



4-1-2001

A Veterinary Behaviorist Saving the Lives of Animals

Joan Capuzzi Giresi
University of Pennsylvania

A Veterinary Behaviorist Saving the Lives of Animals

by Joan Capuzzi Giresi, V'98

Amy R. Marder, CW'73, V'79, has had many surprises in her nearly two decades of work as a veterinary behaviorist. For example, she is continually astonished when she happens upon a client who maintains an owner-pet relationship that is destructive to his or her personal well-being. She is flabbergasted by the person who can live with an animal for many years and then surrender it. And dumbfounded by the cruelty with which some pet owners treat their animals.

Disconcerting though these "surprises" may be, Dr. Marder sees the good with the bad in her private practice and her shelter work. Behavior medicine, she says, lends itself to a clientele "who are generally very bonded with their animals, and want to keep their animals—as well as themselves—happy."

Happiness for Dr. Marder has always emanated from the study of animal behavior. A 1973 graduate of the University of Pennsylvania, Dr. Marder earned a B.A. in biology with a concentration in animal behavior. After obtaining her veterinary degree from Penn in 1979 and completing a private-practice internship, Dr. Marder became the Veterinary Hospital of the University of Pennsylvania's—and this country's—first resident in animal behavior in the early 1980s. During her residency, Dr. Marder demonstrated the effectiveness of Valium in decreasing spraying in cats.

Dr. Marder then created behavior programs at the Tufts University School of Veterinary Medicine—where she remains a clinical assistant professor—and the Angell Memorial Animal Hospital in Boston. Her practice of behavior medicine has steeped her in the midst of complex family dynamics. Consider, she explains, the case of the family dog that growls at the new baby: "There's the family's attachment to the dog and their biological attachment to the child, the wife who spends most of her time with the baby, and the husband who now gets most of his attention from the dog."

"You really are more of a family therapist than just an animal behaviorist," says Dr.

Marder, who also offers behavior and other medical advice in the monthly pet-health column she writes for *Prevention* magazine.

For numerous family pets exhibiting behavior problems, the road frequently ends in shelters, where many are euthanized, often for behavioral reasons. Upon learning that behavior problems are a major reason people abandon their pets, Dr. Marder decided a few years ago to help homeless animals.

In her current position as vice president of behavioral medicine and companion animal services at the American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (ASPCA) in New York City, Dr. Marder—

who also maintains a private practice in her hometown of Cambridge, Mass.—addresses shelter-related behavior issues. These include problems with feral cats, the pit bull "dilemma" and psychological issues associated with "hoarders" who amass unmanageably-large animal collections.

Dr. Marder also conducts research at the

ASPCA, most of it aimed ultimately at facilitating appropriate adoptions and reducing the number of unnecessary euthanasias. In one study, Dr. Marder is working to discern which shelter behavior patterns are predictive of behavior patterns an animal will exhibit in the adoptive home. She is well on her way to debunking several long-held myths, like one that holds that food aggression and many anxiety disorders manifest in the shelter generally transfer into the home. In another study, Dr. Marder is defining the behavioral indicators of prior abuse. "People are constantly saying that their shelter animals were abused," she says, "and that's usually not the case."

Dr. Marder credits her Penn education with her research skills, which enable her to pursue answers to her questions through well-designed studies. And she gives a grateful nod to the School for spawning her fascination with animal behavior, which continues to enchant her. "It's so challenging and interesting. I often think I've seen every type of behavioral quirk there is," she remarks enthusiastically, "and then the next case will be entirely different from anything I've seen."

Joan Capuzzi Giresi is a writer and a veterinarian in the Philadelphia area. For more information on the ASPCA, visit its web site at <www.asPCA.org>.

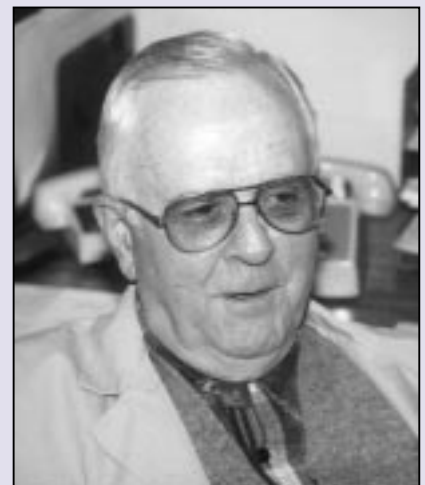


Dr. Raker Honored

A new award that recognizes individuals who have made a significant impact on the development and training of equine practitioners was presented to three veterinarians at the American Association of Equine Practitioners' 46th Annual Convention in San Antonio, Texas.

Dr. Charles W. Raker, V'42 was recognized for his efforts as educator and mentor to the many students and colleagues with whom he has been affiliated. The awards were presented during the November 28, 2000 President's Luncheon.

Noted for his development of the first internship program in equine medicine and surgery, Dr. Raker dedicated his career to teaching veterinary students at Penn. He was also instrumental in the formation of the



American College of Veterinary Surgeons. The Distinguished Educator Award will be presented annually.