

## Perspectives in Veterinary Medicine

### Dr. Jane Brunt: Her Diverse Formative Years

How moving from the Northeast to the Midwest for college expanded her understanding of others.

By Dr. Donald F. Smith with assistance from Julie Kumble and Melena Hagstrom

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It was a gutsy move. Jane Brunt, an aspiring veterinarian, decided to move from metropolitan New Jersey to agricultural Kansas to attend college. Relocating to the Sunflower State to enroll as a biology major at Kansas State University would boost her chances of gaining admittance to the state veterinary college, or so she thought. Little did she know that this radical change in life style and location would also result in a fulfilling journey of personal growth along with a path to professional success.

The wide-open, wheat-strewn state where people spoke with an unfamiliar accent and chewed tobacco, was very different from the populous suburban life to which Brunt was accustomed. Adjusting was difficult, to put it mildly. Support from her family, including her father who had once aspired to become a veterinarian himself before choosing a career in psychiatry, and her own personal ambition and budding independence, provided continued inspiration.

Her life began to change. “I was a pre-vet student majoring in biology, so I had to take the requisite animal science courses to fulfill the veterinary college admission requirements.”<sup>1</sup>

Embracing the strong agricultural presence at KSU, she worked hard during her first year of undergraduate college to prepare a Hereford heifer for participation at the university’s Little American Royal Show. For weeks, she led and groomed, fed and broke the heifer. When the day of the show arrived, her efforts paid off and she and her charge were awarded second place. Her family, who had traveled the 1,400 miles to provide support, was unimaginably proud. For Jane, it was just the beginning of realizing her potential.

The new way of life in the state that Brunt would embrace for seven years threw a few curveballs. She recalled the story of the cowboy, the mice, and a hay bale. The cowboy, while preparing the arena for the cattle show, unearthed a nest of young mice. Huddled under the bale of hay, Brunt considered the hairless mice to be valued baby creatures. The cowboy, on the other hand, as he stomped on the mice and mercilessly smothered out their existence, saw them as no more than pesky vermin that spread disease. Although horrified by this incident, she came to admire the work ethic of the farmers, who loved and cared for their livestock, and who were on call for them and their sprawling fields of crops every hour of every day, from sunup to sundown.

After three years of undergraduate work, Brunt did indeed gain admittance to the veterinary college. Strong personal and professional relationships were cultivated during that time with valued friends and mentors. Many years later, in retrospection, she remarked:

*I sometimes reflect on many of the “things” that are listed on my Curriculum Vitae. Though they may seem impressive to others, to me they are really quite insignificant compared to the seven years I spent in Manhattan. However, the education I obtained there, and values I learned; the life friends that I made, and the many wonderful memories that I have: all that just gets one line on my CV.<sup>2</sup>*

Today, Dr. Brunt is the executive director of the grassroots initiative called CATalyst Council. She is also owner of CHAT, a very successful feline-only clinic in Towson, Maryland. She enjoys her work as one of the pioneering feline specialists in veterinary medicine.

Whether it’s due to her experience of going to school in a place so different from what she’d known during her formative years, or her naturally warm, generous, and driven personality, Dr. Brunt knows how to bring a diverse community together. During her many years in office at the Maryland Veterinary Medical Association, this ability became clear: “I try to be a voice of reason and bring people from different backgrounds together...You have to be persistent and positive, and make everyone see what can happen for the good of the whole.”

Her Type A personality and reflective lifestyle present a winning combination, and even today Dr. Brunt finds lessons for leadership and self-improvement. One of her more recent “ahas” has been to try and be a better listener and be mindful of her tone of voice.

*I’ve learned that “tone of thought” matters a lot, and I’ve discovered if I can be mindful and empathetic in my thoughts, it will show up in my words and actions.*

This is, indeed, Midwestern kindness at its finest.

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<sup>1</sup> Brunt, Jane (DVM, Kansas, 1980), telephone interview with Donald F. Smith (Cornell University) and Julie Kumble (consultant, Cornell University), March 3, 2015. Unless otherwise attributed, quotations and information throughout this story were from this interview.

<sup>2</sup> [Dr. Jane E. Brunt will be honored with a 2004 Alumni Recognition Award](#). Kansas State University website. Undated.

**KEYWORDS:**

Dr. Jane Brunt  
CATalyst  
Kansas State University  
CHAT, Towson Maryland

**TOPIC:**

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## Women in Veterinary Medicine

### LEADING QUESTION:

How do those who enter the veterinary profession from the Northeast differ from those from the Midwest?

### META-SUMMARY:

A New Jersey student travels to Manhattan, Kansas to prepare for veterinary college.

### ABOUT THE AUTHORS:

**Dr. Donald F. Smith**, Dean Emeritus of the Cornell University College of Veterinary Medicine, had a passion for the value of the history of veterinary medicine as a gateway for understanding the present and the future of the profession.

Throughout his many professional roles from professor of surgery, to Department Chair of Clinical Sciences, Associate Dean of Education and of Academic Programs and Dean, he spearheaded changes in curriculum, clinical services, diagnostic services and more. He was a diplomat of the American College of Veterinary Surgeons and a member of the National Academy of Practices. Most recently he played a major role in increasing the role of women in veterinary leadership.

*Perspectives in Veterinary Medicine* is one of his projects where he was able to share his vast knowledge of the profession.

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**Ms. Melena Hagstrom** provided research assistance.