



HERE'S A SECRET ...

Gratitude Is Never Garbage

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Why is it that every veterinarian's office gradually becomes more and more like the secret library of the sage elder in a fantasy novel? Whether you can't bear to part with any of the geodes in your bladder stone collection, are keeping that extra copy of a journal issue with the great cover artwork featuring your favorite breed, or prefer to keep both editions of the encyclopedic tome on internal medicine because the old version has some notes in the margins, we each have some medical oddities that provide a sense of security.

Since my office moved into my home, I was asked—by my generally understanding but nonmedical family—not to display any parts floating in formalin and gently reminded that stacks of slide holders are not, strictly speaking, “décor.” While I still have stacks of books “just in case” I need to reference them—one day, maybe—I had to clear out many of the knick-knacks that I had accumulated over the years. (Don't worry, I still have a secret stash of a few curiosities!)

Amid this decluttering, I came across something I will always have a place for. In the back of a file drawer full of exciting items like car loan paperwork, tax refund information, and an investment state-

ment, I found a cache of my most treasured veterinary possessions: thank you notes from animal owners over the years.

There are thank yous from all types of owners, including those of the cocker spaniel I nursed through surgery during my first clinical rotation as a fourth-year veterinary student, those of the grizzly muzzled lab with a bad case of geriatric vestibular disease that recovered completely in 3 days, and those of the tiny map turtle who just needed an extra heat lamp in his cage to thrive. Among them, there are so many words expressing gratitude, professing my compassion, and praising my knowledge. Those words always bring a sharp pang of tears to my eyes and a little twist in my chest.

In those notes, there is so much to be proud of: surgical skills, communication clarity, medical knowledge, creative solutions, and my growth. That first note from vet school was a thank you for caring and working hard, while that second note was a testament to having the knowledge to counsel that owner to patience because I was confident the patient could recover. In the last note, I was commended for asking questions and not being judgmental in my recommendations. Between those cursive, sometimes hard-to-read words or printed emails is the real story of my professional career, my growth, and my strengths. Those thank you notes are from the people that I mattered to the most on those days. They may not even remember me now, but little do they know that those notes have kept me going all these years. **TVP**

Ben Kirchner

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This column is titled “The Secret Life of Vets” so I can talk about the secrets that really should be considered well-known truths. These are the not-so-secret secrets that can help change our thinking and our profession for the better.

