

# Reflections...

## Adaptability, a key ingredient in life

At 12 years old, I watched with amazement as Dr. Bob Root took 100 ml of blood from the jugular vein of the mother of a newborn filly afflicted with "navel-ill" and injected the blood into the filly's jugular vein. Within minutes, the foal was up and nursing, on its way to complete recovery. That episode started this California-born ranch boy on his way to becoming a veterinarian. After high school, I spent two years working on a farm, then two years in the Army before entering the University of California-Davis.

My mother, a third-generation UC graduate, took me to visit Dr. Clarence M. Haring, the first dean of California's veterinary school (1947-1948). He counseled me, saying that adaptability was what was going to count in being accepted to the veterinary school. That advice proved to be one of the most important aspects of my career.

My background of ranch life working with horses and cattle, a BS in Animal Husbandry, and an MS in Animal Nutrition prepared me for admission to the fourth class of veterinarians at UC-Davis.

The broad-based curriculum gave me the tools to begin my career as a general practitioner. My practice started in Brawley, Calif, in the Imperial Valley. Dairy cattle, pasture and feedlot cattle, horses, hogs, and sheep, sprinkled in with some small animals, were my patients. Blue-tongue in sheep brought about an interesting challenge. One day I vaccinated 6,000 feeder lambs with two 50-ml syringes. As I perfected my skill with automatic syringes, I could do 1,800 in an hour and a

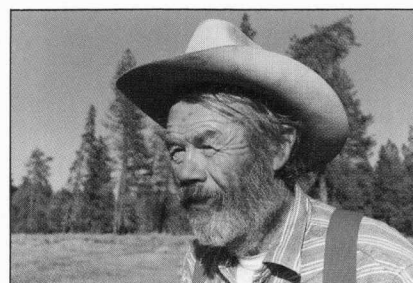
half. I also spayed 100 ewe lambs for a university trial.

During my 30 years in practice, the dairies disappeared, with some relocating to cooler climates. Feedlots got bigger, becoming commercial. Even "backyard cows," of which I probably owned one of the last in the valley, were gone. My clinic, with expansion to include kennels, operating rooms, and other requisites for small animals, became a larger portion of my practice. I built corrals for large animals. My radio-equipped truck became less used as I encouraged clients to bring in their animals for treatment and care.

By the time I got ready to sell the practice in 1986, it consisted of 80 to 90% small animals. I even specialized in ear cropping. My preparation from UC-Davis proved to be more than worth all the university years. Through the years, I enjoyed caring for all kinds of patients and working with a variety of clients. As my wife, Adeline, and I interacted with fellow citizens through our patients, we became a part of the community. We were involved in the community through church, the Rotary Club, roping clubs, cutting horses, and the Sheriff's mounted posse.

Now that I am retired and enjoying life even more than I did while in practice, I am constrained to describe briefly an adventure that exemplifies the strong bond that can develop between human beings and animals.

Back when I was at the university, I spent summers packing mules and guiding in the Sierra Nevada Mountains. Through the years, 10-



Dr. Ben York

*The bonding with my horse and two mules... on the trail was such an experience that I can only wish we could all live together in such harmony.*



*Dr. York sets the pace for Mrs. York and friends.*

day to two-week pack trips, even one with my wife and three children, were common. When the daily practice life ended, new challenges were many. During two years as president of Back Country Horsemen, I got involved with riding and hiking trails. The big adventure began on Apr 21, 1992, on my wife's 61st birthday. We started near Campo at the southern terminus of the 2,638-mile Pacific Crest National Scenic Trail, each of us riding a horse and leading three pack mules. Our pickup camper, pulling a three-horse slant trailer loaded with food, supplies, alfalfa pellets with 20% grain and COB (corn, oats, and barley), was to be moved by various people who had arranged to meet us at several stops on the trail. We scheduled six months to complete the journey, to end at Manning Park in Canada.

At the end of the first week, my wife's mare turned up lame because of an old rope burn on the left hind foot. The young mule was not in shape, so was also sent home. On May 5th, 1992 near Big Bear, Calif, Adeline was riding Molly (one of the pack mules) when we got into our

first snowbanks. She was bucked off, with the mule stepping on her left arm, breaking it near the shoulder. We spent the night on the trail through a two-hour thunder-and-lightning storm. The next morning I managed to get to a forest ranger for help. We were able to drive to within 100 yards of her. She went home with a compound fracture of the left humerus.

I continued on, riding an 8-year-old Standardbred gelding named Leverage, leading Texaco, an 11-year-old male mule, and Molly, an 8-year-old mare mule. By August 1st, I reached the Oregon border. On September 3rd, my 68th birthday was celebrated at Chinook Pass in Washington. Adeline was there and drove the rig, meeting me at several places until we got to Manning Park on September 21st.

The snowpack in June near Mt. Whitney had caused me to detour for 100 miles. So after getting to Canada, we trailered back to California so I could ride the last stretch, finishing on October 4th.

Now in the two years since, I have written a journal and have given

some 40 slide-show talks. In August 1993, I rode with a group some 200 miles on the Pacific Crest Trail and am now on the board of directors of the Pacific Crest Trail Association and other trail groups, as well as doing some trail maintenance. Adaptability has proven to be a key ingredient in my life thus far. All the help I've gotten from family, veterinary colleagues, and friends has made my life interesting. The Good Lord Above not only has watched over me, but also has provided the animals I enjoyed caring for, and has protected me thus far. The bonding with my horse and two mules in five-and-a-half months on the trail was such an experience that I can only wish we could all live together in such harmony.

---

Retired veterinarians are encouraged to contribute to this feature. Dissertations should be concise. Contributors should focus primarily on noteworthy professional experiences and observations. Persons interested in contributing should contact the editor-in-chief for details.