

## Perspectives in Veterinary Medicine

# Rethinking One Health, Part 1

**Author's Note:** As I wrote at the beginning of this series,<sup>1</sup> my commitment to One Health stretched back a decade or more before Beau and I went to Alaska. In fact, the theme of One Medicine-One Biology was the subject of a paper I presented to the Cornell President's Council in 2000. However, like most people, my understanding was primarily restricted to comparative medicine and zoonotic diseases, with passing interest in the relationship animals and humans have with the environment. During my trip with Beau at the end of my deanship in 2007, I recognized something else, a concept so fundamental to the human-animal bond that it changed my whole outlook on One Health. It would later be defined by Dr. Kate Hodgson, a veterinarian at the University of Toronto, using a new term, zoeyia.<sup>2</sup>

Donald F. Smith

By Dr. Donald F. Smith, with contributions from Dr. Kate Hodgson

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By the time Beau and I arrived home after driving across the continent and back, I was well on my way to a deeper and more expansive understanding of One Health. The specifics lacked clarity, but the additional concept had to do with the relationship that each of us shares with the animals in our lives and also with the environment. For some of us, perhaps that relationship is fleeting and only present in the abstract, but for others—and I am one of those—ties to the natural world represent a strong and ever present pull. Connections to our pets are even stronger.

I was raised in rural Canada with farm animals, mostly dairy cattle, and that environment shaped my identity and my early professional life. This trip allowed me to step back in time, as well as look forward into the future to ascertain my goals for a future as a veterinarian and teacher without the administrative responsibilities of dean. It allowed me to reconnect with my future priorities as a faculty member, and to reorient the internal compass of my personality.

Furthermore, I was a member of a large cohort of post-war baby boomers who grew up with agricultural animals and had replaced that connection of our inner self from farm animals to a new relationship with companion animals. I wanted to study that shift from the outside, as well as experience it more fully from within.

I didn't aspire to the social justice-type experience of John Steinbeck in his travels with Charley, though friends and people I met along the way often jumped to that conclusion. Rather, the

transcontinental portion of this trip was about me and my understanding of animals and people at a more personal level. I wanted Beau to slow me down and to literally take the road less traveled. Along the way, we would immerse ourselves in the natural world.

And so it happened, Beau became my personal conduit with biophilia. On the fifth morning of our trip, we were traveling in the dawn from Minot, North Dakota, north towards the Canadian border.<sup>3</sup> I found myself smiling at the ducks bobbing their heads into the water like mechanical toys as we drove along the mist-covered Des Lacs River. Later that evening, as Beau and I watched the pelicans in a secluded marsh south of Saskatoon, the reality of our oneness with the wilderness returned and I realized my eyes were moist as we set up our tent on a little ridge overlooking the wetlands.<sup>4</sup>



*A pair of Trumpeter swans near the Canada-Alaska border*  
(Photo by the author, 2007)

A pair of swans in a lake a few miles from the Alaska border gave me another pause to reflect on the intrinsic surprises that appear when we open our hearts to our natural surroundings. And when we take the time to truly open our eyes as well, we see otherwise hidden things, like this ram tucked in a dimly-lit mountain crevice of northern British Columbia, far from the highway.

Then there is the serenity and inquisitiveness of a wild lamb that, for all the world's chaos and tumult, grounds the soul and reminds us that we are part of a larger universe, one that transcends the daily challenges of life.



*A stone sheep ram high on a ridge overlooking the Alaska Highway  
(Photo by the author, 2007)*



*A stone sheep ewe and her lamb in the Rockies  
(Photo by the author, 2007)*

This post continues.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Smith, Donald F. [Traveling with Beau: My 34-day Trip to a Deeper Understanding of One Health](#). *Perspectives in Veterinary Medicine*, September 9, 2014.

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<sup>2</sup> Hodgson, Kate and Marcia Darling. Zoeyia: An essential component of “One Health”. *Can Vet J.* Feb 2100: 52(2): 189-191.

<sup>3</sup> Smith, Donald F. The Canadian Prairie: Travelling with Beau. *Perspectives in Veterinary Medicine*. October 21, 2014.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid

<sup>5</sup> Smith, Donald F. Rethinking One Health, Part 2. *Perspectives in Veterinary Medicine*, November 17, 2014.

#### KEYWORDS:

Human-animal bond

Traveling with a dog

One Health

John Steinbeck, Travels with Charlie

Biophilia

Minot, North Dakota

Des Lacs River

Saskatoon

British Columbia

Trumpeter swans

Stone sheep

Kate Hodgson

Marcia Darling

#### LEADING QUESTION:

What is the “third leg” for One Health in addition to comparative medicine and zoonotic diseases?

#### META-SUMMARY:

The author’s travels with his dog, Beau, on the Alaska Highway, opens his eyes to zoeyia, the essential third component for One Health in addition to comparative medicine and zoonotic diseases.

#### ABOUT THE AUTHORS:

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**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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