

Covered in Pet Hair



NOT YOUR AVERAGE PET PODCAST

[BY ISABEL ALVAREZ ARATA]

“Are you a groomer?” asked a vendor at SuperZoo. “I’m not,” I responded, “I’m a writer and podcaster specializing in the pet industry. The pet hair just comes with the territory,” I joked.

“Covered in Pet Hair” may be the name of my brand, but it’s also my way of life. I’ve been ‘covered in pet hair’ since 2007 when I adopted a hound puppy named Titan. Titan needed a dog walker while his humans were at work, but I had a terrible time finding one.

I joke that I’m still waiting for a call back from the companies I contacted. At the time, demand for dog

walkers was so high that existing companies were at capacity. Having dabbled in pet sitting in college, I thought, “I can walk dogs.”

Not long after, I established The Wag Pack, a dog walking and pet sitting company serving northern Virginia. Between 2008 and 2020, I grew my solo operation to multiple six figures and shy of 20 employees. I was immensely proud of our work making pet parenting easier. We were locally and nationally recognized, earning the highly-coveted National Association of Professional Pet Sitters Business of the Year Award, among other accolades.

In 2015, with the help of a trusted local business

partner, reliable staff and strategic technology use, I remained involved in my business and industry while following my military husband to multiple duty stations thousands of miles away from our service area. No easy feat.

It was smooth sailing until, like many businesses, The Wag Pack came to a screeching halt when the pandemic hit. My heart broke. I knew that rebuilding wasn't possible. Between my then newborn and toddler, the distance and dwindling demand, I had to say goodbye to The Wag Pack in August 2020.

During the mourning period that followed, I considered career choices outside of the pet industry, but my heart wasn't so sure. Inspiration struck late one night while watching one of my favorite late-night TV shows, "Watch What Happens Live." Almost as if through divine inspiration, I had the idea to create a late-night TV-inspired show for pet lovers. Instead of focusing on pop culture and celebrities, I thought, I'll focus on pets – cats and dogs – interviewing the people who make the pet industry go 'round.

My friend and colleague, Tim Link, thought the idea was worth pursuing. As host of the literary pet podcast, "Animal Writes," Link facilitated a meeting with Mark Winter, co-founder of Pet Life Radio, the No. 1 pet podcast and radio network since 2007.

During our call, Winter asked me what made my show different. With approximately 70 shows on Pet Life Radio, he was hoping for something new. I explained that I wanted to showcase fascinating personalities in the pet industry.



Isabel Alvarez Arata, founder of "Covered in Pet Hair."

Winter wasn't impressed. "We do that already," he said.

"It's boozy," I quipped, explaining the show's format – a fun mix of drinks, games and expert pet care tips. Winter loved the idea, and we recorded my first episode in December 2020.

Now more than 100 episodes in, "Covered in Pet Hair" has brought together pet industry experts ranging from renowned pet trainers, veterinarians and pet sitters to groomers, pet product manufacturers and more. My guests and I have discussed "woo woo" topics like telepathic animal communication, practical topics including pet-friendly travel and car safety, conditions like

separation anxiety and other highly relevant pet content. No matter the guest, my goal is to turn serious topics into entertaining, yet educational discussions, engaging with fellow pet pros and enthusiasts and inspiring pet parents to be the best they can be.

From pet-inspired cocktails, holiday themes and laugh-out-loud moments, "Covered in Pet Hair" is the culmination of all I've done to elevate and promote the pet industry over the years. It was recently named the No. 2 pet podcast to follow in 2024, yet most people I meet today have no idea the turns my career took to get here. No matter, I'm grateful to live a life covered in pet hair because, as I say at the end of every episode, 'there's no better way to live!'

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