

# **Matchmaking Rescue Dogs With the Perfect Forever Homes**

## **A Special Interview With Dr. Turkan Ertugrul**

**By Dr. Karen Shaw Becker**

**Dr. Karen Becker:**

I'm Dr. Karen Becker, and I'm so thankful that a wonderful person named Dorsey has nominated an awesome veterinarian, Dr. Turkan Ertugrul, for a Game Changer award. And she is taking time out of her busy day, not only as a veterinarian but as an amazing rescuer, to take a few minutes to talk about how and why she's doing the work that she's doing. Thank you so much, Dr. Ertugrul, for joining us, and congratulations on your Game Changer award.

**Dr. Turkan Ertugrul:**

Thank you so much for having me. I really appreciate [it]. It's an honor to be interviewed and talking to you today.

**Dr. Karen Becker:**

Aw.

**Dr. Turkan Ertugrul:**

It is definitely not something I expected ever to happen.

**Dr. Karen Becker:**

Wonderful. And so, this is exactly why I started this platform. There are amazing people around the world just quietly doing what they can where they are, and I love highlighting those people and celebrating them. So, I'm incredibly thankful that the person that has clearly been moved by your actions, Dorsey, took the time to nominate you. Let's start with a little brief background of you telling us – Obviously you became a veterinarian, but then how did you get into rescue? And walk us through the evolution of your career.

**Dr. Turkan Ertugrul:**

Oh, okay. I've always been an animal lover since I was a kid. I always knew I was going to be a veterinarian. No matter what, that was my goal. And I've rescued an animal here, an animal there, one at a time, pretty much since I was a kid. And then in vet school, I went to Saint Kitts, which is on an island, and dogs were not treated very well there. So, I adopted two of them and I helped get other dogs adopted and get them back to the States for better care. So, [I] kind of started a little bit more focused on getting more and more dogs saved, and then graduated.

And then throughout my entire veterinary career, I graduated in '94. Through my entire veterinary career, again, I would do an animal here, an animal there. Something that was abandoned or surrendered to the vet clinic I worked at, it was too sick, [or] the owners were going to euthanize for whatever reason, I would save it individually and then find it a home. And so, it just kind of evolved from there.

I was always a big dog person, and one day [in] the clinic, I did emergency. One of the little emergency dogs that came in was a Chihuahua that fit in one hand, and it was an instant connection with him. The people, they treated him, but they didn't really want him. A backyard breeder. And they said, "Well, if he gets sick again, we're going to just let him die. We're not going to seek any medical care." So, I took this little dog and he's my heart and soul. I still have him. That was about 10 years ago. So then, the Chihuahuas won my heart after that.

Once he got older, I was looking for another Chihuahua friend for him, and it was just hard to find any here. Occasionally, one would end up in the shelters locally, but there were so many people on the waiting list, you had to be basically standing at the door when they were up for adoption to be the first one to get it. Well, with my veterinary work, I couldn't just hang out at the shelter and wait for a Chihuahua to show up. So, I got on, like everybody does, gets on Petfinder and Adopt-a-Pet, and found a Chihuahua out in California that I just felt a connection to.

I called out to the shelter out there. I adopted him over the phone, not even meeting him, but just based on what they said, I adopted him over the phone. I wired them the money. One of the staff members there, I convinced him to foster him until I could get a transport arranged. I arranged a ground transport and had him driven here. He was an expensive transport. And as I got back online looking at other little Chihuahuas – and he's a great dog, I still have him too. I noticed that a lot of these little Chihuahuas I was interested in, a few days later, we'd see, "Rest in peace. Sorry, we failed you." These dogs didn't get adopted.

Then I started networking. That's how I met Dorsey out in California, as I was trying to save some of these California Chihuahuas. So, I got involved with other rescues out there, and it sort of evolved into – I need to become a 501(c)(3) so I can get some donations so I can help transport some of these dogs to the East Coast where everybody's looking for Chihuahuas. Whereas California and Texas, they roam the streets. And so, that's kind of how it evolved. And then now I do more. I do a lot more locally. I can't get as much from out there because the flight – We used to fly them over and the prices have gone up dramatically, so I can't get as many from out there as I used to, but I'd still get one periodically. I get them as soon – If I can get them here, I get them here.

**Dr. Karen Becker:**

And just for people that aren't aware, the name of your rescue is called Saver of Souls Pet Rescue. Can you give us your website? Or if this resonates [and] people think, "Oh my gosh, this is amazing," or they have resources or they'd like to donate or they would like to learn more, where would they go to find out more about your nonprofit?

**Dr. Turkan Ertugrul:**

So, we do have a website. It's SaverofSoulsPetRescue.com. We have a Facebook page. We're more active on that. The website needs a little work, but I'm not a computer savvy person, so I really would love to have a volunteer that could take it over and really make it look nice. Yeah, I do mostly Facebook posts, but emailing us at SOSPetRescue@yahoo.com and messaging us through the Facebook page.

**Dr. Karen Becker:**

Nice. Beautiful.

**Dr. Turkan Ertugrul:**

Phone calls are difficult for us because we're all volunteers. We all have full-time jobs, so answering the phone is almost impossible. But emails, we can shoot email back and forth, and text is a little bit easier too. Phone calls are difficult for us. And I don't do this alone. I have an amazing network of volunteers that help with manage emails, manage the Facebook page. We have an Instagram page that I don't have anything to do with. Another volunteer does. I have amazing foster homes. We don't have a facility. I would love to have a facility, but all we have are foster homes, so I'm limited in how many I can take in at any given time.

**Dr. Karen Becker:**

But it's so beautiful. First of all, it's so beautiful that you're doing this without a facility because there isn't one. But you are the veterinarian that is providing all of this free, much-needed, ongoing and sometimes quite extensive medical care. This is your gift back.

**Dr. Turkan Ertugrul:**

Yes.

**Dr. Karen Becker:**

Hardly ever is it a one-person show. And you're right, the network of volunteers and foster homes and people that are committed to helping you find forever homes for these animals, it's such a team that works together.

**Dr. Turkan Ertugrul:**

Yes.

**Dr. Karen Becker:**

But you are the veterinarian, God bless you, that is just tending to all these animals' medical needs, and that's just a passion in your heart.

**Dr. Turkan Ertugrul:**

Yes.

**Dr. Karen Becker:**

What do you love most about this amazing work that you're doing?

**Dr. Turkan Ertugrul:**

A lot of dogs we get, and we're kind of known for this now, they either have behavior problems or they have medical problems. Medical problems, because people know I'm a vet, and so they're, "Give it to her, she'll fix it."

**Dr. Karen Becker:**

Yes.

**Dr. Turkan Ertugrul:**

The behavior problems – a lot of small breed Chihuahuas are known to be aggressive fighters, and they're really not. They're just terrified because people don't socialize them properly, so I love seeing these dogs either come to full health or their behavior changes. I really work on trying to socialize them, because they've never been socialized. They've been coddled and carried their whole lives because they're Chihuahuas, and they don't have any self-confidence. So, I like to build their confidence, get them to where they're not terrified of every person they see. They don't have to like everybody they see. They just can't try to bite everybody they see. And then trying to match them with the right home, because we don't want just any home.

**Dr. Karen Becker:**

Yes.

**Dr. Turkan Ertugrul:**

We want the perfect home for that dog. And I'll have people, they'll message me, "Oh, I really love this dog," and they'll tell me a little bit about their lifestyle, and I'm like, "Yes, this is a great dog, but this is not your dog. Why don't you meet this one? This one is going to fit in with your personality style." So, I'm kind of like a matchmaker in that way. And people laugh because I really do have a knack for putting the right person with the right dog. I mean, I'm not always perfect, but-

**Dr. Karen Becker:**

It's such a huge gift. And for me, I grew up in rescue, and having someone with that intuitive skill is critical, because your chances of success of placing that dog once and done is significantly higher when people have the experience and the background and the intuition and the skill to be able to say, "I know you want this animal. This is not going to be a good energetic or personality fit. Let me show you some others."

**Dr. Turkan Ertugrul:**

Yes.

**Dr. Karen Becker:**

And that's also a really important attribute of one of your skillsets that contributes powerfully to your great organization. So first of all, I'm all just amazed that on top of being a full-time vet, which is hard enough, emotionally, physically, everything. Time-wise, it's really beautiful. It's clear that this is your passion because you are carving out time to – This is another full-time job that's unpaid, on top of your full-time job that you're already working.

**Dr. Turkan Ertugrul:**

Yes.

**Dr. Karen Becker:**

So, the amount of time that goes into this is coming straight from your heart and that this is an important thing to you and you're doing it, which is beautiful. Then that brings me to my last and final question. If you could tell the world one thing, or if you'd want the world to know one thing, what would it be?

**Dr. Turkan Ertugrul:**

There really isn't one specific thing. It's kind of a group of things. First of all, if you have pets, please try to get pet insurance for them because they do get sick. And if you can't afford it, that's when animals get dumped and they end up in shelters or they end up coming to me because they can't afford it. So, pet insurance, I think everybody should try to get for their pets. It really does help out immensely.

Spaying and neutering. We're not going to rescue ourselves out of the pet overpopulation problem. We're not going to rescue our way out of it. The only way to stop it is [to] fix your pets. If you want a purebred animal, that's fine. Get it. Do your research. Don't support these puppy mills that are just pumping out poor-quality dogs. I feel sorry for the dogs. Somebody needs to get them. But you're supporting an industry. Look for a reputable breeder. If you can't meet the parents of that dog, or at least the mother of that puppy you're getting ready to buy, then it's probably a puppy mill. Because a reputable breeder, they will interview you for the puppy. They don't just let anybody have it. So, if you're going to buy a dog, buy a dog, but be responsible about it. Support the good breeders that are promoting betterment of their breed. Don't support these puppy mills.

And then lastly, I think try to get involved in your local politics and animal ordinances, and enforcing some spay and neuters, and microchipping your pet, so we can stop this problem. It is not going away. It got worse since the pandemic. Everybody went out and got a dog because they were staying at home, and now they're back at work and they're dumping these dogs. Every shelter is full. We're having to say no to taking in dogs now, because I just don't have the foster space for it. And so be responsible. Try to help other people be responsible, spread the word, and just really try to help the dogs and the cats. Spaying and neutering is a big thing. And getting the politics involved in it and city ordinances to control the breeding of them.

**Dr. Karen Becker:**

All of your words are wise words from the trenches, meaning those are painful truths you learn being in it, which you are. You're in it. And so, for people that maybe have not had knee-deep experience in rescue, these are important. Sterilization, socialization, local laws that identify mass mills — these are all really foundational things. Getting insurance, all of the tips that you gave today are foundationally just really good principles to implement and live by if you haven't already.

We appreciate, I appreciate, that Dorsey took the time to nominate you as a Game Changer. I'm also wildly inspired that you're a veterinarian and you have this awesome nonprofit rescue. I think it's awesome that you have volunteers and supportive humans that are as committed to caring and placing animals as you are. And I'm just thankful that Dorsey took the time to

nominate you, because it's a light for all of us to learn more about, but also help support you, so thank you for taking the time today to talk with me.

**Dr. Turkan Ertugrul:**

Thank you so much for taking the time out to interview us today, and thank you for what you do. It's just really important to get the word out, and we're so small, we can't get the word out. I don't have time for that on top of everything else that's done.

**Dr. Karen Becker:**

Yes.

**Dr. Turkan Ertugrul:**

And the volunteers that I have, they have families and they have jobs and their own pets. And it is just hard for us little guys to get the word out. So, we really do appreciate the work that you do being a veterinarian and all the social media stuff and helping us little guys get the word out, because together, I think we can make a difference.