A Committed Veterinarian

Robert Lynk’s life has been one of service: to his profession, his community and his alma mater, as well as to his family. Rather than accept a proposed position in North Granby, Connecticut at the time of his graduation, he chose instead to return to his home area because the veterinarian there was running a two-person practice alone and Bob felt he could be of greater service.

At the other end of his career, Dr. Lynk only considered retirement when he was assured that his clientele would be well-served by the veterinarians who remained in the practice where he had spent his entire career. Bob and his wife, Nancy, have been energetic and faithful Cornell alumni volunteers, serving on various college and university committees and councils, as well as providing leadership for their local Cornell Club and the Plaque Class (so-named by the Class of 1961).

Bob was born near Sharon Springs, NY into a farm family with a legacy that dates back to 1859. He and his older brother grew up under the tutelage of their father who was an expert Holstein breeder. Both young men aspired to work with agriculture, though they took different routes: Willard stayed on the farm, while Bob received his BS in agriculture from Cornell in 1954. During a brief experience teaching vocational agriculture, Bob met his future wife. Nancy was a Cornell graduate in Home Economics and they were married in August 1955.

In May 1955, to fulfill his ROTC commitment as a commissioned officer, Bob reported for two years of active duty. That included 16 months in Korea where no dependents were allowed. His wife continued to work as a 4-H extension agent in the Albany area.

Upon his return from overseas in the spring of 1957, Bob decided to take his parents’ earlier advice and seek a career as a veterinarian. With his large animal background and good undergraduate record, he had no difficulty being accepted into the Class of 1961. Through a combination of free tuition, a State scholarship for veterans, saving his military allotments, Nancy’s fulltime position at Cornell, and his part time job in the college’s Ambulatory Clinic, the Lynks were also able to survive quite nicely financially.

“Nancy and I often said that we were in better shape financially during those four years than immediately after I graduated. We even went to the movies once a week.”

1 Full tuition scholarships were offered to all New York State residents through 1963 in accordance with the Land Grant agreement for Cornell University.
Upon graduation, Dr. Lynk moved to Clarksville to work in the general practice established by Dr. Thurman Vaughn (Cornell 1944). The animal hospital and the Lynks moved to Delmar in 1963. In due course, he became a partner in the practice and contributed to its expansion to four veterinarians with responsibilities for growing numbers of small animals, while continuing work with dairy and beef cattle, sheep, pigs, horses, and some wildlife. The equine practice was terminated in 1973.

Because of his academic achievements at Cornell as well as the respect with which he was held by the veterinary community, Dr. Lynk was appointed to the College’s Advisory Council shortly after his graduation. Later, he also became involved in activities of the State, Hudson Valley, and Capital District Veterinary Societies, and the Board of Veterinary Medicine. He was also active in the Delmar Presbyterian Church, and served for 12 years as a Deacon.

A few years before his retirement in 1997, Dr. Lynk took up painting, to satisfy an interest that began during his college years. His initial mentor and source of encouragement has been Sherry Holmes, the wife of one of his closest classmates in college. Over the last 16 years, he has taken lessons from many other accomplished artists. Bob’s medium is watercolor, through which he portrays rural and pastoral scenes, many of which feature his lifelong interest in dairy cattle and the buildings that house them.

Though painting has become his avocation, the world of sports—and more specifically, the Yankees—represent the prism through which Bob personifies most significant human endeavors. No conversation, long or short, with one or many, escapes an analogy to baseball or pitching horseshoes, another of his favorite games. Bowling is another passion. Bob has participated in at least one and as many as three leagues at one time since graduating. He has bowled three sanctioned 300 games.

Dr. and Mrs. Lynk spend their retirement years alternating between a summer home on Crystal Lake near Rensselaerville and their nearby permanent home in Delmar. Their three children (Robin Brewster Koochagian, Tamara Lynk, and Charles) and their five grandchildren are frequent visitors. Bob’s veterinary lineage continues through his nephew, Thomas Lynk ’81.

On September 24, 2010, Dr. and Mrs. Lynk will be jointly honored at Cornell University as recipients of the prestigious Frank H. T. Rhodes Exemplary Service Award. Only the fourth veterinarian to receive this award, Bob humbly acknowledges that he and his wife are not alone in extending the greatness of Cornell through their multiple activities and their generosity. While this may be true, all who know them are exceedingly grateful for their lifetime of commitment and service to a multitude of community and professional endeavors.

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2 In 1963, Dr. Lynk was appointed by Dean George Poppensiek to the veterinary college’s Advisory Council, a group of approximately 10 veterinarians and other agricultural and academic leaders. Their charge was to provide counsel to the college administration on matters related to teaching, research, and service functions.
Interview:

Subject: Robert E. Lynk, DVM
Interviewer: Dr. Donald F. Smith
Interview Date: September 10, 2010
Location: Crystal Lake, near Rensselaerville, New York

Interviewer’s Note:
Fall was in the air when my wife, Doris, and I drove into the foothills of the Catskill Mountains to visit Bob and Nancy Lynk at their summer cottage on Crystal Lake. Quintessential Cornell supporters, their enthusiasm for alumni events and university programs runs both broad and deep. Dr. Lynk’s passion for water color painting is well-known in veterinary and rural communities throughout the State, and one of his beautiful pastoral scenes hangs on my office wall (a gift commissioned by the College Advisory Council at the time of my transition to dean emeritus in 2007). This is the first interview in this series for a member of the Class of 1961, which was the initial cohort of students to matriculate in the new veterinary complex at the eastern end of the Cornell campus.

(Dr. Donald F. Smith)

Dr. Donald Smith:
This is September 10th, 2010. This is Donald Smith of Cornell University with Robert Lynk, Class of 1961. We’re at Crystal Lake which is the summer home of Robert and Nancy Lynk. Nancy was in the Class of 1952, Home Economics (Cornell) 1.

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1 Now the College of Human Ecology.
Thanks, Bob, for doing this interview. Would you please start by talking about how you grew up, your family legacy and how you got to veterinary college?

**GROWING UP**

*Dr. Robert Lynk:*

I grew up on a dairy farm near Sharon Springs, which is on Route 20 about 50 miles west of Albany. The farm was acquired in 1859 and it still is in the family. It was a good dairy farm. My Dad was an excellent farmer. If it was raining, we had to clean cobwebs and pull weeds by the fences and mustard out of the corn rows. He didn’t purchase anything on credit. He did a wonderful job and was a great role model. He never smoked, though once in a while he had a can of beer. He was just a hard worker.

My mother always went to church so most of us kids got into the habit of going to church. My Dad didn’t go too often. He was a Baptist and the Baptist church closed, so we were brought up in the Lutheran church.

During the war years we had about 25 milking head of cattle, and right after the war—in 1946—we increased to about 50. It was one of the bigger farms in the area. We built a new Rilco rafter barn. My Dad was on the cutting edge and he bred purebred Holstein cows.

I loved to go to school because school was not too hard and, if I was in school, I was not working—sort of like a vacation. So I enjoyed school very much; in fact, from the fourth grade through graduation from high school, I never missed a day. I loved to participate in all the sports. A small school like ours where there were only about 200 in the entire 12 grades provided a chance to participate on all the athletic teams.

Dad was a baseball fan and we each had our own teams. My Dad was a Dodger fan and my brother was a Cardinal fan. In 1937, listening to the radio, I heard Lou Gehrig hit a home run, so I became a Yankee fan. I wore number 4 on all my athletic uniforms from that point on.

**COLLEGE, MARRIAGE AND THE WAR YEARS**

How did I get interested in veterinary medicine? Well, no way I wanted to go six years to college. Four years was bad enough before I would get out and earn a living for myself. I had an older brother and made the assumption that the farm would pass to him, which it did.

I thought I would like to teach agriculture, so Cornell was the obvious place. My ag teacher went to Cornell and we went up to a couple football games so I decided to give that a whirl. My brother and I actually applied at the same time. He graduated from high school in 1946 when he was only 16. He always had wondered about going to college so he decided, “Well, if you’re going, I’m going”. So we both started in the fall of 1950.

But the Korean War was on and our hired man decided that he owed it to the country to join up so that left my Dad without any help on the farm. So my brother took a leave of absence and he’s still on that leave of absence.
I went on and graduated in '54. I taught school for a short period of time, from July to December '54, when another fellow whom I knew was coming home from Korea, and he was looking for a job. Teaching was not in my ballgame so I told him to take my job and I would help my Dad and brother on the farm because I had to report for military duty in May of '55.

While teaching school, I met my wife at the Saratoga County Fair. She was a 4-H agent and I was looking over the exhibit area to see about exhibiting for the FFA.² We got married in August of '55 hoping that I would get a military order to Germany. But I got orders to Korea where dependents were not allowed, and I spent 16 months there.

While there, I wondered how I would make a living. My folks had been talking to me about veterinary college so I thought about it. I actually wrote to a couple of medical schools, including Albany Medical, but I thought that I was a lot more comfortable with cows (I think my folks had a good idea). So I decided to investigate veterinary medicine when I got out.

APPLYING TO THE VETERINARY COLLEGE
I returned to the States in January '57 and had a month’s leave. My wife was working as a 4-H agent in Rensselaer County. She was looking over the employment opportunities at Cornell and saw an opening in the editorial office of the College of Home Economics.³ She said, “Well, if you’re thinking about veterinary college. I’ll go up and see if there’s any chance to get that job.” So we drove to Ithaca and I took a placement test. While I was there, I went down to the veterinary college. I assumed I would have to go a year to get my requirements because I had no zoology. Luckily, I had taken physics, so that was out of the way, but I hadn’t completed any zoology or organic chemistry.

I stopped into the old veterinary college and they said, “You’d better talk to the secretary of the college,” who was Dr. Gordon Danks⁴ at that time. That was in the morning and he said, “You go up to the Ag School, bring me your transcript down this afternoon. I have a class and I’ll meet you at 3:00.” I came back, gave him the transcript and he said, “Hmm, you did pretty well.” (I was something like 17th in the class). “What I want you to do next is to go over to Day Hall and enroll in organic chemistry. Take it this summer and you can start in the fall.”

I said, “What about zoology?” And he said, “Heck, you took three hours of botany, and you took six hours of human growth and development, that will suffice for zoology.” So I completed the organic chemistry in six weeks and started school in the fall of '57.

THE INTERVIEW FOR VETERINARY MEDICINE
Dr. Smith:
Did you have an interview with the committee, or was it just with Dr. Danks?

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² Future Farmers of America.
³ Now the College of Human Ecology.
⁴ A. Gordon Danks ’33, professor of veterinary surgery, head of the Department of Surgery, Director of the Large Animal Hospital; Chairman of the Admissions Committee.
Dr. Lynk:
I did have an interview. It might have been a week later that I had an interview. The interview was with Dean Hagan,\textsuperscript{5} Dr. Olafson\textsuperscript{6} and Dr. Fincher.\textsuperscript{7} They are all three pretty scary, pretty stern-looking guys. The first question they asked me was, “Where are you from?” I said Sharon Springs, and Dr. Fincher said, “Well, I know that town well.” Dr. Olafson said, “I do, too. We have both been arrested for speeding in that town.” I thought this is no way to start. We had a one-man local police force and that is how he earned his income. If you were exceeding 40 miles per hour (and there were two hills coming down into Sharon) it was easy to get them.

So that’s how the interview started off. I cannot remember anything else about the interview except the speeding tickets in Sharon Springs. If you’d ever ridden with Dr. Fincher, you would know why he got a speeding ticket. He was pretty heavy on the gas.

So I was very fortunate. I picked up a year. Having a farm background put you in good stead with Dr. Danks because he liked people from farm backgrounds. There were getting to be fewer and fewer kids from farms who were applying in those days. It was already beginning to drop.

**FINANCING VETERINARY EDUCATION**

Dr. Smith:
When you started in 1957, there was no tuition for New York State students.\textsuperscript{8}

Dr. Lynk:
Absolutely, just fees and books.

Dr. Smith:
Your wife was working. Tell me about the financial situation as you went through school.

Dr. Lynk:
Well, it was great. In those days residents of New York State could attend the four state schools at Cornell tuition free. Fortunately, we had a few savings. Thanks to her work as an Extension agent, Nancy had been able to save all of my allotment checks. Then there was a veterans’ scholarship from New York State for my service in Korea. That went directly to the university and it paid for the fees.

My wife was working and had an income. My main expense was the apartment—we had a nice apartment—and the books. I worked for the last three years in the Ambulatory Clinic and that brought in some money. It was also good experience because I got to ride with the practitioners.

\textsuperscript{5} William A. Hagan, DVM, MSc, DSc, professor of veterinary bacteriology emeritus, and dean of the college.
\textsuperscript{6} Peter Olafson ’26, MS, professor of veterinary pathology, head of the Department of Veterinary Pathology and Bacteriology.
\textsuperscript{7} Myron G. Fincher ’19, MS, professor of veterinary medicine, head of the Department of Medicine and Obstetrics, director of the Ambulatory Clinic.
\textsuperscript{8} Tuition for New York residents was instituted in 1963.
My wife and I often said that we were in better shape financially during those four years that right after graduation. We used to go to the movies once a week.

*Dr. Smith:*  
Could you describe what you did on the Ambulatory Clinic.

*Dr. Lynk:*  
Students who worked in the Ambulatory Clinic had to take care of cleaning up and sterilizing the equipment, having the grips ready for Dr. Fincher and Dr. Fox and Dr. Roberts and Dr. Hillman and Dr. van Kruiningen. We had to repair the obstetrical sleeves before the days when plastic sleeves were used very much.

We had to make the 50% Dextrose for acetonemic cows and the calcium for the milk fever cases. There were liniments that we made, and compounds. There were drugs you had never heard of sitting on the shelves and we wondered what they were for. If we needed to order something we had to order it in the office. We had to make sure that the proprietary products (hormones) were ordered when the supplies got low. It was not only a good learning experience, but we also got paid for it so it was the best of both worlds—sort of like playing baseball for pay.

That job lasted though my sophmore, junior and senior years.

**SUMMER EMPLOYMENT DURING VETERINARY COLLEGE**

*Dr. Smith:*  
What did you do during the summers?

*Dr. Lynk:*  
I started Ambulatory my second year. Also that summer, I worked on the mastitis survey. That was another *play for pay*. We got started early and got back from the mastitis survey by 9:00 or 10:00 am so I could do my Ambulatory work in the afternoon.

Between my second and third year, I added an introductory painting course to my daily routine. The following summer I arranged to ride with Dr. Love in Watkins Glen in a mixed practice (both large and small animal). I would go over every morning and ride with him. That summer we purchased two bicycles so my wife could ride to work [while I had the car]. We still have those bicycles—three speeds from Sears and Roebucks.

I had a good experience with Dr. Love. He probably let me do more than he should. I remember he said, “I am going to go to the State meeting; can you hold down the fort?” I suppose it was illegal but it was not unusual for the summer guy [to look after things during

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9 Francis H. Fox ’45, professor of veterinary medicine and obstetrics.
10 Stephen J. Roberts ’38, MS, professor of veterinary medicine and obstetrics.
11 Robert A. Hillman ’55, assistant professor of veterinary medicine and obstetrics.
12 Herbert J. Van Kruiningen ’60, medical interne in the Department of Medicine.
the veterinarian’s absence]. The farmers were used to you by then because the State meeting
was always towards September before school started.

I was treating milk fevers, calvings, infected ears, giving Distemper shots, and harassing the
help. Dr. Love had a technician (kennel man and surgical assistant) and he was a real
Pittsburgh Pirates fan. He was an African-American, a likeable guy. He had a couple hitches
in jail, but Dr. Love got him straightened out and dried out, and he was a good citizen. We
had a good time together.

That year, the Yankees lost the World Series to Pittsburgh when Mazeroski hit that home run
in the 9th inning. When I got home from vet school that day—they played those games during
the day—what was on my back door on Water Street, but a huge Pirates flag! I don’t know
how he found my address, but Willie had come over and planted that flag. We had a good
time.

Those four years of veterinary college were great. Financially, we were in good shape. I left
college not owing anybody anything and could pay for a second car to use for veterinary
practice. We were probably one of the last classes that were like that.

**DR. ELLIS P. LEONARD AND ASEPTIC SURGERY**

*Dr. Smith:*
Could you describe Dr. Leonard and his role in small animal surgery?

*Dr. Lynk:*
Dr. Leonard introduced aseptic surgery and we were all very much aware of that. He taught
junior surgery in the spring term of our third year. We had teams comprised of an anesthetist,
an assistant surgeon and a surgeon. There were four or five pieces of prescribed surgery:
laparotomy, hysterectomy, gastrotomy, etc. We had to have the dog anesthetized with
pentobarbital sodium, which is deathly stuff, so we had to be extremely careful. We knew
how dangerous it was and after we got out in practice, we really knew. When we started to
use inhalants, they were so much safer.

We had to have that dog anesthetized, prepped, shaved and ready for surgery by 2:00 when
Dr. Leonard would appear. The instruments would be all unwrapped and you would be all
scrubbed and gloved. The outstanding thing I remember about surgery is the day the guys
who were next to us accidentally knocked all of their instruments on the floor at five minutes
before two. I never saw three guys hustle so quickly—actually, we were all trying to
help—to get stuff picked up and be in line when Dr. Leonard appeared. The five-second rule
applied [under those circumstances] as the instruments were not on the floor long enough to
break asepsis.

If you were on Dr. Leonard’s team during your last year in the clinics, no one wanted to
mention if there was a little suppuration at the incision that we might want to use antibiotics,
because “This surgery was done aseptically and we don’t need to use antibiotics, do we?” He
was an excellent teacher and really taught us the fundamentals of aseptic surgery.
WOMEN IN THE CLASS OF 1961

Dr. Smith:
You had two women who graduated with you.

Dr. Lynk:
We did have a third gal who failed at the end of her first year. The other two gals went through very nicely and were competent in both large animal and small animal. One married a classmate and went over into the Massachusetts area, though they have since separated.16 We get good participation in our reunions so we get to see each other, which is one of the great things about being in a small profession.

Dr. Smith:
Do you recall if Ambulatory Clinic was different for the women than the men?

Dr. Lynk:
Dr. Fox was a little tough on women. He didn’t think they should be large animal practitioners, but by the end of the year, some of the women who came through got to be his favorites. Just like the Jewish boys—he was tough on those but by the end of the year, some of them were his favorites, his disciples. But he was tough around those people to start with. He didn’t think the city kids knew enough to be large animal practitioners.

LIFE AFTER GRADUATION

Dr. Smith:
You graduated in ’61. Briefly, can you talk briefly about your career?

Dr. Lynk:
The first three years in school, I had planned to go into practice with a classmate, Mac Holmes, in Cobbleskill.17 But in the fall of my senior year, John [Mac Holmes’ father,18 whose practice they would take over] decided not to retire so I told Mac I would look elsewhere.

I almost went to work in North Granby, Connecticut for Dr. Milkey19 and Dr. Forrest Davis20 who I had known from my undergraduate days. Fortunately, they wanted a Notary Public to sign some agreement and they couldn’t find a Notary that weekend I was over there. We even looked at houses.

When I got back to Ithaca, my parents called me to tell me that Dr. Vaughn had been trying to reach me [to offer me a job because his veterinarian had left and he was alone]. I called up Forrest and said, “I didn’t sign anything with you, and here’s a guy who is all by himself and it has been a two-man practice for several years. You are just thinking about going from two to three, so I’m going to have to join him because his needs are greater.” Things are meant to be sometimes. Because we couldn’t find a Notary Public, we ended up 22 miles from the summer camp that we purchased in 1959.

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16 The three students who started in 1957 were Virginia Farrell, originally from Bayside, NY; Marylyn Galatis, originally from Springfield Gardens, NY; and, Beverly Wickesser, originally from Westbury, NY.
17 Macdonald J. Holmes ’61, originally from Lawyersville, NY; currently lives in Cobbleskill, NY.
19 Robert K. Milkey ’52, originally from New Britain, CT, currently lives in Venice, FL.
20 Forrest H. Davis ’57, originally from Hudson, MA, currently lives in North Granby, CT.
We couldn’t have been happier. During my lifetime, we have had one good turn after another. Great wife, she’s been very much a part of my success.

**RETIREE ACTIVITIES**

*Dr. Smith:*
You and your wife have been very engaged with Cornell—with your respective classes, and with activities over your entire careers.

*Dr. Lynk:*
Cornell has been our life. I have great respect for all of the faculty and the people we have met there, and the people we continue to meet. We are active at the Cornell Club and my wife has arranged activities associated with Union, RPI, SUNY-Albany, Skidmore, all through a Cornellian. We identify a Cornellian on the faculty and see if we can host a meeting. It has worked very nicely.

For more than 25 years, I have taken care of acquiring tickets for the Cornell Club when the men’s hockey team has played in Troy at RPI, or in Albany at ECAC and NCAA tournaments. Cornell has been an important part of our lives.

*Dr. Smith:*
Part of your life now is painting.

*Dr. Lynk:*
When I hit 65, I was ready to retire. The reason I could retire is we had a group practice and it was easy to retire because you knew your patients were going to be taken care of properly. I was ready to retire. It was getting harder to move those beef animals around. The practice had gone from 85% cattle down to 3%, but there were still those beef animals and you would have to summon the courage if you knew you were going out to wrestle them all day long. But when you got done, you felt good— you’d accomplished something.

I’ve been retired 12 years already. Somewhere in there, at about our 30th class reunion, I told Mac Holmes’ wife, Sherry, who is an excellent water color painter, “If you ever have a workshop, let me know because I’d like to find out about painting”. She called me in June ’94. She is a good teacher and I’ve been painting ever since. It’ll be 20 years pretty soon.

*Dr. Smith:*
Dr. Lynk, thank you very much. A very fine interview.

*Dr. Lynk:*
I’m honored that you would come down to interview someone from a class that was very talented. It was a great class (the Plaque Class)—it still is a great class and I’m looking forward to next June, our 50th. We’re planning to get that Dean’s Cup again.21

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21 The Dean’s Cup was instituted in 1993 to honor the reunion class that has the highest percentage of participation towards the reunion class gift.