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Humans & Companion Animals

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Bellwether

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University of Pennsylvania

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Amelia C. Van Buren
Thomas Eakins
Photograph, c. 1891
Philadelphia Museum of Art
Given by Seymour Adelman

Humans & Companion Animals

A Relationship Explored

Animals have always been a part of human experience, not just as a source of food, but also as a source of companionship. Consider the multitude of breeds of dogs and cats and you'll realize that animal companions are important to people. Many breeds were originally developed to fulfill a function, such as herding, guarding, or hunting, but breeds simultaneously came into being whose sole purpose was to provide companionship.

In an urban society, the need for companionship is as great as ever and companion animals play an important role in the lives of people. The bond between people and animals has long been acknowledged, although it has not really been studied scientifically until recently. The Center for the Interaction of Animals and Society at the

School of Veterinary Medicine of the University of Pennsylvania will host an international conference on the Human/Companion Animal Bond October 5 through 7. According to Dr. Alan M. Beck, director of the center, this will be the first conference ever held in the United States in which data-based papers on the human/companion animal bond will be presented.

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Humans & Companion Animals



D is for Dash, who nicely sits up.

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about. This structure could contain almost anything: a printing press for political obscenities, a terrorist's bomb factory, a research lab for biological warfare, a Gestapo interrogation center, a prison, or an X-rated movie house. It could be a place of evil or a place of good. But by chance it is a structure for good—a building built specifically to be a high point for us in this great journey of ours. What will be done here is destined to be felt and remembered. Kind and gentle people of the best intent will be taught the art of their benevolence here. The intelligence exhibited here will well match our own ultimate mandate. It will be—it already is—a shrine to the success of suffering. The broken will be fixed here and made whole. Men and women will watch, learn, and participate—the better to go forth and repeat the miracle of that brand of benevolence all around the world.

This is a building, built at great financial cost certainly, but with an even greater investment in good will. The returns will be beyond measure for they shall echo and grow into the future. Without doubt the things learned here, proven here, and done here for the first time will cross over that ever-strengthening bridge between the healing arts of human medicine and veterinary medicine. This building will radiate those qualities in us that assure us of a future of our own, and it can be viewed, as well, as a means of repaying a very old debt. For we owe much to our ancient anions, our non-judgmental forgiver of all sins.

So, we have come here to celebrate today one more peak attained and one more critical step toward benevolence. The cannibal and the destroyer in us move back another inch; the sunlight is a little closer and a little warmer. Our future is the better assured, we are reinforced, made more nearly complete in our inevitable, mandated, and ultimated form. At least we approach it.

Today is a celebration. A speech, in fact, seems less than what was called for. A trumpet call first and then a song would have been a better choice. Heartfelt thanks and certainly congratulations to everyone involved in making this dream, this landmark in benevolence, come true.

This talk was given by Roger Caras at the dedication of the new Veterinary Hospital of the University of Pennsylvania on May 15, 1981. Mr. Caras is an author, naturalist, photographer, lecturer, and recent recipient of the Joseph Wood Krutch Medallion.

Mr. Caras has authored more than forty books on nature, environment, and animals. He is a special correspondent on those subjects for the ABC news television network and a commentator for CBS radio on pets and wildlife. Mr. Caras recently became a member of the Board of Overseers for the School of Veterinary Medicine.

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The Center for the Interaction of Animals and Society is housed in a brownstone building on Spruce Street, not far from the School of Veterinary Medicine. In September 1981 the center will move to the school. In 1977, the center was established to provide a more comprehensive understanding of companion animals and to gather data about all aspects of the human/companion animal bond.

Funding came initially from the Marilyn Simpson Charitable Trusts, individual donations, and a training grant. In 1979, the Geraldine R. Dodge Foundation provided a five-year grant to the School of Veterinary Medicine, which enabled the center to expand and establish a core staff. It now has a full-time director, Dr. Alan M. Beck, who holds a master's degree from California State University in Los Angeles and a doctor of science degree from The Johns Hopkins University School of Hygiene and Public Health. Dr. Beck was director of the Bureau of Animal Affairs of the New York City Department of Health prior to joining the center.

Other members of the core staff are a full-time social worker and two animal behaviorists. The center has become truly interdisciplinary. Psychiatrists, veterinarians, anthropologists, social workers, and animal behaviorists are jointly developing research programs which, according to Dr. Beck, "will be examining many of the roles animals play in society, so as to better understand them, to better utilize them to the advantage of all living things, and to correct those roles that are not in the best interest of people and animals."

The field is complex and the topics covered in the papers and workshops at the international conference give an indication of the many disciplines involved. There will be fifteen workshops:

- Evaluation of Animal Behavior
- Ethical Constraints on the Use of Animals
- Experimental Design of Pet Facilitated Therapy Programs
- Evaluation of Horseback Riding Therapy Programs
- Ethology and the Study of Companion Animals
- Animals as Symbols—Anthropological Study of Companion Animals
- Programs Using Animals with the Aged
- Companion Animals and Human Health
- Legislative Aspects of Animals in the City
- Animals and the Family
- The Human/Companion Animal Bond

in the Veterinary Curriculum

- Social Work Practice and Veterinary Medicine
- Nursing Practice and the Companion Animal
- Management of Grief and the Loss of a Companion Animal
- Legal Counseling of Problems Related to Companion Animals



Child with Dog
Unknown American artist
Oil on canvas, 19th century
Philadelphia Museum of Art
The Louise and Walter
Arensberg Collection

The conference will present current information on the nature of the relationship between human beings and their companion animals. Speakers are coming from many parts of the United States, France, and Great Britain. There will be an emphasis on basic psychological, sociological, and ethological studies, as well as information about projects using companion animals to improve the quality of life and health of people. The conference is sponsored by the Latham Foundation's Delta Group, and co-sponsored by the American Animal Hospital Association, the American Psychiatric Association, and the American Veterinary Association. It will be held at the University City Holiday Inn. Participation in the conference qualifies as two units of continuing education credit.

Philadelphia was the natural choice for the conference because the Center for the Interaction of Animals and Society had initiated several innovative programs at the School of Veterinary Medicine of the University of Pennsylvania. No longer are students trained only to treat diseases, they are also taught to consider the relationships between pet and owner and to keep in mind basic principles of human and animal behavior. Students, in five elective courses, receive information about people, their pets and the

significance of their relationships. The social role of animals in contemporary society is also covered and the implications of pet ownership are addressed.

Training doesn't stop in the lecture hall. The Center has established a Companion Animal Behavior Clinic at the School of Veterinary Medicine where people, who own animals with behavior problems, are counseled by Dr. Victoria Voith, the veterinary medical director of the clinic. Senior veterinary students attend this clinic as part of the school's clinical rotation core. They also attend the clinical conferences where the behavior cases are presented and discussed.

The Companion Animal Behavior Clinic served more than 300 cases during the last two years. It was established to treat and study animals with behavioral problems as opposed to problems of organic dysfunction or disease. Dr. Voith, who is trained in veterinary medicine, psychology, and animal behavior, supervises the clinic, which supplements traditional veterinary medicine as it helps pet owners cope with a problem that is not medical, yet which is one that can become so pressing that it may lead to the eventual destruction of the pet.

The majority of cases presented at the clinic are those of aggressive behavior by a dog towards people and other animals. In families with children, this problem is particularly acute since the safety of children must be kept in mind, while remembering that a dog can serve many positive roles. In many cases, owners ignored the fact that a dog is a pack animal and needs a strong leader. Through counseling, the owner and the animal are trained to assume their proper roles as leader and pack member, respectively. Sometimes behavior-modification techniques and drug therapy are used. According to Dr. Voith, the drugs are employed to reduce the anxiety of the dog.

Other problems presented to the clinic include failure to housebreak; destruction of furniture and other property; and excessive barking and hyperactivity. Cats, too, are brought in with aggression problems, though failure to use the litter box is the most common problem here. The clinic sees about sixty-eight percent dog cases, thirty-one percent cat cases, and one percent of the cases involve exotic animals. The clinic follows through on the counseling with telephone calls. The success rate for correcting the problems is more than ninety percent.

The School of Veterinary Medicine of the University of Pennsylvania is unique in that it has appointed a professor of the School of Social Work to teach veterinary students. Professor Eleanor Ryder holds appointments at both schools and conducts research on how to expand the utility of companion animals to the elderly and to people in mental hospitals. The School of Veterinary Medicine also has a full-time social worker on its staff. Jamie Quakenbush, a predoctoral fellow in the School of Social Work, sees about fourteen cases a month. His primary function is to help



K is a Kitten, that plays with a ball.

clients cope with the loss of a pet. He has counseled people with pets as varied as dogs, cats, birds, and monkeys. "For the older person the loss of a pet is often a major setback," Quakenbush said. "In rare instances people can get so depressed that they contemplate suicide." Jamie has found that the intensity of the relationship between pet and owner varies according to the length of time. "I am called in more frequently when people have owned an animal for more than six years," he explained, "because the loss then is much more traumatic."

Quakenbush also serves as a link between veterinarian and client. The latter often is confused by the medical terms and is not able to evaluate the options open to him regarding the pet's treatment. The social worker translates so that client and veterinarian can communicate. He also, particularly in the case of elderly clients on a limited budget, works with the hospital to develop the best and least expensive treatment plan for the pet and arranges for time payments. Practitioners sometimes contact Quakenbush to help them comfort a client who has, or will, lose a pet. The social worker also spends a lot of time with clinicians and students, covering the social aspects and implication of pet ownership. His services are free and he is on-call at the hospital during regular hours.

The School of Veterinary Medicine and the School of Social Work have joined, through the Center for the Interaction of Animals and Society, to acquaint not only their professions, but also the medical, psychiatric, and psychologic disciplines with the significance of pet ownership, through courses at both schools and through publishing material. An article, "Social Work Service in a Veterinary Teaching Hospital," by Professor Eleanor Ryder, was part of the Compendium on Continuing Education for the Practicing Veterinarian.

In addition to providing services to animal owners and adding to the traditional veterinary curriculum, the Center for the Interaction of Animals and Society is very much engaged in research. Drs. Aaron Katcher and Erika Friedman found that animal owners had a significantly improved survival rate following a heart attack than non-animal owners, who were alike in all other respects. Katcher identified seven functions of pets which would be expected to decrease morbidity and mortality from a broad spectrum of physical diseases. Pets decrease loneliness; are something to care for; something to keep a person busy; something to caress and fondle; something to look at; something that makes a person feel safe; something that provides a

stimulus for exercise. Katcher believes that a question about pet ownership should be included in epidemiological surveys because it would provide information about the strength of the companion animal bond.

Dr. Katcher's group investigated the interaction between people and animals, such as talking to or touching a pet. The survey showed that most people talked to their pets and that many felt that the pets understood the feelings expressed. Researchers also found that the owner's blood pressure was lower when talking to his or her pet than when talking to another person. They concluded that people feel comfortable talking to animals because they believe that the pet is empathic and one does not have to fear the animal's evaluation.

The group also studied how people touch their animals. They found that men touched animals with the same frequency and manner as women and that the size of the pet did not influence the kind or frequency of touch. An abundance of touching had the character of idle play or inattentive petting.

Dr. Beck feels these observations have significant implications for our culture and for the dog family. Apparently, dogs provide an outlet for the comforts associated with touch for men in a culture that ordinarily inhibits men from physical contact. All breeds can serve, permitting people to choose the dog most appropriate for their lifestyle. It was also found that stroking a dog lowered the blood pressure of both human and dog.

Dr. Beck and Dr. Katcher also discovered that blood pressure in people can be lowered by having them look at a tank full of fish. Research is currently being conducted to study this effect in people with labile hypertension.

The companion animal bond is not only evaluated in a clinical setting but also in home situations. Dr. Sharon Smith, a post doctoral ethologist, stays in a volunteer's home and observes the interactions of family and dog. The center anticipates that this study will provide important insights into the role dogs play in the lives of people.

Dr. Robert Fagen, the first Dodge Scholar, is studying play behavior in cats. Dr. Barbara Jones, an anthropologist, is studying the role of the horse in the lives of young people.

Apart from the work at the center and at the Small Animal Hospital, members of the Center for the Interaction of Animals and Society are also available to discuss their work and findings in the media and with community groups, and have generated much interest in the field. Dr. Beck summarizes the role of the center, "The key ingredients of the Center for the Interaction of Animals and Society is interdisciplinary interaction . . . today, animals are so much a part of our lives, having a place in our homes, recreation, work, and our general feeling of well-being, that it takes the varied skills and experiences of a whole university complex to understand and best utilize the very special relationship that exists between people and their companion animals."