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Currently residing in Macon, GA

Born in Chicago, IL, and grew up in Nashville, TN

Graduated UTCVM 1981

First of all, thank you for the opportunity to share in this worthy cause. I have always enjoyed encouraging others to pursue their dreams, so telling my story is a welcome chance to perhaps cause others to follow their heart to reach their goals, despite possible hardships along the way.

I am the third of four daughters, born into a solid middle-class family. Both parents were college educated, so the expectation was for each of their children to do the same. My father had achieved a higher level of education by obtaining two doctorates in pharmacology and toxicology. This gave me a desire to follow him in some type of medical profession; however, I did not believe I could handle doctoring people as well as I could deal with animals. By the time I entered high school, I had set my sights on becoming a veterinarian.

This was an unusual career for me, as there were no mentors to help me along the way. If you are not a person of color, it is hard to convey the undercurrent of prejudices that are a part of our everyday lives. Unfortunately, these issues continue to this day and may never be fully resolved. My life was no different. I sought employment or even volunteer work at every veterinary hospital in Nashville. No one would hire me, nor would they allow me to volunteer.

I decided to concentrate my focus on taking courses that would assist me in my doctorate. A counselor wisely told me to be sure to complete a degree in college in case you didn't finish your higher degree. College life was filled with animal courses (mostly geared towards future farmers and such) and the multitude of classes needed to fulfill my pre-veterinary requirements. I began participating in activities and groups that would enhance my admittance into veterinary school. I had been told that they reviewed outside activities as well as academic scores, because they desired well-rounded individuals.

I ended up with an impressive sounding major in Biology plus a double minor in Math and Chemistry. This sounds very good, but please don't ask me about any of this today! Ha! Whatever the case, all of the things that I did were enough to secure a slot in the 1981 graduating class at the University of Tennessee College of Veterinary Medicine. I was shocked and pleased; my parents were surprised.

Veterinary School was a difficult time for me. We used to call it "cram and catch up," but you never really seemed to catch up. I personally felt very alone, as I was the sole African American person on that campus – even the janitorial staff was all white. Since I had not attended undergraduate school at Tennessee, I had to learn the city, the various campuses, and keep up with the assault of coursework. Our class was the largest so far, so we had less personal care. At the time, eighty students fast-tracked through three years versus four of year-round schooling was a great challenge. Most of us made it.

I moved to North Carolina after graduation, and worked at an after-hours veterinary hospital. This was one of those feast or famine kind of jobs, but I was happy to have it. (Remember that I had no resources or mentors who would have taken me under their wing, so my job resources were limited.) I recall one

July 4<sup>th</sup> weekend where no one slept the entire night. I also did day work at a local hospital. These were both in Fayetteville, NC. After a few years there, I followed my husband to Wilmington, NC. I worked for a few years at a local hospital and then shifted into public health, working at the local animal shelter.

Before veterinary school, I had dreams of owning my own animal hospital. My ideal practice kept changing in my mind as to what type it would be. For example, I thought I would include a pet store that would be attached to the hospital, or perhaps a kennel to board animals. Realistically, I never had the resources to have my own practice. Joining animal control proved to be a better fit for me, as by that time I had become a single mother, raising my young son. This was a county job that afforded me medical benefits, mostly regular hours, and a host of other great benefits.

I became the director of Animal Control Services. People used to refer to “these places” as the “pound” and other not too complimentary titles. In many cases, they were correct; I have personally viewed some very dismal animal shelters that were nothing more than holding spots for unwanted animals, waiting to be exterminated. I knew these animals could use my help and expertise, and I also knew that education was the best way to make long-lasting changes. I believed – and eventually got to see – that educating young children would inspire parents to be better pet owners as well as raise up a generation of future animal lovers.

It took the better portion of my twenty-plus year career there to see the changes materialize, but I can say that we did make a difference. Shelter medicine had little voice in veterinary schools or circles back in the early eighties; however, today it is common practice to see it as part of the curriculum. I believe the work that I did from inside animal control helped to highlight the void that shelter animals and workers experienced. We were the forgotten, despised, and discarded group. Today, shelter medicine is an integral portion of the veterinary curriculum at most universities.

During my tenure in New Hanover County, we built a new facility and added a spay/neuter hospital addition several years later. A major problem we had was getting the adopted pets to their surgery appointments after being released from the shelter. The only sure ways I knew it could be done was either to do it ourselves or transport the animals next day after adoption. We were fortunate to be able to build our own facility and do surgeries prior to placing animals in the adoption area. What a relief to end our contribution to pet overpopulation!

Another major problem we faced was that the competitive mind-set of our area veterinary community added to the general dislike and poor image of any animal control agency. I used the leverage of my education to bridge this gap. We required pet owners to purchase pet licenses annually. Initially all of these were renewed in January. You had to have a current rabies vaccination to receive a license. We decided to change renewals to the same time that the pet received its rabies update. We offered discounts for paying ahead for three-year vaccinations. Next, we enlisted the veterinary community to collect the fees, offering them a portion of what was collected.

I remember the first meeting of our area veterinarians. My former boss was adamantly against it, as were many others in the meeting. One particular doctor was very vocal against us, so much so that he caused my former boss to reconsider. I left the meeting exhausted and discouraged; however, we were

soon able to turn things around. After all, the convenience and benefit would be going to the pet owners by making it a one-stop shop for them. We were in! After the few hospitals joined us, most of the others came on board. Private practice can be very competitive, and people often go where they receive the best benefits for their money in their minds.

Once we got this machine up and running, we nearly became a self-supporting county division. We pulled in close to half a million dollars in pet licensing fees and nearly as much in other fees on an annual basis. This was all generated by a staff of about twenty people, who responded to animal complaints and emergencies 24/7, housed multiple animals, operated a spay/neuter facility for our county-owned animals, and oversaw the massive pet licensing program.

We also started going into the elementary schools to teach the young children about rabies prevention and control. We developed a puppet show, which shared the pertinent information in a format the children could readily recall. My former boss – who at first was very against our efforts – became our greatest ally.

Dr. G. Robert (Bob) Weedon had migrated south and opened a multi-practice hospital. I knew from working with him that his heart always leaned towards teaching. He found his outlet by becoming an adjunct professor at the University of NC, Wilmington. He started a pre-veterinary club amongst the students, and of course he got me to join him in this endeavor.

Working with and mentoring these future veterinarians became one of my greatest joys. I was able to advise them about the public health aspect of our profession, and they logged volunteer hours in taking the puppet show to the schools, helping in surgery, and assisting us with various rabies clinics around the county. Many became veterinarians.

We knew we had made a significant difference when our first “daughter” graduated from veterinary school. Dr. Amy White and two classmates received a special award for their homeward bound program during school. They had rescued thousands of animals, sheltered them, gave medical care (including neutering), and found a way to ship these pets north to find new homes. Mississippi was overcrowded with animals, so they found a way to make it work. We realized what an impact our efforts had made to ingrain our student’s minds towards animal welfare.

I reported directly to the Health Director in my job as Animal Control Services Director. This meant that I got pulled into a lot of activities regarding the health department, which included such items as a weekly management team meeting and policies and procedures. It also meant that I ended up attending the Management Academy of Public Health. I dragged my friend Dr. Bob into attending this program. It went so well, that he pulled me into another training, called the Southeastern Public Health Leadership Academy. We managed to receive both the team and individual project awards in this endeavor. Bob also went on to receive his Masters in Public Health and later became Chair on the Board of Health.

I mention these last items because you never know where or how you will influence another person’s life. Dr. Bob Weedon credits me with his pursuing his masters and perhaps also his decision to return to Purdue as an instructor. As an instructor, he was able to do further work in educating future

veterinarians in the venue of shelter medicine. Our entire community became a more cohesive and united community for better care for our animal population. It all began with paying attention to a need and then doing something to meet that need.

Based on these results, I am pleased and proud to have stepped outside my box of dreams to do something to make a lasting difference for many under-served animals in our nation. My hope is that this information will encourage others to step into whatever is placed before them, and use it to better our profession by whatever means come their way.

This is a two-part video Dr. Bob and I did at Kansas State Veterinary College during a visit we made to speak during the Annual Rabies Awareness Day Conference:

[K-State Rabies Lab Presents Johnny the Puppy, Part I - YouTube](#)

[K-State Rabies Lab Presents Johnny the Puppy, Part II - YouTube](#)

Here's another video we filmed in Wilmington at the shelter to encourage pet adoptions:

[It's Cool to Adopt - YouTube](#)

I currently reside in Macon, GA. I moved here to assist my sister in the care of our 90 plus year-old mother. She is doing well, but one of us needs to be here at all times. It is a joy to be able to have her here for these many years.

On a personal note, I would feel remiss if I didn't give you an idea of how I survived these multiple years of up and down challenges and difficult situations. For me – and, in truth, for anyone – I believe you will do better if you have something (Someone) larger than yourself to depend upon. My faith in Jesus Christ as my Lord and Savior has sustained me over these many years, and He will continue to carry me. I didn't lean on Him in veterinary school as I could have; however, soon after graduating I needed His support more than I ever had in my life. I continue to cling to Him as my life journey goes on.

Some of my classmates and even a few instructors mentioned the Christian veterinary group. Maybe I even went to a few gatherings. Persistence from any one of these individuals would have helped me in my school, and probably gotten me help sooner afterwards. I am grateful that God provided another veterinarian in Fayetteville, NC, to guide me into his church home. I found Who and what I needed all along in that church family.

This has been difficult to write out as I travel down memory lane. At almost, 65, I guess I have a lot to say. I hope it can help someone to lead the life they desire. Mine has been a whirlwind of many changes, but I believe in the end that every step of the way has been worthwhile.