Transcript of **Out of The Woofworks** Episode 3: “Dr. Mayuri Kerr (DoggEd)”

RACHEL: Welcome back to Out of The Woofworks, here with me, Rachel Forday on a podcast where we'll be talking about dogs, training, and more importantly, human social issues, both in the dog industry and in the world.

Today, we have dog trainer, Dr. Mayuri Kerr of DoggEd Training here with us. She'll be talking to us about building confident puppies, dogs in India, and also her life as a person from India now living in the U.S.

There may be things that are hard to hear in this episode in terms of mentions of racism, but they are conversations we need to have and listen to, so please join us in our learning journey in this episode.

[intro music]

RACHEL: Hi Mayuri! Thank you so much for being here with us. How are you?

MAYURI: I am well, Rachel, and thank you so much for inviting me.

RACHEL: Oh, I'm so excited to get to chatting with you. Could you tell us a little bit about yourself and what you've been up to?

MAYURI: Yeah. My name is Dr. Mayuri Kerr. I am a dentist, biomedical engineer, dog trainer.

RACHEL: Wow.

MAYURI: And I live in Northern California, but I'm originally from India.

RACHEL: Did you always know that you wanted to work with dogs? Like how did you decide on becoming a dog trainer?

MAYURI: Oh my gosh. I have loved animals ever since I was little. So to give you context, my first word wasn't "mom" or "dad," it was "hatthi," which in my native language means elephant.

RACHEL: Aw! *[laughs]*

MAYURI: So when my mother tells me that there was a TV program going on and I pointed to the screen and I said, "hatthi," and that was my first word, not "mom" or "dad."

RACHEL: That's amazing.

MAYURI: I've always loved animals. And I grew up without a dog, so my family did not have pets at the time. So my favorite thing to do as a four year old was to walk around and pick up the—you know, we had village dogs.

So whenever they would have a litter, I would grab the puppy I liked and bring it home and beg and plead with my parents to keep it. So then they used to feed the dog and then they would ask me, "Okay, where did you get this from?" And then we walk back together and I say, "Okay, I guess it'll go back with its brothers and sisters."

And my parents found it hilarious that I referred to the littermates as brothers and sisters. They would joke about it so much because they thought it was hilarious that I said those things. It's not really a concept of India. I think in the Western world, dogs are very much looked upon as family, but in India, they're really, you know, village dogs, outside dogs, working dogs, guard dogs.

They're not there—there's utility to a dog. It isn't really a family member. So that is changing of course, but it is, it is a new phenomenon and it is borrowed from the west.

RACHEL: Right. That's really interesting. So now there's more people in India to have dogs as their family members, and do they have that even with street dogs as well?

MAYURI: You know, it's a great question. I lived in India for 30 years and what I saw of dogs at the time was, people really did not appreciate the indigenous breeds that we have in India. Many of

them have been sighthounds—you'll see sight hound, you'll see guarding breeds, you'll see shepherding breeds, and there just hasn't been enough interest in them until more recently.

RACHEL: Yeah.

MAYURI: So people always preferred having the foreign breeds, the better looking dogs, you know, having a pedigree dog was a big. So German shepherds, Dobermans, golden retrievers, Labradors, all of these breeds... Rottweilers. They came in from other countries and they were prized and they were considered pet dogs.

Even to this day, people would much rather get a purebred dog than get a "streetie," or an, "Indie," as they're called in India.

RACHEL: Oh, that's really interesting. It's quite similar to where I'm from in Singapore, where you'll see in like a shelter or rescue, there'll be a mix of street dogs, Singapore street dogs. We call them Singapore specials.

And so we have like a mix of those, but also sometimes like purebred dogs or, you know, dogs of a certain breed that will come in and those dogs get adopted really quickly, while the street dogs or former street dogs, that just kind of waited there for years, but that is also slowly changing and as pet regulations now, in terms of like housing regulations, allowing more people to have street dogs in their house, because previously it could be quite hard as well for people to do that.

So that's really interesting how things are changing and people are becoming more accepting of street dogs. I think street dogs are pretty cool.

MAYURI: I think street dogs are amazing. I've spent months trying to, you know, when I was a teenager trying to convince my father—or a tween, I don't even remember—trying to convince my father that we should have an Indian street dog because they are more adapted to the climate.

They're more adapted—they're just such hardy dogs and they're amazingly smart. But of course I lost that fight and we got a Doberman...

RACHEL: Ohh…

MAYURI: You know what I think it is, and this might be an unorthodox view of the whole situation. But I do think that in countries that are colonized, there is this attraction or, you know, people covet—

RACHEL: Yeah.

MAYURI: —having something for him or imported or European or, you know, "**foreign**." That's what I feel applies to the dogs as well. So dogs that were indigenous dogs that will have lived in the country for centuries are exterminated, at [ets44sts. And what is brought in is these other breeds also in India, and spaying and neutering wasn't a thing—it's still not a thing.

So these pedigree dogs would often come and then they would roam—if they were males—and then meet with the local females, and then you would get these hybrid puppies.

RACHEL: Right.

MAYURI: Now I know that all dogs are technically, you know, man-made creations, but it always feels like a big loss to me. Then when you think about it, that the gene pool is now probably pretty mixed, and if you wanted the breeds that were originally bred for whatever purposes they were at the time, whether they were a farm dog or a hunting dog, maybe you might not find them that easily.

RACHEL: Yeah, no, that's a really good point, a really interesting that you brought up kind of us countries that have been colonized. Some of that internalized—I don't know—colonialism kind of stays with us, and it shows up in these different ways where we covet more international breeds or more European breeds. I think that is so fascinating and a very, very good point.

I work with reactive dogs mainly—which for people who are listening that may not know what that means, an example would be like a dog that barks and lunges at other dogs when they're going past at distance or something like that. And very often it just stems out of fear.

And I know, Mayuri, that you are passionate about helping dog guardians to raise puppies that are happy and confident and less likely to develop fear and reactivity issues, which is so, so amazing. So what would you say is one of the most important things people can do with their pups to help them be more confident?

MAYURI: I think there's a lot of things people can do to help their puppies become confident.

And you know, it's not completely prevented at least reduce the chances greatly of their dog becoming reactive in the future. One of the things that I often talk to my clients about is this concept of socialization, which unfortunately has been beaten to death *[laughs]* in the social media and everywhere you turn, people are usually, "Oh you need to socialize your dog! You need to socialize your dog!"

But if you ask them what it means most people don't know, or they think it is taking your dog everywhere, having them meet a hundred people, having the meet 50 other dogs and just throwing them in the middle of a puppy playgroup. And that is one of the absolute worst things you can do. And the reason is that puppies inherently don't come with the social skills required to live in a human environment.

And as we consider our dogs more and more as family, and the more we expect them to live with us in our environment and apartments, a house, go to a shopping mall with the dog. These are not environments dogs traditionally came equipped for. *[laughs]* So what happens is when you put a dog in a situation where they have no clue what is going on around them, and there are scary sounds and scary noises and, you know—to the human, it might seem all perfectly safe.

That's true because we know it's safe, but for the dog, a loud noise, a screaming child, multiple hands coming to pet it at the same time can be a very scary event, and teaching dog guardians, how to help their puppy through scary events, how to actually set up situations so that the pup is not overwhelmed in the first place is so, so important.

Once the puppy learns to trust you, and then by extension starts trusting their environment, that is how you build a confident dog. You do expose them to new and novel things, but you do it safely. So that is what I guide my puppy parents through then, and just like you, Rachel, I am very, very passionate about reactive dogs.

Those are the only two programs I offer: I offer a smart puppy program, which helps people create happy, confident well-balanced dogs, and the other one is to help reactive dogs or dogs that struggle with their environment, whether it's other people, other animals, or just, you know, storms, um, help them lead happier, confident lives.

So the other thing that you can do with puppies to make them a little more confident is to actually engage the help of a good dog, and what I mean by that is a solid adult dog who likes puppies to begin with—don't, don't put it on with just any adult dog.

RACHEL: Right, yeah.

MAYURI: Find a dog that *is* a good dog. If you can't find it, that's okay. You don't have to do it, but that is one way of helping the dog learn what etiquette is. The problem with puppy play groups is especially if they're unsupervised: Puppies don't know the rules, they don't know manners. It's like toddlers. You put toddlers together, and one toddler is going to play nicely, and another toddler got to go and push the other toddler over.

So that's not an appropriate interaction, and we need to step in to make sure that all the interactions are appropriate and that they're safe.

RACHEL: Absolutely, and even with an adult dog, that's fairly calm and stuff, when we see that either party is having an uncomfortable

interaction or something, we can step in and help them out, can't we?

MAYURI: I am so glad you brought this up, Rachel. Oh, there is this—I don't know where it comes from, but there is this belief that dogs should sort it out or the adult will teach the puppy. No, it's not the adult's job to teach or correct the puppy. The adult's job is to have a nice, polite interaction, so the puppy can model nice, polite interaction.

But just like you said, if either party shows any discomfort at all, we need to step in. We have the bigger brains—

RACHEL: Yes.

MAYURI: We need to step in and say, "All right, I think this is not going well. Let's take a break."

RACHEL: Yeah.

MAYURI: So it's so important to not let the older dog feel overwhelmed and then correct the puppy, because what actually ends up happening is you might think, "Oh good. The adult has now taught the puppy not to do that again," but instead the puppy might have learned big dogs are scary.

RACHEL: Yeah. Adult dogs are scary.

MAYURI: Exactly. And actually you can be setting them up to become reactive to other dogs with these small seemingly minor incidents.

RACHEL: Yeah. Because you and I as positive reinforcement-based trainers, we know about the fallout of punishment. And even though the punishment or the correction comes from another dog, it can still be a punishing, scary experience for the puppy.

MAYURI: Absolutely. I think what we can control as trainers, as guardians, we can control the setup.

RACHEL: Yes.

MAYURI: However, we cannot control what the dog is learning in that moment. And that is something that is so important to remember, which is why things that seem like the dog should know or should be easy for the dog. It feels like the dogs should intuitively know, "Hey, don't chew on everything."

RACHEL: Right.

MAYURI: But that may or may not be simple for that particular dog. I own a dog like that. *[laughs]*

RACHEL: I love that.

I mean, my dog, Dave went into the shelter when he was two years old, and before that he was likely a street dog. So he has certain sensitivities and fears that I don't necessarily know like the cause of them specifically, but I do my best to work with them.

And you've mentioned some already, but what are some of the potential situations puppies may be in all that could happen with puppies that may result in them becoming more reactive or fearful later on as they grow.

MAYURI: I think that the world is interesting and full of fascinating sounds and sights and smells

RACHEL: Yeah.

MAYURI: And smell is an important factor because us as human beings, we are very, very poorly equipped to figure out what the scents around us are. In fact, there was a recent study that's showing that our sense of smell is getting worse.

RACHEL: Oh gosh.

MAYURI: Yes. They looked at the genetics of some indigenous populations and they looked at city dwelling, modern humans, and they found that there were some receptors that were no longer there. We are actually not smelling everything that we used to be able to a little bit, and now we just don't.

So remember that there is a whole scent that you're completely blind to that your dog is experiencing at any given moment. So to come back to your question, Rachel, about things that can be scary, it could be something as big as a thunderstorm or something that's obviously scary or a firecracker or a fireworks or it could be something really, really simple, like you drop the baking tray in the kitchen.

RACHEL: Yeah.

MAYURI: Knowing how to help your puppy through it is what makes the difference, because what happens is when you have—eventually that are going to have life is going to happen. There is you cannot put your puppy in a, in a bubble and hope nothing touches it.

RACHEL: Yeah.

MAYURI: Or it could be something as simple as a texture change when they're walking and they suddenly feel a new texture they've never felt before, and that can be scary.

So I don't think that encountering scary is something we can prevent, but helping the puppy understand that, "It's okay, I'm here. We got this," that is what it's going to help you build a confident puppy.

RACHEL: That is so powerful, and you mentioned about how scary things will happen, but it's how we deal with it.

And so what signals should people take note off if they suspect that their puppy is starting to develop some kind of fear or something?

MAYURI: Oh, great question. I love talking about this because I feel like dog body language is a very, very important subject and more people should know about it. I'm very passionate about it.

So one of the things that there are simple signs that you can see now—one caveat to all of this body language is very, very contextual. Without context, body language means nothing. You

can have the exact same body language in two different situations, and it can mean something completely different.

However, there are very established stress signals or signals that our dog is worried or concerned or afraid, and those don't vary. So those are tail tucked in tightly between the legs. that is always a sign that your puppy is scared. Their ears will go back. They'll start scanning the environment and you can see worry on their face, their mouth tenses up, you can see the whale eye.

For people who haven't heard this term before whale eye means, normally, if you look at the dog's eyes, they are, you know, whatever color your dog's eyes are. Whale eye means the dog holds their head still and just moves their eyes, which causes us to be able to see the white of the eye. That is called waylay.

And when a dog holds its head still and just moves its eyes, it's because it is frozen in place and trying to figure out what's going on in the environment. So that's a sign that the puppy is a little worried. Other signs that are not always clear are things like lip licking or paw lifting the front paw, they lift one front ball or they lick their lips.

Even when there is no food around. These are signs that, you know, again can be interpreted differently depending on context, but generally they are assigned that the puppies a little stressed.

RACHEL: Yeah, no, those are really good points. And the lip licking, you know, some of those subtle things we often miss as well, and they really depend on context.

So for a dog that's licking their lips when there's food about that, maybe that's just food around it. They're happy and they're loose and waggy. I always think like the really crucial thing to look out for is that really tense... You know, you can kind of just see it. If they're very still and very tense, then it's a sign that, you know, something to be worried about and something to take a little bit of a note of, and I think sometimes we see that tense body language, or dog being very still, we just think they're being stubborn, but actually there is so much more going on for them.

MAYURI: Oh, my gosh. I really wish the word "stubborn" would be removed from dog vocabulary. I have rarely met a stubborn dog. Most of them are either—it's not clear what you're asking of them, or they don't know how to do it, or they're scared and something else is worrying them, so they *can't* do it, even if they've done it before. It's, it's never a question of stubborn.

The other thing that I also wanted to add with puppies is sometimes you will see—I've seen the so often, especially in dog parks or when the puppy meets another dog on lead—and some puppies will try to get away from the situation. They'll just turn around and flee, or they'll come to their human and ask for help, and that looks like maybe the dog comes and looks up at you or puts their front paws on you. And people often say, "No, no, you can handle it." No! The dog's telling you, "No, I can't handle it. Please help."

So in those situations, if your puppy is actively moving away from something, don't put them back in there. That's very scary for them. And it actually erodes their trust in you because what they learn is when I'm scared, I can't depend on my human, because my human are going to put me back into the scary situation.

RACHEL: Mmm, that's a big one. And I think in dog-to-dog interactions, there are so many signs that our dogs try to tell us where they're not comfortable, and sometimes they get missed because of, you know, all the play around. There's a lot of distractions. So one big sign is the dog coming to you. Some of them hide behind you.

And it's really important that they've done that and they're trying to communicate with you. So it's important that we listen to them when they do that for sure.

So we're coming onto a bigger topic, but speaking of fear, as people of color or people of the global majority, we certainly experience certain fears in our lives from time to time.

So if you're comfortable sharing, have you personally experienced any racism of our situations in your life that have been very uncomfortable for you, whether that's with other people in the industry or even in your own general life?

MAYURI: Oh, I wish I could say, "Oh, the answer is no, it's been great," but it's, it's been very interesting.

I lived in India for 30 years and looking back, I realize now that I was part of the privileged groups in India.

RACHEL: Right.

MAYURI: So in retrospect, I realized just how blind I was to that privilege. But when I moved to the United States, I became the woman of color, the woman with the accent. And it was initially very daunting.

I tried very hard to Americanize my accent and failed miserably at it. I just sounded weird. So I stopped trying, but talk about trying to blend in. I was very aware that sometimes people interacted very differently with me, and I think if I'd come to this country younger, maybe in my twenties, I think I would have had a different experience because maybe I wouldn't have been so aware of people's body language.

Honestly, I think as you grow older, you begin to notice all the little subtle signs that people give off when they are not okay with your presence.

RACHEL: Yeah.

MAYURI: And I started picking up a lot of those. Thankfully, I came to California, which is a little more diverse than many other places in the United States, but even here, I think the most common one I have experienced is just people pretending like I didn't exist.

So I would talk to them or ask them a question, and they were just not even acknowledge that I was there or they had heard me speak. And that has happened a lot. I think my most egregious one where I just could not believe it was happening was my first day at a job.

To give you context, I'm a dentist and biomedical engineer. I've worked as a dentist for several years in India. I came to the United

States and did my Masters in biomedical engineering from UCLA. So I'm very well versed with the dental device industry, the medical device industry, and I've also worked in pharma.

So it was my first day on the job, and I had joined clinical affairs team and I was going to be working a lot with the regulatory department. As you know, medical devices, dental devices are regulated by the FDA in the United States. So a regulatory team member was walking me around introducing me to different people, and we met this person and she said, "oh, you know, she's here. She's going to be authoring our clinical evaluation reports," which is something that is looked at mostly by the European regulatory agencies. And then we use excerpt from that for the FDA, if any questions arise, et cetera.

RACHEL: Yeah.

MAYURI: So they're very complicated, very detailed technical reports about devices that require a clinical understanding of how they're used for that report to be put together. Each report can be 200, 300 page sized write-ups. That was part of my job. She introduced me to this person and I said, "Hello." And her response to that was, "I can't believe they keep hiring non-native speakers of English."

RACHEL: Oh my God.

MAYURI: "For a job like this."

RACHEL: Oh my God.

MAYURI: She was like, "You know, they're all smart. They all have it in—It's all up here. And she points to her head, but it doesn't go out on paper."

RACHEL: Oh my God.

MAYURI: There were many things I wanted to say in that moment, but obviously I was just speechless. I couldn't believe it, that someone could judge me—all I had said was hello.

RACHEL: Exactly.

MAYURI: But she went on this, um, you know, she said several other things too, but mostly this was the gist of what she was saying is she could not believe that they are hired someone that looked and sounded like me for a job that required so much. Of course, she eventually became one of my, you know, a good coworker and she was very appreciative of all my skills. But her initial interaction kind of colored a lot of my initial experience at that company. It was quite, quite bizarre.

RACHEL: Yeah, such a strange way to start a new job as well, and to introduce yourself to someone that's really uncomfortable. And this was a blatant, racist thing to say, but there are these little subtle signs, like microaggressions that people do where they kind of question our intelligence or question our capability in terms of the job that we're doing. And I know that these may be like little tiny things that did not directly attacker you, but it chips away at you.

MAYURI: It absolutely does. I had another experience much later in the company as well-established, you know, my job was going great. Everybody appreciated the work I did. I would in fact get called on for other projects that I wasn't directly involved with because people wanted advice from a clinical standpoint.

So at this company, I was involved with the medical review of marketing materials and a new person joined the marketing team. So the colleague that I worked with a lot in marketing brought the new person over. The new hire was an older white man, and he walked in and introduced and he said, "This is Dr. Mayuri Kerr. She works in clinical affairs, and is our point of contact for any medical review you need for your materials."

RACHEL: Yeah

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MAYURI: And I think just me being in that position of a little more authority, I think somehow put him off. I'm not quite sure what happened there, but one of the things that I do recognize and acknowledge is that my first name, Mayuri is not a common name or an easy to pronounce name. So I said, "Yeah, hi, you could either call me Mayuri or you can call me Dr. Kerr."

And the new person looks at my marketing colleague and he says, "Oh. She wants to be called Dr. Kurr. Did you hear that? She wants to be called Dr. Kerr."

RACHEL: Oh my God.

MAYURI: And I remember being really upset and walking into my manager's office and saying how many years exactly do I need to practice as a dentist to be taken seriously here?

RACHEL: Yeah.

MAYURI: Because I had seven years of experience. None of the dentists there on staff had that amount of experiences I had, and yet just because I was trying to make it easy for him to not have to say my first name, it became a joke.

RACHEL: That's ridiculous. And you are a doctor you have to right to be called Dr. Kerr as you should. And in fact, that's what they should be offering. That's—that is terrible. And I'm so sorry that happened to you.

And going back to a little bit of the things that you mentioned, you know, how we try to fit in. And I mean, I speak for myself on this as well, because coming from Singapore, we all speak English in Singapore, but we speak with a certain accent. We speak, kind of our own little colloquial dialect type of thing.

And so when I'm here and also on this podcast, I am actually code switching. And to do this forever all the time is really tiring. *[laughs]*

MAYURI: Oh my gosh. Talk about the exhaustion. It is exhausting. And I think I gave myself permission a few years ago and I said, you know what? I'm going to speak Indian English.

Because like you said, we have our own colloquialisms that other English speakers are not going to understand. And when those come up and when I say something that confuses my American audience, I explained to them, I was like, oh, that's funny. Here's how we Indian English works and this is American English.

So this is what I was saying, and this is what I meant. And it has been so much easier for me to just accept that I have this accent and I am going to occasionally sprinkle my language with Indian English-isms.

RACHEL: Exactly. Oh my God. That's what I've been doing as well. And it just feels so much more relaxed, especially because my husband is British.

And so I would just speak Singlish to him most of the time now, and he just has to learn. And that's fine, you know, and sometimes, obviously, I mean, as I code switch in my daily life, I find it easier to do sometimes, but I also just use a bit of Singlish and I do that texting with my friends who are in the US or in the UK, and they just come to learn it, and some of them actually learn a bit of Singlish themselves and have the similar kind of grammar.

So I think that is so, so interesting. And you and I have a lot in common in a sense of coming from where we came from in a different country and are moving to a white-dominated country, like the US and the UK.

And I know you mentioned earlier that, you know, you know about the privilege that you used to have, and I can still relate to that because it's quite later on in life. I learned about the privilege I had as a Chinese person in Singapore, as opposed to the other races in Singapore, like Indian and Malay. Chinese people in Singapore have more privilege.

And that is so interesting that when we have that in common and when we think about it later it all make sense, but in those moments when you're there, it can be hard to look at.

MAYURI: Oh, it's so true. I think the idea that I had a privilege seemed very foreign to me until I actually started breaking it down and learning, you know, and honestly, sometimes you look ahead to look back and it makes more sense.

RACHEL: Sure.

MAYURI: Sometimes in the moment we don't have the tools or the necessary experience to realize that, what we're experiencing is actually a product of privilege. Not just because we are smart. I mean, we are smart, but you know, that's, that's that also might be a product of privilege. The fact that we are smart and had access to these, all these opportunities.

So I absolutely hear you. It's so funny. We have so much in common, my husband's American and speaking of language again, same thing. He quite enjoys my Indian English and he has picked up some of those terms as well, so.

RACHEL: that's really cool. And I mean, coming on to the dog training industry, I think our dog training industry has a long way to go.

And so what changes do you want to see happen in our industry in the sense of better supporting dog trainers and dog guidance that are people of color?

MAYURI: Oh, this is a great question Rachel. One of the things—I mean, honestly, the first part that pops to my mind is an experience I had a few years ago at a dog training conference and it sort of encapsulates the problem with the dog training industry when it comes to people of color.

I was at a positive reinforcement conference, not so long ago. Three years ago, maybe. And I was desperate at the time. I had reactive dog. I didn't know how to help her. So I was trying to gain all the knowledge I could. And I was at a workshop, it was like an arena style where there were two or three people who were going to participate in the workshop part.

And then before that was a theory lecture about what we were going to learn. And this arena style seating, it was only three seats deep. So it wasn't, you could see everybody in here, everybody right from the back row as well, because the back row wasn't that far from the. So I will stay, I think, in the second row and I was fairly close to the stage.

So this person, who's a very well-known speaker in the dog training world, she was talking about cues and you know, how cues work, et cetera. So she was asking questions as she was talking, which is great because it engages the audience and people were shouting out their answers, and that seemed acceptable.
Most of this audience was white and female as is the case with most of the dog training industry.

RACHEL: Yeah.

MAYURI: So the next time she asked a question, I shouted it out a couple answers. And I remember her looking at me and saying, "You folks seem to know everything don't you?" And it came across as—I wasn't sure why she had said that to me specifically when everybody else was blurting out answers as well.

Nobody else got that response. So I was like, "Oh, okay." So I stopped answering because you know, that was a bit punishing from coming from a positive reinforcement trainer who was teaching other people positive reinforcement training. So I didn't say anything, but at the end of her lecture, she said, "Do you have any questions?”

So I had a question I raised my hand. She saw me raise my hand and I kid you not, Rache,. I was at one end of that arc of people sitting around that stage. She started at the other end and she said, "Okay, let's start here." And she started taking questions at the other end. And then by the time she got to my side, I was waiting for her to call on me.

She actually even asked the person sitting next to me if she had a question. She hadn't even raised her.

RACHEL: This is ridiculous.

MAYURI: And my hand was still up and she never called on me. At that point, I just got up and left because I was like, okay, you've made it abundantly clear that I'm not welcome here. I was the only person of color in that group. I don't know what to make of this.

RACHEL: Yeah, absolutely. I mean, I think that many of us can relate to these moments like this, but that was a really blatant one that she was just trying to avoid you. And I think that's really heartbreaking because you're there to learn. And obviously as dog trainers, you want more people to learn how to train their dogs in the way that we do to use kindness and things like that.

And so when you push someone away, it doesn't help our cause as dog trainers, does it?

MAYURI: No. And if you're talking about learning and how to help a dog learn, I would also imagine that maybe we will also help other people learn. That's what we do on a daily basis too, right? So it's been very interesting being a dog trainer in this field.

I definitely have received the cold shoulder many times at dog training conferences. It's always fun to look around and then find a little group of us, people of color. And I've made some great friends through these dog training conferences with other people of color. So it's definitely enriched my life in that way, but it's sad that we connect over the fact that we are such a small minority in the community and that we all have experienced something like this, to some extent, even within the positive reinforcement training community, which is really sad.

RACHEL: Yeah. It is really sad. And I guess there's a lot of cognitive dissonance there about why that is as well. Do you think there is something that the industry can do to change that?

MAYURI: I would imagine that the professional organizations that are currently taking up the baton and saying, "Oh, we will talk about inclusion and diversity." It's great to have diversity panels and have different faces and voices on your panels, but I feel like it's a bit of showmanship.

RACHEL: Bit performative.

MAYURI: Yes. Uh, it's great that you have all these panels and it's great that you're offering scholarships to people of color, but if you've actually gone through a scholarship application, they actually make it even worse in the sense that the questionnaires are

designed to, I don't know... It was just, I felt like I was begging when I was filling out one of those.

RACHEL: Yes. I know what you mean.

MAYURI: Oh my gosh. It's so crazy that you hear that because I thought I was alone in feeling this.

RACHEL: No, absolutely. I feel like they're making us jump through hoops and fight each other to get a spot, you know what I mean?

MAYURI: Oh my gosh. Exactly. And I don't understand why it's not just a normal application and then you can have a separate interview if you want, if you really want to judge someone's capability, but again, in the grand scheme of things sure, you've helped one or two people get that scholarship spot. Awesome. How does this change things for the community?

RACHEL: Right.

MAYURI: So I feel like some training for existing dog trainers within these organizations to sensitize them towards issues of race of diversity would be really, really important.

Make it part of CE. That's not very hard. Yeah, that would be a better step, in my opinion, is to educate people after all our job as trainers is education. I feel like we are on both sides of the coin at any given time. At any given time, we are teaching our dog guardians who work with us about communicating with dogs. Most positive reinforcement trainers I've met are lifelong learners.

So we are educating ourselves on the various aspects of dealing with dogs guardians, of dealing with dogs. Then why shouldn't we also have some education geared towards dealing with each other.

RACHEL: Of course, that is huge. And like you say, Continual Education Units is a start for these organizations to consider and scholarships can't be the only thing. And also scholarships, particularly that are designed to kind of make us feel uncomfortable or feel like we're fighting each other. Even worse because that defeats the point of scholarships. If you have a scholarship, you

want more people of color, people of the global majority of people in marginalized communities to kind of join in.

And if you make that really hard or make it really uncomfortable, then you're not actually helping the cause.

MAYURI: Well, I actually felt quite deeply about the whole process was it wasn't encouraging people of color. And in a way I really started learning dog training for my own dog, because she was so difficult.

But what I realized was, that people in India, for example, from my home country, don't really have an example of how to treat dogs well. Dogs are sometimes hit because children are hit in my country. It's perfectly legal to do that. You know, if you were child and you went and told someone else “Oh my mom gave me a beating yesterday, because I didn't listen to her or whatever.”, people were really like, "Yeah. Well, what were you expecting?"

RACHEL: Right.

MAYURI: That's considered completely normal. So when you consider normal for rearing children, dogs are not terribly far behind because like, "Yeah, it's a dog. What do you mean?" So punishment techniques were part of my life too. That's how I got into dog training.

I had a Doberman and I asked my vet for training book. I was always interested in training.

RACHEL: Yeah.

MAYURI: And he gave me some books, that were written in the seventies and they were all about punishment training. So that's what I did. I scruffed them. I used choke chains. I told them, no, I yelled at him. I did everything wrong. I did everything wrong and I ruined that dog.

And it wasn't his fault. He was two years old and nobody could touch his collar by the time he was two. And he bit everybody in the

family except my grandfather, because my grandfather always treated him with respect and kindness.

RACHEL: Ah, interesting.

MAYURI: I got bit five times and he was a massive Doberman. He could have killed me if he wanted, honestly. He was 110 pounds Doberman when I was a very tiny child. I was a teenager, but I was never very tall or, you know, I was a very skinny kid, so he could have easily killed me. And the restraint that dog showed, even when he was upset with me, was incredible. I apologize to him every time I think of him.

RACHEL: Aw...

MAYURI: I swore to myself, I would never punish dogs again.

And over time then I educated myself and I got to a point where now I've personally experienced the fallout of punishment training, but I've also seen how well, because I work with reactive and what are labeled aggressive dogs who have bitten people who have picked dog fightsm and I helped them become calmer, better behaved versions of them.

RACHEL: Yeah.

MAYURI: I absolutely know that there is no need to punish even what seems like the worst behavior, because it doesn't actually help.

RACHEL: Exactly.

MAYURI: So it's been quite the journey and I think understanding that punishing people for being who they are or how they look or how they speak is something that positive reinforcement trainers should be better.

RACHEL: For sure. I mean, it's hurtful to think about how positive reinforcement-based trainers would fight so hard for late the dog's welfare and to not have them punished. But then when it comes to us, as people, as their colleagues, as kind of pushed aside, it's kind

of like, "Oh, we don't talk about that. This is a dog space kind of thing."

MAYURI: Yes. I have those comments that you mentioned, Rachel. Like, "Oh, this is about dogs. Can we keep it to the training and not bring in these issues of race and diversity?" And it's like, but wait a minute, dog owning guardians are suffering. Other dog professionals are suffering because of the ideas that other people have.

I don't understand how this is not related to dog training.

RACHEL: Right. It's always, definitely going to be a part of the conversation. It's so, so important. And you've brought up such amazing points there.

I wanted to ask, if there are any BIPOC dog lovers or other trainers listening to this, do you have any words of wisdom, encouragement, or advice you would like to share with them?

MAYURI: Heh, I don't know about wisdom. I don't think I'm very wise, but, um, I, I do think that I have a few words of encouragement. One is, you know, when I started with dog training, like I mentioned earlier, I only started because Rosie was such a... I got her from the shelter and she was attacking my husband every single day.

She was attacking dogs. She picked fights. She was barking all the time. She's in the room with me right now, this whole podcast, and she's been such a good girl, because that's what positive reinforcement training gets you. But at the time I did not understand the principles. I did not know what I was doing. I didn't know what to do.

And everybody I spoke to close by was like, "Yeah, put a shock collar on her." And I knew I wasn't going to do that. So I became really a dog trainer for her. But when I looked at the industry and I saw all these amazing tools I'd picked up, I said, okay, no more people need to hear about this because it's really, really changed our lives.

It really made Rosie into this wonderful little girl that she is today. Not without her problems, don't get me wrong. She's not—but you know, I'm not aiming for perfection as long as she's happy and comfortable and relaxed. That's what matters to me. So I started my professional journey, not too long ago, I think three years ago, because I wanted to be someone that people could look at and say, "Okay, there is space for people like me," because there absolutely is.

And the other thing that has happened is I post a lot about my dogs and my clients on Facebook and a lot of the social media. I want people in India to see that because they have a different perception of dogs. It is changing, like I said, in the urban areas, but the more we focus on trying to get the dogs integrated as part of the family, the more successful training is because then you really are able to help the animal along in a way that you wouldn't, if you treated it as an outsider.

RACHEL: Yeah.

I think having people see, you know, they were shocked when they heard my dogs are indoor dogs. They were like, "What? You, you just keep your dogs in your house all the time." And we're like, yeah, you know, they have their own bedrooms and that. And they live in the house. Most of the time beaches go out occasionally, whereas in India, dogs are rarely allowed indoors.

Um, you know, so I think all of those things have definitely helped in the sense that people can see what is possible with dogs. And many people have followed Rosie's journey and all my—honestly—desperation, because I didn't want to give her back to the shelter because I had volunteered in shelters for years. I knew what would have happened to her if I had sent her back.

RACHEL: Sure.

MAYURI: So staying with her and helping her through her issues and her honestly, helping me become a better dog trainer has been a huge journey. So Rosie has been one of my greatest teachers, so it has been interesting to see people reach out to me and say, you

know, that they've seen my dogs and they see how well I take care of them.

And that also in a way I feel sets an example on how dogs can be treated as family, especially in cultures, where that is not the norm.

RACHEL: Yeah.

MAYURI: I believe that the start of positive reinforcement training is really understanding where the dog's coming from. And if you don't see the dog as worthy of respect or as worthy of care, then you cannot start that journey.

RACHEL: Yeah.

MAYURI: So I definitely feel like those have been some of the reasons that I became a professional trainer. If you are a person of color and you want to become a dog trainer, please reach out to us. There are so many great BIPOC, positive reinforcement trainers that would love to help you and tell you exactly how to get started and what to do or what to avoid.

We know all the dirty secrets that the industry has. *[laughs]*

RACHEL: For sure.

MAYURI: So, you know, reach out, don't be afraid to make connections. The dog training industry is completely unregulated. So that's another piece of the puzzle that I feel will benefit people of color, because I feel like once regulation brings in an even footing, or at least that's my hope, I think it will be much easier for people of color to be recognized.

And I think one thing that people also don't realize this was a fear of mine. When I started, I was like, "Oh my gosh, what if I get a client who's already racist?" And then it's a problem. How do I deal with them? You know what I did to counter that, I plastered on social media with my images and my website.

RACHEL: That's what I do as well.

MAYURI: Exactly. I am not hiding any surprises. I talk about my journey from India. So if anybody is uncomfortable with that, they can screen themselves out. And I actually ended up getting a lot of families of color because they feel comfortable.

RACHEL: Yeah.

MAYURI: Reaching out to me because they know I am not going to judge them for their immigrant experience. Um, so there is a huge, huge space for BIPOC trainers. And if anybody's thinking of it, do it, the dog training industry needs you.

RACHEL: Yeah. Oh, that is such great advice as well. You know, we don't, well, I don't want to work with a racist, so let's put our faces out there. Just—don't reach out if you're racist. Basic.

MAYURI: Exactly.

Exactly. If they see us in, they're like, "oh, not this person. They probably don't know what they're talking about." Great! Done me a huge favor. They won't even get that in touch with you.

RACHEL: Exactly. Especially because I have quite a white passing name, you know, Rachel Forday. So I am particularly obvious about being Asian. I put it recently on my Instagram profile that this business is Asian owned, just so that people know.

And you've mentioned about having people reaching out. And so finally, what's the best way for people who want to know more about you and your work, or if they want to reach out to you, what's the best way to get in touch with you?

MAYURI: I have a website. My business is called DoggEd, LLC. So my website is https://doggedtraining.com/, and there is a contact from there. You can get in touch with me or you can email me just my first and last name: mayurikerr@gmail.com or doggeddtraining@gmail.com. Nothing too complicated.

RACHEL: Okay. Brilliant. And I will definitely put all of that in the show notes so that everyone can go check those out.

Thank you so, so much for your time and being here and thank you for emotional labor and sharing those experiences you've had, because I know some of them must be still really quite painful sometimes. And so it's been absolutely lovely speaking with a wonderful person like yourself.

MAYURI: Thank you so much for the opportunity, Rachel. I am so thrilled you invited me. This has been amazing. And thank you for being a tireless advocate. I know that, you know, you have faced several moments like this.

RACHEL: My goodness. It's one of those things, but thank you so much for being here and I will speak to you again soon.

MAYURI: Sounds good. Thank you, Rachel.

RACHEL: Bye.

[outro music]

RACHEL: Thank you all so much for listening. As mentioned, you can find links on transcriptions in our show notes. If you can't find the link in the description, you can find them on my website, dogatheart.co.uk/podcasts. If you enjoyed the podcast and would like to support us in what we're doing, you can buy us a coffee at buymeacoffee.com/dogatheart.

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