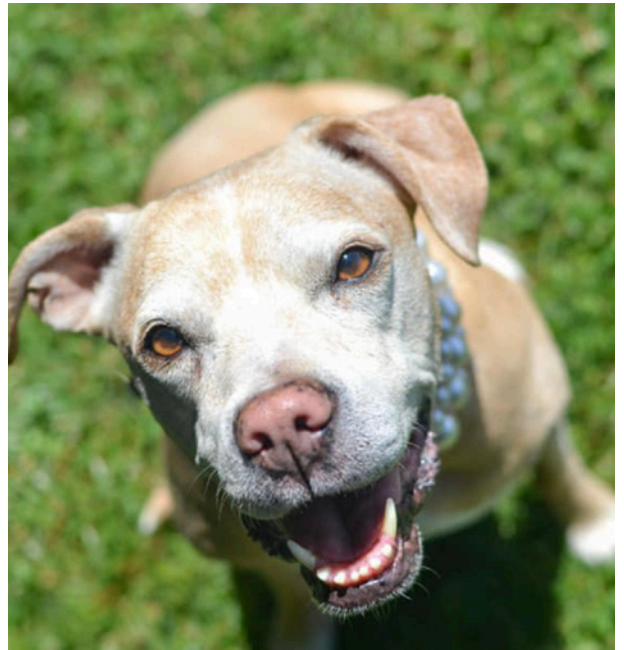


# Believe In Dog

by Chelsea Pegues

Most children of the 90's will undoubtedly remember the Disney classic, *Homeward Bound*. You know, the one about the three pets (two dogs and a cat) who are left on a friend's farm to be looked after while their family is traveling, only to have the adventure of a lifetime after deciding to escape and go looking for their humans (who surely must have left them behind in error). Of course, audiences were on the edge of their seats until the very end, when after what felt like years on their own in the wilderness (but was only about 2 weeks), all the pets returned safely home. When Shadow (the wise, older Golden Retriever who had led the way from the beginning) is the last to limp over the hill of the family's backyard and into the arms of his boy, Peter...not a dry eye in the house. Their deep emotional connection is the driving force of the story, ultimately. Thirty years after its release, the film is an enduring portrayal of the profound bonds between humans and their animal companions- dogs in particular. After all, there is now enough solid research to prove that having a dog in your life can alleviate stress and anxiety, help ease symptoms of depression, and increase socialization. Perhaps most importantly, they can expand our hearts and minds in ways we never thought possible.



In 2004, Erin Scott was not about that “dog mom” lifestyle. In fact, she hadn't had an animal companion until then, and it was her husband (a lifelong dog owner) who convinced her their family needed to expand. Enter Erin's first (canine) love, Lucy. “I didn't just become a ‘dog person,’ I was determined to be the best dog mom that I could be...through the years, my dogs have become healers, teachers, and inspirations in my life. I've met so many people and had so many experiences that I wouldn't have otherwise had, if not for the dogs.”

When asked about Lucy, Erin's face lit up. “There's two moments, where it really like cracked through my heart, you know? And the first one was: we had brought her home...Lucy had just been spayed, so she was all like, doped up on anesthesia still...so we did not have this like hallmark moment. And the next day I like, I got up first. I let her out of the crate...just seeing her be so tentative and it was like, ‘Oh, I don't want you to be scared, honey.’ Erin's smile broadened as she continued “You know, teaching her ‘This is where you go outside’ and ‘This is where we get food.’ And all of a sudden, it became really important to me that she'd be able to trust me. And then I remember a couple of weeks later I was reading this book [laying on the sofa] and the book made me cry. And she had just been chewing a bone or something on the floor, and she got up and jumped on the sofa and just kind of laid with her head on my chest. And I was like, ‘Oh, I get it now.’ About five years ago, Erin received the shocking news that she had breast cancer. Long days in treatment gave her the opportunity to listen to podcasts to pass the time, and she was shocked at the myriad of topics hosts were able to discuss- and keep their audiences engaged in. “I kept telling my husband, you know, I really wanna hear people's stories. Like there's only so much dog training advice I can listen to. [What's more interesting to me is] ‘Oh, well how did you even get started doing this?’ [because] I'd gotten to meet all these

amazing people and one of my friends, Diana...she used to work this very corporate, C-suite job, and she left it to be a trick dog trainer. And now her dogs are in chewy.com and Mercedes-Benz commercials. [I feel like] I've met all these people who have these cool stories and, and I'm like, 'Why isn't there a podcast talking about this?' And my husband's like, 'I think you need to start one.' Like most first-time podcasters, Erin knew the direction in which she wanted to take her show, but of course, she needed guests. Early on, she landed Zazie Todd, a trainer she was very interested in talking to, who mentioned that she had a book coming out (episode 9: Zazie Todd's Wag: The Science of Making Your Dog Happy). In what would prove to be a very savvy move, Erin decided to reach out to the publisher to let them know she had a podcast, in case they were interested in having more of their pertinent authors come on the show (a win-win for book promotion and exposure for *Believe in Dog*). "I had another [instance] recently where I saw somebody had a book coming out, and I reached out through the publisher and, you know, two weeks later I'm talking to them." As an indie podcaster, your goal is to hit the ground running and help your show grow as steadily as possible. Challenging as it may seem, the lesson Erin exemplifies is to let go of the imposter syndrome.

At the end of the day, most creative endeavors thrive on self-promotion, and the opportunity will be mutually beneficial for your show and your guests. Try not to be intimidated and reach out to anyone and everyone you think is interesting and can help your podcast thrive! *Believe in Dog* has already reached the global top 5% of podcasts, and a lot of that is due to Erin's tenacity. Revealing another wise maneuver, Erin said that if she knows she's interviewing someone with media training, she'll go the extra mile to do research and curate questions they haven't been asked yet. When a guest is used to being interviewed on a topic, they will likely have prepared a narrative. While this is helpful in some ways, it can also potentially knock out your interview in the first five to ten minutes. Therefore, said Erin, "Whenever I'm dealing with somebody that has that, I think, 'Oh, they've definitely had [press training]'. I make sure I'm well, well, well prepared with questions and angles of their story to cover."

When it comes to advice for new hosts, Erin says it's best to just take the plunge. A good microphone and quiet environment are, of course, paramount; but you don't always need to worry about having the most hi-tech setup right away. "Zoom works just fine. There's so many, you know, just YouTube videos and things that you can watch...I didn't have any background in media production or anything like this until four years ago. I'm just self-taught, and so it's definitely something that [anyone can manage]. It's not easy, but it's worth it." There are myriad free programs available to download for sound compression and mixing as well, such as Audacity, WavePad, and Studio One. Most platforms allow you to simply run your saved MP3 files through their software, and they will master the sound and levels automatically for you.



Growth is a mindset, after all. When asked what she thinks is in store, Erin tilted her head thoughtfully. "I think about that constantly. You know, I'm coming up on four years, I'm coming up on like a hundred episodes in the somewhat near future. One of the things I really love to do is these round-table episodes where I

bring several different people on, and instead of concentrating on each person's story, it's kind of like getting each person's take on a topic. I really love being able to bring people together [and ask] the more uncomfortable questions."



As far as inspiration is concerned, Erin is confident and enthusiastic, stating "I have an endless list of people that I would love to talk to. The nonprofit people who have really shaped my viewpoint and how I approach the volunteer work that I do; would love to connect with them [because they don't know how much they've] influenced me, you know? There's still just so much that I, I feel like I haven't gotten to do yet...yeah. It's crazy how much more that I want to do." Speaking of which, Erin emphasizes that we shouldn't wait for an unfortunate medical diagnosis or other life-changing event to occur in order to be motivated. "I think what's really special about being a woman is that we're allowed to be passionate about things in a way that maybe men aren't. I don't have human children, but I know people who are so excited about mom life or dog life, dog mom life, or you know, their business or whatever. And so, I just think we should all follow our passion and, if we have something in us that we want to share with the world...it's our duty to do that, you know? I love the idea of giving women a voice. I spent a long time in my head thinking that if I didn't get somebody else to sign off on what I was doing, that I shouldn't do it. And I spent way too many years snuffing out that flame inside of me." For that reason, she says, "I think podcasting's a great way to literally get our voices out there. I love this medium and I'm so grateful for all the people that it has brought into my life and all the opportunities it has brought my way. And I mean, these last four years have been such a crazy, crazy good ride that I could never have imagined for myself...I want everybody to have that."

When you scroll through the long list of guests Erin has hosted, the variety among them is awe-inspiring. From trainers, authors, professional pet parents (you read that right!), animal wellness (and grief) experts, breed-specific advocates, and animal communicators, she has found a way to shine a bright, engaging light on the amazing world of dog companionship, and broadcast just how rewarding it is to engage in these relationships and get to know others who feel the same. "I believe a dog can be a healer, a teacher, and an inspiration" Erin states at the opening of each show. When it comes to innovation and turning a passion into a popular, well-executed podcast, Erin herself is the teacher and inspiration.



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