Transcript of **Out of The Woofworks** Episode 11: “Sandy Sharma (Chew Barka Academy)”

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

Today we have Sandy Sharma with us. Sandy is a dog trainer with her business Chewbarka Academy, based in the UK. We’ll be talking about racism in the UK and in the UK dog training industry, as well as Sandy’s personal experiences of racism as a South Asian person in the UK.

So just as a little trigger warning here, there will be mentions of racism, racist violence, as well as the mention of a slur being used against Sandy.

Now let’s get right into this episode!

[Intro Music]

RACHEL: Hi Sandy. Thank you so much for being here and chatting with us. How are you doing today?

SANDY: I'm very well, Rachel, thank you for having me on your amazing podcast. I'm very excited to be here.

RACHEL: Oh, I'm really glad to have you here. I can't wait to hear what you have to say. So could you tell us a little bit about yourself and what you've been up to?

SANDY: So I'm a dog trainer. I've been a dog trainer for over 10 years. I class myself as a holistic dog trainer. So for me, that’s been something that my dad taught me is how to actually look at other souls rather than seeing a dog. You actually connect with a soul. So for me, it's a soul to soul connection and that's how I do my training.

So I do it from my heart. I always try and come from my heart

because I feel that's the best way you can connect with any other soul. Any other being that is on this planet. It's something that people are getting into now, but I think it's to do with the culture I was brought up with. So my parents were very holistic in their view on how they brought me and my brother up.

So we are Hindu, I'm Hindu, Hindu Punjabi. So that means I'm from the north of Punjab. My grandparents were from there. My parents left there, went to Africa. I was actually born in Africa and then I came over when I was about three years old. So yeah. So that's a little bit about me. Ah,

RACHEL: How was it like for you growing up?

SANDY: Growing up in Africa was absolutely amazing because it was a community and I never felt uncomfortable in any sense way or form. I had uncles who were Sikh. I had uncles who were Gujarati. I had uncles who were Hindu Punjabi. I had uncles who were Ugandans. I had uncles who were, you know… and also aunties, I said uncles, but aunties as well. Because to us it was a community. So we had every single skin color that you could think of, but as a community, so nobody saw religion. Nobody saw your skin color. So my first experiences of getting to know people wasn't because of their color or how they made me feel in any way, shape or form, it was, this is who this person is. This is who this soul is. And that was it. You didn't look at their color of their skin or anything. I was very lucky in that way.

RACHEL: Yeah. And you mentioned a sort of holistic way of being raised even as a child. Was that quite rare or was that how most people where you were growing up was that what they were doing as well?

SANDY: I think for me, it was very normal in the communities that we were, we were very holistic in our ways. Like for example, I can go to a Gurdwara, which is a Sikh temple, and I could even go into a mosque. And, or I could go into a church. In my mom's temple, so we have temples at home, in my mom's temple she had pictures of Guru Nanak, who is the Sikh leader as such, and then we also had the sign of Allah, which is Muslim. And my mom also had Jesus

Christ as well as our own deities. So when I say holistic, that's what I mean by holistic, that there was no differences. It didn't matter who you prayed for because as a child, I was taught “you pray to whoever you want, because they're all one being, we're all one soul”.

RACHEL: Yeah, I know this is kind of veering off a little bit, but it's interesting to think about culture and talk about it. So in Singapore, my mom, she used to learn Qi Gong and she had a Qi Gong teacher who said he could see or sense Ganesha near her while she was practicing. And so he said to her, if you want to, you could go to the temple and kind of give an offering, say thanks to Ganesha.

And my mom did that and it was really nice because in Singapore we have Malay people, Indian people, Chinese people, and Eurasian people, et cetera. So there are all different types of temples, so you can quite easily go to a Hindu temple and places like these are welcoming. And my mom felt that as well.

SANDY: That's beautiful. That is- that's what- if you go to any place, whether it's to pray or to be in a spiritual awareness, you should never feel uncomfortable, ever. You know, because one of the things that I was taught as a child, so being of south Asian origin, we go barefooted to our temples. We don't go in there with our shoes.

We go barefooted. And there is a reason for that because you feel certain vibrations through your feet. That's why you go barefooted in there, cuz you go in there so that your vibrations can then come up from the temple into you as well. So a lot of people don't understand why do you do certain things, but there is a reason behind that, of why we go barefoot.

So when we try and connect with Mother Earth, one of the things, if you are doing some sort of spiritual awareness is you will go barefooted. So that's why when you think of companions, you know, they're barefooted. Anyway, they're already connected. They have such spiritual awareness for us to look for guidance.

We should look at our dogs much more and think, you know, not just dogs but cats, but for me, mainly dogs because that's, my specialty, so it’s gonna be dogs. But when you look at how they are and how they interact. Not just amongst themselves, but within nature, it's quite enlightening. If you just stop and watch and don't- I what I've noticed is sometimes we interfere too much in dogs and we micromanage cuz we think, oh, this is gonna happen. And we don't let our dogs have that say. So yeah, I'm going totally off topic because you know me, you have to reel me in Rachel.

RACHEL: No that's okay. That's fantastic because it kind of comes onto what I wanted to ask you next, which is at what point did you start thinking, oh, I really want to work with dogs, this is like what I want to do?

SANDY: So for me, this happened when my dad passed away. So prior to my dad passing away, I was in banking. I was in commercial banking. So not your high street banks. You know, I would work for banks abroad. I was extremely lucky that I got to travel through my career.

And I got to meet some amazing, amazing people through my career, but after my dad passed away, that made me realize I wasn't happy in the career that I had been happy up until that point. Sorry. That is one of my dogs making a noise, not me. He just likes to get involved. Cause he knows when I get upset. So, because I'm talking about my dad, um, he knows instinctively.

He just knows that I need him so hence him wanting to come up at this precise moment. This is what I mean by connection of two souls. When they read you when they understand, and it's not just about releasing hormones from your face that are gonna tell them it is a much deeper connection than that for me.

Anyway. So yeah, for me, it was realizing that I wanted to do more with my life than just being at banking anymore, because I wasn't happier. I wanted to be happy and dogs make me happy.

RACHEL: Aw, that's so sweet. And when did you move to the UK? What was that like? Cuz I can imagine that's quite a big shift.

SANDY: So we moved here- It was quite, gosh. So my dad was involved with the British government, but he was trying to save people in Uganda. So there's a long story of how my dad actually helped 4,000 Asians Uganda's escape from the army. And we actually were one of the very last families to leave. And all I remember of that is that we had to leave in the middle of the night and we had dogs.

We couldn't bring our dogs with us, but what my dad did was he made sure that the dogs were given to people that were outside of Uganda. So the dogs couldn't get hurt and he made sure that the dogs would have the most comfortable life that you could think of. So we left, I think God, 1972, we came over, sorry, 1972 I think it was not 73, 72. And I just remember it being very, it was almost like something you'd see in a movie, like a cloak and dagger thing. Like when you leave in the middle of the night and you know, you've all got to be quiet. I just remember feeling not sure. And I wanted to know where Poppy was, cuz Poppy was my, my soul sister.

She was the German shepherd puppy that I'd grown up with. And I couldn't understand where she was. And I was very distraught that we were leaving her because I didn't understand we were leaving her, but it just didn't make sense why she wasn't with us. Where she was always with me. So I know my mom said that I was getting quite distraught, but they were trying to distract me. And eventually we were on a plane and over into the UK.

RACHEL: Wow. That is incredible. Your life is filled with all of these big stories, and I think it's important for people to hear that you've had to go through all of this to be where you are now as a dog trainer in England. I think people need to understand and hear about some of the difficult things in our life.

Like racism, for example, because it's frustrating, particularly in the UK where I find that people will say things like, oh, well everyone gets bullied or I was bullied in school as well. Or people get beat up all the time. That's normal. The thing is that what they have experienced, while awful in itself, doesn't have to do with race.

It doesn't trigger generational and community trauma, which is the

issue here. So if you are comfortable sharing, have you experienced racism as you started out as a dog trainer in the UK? And could you tell us what you've been through?

SANDY: Yes, I, I have, I've had racism from a very young age. So if you don't mind, I'll explain how.

RACHEL: Yeah.

SANDY: My first experience of racism started. So it happened not at my first school in the UK. So I was brought up in Kent. My mom was pregnant with my brother. In Uganda parents were very trusting, so you would be able to walk to school. And it wasn't an issue. When we lived in Tonbridge, I used to actually walk up with my mom's friends with their children because my mom wasn't able to walk up because she was quite heavily pregnant.

There, there was no racism. So I was about six by then. After we moved to our second village, which was in Hadlow, that's where the racism started because we were the only family that were Asian. There was no Black families. There was no Chinese families. You know, we were the only ones that stuck out like a sore thumb, cuz everyone was white.

My mom, again, used to let me walk to school, cuz that had been normal. Everything had been fine. And then one day a lady walked back with me to my house. And I was crying and my mom was then told by this lady that “look, you really need to come and get your daughter because they were actually beating her up and I had to stop it”.

So at school from a very young age, I was, you know, I did get beaten up and it hurt. It hurt because I couldn't figure out why, you know, what was different. And I remember one child actually coming over and licking my arm to see if I tasted of chocolate.

RACHEL: What?

SANDY: Yeah. So as a child, you start to realize that people are gonna be quite horrid to you and it was difficult.

It was very difficult. We only stayed in that village for a short time. And then we moved to another place where there were a few other Asian families, but even there, racism was quite normal. It was quite normal to be called the P word or the W word or even the N word because they didn't see that. I mean, I remember going to secondary school, so, you know, forget the younger days, the secondary school. I remember them singing “brown girl in the ring” to me, but in a really horrible way. And that used to really get, because what could you do? You know, you can't fight everyone. You try to, or you try to mix in. So that's what I ended up doing to a certain point. I tried to mix in and be, um, I forgot my culture because of how I was feeling.

Cause I didn't know. Cause you didn't have any role models then you didn't have people that you could look up on. You know, there used to be this Indian program that used to come on Sunday. I can't remember the name of it, but oh my God, we used to all get excited because there was like, you know, it was for half an hour.

I mean the prime example that I can say of a program that explained racism from a south Asian point of view was Goodness Gracious Me. That explained it with humor so that people got it. People understood when they said we're going out for an English. People got it. And then going into banking, I didn't face that much racism in banking.

I did, but not as much as I have, believe it or not in the dog training world. So much so that some of the times I have actually thought I don't wanna do this.

RACHEL: That is such a mess. And I am so sorry you've been through all that since you were a child and up until now, and I totally relate to what you're saying about trying to lose the culture and just trying to blend in.

It's like a survival skill almost, right? It's about, you know, losing your accents and just pretending like, “oh no, I'm one of the more whitewashed Asians”, I guess, is the more appropriate term. I think it's heartbreaking and it takes us quite a while. And I mean, I’ve only spent a few years in the UK, you know, I didn't live here my whole

life, but it just took those few years of living here that made me change my accident and everything.

And it's only, now that I'm coming back to kind of finding who I am again. And I think the fact that you've been through it since you were a child up until now is just really heartbreaking. I mean, I know that the dog training industry can be really difficult and be really challenging and be really cruel as well.

And I'm sorry to hear that the racism has been so blatant towards you.

SANDY: It's been really quite bad in the sense that... you do. You sort of try and lose your, you know... I remember growing up thinking that being blonde and blue eyed was beautiful. Being dark hair, dark eye was ugly, because that's the images. That's what you were told. It's again, I'll bring it back to, Goodness Gracious Me is when I think it's, Meera Syal actually turns around and says, “why can't I be an angel?”. And the teacher actually turns around and says “brown girls can't be angels”. And that actually was how it felt because I wanted to be an angel as a child.

But no, I was like, I dunno, a sheep or something in the school play. But you do, honest to God and. Like I said, I can laugh about it because I have cried too many tears. So now I have to think of, for me culturally, I am back at being me. I love my religion. You know, we had a chat about tattoos and I said, I had seven.

So a few of my tattoos are religious. And I proudly show my tattoos to people because they mean a lot to me. My religion means a lot to me because it's what. Kept me going it's what's grounded me as a person.

Getting back to how dog training has affected me… so I remember going on a course and having, you know, there was like a line of us.

We were all sat up to each other and we had to ask each other questions. And when it came to my turn to ask this particular person a question, they actually turned and said, no, I have nothing I wanna ask you. And yet for everyone else, they had questions, but

not me. I actually had a conversation with this person and tat person actually apologized when they realized how they made me feel.

Another example I can tell you is there was a trainer. She was looking for someone to do her puppy classes, and I thought, oh, that'd be great. You know, I could work with another trainer. We could work together. I was told, “oh, you don't have the qualifications or I'm looking for a particular qualification”.

So I was like, okay, cool. I need to find out that she'd gone and employed someone who had no qualifications whatsoever and was white.

RACHEL: Oh…

SANDY: Yeah. You know, when I do my training walks, I've had people who have shouted out the P word to me.

RACHEL: That's horrific.

SANDY: And this is coming from not a trainer. This was actually from walkers, dog walkers, because I was obviously doing something different to their dogs and because I would ask them, please come and get your dog. I don't know, is your dog resource guarding over food? How do I know? I can only say what I know about my own dogs that are in my little group, but this used to happen quite a lot, so much so that so many times I had actually questions.

“Do I need to put myself through this? Do I wanna put myself through this?”. It's like, I remember going, like I said, on a course and all of us explaining what sort of trainers we were. And I remember saying I'm a holistic trainer and I could hear the little snickers people said, cuz they didn't get it. It's like we have these words, these little words that come into dog training until they become called, if you say you are something before it's cool people take the Mickey, take the piss. In the sense, like, people they're so judgemental in our industry, but the judgment doesn't stop at your ability to train. It actually is judging this color of your skin. And that's

what hurts. It's put me in a position that I think I don't wanna show people what I know, because they're gonna judge me and they're not judging me as a trainer.

They're judging me because of my skin color. And that hurts. That really hurts. And it does. I mean, don't get me wrong. There is some amazing, amazing trainers who are English, who are very good friends of mine, who I absolutely can turn to, but they're in the minority. That's the difference.

RACHEL: Yeah, and you bring up some really great points as well about when you're trying to tell someone to get a hold of their dog and that turns into a racist interaction. And I think about how as dog trainers, you know, sometimes we'll tell our clients, oh, you gotta advocate for your dog. You know, stand out to people and tell don't touch your dog. But sometimes it's really hard as a Person of Color to do that because you are at risk, right?

Any interaction you have with someone, especially when it's slightly confrontational, we're at risk. And so I always think about that and how we can't just simply give that blanket statement of, well, you have to advocate for your dog. You're not doing a good enough job of advocating for your dog because not everyone can.

SANDY: And it's not just that it's the actual effect it has on you as a person.

Like you said, you can't blatantly come out with a sentence because if you did, the repercussions of being racially abused can be quite high, especially like you said, when there's a confrontational conversation that could develop. Like you said, asking someone, please, can you call your dog back? Because straight away, where do you go? When someone has insulted you to the point of the color of your skin, where do you go? Cause it's more than just an insult. To them, they've said those words, but those words stay with you.

RACHEL: Hm.

SANDY: They've said them and gone on, they've gone on to

whoever next. But you, I mean, for me, I would say it is a battle to get up every day.

And the only enjoyment part of it is when I'm with my clients' dogs or when I'm with my clients, and when I see a light bulb moment shine up in their heads and they go, “oh my God, I didn't. Oh, wow. Do you know my dog didn't do that? Or my dog recalled back to, they chose me and they didn't choose…”. And it's things like that that keep me going.

But I've also had people come to me, seek me out because I'm south Asian, because they've gone into a white trainer's class and they're made to feel uncomfortable because of whatever reason. I mean, I'll give you an example. Recently I had someone come to me… yes, it's not the ideal dog. I would've said had they come to me and we'd gone through a list of dogs of what breeds would've been ideal for them.

It wouldn't have been a breed I would've said would've suited their lifestyle. But how many of us actually have bought dogs or bred dogs or have rescued a dog that really shouldn't have been suited to your life, but you've fallen in love with that soul. What are you gonna do? Are you just gonna say “well, yeah, okay off you go, I don't want the dog because it's not the breed...” that isn't what people, that's not humanity. You know, we do things impulsively sometimes, but you've now got a soul in front of you that needs guidance from you. So you look for that guidance in a professional trainer and that trainer makes you feel like shit because of the color of your skin.

Is that- what the fuck? Sorry, I'm getting annoyed there.

RACHEL: That's fine. That's fine. I think that's also why... I mean, unfortunately it has to be the case, but that us, as People of Color or people in the Global Majority, show ourselves as who we are on our training pages, we have to be ourselves so that the people who can feel safe with us can come to us.

I mean, it's unfortunate that it has to be like this, you know, that they have to find someone that looks like them, or is a Person of Color at

least that they can feel comfortable with because they know at the very least, hopefully, they're not gonna get racially abused at classes because I mean, first of all, going to a dog trainer, and going to any professional for that matter, is quite a vulnerable experience.

And if you've ever been to a dog trainer in the past, and then you're coming to another one, it, depending on your experience, it can be quite scary. And so the fact that people have reached out to a dog trainer already is a huge deal. And yeah, for sure people make mistakes all the time. Like you say, and sometimes it's impulsive.

Sometimes it's not the right fit, but as professionals, the fact that they've come to us is a sign that they wanna do something right. That they wanna change. They wanna try. And so to continually be shamed for the mistakes and also for how they look is just the most horrific thing.

SANDY: And it's, it's horrendous.

It's something that people can sometimes do without realizing. So unless you realize how your words affect people... Because you know, a flippant comment, just said like that, off the tip of your tongue, can actually crush someone. You know, when we sort of look at how we behave, how we are, for me when I was younger, I used to get angry at racism.

And why? So when people would say to me “a Paki, can't do that”. One, I'm not Pakistan. I'm actually, my origins are Indian, to get that right. But as soon as they said that it was like a red flag, it was like, “yeah? now I will do it. I will prove to you and I will be the best at it”, but that's wrong. The anger part of me over the years, I have learned, especially the last two years, because I had an incident of a huge falling out with someone that I thought was a friend.

But when I look at relationship. I was the token brown person in that relationship. I was that token friend, you know, where they go “Oh yes. But I have a friend and her name's Sandy and blah, blah, blah”. And it's like, actually, no, I'm not your friend. You know, I don't get invited to any of your things, yet everyone else did, but I was

just that token person that they'd go “Yeah. But we know someone who's Asian” sort of thing. I learned over the last two years that anger doesn't help, but I am human. So I am gonna sometimes get angry. That's part of being human and learning to live. But for me, I try and raise my vibration up because I'm not gonna come down to their level. I refuse to do that. I try and come from the heart. Sometimes I do. Sometimes I don't, if I'm angry and something has hurt me really, really badly then as a human being, I will be honest and say, yeah, I haven't always come from the heart, but I try my utmost to try and come from the heart now. Because to make change we have to show how we can change, but we also have to encourage the younger generations to be able to achieve what they want.

RACHEL: Yeah. And I mean, you are only human and of course you can get angry from time to time. And just knowing that you have these feelings and being with it, I think is still really important as well.

And in my opinion, sometimes it’s more challenging in the UK, because there is a bit of a denial that racism even occurs here. Even like you say, you have all of these lists of experiences that are horrible, but many people in the UK will just talk about how much worse it is in the US. They'll see racist shootings or, you know, police brutality against Black people.

And they're like “oh, well, it doesn't happen here”. But it does and people don't see that there's an issue here. And, you know, I think that is really frustrating.

SANDY: I think the most frustrating part is where people walk around where their eyes blinkered. I can't remember exactly when it was, but it was when I think Boris Johnson actually said that the UK was known for not being racist.

And it was like, excuse me, where do you actually live? Where you say you haven't seen this, I've experienced it. My friends I know have experienced it. So when we see, for example, that child at school, my horror at hearing what happened to that young girl of being stripped searched by two police officers.

Would that have happened to a white girl? I don't think so. I really don't think so. I cannot imagine how that girl must feel. That is a prime example of how deep rooted racism actually is in the UK, but it's brushed under the carpet. It's always brushed under. Or it's just skimmed over. It's not looked at, it's not, how can we help? What can we do?

There's many, many things that people try and we'll keep trying, because we have to, we can't give up, you know, the younger generation are, you know, I'm sure when my parents first came here and they experienced racism, I know in my dad's heart, he didn't want his little girl or his son to go through that, but yet we have, and one of the reasons why my parents left Kent to come towards Twickenham was because it was a bigger Asian society here.

So. You tend to find certain places will have pockets of communities because you feel safer within a certain community. I mean, I lived out in south London and I felt totally safe. And I remember a white colleague of mine actually saying to me “But aren't you scared walking there?”. And I was like “actually, no, I actually feel quite safe walking about in Brixton”.

I have no problem walking around in Brixton, but I knew what she meant. What she really wanted to say is, do you feel safe living with so many Black people? That's what she wanted to say. Couldn't say that. And that's when I mean that it's there, it's sort of underlying, and people will say certain things, but won't actually fully say what they mean.

RACHEL: Yeah, totally. This is so common in the UK. And I see this reflected in the UK dog industry as well. There is nothing, in my opinion, that the organizations in the UK dog training and behavior industry. Are doing in terms of inclusivity and diversity, you know, we're not even getting the bare minimum of diverse speakers in conferences.

And it's that thing of people in the UK thinking that racism, isn't an issue here. I mean in the us training industry, there are huge problems of their own, but at least we're seeing more kind of scholarships here and there a few speakers at conferences who are

people of the Global Majority. I know that it's not enough at all.

There's a long way to go, but in the UK, it's just literally nothing. And people get hurt in certain ways as well, because there is no awareness of actions that are racist. So on that note, what change do you want to see happen here?

SANDY: So that obviously brings us to what I asked you to help me with. So like I said, if we wanna bring change, we have to do something ourselves.

So hence why me reaching out to you. And I totally agree with you, cuz I don't see People of Color being asked to come to seminars to speak. Like you said, scholarships… I don't see any of that in the UK or very rarely, very rarely. I do have to say that the dog training college that I studied with actually were extremely supportive and helped me much more than another organization, which I will go into in a second.

But yeah. So we're gonna be doing a summit aren't we, Rachel?

RACHEL: Yes, we are.

SANDY: Where we get to bring the amazing talent that people have, and we get to bring them to the screens of everyone, of your listeners and everyone else that wants to see how difficult it is when ethnic minorities aren't given that chance.

That to me, needs to change. So hence our summit coming along in a couple of weeks where we get to invite amazing, amazing people who can show their strengths, who have never been given their chances to show their strengths and that needs to change. And that is something I have the great pleasure of doing with you, Rachel, or this it's something that I have dreamt about for over a year.

To bring this. And I think what I would really love is if we could get people, organizations actually sitting up and listening for once, because when you look at the organizations that are in the UK, from the different sectors of, you know, whoever you trained on, how many of them actually have an ethnic minority on their board?

Zero. I think from what I last looked at, I couldn't see any sort of representation. That needs to change. And to do that, we need to go to these organizations and say, look in the UK, we have all this talent. What are you guys gonna do? How are you gonna help the next generation come up? Because that's what we want.

We want organizations, we want other trainers to take on board. Okay. Yes. People can feel bullied. Yes. People can have different ways that they've been treated for different reasons, but the difference is when you can't change the color of your skin, I can't physically change the color of my skin and that's my disadvantage straight away against anyone who's white.

It's that, you know, when you're at school, you've got the Miss Popular and the Unpopular? Guess which one I was in? But we get to bring change. So that's what we're gonna do. Aren't we, Rachel?

RACHEL: Absolutely. We'll be working on that for sure. Something you mentioned earlier reminded me that one time I did see a comment on a Facebook post in a dog group, and the comment said “we don't see many Asian trainers in the UK, it must just be cultural”. And I'm just thinking, it's not that we're here, but some of us may have been here in the past and then tried to be in this industry, but there was always something pushing them down. There's a feeling of not being sure whether other people in this industry want us to succeed at all.

And that's then maybe why the commenter and many people like them think that there aren't any Asian people in the training. But there's loads of us. And I guess both the summit and this podcast here is about giving a platform to these voices that other people in the industry may not hear from, you know, giving people of the Global Majority in our industry, a chance to speak out and share their knowledge and stories.

I don't think people understand how hard it is for some of us to be in this industry and how exhausting and tiring it can be to continually see racism and the lack of diverse representation in a field. We're so passionate about.

SANDY: Exactly. It's when you feel every day, you don't know, when you walk out your door, you're safe in your house.

When you walk out your door, you don't know what you're gonna come across. You don't know. You know, you could be training someone with their dog and some instance could arise. And before, you know it it's a racial incident because it's so quick to turn it to racism and belittle someone and make them feel low.

But this is where, like I said, we get to raise our vibration and as hard as it is, We can't give up because we have generations below us that we need to pull up with us and we need to get other trainers to understand what it feels like. And to have them come on board and go, do you know what? I can see the potential in a client exactly how you could sometimes see that potential in a client and you would maybe go up to them and say, do you know what? I think you could really be a great dog trainer. But you see that in an Asian person, a Black person go up to them, help them up. Don't push people down and that's, what's happened to us. I feel the color of your skin, whether people like it or not does make a big difference. Racism is a battle and we can't let it win. We can't.

RACHEL: Yeah. Racism is a battle. Just kind of switching gears a little bit, because obviously a lot of the stuff that we've talked about have been really difficult and really challenging, and I'm hoping to also file a little bit of inspiration with it. So if there are other BIPoC dog trainers or, you know, dog lover interested in becoming dog trainer, listening to this do you have any encouragement or advice or wisdom you would like to share with them?

SANDY: I would say, do what your heart makes you happy. When you follow your heart... If you wanna be a dog trainer, do it. It is the best job in the world. It really is. You get to help so many people connect with their dogs. And you get to help dogs at the same time.

It's a job that if you go with your heart, you will succeed. Never give up, reach out to people like you and me. We will do everything we can to support you. Get yourself a support network. I mean, the hardest thing is actually not having that support. That's the hardest thing. So let's get supportive, let's help each other.

Reach out. Don't be scared to reach out. If that person says no, find someone else don't give up. If your dream is to be a dog trainer and you wanna go down that path, then keep going at it. And like I said, reach out to Rachel, reach out to me. We will do everything we can to make sure we support you and help you.

RACHEL: Absolutely. I'm always open to chatting with people and getting to know people who are starting out, but also just anyone in this community, because it has taken me a while to find this community within the dog training industry. I'm so glad that I have now. With doing the podcast and through social media, that's all been incredibly helpful.

And so before we go, is there anything you want to say that you might have missed?

SANDY: The only thing I would like to say is I would love all trainers to reach out and offer sponsorship or offer something that will give a helping hand. I would love organizations that are quite big in the dog training world to actually have a look at your board members and go, where is the representation of the ethnic minorities here? Who is responsible for that? Find out, come back to us, you know, work with us so that we can create more diversity in an industry that is caring. We just need to bring the care back into dog training.

RACHEL: Yeah, for sure. And all of us have so much to give and so much to add as well to the conversation about dog training, cuz we bring with ourselves unique experiences from our culture and I think it's a loss without all of us together.

SANDY: Yeah. And you know, it just brings more joy. It brings us more joy, more knowledge. We can share different knowledges that we've learned through our culture experiences, to maybe our own experiences of our own dogs.

You know, there's so much we can give, so work with us. Not against us. Come on board. Be part of that change. Come from your heart. We want you to take us as being people who wanna succeed. People who want to have that support network, not the ones that are on the outside or you know that. Yeah. I do know

someone who's a dog trainer and I think she's Asian.

No, we don't wanna be that. Get to know us. Come talk to us. We love talking. We could talk all day, can't we, Rachel? Yeah, for sure. but work with us. Come work with us. Don't let opportunities where you can help someone succeed, be pushed to aside.

RACHEL: Thank you so much. And finally, before we go, what's the best way for people who want to get in touch with you or kind of get to know more about you, how do they do that?

SANDY: Oh gosh. Okay. So, you know, I'm not great at tech , but by all means look me up, my company, because I am a Star Wars fan is- I haven't got website yet. I'm working on it. I've actually got an amazing friend helping me with that. My company is called Chew Barka Academy. My name is Sandy Sharma, but all means jump on, send me a friend's request, um, on Facebook, you will find me if you're good on, on tech stuff, you'll find me

RACHEL: For sure. I mean, what I'll do is I'll put your Facebook page in the show notes so that people can find you easily. And thank you so much, Sandy, again, for being here with us today and sharing your story and your insight into these serious topics, and I know they were really emotional and thank you for trusting me in putting your story out there as well. I think it'll help people.

SANDY: Thank you, Rachel. You're a total star. Thank you from the bottom of my heart, but let me open up and speak freely. That means so much to me. Thank you, my love.

RACHEL: Thank you. I'll see you soon. Bye.

[Outro Music]

RACHEL: Thank you all so much for listening! As this episode was pre-recorded, we mentioned a free summit that is happening but didn’t mention the date. We now have decided on the first week of August and more details about it will be coming out soon on our social media pages.

As always you can find links and transcriptions in our show notes. If you can't 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 or you can leave us a nice little review on Apple Podcasts which will help us reach more people! You can also get updates about future guests and episodes on our Instagram @dog_atheart and connect with me. I'll see you in the next one!