

## Perspectives in Veterinary Medicine

# Dr. Jane Brunt: The Making of a Feline Veterinarian

By Dr. Donald F. Smith, Julie Kumble and Melena Hagstrom

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Cats are aloof, independent, and capable of dealing with pain on their own. These false assumptions still abound, and contribute to startling figures: cats, despite being the number one companion animal in the US, are taken to veterinary clinics half as often as dogs. No one is more familiar with this unfortunate feline state of affairs than Dr. Jane Brunt, eminent feline expert and cat advocate.

Knowing where she is today, it may come as a surprise that the cat was not the early focal point of Dr. Brunt's career as a veterinarian. A Jersey-girl-turned-Kansas-resident, she completed her undergraduate and DVM degrees at Kansas State University (KSU).<sup>1</sup> The strong agricultural presence at the university and the surrounding state gave Dr. Brunt a thorough background in ruminant medicine, and her initial inclination after her 1980 graduation was to work with small ruminants, perhaps internationally.

A year later, after some dairy work and general small animal medicine, Brunt emerged as an independent veterinarian, finding ways to work without direct guidance or constant mentoring. "I know I did things that weren't necessarily the optimal way each time, but I learned independence." As for continuing to do large animal work for a career, she opined, "I could treat a cow with a prolapsed uterus in the middle of the night as well as any new veterinarian. I knew I *could* do it, farm calls and that lifestyle, but I also knew I didn't *have* to."

So Dr. Brunt changed course, and for the next three years, worked at a five-doctor cat and dog practice in Baltimore.

Into her life walked the cat! Feline medicine had been lurking in Dr. Brunt's mind for a while, a ghost in the form of a cat nutrition sophomore project at the KSU veterinary college under her former professor, Dr. Russ Frey, and a chance experience during fourth-year clinics where she amazed herself by successfully placing an intravenous catheter in a sick cat. "That was a pivotal moment for me," she says. "Somebody let me do something and recognized my accomplishment, and I suppose it became a seed that grew."

To confirm her new career interest, she visited four veterinarians who owned feline practices: Drs. Marcia Levine in Buffalo, Joanna Gugliemino in Rochester, Sue MacDonough in Philadelphia, and Tom Elston in Boston. Dr. Brunt was inspired by their quiet and calm surroundings, the colleagues' gentle ways, and their gracious hospitality. With the realization

that she could do this as well, and her fascination with the quieter and more mysterious species, she engaged in “shoe-leather market research” and chose a place in Maryland where she felt a practice could thrive.

Here, she founded the Cat Hospital at Towson (CHAT)<sup>2</sup>, the first feline-exclusive clinic in the state. As with any practice, there were unexpected setbacks. “My associate fell in love with the contractor of the new practice location and they moved away,” she laughs. But she was successful nonetheless, and eight years later opened the Cat Hospital Eastern Shore (CHES), an hour from the first.<sup>3</sup>

These clinical efforts earned her recognition as a feline expert, and opened new and interesting doors. Her current interests lie with the non-profit CATalyst Council,<sup>4</sup> formed from grassroots organizations within veterinary medicine, the shelter/animal welfare movement, and related entities such as foundations, Cat Fanciers, the media, and commercial companies. As chair of the CATalyst Summit in 2008 and her later appointment as executive director of the Council, she attempts to further improve feline medicine and address the importance of feline care to the general public. By virtue of the open and inclusive structure of the CATalyst board and Dr. Brunt’s direction, its associated bodies are able to represent a broad range of diverse stakeholders in feline healthcare and welfare.

In addition to her feline medicine interests, Dr. Brunt’s career has included leadership in many aspects of organized veterinary medicine, including the Maryland Veterinary Medical Association (MVMA), American Animal Hospital Association, and the AVMA House of Delegates representing the American Association of Feline Practitioners. In 1996, she founded Animal Relief, Inc., to assist organizations in the healthcare of animals, and cats in particular. Dr. Brunt’s life with the cat reflects the modern version of such legendary feline veterinarians as Louis Camuti,<sup>5</sup> Jean Holzworth,<sup>6</sup> Fred Scott,<sup>7</sup> and Jim Richards.<sup>8</sup> Though she dismisses those comparisons too quickly, she does know her strength of character.

*I know that I’m driven and directive, but my personal core values are of integrity and honesty and a sense of humor. I believe that everyone has a gift. That’s my basic value and maybe should go on my headstone some day!*

Inspired by the aloof creature that is the cat, Dr. Brunt has lifted the veil and made the cat more accessible, personal, and ultimately, less of a mystery.

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<sup>1</sup> Donald F. Smith. Dr. Jane Brunt: Her Diverse Formative Years. *Perspectives in Veterinary Medicine*. March 30, 2015

<sup>2</sup> [Cat Hospital at Towson](#).

<sup>3</sup> Dr. Brunt sold this second practice eight years later, but continues to own the Cat Hospital at Towson.

<sup>4</sup> [CATalyst Council](#).

<sup>5</sup> [Dr. Louis J. Camuti, Cat Specialist](#). *New York Times*, Obituaries, February 27, 1981.

<sup>6</sup> [Jean Holzworth, Obituary](#). *New York Times*, January 17, 2007.

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<sup>7</sup> [Cornell Feline Health Center: Unwavering Devotion to Cats](#). The Internet Home of Steve Dale.

<sup>8</sup> [James Richards, Veterinarian and Expert on Cat Care, Dies at 58](#). *New York Times*, Obituaries, April 26, 2007.

KEYWORDS:

Dr. Jane Brunt  
Feline veterinarians  
American Association of Feline Practitioners  
American Animal Hospital Association  
CATalyst Council  
Dr. Russ Frey  
Dr. Marcia Levine in Buffalo, NY  
Dr. Joanna Gugliemino in Rochester, NY  
Sue MacDonough in Philadelphia, PA  
Tom Elston in Boston, MA  
Animal Relief, Inc.

TOPIC:

Women Veterinarians

LEADING QUESTION:

What are the characteristics of a successful feline veterinarian?

META-SUMMARY:

The making of Dr. Jane Brunt's leadership in feline veterinary medicine

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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