

Perspectives in Veterinary Medicine

Traveling Dog Named Beau

By Dr. Donald F. Smith

April 28, 2015

As we travel through life, we often segment our journey with reference points: our years growing up, our time at college, our retirement years, or our years with a certain pet. For my wife, Doris, and our three children, we recently closed the chapter on an 18-year segment of our lives with a happy and gentle dog named Beau.

From his earliest puppy days Beau was a traveller. Born on election day in November 1996, Beau's first long trip (with his littermate, Belle), was from our home in Ithaca to Doris's parents' home near North Bay, Ontario. Adorned with a cute Christmas bow, and his sister with a bell around her neck, the two balls of fluff played in the powdery snow 200 miles north of Toronto. Because we always encouraged them to be outdoors, the puppies grew to love being outside whenever possible.



Beau enjoying a fresh March snowfall at home in Ithaca (2008).

(Photo by the author)

It was only in his waning months this past winter that there were days when Beau, having lost 14 pounds from the 41.5-pound frame that he carried his entire adult life, began to shun being

outside on cold and rainy days. But if it was snowing, he continued to happily make his way slowly through the soft snow on all but the coldest of days.

Beau and Belle were English Cocker Spaniels, not purebred, and with full tails that were as much their trademark as their long and floppy ears. They were bred by my brother and his wife and we got the pick from a litter of six. We had only intended to adopt one for our five-person family: two sons, Darryl (18) and Dennis (13), and a daughter, Debra (15). Our older son, Darryl, had selected the male puppy from the litter, but before we could leave with our little prize bundle, the runt of the litter (a petite female) slid across the slippery floor after her brother. She would not let him leave without her, so we arrived home that early December afternoon 18 years ago with the obese Beau, and his alpha sibling, Belle.

The two were raised together with regular twice-daily walks and free-choice Eukanuba dry food. They made occasional visits to Cornell where Darryl and later Debra went to college. Between 2002 and 2006, Beau and Belle made frequent weekend trips to the University of Delaware to see Dennis when he was playing lacrosse.

When Darryl relocated to southern Florida after his graduation from Cornell, and later, while he studied law at the University of Florida, the dogs would join us on long drives south. On one occasion, the family car was loaded with four adults, two dogs and Christmas parcels packed to the roof. No pet-friendly hotel stops on that holiday trip. We left Ithaca after the Christmas Eve service and, with multiple drivers, drove straight through, arriving in Gainesville mid-afternoon on Christmas day.

After a long and painful illness in late summer 2006, Belle left us. Though Beau missed his companion his mourning was eclipsed by a new lease on life because his sister no longer dominated his every action as she had since they had been puppies.

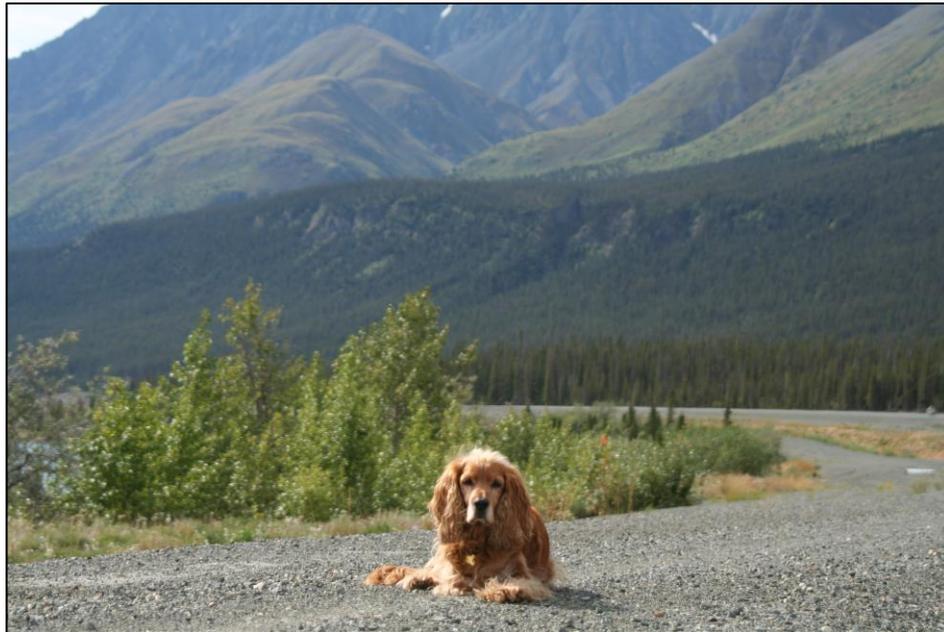
Our family, now reduced in size with our children having establishing their own lives, and with only one dog, Doris and I settled into a new routine. Our trips continued, visiting our children and occasional regional vacations, often accompanied by Beau.

Upon completion of my ten-year dean position at Cornell in 2007, I had the good fortune to have my portrait photographed with Beau. Though the college tradition had been to have a painted portrait, Doris suggested that a photograph with Beau would be more interesting. Not only would it present a more engaging image, but Beau had been with me throughout my entire deanship, and had been such a frequent visitor to the college that many staff and students knew him well.

We made a trip to New York City, staying in the pet-friendly Hilton hotel on 6th Avenue. Early the following morning, a Saturday in July, we met our good friend and photographer, George Kalinsky, in Central Park adjacent to the bridge that looked similar to the bridge at Beebe Lake on Cornell's campus. The photo shoot lasted over two hours, with the result now hanging in the atrium of the veterinary college. Some months later, I discovered our picture on Mr. Kalinsky's

web site, on the same page as several presidents and other dignitaries. Beau was the only dog on that particular page of portraits (though he featured animals elsewhere on his web site). As of this writing, Beau's image with me is positioned between those of businessman Carl Icahn and Pope John Paul II.¹

That fall, Beau and I took an epic journey by Jeep to Alaska. Chronicled elsewhere in this blog,² we crossed the northern states to North Dakota, then headed through Saskatchewan, Alberta and British Columbia where we joined the Alaska Highway. We progressed through the glorious Yukon, arriving in Anchorage in late August. There we met Doris, who had flown in to spend a week with us, then man and dog departed for the 4,000 mile return to upstate New York.



*Beau in the Yukon with the Alaska Highway
and the Kluane mountains in the background (2007).*
(Photo by the author)

During the 34-day trip, Beau and I made a myriad of human and animal friends, slept in a tent, under the stars and in a four-star hotel. It was the defining experience that solidified our friendship.

It also fortified our relationship in ways that only became apparent in the days following Beau's departure two months ago. It didn't make the separation less painful, but it added depth and substance, as well as balance, to memories that may fade, but will never be extinguished.

If I have one piece of advice for others who share their lives with their pets, it is this: give them their space to create memories. Our pets make the present more vibrant, and they enrich your future when you must go on without them.



Even last spring, at age 17, Beau was still enjoying his regular morning walks and craving the freedom of being temporarily off-leash.

(Photo by the author)

Compared to people, our pets have limited life spans. Regardless of whether they share eight years with us, or 18, they come into our lives for a defined period of time, helping us navigate our own journey and fulfilling special needs in that particular season of our life. When we move on without them, perhaps to have another pet and perhaps not, we will remember them for providing one of our greatest blessings through that special relationship we call the human-animal bond.

¹ [From the Lens of George Kalinsky, Portraits.](#)

² Smith, Donald F. Traveling with Beau: My 34-day Trip to a Deeper Understanding of One Health. *Perspectives in Veterinary Medicine*, September 9, 2014.

Smith, Donald F. Returning to my Canadian Roots: Traveling with Beau. *Perspectives in Veterinary Medicine*, September 11, 2014.

Smith, Donald F. From Ontario to Wisconsin: Traveling with Beau. *Perspectives in Veterinary Medicine*, October 16, 2014.

Smith, Donald F. A Lesson in Humility: Traveling with Beau. *Perspectives in Veterinary Medicine*, October 17, 2014.

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Smith, Donald F. The Texas of Canada: Traveling with Beau. *Perspectives in Veterinary Medicine*, October 29, 2014.

Smith, Donald F. The Alaska Highway: Traveling with Beau. *Perspectives in Veterinary Medicine*, October 31, 2014.

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Smith, Donald F. The Long Journey Home: Traveling with Beau. *Perspectives in Veterinary Medicine*, November 12, 2014.

Smith, Donald F. Rethinking One Health, Part 1, *Perspectives in Veterinary Medicine*, November 18, 2014.

Smith, Donald F. Rethinking One Health, Part 2, *Perspectives in Veterinary Medicine*, November 19, 2014

KEYWORDS:

Human-Animal Bond
Traveling with Pets
Dogs

TOPIC:

Human Animal Bond

LEADING QUESTION:

How can you create unique memories of your pet?

META-SUMMARY:

The story of a traveling dog and his family.

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.