



Julie Hill is the host of DogCast Radio, a twice monthly radio show about dogs. Shows can be accessed online, downloaded to an MP3 player, or listened to as podcasts. The DogCast Radio website also includes informative articles about dogs, breed profiles, and a list of pet-friendly hotels.

DogCast Radio is a magazine style radio show, with interviews and news from around the world, breed profiles, training advice, Puppy Playtime for younger listeners, and original fiction. It covers anything and everything dog related.

Julie lives in the beautiful Shropshire countryside with her husband, daughter, two dogs, and assorted menagerie. It is amid this general chaos that DogCast Radio

is created. She also writes for a number of UK dog magazines and other publications.

Ms. Hill, how did you become interested in doing a dog radio program?

JH - I have always been a “talker”, and dog owners know how easy it is to fall into conversation about their dog. Basically I was spending a lot of time talking to people about dogs. My husband, who is the “techie”, realized that internet radio was about to take off, and suggested we start a dog related podcast. The show makes use of my ability to talk, and his computer skills.

I have always loved dogs, and for most of my childhood *yearned* for a dog. As an adult I still yearned, but I waited until the time was right to get a dog. It was getting our Labrador, Buddy, that really led us to making DogCast Radio.

What has been the most unusual topic you've covered on DogCast Radio?

JH - Maybe the kick boxing Black Russian Terrier? No, I'm not joking! This was a dog who was used in security work. Rather than teach his gentle, friendly dog to use his teeth, the handler noticed the dog liked to kick the door to show he would like to be let out, and so trained him to develop the ability.

Also, we were contacted by an owner who had trained her Bichon Frise to sneeze on command. She sent us audio and video of the dog performing this and other tricks, and we thought it was delightful.

What's the best advice you've heard from guests on your show?

JH - The best advice I've had on the show is from Graeme Sims, a former shepherd who can work up to nine sheepdogs simultaneously. I asked him what the secret of good training is, and his answer was surprising and simple. He said, “Love them so much that they can't resist you.”

I thought that was remarkable. No gadgets, no tricks, no nonsense; just building a good relationship with them. Of course, it also implies using positive, kind methods which is great.

Other tips I have picked up are to train in the situation in which you want the dog to perform the behaviour. So for example, if you only train recalls in the back yard, don't expect the dog to come back to you in the park. A really important bit of advice that is so hard to get right is to stay calm. Stress is the enemy of good training, but sometimes training is stressful – it's a difficult one!

What kind of dog(s) do you have?

JH - My dog is a black Labrador called Buddy. He is the softest dog in the world. We thought very carefully about what kind of dog would be happy with us, and then researched some breeders just as carefully. When we visited Buddy's breeder we were won over by his big soft chocolate Labrador father, and extremely friendly black mother. Many of his siblings went to be assistance dogs, which was a really good recommendation for his breeder.

Buddy is enthusiastic about every day, every person and every dog. He has slowly mellowed, but is still very puppyish as the age of six years old. He not only inspired DogCast Radio, but the Buddy' Diary feature, and many of the short stories in the show. He is happy as long as he is with his people, whether we're chilling on the couch or walking on the beach. He is a truly wonderful companion, and I love him so much.

The other dog in my life is actually my daughter Jenny's dog, Star, who is a Bichon Frise. She is much more independent than Buddy, in that she will choose to be on her own sometimes, while Buddy always opts for company. I was used to bigger dogs, but a little dog has a charm of their own.

Star has taught me to admire a small dog's capacity for spirit; she came into our lives as a tiny scrap of white fluff, but from the start she was always "tail up". She uses discretion about humans and dogs, and is choosy who she bestows her affection on, but when she loves she does so with all her determined little heart.

I am so lucky to live with the nicest dogs in the world! (But I may be biased.)

Do you have a favorite story about how dogs have improved your life that you'd like to share?

JH - Buddy has taught me so many things. I have learned to be patient when I want to rush ahead, to be gentle instead of harsh, and to appreciate the simple pleasure of a walk. He also has one heck of a sense of humour, and has definitely enriched my life with a lot of laughter.

During the past year (2008-9) we have been exploring many new areas of training. After years of watching others enjoy agility, or heelwork-to-music, I decided we should have some fun too. Buddy and I have passed our Bronze, Silver and Gold Kennel Club Good Citizen Awards, won a fourth place rosette in a heelwork-to-music competition, and even competed in obedience shows.

It was during agility train that Buddy did one of the funniest things he's ever done. He had a strange attitude to agility. He made it look like such hard work going over the jumps, that the instructor lowered them to the middle position. He is a sturdy Lab after all, not a streamlined Border Collie. But after completing a row of jumps in this lowered

position as if it was taking all the energy he could muster, he would run off and clear with ease a jump in the high position and run up to us all enthusiasm.

I suppose he was like a kid in a playground. If you took your child to the park and instructed them to swing for thirty seconds, do ten complete revolutions on the round-about, come down the slide twice, and so on, it might cramp their style a little. Buddy loved the look of the agility equipment, and I have to say nothing threw him as we introduced it to him. He leapt fearlessly through the tyre, he scaled the high dogwalk with no hesitation, and he hurtled through the tunnels, even the flat ones. But what he really wanted was to just be left alone to explore in his own time on his own schedule. He did what we asked him - albeit sometimes eventually! - but at the end of most runs, he veered away and added one more piece on, just for the fun of it.

Which was fine until one day it backfired on him. We were building up to some quite long runs, and it was hard mental work for both of us. I found agility handling to be very much like working a puzzle out - where do I stand, which arm do I use, do I lean back or forwards, at what point do I move, can I swap sides and so on. There are so many variables, and I never expected that it would be as much an intellectual workout as a physical one, but it is. So we had practised for a while, and Bud was probably feeling a bit fed up, so he trotted off to explore a new piece. By this time in our training he had been on most of the equipment, but never the teeter-totter, or see-saw. All the equipment he had encountered that had a white contact point then a green main piece had stayed still beneath his feet and supported him as he had expected.

He had no concept of a see-saw. And that was probably why he chose to run at it full tilt. Before the instructor or I could even try to command him not to he had reached the piece at top speed. All was well to begin with as his weight kept the side he was on down. However once he passed the fulcrum, his rapidly advancing weight began to tip the see-saw down away from him. He was going way too fast to do anything about it though, and so he hurtled on. The see-saw tipped down, and Buddy carried on into thin air.

I promise you that for one glorious second he hung in the air, legs flailing cartoon style, with a very surprised look on his face. Of course he quickly realised he was in thin air, gravity reasserted itself, and he came to earth; luckily not with too much of a bang. He came to a stop, and shook himself, then he stood mouth open tongue out in a cheeky grin, as if to say, "I meant to that you know." The instructor and I doubled over laughing, and I only wish I had captured it on video to preserve the moment forever. We recovered ourselves and carried on with the session, and funnily enough, Buddy went nowhere near that see-saw ever again.

Anything you'd like to add?

JH - The best way to give your dog the best life possible is to understand him as well as possible. How does his breed or mix incline him to behave? What training method will motivate him? What diet will keep him healthy? How much exercise will keep him happy? What is his body language and behaviour trying to communicate to you? Research as much as you can about all those questions; surf the net, read books, watch television programs, talk to your vet, other owners, trainers and breeders.

Sharing my life with a dog is a privilege, not a right, and I am careful to try to give back as much as I can to our dogs. We are the world to our dogs, and in return they ask to be just a little part of our world, that's not too much to ask is it?

Listen to Julie's DogCast Radio show and podcasts at: <http://www.dogcastradio.com/>. Once you've heard a couple of shows, you'll want to get a copy of *Buddy's Diary*, which includes daily wisdom from the black Labrador, Buddy, along with information from DogCast Radio.

