When I was asked to write a "Reflections" article for the JAVMA, a few questions flashed through my mind: Why me? Am I qualified to carry out this assignment? Do I have anything to say that anyone will be interested in taking time to read? I wasn’t sure of the answers then, and I’m not sure now, but I did realize that someone asked for my help, so the best I could do was try.

In the history of veterinary medicine, I would guess that few veterinarians went to work any sooner after graduation day than I did. Graduation exercises were completed just before high noon on June 5, 1952 at the University of Missouri’s campus at Columbia. After turning in my cap and gown, I picked up my diploma in the basement of old Jesse Hall. I thought I was ready for veterinary medicine but I wasn’t sure that veterinary medicine was ready for me.

It took some work to try to convince my mother that there wasn’t time to drive the 200 miles to the old home farm to spend the night and be properly fed before starting my veterinary career. After all, this was Mom’s “red letter day.” It had been 50 years since the last member of my family had graduated from college. My Uncle Job was in the class of 1902 at Ole Mizzou.

My mother finally gave in when I jokingly told her that I just might have some veterinary calls waiting for me in Pinckneyville, Ill. She could equate this with the Army’s West Point graduates’ promise of duty, honor, and country. In my case it was duty, honor, country, and a need for income, for I was $7,000 in debt to start the new practice. I figured I was getting a late start at 28 years of age.

My wife Peggy and I drove to our new home in Pinckneyville. We were in the process of unpacking our belongings in our apartment when we heard knocking at the door. A local farmer wanted to know if I was the new veterinarian he had read about in the local newspaper.

Ira Pursell had been anxiously waiting all day for my arrival. He had a big old Holstein cow down with milk fever.

We drove to my office to pick up the pandora bag, two bottles of calcium gluconate, and other necessary items for my first veterinary call.

Ira led Peggy and me to his farm and to the cow that was down. After treatment, I took the IV needle out of her vein, bumped her behind the shoulders with my knees, and gave the “reb el yell.” She got up on her feet and walked to the barn.

After cleaning up my IV outfit, I wrote out a veterinary ticket-receipt and Ira paid the bill for my veterinary services. He couldn’t stop thanking me for what had just taken place before his eyes. He seemed to think I was a combination of a miracle man and the “candy kid” with the gumdrop nose all rolled into one. Ira and his
I learned early in a rural veterinary practice consisting of 75% large animal and 25% small animal, that you need a good sense of humor to survive. When everything seems to be going wrong and the odds are all against you, your sense of humor is about all that's left to carry you through.

Rural practice takes a physical toll

Very little has been written about the amount of stress, strain, and physical abuse a veterinarian is exposed to in a busy rural practice. From 1952 to 1975, most rural veterinarians had a potential of more physical danger than any running back in pro football will ever be exposed to. When you pit your skill and knowledge and a body of 150-200 pounds against a wild, untamed, and untrained (so-called domestic) animal weighing 1,000 to 2,000 pounds or more, you are definitely living on the wild and dangerous side of life.

If after 15 to 25 years of this type of work, you aren't bent and broken up like a pretzel, you are one of the lucky ones. There should be an organization for rural veterinarians that are still all in one piece after veterinary practice called the "Veterinary Green Beret." People would say, "there walks a man among men. He's been down one of life's most dangerous paths and still lives to tell of it!"

I learned early in a rural veterinary practice consisting of 75% large animal and 25% small animal, that you need a good sense of humor to survive. When everything seems to be going wrong and the odds are all against you, your sense of humor is about all that's left to carry you through. One of my neighboring veterinarians once told me that the mark of a polished rural veterinarian was one that could gracefully fall on his rear end in the mud and manure of the barnyard. I felt a lot of times but I don't believe I ever did it gracefully.

With a good sense of humor you can keep your sanity, self-respect, and dignity despite the practice. A one-man practice is not difficult to handle and manage. The real problem is when you have too much work and problems for one person, but not enough income for two. You get tired of hearing the phone ring between midnight and 6 AM. You figure there should be an easier way to make a living. It drives some to drink, some to other types of work, and a few survive the constant everyday strain. One of my clients told me that only the good die young and that I wasn't the "Lone Ranger." Maybe that was good advice and words to live by. It helped keep me going on the rugged days and nights.

A high tribute needs to be made to the wives of older veterinarians. They did it all. They cared for the home, children, and family, cleaned the cages, swept the floor, helped in surgery, mixed the medical solutions, did the office work, soothed irate clients, raised the children, and even loved that grubby old veterinarian who came home tired and worn-out and complaining about all the things that had gone wrong. I always said a general practitioner was a man who did all the things that he couldn't get his wife to do. I take off my hat and salute the wives of veterinary medicine. A special salute to my wife, Peggy.

One of my classmates, the late Dr. Carl Rogers of Highland, Ill, summed up the veterinary situation most of us stepped into in the summer of 1952. He said the world of rural veterinarians didn't need anyone brilliant or unusually talented. It just needed someone properly trained and willing to deliver the dead, rotten, and stinking calves and foals and to spay the bitches and cats.

Another classmate, the late Dr. Dave Frazier of Edwardsville, Ill, told me that the secret to building a successful rural practice was the ability of the veterinarian to treat clients with respect and under-
standing and to be able to identify with their problems and their sick
farm animals or pets.

To set the stage for the thinking and trend of the times in the
summer of 1952, the following facts should be noted. Of my class
of 30 graduate veterinarians, only 4 went into exclusively small an-
imal practice. Of these four, one returned to mixed rural practice and
one went into governmental veterinary service.

I think the other 26 members strongly believed that it was their
duty and obligation to practice rural mixed veterinary service. Here
they felt wanted, needed, and accepted by the people they served.

**Bangs testing boosts income and cattle health**

In my area in southern Illinois, bovine TB was on the way out.
After testing in Perry County and several surrounding counties in 23
years of practice, I only found 5 or 6 TB reactors and all of these were
nonlesion reactors at the slaughterhouse.

Bangs disease or bovine brucellosis ran 7 to 8% infection in
1952. Illinois had set up a Bangs vaccination and testing program
whereby the rural practitioner could earn up to $500 per month on
calfhood vaccination and testing work. This Bangs vaccination and
testing program in Illinois was a great financial aid to some of us new
graduates building up a rural solo practice. We received $1 per head
for calfhood vaccination, $2.50 for each testing herd-stop, and fifty
cents for each head of cattle tested.

Later, Illinois took off the $500 limit during the Bangs certifi-
cation program in the state. My home county of Perry was the first
county certified in Illinois. This was accomplished by the Bangs
testing program set up by myself with the help of one hired veter-
narian and moral support of the Perry County Board of Commis-
ioners and the Farm Advisor. Though Perry County was first in the
state on Bangs certification, Ford County, to the north, got all the
publicity and recognition. They must have had a much better public
relations program than we had.

**Progress brings bittersweet changes**

The period of 1952 to 1960 saw the end of horses and mules
as a source of farm power in southern Illinois and most of the rest
of the United States. One of my neighbors and clients located just
over a block south on Douglas Street was a man named John
Schwetzler. He was a rural livestock dealer and trader. During this
period, thousands of horses and mules were unloaded, fed, and wa-
tered at his trading barn. This was a rest stop for these animals on
their way to slaughterhouses in Canada. John’s trading barn and the
horses and mules that were fed and sheltered there are gone now.
A new brick house sets on its site. A few of us still remember it as a
landmark in the march of time and the change in the American
livestock and agricultural scene.

The dairy program in my area witnessed many dramatic
changes. In my early days in practice, I worked on many dairy farms
that milked 8 to 15 cows, producing ungraded milk. Most of these
dairy farms and their milk cans disappeared because of a change in
the health and milk sanitation laws, a change to beef cattle produc-
tion, a few advancing to Grade A production, a change in the farmer-
ner’s financial situation, the cost to replace the milk cans with a
stainless steel bulk milk tank, and the retirement or death of the
older cow milkers.

Grade A dairies in the early to middle 1950s usually were
equated as one man producing milk from 25 cows. By the 1970s,
the dairy herds had grown to number 100 to 125 head or more. The
manpower and woman power to milk these cattle increased from
two to three people to two to three farm families.

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Dairy production is one of the most confining jobs anyone ever dreamed of. One of my dairy clients, the late Sam Shaw along with his son Jim, milked about 25 to 40 purebred and registered Guernsey cows. He once said to me——“Doc, Lincoln freed the slaves in this country, but those were black slaves. The white slaves still aren’t free. They milk dairy cows.”

The need and desire for a little free time from milking cows has brought about many of the personnel changes in the dairy business. Now, with additional hired help, more cows supporting more than one family per dairy farm, the dairy farmer can sometimes get a little time off from the milking chores.

The change in farm tractor size affected the rural veterinarian directly and indirectly. In 1952, less than a dozen farmers in my practice area had anything larger than a two-plow tractor. By 1975, many farmers had tractors pulling 6 to 8 plows.

Some of these farmers changed from being a livestock and grain farmer to strictly a cash grain and row crop farmer. This had a direct effect on the veterinarian. The indirect effect was that some of the big-tractor farmers paid less and less attention to their livestock’s care and management. The local veterinarian saw more and more cases of sick calls that were too late to medicate and still too early to call the rendering truck.

The combined harvester greatly affected the American livestock and agricultural program in America by making it possible for the farmer or rancher to harvest his crop quicker and easier; by making it possible for one man or woman to farm more land and harvest more crops; and by making it possible for the farmer or rancher to say, “I don’t need my neighbors anymore. I’ve got a combine now and I don’t need to swap work or depend on my neighbors for harvest work or help.”

The combine put the death blow to the neighborhood threshing machine and the neighborhood threshing ring in my area between 1952 and 1959. The local veterinarian felt the effects of this change in the hog vaccination program and livestock testing programs. The necessary help or personnel was no longer readily available from the neighboring farms. You soon learned how to handle a Shikles syringe and bag along with two other syringes, a castration knife held between your teeth, an ear notcher in one pocket, and an ear tagger in another pocket. All rural veterinarians should have at least 4 to 5 hands and arms, and their arms should be at least six inches to a foot longer for obstetrical work.

You learned to do these difficult jobs, not because you wanted to, but because it was necessary to get the job done under mean, dirty, and stinking conditions. Many of my clients didn’t call me because I was pretty or smart, but because they knew I could handle horses, cattle, and hogs and get the job done under adverse conditions.

The improvements in rural roads in my area between 1952 and 1975 was a great asset to my practice. During the first 3 to 5 years of practice, a lot of township road districts were too poor to afford gravel or rock for the graded road surfaces. These roads were sprayed with road oil and then dusted with sawdust to soak up the excess oil. This made it possible to get over these roads most of the time during bad weather. After the roads had been graded and oiled for several years, the road base remained in relatively good condition. It was a challenge to get to the top of the hill on wet and slick clay roads during the first few years of practice.

Road improvements continued over the years and the road districts financial conditions improved along with the state aid programs. This brought the rural roads in Perry County into pretty

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good shape by 1960. At the present time, most all the roads are graded, rocked, oiled, and chipped, and a few are even paved with a soil/concrete surface.

**Interests in feeder pig production**

Between 1960 and 1970, a great number of worthless and non-functional farrowing houses were built in my area. Clients wanted to farrow more sows in a confined area, with less labor and less expense. These ideas and goals were well founded, but there were a great deal of stumbling blocks and learning experiences along the way. Some of the worst stumbling blocks in these new farrowing houses were: thermostats mounted 3 to 4 feet above the floor, with most people not understanding that baby pigs didn’t live and sleep 3 to 4 feet above the floor; too much ammonia gas from waste storage pits under the floor; wet, cold, and dirty floors, and absolutely no use of bedding; and poorly designed farrowing crates and pens.

Over time, most of these conditions have been corrected or changed, or the swine farmer has gone out of business or gone broke as a direct result of them.

From a financial and business standpoint, the production and sale of feeder pigs made such a change between 1952 and 1970, it was almost unbelievable. In the first 5 to 10 years of my practice, feeder pigs sold for one standard price, $5 per pig. It didn’t seem to make much difference whether the feeder pig weighed 25 pounds or 50 pounds; $5 was the going price.

With the demand for quality feeder pigs and the movement of these pigs from a few hundred miles to as much as 2 to 3 states away from the farrowing site, there evolved a system of standards for size and quality along with a system of marketing.

In my case, I first worked with a series of feeder pig sales and feeder pig dealers. Later on, this changed to mainly one feeder pig sale in Conant, Ill. The feeder pig that once brought $5 is now marketed for $50 at 50 pounds. Feeder pigs arrived at the Conant Feeder Pig Barn from farms 5 to 75 miles away. There the feeder pigs are sorted, ear-tagged, vaccinated, examined for quality, and graded. Then they are sold by telephone auction and the buyer does see the pig purchased until the delivery truck arrived on his farm.

This put a great deal of responsibility on the feeder pig examiner and vaccinating veterinarian. My policy was to send out the best quality feeder pig possible. The cull pigs were returned to the farm of origin. It didn’t take long for the producers to get the message. Healthy and quality feeder pigs were the result of our efforts. Some of the better years saw 50,000 feeder pigs move through the Conant Feeder Pig Barn.

**Racing to own a part of the wild west**

Between 1952 and 1970, most of us in rural mixed practice were caught up in the backyard and back pasture western-type riding horse era. It seemed like everyone had to have a horse. I believe this trend was brought on by television shows. Thinking back on the number of TV westerns the viewers watched, it seems only natural that people wanted a horse of their own. The fact that most of these people had no idea or knowledge about the feeding, care of, watering, housing, stabling, training, grooming, or riding of these animals did absolutely nothing to stop the “got to have a horse of my own stampede.”

Some of these new horse owners became good clients with time and learning. Some didn’t. They definitely brought new factors into rural veterinary practice.

One of the large Standardbred horse farms I was privileged to work on had a sign on the wall of their rotunda barn that read, “Show The fact that most of these people had no idea or knowledge about the feeding, care of, watering, housing, stabling, training, grooming, or riding of these animals did absolutely nothing to stop the ‘got to have a horse of my own stampede.’"
me a land where there ain’t no horses and I’ll show you a land where there ain’t no men.” Maybe this statement had some influence on the backyard horse program.

One of the most difficult factors for the veterinarians to live with was the attitude of some of the new horse owners. After being in the local horse and riding club for 6 to 8 weeks, some of the new owners knew more about horses, horse diseases, and lameness than the local veterinarian did after spending 8 years in agricultural and veterinary colleges. I believe the best veterinary cartoon of this era was the one with the horse’s foot in the veterinarian’s mouth. The horse’s owner in the cartoon was a teenage girl with a long pony tail. She was hysterical with fright, but the fright was not for the veterinarian’s health or welfare. She was wringing her hands, running up and down along the walls of the box stall, and screaming at the top of her lungs, “Don’t hurt my horse!”

**Finding causes and cures for animal illnesses**

The treating of some farm animal diseases started off easy and got worse as time marched along. In the early days of my practice, I could count on curing calf scour with one bottle of National Laboratories’ calf scour medicine with my name on the label. My clients thought it was a “wonder drug.” At $1.25 per bottle it cured calf scour. Farm people came into my office and purchased it in orders of one to a dozen bottles. Sometimes all good things must come to an end. By the late 1960s and early 1970s, nothing seemed to stop calf scour. It was no longer simple calf scour. Now the experts called it the “calf scour complex.” Nothing seemed to work.

We had always had the problem of dairy calves occupying the part of the barn that was dirty, dark, and damp—the 3-D’s allied themselves with red nose, virus diarrhea, and other new killers. To add to these calf killers in my area, we also had a water problem.

It was bad enough that the strip mines were tearing up our best prairie land with excavating buckets on their giant stripping shovels and draglines; area drinking water for livestock became contaminated with the leaching of new agricultural chemicals and fertilizers.

I submitted water samples numerous times to the state laboratory for analysis and the reports always came back with the same statement—“This water is unsafe for use or consumption by humans under 1 year of age!” I believe a dairy or beef calf would fall into the same age group as a human being under 1 year of age.

Improvements in hog and horse dewormers between 1950 and 1980 would fill volumes of veterinary history and literature.

For hogs, oil of chemopodium from the jimson weed and sodium fluoride powder were standards at the time of my graduation from veterinary college. For horses, we used carbon disulfide and phenothiazine capsules. What a bad stink and a slobbering horse you had when one of those carbon disulfide capsules was crushed in the horse’s mouth.

**Proud of the profession**

Quite a lot of ink was used between 1965 and 1975 to write about the death of the “fire-engine veterinarian” and his replacement by the veterinary consultant. One of my fellow veterinarians in Illinois stated that he was proud to be known as a fire-engine veterinarian rather than never to have been known as a veterinarian at all. I would like to add to this statement that, if some of us so called fire-engine veterinarians hadn’t kept the veterinary “fires” under control, there wouldn’t be anything to consult on now.

An English veterinarian, Dr. James Herriot, probably had more influence with his pen than some of us American veterinarians did.

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with our swords. His book, All Creatures Great and Small, influenced a great number of young men and women to enter the field of veterinary medicine.

**Alternative ways to educate**

My reflections on veterinary medicine could go on and on. I would like to cover one more subject that is very close to my heart and to the heart of veterinary education. There is a great need and demand for veterinary students to see and learn practical veterinary medicine that is carried on every day in the real world. Veterinary college educators will not come out into the real world where veterinary medicine is being practiced to see and learn and they won't let practicing veterinarians come into the teaching world because they do not have the PhD degree behind their name. Therefore, I believe a solution to this problem would be to organize a team of retired veterinary practitioners to lecture and travel to veterinary colleges. It would be to the profession's advantage to tap this vast fountain of knowledge and practical experience into a powerful force for the betterment of veterinary education. A group of retired veterinary lecturers might be organized by working with the American Association of Retired Veterinarians and the Association of American Veterinary Medical Colleges. Such a group could become a forceful element in the advancement of veterinary education. After all, most of these veterinarians will never write a book about their knowledge and experience to be passed along to the young veterinarians of the future.

Veterinary medicine has seen changes and problems in the past, and it will see changes and problems in the future. It has seen the change from the horse being replaced by the tractor as our main source of power on the farm and change from the hog cholera vaccination program being the main source of veterinary income in several midwestern states to no income from hog cholera vaccination at all. I've never heard or read of a single veterinarian starving to death during these drastic changes or problems.

I refuse to believe any negative stories I might hear about the future of veterinary medicine. I don't know if the veterinary colleges are turning out too few or too many veterinarians. The experts don't seem to know the answer either. The two greatest fears that individuals or veterinary medicine face are the fear of rejection and the fear of failure. When an individual, or veterinary medicine as a group, faces up to and overcomes these two fears, the battle is more than won.

Dr. Doughty sold his veterinary practice in 1975. He has written a book about the Civil War titled, *No Peace For A Rebel* under his pen name of Doc O'Bannion. He enjoys working on his projects as a carpenter and operating a bed-and-breakfast establishment in downstate Illinois.

For this feature, the editor welcomes contributions from veterinarians who have retired or are about to retire.