Transcript of **Out of The Woofworks** Episode 9: “San Choi (Ruff Roll Academy)”

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

Today, we have San Choi with us. He's a dog trainer with his business, Ruff Roll Academy, based in Los Angeles.

One of the things we'll be discussing in this podcast is hate crimes against Asian people, and so I just wanted to give you all a little warning for that. I really appreciate San being here and sharing his story and for his friendship too. So let's get right into this episode!

[intro music]

RACHEL: Hey, San. It's so wonderful to have you here. Thank you so much for taking the time out to chat with us.

SAN: Yeah, of course, it's a pleasure to be here and I'm so honored to be talking about some of the things that we'll be going into.

RACHEL: Thank you so much. Could you tell us a little bit about yourself and what you've been up to?

SAN: Yeah, so my name is San Choi. I am an Asian American that's based in Los Angeles. I'm a certified dog trainer so I train dogs and I also run a daycare where I take care of other people's dogs and just get them out of the house and make sure that they're having fun and getting some exercise. I've been getting into like my weekly patrols, just like things that I've been doing that are part of my routine for like the past year or so. It's just, it's kind of going that direction.

RACHEL: Oh, that's brilliant, and we'll definitely get to the patrol stuff in a bit. You know, I really find it interesting how people get

started working with dogs because everyone's journey is so unique. So what was it like for you? How did you kinda get started?

SAN: My journey with dogs was in terms of profession, it was as backyard-esque, as you can get per se. So what I mean by that is I got my start from just creating a profile on Rover, if any listeners or if you're familiar with that, Rachel.

RACHEL: Yep.

SAN: It's a pet sitting app where, if you'd like to be a pet-sitter, that works online, you would just make your profile and then people will search your profile and, and look at what your offerings are. So my first start was just getting into Rover, because I just wanted to make some side income as a college student just working.

RACHEL: Right. That's really fascinating. And I think starting as a dog walker is often one of the first ways people get into becoming a dog trainer as well. You know, you build your confidence with handling and being around dogs and like, but I guess at the same time, you can see the issues some dogs have and it's like, you wanna help them, I guess.

But dog training has a big human client element as well. So what's your favorite part now that, you know, that now that you work with more on the training side of things, what's your favorite part about working with dogs and the people?

SAN: Yeah, I think as a person going through this rabbit hole from pet sitter to dog walker and to doing daycare and then eventually making your way to diving deeper into becoming a trainer and, and then it still keeps going!

But yeah, going through that progression, it was really interesting at each stage, like from just doing pet sitting to dog walking, to being a trainer, I guess for me, I always had the question of how could I make sure this person and this person's animal companion can live the happiest lives together?

And I felt like for pet sitting, you were able to do that by giving the dog really good care. So the owners really have peace of mind, but at each stage, it just seemed like there were these misunderstandings between people and their animals and vice versa. Up until now, it's really about helping people understand by delivering information to them, delivering information that they're missing, that's really causing that miscommunication.

RACHEL: Sure.

SAN: So that part and really seeing the growth of the miscommunication developing into understanding is like the best piece of like human-animal coaching that as a trainer, you go through, or for me personally, just seeing that person not understand and go through that path of misunderstanding to understanding and seeing what they go through.

Because I think everyone has such a unique story to bring to the table, whether it's working with a client or maybe watching the growth in the development of another trainer, nerd, dog, but there's just so many of these unique stories. And for me, it's just being able to just take in and learn from all these unique, different stories.

And I think we're just so fortunate as trainers to be able to almost be that third person, uh, or looking at the case in a third person's perspective to be like, oh my gosh, this is, I learned this and this unique team in my experience with them and something different with another team. So it's just wonderful to see the different stories people and their dogs paint, and kind of learn from you own.

That is what I enjoy about dog training.

RACHEL: Yeah. It's like really making those connections with different people and their story. I think that is so important. And like you say, you know, really getting to know them and seeing how much they learn and how much they've changed to really want to help their dogs in the most kind and compassionate way possible. I think that's like a really incredible feeling.

Is there an aspect in your work that you really love the most? Like is it working with puppy stuff or like leash walking or reactivity?

SAN: Yeah, I guess it's always that interest for me. It, it it's ever changing, but for a very long time and still up to this date, I just have a passion for just spending time with dogs.

Like literally just being with dogs and just doing daycare and, and having my experience of walking dogs and just taking care of many different dogs and experienced many different kinds of dogs. That's always been something that just gravitates towards me. But, you know, as you get into behavior modification, working with fear and aggression, there is that side of helping that animal feel safe and reassured. It's like one of the most beautiful things to experience and kind of go through and being able to help out different animals.

So one, I always love spending with time with animals, especially dogs and two, it's really about seeing them be happy or seeing them go through this journey and this growth of maybe possibly feeling some sort of aversive relationship with their environment, to the point where they express some aggression. Just seeing that change and seeing them feel more safer, that's something that I can just get from just being with dogs. So I love that I'm able to do more training as I move forward with my career, working dogs.

RACHEL: Oh, you kind of have the best of both worlds right now, though ,with the daycare and just kind of being with dogs and spending lots of time with them, but also being able to help dogs and really seeing that growth and healing and changing them as well.

And I think the world is kind of short on daycare, walking type of things that is really with the positive reinforcement-based methodology. So I'm really glad that in your area, they have you out there doing it. So I think that's really, really good.

SAN: I think for me personally, just as someone operating like a daycare and, and doing training, me, doing training really helps me with what I do daycare and vice versa.

Me doing daycare really helps me what I do with training. So sometimes for example, working with clients and their unique cases, it can be such a great place for me in daycare to decompress and just also enjoy doing what I love spending time with dogs. Um, that also helps me to build inspiration towards helping my clients even more, because I'm able to just have these positive outlets, especially working with people with intimate concerns. I'm sure you, you know this kind of pitfall as consultant almost. I guess it's a really good balance because I love training, but I don't want to do so much training where it takes my time of what I also love, which is with dogs.

So I love that I can do both, and also more importantly, offer this specific service to the Los Angeles area because there's so many finite places that provide quality care where dogs don't feel overwhelmed in LA where there's just so many dogs and being a billion dollar industry, dogs can almost be seen as commodities or pieces of checks.

And I think one thing that's so great about working with daycare, I'm working with more everyday clients and sometimes, with training clients, they might be more specific to greater pool of pet owners and guardians. And it's nice to show them what good training looks like, because sometimes they don't know what good and bad training is.

So I really feel like just having dog walkers and having, uh, people that do daycare that have really strong backgrounds in science-based training, it really helps to move the needle to show people what good care and good training really looks like. So that's another reason why I like doing what I do and also just being able to spend time with dogs, of course, right.

RACHEL: Yeah, absolutely. And I think there is such a need for science-based dog walkers and daycare and things like that. So it's really good that you're out there.

So to kind of switch gears a little bit, you know, you are one of my fellow Asian brothers in the positive reinforcement dog training world and I was really fortunate actually to grow up in Singapore

and I largely only started to experience racism when I was traveling to countries like, you know, in Australia, and also now I live in the UK.

So I wanted to ask if you wouldn't mind sharing, what was it like for you growing up in the U.S. as an Asian kid?

SAN: Yeah, I mean, growing up as, as an Asian American, I... Well, let's just say I've only became an Asian American recently because when I was around the age of 17 and 18, my mom was able to go through and pass the citizenship test. And so, but before then I actually, um, I was born in Macau, which is a peninsula that's like, right, right, right next to Hong Kong, if you're--are you familiar with that?

RACHEL: Yeah, absolutely. Yeah.

SAN: Yeah. So I'm from there and I moved here when I was four and that's where my life started with just being here in America. It was very interesting because. But whenever we went out and if it was in an environment that was not so centric to our culture, so maybe it was in a Chinese restaurant or, or Chinese market, if my parents would behave in certain ways that they've been behaving for years.

And let's just say, um, the kind of Chinese that my parents are, sometimes they can be more loud and vocal. Um, when they're on the phone or if they're I'm laughing because they are very loud and sometimes flamboyant the way they talk.

So I don't think Americans are so used to seeing that--so little things like that, where me as a kid growing up noticed is, whenever my parents would behave in certain ways, I would be able to see how people would do and almost what kind of vibe that we were giving off. There were always these hard stares and almost like this look of unwelcomeness.

So I think as a younger child, I kind of saw that. But of course, when you're so young, you don't really understand why that is or, or why people may feel that way.

RACHEL: Yeah.

SAN: It just felt like, uh, look of disapproval. I mean, When you're a kid, I'm sure you've noticed when you've done something wrong and your parents aren't too happy, right?

RACHEL: Yeah.

SAN: So it kinda was that vibe. And so at a, at a younger age, I really picked up this in, I guess, more of what that was portrayed in high school. So growing up in an American high school in a city that was more Asian populated, there was a really clear like division of students and the friends that they've made.

So being in a high school that was almost 80% Asian or 80 high, if anyone's local, but if you're from this area, you know, like there's a bunch of Asian people in this city. It's just how it is growing up in this space, it was really clear for children to gravitate towards Asian friends or if they were white people, per se, they would gravitate towards being friends with other white people.

There were those crossovers of certain Asian kids growing up that would be friends with white people. That was, I guess, it was more selective it's like if they could have relate more clearly. So it could have been perhaps the Asians that didn't have as strong of a tie to their original culture, maybe at first or second generation Chinese.

Um, there was a sense where that child still kind of maintain a lot of that culture. Usually with those groups where there were white people making friends with Asians, they were Asians possibly that didn't have as much of a root in their culture. So I guess on their end it made a lot of sense for them to, uh, conglomerate and make friends.

And so I guess there were other Asian children that didn't have this Americanized culture in a part of their life, I guess. And so it was very interesting how, like kids would make friends. So interesting because as Asian people, there's different kinds of people and it's hard to pinpoint one specific type of person.

There's so many subcategories, but my point is there were kids growing up, they didn't speak as well of English, and it was interesting how they related because they, they spoke more of their natural language, maybe Chinese, for example. And then there were like kids that were still, maybe were first or second generation Americans, but didn't have these strong American ties and they would conglomerate friends together. So it was really interesting to see that growing up.

RACHEL: I suppose there were more Asians in your school, but did you still experience any racism while you were there?

SAN: I mean, the, the great thing about Arcadia was that I guess there are families that value with education, but we didn't really see too much like direct racism in terms of like bullying, just because the kid was Asian.

RACHEL: Right.

SAN: It was more like certain kids wouldn't, uh, make friends with certain kids that had certain cultural backgrounds. It was just like, they couldn't relate to each other. Well, fortunately for me, I can only say for myself, but out of one of the, maybe like 4,000 students, that were there, and like 80% of those students were like Asian.

I didn't really experience that direct racism, but I guess as an Asian person and just the heritage that we bring, like, I think it was a part of my upbringing where that racism wasn't as clearly expressed, which I, I am still thankful for because there's so many people that go through that.

RACHEL: Yeah, it can definitely be a hard thing to go through as a child. As we're on the topic of racism, seeing hate crimes against Asian people on the rise during COVID-19 times is really heartbreaking.

And sometime ago I saw a link to a news article online that was talking about the rise of COVID in the U.S. and Europe, but the photo they used for the thumbnail was of all East Asian looking

people on the streets with their masks on. Uh, that was really frustrating to see and to see how things like that isn't helping with the violence against Asian people.

So I wanted to ask you if you feel comfortable sharing, how have these events been affecting you, both in your personal and your business life?

SAN: Yeah. I mean, this is why I, I am just so grateful for what you do in terms of having this platform for people to talk about these things.

It is something that does affect myself in terms of how I carry myself or what I think about in my focuses from a day-to-day, whether, um, if I'm doing, uh, extracurricular things, like on, on my own time outside of working. So there is that daily weight, but it's crazy how we see that the media's projecting that Asian people have something to do with all of the travesties that happen from our pandemic.

And it's crazy how we have such a spike in Asian hate. 339% since like the beginning of the pandemic in terms of like our hate crimes. And that's only for reported hate crimes cases that aren't reported that don't get on social media that don't catch attention or the police or anyone for the matter is aware the perpetrator. That number is alarming because when you go outside every day and you've seen that people that are of any age at this point from children to young adults, to the elderly, anyone that's Asian within, um,--especially in metropolitan area is New York, San Francisco, and more so starting in Los Angeles now, too--there's more of a likelihood of you being in danger, just for you going outside.

RACHEL: That's messed up.

SAN: Yeah, and so if you're trying to do your best in terms of making a living and just doing what you love and your well-being is in jeopardy of, of course it's going to affect you. Right. So, because there's not too much discussion in how the average Asian person feels in the context in communicating beyond their, just their, their own Asian community.

It's harder for people to understand it. So it's great that you have this platform for people to know how these hate crimes, these Asian hate crimes have that effect on just the mindset and how people are, are, uh, navigating through their lives, through this type of violence.

RACHEL: Yeah. It's our day-to-day life, really. Because like, I don't go out at night by myself. So I would've walked Dave in the evening when it's dark or anything like that. Like if I were to walk him, I'd just walk him really close by. Because like you say, you just don't know what's gonna happen and you don't really feel safe and no one should feel that way, right? No one should feel unsafe just going about running their errands in their day-to-day life.

SAN: Yeah, absolutely. It's just for living life, just being worried about that. And that's just the physical aspect in terms of how these spikes in hate crimes could affect the Asian individual. The amount of like trauma that you go through in terms of people getting injured, put in comas, dying, getting murdered, it really has such a great toll on you, especially if you are worried about the well-being of not just your own family, but the wellbeing of people that are in similar positions. Like you, like Asians to other Asian people.

So even though there's all these travesties and all this trauma that's happening, the greater good that is happening is people are connecting together.

So from what has happened, I feel like there's more sense of a community because people are hurt. And for people that do care, they're able to sense that and come together and connect and do things like this. I'm so grateful to talk about this because it's so healing for me to voice this out for people to listen.

And just to know that it might not just be myself that's impacted, but this could very much be the case for, for any other Asian person that's within your very life.

RACHEL: Yeah.

SAN: So it's great that we get to speak about this because I guess, um, and you can tell me if this is true for you. Growing up and especially being Asian, it's very well rehearsed that we don't really talk about our emotions or talk about the things that worry about us too much.

Uh, we almost see ourselves like as really strong people where we don't want to like burden in other people with our boohoo.

RACHEL: Yeah.

SAN: Right. So it's nice for me to talk about this, not in a boohoo kind of way, but in a way to just share how my life has been playing out.

RACHEL: Oh yeah, I totally get what you mean.

And I was quite lucky growing up, just being able to say how I feel like telling my mom I'm nervous every night, this day before school. So I'm thankful I had that, but I know what you mean about the general social culture and I definitely still carry some of that with me as well.

One of the things that really bothers me about hate crimes to do with COVID is because, uh, for the longest time, since the start of COVID, many Asian countries, for example, like where I'm from Singapore, have good regulations for COVID while in the UK just-- the bare minimum of wearing masks was always kind of optional and now they're completely gone. And in Singapore, you know, we were always talking about being socially responsible and not wanting to spread COVID to other people. And then to see the way that Asians get blamed for COVID, that sort of attitude I find is just fundamentally racist.

SAN: Yeah, absolutely. I completely agree. It's really disheartening. I see on a local level. So I, I see Asian people that are within my community, they're really sensitive about just having their mask and, and making sure that they stay at a good proximity away from people.

But yeah, it is so sad that people are being generalized for something that has nothing to do with their intent as people, but these feelings that we get from just the frustration of being in the pandemic.

So it's--I know it's why it happens and it is racist and it really generalizes people in a huge umbrella, that's just very unfair. And I just hope that there are more people that can see past that and, and seeing past the motion of what that pandemic has caused people to feel. But it's really tough.

Um, people are just trying to do their best and it's, it's tough that we're almost taking it out on one another.

RACHEL: Hmm. It's like finding someone to blame almost, or using it as an excuse for turning existing racist feelings into violence. But like you mentioned earlier, there are amazing things happening with the community.

For example, with me, when I first came to the UK, I didn't have many Asian friends or like a community, but now I kind of do not necessarily in the UK, but around the world, like you, for example, and other Asian trainers out there.

SAN: That's great.

RACHEL: And of course, people like you are out there on the ground helping people.

So we mentioned a little bit about your patrol work. And I'm so grateful that you're doing this. Could you tell us a little bit more about what you've been doing in your community?

SAN: Absolutely. And I think community just falls beyond what we can do physically or, or do within our, our local measures. Just being able to understand that there's people that are suffering, that that are going through physical and mental and psychological trauma and really coming together to be in a space where you can feel supported and you can feel that that person understands what you're going through. And they're openheartedly coming up to you

and telling you that they have your back. And I think that's the beautiful thing about this.

Unfortunately, it it's taken a lot of emotional and psychological toll on so many different people on different levels. It's nice that we have that and I just feel like just being able to connect with people, just being, do something about this, uh, just has fallen into other parts of my life in terms of as a younger man, it's nice to be able to contribute to people that need help in ways that are a part of my community, such as the elderly people that just walk on the street and they just wanna get home or feel safe while waiting for their food when they're outside.

So that sense of community in terms of what I've been able to experience with, with you, Rachel, and, and other Asian trainers and other people of different shades of color, it's nice that we can be there to support one another.

What we try to do with the patrols is to just make sure that people feel that there is someone there for them. So what I've been able to do for the past, uh, six to eight months is just spend, um, one night out of my week to go, um, patrol in the evening. Anywhere from like 6:30 to like 10 o'clock or so, and walk this route that myself and other, um, volunteers walk to just make sure that everything is okay and people and businesses feel safe.

There's been a lot of crimes and people getting hurt and threatened and getting into fights in Chinatown. So what we try to do as a group is to deter violence or any kind of conflicts that occur. It's nice that I found people that would care enough done to really just look out for the person's wellbeing.

That's just walking down the street. So literally getting into the grassroots of actually helping out a person like physically, um, like walking, uh, only across the street, but that's, uh, that in a nutshell is what I do during every, um, Thursday night in Chinatown. It sucks that all this stuff is happening and I feel like being able to do something about it where I can know that that other person is more safe.

It means so much to me, because I think we need more of that sense of community that people can support one another in any kind of way you do. Um, I just found like patrolling and just walking the streets at night is just my way of wanting to contribute. If there is something that of a violent crime that would happen, it usually might occur that time.

So that's just two cents of what I spent my time time doing sometimes, um, to just do something about this, it's just so frustrating to go through what's happening to my people. What without me contributing to the greater good of my people, just because a lot of violent crimes that we're experiencing.

So I find that everyone can have their way to contribute and just spending my time on Thursday, just walking by businesses and, and making sure that the shop owners can close and walk them to their cars. It gives myself, and also those mom and pop shops--that Asian couple that's well over 70 years old, still literally like busting their ass--at seven o'clock in the night, bringing in their vegetables, into their store and just closing up and sweeping the streets and making sure that they're okay. You know, like hardworking people that should never be in a situation where they're threatened just for doing just something that's a part of everyone's a daily routine, like going to work. So, yeah, just being able to do that. It means so much to me.

RACHEL: It sounds like it's really empowering.

SAN: It really is. It really is. And one thing that I love about patrolling, especially just going to a certain city and just really doing that for a consistent basis. Just learning about that unique culture of that city.

We're so fortunate in, in L.A. where there's just so many different cultures that are a part of our daily life. Each city has their own kind of culture and kind of like a vibe. It's nice to really get used to that and getting used to the culture and the businesses that are there. I've learned so much about Chinatown's culture and history, just from the people that patrol there.

They are really involved with the community. I even know, um, young Chinese politicians that I have the honor of patrolling with and just being a part of that city and just understanding the local events and the things that people are doing locally.

And also to learn that Chinatown was always the roots of establishment for Chinese people in any kind of metropolitan city. If you look, Chinatown is always the place where Asians would conglomerate to feel safe and to feel welcome. Yeah. And then over time they would expand and go to different areas and create their own little Asian cities.

So here in, in LA, we have Chinatown that kind of established everything. And over the recent current history, there's been developments of other, um, Asian cities. So San Gabriel valley is one of the more prominent ones that are known now, but all that came from Chinatown. So just being able to learn the roots of that city and Chinatown is so rich in culture, it really gave me a place to learn about more about my community. Yeah. And that was the beautiful thing about patrolling, not, not just building the community in terms of finding people that can support one another and just standing up for what's right. But really, as an Asian person, getting into the touch of my roots in terms of the history that's behind, um, the people that walk similar footsteps as Asian people living in America. Like it's really, um, a place of sentiment and just getting to know the city, it just made patrolling that much more meaningful to me.

RACHEL: Totally. And you must learn so much about the people there and really just being able to connect with people. And I think that's always– again, you know, when we think about being a dog trainer, it's about connecting with people and you're doing that in another aspect, which is so amazing.

And I mean, it's sad and upsetting that you have to do it, you know, that you have to be out there helping people because there is a danger there. But it is also amazing with how much you're learning and how much you're helping people. And I think so much about my mom, my grandma, you know, my family. And I'm really lucky

and I'm really glad that they're back in Singapore, where, where it's generally safe.

But when I hear about older people, especially, getting attacked, I do think about them and I think about their families and it always really hurts my heart. Like ,people just want to live and go about their day and now they have to live in fear, you know?

SAN: Yeah absolutely. I'm just so glad that your parents are in a safe environment. That's first and foremost, right? We were saying behavior like, like safety that trumps all, like, if you don't feel safe, what's the point of doing anything else?

RACHEL: Yeah. So I wanted to ask what has been the response from the community when they see you and your team out there?

SAN: Yeah, um, it's for the most part, it's been really great on the local level, in terms of the actual shop owners and the community that we're interacting with. Just, just getting to know like the elders that would just like, hang out just before sunset, like usually in the summer. Just learning about a little bit about their culture and what they've gone through and, and all the shop owners where we'd help them close and walk to their cars. We just got a chance to really got in touch with the community. And people are honestly just so grateful that people would take the time to do this. And just to see how people and how grateful and appreciative they are, it is such a great feeling. And I feel like there is that part where I get so much fulfillment in knowing that those people feel happy. I'm just so glad to be a part of things like this.

But on almost like a political level, like people aren't really like backing us up in terms of like, "Oh, we support you and we really wanna help you out." It's more like a group of volunteers that just wants to help out the community, like really grassroots, right.

And– but that's not to say that's what we're doing is not important and it's not appreciated. So we always keep doing what we're doing. And I'm just glad that everything's moving towards the right directions, even though, uh, sometimes there's not as much of a direct support from other organizations. So there's that.

RACHEL: Yeah, I know. I would feel really safe and confident if I was in that situation, doing that you and your team are out there helping and protecting people and think that's really amazing.

If people are listening and they want to get involved in doing this great patrol work that you're doing, is there a way they can do it or get involved to help out?

SAN: Absolutely. I think for Chinatown in a place that we patrol, there's always room for people to come and to start volunteering. Maybe one thing that would be helpful is eventually having enough people to support where there will be multiple days that patrols could happen.

RACHEL: Mm-hmm.

SAN: But I'd say if anyone is local in the Los Angeles area, and that, that wants to get involved and is curious in learning, I'd say find a local patrol group that's local to you, and just spend some time feeling out who does the patrols and, and how you feel about it.

I feel like everyone has their own way of doing these things and different groups, almost like pockets of people that might have certain similar interests. So I feel like if anyone's local, to have that experience of what patrol feels like, and seeing if they would like to do this as something that they volunteer their time, either on a weekly or like monthly or however, what kind of basis that works out for you.

But I think just simply getting your feet wet and contacting people, such as, uh, neighborhood safety and companions who patrols in Koreatown. If you're more towards the West side or, uh, you can also contact me, who does Chinatown when we're more towards downtown. There's also another patrol group in San Gabriel valley and Susan who runs the patrols is someone that I also know. So, uh, you can also talk to Asians Taking Action LA. S o there's at least three primary patrol groups. And depending on your area and who you feel most comfortable with or local for the matter, um, I implore you just to check it out and see how you feel about things.

But sometimes I think patrol might be just fall outside of joining something. I feel like a group of friends that just wants to take initiative can do the very same things in terms of joining a group. So I feel like it's hard for people to know where to start when they want to get involved. And sometimes it just starts on what you want to do. And sometimes it can just be you supervising people that are in, uh, in a supermarket plaza. Like, or maybe with a friend and just standing there, just being that person if something were to happen.

RACHEL: Yeah.

SAN: Do you wanna do for two minutes right before you get into your car or maybe for 10 minutes just to do it, or maybe actually take time out of your day to go meet with someone to do that kind of patrol work for, uh, maybe like an hour.

Like, I mean, I think there's so many ways to start. It just feels like we don't know like which way is what, but whatever way people feel comfortable with, I think that's where we start learning in terms of finding some sort of fulfillment and doing something about some of the things that are happening around, uh, Asian hate and things like that.

RACHEL: And I think, yeah, like you say, it's what people feel comfortable with. And for those who really want to look into some of the groups that you know of or that you are in, I'll put some links to that in the show notes, perhaps so that they can have a look and reach out if they want to join in.

So apart from helping people through your patrol work and advocacy, of course, as a dog trainer, you help people too, by helping them have better lives with their dogs and educating them about their dogs.

SAN: Yeah.

RACHEL: Have you found that perhaps more Asian clients reach out to you because perhaps they feel a little bit more comfortable with you or anything like that?

SAN: You know, what's so interesting, before the pandemic more, my clientele was people that weren't Asian. And as I started working through the pandemic there were much more Asian clients or people of color that would reach out to me. I thought it was strange at first and it wasn't until I was just talking with a few other Asian colleagues that are just talking about the training space. It does feel that there is that hint where these Asian clients, they might feel more comfortable with someone that kind of looks like them for whatever the matter is.

But just because there's trainers that are asking about these things and I'm just like, yeah, it makes me wonder too. I think it might be a case where I don't know. I mean, two years is still a very small sample size, but there has been an increase in people that are Asian that would reach out. It's interesting, uh, because I don't entirely understand, but it is interesting that that is occurring. And that, um, other trainers are also talking about this too.

Oh, so I wanna pose you a question!

RACHEL: Yeah, go on.

SAN: I know I'm here to answer, but–

RACHEL: No, please go ahead.

SAN: Yeah. cause, cause you're Asian too. And I, I think we're just having a conversation with just two people of similar cultural background. Do you feel like you're able to relate to more of the Asian clientele within your workspace?

RACHEL: Yeah, so it's really interesting because I do get more Asian clients as well, and like you say, in the last two years. But generally I've found that people are from outside of the UK because I can work virtually so locally I've probably only had one person reach out to me that was Asian, but I've had Asian clients in like Singapore and the US, in the Philippines, and they would reach out to me.

And it sounds like for them, it's more like struggling to find a trainer that has the same values as them in terms of like positive reinforcement based training. So sometimes it's like that, or sometimes it's just based on my content and me being able to talk about anti-racism and Asian stuff and, uh, just general social justice stuff that they feel like, okay, this person is kind of safe to be around. And I kind of have that feeling because the clients that I've had are people that sometimes would post about these things as well. So interestingly, not locally.

SAN: Yeah. Uh, I mean, it's so interesting how people can relate to what they're familiar with, whether it it's based on how they look or their last name to like their mindset and, and then dive deeper in terms of your brilliant work on the internet, conveying the social justice and the mindset that an Asian trainer is going through and relating on the positive reinforcement end. And it's nice that people can relate to that. And to know that honestly, there is that community where people are likeminded and that want to support each other, and just feel like sometimes with the greatness of social media, where we can connect, people also feel so isolated being on a phone and also being in a context of COVID where you want to be away from people.

I know that there are people that care, but we almost have these devices that separate us.

RACHEL: Yeah.

SAN: But it's nice that people are still able to build community as even though there's these challenges.

RACHEL: Because I work virtually and because I am from Singapore, I do go back to Singapore. And so the last time I was back, I actually met up with my Singaporean clients and their dogs.

SAN: Oh great. Oh, that's wonderful.

RACHEL: And both of them were really like fearful dogs and they came out to the park and hung out together. We all had a picnic.

And so it was kind of like seeing the growth in real life. It was really amazing.

So I think that having that community both online and then making it real life is really, really cool. So for me, when I work virtually there's still a really good connection there, especially with Singapore people. And also partly why I get a lot of Singaporean clients, not just because I'm Singaporean, but because I have a Singapore Special dog, Dave, and he's like, you know, a Singaporean street dog. And so people who have those dogs, they often do have similar issues that he used to have, being a little bit more skittish, more fearful, more reactive.So they feel comfortable reaching out to me with that as well.

SAN: I didn't know that Dave was from Singapore.

RACHEL: Oh!

SAN: I think that's, that's so cool. I know that's a part of his title. But I never had a chance to really learn that. I think that's so cool how you're able to get a dog that was so close to home.

RACHEL: Yeah.

SAN: So it's like when you have Dave, it's like, even though you live in the UK, it's like you have that little piece. That's–

RACHEL: I know!

SAN: Yeah. That is super cool. But that's so interesting how, like when you're training virtually, and then you're also meeting the dog that you've been working with so diligently over virtually where there's just like these different sides you see out of the dog and also more so of the people.

It's like, I can totally relate how you've built a connection with the clients you're working with and you're working really closely with them. So when you do go to visit, it's like seeing a friend, so–

RACHEL: Yes!

SAN: And seeing a friend that is so relatable. And I really think that's the element that really helps people feel comfortable. And you can tell me how you feel about this, or if this is something you experience: Sometimes when people are training, it feels like they're putting a lot of pressure on themselves. And like, they're doing stuff in front of an air quote unquote "trainer", right? Like someone that's good at what they're doing.

So it's nice that there are Asian trainers that can relate to Asian guardians. That might feel that kind of pressure from us just simply trying to help them. So it's nice that you can cater to that. And it almost remind me of like community work that I do in terms of just helping out the elderly Asian person. And it's nice how, like how dogs and social justice really do tie together really well.

RACHEL: They do! They do, don't they? And you know, you mentioned about understanding the culture and, um, how they feel as an Asian person. So I worked with someone who's Asian American, and the reason why they were using like shock collars in the past is because they felt like they were being a burden, that their dog was being a burden to other people when the dog reacted.

SAN: Yeah.

RACHEL: And so, you know, being able to understand that, not judge them for it, but just really understand that there's the fear there of worrying about these things and then working through that and helping to alleviate those fears and those worries, I think, is really powerful.

SAN: Yeah, absolutely. And I think that's the important piece about just having more BIPOC trainers.

RACHEL: Yes.

SAN: Not just for the greater good of the trainers in terms of a trainer being successful in this industry, but looking at it on the clientele's perspective of how much of a dynamic being able to be relatable to your client in such ways, from Asian client to Asian

consultant or trainer. It just opens so much more windows that maybe it's more comfortable to people. And I think that's great that we can open these topics, cuz they're so important.

RACHEL: This is a great segue because I also wanted to ask you, how do you feel like the industry leaders, the dog training industry leaders and the organizations that we have can do better? What do you wanna see more from them and how can they be, I guess genuinely anti-racist, rather than just doing it on a performative level, just releasing like one statement ,or having just one BIPOC trainer or the conference and things like that?

SAN: Yeah I think what is so helpful for the wellbeing of all people is having to give every kind of person an equal opportunity to succeed, whether it's the client or whether it's a trainer or whatever person it is, we should focus on just accepting people as people and helping any kind of person.

So, one thing that I would love to see more from– Well there's many things, but one thing that really is a great start is just for leaders in these organizations to really give the mindset of needing to do more, needing to let it be known that People of Color are well supported as trainers and to also potentially have more content where there's the faces of BIPOC trainers.

That representation piece is so important, but on a more relatable level to trainers, I think it's important that these organizations have some sort of mindset or some sort of action in creating certain agencies within our organizations to help People of Color as a way to be more equal and just to help support them and provide resources, so it's easier for more people to be involved in, in the dog training space.

I think if there's more trainers that are successful that are People of Color, they will be able to touch different markets of people that let's say a White person may not be as successfully able to tap into. So I just feel like if we focus on giving all of the people fair opportunity, there's so much ways that we can grow as an entirety. I think that that representation piece and just, uh, organizations just really spotlighting these trainers on a daily, just making sure that people

are getting more used to seeing Black, Brown, and Yellow faces as, as much as they see their White counterparts.

I hope there to be a day where there's just so much representation that people are just used to seeing all colour. And I think that's where the work that comes in from the leaders that are in a position to have the resources and to have the connections to promote these type of organizations. Not only is it advantageous for them in terms of maintaining their organizations and finding different markets, but also a way to just help out the average person, and just using kindness as a way to just build their marketing brand or just who they represent as a company.

I mean, I think it's, there's just so many ways that we can all win together, but I think it starts with just having the mindset that there always can be some sort of work that's done in the social justice realm to make things more fair. Because as people we're built on inequality and that's one of the things that's kind of made the system the way that it is. So, it's nice that we are moving towards the needle of having more fairness and more equal opportunities for all people.

RACHEL: Yeah, it really starts with good representation, like you said. It's also really important for people in the industry to learn more. You can absolutely hire someone who's Black, Indigenous, or a Person of Color to educate you on these issues and how to do better in the work of inclusivity and diversity. And as you mentioned, people of all marginalized identities should be able to see themselves represented in our field because seriously, so many people, no matter who they are, love dogs and have dogs.

SAN: Yeah, absolutely. A lot of Asian people too, like–

RACHEL: Yeah! *[laughs]*

SAN: It's... right, a lot!

RACHEL: So many! And you know, when I was a kid, I thought the only animal jobs that existed were vet and zookeeper. Because I just had no idea that working with dogs in that way, kind of being a

trainer or being like a behaviorist was an option at all, because hardly anyone that looked like me was represented in the media as a dog trainer. You know, when we think about dog trainers.

So yeah, no, I would love for the new generation or trainers to see that "Oh, yeah." You know, or just be really normalized about it, "Yeah, of course, there's an Asian trainer, like yeah, of course I can do that." You know? Um, I think that would be really, really amazing.

SAN: Absolutely. And for those organizations to work side by side with BIPOC trainers or trainers that may look like the people that might be going to trade shows or, uh, school presentations. I think being able to have those unique faces, those unique, uh, professional faces being at the head of these conversations as a spokesperson, as someone that represents DEI [Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion], I think that would be such a great thing for these organizations to get into.

RACHEL: Yeah.

SAN: And I can totally agree. Definitely growing up, being a dog trainer is not something that came anywhere close to being on a list of things that was acceptable.

RACHEL: Yeah.

SAN: And building off of just the lack of exposure of just dog training being an actual career, it's such a challenge for, for people like you and I that have a passion for animals and helping out animals that are a part of this culture.

It's so wonderful to be able to do something that you actually love. I hate for people to miss the opportunity and to only just talk about this between us being the lucky ones out of the bunch, where there can be more people that can tap into these innate, uh, passions that can serve as a way to make a living.

And yeah, so I think, and I hope that we're moving towards that direction–

RACHEL: Yeah.

SAN: –of that representation and just pushing the needle, so there can be more people that are just like us in the future that can just keep this going because we're still young, but there's gonna be a point where we're not as young and.,, I think that work in social justice that's so important, this work just goes beyond generations.

Something that's really important for us to understand is social justice work is multi-generational work.

RACHEL: Yes.

SAN: So it's not the work that myself and yourself will do in our length of time. It's about the work that prolongs throughout generation, because for the change that we want to happen, for there to be more equal-ness it might be practical to understand that the needle might be always ever progressing.

So being able to have BIPOC trainers be more represented and for them to be in a spotlight where there can be more Asian trainers that want to seek this out as a career. I think those are the young leaders that will continue to push needles.

RACHEL: You've really made such important points here today. And you've really given us a lot to think about, especially in terms of finding that community and really joining up with that community, doing a lot more within our community, and making connections with people. So before we go, I wanted to ask, is there anything else you want to speak about?

SAN: I think, there isn't anything in terms of a newer topic I wanna speak about, but I wanna dive deeper in terms of what this social justice movement can really be on different lenses.

RACHEL: Yeah.

SAN: I feel like just going back to the topic of this being such a long term work, that's multi-generational. We all have a part and a role in getting to a place that's more equal and more fair and where people

can live the lives as happily, as freely as they want. And it's really about the work that we all do together as a community, not just people that are within the Asian community, all sorts of different communities.

RACHEL: Yeah.

SAN: People as a whole do the work for those that are affected, to really share how they feel and build themselves up to be able to spotlight themselves in accomplishments that they've made. I think that's a great place for people to start in terms of seeing a greater change. Also in turn for the people that are listening, the people that aren't experiencing the pain directly, for them to have an open ear and also to find some sort of way that they can learn more. And sometimes that can be just simply picking up an audio book of just learning more about Asian culture. Learning about the history in terms of what may not have been talked or taught in schools in terms of the journey that Asian people of all different parts of the world have made their ways in passing on their generations in different countries.

I think there's so much value in us just doing something about it. And sometimes it can just be voicing out your opinion, expressing it, and also on the other end for the people that aren't directly affected to have a place to really listen and to internalize how you feel about it. And also most importantly, to have some sort of action based on those feelings that manifested in you from listening to these conversations.

So I say there's always something that we can do. There's so much to learn on the internet. You're one click away from an audio board that can tell you so much about a given topic.

RACHEL: Yeah.

SAN: And on the other end, just for the BIPOC that are out there, just talk about their stories in some way, shape or form. Not to just do it for other people, but for yourself too, for you to find that peace, of almost venting or just having an outlet for all of the challenges that you may have.

It may feel more difficult in the beginning, but it feels a whole lot better once we can express ourselves. And that's why I just wanna close by just saying I'm just so grateful to come in a space where I can talk about how I feel and to heal and to talk to you about my own feelings. I guess that's my way of hopefully sparking some sort of interest or mindset of another person that may look and feel like me to have some sort of takeaway with that.

RACHEL: Yeah, no, you are doing such amazing work and thank you so much for coming on here and speaking with me today. And could I ask, what's the best way for people who want to know more about you and your work to get in touch with you?

SAN: Yeah. So you can find all of my information on my Instagram. From there, you can get in touch with me through my email or through my DM, or you can simply just give me a call. If I cannot get to you, you can always just leave a message and I will be sure to revisit you in terms of anything that you wanna speak about.

And honestly, just for Asian people that are going through these challenges as we speak, above all aside from being a dog trainer, I am also just an AAPI that just cares. So if you're affected from this Asian hate and the things that are happening, just know that I'm always here to lend some sort of hand in support, whether it's in resource, in terms of information I can share or having a quick chat with you or really diving in deeper.

I'm all for building community and connecting with people in such ways. So if you just wanna have a simple conversation, that's what I'm also here for aside from just working with dogs or just working with social justice. I think it's just about building a community, just making sure that we can make the most of the time that we have with one another. So I wanna offer myself out to that.

RACHEL: Oh, thank you, you're so generous with your time. And I'll definitely put your Instagram handle in our show notes, and along with some of the information we kind of mentioned about like patrol stuff if people wanna help out, they can have a look and check that out as well.

So thank you so, so much San, for being here with us and being so open with sharing your experiences and all of your amazing work that you've been doing. I know it can be a painful time for our community, so I really, really appreciate your emotional labor here.

SAN: Oh, thank you. And I think it's just a part of my duty just for myself and for my people.

And I just really am so grateful to just be in this safe space and just to be invited to talk about these things that are so important. Just to know that there are colleagues and inspirational individuals, just like yourself, that are doing the work that you're doing, that are looking to collaborate with folks like me, it really gives me the hope of the community that I want to continue to build.

Just thank you for everything that you done and just so grateful to share these experiences with everyone.

RACHEL: Aw, thank you. Thank you so much. We'll see you next time. Bye.

SAN: Alright. Thank you so much. Bye now.

[Outro Music]

RACHEL: Thank you all so much for listening. As mentioned, you can find links and 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 and what we're doing, you can buy us a coffee at buymeacoffee.com/dogatheart. And you can get updates about future guests and episodes on our Instagram @dog_atheart. I'll see you in the next one!