

Transcript of **Out of The Woofworks** Episode 14: “Uyen Nyugen (@jimmypinkpaws)”

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, Uyen Nyugen with us, who is the guardian of Jimmy the dog and Muffin the one eyed kitty. Their adventures on Instagram are just beautiful and I just love their pages so much.

I also really wanted to hear more perspectives and experiences from guardians, not just dog trainers on this show. I hope you'll enjoy this episode. Let's get right into it.

[Intro Music]

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

UYEN: Hi, Rachel. Thank you for having us. Thank you for inviting me to your podcast. You and Dave have been such a huge inspiration to our learning progress and it's so exciting that I'm invited. Like it's nerve-wrecking, but super exciting and I'm so honored.

RACHEL: Oh, thank you.

UYEN: And of course I'm also doing well today. Thank you.

RACHEL: I love that. Yes, I'm glad you're doing well. Could you tell us a little bit about yourself and kind of what you do?

UYEN: Yeah, of course. My name is when Uyen and currently I, am student at University of Maryland. And for mom to Jimmy, the white pitbull with a brown patch over his right eye, I just love seeing that, and Muffin the one eye Calico cat.

RACHEL: Aw. And of course, like, I first got to know you from Jimmy's Instagram, Jimmy pink paws, and he is very, very cute and clever. So tell us about Jimmy and his story. Like, how did you end up getting him?

UYEN: It was like most great things, I think it was totally unplanned.

Mm. It was. A couple of months that we lost our previous dog. So I wasn't really, like, there was no head space for me to get another or welcome another pet into our family. And I really thought that she was our last, but then, you know, my partner at the time was working from the home and he really just missed her presence. So it was Valentine's day weekend. And he was like "Hey, there's this adoption event in the city" -we were living in Brooklyn at the time. So he was like, "there's this adoption event. Why don't we just go and look?"

RACHEL: Yeah.

UYEN: You know, keyword look. So we're here at this event and I see puppy, Jimmy bouncing off the walls in his enclosure.

RACHEL: Oh...

UYEN: He was with his sister. He was climbing all over her. He was sitting on her shoulders at one point and I looked at my partner. I'm like, "that's definitely not the guy we want"

RACHEL: Oh, wow.

UYEN: Because he, he, he was just like too much.

RACHEL: Right.

UYEN: So I naturally like gravitated towards his sister because she was calm and just kind of like hanging out. So we decided to adopt his sister.

RACHEL: Mm.

UYEN: But then, you know, I went to do the papers and then I came back and I hear my partner sitting there with two puppies in his arms.

RACHEL: Oh!

UYEN: And he was like “they’re siblings, we can't separate them!”.

RACHEL: Right.

UYEN: So naturally of course we just decided to adopt both, but unfortunately, we didn't know at the time, but the litter actually had parvo virus.

So that's, that's pretty devastating. And so Lizzy didn't make it, but luckily, and then it is probably why looking back, she was so docile. She was most likely, very sick.

RACHEL: Right? She wasn't well.

UYEN: Yeah, but luckily Jimmy made it and he recovered. And then here we are. Oh, Jimmy. But his name, his full name is actually James Robert, so...

RACHEL: Oh, I didn't realize that!

UYEN: James Roberts, who we call him Jimmy or Jim Bob or Jimbo.

RACHEL: Jimbo! That's perfect. How old is he now, actually?

UYEN: He is six.

RACHEL: Okay. So you've actually had him since he was a puppy then.

UYEN: Yeah. Yeah. Like eight weeks something. When we looked at the pictures, like at the adoption event, he was the smallest in his litter.

RACHEL: Yeah.

UYEN: Like all his sisters and brothers are pretty big and we actually connected through Instagram with his brother, Dean.

RACHEL: Right. They all have such great people names, which is, you know, my favorite thing.

UYEN: Jimmy Dean. So we call them the sausage boys.

RACHEL: So cute. Oh, and also like, is he still kind of that bouncy puppy, he is now?

UYEN: Yeah, I think internally he is, but I also -it probably stems from a little bit of uncertainty from him, you know? Like “what's happening? So I'm just gonna bounce around cuz I don't know what's happening”.

RACHEL: Sure. Yeah. Yeah. That's really common. I totally understand that. And I know now that you also have Muffin the cat who has her own Instagram page, I love her as well because I'm a big fan of cats too.

And we just said this earlier, but that's my dream life. I want to have a cat and a dog. So you're living my dream, but how was it like integrating Muffin in with Jimmy?

UYEN: Oh my gosh. Uh, it's kind of boring to say. And I'm glad it's boring to say-

RACHEL: Yeah.

UYEN: -because it was really seamless. I think also because I don't know, it may just be like, Jimmy just came that way.

RACHEL: Yeah.

UYEN: But when he was a puppy, we lived in an apartment building and one of the tenants, she took care of straight cats in the courtyard.

RACHEL: Yeah.

UYEN: And then she also had her own cat named Oliver.

RACHEL: Aw.

UYEN: That we all called Ollie and he was such a chill cat.

RACHEL: Yeah.

UYEN: He would just hang out in the hallways, the banister, just, you know, looking around. So when Jimmy came home with us, he, he saw him a lot. He had many interactions with Ollie, but those interactions were always really chill. Like “what's up dog?”, “What's up cat?”

RACHEL: Yeah, yeah.

UYEN: And I think that helped Jimmy a lot, just seeing this cat that was unbothered.

RACHEL: Yeah.

UYEN: So naturally when I saw Muffin at our vet clinic, you know, I was, I was thinking, oh my gosh, oh my gosh, who is this? I have never had a cat ever.

RACHEL: Right.

UYEN: Like it never occurred to me. My family were not really cat people. So, I mean, I didn't hate them at, I just never had this inspiration to care for one, but then we took Muffin home and it was like, the rest was history.

RACHEL: Aw, that's amazing. Do you know about like how she ended up with one eye or is that kind of a mystery?

UYEN: Oh no. She came to the clinic from a good Samaritan that I saw her eye infection. It was really bad. It, it was, uh, feline herpes,

which is pretty. So she came to the clinic and we couldn't save the eye. So the vet had it removed.

RACHEL: Aw, poor baby. But she's living her best life now. Isn't she?

UYEN: Oh, she's amazing.

She is absolutely amazing. But when we got her home, I remember having this elaborate like plan of, "okay, Jimmy's gonna be in the kitchen. He's not gonna see her. He'll be leashed. I'm gonna go straight into the bedroom and put Muffin into the crate and then Jimmy can just watch her from the hallway".

RACHEL: Yeah.

UYEN: No interactions.

RACHEL: And then, so. so the, the night comes and I'm. Jimmy's in the kitchen. I rush into the bedroom, my place Muffin into the crate, and then Jimmy's like, "oh, it's a cat. Oh my God, you guys". He was kinda like judging us a little bit. Like, "oh my God, like calm down folks. It's just a cat".

RACHEL: It's just a cat. No big deal. He says, I've seen one before. I've seen one of these

UYEN: So, and then that was it. I. At least for Jimmy's part because he was fine with her.

RACHEL: Sure.

UYEN: But she was nervous with him. So we just kept her in her crate, like covered. So he wouldn't spook her. But then I think the second day we took the crate into the living room because Jimmy's like completely unbothered. He's not coming close to the crate. So it kind of gave her time to adjust and explore his presence, I guess?

RACHEL: Yeah.

UYEN: So when we took her to the living room area, she was fine. And I think by the third day we just left the crate door open and then she just came out and. The rest is probably just history.

RACHEL: Oh, that's so sweet.

I love that they get along fairly well. You know? I mean, a lot of people worry about having both cats and dogs. And even though with my Dave, I know he's generally okay with cats, but still there's always like, you wanna be prepared, you know, you wanna keep things safe. Especially with, I guess, Muffin was really little at the time as well. She was like tiny wasn't she compared to a big Jimmy.

UYEN: Oh, yes, for sure.

RACHEL: I'm sure you know this, uh, you know, you've perhaps been through this, but I know it can be really hard to find out about training and what kind of training methods you should use, because there's just so much information out there and, you know, they can often contradict each other.

So I'm always really understanding about like how dog guardians choose to train the way they do, because I know it's really hard. And so how did you discover, like training with positive reinforcement or, you know, force free training and how did you kind of decide this was right for you?

UYEN: I have to think my partner and his boss, when we first brought Jimmy home, his boss, she sent us two books.

“Clicking with your dog” by Peggy Tillman and “101 dog tricks” by Kira Sundance.

RACHEL: Yeah.

UYEN: I actually didn't read Tillman's book, but the clicker was was fascinating.

RACHEL: Yeah.

UYEN: Like I have this clicker in my hand. It sounds awesome. So naturally, like anyone I Googled it, which led me to positive reinforcement training.

And then that method really resonated with me. And then to my partner, he's constantly reminding me and asking me, "how do I know how they feel?" Uh, every time we talk about altering Jimmy, because you know, like, I think in, at least in the US spaying, like, I don't wanna get into that. But neutering and spaying is pretty common here.

RACHEL: Yeah, for sure.

UYEN: So there's always a conversation, but each time we talk about it, he's always reminding me with that question. But, but to be honest though, like training to me at that time was still not really about animal-felt welfare. Like it was still. It was still me-centric. Right?

RACHEL: Right.

UYEN I was using positive reinforcement, but I had like this mindset that Jimmy was doing what I wanted and needed him to do.

Regardless of how he really felt about it.

RACHEL: Yeah.

UYEN: It was still influenced from like a punishment mindset, I think. Yeah. So, but then it, it had to change because when his reactivity surfaced, I started to dive into my readings about like dog behavior and animal behavior. And then I found this book called, "Are we smart enough to know how smart animals are?"

RACHEL: Mm-hmm

UYEN: By Frans de Waal, he's an ethologist and primatologist, and that really changed the way I felt about dog training.

RACHEL: Yeah.

UYEN: And I, I think from there I decided, like, I don't know how am I gonna do it, but this is the way we have to go. So I started to become more interested in like cooperative care and consent based techniques. And I was just like, absolutely obsessed with finding ways to let Jimmy be himself.

RACHEL: Yeah. Kind of looking for ways to like, understand how he feels and then, work with him through that. Isn't it? Especially with reactivity issues. Was that quite hard for you and how is he now?

UYEN: Oh yeah. Yeah. Reactivity was really hard, really hard. Um, sure. So many dog parents can relate to that.

RACHEL: Yeah, yeah.

UYEN: It's isolating and, and it just doesn't really good. Look good in public. Right?

RACHEL: Mm-hmm

UYEN: But then that was the problem. Like it was still very circled around how I felt and that's probably why we're so uncomfortable with it. It's not like if I started out feeling Jimmy's not feeling great, then if he did react it in public, then I wouldn't have that feeling of, "oh, this is terrible".

I would be like, "oh no, my poor baby, he's- he's uncomfortable". You know what I mean?

RACHEL: Yeah. Yeah. No, totally. And, but I can understand sort of the feeling about, I guess, like how it looks to other people, I suppose, particularly with Jimmy being a pitbull and you know, like pitbulls are still banned the UK and the whole like anti pitbull rhetoric has a lot of roots in racism, of course.

And. I was wondering, like, has the stigmatization or pitbulls, like Jimmy affected you, particularly in that way? Like, are there the concerns that you have sometimes?

UYEN: Oh yeah, for sure. For sure. I, I think also with the development of technology, like people get their sources and information so quickly.

RACHEL: Yeah.

UYEN: Like before Jimmy's not my first pitbull, but our first pitbull, I have never felt any pressure, any kind of pressure.

RACHEL: Yeah.

UYEN: If that makes sense. I-I'm sure dog attacks has happened before, but I felt like I know sometime 2013 or something, like, I don't know what was happening, but when we moved from Mongolia back to the US and we were in New York, it felt like dog attacks were happening all the time.

And then we, we have this pitbull. And I remember walking puppy, Jimmy down the, the neighborhood, and there were just bizarre interactions. Like we had a lady pointing the pointy end of a flag pole at Jimmy.

RACHEL: Oh, what's that about?

UYEN: And she was like "oh, is that a pitbull?" We had people... we had, I remember a man, his wife was walking by us and he, she was looking at Jimmy and then her husband like rushed her by and said "oh, don't look at it. It's a pitbull". This is a puppy by the way. And I had people tell me that all Jimmy needs is a heavy hand because of his type of breed and it was so bizarre because I have never gone through that with my previous dog that I had, like back in my high school days.

You know what I mean?

RACHEL: Yeah.

UYEN: He was a pitbull, but I wasn't having people stop me or tell me these things. But I think also because the news is just so easy to access now.

RACHEL: Yeah.

UYEN: Like before we were waiting for the, I don't know, the Washington post to be delivered

RACHEL: So it took some time and not everyone might see it at the time, but now it's like-

UYEN: um, You have your smartphone and breaking news and media's everywhere. .

RACHEL: Yeah. So that, that also makes like, when Jimmy does have a reaction, when it feels sort of more worrying, I suppose, if you worry about what people will say in that sense.

UYEN: Yeah. And it made me feel like he had to be perfect, which is the worst thing you can do to dog, really, or anybody any being, is to put that pressure.

RACHEL: Yeah, I can imagine.

UYEN: And I think that's probably what added to his reactivity, to be honest.

RACHEL: So just kind of having that pressure to be perfect and us maybe almost doing too much, would you say?

UYEN: Mm-hmm, overexposing like yeah, we were like “okay. Socialization. He has to be perfect. He has to meet everybody.”, you know, all of the things that he shouldn't do.

RACHEL: Yeah, I totally understand that worry. There is sadly, still really big stigma. And I also understand that it's complicated sometimes.

UYEN: Mm-hmm

RACHEL: I love that you get to show how amazing and clever Jimmy is through positive reinforcement and how well he can learn.

UYEN: Yeah, but at the same time also understanding, I mean, don't get me wrong, I'm not saying that Jimmy's a tidy bear and all that type, but I think like, definitely for sure, understanding dog behavior is the most important thing. And getting that mindset of compliance out of the way, you know, like "a good dog will do what you bid it to do at any given moment, wherever, whenever". I think that could also help

RACHEL: Yeah. Understanding that they are their own person. Their own dog person. Aw, what's your favorite training thing or like activity that you like to do with Jimmy?

UYEN: Oh, we, oh, he loves to, to shred boxes.

RACHEL: Yeah.

UYEN: So we, we definitely have like shredding sessions in the yard. And that's probably the best thing. I, I just love seeing it.

I always call it like his recycling job: flatten out boxes. Uh, he charges by hourly rate kind of thing. He does it so well.

RACHEL: Yeah.

UYEN: Um, and then recently we also added the jolly egg.

RACHEL: Okay.

UYEN: I have, I have no- I've seen it before, but I just never considered it. And then a few weeks ago we got the jolly egg and, and it was magical.

RACHEL: Right! Oh my goodness.

UYEN: But I hope that it's magical and not causing some kind of frustration.

RACHEL: Yeah.

UYEN: I, I don't know. I think you have to watch the video and tell me , it's this hard- nontoxic hard plastic material in the shape of an egg and I guess his desire to grab onto it, but he really can't.

So it's like this fun – I hope fun, activity way, just pouncing on it and trying his best to grab hold of it, basically

RACHEL: Aw. That's great. And how about Muffin? Like what training do you do with Muffin or like games that you play with Muffin?

UYEN: I'm so glad that I had experience with Jimmy. So now I can kind of pass on activities to her.

RACHEL: Yeah.

UYEN: But we do set up like enrichment stations. We have like a cat tunnel and this like food puzzle, cat tree. I don't know if you've seen it there. It's like three levels of where you put the tree in. And then I have like these tiles with little dips, like a little hole dip where I can place treat in.

So basically I would try to treat and spread it around these stations and she'll go and sniff them out. I adore it so much watching her do it.

RACHEL: Aw, I love that cats deserve a enrichment too.

UYEN: And before she didn't use to snuffle for the treat, because I would at the base of the food puzzle, there's like a tray.

RACHEL: Yeah.

UYEN: And then I would put like crinkly toys all over it. But then also scattered treats in.

RACHEL: Yeah.

UYEN: And before she had no idea what, what this is about, like, what am I supposed to do? But then now she started actually

snuffling for the treats. It was really exciting. I was like genuinely excited

RACHEL: With cats and with some dogs as well, I feel like sometimes it takes a little moment. Like with my cats back home in Singapore, they were initially a bit suspicious of the snufflemat when they first saw it. Um, but Kenzo who has passed was a very brave boy and he pretty much just went for it after a while. And then Kimmy, who was a little bit more of a nervous girl kind of followed and watched and learned from him. And now she's really great at snufflemats and puzzle toys and stuff like that is just really cute.

UYEN: It's super cute. And then. Uh, Jimmy's very polite now he'll watch her with her, um, stations. And then when she's done, he'll go and make his round and make sure that she's gotten all the treats.

RACHEL: Yeah?

UYEN: And then he'll steal them. It's fun to watch them both. Be silly.

RACHEL: It's so cute. I just love hearing about people and their animals and what they do together as I'm sure many of my listeners do as well. So now I just wanted to turn the attention back to you a little bit, because of course, this podcast is always talking about the human end of the leash.

So what was it like for you growing up as an Asian person in the US?

UYEN: My family is from Vietnam. We immigrated to the US when I was six years old, we moved to Highsville Maryland, where most of my family are still living.

RACHEL: Yeah.

UYEN: And the neighborhood that we grew up in was very multicultural. So I've had plenty of interactions with a lot of neighbors and classmates from my schools from various backgrounds and ethnicities.

So it in general, it was pretty comfortable cuz we're, you know, we're just kind of all here together in this melting pot.

RACHEL: Sure.

UYEN: Exactly how America was advertised.

RACHEL: Yeah.

UYEN: You know what I mean? But then I also was unique because, while it is diverse, I was still in like a handful of Asians. Weren't a lot of Vietnamese girls like me. There were Asians, of course, but then, they were different.

RACHEL: Yeah.

UYEN: Which is something that a lot of Americans kind of have it, uh, not an understanding of like Asians are usually grouped together. I also remember giving myself an English name, like in the third grade I was in a playground. I can remember it so clearly. This teacher approached me and she asked me what my name was, and of course I said Uyen, naturally, cause that's my name. Uh, and then she said, Gwen.

RACHEL: Oh no.

UYEN: And I thought about it for a moment. I, I could, for some reason I still can remember kind of like my face having a, a moment. And then I decided, yeah, Gwen.

RACHEL: So you just went with it?

UYEN: Yeah. My name is Gwen. And then from then I, I introduced myself as Gwen and I didn't start using my real name again until like some time in college.

RACHEL: Wow. So it's quite a long time that you used that name.

UYEN: Yes. In fact, when I started to go back to my real name, I was a little surprised myself. I, I like didn't recognize it. I remember

sending an, a friend an email and then I signed it with Uyen. And then when I got the response back, he was like “oh, you, you signed your name with your real name, you're growing up!”.

RACHEL: Wow. Yeah. Was it also frustrating because you had to like correct people under pronunciation of your name a lot?

UYEN: Yeah. I think we make a lot of accommodations. Just to fit in. I guess we kind of silence ourselves a little bit, our story, our background a little bit.

RACHEL: Yeah.

UYEN: Just to find this harmony that probably didn't help. o you know what I mean?

RACHEL: Yeah, sure. It's like not wanting to be like too much trouble. “Oh, well you could just call me Gwen”.

UYEN: Yes. but it's so weird because I embodied it so much that I didn't even recognize it until much later.

RACHEL: Mm that's really interesting. And I like that you brought up another point in that is that as Asian people, sometimes you all get lumped together.

UYEN: Mm-hmm.

RACHEL: But it's important to be specific when, you know, we need to be specific.

UYEN: Oh, for sure. I mean, I actually didn't... even the question of like “where are you from?” Kind of... I didn't even feel like I could comfortably answer that I'm from Maryland.

RACHEL: Yeah.

UYEN: You know, like this confidence, like “where are you from? Maryland!”

I had to like say an entire story. "My family's from Vietnam. We immigrated here. I was six", I'm like, oh my God. Why? When can I save Maryland?

RACHEL: Mmm.

UYENN: And then I think there's a point as I'm getting older. And I have like this conversation with myself, like, oh, I feel like it's unfair. If I say that I'm beat Vietnamese because there's me, there's Vietnamese-American and then there's beat Vietnamese people. And I'm a little bit removed from it. I'm not saying that I don't want to be be Vietnamese. That's different, but you know, I think completely in English, there are norms that I have adopted and I feel like it's unfair if I said I'm Vietnamese. Do you know what I mean?

RACHEL: Yeah, I get that. Also. Have you faced any racism or micro-aggressive, uncomfortable interactions with people, particularly when you're out with Jimmy, but also in your general life?

UYEN: Oh, oh, well, uh, I'm, I'm so passive and I'm so non-confrontational and also an introvert. So it's kind of like, ugh, hiding somewhere.

So it does really become uncomfortable. I mean, I remember when I was 13 and an adult asked me where I was from and I, you know, I said "oh, oh, finally. I said, I'm from Maryland". And of course I get the response "I know, but where are you really from?". I really thought that that was like a one time thing, you know, like, "oh, there's just this person".

So I'm like "oh, oh right, my family's from Vietnam, and here I am in Maryland".

RACHEL: Yeah, sure.

UYEN: But then here we are, 2022, and my partner and I, we moved from New York to Maryland and our usual trail of walking Jimmy. And we see this elderly lady all the time. And then, and then our interaction with her was the exact same thing.

RACHEL: Yeah...

UYEN: But she was talking to my partner and she was like “oh, where are you guys from?”. And my partner's like “Maryland”. He's actually from New York, but it really didn't matter. Yeah. She says “I know, but where are you really from?”. And he continued to repeat like “Hey, I'm from Maryland” but she insisted that he was Chinese.

RACHEL: Oh my goodness.

UYEN: Like she was really insistent and you know, we're, we're just like, okay, “well, okay, have a nice day”. So it's, it's really bizarre. Like. I don't know. I don't know if I can appropriately respond. I think it requires a lot of guidance, a lot of training, I think too, like, no matter how much you read and you understand, and you know about these issues, but when you do experience it, it's still difficult to address it.

RACHEL: Yeah. I think particularly, I mean, that situation aside, but it's, you also have to worry about your own safety, you know, how will someone respond to you if you were to really insist or, you know, have a discussion about it, even, how will they respond? I suppose.

UYEN: Yeah.

RACHEL: So that can be really hard. I totally understand.

I mean, I am also quite a passive person and it's really hard. So I sometimes talk about how we can say “oh, you've gotta advocate for your dog”. But when we are of like a marginalized community, when someone kind of picks on us, for our dog or for the race that we are, it can be hard to fight back because you have to worry about your safety and your dog safety, and so sometimes the best option, in my point of view, sometimes the best option I take is just to quickly walk away.

UYEN: Yeah, which is unfortunate at the same time. I mean like how do you have a conversation?

RACHEL: Yeah.

UYEN: Like this is happening in real time, you know, you it's different when you go home and you raise awareness to it, but in some ways I think it's helpful that we are able to address it in real time, comfortably and safely.

RACHEL: Yeah, absolutely. That's important. Folks listening will know that I feel like the dog training world has a long way to go in terms of being anti-oppressive and understanding what people are going through. And for dog guardians, this can have an impact as well. So just from your point of view, do you feel like there are ways the dog training industry can better support you as a dog guardian?

UYEN: Ooh, that's a, that's a big and tough question. I might have to like, turn it around and ask you too.

RACHEL: Yeah!

UYEN: I- How do you add like cultural awareness classes for dog trainers?

RACHEL: That's a good one.

UYEN: To certifications, you know, to the certification process. I know that in the US, the Asian and Black community is still among the groups that are least likely to own a pet.

According to the American housing survey. So there's definitely a ton of support that is needed in those communities in terms of like dog training and even how to care for a pet like vet visits, et cetera. So how can the industry, you know, draw up plan to help, to spread awareness? But then also at the same time, how do you support and reach those communities without, I don't know. There's like this weird mislabeling of, uh, force free, R plus community being like a privilege. Do you know what I mean?

RACHEL: Right.

UYEN: How do you provide support without, in some ways ostracizing? It's concerning because I fear it could be used. In some ways to advocate for aversive tools use and it's so much easier?

RACHEL: Mm.

UYEN: You know, like you just go into a pet store and-

RACHEL: Yeah...

UYEN: -grab whatever it is you need and watch someone from TV, because it's just so much cheaper and, you know, quality courses are pricey. So it -it's, how can the industry build that bridge to reach communities?

RACHEL: Right. These are some really important thoughts and questions you've brought up.

First of all, you are absolutely right that there needs to be more cultural awareness. I hope it can be part of CEUs or, you know, continuing education units, which a lot of trainers do. So why not have that be a part of it? Like you say as well, you know, quality educational courses that have to do with like training and behavior can be costly and not always accessible. Certification processes are also not often accessible in the dog training on and behavior world.

I mean, I don't have all the answers, but I feel like having these discussions is helpful in thinking about what can be done to better support people and reach more people who do want or need training. So I really appreciate you sharing how you feel here. Finally, where can people who want to learn more about Jimmy, Muffin and you follow you and see more of their journey?

UYEN: Oh, oh, yes. Um, really easy. I have, we have an Instagram account. So for Jimmy it's @jimmypinkpaws and for Muffin. Oh, Muffin's kind of complicated. It's it's @one.eyed.muffin , "one eyed Muffin"

RACHEL: Okay. Yeah, that's not too complicated. That's a good one. That's amazing. And you know, all of those will be on the show notes on our website.

And before we go, I just wanted to ask, is there anything else you want to say or want to add?

UYEN: Oh, besides, oh, I, I forgot to mention Muffin is learning how to use buttons to communicate.

RACHEL: Aw!

UYEN: And it's been almost a year and she knows 12 buttons.

RACHEL: That's amazing!

UYEN: Recently I added “want” and “raining” and she has just been exploring those buttons so much.

And it's just so amazing to watch her learn and communicate. If you're not uh, aware, they're augmentative and alternative communication devices.

RACHEL: Mm-hmm

UYEN: For people with speech and, uh, speech impairment, but Christina Hunger who started the entire thing with her dog, Stella, it just like kind of exploded. And so I just really wanted to get on that with Muffin and it's been such an amazing journey.

RACHEL: Aw, can you tell me, like, what other, other words that she knows?

UYEN: She knows like “outside” of course, “mom”, “Papa”, “Jimmy”, “play”, “brush”, which is so, so interesting because she doesn't like to be handled.

RACHEL: Yeah.

UYEN: And when I introduced the brush button, it was really something in her repertoire.

Like I hate being handled, but I need to brush.

RACHEL: Oh, wow!

UYEN: So she would press “brush” and then go to her mat and I would, I would be able to brush her for, you know, the limited time that she wants to be brushed with, there's no way. Otherwise she, she's not that kind of cat that wants to be handled.

RACHEL: That's a really cool use of that. I've never thought of that. She sounds like the most clever cat ever.

UYEN: It's just so neat. Um, I think, sorry, I'm going on, but-

RACHEL: No, it's fine!

UYEN: Just the last one about her buttons. So we recently added “raining” to her word list and there was a week that it was just raining every day. And then afterwards it was clear.

So I was inside, I wasn't paying attention. I saw at the forecast that it wasn't raining, but then Muffin looked out the window and she came and she pressed raining. And I said “no Muffin, raining's all done. I press raining and all done”. And she looked at me for a little bit and she's like “okay. Outside”. I'm like, all right, fine. Let's go outside. So we both walk out to the door and when I opened it, it was pouring, but she stayed at the door and she looked outside like, “oh, this woman”.

RACHEL: Yeah. Yeah.

UYEN: But so, so she ran out straight into the deck and then like, after like a minute she ran back in and then I was like, “oh, I'm sorry, Muffin outside raining”.

I pressed “outside”, “raining”. And she was standing in front of me and she stood for a while and she looked up at me and she

bounced on me. "That's what I said". I, I don't know. I could be making this all up, but it just felt so context-wise. It just, I don't, was it, is it a coincidence? I don't know, but it was quite comical

RACHEL: Yeah.

I mean, it's one of those things. There's still a lot of research going on in.

UYEN: Uh, yeah.

RACHEL: I think it's amazing. That, I mean, these little moments happen. I think it's so sweet. Aw thank you so much for being here with us, and your perspective as a dog, guardian is so valuable and important, and I hope that other dog guardians listening can feel like they're not alone in like whatever struggles that they are having.

And that dog trainers listening to this can take some of those thoughts on board. And, you know, we can think about how we can make this industry better, more accessible and reach more people for sure. I really appreciate you coming on here. Thank you again.

UYEN: Oh, no. Thank you for having me. I hope I was adding something valuable really, honestly.

RACHEL: For sure you were. Thank you so much. We'll try again. Next time.

UYEN: Thank you. Take care.

RACHEL: Bye!

[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 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. You can also get updates about

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