

Cindy L Adams, MSW, PhD, Jason Coe DVM, PhD

Use of a conceptual framework and poetry to teach capacities that are necessary for developing an understanding of the human animal bond

Animals are deeply imbedded within the human consciousness (Kellert & Wilson, 1993; Wilson, 1984); they have been sources of food, transportation, economy, and mediators of cultural symbolism and identity (Booth & Jacobs, 2000; Descola, 2005, 1996, 1992; Franklin, 1999; Grim, 2006; Lawrence, 1994), and they have also been understood to be both contributors to and barometers of human well being and quality of life (Schwabe, 1984). An understanding of the inter-relationship between humans and animals is fundamental to veterinary education. Literature and poetry have been used extensively in human medical education to teach issues inherent to the human condition (Shapiro et al, 2004), and in education poetry is used to help students deal with feelings and express emotions. More recently veterinary education has begun to explore the use of poetry to 'teach' students about the complex nature of human animal relationships.

One of the core competencies for entry level graduates, outlined by the AVMA Accreditation committee, is the need to be able to 'communicate effectively with clients and address the interrelationship between animals and their environment'. Some veterinary schools are screening incoming students to determine whether they have the capacity to respond to the range of economical and emotional needs that are associated with animal 'ownership' (Hecker et al. 2008). Veterinary medical educators have the responsibility to ensure that graduates understand and are prepared to address the range of relationships that 'people' have with their animals.

This presentation will describe the authors' approach to teaching students to appreciate and understand the complexity of the human animal bond using a framework called the Relational Map (Keller and Bonvicini, 2003). This framework organizes human animal relationships into 4 quadrants entitled: pet human, companion, asset and partner. These relationships have to do with the functional and/or emotional nature of the relationship. Poetry by Alan Nowlan (1996) and entitled: *Weakness* was thereby used as part of an assessment strategy to integrate concepts from the Relational Map and assess second year veterinary students' understanding of the relationship between the horse, owner and family. Additionally, students were asked to 'describe' the relationship between horse and owner, state assumptions and to identify communication skills that are necessary to ascertain the relationship. Based on the responses of students to this exercise, poetry was seen an excellent tool to teach and encourage a deeper understanding of the human animal bond.

The capacities that are necessary for ongoing understanding, appreciation and ability to act with compassion require lifelong development and reinforcement. Poetry is one way to invite learners to reflect on personal experience, take the perspective of others, experience and express emotions about a wide range of issues inherent to veterinary medicine.

Catherine M. Bianco, APR

A Cat, a Love Triangle and the Human-Animal Bond in 1930s Japan

In our early 21st century society, we've become accustomed to companion animals sharing our lives, our homes and even our beds. Much as we might enjoy thinking Western society has taken the human-animal bond to new levels today, does it really differ from the feelings and actions of generations past?

The human-animal bond encompasses multilayered connections between humans and companion animals as they share dwellings, food, and emotional awareness – but does it translate through the generations and across cultures?

The early 20th century literature of Japanese author Junichiro Tanizaki opens a window onto a world that has much in common with contemporary Western society. In his 1936 novella *A Cat, A Man and Two Women* (*Neko to Shozo to futari no onna*), Tanizaki captures a world that is at once quite specific and yet universal, one that encompasses yesterday and today.

It is a story of a love triangle – Shozo, his ex-wife and his current wife – but a triangle with a twist: a fourth character in the form of Lily, an aging tortoiseshell cat. Tanizaki's descriptions of the interactions between Lily and Shozo are fascinating and intimate. The snapshots of life in 1930s Osaka explore the bonds between humans and cats and spark comparisons to life with our companion animals 80 years later.

Tanizaki, who lived from 1886 to 1965, had a passion for cats. His descriptions of Lily and her relationships with the other characters in *A Cat, A Man and Two Women* are luxurious, unique and memorable. His words describe interactions both ordinary and extraordinary. Tanizaki captures the reality of cats in words that are immediately recognizable today as a celebration of the human-animal bond.

Marie-France Boissonneault, BA, BSc, PhD, Elizabeth Stone, DVM, MS, MPP, DACVS

Veterinary Practitioners and the Literary Memoir

This presentation explores the nature of 24 selected veterinarian memoirs sampled from each decade from the 1950s over a fifty year time span. The examined works were written by practitioners working with small animals and farm animals, in circuses, military bases, zoos, and in conservation settings. Some thematic patterns arising in the memoirs concern the impact of the veterinary career on personal and family lives, veterinarians' communications with clients, cost of care, fallibility, cross-species care, euthanasia, veterinarians' sense of humour, and the human-animal bond.

The illustrative description created by veterinary writers through their memoirs allows readers to connect with the veterinarians' sense of compassion and candor as human beings. The veterinarian memoir can also be used as a basis for examining the veterinary profession's concerns. Exposure to the veterinarian memoir can broaden students', early practitioners', and the public's appreciation for the roles of veterinarians beyond their professional façade and enlighten the reader to the humane side of veterinary medicine enabling a better understanding of practitioners as unique individuals. The narrative of the memoir allows the reader to reflect on the description of events, and to develop a deeper personal interpretation of the given perspectives offered by the author. As a teaching tool, the use of memoirs can facilitate self-reflection and further engage a reader to draw upon their memories, experiences and emotions to learn about how to adequately manage their own behaviours and concerns.

The use of the veterinary memoir points to real life events encouraging both the public and veterinary students to become more engaged in the learning process. As a result, exploring veterinary memoirs can help to develop the professional skills of future practitioners, as well as enable readers in general to carefully consider their own values and beliefs with regard to the treatment of animals and the human-animal bond.

Andrew Cuk, Ph.D.

Animals Onstage: From Real to Metaphor and Back Again

The theatre offers a unique challenge in the portrayal of the human/non-human animal bond. Literature meant to be read—novels, short stories, poems—depends on the author's ability to stimulate the reader's imagination and the reader's ability to actively organize those images into a coherent and believable story. We readily accept the "reality" of two animals conversing, because we are not presented with visual data to help us either accept or refute the premise. In a sense, it's all in our heads. Not so with the theatre. If a play calls for an animal character, it must be played by a constructed device, a real animal, or an actor portraying that animal.

The technology of animatronics and puppet engineering has made great strides, as is witnessed by the currently touring *Walking with Dinosaurs*, where life-sized puppets move and sound convincingly like the extinct animals, yet this is very expensive. Animals playing themselves in a performance have the cache of verisimilitude, but come with three inherent problems. They cannot be completely relied upon to do what is needed. They cannot act in ways their species is incapable, and finally, bringing a real animal on stage has the exact opposite effect on the audience. It pulls them out of the fictional reality of the play, illuminating the fact that they are indeed watching a fiction. Most prevalent in theatrical performances are attempts to have human actors portray animals.

There are three broad categories of animal portrayal: 1) imitating animals with the attempt to achieve realism, 2) portraying animals that are real animals with human attributes, and 3) playing animal characters that are just like us, either to the exclusion of their inherent animal attributes or somewhere on the continuum between animal and human. Mark Medoff's *Prymate* is an example of the first category. In this play, an actor is asked to portray a gorilla who has been spirited away from a research lab by his deaf linguist researcher. She has been teaching him to read sign language, but has learned that he is to be infected with the HIV virus as part of another experiment. In the Broadway production of the play, the actor wore shorts, a t-shirt and black gloves, but attempted to embody the true physical and vocal attributes of the animal character. In *The Day They Let the Lions Loose* by Emilio Carballido, two lions are played by actors in as realistic a manner as possible. As the play progresses, the animals begin to act in anthropomorphic ways, yet remain in the liminal space between human and lion. The stage adaptation of Timothy Findley's novel *Not Wanted on the Voyage* takes us one step further. Real and mythological animals share the world with us, and can talk with each other and humans. The story offers the moment when we became separated into them and us.

This talk will outline how animals are portrayed in live theatrical performances and what that may mean for humans and the animals themselves.

Helen Douglas, DVM

William's Gift

An anecdotal journey of self-discovery, *William's Gift* tells the story of one woman's life as a country veterinarian with honesty and humility. Through the trials and tribulations of learning on the job, this committed caregiver learns the ropes of caring for animals both great and small. Tale after "tail" of humorous and often heart-wrenching stories illuminates the deeply emotional connection between the everstoic animals and the author. Running through these stories is the common thread of compassion for the special creatures with whom we share our lives. A foundation of knowledge and lore is built lovingly, brick by brick. Dr. Douglas's career path becomes a winding country road and negotiating the twists and turns that lead from city clinic to rural farm challenges her both personally and professionally.

Framed by her love of Lanark County and horses, these memoirs contain something to delight every animal lover. In the end, the journey becomes the greatest teacher, and the realization of where that journey takes her will be as rewarding to the reader as it is to the author. It is only then that the true nature of William's Gift is understood.

Laura Fanthome, MES Candidate

Death becomes Us

Companion animals have given some humans incredible joy, comfort and companionship. Veterinary medicine as a practicing science has seen the increase and demand for excellent care and overall well-being of domesticated animals and their care givers, often to the point of going above and beyond what is humanly financially, and spiritually possible. I have seen this first-hand over the twenty-two years that I have been a veterinary technician. I have witnessed and gone through the loss and grieving of the death of a pet. And I have struggled as to why some of us care so much for an individual being, such as a domestic dog, while others do not.

To understand these conflicting notions of care and empathy for nonhumans, I engaged several pet owners in conversations about the loss a companion canine to cancer or another terminal illness. The conducting of these interviews through the methodology of phenomenological hermeneutics has allowed the participants to express their lived experiences and stories about their human/animal relationships openly and candidly. These participants shared poetry, short stories, photos, and journal entries on the lives they shared with their dogs. Every individual has had their reasons for the preservation of the life of their companion, but were they self serving or were they reshaping the way in which humans understand, care for and live with species in this ever changing environment.

At times, we have felt that domestic dogs need us for survival, which in some cases has allowed humans to "speak" for them when medical care was required. Our use of spoken and written language has given us the power to communicate and make choices for another species, but does language alone truly help us convey what we are feeling when we make decisions to prolong an animal's short life or do we as humans learn to communicate and understand canines through strengthening the human/animal bond over time, especially when caring for them when they are ill. By relaying, interpreting and sharing lived experiences of what canines truly have meant to a handful of participants, I hope to break down barriers and misunderstandings about these specific relationships and re-introduce the need to maintain healthy human/animal relationships in modern Western society through understanding another's point-of-view.

Sid Gustafson, DVM

Discussion of passages from the novel *Swift Dam*.

The protagonists are an aging veterinarian and a surviving Native American. The characters journey through life guided by the human-animal bond. *Swift Dam* is a novel of men and animals bound together by the landscape, textured with themes of domestication and miscegenation.

Veterinary medicine and literature become entwined. My novels digress into the morals and ethics and troubling issues of veterinary medicine often, and are at times exorcisms of my life as a horse doctor.

A thematic summary of *Swift Dam* follows:

Sheriff Oberly's dreamworld is born from sleep cuddled next to his wife. He sleeps in her arms dreaming a flooded dream that is never fully realized. There are parts of the dream Oberly wants to register and remember so he can share them with Doctor Vallerone next time he sees him, believing his friend the veterinarian qualifies as an interpreter of dreams.

In Oberly's Indian culture, animals dream as humans dream. His good friend Dr Vallerone knows animals. When the two men meet again and visit in the silence of night, Artemus Vallerone will listen to Bird Oberly's animal dream. He will contemplate the hard questions the animals in the dream put forward. Vallerone is fluent in the gesture language of animals.

Veterinarian Vallerone also nurtures a dreamworld, but unlike the sheriff, the veterinarian's dreamworld arises in his car, away and alone. Veterinarian Vallerone journeys up and down the Rocky Mountain Front looking for the right place to dream the right dream. At times, he listens to Sheriff O's animal dreams and contemplates the dream without offering any interpretation. Sometimes it seems he himself has dreamt the animal dream Oberly has shared with him.

Maybe it isn't dreams the two share, but the stellar darkness under which dreams are forged; that space in the world at night where it is difficult to determine with certainty where living ends and dreams begin.

Swift Dam is a novel of the contemporary reality of life; the dreams men pursue attempting to live in harmony with the world of animals surrounding them.

Blackfoot elders rarely share memories about *Swift Dam*'s rolling wall of water scouring Birch Creek Valley and the life once there lived. A silence preceded the water's loosened rage, a suspension of sound, a rolling sea of water not bore by this land since the Ice Age, a final sigh before erasure of a life on the river.

Other survivors still feel the chill of the Two Medicine River's slow-rising water. Rather than being swept away too suddenly to consider death, a few unfortunate Blackfeet children slipped away into the waterworld despite their parent's efforts to keep them from slipping away.

Horses pony-paddled through the floodwater delivering people to safety.

Not all were saved, *Swift Dam* remembers those Indians and animals swept away by the torrents of man and nature, for those lost and not yet found...a tale of the fate and fortune of souls burdened and left behind.

Dorris Heffron, Writer

Creating a Novel from a Dog and Vet

As a writer of realistic fiction, my first four novels were all based on real people, events and places. I was in charge and led myself into the stories. I've always had pets. Everything from skunks and hens to cats and dogs. But mostly dogs, some variety of collie mutt. Dear old Frausie dog died the day after the contract for my fourth novel came through the door. Bereft, I decided to find consolation in my first purebred. I wanted an indigenous Canadian dog I could swim or ski with. Having been refused a Newfoundlander, I ended up with an Alaskan malamute whom I named Yukon Sally.

She was a regal malamute but too much of a 'throwback' in her composition to become a show dog. I was so intrigued by her difference from all the dogs I had known, by her sled dog and wolf-like nature, I studied her intensely. That was the beginning of my following her, my being led by her into researching the traits and history of her breed, which led me into researching wolves. And then she took me to the Yukon and Alaska. We spent a long time in Dawson City where she sniffed out the history of the Klondike gold rush which was the glory days of the malamutes.

Upon return to Toronto, we sold our city house to buy fifty acres which we called Little Creek Wolf Range and got a companion for Yukon Sally, Yukon's Jake. I was now ready to begin writing this novel I knew would be called *City Wolves* and would be about wolves, sled dogs and the gold rush, but I couldn't fully imagine the main character...until I realized why Yukon Sally kept taking me to the vet. It wasn't only about removing the porcupine quills, it was because Dr. Ardis Ardiel was an inspiring woman vet and that should be my story...the life of the first woman veterinarian!

My presentation will include photos of my research in the Yukon and tell more about this unusual process, for me, of "Creating a Novel from a Dog and Vet".

Dorris Heffron was a part time tutor for Oxford University throughout the seventies when she wrote three internationally acclaimed novels about teenagers which are regarded as pioneers in the genre of young adult fiction. Returning to Canada in 1980, she became an active member of The Writers Union and PEN Canada and wrote the popular adult novel, *A Shark in the House*. She lives at Little Creek Wolf Range, near Collingwood, Ontario.

Michael Kula, PhD

The Cattle Specialist: A reading from the novel and a discussion of research exploring the life and practice of a veterinarian in 1918

The Cattle Specialist is an historical novel based on the true story of Dr. David Roberts, one of the wealthiest and most respected veterinarians in the nation during the early decades of the 20th century, and at its core, it is a tragedy about loss: how we react as we feel it occurring and how we respond once it has happened. Set in 1918, the novel follows the events that unfold after Dr. Roberts enlists a young schoolteacher to help him write a book on the history of cattle breeds, and one night, after traumatic events that occur when Dr. Roberts is forced to euthanize several ill cattle; the two begin a secret affair. Their ensuing relationship is closely connected to Dr. Roberts' veterinary practice and a re-awakened spirit of "caring" that the teacher brings to his life. Unfortunately as their intimacy grows, the tensions at home with Dr. Roberts' wife escalate until ultimately tragedy strikes. In the end, Dr. Roberts finds his wife dead at the hand of his lover and in response to his grief; he lashes out in the most reprehensible of ways.

While researching and writing the novel, one of the greatest challenges I had--and one of the areas where I felt most responsible for being historically accurate--was in depicting authentic, period-specific veterinary practices, especially those integral to the plot. In this session I will present a brief reading from the novel, focusing specifically on selections from the pivotal passages dealing with euthanasia, and then discuss my attempts to capture how the characters (the professional and the layman-observer) present radically differing views of this ultimate act.

Alice Kuzniar, PhD

The psychoanalyst and her dog: Learning about mourning from Marie Bonaparte's "Topsy"

Surprisingly, psychoanalysis has very little to say about pet love, so that it offers veterinarians and pet owners alike little guidance on how to cope with animal death. One of the most famous literary tributes to a dog, however, comes from the pen of a psychoanalyst herself, Marie Bonaparte, who also happened to be a friend and patient of Sigmund Freud. In this paper, I look to Bonaparte's luminescent homage to the chow she received from Freud for what we can learn about the psychic intricacies of anticipating the loss of a beloved dog. Topsy was diagnosed with jaw cancer—the disease of which Freud eventually died—and Bonaparte writes openly of her fears and fantasies, which include imagining the dog's death and her own. Bonaparte anticipates the full range of stages leading from the present illness to the beyond, including tranquilizing Topsy before the trip to the veterinarian, the lethal injection, her burial in the garden, and decay of her body. These steps are fantasized in elaborate detail, pictured "with fearful intensity."

Moreover, when Bonaparte reflects on the dog's present life it is retroactively, from the perspective of her death, in the future anterior: "What will Topsy have loved when death comes to take her away?" The pet is revered and idealized as if it were already being commemorated.

If the dog serves as our companion during waking hours, we hope it will also ease us into death and accompany us into the beyond. Thus, Bonaparte envisions her and Topsy sharing the same death. Yet in the novel, Bonaparte also sees her dog as warding off fears of abandonment and guarding against memories of departed relatives. Marie Bonaparte's autobiographical story thus taps into the mysterious powers attributed the dog by world religions from time immemorial. In Greek mythology, Cerberus guards the entrance to Hades, keeping the living out and the dead in. Anubis was the jackal-headed Egyptian god of the tomb and protector of the deceased. And in the great Hindu epic, the Mahabharata, King Yudhishtira refuses to enter into heaven without his dog, at which point the dog is transformed into Dharma himself, the God of Righteousness. To see the dog either as an emissary to the other world or as a protector of the tomb are ways of counteracting the inconceivable notion that our passage into death must occur without them.

However fanciful Bonaparte's imagination and blithe her affection, her narrative delves into these ancient apprehensions regarding the loneliness of death and the longing for the dog to continue its companionship and protection into the unknown life beyond.

Bonaparte's psychic mechanisms for forestalling the trauma of Topsy's loss, by trying to imagine it in the present, are familiar to all who live with aging animal companions. Her candor, profundity, and eloquence serve as a wonderful instance of how literature helps us understand the depths of our love for them.

Joseph Little, PhD

When Author and Audience are One: Freewriting, Insight, and the Challenges of Veterinary Medicine

“We do not write in order to be understood,” quipped the Irish poet Cecil Day-Lewis, “we write in order to understand.” Much more than a process of documenting our thoughts, freewriting is a form of thinking itself, a raw, unpolished, sometimes unnerving form of personal inquiry and sense-making that has long been shown to help people navigate the landscape of their personal and professional lives. From Darwin to Jung, Auden to Kafka, freewriters write for insight, paying little attention to grammar or spelling and less to that inner voice that censors possibility and epiphany. In the tradition of the great Russian formalist Osip Mandelstam, who wrote,

The word I forgot
which once I wished to say
and voiceless thought
returns to shadows' chamber,

freewriters give voice to the liminal regions of their mind, a process that often generates new perspectives and improved confidence in professional decision-making and action. You may not like everything you freewrite, you may not even believe it all, but there on the page it will be—your emerging thoughts, your fears, your fleeting connections—ready for your consideration and possible development as you continue to navigate the complex terrain of your career.

In this presentation, I will survey the landmark empirical research on freewriting from a variety of intellectual traditions—clinical psychology, composition, English education—before offering five practical guidelines for effective freewriting, culled from the literature and refined over the years in my own classroom practice. Ultimately, the best introduction to freewriting is to experience it yourself. Therefore, time permitting, we will conclude with a freewriting exercise designed to help you evaluate its potential for your own personal and professional development.

Jane Magrath, PhD, Dr. Lisa Miller, DVM, PhD, Med, Diplomate ACVP

AVC Writes North: The Chinook Project, The Arctic, The Student Writing

AVC's Chinook Project is a unique, interdisciplinary innovation that involves veterinary medicine, the Canadian Arctic, and AVC student writing. Founded by Jane Magrath (Department of English) and Lisa Miller (AVC) in 2006, the Chinook Project is a two credit internal rotation for 4th-year students at AVC. Each summer, the Project takes two volunteer veterinarians, 4 AVC students, and a coordinator or technician to a remote community in the Canadian north to provide free services (spay, castration, parasite control, wellness checks, emergency services). In four years, the Project has provided initial services and follow-ups to close to 400 dogs in Kimmirut, Cambridge Bay, and Kugluktuk. This summer, the Chinook Project will travel to Natuashish, Labrador.

During their time in the North, AVC students keep personal journals about their experiences; when they return, they work with Jane Magrath (who often travels north to coordinate the team and the community) to turn sections of those journals into nonfiction pieces that will eventually be collected and published in a book, tentatively titled *AVC Goes North*. The pieces vary from shorter meditations on the northern land, to longer personal essays on dealing with difficult surgical situations, to comic pieces on the experience in general. This past year, two of the students kept a blog, hosted on the website of CBC Prince Edward Island. A revised version of this blog will comprise a section of this year's writing.

The writing and revising serves several purposes: it allows students to record and remember their experience; it allows students to communicate that experience to a larger audience; it allows the students to process aspects of that experience when they return—and, in the case of the brave students who focus on particularly difficult situations (mistakes, unsuccessful surgeries, deaths), it allows for a certain degree of healing and perspective. One of the things that tends to surprise the student writers is how *good* their pieces are—how professional, how readable, how enjoyable. Excerpts from student pieces from the first year of the Project have already been featured in

Charlottetown's local newspaper and in UPEI's February 2009 Alumni Magazine—pages 7-10 (<http://www.upei.ca/alumni/backissues>).

This 15-minute Podium Presentation will provide a brief, PowerPoint overview of the Chinook Project and its writing component, followed by the reading of short excerpts from the writing of 2 or 3 student participants.

Further information about The Chinook Project can be found on our evolving website:
<http://www.upei.ca/projects/chinook/>

Paula Martins, Laura Fanthome, Mora Campbell, PhD & Leesa Fawcett

Beyond Knowing: Dog-Human Bonds and Communication

The epitaph for *Sight Hound*, reads: "I know that hope is the hardest love we carry." In this novel Pam Houston explores the relationship between a playwright, Rae, and Dante, her Irish Wolfhound who is suffering from cancer and, in turn, their relationships with veterinarians, therapists, as well as family and friends. In describing the often non-verbal languages of hope and fear, Houston explores the ways that we story the lives of dogs, but also how dogs themselves story our lives in ways that bespeak the interspecies importance of multi-sensuous listening to, and communication with others. Through this novel, each of the four panel members variously address the themes of the human-animal bond and interspecies somatic knowledge making, conceptions of time in relation to dying, death and grief, client communications, and the use of fiction and poetry in enhancing understanding and empathy in the healing, caring and associated teaching professions.

Paula Martins speaks of knowing and co-creating the stories of others and self in her relationships with animals and their guardians, as well as the veterinarians and other veterinarian staff at the animal hospital where she works. Additionally, she describes her research with staff and participants in a Florida Cell Dog Program where the sharing of the often harrowing stories of the rescued dogs in the program allowed inmates and guards to disclose stories of otherwise unspoken dimensions of their lives - allowing for more humane conditions for all. Laura Fanthome, a graduate student and veterinarian technician for the past twenty-two years, has witnessed the demand by clients, the desire to change by veterinary staff and the need to implement better patient care through non-traditional veterinary practices. To remedy this situation, Laura has been researching the positive impacts of the human/canine bond when caring for an ailing companion animal by engaging participants in conversations about their deceased dogs, who died from cancer and other degenerative diseases.

Leesa Fawcett and Mora Campbell, professors and dog owners are equally drawn to Houston's novel for the ways in which it illustrates aliveness and the interplay between fear, humour, love and communications and miscommunications across the species boundary. Using a phenomenological/narrative approach, drawing on poetics, they will explore the themes of time, mourning, interspecies somatic knowledge making, and the ongoing interchange of curiosity and mystery in our relations with our companions, colleagues, students, and the more-than-human world.

Erika Ritter, Writer

Voices at the Vet Clinic

In brief monologues, I will present the separate points of view of a Human Client, a Pet Patient and a Vet in a developing drama, centred on a pet in chemotherapy. By using the characters' own words in direct address to the audience, I hope to provide insight into the situation of each of the three—in a way that will be recognizable, meaningful, and even entertaining to an audience of veterinarians and anyone else who has ever made important medical decisions on behalf of an animal.

The Vet's perspective reveals what it's like to confront yet another human client with a diagnosis of animal cancer, and then watch that person go through the predictable range of reactions. The Vet wonders how he can foster legitimate hope, without promising miracles,

For her part, the Human Client shares with us her ongoing internal battle with hope, fear, suspicion, financial decision-making, and gnawing responsibility for the life of her pet. In her sense of hope and responsibility in particular, the Client unconsciously echoes the Vet. However, she has to move from her initial reaction of shock and anger, after hearing her pet's diagnosis, to a gradual acceptance of the process of treatment. Eventually, she is able to reach out to other regulars clients in the waiting room.

The Pet, predictably, expresses initial fear, resistance, and suspicion about the other dogs and cats all around him. But gradually, he too learns to accept the fact of the weekly regime, even if he can't grasp the reason behind it. Unwittingly, the pet touches both the vet's and his owner's consciences with his utter dependency on them to do what is best for him.

My hope in creating and presenting the monologues that make up "Voices in the Vet Clinic" is contribute something useful to those engaged in any way in the ongoing dramas that play themselves out in veterinary clinics everywhere, especially when regular treatments to ameliorate the effects of ravaging disease are involved. As well, by trying to understand the perspectives of each of the main players, I am also hoping to put into action some of the ideas that will be exchanged at the entire symposium, on the subject of the relevance of literature to veterinary practice. If I can in some way illuminate the points of view of all three characters, I believe I will offer a practical demonstration of how imagination, empathy and the shock of recognition can combine, both in drama and in the veterinary clinic, to further connections, both human-to-human and human-to-animal.

Elizabeth A. Stone DVM, MS, MPP, DACVS, Hilde A. Weisert

Why Veterinary Medicine and Literature?

For almost 10 years, a veterinary surgeon (EAS) and a poet (HAW) have been exploring the many ways literary works can help veterinary students and veterinarians excel – and, at the same time, find meaning and joy in their work. An elective course for veterinary students was developed and taught at North Carolina State University, which has now been introduced at the Ontario Veterinary College. In addition to formal courses, community readers groups have been formed as a once a semester or yearly engagement for faculty, staff or students. The website of the Society of Veterinary Medicine and Literature offers guidance as to how literature can be used in the academic or practice setting (www.vetmedandlit.org).

The interaction between a veterinarian and an animal owner depends on language – telling and hearing the case history, assimilating and explaining the findings and results, and relating the diagnosis and recommendations. In the traditional veterinary curriculum, case presentations play a major role in helping students learn to integrate client information with physical examination and laboratory data. However, the focus is on the medical problem, not on the whole animal and person involved. The human-animal interaction may not be discussed, particularly in regards to diversity in cultural background, communication styles, and the relative value of the animal to the owner. Through readings and discussions, veterinary professionals and students can encounter new situations and issues that cannot be replicated in a veterinary teaching hospital. As well, the rich literature of animals speaks to our students, including the human animal bond, learning from animals, and connecting with the natural world. In addition, we want literature to help renew their purpose as they remember why they wanted to be a veterinarian. Veterinary medicine and literature is such a rich field for exploration, not only by veterinarians and veterinarians-in-training, but by anyone who cares about the connection between “the animals” and us.

David Waltner-Toews, DVM

Riding the wave, Living with Contradictions: a personal narrative of the writer as scientist as veterinarian

Maintaining life as published writer, a scientist, and a veterinarian (never mind father, husband, human being) has involved living with multiple, often contradictory, realities. Science requires precision, in which cultural resonance, emotional baggage, or playful double entendre is discouraged. Literature is excellent exactly to the extent that it engages language and cultural and biological reality at multiple levels. Good professional practice (and family life) demands a mixture of emotional empathy, clear communication, playfulness and reality-checks. While developing skills as a writer, it was essential to keep these various modes of language alive, but separate in the same mind and heart. The drills to learn poetry and fiction writing needed to be kept separate from the drills needed to perfect scientific writing.

For me, writing literature could be used to address the gaps left by scientific and professional practice; science described the wave. Literature has enabled me to surf it. Only after the skills were honed did I feel sufficiently confident to bring science into literature and literature into science, and both into practice, to the enrichment of all of them. Using a wide range of examples from my own writing, this presentation will be a personal narrative of riding that chaotic surf.

Hilde A. Weisert, Co-founder of the Society for Veterinary Medicine and Literature

Having Serious Fun Reading Poems with Veterinary Students

How do you go about reading poems with veterinary students (or anyone!) in a way that is enjoyable and meaningful to their stressful lives, while also opening up the poems in a way that will enrich future reading? Our goal in our selectives on veterinary medicine and literature has been not just to “use” literature as a new tool for studying ethics, the human-animal bond, or the doctor-patient relationship, but to provide a new context for serious literary engagement that may serve the students’ throughout their lives.

In this session we’ll look at several poems that we read on the theme “The transformation – from past lives to veterinary students to veterinarians.” The transformation theme was an excellent way to reach our students where we found them at the beginning of the class – blurry-eyed from the demands of an arduous curriculum – and help them make the transition into the more reflective realm of the imagination. Many of our students, it turned out, had been literature majors and avid readers as undergraduates, but had done little outside reading during the school year. Reading and thinking about transformations gave them a natural way to re-connect with their earlier selves and contemplate integrating these dimensions into their current and future lives.

Poems include: Robert Frost, “The Span of Life.” Randall Jarrell called this a slight poem, “...yet the sigh we give after reading this poem is not a slight one.” Jarrell read Frost’s poem as a metaphor for the human lifespan; for our students, it has literal meaning as well.

Thomas Lux, “The Voice You Hear When You Read Silently.” This poem is a wonderful way to begin any return-to-reading class or workshop where participants need to make a transition from their mundane routines into their inner world. Our students recognized this voice as one they might have lost in their transformation to hardworking veterinary students, but were pleased to return to. Its choice of details was a happy one for our audience: a barn, horse-gnawed stalls, and cows.