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### Dr. Katherine A. Houpt

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## Dr. Katherine A. Houpt

*Penn Vet Class of 1963*

Dr. Katherine Houpt almost didn't make it to Penn Vet. "I had a boyfriend who didn't approve," she explained. "I was accepted and turned it down, and I spent the whole summer crying."

After being readmitted in August, "I thought I was taking a vow of celibacy when I went to vet school," Houpt said. "The mentality at the time was that no guy wanted a girl better educated or smarter than he was."

As it so happened, Houpt would soon meet her husband-to-be and future research collaborator. "They assigned a faculty member to show us around the Penn campus—and three years later, I married that guy!" she said. Dr. T. Richard Houpt, V'50, wasn't threatened by her smarts. "He taught physiology, and I studied hard because I wanted to impress him." For their honeymoon, she quips, "We visited veterinary schools in the U.S. and Canada."

Houpt was one of five women to graduate in 1963. "I really had a good time in vet school," she said. Two of her classmates—the late Drs. Joan O'Brien and Jeffie Roszel—had enrolled in their thirties. "Joan and Jeffie were older. They were ladies. I never heard a dirty joke. We were treated nicely."

"I always make a big point of saying I'm a VMD," Houpt noted. "Penn did accept me, and many other vet schools weren't accepting more than two women." She would earn not only a VMD but, in 1972, a PhD in biology from Penn, followed in 1993 by Board Certification as a charter diplomate of the American College of Veterinary Behaviorists (ACVB). She served as ACVB president in 1999.

*"I thought I was taking a vow of celibacy when I went to vet school."*



*Drs. Elinor Brandt, Katherine Houpt, and Barbara Henderson (from left to right), all V'63, remain friends more than 50 years after graduation.*

Houpt became a leading researcher in animal behavior and welfare, authoring numerous papers as well as the widely used textbook *Domestic Animal Behavior*, and lecturing around the world. She is most proud of her studies in equine behavior; in particular, the physiological basis of equine ingestive and maternal behaviors.

Although she became the first woman appointed to a full professorship at Cornell's College of Veterinary Medicine, her initial application for tenure, despite impressive credentials, was not approved. "That was probably the most challenging year of my life," she said, noting that in the late 1970s and early 1980s "there was still a lot of prejudice against women. But as soon as the barriers came down, they just flocked into the profession."

In 1978, she wrote about this trend in the article "Equal Opportunity in Action: Veterinary Medicine, A Success Story" for *Veterinary Medicine/Small Animal Clinician*. She also co-wrote two in-depth editorials for *The Cornell Veterinarian*; the first delved into the history of women in veterinary medicine, while the second explored the field's current status and promising future.

At Cornell, she served as a Professor from 1989 to 2005, followed by four years as James Law Professor of Animal Behavior. She has been Professor Emeritus of Animal Behavior since 2010.

"Whenever a woman got tenure, I'd have a party for her. I always tried to do things like that," Houpt said. "I really tried to help women."