

Opening Your Heart and Home to Animals in Need

A Special Interview With Sylvia Melendez

By Dr. Karen Shaw Becker

Dr. Karen Becker:

Hi, I'm Dr. Karen Becker. And today we are celebrating a Game Changer, Sylvia, who was nominated by Marie. And we're excited that Sylvia's joining us today to talk more about the amazing work that she does with animals. So Sylvia, thank you for taking a few minutes out of your busy day to chat with me. And congratulations on your Game Changer award.

Sylvia Melendez:

Thank you. Thank you. And nice to be with you. Thank you.

Dr. Karen Becker:

So Sylvia, I know that you've been working with animals for a while, but back up and tell our listeners and readers how you got started helping homeless animals or abandoned animals find their forever homes via your house. They'd come through and then you placed them. But how'd that get started?

Sylvia Melendez:

Yes. I actually started fostering a Great Dane a few years ago. She was abandoned on my doorstep in my own home. She was 6 months old when that happened. And we, my kids and I, we fostered her for a few months. We got to know her, bring her to health. We definitely put a lot of time and effort, love, and found her a forever home when she was almost a year old. That work definitely opened our hearts a lot, and I think she found us instead of we finding her. And the work we did with her, it opened our hearts to definitely work with animals. Work with different pets, not only dogs, also with cats. And we open our home to do boarding, daycare and open our home and hearts to different kinds of pets.

Dr. Karen Becker:

Well, and it's interesting sometimes I think when, for whatever reason I have had this opportunity too, people have tied animals literally to my doorknob, and it's like, "Okay, well I guess I'm going to assume responsibility of this animal." And sometimes when we're shoved into those circumstances, they can be some of the biggest blessings in that, like in your situation, you were able to place that dog into a beautiful, forever home and then that opened the door to more fosters, including fosters of kitties. So right now, when you acquire a dog or a cat that needs help, Sylvia, do you have friends, family, community members that just reach out to you? Or how are you acquiring the animals that need help or that you are currently fostering? Is it just now that you're known in the community, people are calling you? Or how does that work?

Sylvia Melendez:

Yes. Our first foster was Rosie the Great Dane. After that, many, many other people have called us to get information about us fostering or how they can get information about other community

or [inaudible 00:03:19] for fostering or rescuing or how to adopt other pets. I have to say, thankfully, we definitely are in contact and in communication with other rescues and other people that work in the pet industry that can help hand-in-hand with different kind of pets or specific breeds. So, we definitely send them and find the information for them.

As far as us, I open my own business for boarding, daycare, pet walking. So, I'm not working directly with fostering, but I always refer them to a specific place or person that it can help them. I don't close my heart or arms to a foster. I'm always open to any that can come to my home. I always say, and always will say that Rosie opened a very part of my heart that I didn't know existed. I didn't know anything about rescue until she came to our life. And we're always in communication with the family that is having her right now, and she always will be part of us and part of our lives.

Dr. Karen Becker:

Yeah. And I totally understand that. And a lot of other people who maybe have been zapped by the overwhelming need for helping animals around them, oftentimes many animal lovers are able to do assist other ways as you have done with boarding and helping other people. You're able to help support well-loved animals at the same time, which is beautiful. Back to the fostering and rescue, Sylvia, how long ago was the situation with the Great Dane? How many years have you been doing this?

Sylvia Melendez:

About five years now.

Dr. Karen Becker:

Okay, okay.

Sylvia Melendez:

About five years now-

Dr. Karen Becker:

That's so great. Yeah.

Sylvia Melendez:

Yeah. When Rosie came to us, she was very underweight. She didn't have any vaccines, so we definitely forced her back to health. We took her back to the vet, we spayed her. She was very fearful of humans. She was very fearful of men. So, we have a few families that came to see her hoping that they could adopt her. And I was very careful with people-

Dr. Karen Becker:

Sure.

Sylvia Melendez:

-of course, being a Great Dane, everybody wanted her. And I was like, "You have to be careful and she's not going to hurt anybody." I just want a good home for her and I'm going to wait

whatever time I need to ensure that she's going to a good home.

Dr. Karen Becker:

Yes.

Sylvia Melendez:

It was very important for me. And I remember the family that has her now, the first time we met and the lady came with her husband, she ran, Rosie, ran to her husband, and that was a sign for me because she was very fearful of men. So when she ran to this guy, I was like, "Okay, she's ready."

Dr. Karen Becker:

Yes. Yeah.

Sylvia Melendez:

And he called her his Valentine, and we get pictures of them together and she's being treated as a queen.

Dr. Karen Becker:

Yes.

Sylvia Melendez:

And that's exactly what I wanted for her. I would not have it any other way.

Dr. Karen Becker:

Yes. For sure. For sure. Sylvia, what do you love most about your, I don't want to say new, heartfelt passion, volunteer job of both helping people in your community through walking and pet-sitting, daycare, but with the homeless rescues, what have you loved most about the work that you're doing in the last five years with the animals in your community?

Sylvia Melendez:

Well, like I said, I haven't closed my heart entirely for rescues. Most of my clients have rescue pets that I care for, and each one of them teach me something different. No pets are alike. Each one of them has something to give me and to give my clients. I feel like there's so many of them out there looking for love-

Dr. Karen Becker:

Yes.

Sylvia Melendez:

-looking to change our life. We feel sometimes that we are changing them, their life, but they're changing ours as well. Even us, it's like loyalty, it's like endless love. We can have many things in life, but the love of a pet, it's unmeasurable. Definitely.

Dr. Karen Becker:

Yes. It is. Yeah, it is. And I completely agree with you that the love of an animal is very different and unique and magical, and it's something that you are in the middle of, in your own community, fostering that relationship between animals that need love and humans that can give love and you're that liaison, which is really beautiful. So, Sylvia, if you think about your last five years and everything you've learned pertaining to animals, animals that need help and support animals that need homes, animals in your community, if you could share one thing with the world, what would you want the world to know?

Sylvia Melendez:

I would like for each person to think about volunteering. It doesn't have to be your home. In my case, I had the opportunity to bring pets in my home and to give my time. But if you have time to volunteer to a rescue, or just to bring diapers, those diapers for dogs or blankets, or just to go to an hour or two, volunteer your time to a rescue or foster for a weekend to change their life, that will be grateful, I think they will be grateful. I think we all going to be grateful for you to change their life. We change their life one day at a time, one minute at time. They need us. We have a voice. They don't. So, we definitely are their voice. We have to be the voice for the voiceless. And I'm a pet advocate. We have to be an advocate for the pets. They expect for us to love them, to give them the best we can. And I think we owe them as much as they give us love and they don't expect anything in return, we can do better. We definitely can do something for them.

Dr. Karen Becker:

Yes. That's beautiful and very accurate, and a beautiful sentiment and a reflection of who you are and what you are doing. Sylvia, I'm so thankful that Marie nominated you for a Game Changer award. If people wanted to learn more about the work that you do or if you do have rescues that come and go or need to place an animal in a home, do you have a website or a Facebook page or how would people get ahold of you or learn more about what you're doing?

Sylvia Melendez:

Yeah, I have a Facebook page. It's [facebook.com/WaggingTalesLovinPaws](https://www.facebook.com/WaggingTalesLovinPaws). Phone number is (215) 971-0278.

Dr. Karen Becker:

Beautiful. Well, congratulations, Sylvia, on your Game Changer award.

Sylvia Melendez:

Thank you.

Dr. Karen Becker:

We're happy that there are wonderful people like you in the world doing great things for the animals around you. Thank you, Sylvia.

Sylvia Melendez:

Thank you, Dr. Becker.