

Reflections . . .

If I had been a little smarter, I could have been a farmer

My father and mother, both immigrants from The Netherlands, were experts at teaching their 10 children to share in the work on our farm in northwestern Iowa. All of our instructions were given in Dutch, which, luckily, we mastered early in life. After going to school for a short time, my older brothers and sisters taught the rest of us some English. Even though we were a fairly respectable bunch, we did have occasional conflicts with our parents. One method we devised to irritate them was to speak to each other in English, rattling off words so rapidly they couldn't understand us.

Because of the heavy workload, the first eight children stayed home to work on the farm after completing grammar school. For some reason, when I finished my stint in the one-room country school, my parents decided I should go on to high school. I still don't know why they made that decision. Perhaps, they thought I lacked the aptitude or intelligence to succeed at farming.

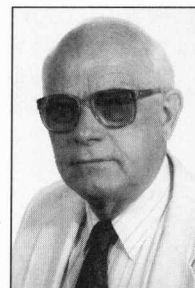
Now I was confronted with making a career choice. Seeing Dr. Martin Van Der Maaten, Sr., our Orange City, Iowa, veterinarian at work often on our farm, I calculated, "That doesn't look too difficult; maybe I could do that." I didn't know much about the profession, but Doc always drove a new car, which was rare in our community. Surely, I thought, if I could ever afford a new car, I would be the envy of our entire county. I trudged off to high school and, thereafter, to Iowa State University. Amazingly, I was admitted to veterinary school and, after considerable brain drain, slipped through to graduate in

1956. Sometime during all those years, I learned to speak English fairly well and at a pace slowly enough to be understood. My younger brother was also sent to college and became a physician.

While in veterinary school, my hometown draft board was giving me beckoning glances, so I enrolled in the Reserve Officers Training Corps to escape their grasp. During my last year in school, I discovered a vivacious widowed redhead who was enrolled in home economics at Iowa State. She had a two-year-old daughter who also was quite special. We got along fantastically, and the charming mom and I were married on the afternoon of graduation day. Two days later, I was off to Des Moines to take my state board examinations. Shortly thereafter, my favorite uncle (Sam) was waiting for me to walk up, salute, and say, "Here I am, sir!"

Several of my classmates and I were assigned to the US Army Meat and Dairy Hygiene School in Chicago. What a deal—we got paid "big" money to go to school! Too bad Iowa State had never adopted such a user-friendly policy.

All of us new first lieutenants thought we were destined to become Army food inspectors. We were impressed when we received forms requesting us to select the place we would like to serve. My first choice was Germany, and my second, California. I don't recall why I chose those destinations but, apparently, it was because I thought either one would be a pleasant change from Iowa winters. With my usual luck, there were some last minute changes,



Dr. John Mulder

and a few of us were selected to go to Fort Detrick, Md, to serve with the US Army Biological Warfare Laboratories.

My Army experience was challenging and educational. After I learned who was to be saluted and which hand to use for this respectful task, I survived quite well. I became acquainted with numerous scientists and learned about an entirely new endeavor called research. Having top-secret security clearance, I can relate no more about this part of my career. For this I am grateful because, at my age, I no longer remember much about those years other than the miserable Maryland winters.

After my two-year obligation to Uncle Sam, I discovered that my helpmate had failed to save sufficient amounts of my voluminous Army pay to allow me to retire. In fact, our meager savings were even insufficient to permit the purchase of a new car. Thus, it became imperative that I seek other employment. Having worked as a veterinary student in a mixed veterinary practice with Drs. Orin and Wayne Emerson in Eagle Grove, Iowa, I thought I'd stop and inquire if they knew of any available jobs. Immediately, they asked me to join them in partnership.

I loved veterinary practice and my father was now very proud of me. He told everyone about having a veterinarian in the family, but generally said little about my younger brother, the physician. I suppose this was because Father understood animals and could also read my writing. He frequently came to ride with me on country calls, but was somewhat confused when I communicated with my office, using my two-way radio, since there were no wires running from my truck to my office.

I could go on a long time about my experiences in veterinary practice, but will share only a few of the significant ones. An older farmer came to our house one evening and rang the doorbell. My petite wife answered the door, and the farmer asked, "Is your daddy home?" Following that episode, my wife called me "big daddy" for several months. One evening, after my wife and I had been out most of the day, we came home to find two dressed chickens in our refrigera-

tor. Of course, we never locked our doors, because Eagle Grove wasn't New York City. Many months later, while on a call, a farmer asked if I had found the chickens he had left as a gesture of appreciation.

My most notable experience was the treatment of a cow that belonged to a farmer of Norwegian descent. Mr. Dan Lothe had a huge Jersey cow recumbent and at death's door with milk fever. Displaying my keen professional excellence, I hit the jugular vein with the first stick. Dan watched with great skepticism, exhibiting his usual "I know I am wasting my hard-earned money" look. No sooner had I withdrawn the needle, when the cow got up and walked right through the wall of the old barn, leaving a gaping hole and scattering splintered wood everywhere. Dan's eyes got as large as Volkswagen hubcaps and he exclaimed, "Gosh, doc, vot dit you gif her?" I never told Dan what I gave the Jersey, and I believe it would continue to be in my best interest to refrain from revealing this secret to anyone.

After 11 years of enviable veterinary practice accomplishments, I started thinking about other areas of service. After all, I still didn't have my new car, winters continued to arrive on schedule, and what further practice goals were there to attain following the miraculous healing of the Jersey cow? Looking back, I think my partners may have been ready for me to move on, also.

My basic instincts told me, "Go south, young man, go south." So, hoping my reputation had remained fairly local, I drove to the University of Missouri in Columbia. I was given a job as a clinical veterinarian for one of their research farms and was allowed to pursue graduate training. My wife now told everyone that I had been institutionalized—and I assumed that was a compliment! My father was quite distraught and told his friends I was no longer a veterinarian. This certainly did wonders for my younger brother, because he was now the only remaining doctor in the family.

I obtained a Master's degree in laboratory animal medicine at Missouri, then stayed on to obtain a Master's degree in higher and adult

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education. Often, I have been asked why I wanted a degree in education. Frankly, I haven't the foggiest idea.

The next 25 years found me engaged in managing animal care and use programs at Michigan State University, the University of Kansas, and the University of Arizona. Over those numerous years, I was privileged to become acquainted and work closely with many outstanding biomedical scientists. As a laboratory animal specialist, it was my responsibility to assist our institutions in meeting the requirements of animal welfare laws and regulations. Occasionally, this caused minor conflicts with research investigators and almost always put me at odds with animal rights extremists. My worst experience was having my office burned by animal rights terrorists at the University of Arizona in 1989. At the time, I thought this was pretty rude, and my conclusions concerning this unhappy episode haven't changed much since then.

The discipline of laboratory animal medicine provided me many tremendous opportunities. I was fortunate in obtaining over a million dollars in grant support to renovate animal facilities, assisted with the design and completion of four new animal facilities, helped two universities

achieve accreditation from the American Association for Accreditation of Laboratory Animal Care, served as an officer and on committees for various animal care organizations, and received a few treasured awards and citations along the way. As rewarding as these accomplishments were, I still felt somewhat demoralized, since I didn't have my new car.

A final pleasant part of my career involved a six-month sabbatic leave with the AVMA Governmental Relations Division in Washington, DC. This opportunity allowed me to learn first-hand about the visibility of our profession in our nation's capitol. The director, Dr. Robert Jorgensen, and his staff members were always helpful and knowledgeable. Furthermore, time spent in Washington, with the opportunity to see the many interesting and historic sites, was truly enjoyable. I would certainly recommend this experience to anyone having an opportunity to spend some time in this office.

I have concluded that whatever I accomplished during my career resulted from many fortunate incidents. My parents had little, so I was forced to learn appropriate work ethics and develop a sense of humor early in life; Iowa farmers taught me the value of perseverance; I learned much

from numerous outstanding veterinarians and biomedical scientists; my children kept me honest and humble and, most important, my wife always stood by me with loving devotion and support. Although my career in our great profession has been highly rewarding, I still detest winters and continue hoping I will be able to afford a new car some day. Finally, could someone please tell me why I wasted two years getting a Master's degree in higher and adult education and how that two-way radio worked without wires?

Dr. Mulder and his wife, Wilma, have retired in Prairie Village, Kan, where they manage Professional Associates, a laboratory animal science and medicine consulting firm. Dr. Mulder also continues to write philosophical, humorous articles for a variety of publications.

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.