

Perspectives in Veterinary Medicine

9/11 Revisited; 2014 Awaits

Editor's Note: On the afternoon before Thanksgiving, I visited the library to check a few references for one of my stories. Sitting on the table just outside the library door was a stack of journals, books, and other items no longer needed by the College.

One item was a copy of the Winter 2001 College newsletter. Turning the inside back cover, I found the short essay that I, as dean, had written as a Thanksgiving piece 12 years ago. There was no title, just "Endnote."

Though many of the circumstances have changed, what I wrote on that Thanksgiving weekend in 2001 ago seems just as relevant today as we enter a new year amid challenges within our profession and with the larger world. Here is my "Endnote", reprinted in its entirety.

Donald F. Smith

By Dr. Donald F. Smith
December 29, 2013

November 2001:

Piano virtuoso Andre Watts performed at Cornell's Bailey Hall on a recent Thursday evening. During his rendition of Beethoven's Appassionata sonata, I could not help but marvel at the great mystery of triumph over tribulation. The sonata was composed in 1804 and 1805, when Beethoven was deaf, lonely, and unable to sustain the close personal relationships that he sought with great passion. Having no children of his own, he even attempted unsuccessfully to adopt a beloved nephew. Angry and alone, and in a world where the only sound he heard was inside his head, he composed his most brilliant and expansive of piano scores, which some scholars have likened to Dante's Inferno. Despite indescribable personal tragedy and solitude, Beethoven had the capacity to carry on, making transcendent use of the expressive powers with which he had been imbued by his creator.

One week earlier, I sat in the home of an elderly man in southern Florida, listening to story after story of his life experiences with Samoyed dogs. Since his early childhood, George Cornell¹ had seldom been without one of these favored companions. Their names denoted a pattern of Russian influence: Sergei, Ivan, Prince, and so on. Now that he is recently widowed, the gentleman's Ivan III and Posie sustain and amuse him. He not only plans every detail of their dietary needs and veterinary care, but he also prepares them for conformation and obedience showing. Though he has never had a litter of puppies before, he plans to breed Posie next year. Now in his nineties, he aspires, once again, to witness the creation of life.



George Cornell and Posie

(Photo by the author, 2001)

This photo was not part of the Endnote published in 2001

Our third child prepares for university. Every weekend finds him visiting a different college: Colgate, Delaware, Gettysburg, Nazareth, and others. He visits classes and meets with lacrosse coaches. He rooms with freshman students, eats in cafeterias, and watches team practices. In the face of unstable national and world affairs, he and his classmates dream dreams. They are our future, and we find great joy in their planning, and we are sustained by their hope and optimism.²

Despite the tumultuous events of the past two months when creation groaned and travailed in pain,³ we continue to celebrate life. We recognize the joys and fruitfulness of our work, even as we struggle to comprehend the tragic event unfolding before us. And we recall that to everything there is a season:⁴

*A time to weep, and a time to laugh;
A time to mourn, and a time to dance.*

Like so many public and private enterprises, the College of Veterinary Medicine faces great challenges in the aftermath of September 11th. How we deal with the unanticipated fiscal pressure will define our ability to prevail during adversity.

Thankfully, we have prepared wisely during the last few years: by reorganizing and revitalizing departments, by establishing priorities to yield maximal impact, and by venturing into new markets. Nevertheless, we are still about to be caught in a tightening vise of decreased state and public support, while facing increasing university and public expectations. The road ahead will be difficult. However, we are confident that we will prevail, and we will be strengthened greatly in the process.

More than ever, I thank you for your support and encouragement, and invite your input.

***Addendum** -- As the Year 2013 comes to a close, may we be filled with hope, humility, and with the same spirit of joy and fulfillment that sustained us after 9-11. And may we have confidence and wisdom to address the challenges that lie in the year ahead.*

¹ George D. Cornell was a distant relative to Ezra Cornell, the university's founder. George Cornell's \$50m gift to Cornell University following his passing funded a substantial portion of the life sciences building (that later was named the Joan and Sanford Weill Life Sciences building); and established a scholarship in his and his predeceased wife's name. After Mr. Cornell's death in 2003, Ivan and the six puppies were reassigned homes. I personally drove Posie from south Florida to the home of her original owner in New York.

² Dennis attended the University of Delaware and later received his MBA from Arizona State University in 2011. He is associate brand manager for Henkel AG and Co, in Scottsdale, Arizona.

³ Adapted from Romans 8:22 (King James translation)

⁴ Ecclesiastes 3:1-4 (King James translation)

KEYWORDS:

September 11
George Cornell
Andre Watts
Dennis Smith
Triumph over Tribulation
Thanksgiving
History of Veterinary Medicine

TOPIC:

History of Veterinary Medicine

LEADING QUESTION:

Do we still live with post 9-11 challenges?

ABOUT THE AUTHOR:

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.