

## **Suggested Interview Questions for Mary Debono, author of *Grow Young with Your Dog***

**Mary Debono** has a passion for helping people - and their dogs, cats and horses - move easier despite injuries, arthritis and aging. She is the author of the Amazon best seller, *Grow Young with Your Dog*, which won the 2015 San Diego Book Award for Best Health/Medicine book. Over a career spanning more than 20 years, Mary has helped thousands of individuals, ranging from disabled dogs to high-performing equine and human athletes. A Certified *Feldenkrais*® Practitioner, Mary created her signature approach, *Debono Moves*, so that people could easily learn how to enhance their animals' health, athletic performance and well-being.

In addition to seeing human clients in her Encinitas office, Mary teaches workshops internationally. Her book and videos have made it easy for people all over the world to enjoy *Debono Moves*<sup>sm</sup> with their animals. Mary and her husband, Gary Waskowsky, live in Poway. They stay young by playing with their energetic Rat Terrier, Ruby; spirited Quarter Horse, Breeze; and laid-back cat, Higgins.

### **1. Why did you write *Grow Young with Your Dog*?**

Thirty years ago I had chronic hip, back and neck pain, along with carpal tunnel syndrome that didn't improve with surgery or physical therapy. After living with pain for several years, I began to study holistic approaches to health, including the *Feldenkrais Method*®. My pain vanished and I felt younger and more hopeful than I had in years! Grateful for my own transformation, I've been helping animals and their people overcome injuries, arthritis, stroke, anxiety and other challenges for more than 20 years.

For many years, I've been receiving emails from people around the globe asking how they can learn to help their dogs with *Debono Moves*. I was frustrated that I couldn't help many of them, since they live so far away. I wrote *Grow Young with Your Dog* so that people and dogs all over the world could benefit from my experience.

### **2. Please describe what you do.**

I teach dog lovers how to use gentle and supportive contact to enhance their dog's body awareness and coordination. This can help wake up areas that have been "turned off" due to injury or habit. Moving as one, human and canine can feel deeply connected, balanced and unrestricted. This reduces stress and promotes flexibility, vitality and well-being for both dog and human.

I also teach workshops for cats and horses, and I offer private *Feldenkrais Method*® sessions for humans in my office in Encinitas.

### **3. Why is *Debono Moves* important for people and their animal companions?**

Moving freely and pleurably enhances quality of life, so it's important to nurture that ability, especially as one ages. In addition, enjoying a deep bond with our animals is a big reason why we share our lives with them. *Debono Moves* can strengthen that bond.

#### **4. What are some examples of dogs and humans that you've helped?**

I met **Bruno** when he was a nine-year-old Akita with soreness from life-long hip dysplasia and damaged knee ligaments. Not surprisingly, Bruno was very resistant to being touched. I taught his family how to touch him in a way that was comfortable, safe and pleasurable for Bruno. After years of being withdrawn, he became a happy, active member of the family.

**Cassie** was a 70-pound Spinone mix who suddenly began collapsing on walks. Her veterinarian diagnosed her with arthritis in her lumbar spine (lower back). Medication wasn't effective and surgery was risky. Upon seeing Cassie, I realized that she had been overusing her lumbar area (like many dogs and humans) and underusing other parts of her spine. I used my hands to gently remind Cassie that she could use her body in a more efficient, coordinated way. This took the strain off the injured area and Cassie stopped collapsing. She could once again run and play without pain.

When I first met **Kate**, she was bent over from chronic back pain and sciatica. I helped her learn how to move in a way that enabled her to be a competitive Grand Prix equestrian – and to do it pain-free!

**Kathy** is an active, silver-haired woman who had injured her right shoulder in a car accident decades earlier. She assumed she'd always have limitations with that shoulder. In addition, Kathy was unable to lie flat on her back. After working together, Kathy has regained full use of her shoulder and lies comfortably on her back. At 66, her movement is better today than it was when she was in her 40's. She's another example of someone who has "grown younger!"

#### **5. In the book, you say "*No matter the age, no matter the condition, some improvement is usually possible.*" Why do you feel that way?**

Despite what popular culture may tell us, animals and humans can continue to learn and improve over their lifetimes. That's why it's important to keep an open mind and not project limitations onto your dog. Some of the animals I've worked with were at an advanced age with severe difficulties, yet they recovered despite a grim medical prognosis. I write about some of these dogs in my book.

While I've been fortunate to have witnessed extraordinary transformations, I never know to what extent someone will improve. But I do know that I can facilitate at least some degree of improvement. Even simply providing a sense of comfort through hands-on support and emotional connection can improve quality of life. I've helped a bedridden, 16-year-old golden retriever become calm and content during her last weeks. That was certainly an improvement and one that her person was very grateful for.

I suggest that people remember this: "An open mind and helpful hands can do much to change a dog's future."

**6. People – and their dogs – often struggle with difficulties that arise from aging or injury. What's your best advice on how they can deal with that?**

Pain and stiffness caused by injury or aging often creates a vicious cycle where you become stiffer and more uncomfortable as time goes on. Anxiety can also set in as you feel that it's all downhill from here. But it doesn't have to be downhill! When we interrupt the vicious cycle of fear, pain and stiffness, we are empowered to make changes which put us on the path to health.

So the first step is to interrupt the vicious cycle with gentle, relaxing techniques. Ridding yourself of stress and anxiety will help promote healing and optimism.

I have a powerful meditation exercise in my book, *Grow Young with Your Dog*, in which I guide the person through breathing in a special way with their dog. It can help reduce tension and improve the well-being of both the dog and human at the same time. It can be easily adapted to cats and horses as well.

As a special gift, your audience can go to <http://www.debonomoves.com/banish-stress> to listen along as I guide them through this relaxing meditation with their dog.

My book has many unique exercises that can help you and your dog recover health and well-being.

**7. What's the most important thing readers will learn from *Grow Young with Your Dog*?**

You can improve your dog's future – and your own – by learning new ways to move and connect with your dog today!

**8. Where can we buy the book?**

[Amazon](#) and [Barnes and Noble](#).

**9. What's the best advice you've ever received?**

My husband, Gary Waskowsky, told me this: "First comes the feeling, then the events to justify it." For example, if you're a worrier, you'll continually find things to stress about. If you feel grateful, opportunities for gratitude will pop up in your life. We'll lead richer, happier lives if we remember to focus on the feeling first.

**10. What is one thing people would be surprised to find out about you?**

That I hike and run alongside my horse, Breeze, more often than I ride him. And I've taught Breeze to do equine agility, which we often do to music. We both have fun doing it!

**11. Please describe your idea San Diego weekend.**

Hubby and I would get up early and do a *Feldenkrais* exercise together so that we would feel really good all day! Then I would play with my horse, Breeze, for a few hours. Afterwards, Gary and our dog Ruby would enjoy walking around Ocean Beach and I'd shop for healthy, organic food at People's Co-op. Later that evening we'd go to a local club for some dancing.

**12. What do you love about Poway?**

That it's horse country! My horse is boarded at a facility with wonderful fellow horse lovers and great trail access. Poway has many beautiful areas to hike, run and ride. It's a great place to live.