the middle of boomers. But there are boomers who are in their eighties. I actually have a client that was here this week he's 90 on Monday. And every dog he has in his house is young and huge. He has Bernice mountain dogs and Newfoundlands, multiples of each. So he's a pretty ambitious guy, but he's also physically able to do things that very few 90 year olds are physically or mentally able to do. So it's really important that if you're a boomer and you need a dog that's not going to weigh more than 12 pounds and isn't going to shed, and isn't going to knock your friends over when they walk in the door, that you have the ability to select that dog.

And what's really important that I emphasize in the book is there's no right answer or wrong answer for where you get your dog. There's nothing wrong with getting a purpose bred dog. There's nothing wrong with getting a rescue dog. They just come with different sets of situations that you need to be prepared for before you make a decision that this dog is going to live with you for the next 15 years.

Laura Reeves:

And so you're the end of the boomers, I'm the start of the gen Xers. So where do you see, I guess my generation, that sort of middle group falling?

Dr. Marty Greer:

Yeah. And you kind of go both ways and I'm not saying that we don't see boomers that get rescue dogs, and I'm not saying we don't see millennials that get purebred dogs, because we see crossover. But you're kind of in the middle. And we do see both of those, but you again are in an age group that the generation of dog you're getting now that lives to be 15, you're going to be approaching the years that you may have some physical limitations, but you're still pretty capable of taking care of a larger, giant breed dog. And most people in the 90 age group, wouldn't be able to do that. If you're in your fifties, you probably can. The other thing I think we've seen as veterinarians, and again, I don't want to classify everybody, put everybody into one pot.

Laura Reeves:

No monoliths here, but.

Dr. Marty Greer:

Yeah. But we do tend to see more rescue dogs, dogs that came through human relocation or whatever term you want to use for. Dogs that weren't purpose bred. We do tend to see more of those dogs having behavioral issues of anxiety, fearfulness, and sometimes even aggression. And we don't really know where these dogs came from genetically, behaviorally, their epigenetics. There's a lot of factors come into play. And like I said, I'm not putting everybody in the same pot, but if we're going to see a dog that's fearful, anxious or has aggressive tendencies, it's more likely a dog that came from an unknown breeding source. And those dogs, not only do we not know their genetics, but we don't know how they work raised, socialized, transported and managed as young dogs when they were at the fearful stages that we see as very young puppies and then again at 18 months of age.

So again, I think it's important that people, if they do decide to take a dog, whether it's from a breeder or a rescue or humane society, that they have a pretty good idea of how this dog is, behaviorally. Have they been assessed behaviorally with what happens if somebody takes their food bowl away? What happens if a little kid on their ear? What happens at a strange person comes in the door? Because every day in the exam room, I'm in exam rooms with dogs that I walk in the room and I can almost nail down what their source was because of their behavior and the exam room. That's a disappointing and scary thing to say. And a lot of these dogs are with people who aren't getting the kind of behavioral counseling and medications that they may need.

So a lot of these dogs can be helped significantly with the right classes and with the right medications to help with their anxiety and fearfulness. But sometimes clients don't know that a veterinarian can help them. Sometimes veterinarians don't have the information they need because they're not experienced at behavioral care. And sometimes people are just kind of embarrassed or they make excuses for the dog. "Well, it's really not his fault. He came through rescue. It's really not his fault." Well, when somebody gets bit, it doesn't matter whose fault it is. What matters is somebody got hurt. And we as veterinarians need to stand up and start taking a role in this dog's behavioral health, because that's every bit as important as their physical health and keeping them in a household where they are well adjusted and safe for the people and safe for themselves.

So veterinarians need to take a strong role in this and owners need to ask their veterinarians, or there's actually an association of veterinary behaviorists that have members all across the country. So if you're struggling with this, this is something that these group of veterinarians that have very high skill levels in these modifications of behavior and medications can be really skilled at making a difference in these dogs' lives.

Hang tight guys, got a little bit of information for you. We'll be right back to the podcast in a minute.

So, hey crew, as 2020, otherwise known as the year from hell, draws to a close, I have some actual good news to share with you all. First of all, if you haven't twigged to the Good Dog Pod, you should most definitely add it to your downloads. This is a new podcast I'm hosting for Good Dog, with the goal of reaching an even wider audience than we do here at Pure Dog Talk. With great content, supporting dog breeders and responsible dog ownership. You can find the Good Dog Pod, wherever you get this podcast, including Spotify, Apple Podcasts, and Google Podcasts. Our primary topics on the Good Dog Pod, our training and veterinary and breeding and legal advocacy. And I am so excited because we're going to try out a new format. We're sort of taste testing it. Basically a call-in show concept with an ask our advisors Q&A session with myself and Dr. Gail Walkens and Susan Patterson from the Facebook repro-group. Our first crack at this, we're talking about that very first week of neonatal care and fielding questions from the audience, IE you guys. So very cool. Second of all, stay tuned for more good news in the new year. This is, in advertising speak, what we call the big tease. But seriously though, enjoy this month's outstanding, Pure Dog Talk and good Dog Pod episodes. Go like the Pure Dog Talk Facebook page so that you can get up to the minute details and consider joining our patrons community by supporting great content at Pure Dog Talk. Most of all, stay safe, stay healthy and stay strong. Happy holidays to one and all.

Laura Reeves:

When you were writing this book and when we're looking for our Christmas present or holiday gift for our friends and family support our community. Is this aimed primarily, your audience is primarily what I always call John Q Public. The general people out there in the world is that who you're basically writing this for?

Dr. Marty Greer:

It's written for that as the consumer, but a lot of my breeders have already stepped up and seen the Facebook post about the book and said, "I want to buy enough of these to send home one copy with every puppy." I think it's a great place to start. If you haven't already obtained the dog that goes through purpose bred dogs and others, randomly sourced dogs. So that before you select a dog, you have the information you need. You have the criteria that you may be looking for, and there may be things pointed out in there about indoor activity versus outdoor activity or friendliness with strangers or how they are with children that may not have come to your mind before you obtained a dog.

So it's targeted at the person who's John Q Public that will be getting a dog it's targeted at the people that have recently gotten a dog. It's targeted at breeders, and I've written it as really my exam room material. Like I said, it started off that way. And every client that comes to our practice with a new dog, a new puppy is going to go home with a copy because it goes through behavioral health, medical health. It goes through spaying and neutering and heartworm and flea and tick and vaccinations and how all those things have evolved and changed over the last 15 or 20 years. So that they're reading material that's current and well thought out. Flea and tick meds are hugely different than they were five years ago.

Laura Reeves:

Well, heartworm. Just heartworm itself has changed tremendously.

Dr. Marty Greer:

Exactly. So there's a lot of things that I think are important and it's hard for people to find a reputable source for that information and for spaying and neutering them. What are the nuances of all that? And so it's just a good opportunity for people to educate themselves along the way. And so it's written in chapters so that it's easy to follow and the publisher did a tremendous job of making it a very readable and nice soft cover book that's \$20. It's a really nice little book. I'm really proud of it. And I think Denise as a publisher did a tremendous job of putting this together in a very timely manner, because it's hard to get a book out in this short a period of time.

Laura Reeves:

I was just going to say, you've managed this in like less than nine months, which I think is incredible.

Dr. Marty Greer:

Yeah. It's been just a little over eight since we started even talking about it. And that was the 20 pages that I started to write. She's like, "No, no, it can't be 20 pages. It needs to be big." So I'd send her things and she'd be like, "There's too much in here about parasites." I'm like, "Oh, I forgot not everybody likes worms. I think parasites are really interesting." But she's like, "You need to cut this back." She's done a great job of bringing it in.

Laura Reeves:

I love it. I think too, Marty, one of the things that I see out there and you see it on social media, you see it in your exam rooms. There is across the board, outside of the sort of tiny little puddle that we all live in as dog breeders out there in the general public, there is a really significant lack of education and knowledge about really fundamental dog husbandry, animal husbandry. And this sort of material is so useful for that.

Dr. Marty Greer:

Yeah. We go through very basic things. Crate training, we go through the importance of water. Water is the most important nutrient your dog takes in and people forget to talk about that. We go through dog food, different types of

choices of dog food. And so it's pretty much every question that we routinely get in the exam room and I've been doing this 39 years. So I've had plenty of interactions with clients, and actually, it was kind of interesting because the exam room material piece kind of came to mind when we had a client that came in, she's a teacher. She has two young children. She got a new puppy from a breeder and she had a gillion and a half questions. And I went back and watched the video because we have video and audio in our exam rooms and watched the questions she had and how she was thinking about dog ownership, because this was her first dog and she's got two kids and she's teaching from home and she's got all this stuff going on and this puppy is doing this, this and this.

And so she was really overwhelmed with how to even understand what to do and where to start. And when the puppy jumped up on the kids, what to do, and you know how to feed her and how to appropriately medicate her. And so it was a really interesting study in human behavior for me to go back and watch the interaction and decide what types of topics are really important to people. It is written by me as a veterinarian, but it's written from the perspective of what do clients in the exam room need to know to survive their puppies first year and through adolescence?

Because those are challenging times, especially like I said, when there aren't classes. So you may be able to take a Zoom puppy class, but your puppy doesn't see other puppies on Zoom. It doesn't really work. So, how do you house break and how do you socialize the puppy? And what about masks? And what about all the things we used to do? People used to take their dogs to the pet store and walk them down the aisles and they would have social interactions and they could take puppy classes and they could go to the dog park and play. And so things have really changed a lot in this time period. And I don't want people to feel that they're not supported by the veterinary community.

Laura Reeves:

I think that so much about it is that it's changed so dramatically overnight, just sort of across the board when we talk about this entire year in so many areas. But I think specifically in this area, so much changed so dramatically so fast, and people just have felt whiplash trying to get their heads around it.

Dr. Marty Greer:

Right. And so people were completely unprepared. I had a client that came in one day. He works as the head of the IT department at a very large insurance company. And he came in with his dog and I said, "You look kind of tired today." Because he comes every five weeks. So the dog's 11 years old. I've seen him every five weeks. I said, "You look kind of tired today." And he said, "Today I sent home 5,000 people to work from home. 5,000 people, they had to drag their desktop computers out to their cars. They had no headsets. They didn't have a phone at home that would work. They don't have a place with enough wifi and a table to set up. I just kicked him out the door and if in two weeks they're not productive, we're going to let them go."

So it's a lot of strain on a lot of people in a very short period of time to try and adjust to this. And so it has been really difficult. It's been hard on us because we're still working at this point as if hardly anything has changed. And in fact, we've got clients coming in more frequently. Most veterinary clinics are completely overwhelmed right now with clients. It's hard to get an appointment for a client because people are home now. And so they can come in with a dog and now they're walking the dog four times a day and then they wonder why they're having four stools a day instead of one that they're used to. And so everything is just upside down. And we may be the only social interaction that a client has in a week. So they're kind of desperate to see a real human being and actually carry on a human conversation with them.

So it is so very different than it has been. And you're right, there was no preparation for this. I have a client that works for the education department at the state of Wisconsin. And he said, "We're not considering this homeschooling, this emergency that we did in the spring. This is emergency education. This is not homeschooling. Now eventually that's going to evolve into something that's more effective, but we know our kids, aren't getting the same educational experience, even if they're still part-time in the classroom." Things have upended so many people's lives. They don't have PTA meetings and they don't have so many things. They don't have softball and soccer and all the things that these kids are used to. So the kids are different. The parents are different. The family dynamics are different. You can't go see grandma. Grandma's on a Zoom call. And so it's so upended everybody that people are just scrambling to try and understand how to interact socially. It's been very difficult for everyone.

Laura Reeves:

No question. And I know here in my state, my clinic, I still can't go in. My vet will come out and talk to me in the parking lot sometimes because she's my friend, but it's been a lot. I continually say I am grateful that I am by nature a hermit. I have survived this more successfully than many of my friends. I can remember talking to my one girlfriend. And she was practically in tears because she's a very social, outgoing, really feeds on the human connection of people. And she was really having a hard time. And I just think that one of the reasons that people have been so desperate for dogs, for puppies, is the companionship. A warm breathing body next to you is for a lot of people, what they've had this year.

Dr. Marty Greer:

Right. And it's really essential that they'd had those opportunities. So, absolutely. And so it's been really fascinating to see how people are reacting, responding, how they're dealing with their new found life, because it's been a big change for everybody. So the dogs have really been a social lubricant and really helpful. And we don't want to leave cats out because cats are important as well. But we didn't write about cats because they have different social skills than dogs do.

Laura Reeves:

They have no social skills. They're cats.

Dr. Marty Greer:

They have their own set. They're cats. It's okay. But yeah, it's dramatically changed everybody's world and without preparation. It's been a fascinating study in how to adjust, but it was just really important to me that we kept dogs in their homes. And so that was really the whole thrust behind the book was to say, "What can I do to make a difference in how dogs are interacting and family homes? How are they been selected? And how are we going to keep these dogs from ending up going someplace that they shouldn't at the end of the pandemic?" We don't want to see all these dogs end up homeless. And so it was really important to me to educate people and give them the tools that they needed to interact with their puppies, to train them, to socialize them, to feed them, to water them, to spay and neuter them. To do all those aspects so that they were on the cutting edge of what we know, because some veterinarians are reluctant to change.

Laura Reeves:

All of us.

Dr. Marty Greer:

So I'm kind of not change averse. I'm kind of one of those people that likes change.

Laura Reeves:

But a lot of people are change averse. And that again goes back to why this has been such a struggle, because change is terrifying for a lot of people. Anyway, *Pandemic Puppy*, we will have a link to it. It is available for sale right now on Amazon, a fabulous stocking stuffer for every single dog loving person on your list.

Dr. Marty Greer:

Well, thank you so much for letting me come talk about it today because it was a labor of love and really a lot of fun to write. So I hope it helps as many people as I hope it does because it was really important to me that I made this work.

Laura Reeves:

And I tell you what, you are a gift to the Pure Dog Talk community. And this is my gift to you. So everybody check it out. I'm super excited. I can't wait to get my copy. And thanks Marty, we'll talk to you in the new year.

Dr. Marty Greer:

Thank you.

As always, if you have any questions or input, we'd love to hear from you. The show notes and links to resources on today's topic are available at puredogtalk.com. Drop us a note in the comments or email to laura@puredogtalk.com. Remember guys, this podcast is for you. So if you want to know something, give me a holler. We'll do a podcast for you. If you wouldn't mind, you could help me out here. Take a couple minutes to visit iTunes and give us a review. The Dog Show Superintendents Association is a proud supporter of Pure Dog Talk. Our dog show superintendents are the hardworking people who make the dog show function. They are advocates for education and mentorship in the purebred dog fancy. So stop by the Super's desk at your next show. Tell them how much you love Pure Dog Talk and give them a shout out for their support. That's all for today. Thank you for joining us on Pure Dog Talk.