Transcript of **Out of The Woofworks** Episode 1: “What are we woofing about on Out Of The Woofworks?”

RACHEL: Hi there! Welcome to the first episode of Out Of The Woofworks, a podcast where we’ll be talking about dogs, dog training, and more importantly human rights and social issues, both in the dog industry and in the world. Whether you're a professional in the dog industry or a loving pet guardian, if you care about both animals and people, you're in the right space!

[Intro music]

RACHEL: So let me start by introducing myself: My name is Rachel, I use she/they pronouns, and I am the founder of Dog At Heart, my dog training business, where I specialise in helping reactive and fearful dogs and their guardians using force free, humane training methods. I work with clients and their dogs all around the world by doing so virtually and equipping the humans with the skills to work effectively with their dogs from scratch. While dogs are of course the focus in my dog training work, the human side of things is really important to me as well and you'll see why in a bit. I am originally from Singapore, I’m Singaporean Chinese, and in the last few years I have been living in Liverpool, in England, with my partner Dave and our medium-sized, very handsome, Singaporean former street dog, who’s also called Dave. Yes there's a dog Dave and Human Dave in my life. I refer to the dog as just Dave and Human Dave as Human Dave so that minimises some of the confusion but makes for funny moments too. I'm sure I'll talk about Dave more in future episodes.

As a side note, I will be occasionally using the umbrella term People of Colour or POC or People of the Global Majority. I do understand that there can be issues with this as it groups together people of very different ethnic diversity and identities, as well as experiences. So when speaking about unique experiences and identities, I will do my best to be more specific in my language.

You may be wondering... why dogs, dog training, and these social issues? What do they have to do with one another?

So to start off with, there is a huge lack of representation in the dog industry, particularly the dog training industry which I am a part of. Dog training as it is, is a really unregulated field. Anyone can call themselves

a dog trainer and they can be great or they can do horrible things to dogs that traumatise them and potentially their human guardians too.

And we do have organisations and certifying boards for dog trainers, but they definitely lack diverse representation, especially at the top, and therefore they lack inclusive and accessible policies and they lack a genuine push to be more inclusive and accessible. The whole system, in my opinion, is very much, still broken. So when wanting regulation in the dog training industry, it always concerns me to think about who, specifically, will be doing that regulating? Will it be more ethical and beneficial not just for dogs but also for the humans like trainers and our human clients?

Outside of the formal organisations and certifying boards, we see the same issues in dog related communities like training clubs, or Facebook groups where admins are entirely or predominantly White, and when topics come up that have to do with for example, race and racism, things may not get handled as well as they should be and that results in People of Colour no longer feeling safe or heard in these dog related communities. This is something I've witnessed a lot personally and still have a lot of big feelings about.

As a dog trainer who's Asian and living in a predominantly White country, it does feel frustrating at times and you know, there's a long way to go. And so I really want to see our industry do better in all areas of diversity, equity, and inclusivity including making our industry safe and accessible for LGBTQAI+ people, disabled people, and neurodivergent people. All our non-dominant communities.

And again, you may ask "But, what does it have to do with dogs?" or "Why can't we just have a dog loving space and that be it?"

So as a dog trainer who works largely virtually with clients all around the world, I've truly come to aware that when we talk about dogs, especially pet dogs and family dogs, there is always a human on the other end of the leash. And so dog training is often just as much about the humans as it is about the dogs. And diversity and inclusivity and human rights matter to the humans we work with. To be better dog trainers, we have to understand where our clients and potential clients are coming from, be aware of what they are experiencing, understand their struggles, and be aware of their cultures as well. And just as a dog guardian rather than a professional in this world, it's helpful for us to be more aware about

these things when we meet other dog guardians and friends of different identities and be safe people for them to be around too.

To give a personal example, as an Asian person in the UK during COVID19 times where hatecrimes against Asian people have been rampant, and having experienced some of that racist shouting from people myself, I don't actually feel safe walking my dog when it gets dark. I only walk my dog Dave by myself in the mornings and I let my partner Human Dave walk him in the evenings. Working with reactive and fearful dogs, one of the things I may suggest to clients is to walk their dogs in quieter places or at quieter times like in the evening or early in the morning... However, I know that I personally may not feel safe doing it and so I would also ask my clients how comfortable they would be doing this and if they're not, I would totally understand and figure out other solutions for them because there always are other ways we can get creative in dog training. This is something I'll definitely like to talk more about as we go through this journey together with this podcast.

But to come back to the question of "Why can't we just keep to talking about dogs, it makes me happy in this bleak world", well unfortunately the world isn't just about dogs. And behind every dog community are people. And for people to feel included and safe in conversations about dogs, we also need to be aware of human rights and diversity and be open to having conversations and understanding more about these things. When we're out with our dogs, we still have our identities and that impacts our perspectives and our experience of the world around us. Marginalisation and oppression is in every industry and it’s all around us. It’s not something that people of colour or people of other marginalised communities can just ignore. It's why I can't just have a dog training podcast and a cursory episode or two on anti-racism. Human rights and social issues have to be a part of all of our conversations.

So on this podcast, I will be featuring guests of different backgrounds, ethnicities, and of various non-dominant identities. Some of our guests may be professional dog trainers but also pet guardians as well! And we will talk about dogs, training, behaviour, and of course, the social issues that affect us both in and outside of this community. I really want to especially uplift the voices in this industry and in the dog world that we may not regularly hear from, and the many amazing people that get overlooked, who have so much to offer and who are so knowledgeable

and who can provide us with such different perspectives and insight into things that perhaps we may not have thought about before. I know I have so much to learn myself.

I also would like to say that with regards to our guests, you may hear various different points of views and that's so important because each person within any community is an individual and no marginalised community is ever a monolith. And so I really want folks listening to bear that in mind and just be really open hearted and bring your most compassionate and understanding self when you're listening to these conversations.

I really hope you'll join me on this journey, I hope you will enjoy learning and I hope you will gain new perspectives that perhaps you may have never even considered before, and just be really open to them. You may feel some discomfort during this, but understand that that is part of the learning and change and growth that is going to happen.

In the show notes of this episode linked in the description, you'll find recommended resources if you're interested to get ahead and learn more.

If you've listened up to now and would like to know about updates on the podcast and know what I'm up to, please follow me on instagram @dog_atheart. If you have any questions or comments, you can DM me on Instagram or email me at dogatheartuk@gmail.com.

So... let's do this!

[Outro Music]