

How Austy Went From Falling Down to Short Jogs Again

This 14-year-old Austy girl started falling and having trouble pooping and getting back up, as what can happen with older pets. But when Austy's owner-veterinarian made these three changes to her care, she not only lived almost two more years, but, miraculously, started going for jogs again.

Analysis by Dr. Karen Shaw Becker

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STORY AT-A-GLANCE

- Today's Pet Game Changer is Dr. Katie Kangas, who runs Integrative Veterinary Care in San Diego, CA, a practice focused on prevention and natural healing and wellness
- Like so many veterinary Game Changers, Dr. Katie's inspiration to branch out into the fields of holistic and functional medicine was her very own 14-year-old dog
- Dr. Katie started her integrative journey over 15 years ago, and today she runs a busy practice helping to maintain and restore health in her patients, and often inspiring their owners to take care of their health as well

My guest today is veterinarian Dr. Katie Kangas, who was nominated for a Game Changer award by Paula T. Dr. Katie is the owner of Integrative Veterinary Care in San Diego, CA. Her practice focuses on prevention and natural healing and wellness using a holistic approach that effectively complements conventional veterinary medicine.

It's always a joy for me to chat with a fellow integrative veterinarian, so I'm very excited to talk with Dr. Katie today.

"First, Karen, I just have to say I'm honored to appear with you and to be invited into the beautiful intention that you have put together with this program," says Dr. Kangas. "You're highlighting veterinarians not only as a resource for pet parents, but also to connect us with our colleagues."

Your program allows us to share veterinary approaches that are not only helpful for pets and pet parents but are also really rewarding for us in helping us expand beyond our conventional veterinary training. Thank you so much for giving us a stage to share all this."

As many of you reading or listening here today know, this is exactly why I started the Game Changers series. It's my goal to reach pet parents in need of the kind of help for their animals that many veterinarians aren't familiar with, as well as to inspire conventional veterinarians to seek alternative options for their patients who need them.

Her Inspiration Was Her 14-Year-Old Dog

Dr. Katie explains that she began learning about holistic approaches when she realized she needed additional resources and options beyond her limited conventional veterinary toolbox to better serve her patients.

"I was a Wisconsin grad," she explains. "I'm from Wisconsin originally, but I've been in San Diego for more than 20 years. I graduated from the University of Wisconsin Veterinary School in 1993. I was in general practice as a wildlife vet and then I became a shelter vet. I was also the medical director of the San Diego Humane Society and SPCA from 2002 to 2007.

During that timeframe, my 14-year-old Austy girl began having weakness in her hind end, and lumbar sacral issues in the lower spine. She started falling and having trouble pooping and trouble getting up, just a lot of the symptoms we often see in older pets. I knew that from prior experience that she didn't tolerate the medications she needed very well, and I also knew that my options to help her were very limited in terms of conventional medicine strategies."

Dr. Katie explains that she was already very interested in holistic health and had even attended a seminar on homeopathy that she thought was amazing. When her dog developed mobility issues, it really motivated her to find a mentor to help her learn about alternative medicine strategies. She found a holistic veterinarian in her area, Dr. Keith Weingart, who at the time owned the Animal Healing Center in San Diego.

"I brought Austy to Dr. Keith and we saw miraculous results with a change in her diet," Dr. Katie says. "I admit she was on kibble. I didn't know any better. We all have to start somewhere. So, when my clients get the guilt feelings of, 'Oh, I should have done this sooner,' I tell them we all must start somewhere, even me.

Now we move forward with more knowledge. Anyway, I changed Austy's diet, began acupuncture and chiropractic therapy, and the changes that happened in my dog blew me away.

I was able to spend almost two more years with her, more than a year and a half. She went from falling and being unable to poop on her own to short jogs again. It was miraculous and I knew I couldn't NOT pursue this for my career.

I needed to be able to provide something like this for my patients. So, I put in my notice at the shelter and enrolled in the CHI Institute in Florida. I started my journey into holistic veterinary medicine through Chinese medicine and branched out from there."

That was over 15 years ago, and today, Dr. Katie has a rewarding career practicing functional veterinary medicine.

A Job That Never Feels Like Work

As I do with all the Game Changers I interview, I asked Dr. Katie what she loves most about the amazing work she's doing.

"I just love what I do," she replies. "Of course, it can be fatiguing and intense to work with patients, pets who are sick and need so much help. But it's so rewarding that literally every day I'm like, 'Who do I get to go help today?'

And the neat thing is, fortunately for me, I'm just as much a people person as I am an animal lover. That makes my job rewarding because every day people tell me how much difference I've made in their pet's lives, and often they tell me of the difference I've indirectly made in their own lives as an inspiration for them to get healthier.

When we practice reactive medicine, we're putting out fires and working against disease. When we practice proactive preventive medicine that supports maintaining good health, the whole family benefits."

Functional Medicine and the ABCs of Health and Well-being

Next, I asked Dr. Katie what one thing she would share with the world if she had the chance.

"I think I'd like to share the awareness that there is so much more beyond the conventional healthcare concepts we see in both veterinary and human medicine," she replies. "It's wonderful to have numerous tools in your toolbox and not just a few limited items. That is definitely something I want to share.

Also, Dr. Keith Weingart, my original mentor, talked about the ABCs of health and well-being, which plays into functional medicine. A is to avoid as many offenders as possible that deteriorate good health, such as heavily processed and high carbohydrate foods, toxins, and excess vaccines and medications. B is to build up the body with positive, proactive, health supporting tools. C is to be committed to the process.

I also want people who have pets with significant illness to know that even with a functional medicine approach, the problems don't resolve overnight. However, I'm always optimistic, because most of the animals who come to me either get complete resolution or they get a whole lot better, even from disorders and diseases for which conventional medicine has little to offer. But this requires a commitment to the process, because one conversation or exam visit or treatment isn't going to take most patients from A to Z."

I'd like to add a plea here to our conventional colleagues to get in contact with functional medicine veterinarians when they have difficult cases and don't know what else to do for those patients. There are people out here who can support you and help you learn skills that none of us had when we graduated veterinary school.

If you're out there thinking, "I've never had an autoimmune case recover. I've never cured a case of cancer. I've never fixed an allergic patient," there are options available to you. We have a growing body of professionals worldwide that are here to support you.

If you'd like to learn more about Dr. Katie's practice or get in touch with her, you can visit her website at **[Integrative Veterinary Care](#)**, email the practice at **intvetcare@gmail.com**, or visit their **[Facebook](#)** page.
