

NEW YORK STATE VETERINARY COLLEGE

CORNELL UNIVERSITY

ITHACA, NEW YORK

Seasons Greetings

DECEMBER, 1974

DEAR CORNELLIAN:

Since becoming an alumnus of this College, I, like all of you, have been the recipient of the annual letter, a tie to college days which has meant a time to reflect on old memories and keep abreast of current happenings. But never in all those years did I consider the possibility that I would be faced with the responsibility of bringing this message to you. Early this fall, prior to assuming the deanship on October 1, I was counselled to begin immediately writing the annual letter for gathering all the needed information would require considerable time and effort. As I reflected on the matter my first thought was to abandon the idea in favor of other means of communicating with our alumni and friends. But on further study I found that this communication has been a part of the College for at least 43 years and good traditions are well worth maintaining. And so, with great humility, I begin this letter to you.

Over the past several weeks it has been my rare pleasure to read several of the previous letters. Many brought back pleasant memories or told of people and events which preceded my attendance at the College but, nevertheless, were familiar to me as part of the heritage passed on to succeeding generations. For a number of reasons I have chosen to alter the previous style, knowing full well that this decision will come as a disappointment to many. However, any knowledge I have on specific events of the past year and the activities of our staff and students would largely come secondhand and, rather than run the risk of reporting this to you in an inaccurate manner, I have elected to devote these pages to other matters.

All of you by now must know of the decision made by my predecessor, George C. Poppensiek, to relinquish the deanship after more than 15 years of devoted service in favor of new challenges. In the few weeks in which I have labored, attempting to pick up the reins of leadership, I have become increasingly aware of the enormity of the contributions he has made to this College and to veterinary medicine. The past years have been ones in which more challenges have come and changes taken place than in any similar period in our history. Through this tumultuous time, George Poppensiek provided a steadying but dynamic leadership which remains unequalled or unchallenged in our profession. Cornell and veterinary medicine are stronger as a result and it is with great respect and humility that I now attempt to continue the work he has shouldered so long and so well. Other than his family, probably no one knows better than I the untiring efforts and devotion George has given to this College. During the next several months he will be preparing the ground for a new program in comparative medicine to be initiated at the College, spending time at the Upstate Medical Center in Syracuse, and then in Europe. We all join in wishing both

him and his wife, Edith, well in their new endeavors, for I expect them to return to the campus next fall, full of renewed vitality as the first James Law Professor of Comparative Medicine at Cornell University.

Although not in keeping with the traditional spirit of the annual letter, the Holiday Season is also one of time of change and for setting new goals and directions. It is in this sense that I devote the remainder of this message.

During my professional career it has been my privilege to touch on several of the fundamental segments which make up traditional veterinary medicine as well as to chart new or emerging areas. These include practice, teaching, research, and developing a new interface with our sister medical professions. It has been an exciting period in my life. As I look to the future, there is the need to identify those areas and relationships which will be important; to recognize and build on the strengths of the past. This College has an illustrious past and a recognized present but we cannot be complacent for nothing can remain as it is now. We must either chart a course to reach still greater heights or witness a gradual decline in both prestige and influence. And we must do this at a time when society appears to demand egalitarianism, the surrendering of excellence and possibly elitism to mediocrity. The pressures to accept this course are enormous as influenced by legislation, both State and federal, the worsening financial picture, and the gloomy prospects for business and the economy. I cannot predict how well we will succeed as a College or as a profession in struggling through these difficult times. I would like, however, to share with you some of my thoughts for the future.

Cornell is a great institution, composed of several schools and colleges which collectively form the University. Our College is but one of these units. All too frequently we think of our own experience, problems, needs and goals and not of the important interrelationship which makes the greatness of a University. It is estimated that our total knowledge in science doubles approximately every four years, a humbling and somewhat frightening bit of information. It is both unwise and impossible for one College to remain an island for to move ahead, we must increasingly rely on the interaction and cooperation of complex, highly specialized disciplines. In the months ahead we must build additional bridges to our sister faculties, developing cooperative programs in both teaching and research for we will come to rely more and more on the total strength of the University if we are to succeed. As an ultimate goal, we in turn must become the center of biomedical activity on the Ithaca campus, providing a focal point for exciting programs in teaching, research and service. By simultaneously reaching out to our sister institutions, including the Medical College in New York City and the Upstate Medical Center in Syracuse, we can provide the necessary interface for these activities. I hope that you as alumni will begin to think of Cornell as a total institution, rather than focusing on this College as has been traditional in the past.

In a similar vein, both the College and veterinary medicine must come into our own as a full fledged member of the health professions. Our responsibilities and activities are somewhat unique, spanning traditional agricultural as well as human health-related needs. But are we not all eventually focusing on one end, the betterment of man and his environment? With the ever increasing complexities of life, we must play a vital role in helping to solve the critical worldwide food shortage, including the development of new sources, the greater protection of our environment, contribute to the improvement of mental health, lessen disease through animal sources, assist in the development of new knowl-

edge, and bring our talents to bear in areas of public health. We must accept this challenge.

The current disparity between numbers of qualified students seeking admission to colleges of veterinary medicine and numbers of available openings is well known to most of you. In an article which appeared in the "New York Times" this past summer it was stated that this ratio is now running about 7:1. Practitioners and others are desperate to obtain additional assistance or fill positions requiring a veterinary medical education. Exactly what the relationship is between desire and actual need is unknown, but all studies would indicate that more veterinarians must be trained. To that end, several States, including Florida, Mississippi, Virginia, Tennessee, and North Carolina are in various stages of starting new schools. Other States are interested. These events raise several important issues: Is this sudden splurge of expansion necessary or desirable? How can all be adequately financed when existing schools are traditionally undersupported? Where will faculty come from to staff these schools? Is this the best way to proceed? These are important questions for the ultimate answers will affect every one of us. It seems to me that this College must remain a leader in the profession, providing strength and guidance in the months and years ahead. We will be called upon to provide both faculty and advice. We may be asked to dramatically expand our enrollment, to find new ways of sharing costs for training as well as capital expenditures, to enter into newer ways for providing both pre-clinical and clinical training, and to develop improved methods for continuing education, diagnostic and specialized medical and surgical support. These are important issues to be faced and will require the considered wisdom of all of us, both faculty and alumni alike.

Continuing on with this discussion, I suggest that new ways to the solution of old problems will be found. We have witnessed the growth of large, corporate practices, increased specialization and use of techniques and instrumentation unheard of just a short while ago. The question of providing adequate medical support to the large animal segment while maintaining continued professional challenge for our practitioners may be addressed through new and innovative programs, including the use of para-veterinary medical support personnel, closed circuit television, greater reliance on sophisticated diagnostic equipment, computers and regionalization of support and continuing educational programs. In a similar vein, our companion animal practices will become more specialized and complex, with greater intra- and inter-professional cooperation. This College, through its professional, postdoctoral, and graduate programs, aided by newer techniques for providing diagnostic and referral services, will play a major role. These are exciting times, indeed.

In the above, I have touched on many of the challenges that lie ahead. It is a time of great opportunity and we must not be found wanting. It is my hope that all of you, as alumni of this College, will join with us in working together to solve these important issues. I will value greatly your suggestions and good counsel as well as your cooperation. To that end, I propose to develop improved means of communication, keeping you informed of developments here at the College. In all probability, a form of newsletter or magazine will be developed within the months ahead. Coupled with this is the intention to establish an office of public relations and development. Properly staffed and supported, such an office can do much to strengthen our ties, improve public image through telling our story to the public we serve, the legislature which provides our vital support base, and others to whom we must increasingly turn for financial assistance. If we are to meet the challenges ahead, we must achieve greater support

from our alumni and friends, foundations, and businesses alike. Given this backing, the College and Cornell can go on to achieve greater heights to the betterment of all.

A very brief comment on affairs here at the College as seen through the eyes of a newcomer. The students are bright, enthusiastic, working very hard and, surprisingly to me, complaining little for they all are cognizant of the very special opportunity being provided. Intellectually, they push our faculty very hard. The staff, too, is hard working with extraordinary commitment to their teaching, research and service responsibilities. Continually struggling with better means to provide vast amounts of information to students, the curriculum is undergoing constant study and change. Our clinicians are overworked for we desperately need assistance to expand into specialty areas, improve equipment and physical resources while working more closely with our students. This need must receive our highest priority in the months ahead. The new research and teaching building is on-line and has proven to be a major source for breathing new life into the institution. A new and exciting computerization of clinical records is under way, opening up important new means for both teaching and research. The final planning phase for the new central Diagnostic Laboratory has been completed and, if all goes well, we anticipate breaking ground in February for that important addition to our College. The new programs in feline disease and in aquaculture have been launched and development of our equine research park is progressing. These are but a few of the exciting programs now under way.

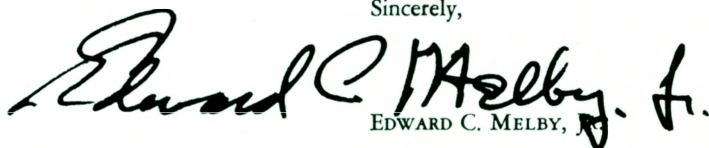
As I indicated earlier, it seems fitting that an annual letter bring to you some recounting of events of the past year, but more importantly, a recognition that this is a time of change, for bringing new ideas and programs to the fore. A new year will soon begin. I have purposely refrained from discussing individuals or their activities. Likewise, I have omitted the customary listing of alumni and friends of the College who are no longer with us. Both will be realized through other communications in the months ahead.

In closing, may I quote from T. S. Eliott, for the statement has direct bearing on the challenges ahead for this College, you the alumni, and our many friends: "Tradition cannot be inherited, and if you want it, you must obtain it by great labor."

My family joins with me in extending Season's Greetings and in the hope that you will enjoy good health, happiness, and the prosperity that comes through hard work in the year to come.

All best wishes to you and yours,

Sincerely,


EDWARD C. MELBY, JR.