

WVMA VETERINARIAN OF THE YEAR – ACCEPTANCE PRESENTATION

October 12, 2017

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Thank you for my introduction. And thank you, WVMA, for honoring me with this amazing award. Thank you also to Julie Hilker, our invaluable practice manager, for nominating me. And, I am also indebted to those who wrote such moving letters of nomination: Julie, Ann Stein, Dr. Tara Mendez, Dr. Melinda Wright and Dr. Patty Glover.

I know that this was intended to be a surprise announcement, but I was fortunate to be given a heads up a few weeks ago, and I am so very grateful for that. I have had time to savor the honor, to collect my thoughts, and to reflect upon my career. This reflection has enabled me to define why I am passionate about veterinary medicine, and what I believe has led to my honor of receiving this award. I am thankful, also, for this opportunity tonight to share my thoughts and to share this honor.

Small animal veterinary practice is often defined by clinical knowledge and skills, emerging technology, business savvy, long hours and hard work. But I believe what pet owners really value, and what sets a clinic or veterinarian apart is the often-overlooked art of veterinary practice. The other facets are vital, but I believe that they form only the body of veterinary medicine. The art is the soul of veterinary medicine---and the body without the soul is an incomplete entity.

So, what does the art of practice mean to me? I believe it starts with a full and true recognition of the individual unique bond shared by each pet and each person. It is followed by actions that demonstrate the understanding of that bond: fully explaining everything related to the pet's care in language appropriate for each person, and guiding that unique individual to the most beneficial option for the pet. The art allows owner, pet, veterinarian and support staff to function as a closely linked team.

That's a wordy definition, but I think the true meaning is more intangible. For me, it was best defined years ago by a wonderful client, Jane, and her Irish Setter, Murphy. Murphy had a very aggressive mast cell tumor and we worked hard as a team to maintain his quality of life. When the end came, and we shared Murphy's passage, Jane said to me, with so much emotion in her voice, "He was my best friend." I replied, "I understand". And Jane looked intently at me, stating, "I know you do". Her affirmation, seemingly so simple, but yet so complex and so profound---that defines the art of veterinary medicine.

I know that there are many Wisconsin veterinarians who practice this art on a high level, and I want to recognize and share this award with them.

I would also like to share this award with those who have supported me through the challenges of veterinary practice--my family and friends, and especially my husband, Jim. Thank you. I am so honored by your presence here tonight.

It is said that people are only as good as the team that surrounds them. I am blessed to be surrounded by an incredible team that really "gets it", and, I want to share this award with everyone in that amazing team at Appanasha, especially my partners, Dr. Marty Heindel and Dr. Murray Hurlburt. Would everyone from Appanasha, past and present, please stand, be recognized, and share this award with me! And, I also recognize those staff members who couldn't be here tonight, several of whom are working right now.

It is fortunate that this is a huge award, because I would like to share it with an additional group. I wish to recognize the previously unrecognized women veterinarians who paved the path for me and all of my female colleagues. Not everyone may be aware of past history. The WVMA website lists all of the veterinarians honored to receive veterinarian of the year awards from 1954 to present, and I am so honored to be included with this amazing group, including many women who have received the award since 2000. But, in the nearly half century from 1954 to 2000, no women were honored. Granted, there was a small population of women veterinarians, but this population included incredible, talented and tough women who had to work twice as hard, and be twice as good in order to receive half the reward.

If you were born after around 1980, you may not realize what the veterinary environment was like. In 1972, while doing my undergraduate studies at Madison, I worked Saturdays as a receptionist at a Monona veterinary clinic--the clinic no longer exists, and I suspect the veterinarian/owner has passed, because he was older at the time, and very old school. He told me that there was no place in veterinary medicine for women, and that the profession was much too difficult for them. He said that I shouldn't even bother to apply to veterinary school because I'd never be accepted, and I wouldn't possibly be able to do the job. That's the way it was. And, the 1970's were much more progressive than previous decades.

But, there were also fair and unbiased male veterinarians, including Dr. Emil Roth, who encouraged me to pursue a veterinary career. These men bucked tradition, encouraging and accepting women in the profession. I share this award with both the women and the men of the past who helped to shape the face of today's veterinary profession.

Finally, I would like to share this award with every patient and every pet owner that I have had the privilege of serving since 1979. Each of them has taught me and helped me down my life's path. This is an incredible profession, and I have been blessed to enjoy its rewards. Thank you, WVMA, for adding to them.