Philosophically Speaking

A little book of inspirations
from veterinary life

Jim Euclid
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1. Inspiration  2. Autobiography
To Maureen and Nick
Some days I don’t feel like a vet…

… I feel like a scratching post, an ATM, a doormat, a wailing wall, a recorded message, a diplomat, a chauffeur, a philanthropist, a drug cabinet and an actor in 'Spays of Our Lives'.

I am very ambitious about getting enough sleep.
If I see a young lout pull up in a 4WD with a pig dog on the back, I know I can trust his strength to restrain that brutish mutt.

If I see a security officer with a bristling Shepherd in tow, I put my faith in his experienced hand to curb its slavering growl.

But if I see an elderly lady with a frothing Chihuahua, I tremble before almighty god.
It is a right of any person to seek a second opinion. In being a first opinion, we respect a client's right to seek a second. As a seconder, we concur, enhance or modify, but never disown the first; remembering what is declared to a client in private sometimes becomes public knowledge in court.

Call another vet an idiot and you’ll be sure to hear from them.
Depression comes in two forms; organic and circumstantial. If you are feeling down and it's not a medical problem, remember that circumstances change. You don't have to do after-hours, or expand your practise, or be rich, or say yes to everything.

Strangely, I have always been fascinated at such times to see what may eventuate if instead of giving up or giving in, I choose just to give.
Location doesn't make the vet any more than gold needle holders compensates for poor surgical skills. Great vets have worked in humble locales. It is their experience which transcends all limitations of geography and tooling.

Travel is still a great educator, but only for the hungry of mind.
Some folk have a mind like an encyclopedia, others like a literary masterpiece, or an Almanac of treasures. Fortunately rare are those which resemble a trashy novella which entertains poorly, forcing the reader to be led vaguely amongst alien events, only to arrive at a conclusion after many detours, making us wonder why we asked 'How are you today?' in the first place.

Such clients should pay a long-consult fee.
Ah, the crisp smell of a dairy farm at 6 am; where thirsty urns brim with white gold, where milk machines beat at the ear, and well-fed cows bellow across verdant valleys, where fluorescent-eyed calves suckle afoot and rocky gutters flow with green shit, where the farmhouse is perfumed by breakfast and a farmer's hard face brims with a smile and a G'day.

And they paid me for such memories!
"The flesh alas is wearied; and I have read all the books there are."

Stephane Mellarme

For mature vets - remember there is no such thing as routine. It is your attitude that calls life mundane, not life itself. Do not laugh at a new graduate's enthusiasm, knowing it will wane. Foster their hunger to learn and it will rekindle yours.
"The flesh alas is wearied; and I have read all the books there are."

— Stéphane Mallarmé

For mature vets - remember there is no such thing as routine. It is your attitude that calls life mundane, not life itself. Do not laugh at a new graduate's enthusiasm, knowing it will wane. Foster their hunger to learn and it will rekindle yours.
Because we are vets, we are often thought to be smart. As for myself, I am yet to find a client I am not fascinated with, or who hasn't taught me something. And what of those clients who have brought me humbly to a truth I had so errantly disregarded?

There is wisdom not only in books, but on the busy streets of life.
It is the depth of our connection with clients, colleagues and community which defines who we are as a vet and is the likely predictor of our professional life.
Wherever we practise in the world, there is commonality abound. There are diseases unique to dogs, diseases unique to Russian dogs and diseases unique to Russian prairie dogs.

Yet a mangy wormy dog is seen the world over.
There is the language of science spoken with ease between vets. But for lay folk, unacquainted with Latin or Greek, let us refrain from excessive verbiage lest they be not so much impressed by our knowledge as depressed by it. There is no value in learning if it cannot be disseminated, or fails to reach the common person.

Clients don't care how much you know until they know how much you care.
The 'pilot wave' theory describes how two 'sister' electrons can communicate instantaneously with each other, regardless of the distance between them. This may explain why the moment I've mailed off an overdue reminder to a slow-paying client, they suddenly appear at my door with a cheque in hand.

Be patient with debtors and they shall be indebted to you.
A Tribute to Rick Atwell FACVSc.

At twelve years of age, I first glimpsed a brave new world through the viewfinder lens. Though at first frightened by those writhing filarids swimming so desperately in a sea of blood corpuscles, I later discovered their specious nature through the wise guidance of kindred souls whose veterinary lives were dedicated to the investigation of the microscopic in order to relieve the macroscopic.
There may be a time on a rainy wintry night in the middle of a muddy yard with an arm deep inside a calving cow when you could be forgiven for thinking 'What the hell am I doing here!'

You could instead reflect, 'This is the warmest place in the paddock.'
"A soft answer turneth away wrath."

Proverbs.

When dealing with difficult clients, it is more effective to stay calm than to confront. There is no problem that can’t be resolved with patience, consideration and a primary interest in the patient. No matter what you do, some clients will love you and some will not.

Remember - a happy client tells three of their friends and an unhappy client tells nine.
"Art is a jealous mistress to science."

Ralph Waldo Emerson

When explaining a disease to a client, take the time to clearly render the diagnosis, cause, treatment and prognosis. Spell the disease for them. Write it down. Show pictorials if it helps.

Later, such lofty words will become a part of the client's vocabulary. They will respect you for it and might call you wise.
"That's only a flesh wound. Fight, you coward."  

John Cleese.

So your dog spay has just died post-op, or your spouse has left you, you've just gone bankrupt, or quit a dreadful job. Instead of saying 'What gives!' should you instead ask 'What gifts?' There are no disasters without new perspectives on life, as long as we are open to them. Sort it out and soldier on. You may be surprised to find you are still loved by clients and friends.

Life without 'u' is not 'fun'.

The hologram was invented by Dennis Gabor in 1947 while trying to improve the resolution of electron microscopes. Since then, physicists have theorised that the universe might be a grand holographic illusion in which reality is merely a reflection within the mind of the viewer.

I try to recall such objectivity when nervously trying to spay an overweight Rottweiler who bleeds at every touch.
"We are prepared to go the gates of Hell, but no further."

Pope Pius VII

To accomplish any worthwhile feat, you have to go that extra mile. Nothing is more true than with dying animals; no matter how hopeless or apparently futile. Know when it is time to call it quits, but until then see to it you do everything you can.

Your clients will appreciate your 'love' for their pet.
Vets are the grand peddlers of drugs to the animal world. Such responsibility demands we should dispense our wares with a caring hand, rather than by a fork lift.

*Do you really know what is in that beef-burger you're eating?*
It is the age of 'Dolly.' Some say madness, others necessity. Veterinary scientists will be judged for facilitating the advent of genetic engineering. Right or wrong, we have assisted her birth. She is our child. Let's raise her proudly, and with a parent's concern.

The Greeks didn't give us myths about gorgons for nothing.
Preventative medicine seems to me the hardest discipline of veterinary science. It is concerned mostly with educating a reluctant public about things they know they should do but prefer not to, choosing rather to knock at our door at some ungodly hour instead of having that long-avoided check-up at a civilised time weeks before.
"The biggest disease today is not leprosy or tuberculosis, but rather the feeling of being unwanted, uncared for and deserted by everyone."

Mother Teresa

As veterinarians, we are treating living creatures. Are we really so disconnected from nature as to think animals are devoid of feelings, hopes, fears and love?

Do you really care for animals or is it just a job?
If a new graduate sees their first dermatological case and diagnoses Pemphigus, I'd consider them wise. If a second skin case leads to the same diagnosis, I'd consider them imprudent. If a third skin case led to the same diagnosis, I'd consider them foolish.
Once while I was removing a splenic tumour from a Rottweiler, the owner mentioned that the only reason he brought his pet to me was because his dog had been hit by a car. Had it not been so ill, the dog probably would have made it across the highway and not ended up on my surgery table.

Why did the dog get hit crossing the road? Because it had cancer.
I am often told that because I'm a vet, I must love animals.

Moreso, I am fascinated by them.
My first day upon graduation as a vet involved a caesarean on a cow (which subsequently failed to get back in calf), two dog spays (one on heat, which subsequently died), three cows with retained afterbirth (one later prolapsed), one hundred and twenty pregnancy tests (twenty incorrectly diagnosed) and three hundred kilometres of travel (three sheep accidentally killed while driving to one farm).

I pray we still don’t treat our new graduates like this.
"I submit to you that if a man hasn't discovered something he will die for, he isn't fit to live."

Martin Luther King

We can't be inspired all the time. Sometimes we are moved by higher ideals but at other times, we're merely working for our daily bread, that hoped-for holiday, or motivated by fear of our partner's scorn.

On such days, take shelter in the company of your colleagues, seek refuge in a proud profession and buy your partner some flowers. There is always tomorrow.
"No grand idea was ever born at a committee meeting, but many have died there."

Val Taylor

Get yourself to a conference at least once a year, even if you only go for the food or the golf. Ask a question during the lectures. Participate. You'll be surprised that you aren't the only person feeling 'out in the cold' intellectually.
"Where there is no vision, the people perish."

Proverbs.

Where are we going as a profession? Where are we going as vets?

I have met many a vet with a clear direction, but rarely one with a clear goal.
At present, vets are 'raging' an attack on the principles of yearly vaccinations and the validity of alternative therapies. Whatever the conclusion, let it be taken fairly and squarely on the jaw of scientific facts.
Go placidly amidst the noise and haste of consultations and remember what peace there may be in the silent study of the eye. At all times, use ophthicaine and raise the third-eyelid. Wherever possible, avoid use of cortisone and remember what beauty there is in a full examination of the orbit. Use proper antibiotic choice. You are a child of ophthalmology and no doubt the cornea is healing as it should. When in doubt, consult a specialist; they too have their place. Neither be cynical about buying an expensive ophthalmoscope, for they are rewarding in revisit fees.

Strive to be eye-happy.
It is often the minutiae which demand our greatest attention.

Whether we are waging war against microbes, stimulating the health of a cell to save an animal from disease, sending a sympathy card to a grieving client, or counting pennies in striving for wealth.

There is no such thing as a little thing.
Tolerance above all, in all things veterinary.

There are as many types of vets as there are colours of the rainbow: with varying life ambitions, motivations, interests, personalities and temperaments.
As a toddler, I was accused of having a morbid fascination with animal reproduction, chemistry sets and the dissection of frogs. From such 'praise' and through various other biological distractions did I end up pursuing a veterinary life.

To commend rather than condemn is the highest benediction.
"Titles distinguish the mediocre, embarrass the superior, and are disgraced by the inferior."
George Bernard Shaw

So now you have finally got that vet degree, or fellowship, or are recently appointed senior lecturer in veterinary medicine. Congratulations!

If this achievement doesn't humble you, it will eventually humiliate you.
Only after working on Palm Island Aboriginal Mission did I realise that all dogs bleed red, have brown fleas and white worms.

The chain of our humanity is broken by its weakest link, discrimination.
I have always been astonished by Lawyers who can, by donning a wig and gown, perform with such precision an operation upon holy Law, and with such alacrity so as to dissect statutes like a surgeon, then asking an assistant to staunch with a tort swab the bleeding wound of Jurisprudence. Then, when all seems lost, to uphold some diseased precedent to the jury's scrutiny, and miraculously suture the gaping canon of Legislature back together with such deftness as to rival old Aesculap. Then behold, a healthy verdict is made conscious to the world.

Thus has bloody fear led me to avoid the courts.
Painfully have I struggled to find a valid understanding of the eternal. After years of childhood kneeling before the altar of Divine Creation, I suddenly found myself as a vet student forced into the enemy camp, genuflecting before almighty Darwin.

Only by persistent inquiry did I find my Truth siding with both.
We have an obligation to financial success in private practise, or we would not be in practise for long. But there are some clients who can't afford our expert advice. What cost is it to give them a few comforting words and their pet some basic first aid... nothing.

Does empathy come with a dispensing fee?
When it comes to charging for your services, remember that your client has a hip-pocket nerve, unlike their pet who has not evolved such a luxury.
I can't help but liken my undergraduate years to that of a calf fattened for slaughter, being force-fed facts beyond my capacity to absorb them, only to be later feasted upon by a hungry public.
"A little learning is a dangerous thing."

Alexander Pope

I have always been in awe of those experienced farmers who can diagnose better than me. Mostly they have been right, but on occasions when they weren't, I found myself thinking, 'What a disaster I have got myself into.'

Listen to their experiences, but decide for yourself.
What constitutes a medical emergency? I find there are fewer and fewer cases the older I get, and that beyond the urgent screams of clients and blood upon the floor, most medical travesties can be relieved with the judicious use of a mop, some tissues and the steady application of first aid.

Don't lose your head just because a client has lost theirs.
There have been times when I have waited impatiently for a farmer to arrive, only to be told by him when he turned up 'I meant the other paddock, Jim.' There have been other times when I have kept a farmer waiting six hours, only to be greeted with a friendly, 'Thanks for coming... I realise you're busy.'

Who are we working for... Mother Nature or Father Time?
Don't over-medicate... this leads to unavoidable side-effects.
Don't over-prescribe... this leads to loss of client confidence.
Don't over-charge... this leads to eventual loss of revenue.
Don't over-capitalise... this leads to loss of profit.

Success is a self-fulfilling prophecy.
There are two generators of veterinary income... what we know and what we can do.

The rest is merchandising.
When it comes to teaching...

...wisdom is treasured long after what you taught is forgotten.
...it's not words which inspire but the inspiration behind them.
...the greater responsibility for learning lies with the learner.
...though knowledge is priceless, experience is golden.
"If you look like your passport photo, you are too ill to travel."  

Anon

Look after your physical, mental and spiritual health. You are no good to anyone dead or dying. Physical health comes from eating the right things, having a regular exercise program and getting enough sleep. Mental health comes from avoiding negative attitudes and negative people.

As a great teacher once said, "Don't eat junk food and don't have junk thoughts."
In private practise, wages should never be a private matter. This only leads to dissent. Pay your nurses what they are worth, and your vets what they deserve.

The rest is arbitration.
If an animal must die for us to eat, then let it live in peace until that time; free of pain, isolation and stress.
When Fleming discovered penicillin, he was not on a quest for the 'Holy Grail' of medicine. He was instead attempting to find a suitably coloured fungus to make microbiological sketches with. Yet it was his lucid observations and propelling logic which led him to realise Penicillin's great potential. Only later did Florey deliver this 'magic bullet' to the world.

Thus is research often described as an arrow shot skyward and where it lands we call 'discovery'.
Euthanasia is often the conclusion of a long medical drama, the last act which ends with a coup de grâce. For the client, it is a heart-wrenching curtain-fall with furled-out tissues. But let this not be the end of the season.

Remember them when you have an unwanted pet needing a home.
If you are a petite vet trying to wrestle with a 500kg steer, expect farmers to give you unasked-for help.

You would be silly to refuse, for even in a cattle yard, there are still gentleman to be found.
Never reject a farmer's hospitality. It is their way of saying thank you. Partake in sociability, even if you don't like their version of pumpkin scones or you're a vegetarian facing a meal of braised brains.

It is better than giving the work to a neighbouring practice.
When I worked for a boss,
I blamed him for everything.
Now working for myself,
I see that boss as a wise teacher,

    and myself as a troublesome employee.
Have faith...

...that your clinic will eventually be so busy you will be able to work one hour a day, that you will discover a disease later named in your honour; that your child will forgive you for not being there for their birthday party, that you will love your partner as much as you dared, and that you will find peace in the simple fulfilment of life.
Have faith...

...that your clinic will eventually be so busy you will be able to work one hour a day, that you will discover a disease later named in your honour; that your child will forgive you for not being there for their birthday party, that you will love your partner as much as you dared, and that you will find peace in the simple fulfilment of life.
"A life unexamined is a life not fully lived."

Socrates

A clinical case diagnosed 'over the fence' might impress a client, but leads to intellectual laziness. Thorough clinical exams and diagnostic workups lead to deeper knowledge. Though it is true that 'the common diseases are common', it is the uncommon disease which proves our worth as veterinarians.

Yes, you should take out the textbook on this one.
If you can spay a dog, you have what it takes to be a vet. Nerves of steel, persistence, and ability to set in place an unfailing rigorous routine, as well as a thorough knowledge of surgery, anaesthesia and medicine.

If you can spay a dromedary... good one!
"I hold every man a debtor to his profession."

Francis Bacon

We are not given a degree lightly, but with heavy responsibility to ourselves and others. Choose then the level of your responsibility and live it fully. It is a degree never wasted, even if you are now a real estate agent or mother.
Oh, those halcyon days of college youth when I knew everything, and if someone said the phone was for me I was excited; when I didn't mind being poor, and on a Saturday night with $20 in my pocket and a girl in arm, I was an immortal king.
"We have to distrust each other. It's our only defence against betrayal."

Tennessee Williams

I always dread that goose-bump shiver running along the nape of my neck during a consultation; telling me I know exactly what a particular clinical case is about, its diagnosis and likely outcome. At such times I perform a full examination, blood tests and x-rays.

My final diagnosis is often at odds to an original hunch.
Do not be perturbed if you doubt what you are being taught at university. It is the inquisition of nature which finally leads to the martyrdom of mystery and the revelation of truth.

Your teacher was probably right, but at least you know why.
Why is it that the only subject I failed at uni was Parasitology? And through what perversion did I end up doing a PhD in that very same field? And by what bizarre circumstances is it that I still know so very little about this specialty?

Thus have I come to wonder that if there is a God, is It a worm?
"Habit with him was all the test of truth,  
'It must be right: I've done it from my youth."  

George Crabbe


You can't teach an old dog new tricks but he can be tempted with new treats.
"Those who can, do.
Those who won't, teach.
Those who won't teach, administrate."

Anon

The best vet practitioners produce the best results.
The best vet teachers produce the best graduates.
The best administrators run the best vet schools.

Stop judging and get on with what you do best.
"In Memorium..."

Here lies the memories of my research; the struggling squeaks of hybridoma mice being killed, the incessant flapping of rabbit's ears against their wire cages during blood sampling, the smell of formaldehyde in a dark autopsy lab, the constant yapping of donor dogs in tight cages, the smell of tom-cat urine in an overcrowded cattery, the pungency of the sheep shed, and the sight of dead rats being wheelbarrowed from their Gulag.

May they rest in peace.
I am no longer surprised to diagnose a case of ulcerative colitis in a dog, only to find the owner has been a long time sufferer of the same disease.

Transference - that subtle, powerful and often-overlooked superimposition of emotions from an owner to their beloved pet.
One-vet practise can be hell - a sense of professional and personal isolation. If we are suffering from fatigue, drug-abuse, marital problems or other tell-tale signs of stress as a result of our work, let it be the responsibility of all vets to do something about it.

We cannot rise as 'one', if one is missing.
Be a good historian and take excellent case notes. Publish them wisely in journals, talk about them prudently to colleagues. Veterinary science evolved not only in the hallowed halls of university life but also in the broad fields of clinical endeavour.
The three most important things in a clinical examination are: look, listen and log.

Eyes rarely lie... they are the perception of experience.
Clients rarely lie... they have the interest of their pet at heart.
Notes rarely lie... they are our main testament in a court room.

A misdiagnosis is often from not seeing rather than not knowing.
"First do no harm."

Aeschylus

If in doubt with a clinical case, work it up and/or admit it to hospital. It is better to wait nervously for further clinical signs or blood results than to treat in haste and repent at your leisure.
"Scientists should not be on top, but on tap."

Winston Churchill

Professional arrogance is a sign of ignorance and only leads to isolation. Humility and compassion are the vanguards for a successful and meaningful vocation.

Ivory towers only lead to damsels in distress.
If you are an undergraduate questioning why you are in this vet course, or why it is so hard, or why you feel so alien to other students, then you are probably in the right place at the right time.

If you are questioning nothing, you are probably in the wrong course.
I am constantly astonished at the potential array of psychopathologies - neuroses, psychoses, obsessive compulsive disorders, manias, depression and anxieties - which by luck most of us humans are spared.

Gladly have we now come to empathise with animals who lack such fortune.
There is no such thing as a bad vet or a failed vet. You are either a vet or not. The rest is hearsay.
"Disease desperate grown, by desperate appliances are relieved, or not at all."

William Shakespeare

There is no common cure that will cure all ills. Those which do not respond to treatment require specialist attention. Yet, in spite of the best veterinary attention, patients still die and these cases propel our interest in science generally and veterinary science particularly.
Try not to live the dreams of your parents.
Rightly or wrongly, you have chosen a veterinary career.

If wrong, branch out into something else. Your skills are now much broader than you think.

If right, your happiness validates the wisdom of your choice.
It is a right of any person to seek a second opinion. In being a first opinion, we respect a client's right to seek a second. As a seconder, we concur, enhance or modify, but never disown the first; remembering what is declared to a client in private sometimes becomes public knowledge in court.

Call another vet an idiot and you'll be sure to hear from them.
Our parents teach us unconditional love.
Our children allow us to practise it.
Our lecturers teach us objective knowledge.

Our clients allow us to practise it.
"See one, do one, teach one."

I was once told this by a lecturer at uni while being shown how to do a caesarean on a cow. After seeing him do it about twenty times, and then after the twentieth time in practice, I started to get the hang of it. However, I am still reluctant to teach a farmer how to do it.

Maybe my teacher was a better vet than me, or maybe he was speaking metaphorically.
The picture we portray to the general public is in direct proportion to our own self-image. If there is any confusion about our public face it is because of our multifaceted talents and the diverse vocations we chose in the public arena.

Not every vet wants to be Dr Doolittle.
"Any customer can have a car painted any colour that he wants as long as it is black."

-Henry Ford

Though there is a standard treatment for most diseases, this does not preclude a client from choosing an alternative treatment. No treatment schedule should be seen as the only choice, but as an option. And an expensive treatment is not necessarily better than a cheaper one.

Are we concerned with the outcome of an illness or the income?
Education of clients begins at childhood, not puppyhood.

Teach your client's kids about vaccinations, worming, desexing and health care and you'll have their children's puppies too.
"Nature is often hidden, sometimes overcome, seldom extinguished."

Francis Bacon

Chronic diseases such as flea allergy can be a great challenge. In spite of elucidating the exact mechanism, and finding the most suitable remedy, you can guarantee you'll still be seeing that itchy dog in five years time.
New diseases emerge slowly, but new drugs rapidly. Drug representatives, veterinary journals, conferences and the internet all help to keep us abreast of the ever evolving pharmacopoeia.

Don't let your clients teach you about that 'new' therapy.
"An overnight success usually takes about ten years."

Woody Allen

One thing I have found to be universally true - that events progress slowly, then all of a sudden: whether it be study leading to wisdom, research ending in discovery or the growth of a practise toward wealth.

If I were Newton I would call it the Fourth Law of Motion.
"Divine is the work to subdue pain."

Hippocrates

There is nothing more rewarding than a job well done; that sick puppy wagging its tail once more, or that horse cantering off into the paddock after some frightful ordeal.

For a while the world has been set right again.
An exploratory laparotomy is a valid option when diagnostic tests fail to yield a diagnosis. I sometimes adhere to that dental philosophy "If in doubt, pull it out." But be prepared for the unexpected...

I once went in thinking cancer and came out with a cricket ball.
In my raging days of research, I sometimes forgot that my productivity was but a shadow of that which I conspired in quiet study. Great ideas often came at night's rest, in quiet pubs or on Sunday walks.

The greatest jewels lie not in mines, but in the mind.
A 3 am call out to see a 'dying' dog later found me trying to pacify a bull mastiff who made it clear he was neither dying nor interested in being helped.

Such reluctant patients justify a hefty after-hours fee.
If you find yourself on a live export ship in the middle of the Indian Ocean amidst a dying flock of 120,000 heat-stressed sheep, do not question the Captain's order to think the unthinkable and perform the unquestionable.

*It's a long swim home.*
I have found myself occasionally in that peculiar predicament of being questioned about human illness; perhaps to diagnose a chronic malady or to prescribe some horse tincture for an old man's cough.

We are vets, for God's sake!
If a child wants to say goodbye to her dying pet and chooses a performance which rivals Lady Macbeth, arm yourself with tissues, some soothing words and a chair. It may take a while.
A torch-light examination in a rainy paddock of a fractious horse with a stake wound is not the best condition in which to base a prognosis. Your client will thank you in the morning that you waited.
Respect those vets more talented or successful than yourself. They are your inspiration.

Respect those vets less talented or successful than yourself. You are their inspiration.
Be content with who you are. It matters only how well you love your work. Challenge yourself daily, set goals, but don't be too concerned if you fall short.

Rarely are vets remembered for their wealth, but for being competent, generous and caring.
There are three types of knowledge; that which we know, that which we don't know, and that of which we are unaware.

On things we know, seek to expand. 
On things we don't know, seek to learn. 
On things beyond us, seek to comprehend.
I grew up in a café and learnt the selling power of ice-creams. I grew up in a small town and realised the importance of reputation. I grew up hard and realised the value of gentle things. Now I work as a vet, providing a service which pleases people, embracing a modest life from the earnings of that reputation.

Remember where you came from. It’s a signpost to where you are going.
I once met a Swiss parasitologist of such warm disposition as to lead me to believe that all Swiss people possessed such congeniality. Thus did I find myself inspired to learn more about his field of scientific interest and his country.

When working in foreign lands, remember that you are an ambassador of your country and profession. You are firstly a vet, secondly a vet and thirdly a vet.
When troubled as an undergraduate, spend time with clinicians to remind yourself what you want to be.

When troubled as a graduate, spend time with clients to remind yourself what you need to be.

When troubled as a person, spend time with loved ones to remind yourself who you are.
Yes, you should go to your own graduation!

If only because so many people are proud of getting you there.
In pursuing a BVSc...
... never has so little been done by so few for so many.

In pursuing a PhD...
... never has so much been done by so many for so few.
I am always astounded by what little I understood upon graduation - a head full of knowledge, yet innocent of what to do with it.

Now I know less, but at least know what to do with it.
I used to have a photographic memory, but lately can't remember where I put the film.

Now I write things down.
Doctors are forbidden by law to treat their spouse and children. Yet a vet is expected to attend to their partner's pet.

Unless it is deworming or desexing, I prefer sending my pet to a specialist rather than face the prospect of a divorce.
A dog biting you during a consultation is indirectly proportional to its size, directly proportional to the number of children watching and always with an owner who insists 'Oscar's never done that before.'

A horse kicking you is always unexpected, totally amusing to the client, and rarely painless to the flesh or pride.
I worked briefly in the public service, registering veterinary pharmaceuticals. I was astounded by this Eden where people worked in leisurely surroundings, came to work bright-eyed at 9 am, were rarely overworked or stressed, had social lunches and left their cares behind at 5 pm. It was the only time I've had my employment unfairly terminated.

In the workplace, surround yourself with like-minded folk.
At fifteen I did work experience with my local vet. He later thanked me for my help. At twenty, he taught me how to geld a horse. He said I had potential. At thirty, he gave me a job when I was down on my luck. He cheered me up. At thirty five, I opened a practice in opposition to him and he congratulated me. At forty, I gave him a part-time job when he was unhappily retired. He thanked me.

I have always been humbled by the generosity of other vets.
I once met a vet who spayed a cat in three minutes. I once met a vet who could diagnose a diaphragmatic hernia from across the room. I once met a vet who could detect the hour at which a mare would ovulate. I once met a vet who resuscitated a dead cow back to life with his bare hands.

But usually I meet vets who are kind and competent.
Do not go drunkenly into the veterinary night, or speed out to a foaling mare.

The police won't listen to your pleas.
'Life is like a race...'

...we first learn to crawl, then walk, then run.
As we grow up and leave home, we learn to run faster and further. In mid-life, we begin to tire, but push ourselves even harder to the finish line. Finally, as death looms like a chequered flag, we begin to back-pedal, until at old age, we are frantically kicking and screaming before the grave.

There is a lot to be said for moccasins.
I have occasionally been scrutinised by a new client who wants to know when I graduated, what experience I've had or why they should use my services over another vet. I see them not as an annoyance, but like a parent fussing about their child's welfare.

It is better to be looked over with a cautious eye than to be overlooked.
A vet I once knew treated a cat then later that same afternoon treated the cat's owner in his capacity as a medical doctor. It was a sad loss to the veterinary profession when the client's outrage forced the vet, upon legal advice, to focus his skills on human medicine.

Rarely is a prophet recognised, but often condemned.
I have long suffered from that bromide fear of failure.  
Only when I lost everything did I finally dispose of this unreasonable mistress.

Now I enjoy that greatest of all aphrodisiacs, success.
The heart is the most written-about organ in human history; discussed by scientists, philosophers, writers and lovers alike. It was with regret in my undergraduate days that I heard this mystical organ described as 'a mass of autonomous muscles regulated by involuntary nerves.'

Would Shakespeare still have composed his sonnets with a pacemaker?
Flying over the Gulf in an overloaded Cessna, descending onto an airstrip I wouldn't land a pack of cards on, roughing it with beasts harder than ironbark, swatting flies big enough to eat, vaccinating a hundred steers piled into a race meant for twenty, sitting around an evening fireplace with stockmen who warm me with tea and dampa and stories of dreamtime.

Oh to spend such a week away from civilisation, where VB replaces the TV, and colour is never mentioned.
If a client asks for the impossible; perhaps a gold filling in that canine tooth, or to spay their bitch without shaving the hair; or dematting a Persian cat without sedation, do you say no?

Somehow such clients always seem to know another vet who will comply with their wishes.
Remember to liberally apply alcohol well beyond the margins of a surgical wound.

There is nothing worse than trying to locate a flea swimming amidst the abdominal organs.
According to Murphy's Law, there is no such thing as the perfect veterinary procedure. Either the cat chews all its stitches out that same night post-op, or a client immediately goes away for a month's holiday after you've just put a cast on their foal's leg, or that cow you heroically pulled from a muddy dam decides five minutes later to go for another drink.
Why is it only after you've draped a wound, have gowned up and just made a lengthy incision that you realise you didn't shave enough hair from the surgical site, or you've forgotten to prep the wound with alcohol, or there's someone on the phone who urgently needs to talk with you?
In my enthusiastic youth, I was once asked to perform an autopsy on a steer that had been dead for three days. It was mid-summer in North Queensland. I could smell the beast long before I found it, and when I got there, I couldn't see the carcass for flies. Though it was beyond me to ascertain a cause of death, my antics certainly entertained the farmer for days afterwards.

There is a time to live, and a time to die, a time to autopsy and a time to deny.
Beware the pigeon fancier...

If you don't know what a Federation Cup is, or why a cock should explode from its box, or why a hen's iris changes colour, it may be wise to seek professional advice.

Not all birds have names like 'Tweety.'
In pursuing his career, a racing car driver spends many a night plotting against his opponents. Only after many victories in Formula One does he finally realise that his greatest opponent is himself.

It is one thing to strive for ambition, another to realise you are the driver and the driven.
I confess a certain curiosity for horse racing - a lethal weapon being ridden by a financial obsession.

A greyhound is the only dog that will lie down when it is told to, race when it doesn't want to, and kill cats when it shouldn't.

A show pony is the only horse that will sit when you examine its hoof, bite during an oral examination and kick when you are nowhere near it.


A ferret has two ends - one that bites and one that scratches.

Why is it that snakes always come to my clinic suffering from oral thrush?
If you have a client who insists that chiropracty is the solution to their greyhound's back problem, perhaps you should flex your mental muscles and learn about it. More harm has been done through the ignorant pulling of joints than through the entire annals of conservative physiotherapy.

I also have a healthy respect for 'muscle men', but I consider them better confined to the gymnasium.
"An apology to our patients with mange...

Forgive us those dieldrin years when we attempted in vain to eradicate that blighted parasite, to
then try to relieve your itch with cortisone only to find you worse off at treatment's end than when
we began.

Remember that there is more to a parasite than mere infection.
I am amazed at those husbandry folk who can patiently train a wild horse with whispers, or with watchful eye and patient hand subdue a savage dog or feral cat.

Happy is the vet who realises that taming by force is merely taming by halves.
One of the great scientific discoveries has been in the understanding of viral infections. We now know that there is nothing 'dormant' in viral behaviour; they are a restless and aggressive foe, ever pursuant of new conquests. AIDS, for example, is the final surrendering to HIV infection.

I like to think of viruses as the Klingons of nature.
Dogs have masters and cats slaves,  
caged birds seek windy emancipation,  
and horses the equality of work and play.

Who then will draft the 'Bill of Rights' for animals?
I recall with horror my first rectal examination. It was as wretched an experience for the cow as it was for me. After many years of practise it had become acceptable to me as part of a clinical examination, yet was still wholeheartedly loathed by my patients.

There is no kinder word for it than rape.
Though we have for years accustomed ourselves to the diversity of pet breeds, it still astounds me that a Chihuahua is the same species as a Great Dane. I can't help but wonder not only at the flexibility of the animal genome but our tenacity to modify it.

Perhaps one day our pet mouse will wear a saddle and our cat will be playing with a Rubik's cube.
Long ago, I used to laugh at the concept of Animal Psychology as a valid field of study. Now there are vets specialising in the psychology of Tasmanian Devils. Thus do I compare specialist vets to Einstein's relativity...

The smaller their area, the weightier their impact.
I can't think of anything more heart-wrenching than a moribund cat purring loud enough for all to hear, a child weeping in consolably over it, as her parents suck mutely on trembling lips, while I try to calmly administer the lethal injection.

It is said that the dying possess the most dignity.
Often do I compare an animal's lung to a tree folded in on itself.

That glorious arboreal system with branches, stems and leaves, though prey to all wildlife and disease which befalls it, still manages to inspire the growth of its greater self, and only at season's end does it lose its autumnal colours one by one.

Yet still we smoke...
I was fascinated once to watch a small terrier unleash its fury upon a Mastiff. Curiously did the little dog’s bravado frighten off its opponent.

They say that it’s not the size of the dog in the fight, but the size of the fight in the dog.
Cancer never happens out of the blue. It is the combination of genetic susceptibility, diet and lifestyle. As well, it takes a billion cancer cells before it is felt by hand or seen on Xray.

Thus have we a far greater obligation as vets to heighten its detection and prevent its occurrence than to merely attempt heroic feats of remedy.
When I think of all those cattle dead from BSE (Mad Cow) and the many human lives dedicated to its eradication, I can't help but wonder at the insanity of feeding cows beef-products in the first place.
Synchronicity is when, after ten years in practise, you suddenly diagnose a rare disease you have so long looked for, and then within a short time, other cases coincidentally present themselves.

To see for the first time is to perceive anew.
Only when we have walked for a day in the paws of a dog or on the hooves of a horse will we understand how animals perceive us. Until then, we will merely rationalise, hypothesise, anthropomorphise and generally misinterpret the intentions of those animals under our dominion.

Get out of your Pajero and spend a day in the world of nature.
I can not think of a more intolerable phrase than compulsory retirement, when it is the maturation of age which renders mysteries less so and knowledge more so. Wisdom is like a summit, that without which there would be no mountain at all, and nothing to aspire to.

Keep your hand in, even if it hurts.
It astounds me that the more we advance scientifically, the more closely our inventions imitate biology. I would not be surprised to learn of a new technology so intricately self-governing, functional and sentient as to be called miraculous.

Congratulations, you've just re-invented life.
"Memoirs of a travelling locum..."

...always trying to find where the drugs are stored, struggling with computer systems, deciphering illegible clinical notes, sleeping alone in a strange bed, learning the idiosyncrasies of staff, familiarising myself with an unknown vehicle, a lonely road and a stranger's face at the end of it. And being rewarded, finally, with irregular pay checks.

Be kind to locums - they deserve your gratitude.
I have always considered the most pivotal moment in my life to be the advice I sought from a high school guidance officer. When told that, with my grades, I had no hope of securing a place at University, it would have been far simpler to merely accept his advice - yet instead I decided to prove him wrong.

Oh what experiences we embrace when choice is ours to make.
At social functions, I sometimes find myself cornered by someone wanting to tell me their pet's problems.
I try to look on the bright side....

I could be a doctor having to listen to their ordeals with varicose veins or piles.
Anaesthesia can be best likened to war:
intolerable boredom interspersed with moments of sheer terror.

Surgery can be best likened to peace:
unrelenting diligence interspersed with moments of sheer abandon.

Nursing is just hard work.
"The whole is greater than the sum of the parts."

Euclid 300BC

There are scientists who have calculated that it is statistically impossible for the human genome to have evolved purely by chance. Yet others who have said that in the infinite time of the universe, these odds are highly likely.

Whatever the truth about life's origins, let us not use statistics as a drunken man uses a lamppost - for support rather than illumination.
As a struggling playwright, I was challenged to move my audience emotionally. Only after much trial and error did I slowly learn the art of dramatic tension. Lo and behold, not a dry eye was to be seen!

Alas, this technique has never worked with 'dry eye' (keratoconjunctivitis sicca).
Canine verse...
An apple a day keeps the doctor away.
A bone a day keeps the vet away.

Feline Haiku...
We kneel in deference
to fuss the uneaten bowl
Now eat!

Equine stanza...
With tail raised high, she worries the evening air,
And emits a symphony of whinnies and chortles,
As the lonely rider cantering upon her wither,
Seeks Arabian nights on suburban streets.
Legg-Calvé-Perthes Disease is a very impressive title for a syndrome about which very little is known, and to which there is little prevention. And yet has a treatment which is often successful.

I sometimes wonder if long names make us feel bigger about little problems.
Nosocomial: too many antibiotics, too many germs, or too many patients.

Iatrogenic: what happens when you put your foot in it.

Idiopathic: there is a reason for it, but we're still looking.

Zoonosis: the detestable which is mostly preventable.
Frankenstein's monster is the example of a rare iatrogenic syndrome characterised by multi-organ dysgenesis, osseus exostoses, dysarthrodoses, lordosis and exophthalmos, associated clinically with hyperaesthesia, aggression, excessive vocalisation and a simian-like hypermetric gait.

Good on you, Mary Shelley.
So you wish you had spent the last few years publishing more scientific papers or expanding your practise to equal your rival. Yet what becomes of unrealised ambitions? Who will rein in this unruly steed? No greater liberty is there than self-empowerment realised through detachment and love.

Professional jealousy is nothing to be envious about.
A flail-chest constitutes a medical emergency;
 a severed artery also.
 A prolapsed eye needs urgent attention;
 a gastric torsion moreso.
 But a dog with a tape-worm does not.

It may help sometimes to clarify this for clients.
The hand that rocks the cradle is the hand that rules the world.

The hand that cleans the stable is the hand that rules the stall.
Roo culling - the culpable pursuing the hoppable.
Mink farming - the couture pursuing the velour.
Boar hunting - the illogical pursuing the inedible.
Rodeo riding - the irascible pursuing the unrideable.
Butterfly collecting - the neurotic pursuing the quixotic.
Duck shooting - the reprehensible pursuing the indefensible.
Seal hunting - immoral.
It is our ability to admit error for ourselves and on behalf of others which marks our humility. Yet not only is it the great heights to which we aspire that reveals our soul, but also the depths to which we go to correct those faults within and without. If you made a wrong diagnosis, be honest and fix what needs correcting.

Any knave can err; but only a King can pardon.
Retribution is wanting to discipline a Rottweiler which it has taken four people to restrain.

Prejudice is wanting to shout at that Daschund while trying to find a leg-vein big enough to inject.

Derision is wanting to muzzle that raucous cockatoo during induction.

Oddly enough, colourful anaesthesia is often followed by stress-free surgery.
Don't you hate it when...

...you can't find the ovaries during a cat spay and the nurse points to the cat's testicles.
...your patient keeps inexplicably moving and the nurse asks why the anaesthetic machine isn't turned on.
...a patient won't stand still during an examination of its sore foot and the nurse reminds you its only got three legs.
...you're losing your cool with patients, nothing is going right and the nurse asks you politely to take a cigarette break.
If a client says:
...a digital injury - they don't mean it's electric.
...the croupier ligament - they don't mean the casino.
...a swollen prostrate, they don’t mean lying down.
...the sesame bone - they don't mean an edible treat.
...pantyatitis - they don't mean a stocking problem.
...the carnival tooth - they don't mean Luna Park.

Correct your client's grammar at your peril.
After explaining to a new client for an hour the treatment protocol and costs for a dog with a cruciate ligament rupture, I then had to repeat the information to the client's partner on the phone, then some time later to the client's mother, only to have them apologise that they still wanted to see their regular vet.

No one ever suddenly becomes impatient.
Plumbers and vets are not that much different.
I once had to call out two separate plumbers to fix a blocked sewerage pipe. I got two different stories as to the cause of the problem, they charged variant prices, tackled the problem in two totally different ways and the first left without being able to fix the problem but still charged me for his services.

Alas, plumbers have to exhume their mistakes.
Insulin was first isolated by Fred Banting under difficult circumstances in a musty lab in Toronto during the 1920s. Since then, this hard-won drug has been used on every continent, on every domesticated animal by every nationality of veterinarian, saving untold millions of animals from an untimely death.

One man's passion, another's potion.
I studied at a hard desk, when all about me were the arias of laughter, wine and song. I grew weary through theory's moil, midnight's oil and holiday's toil. I lamented the passing of time; a youth's heat squandered in veterinary books. And why? Because I wanted to be thought learned and to have people respect me for this knowledge.

They say that when God is angry, he gives you what you want.
I admire those brave scholars of antiquity who began the unenviable task of opening a dialogue with the unknown. From such humble hypotheses did they create the schools of Science, Literature and Art. And here we are, surfing on that great wave of history, enjoying the buoyant pleasures of scientific wisdom.

Why aren't we taught Philosophy of Science any more?
It is usually with a bulky medical dictionary in tow that I tackle the task of deciphering a pathology report. I always marvel at a pathologist's high-brow comments, the complexity and subtlety of their language, and the pragmatism of their diagnoses.

I consider such learned folk scienecniks.
I know what Megaoesophagus can do... I once had a difficult client who, when told of his pup's condition and its poor prognosis, decided to prove me wrong. From that day forth, this irritable man hand-fed his beloved Weimeraner upon every chime of the clock as if its life depended upon it. He became a versatile chef, sensitive companion and compassionate nurse. Now he smiles every time I see him.

A rough diamond is better than a fair pearl.
Sexual dimorphism is one of nature’s tools for bringing the opposite sexes together to propagate a species. I have noticed that the greater the degree of dimorphism, the more spectacular the courtship rituals and mating.

I think of this when my partner’s credit card is overdrawn.
The sacred Hindu Vedas describe urine as 'the beverage of immortality,' and teach that you should drink it. Ancient herb doctors believed that taking drugs and urine together boosts their efficacy. In ancient Rome, where urine was used for tanning leather, the emperor placed a tax on every drop.

Is this why our patients are so reluctant to give us a sample?
Leucocytes (white cells) evolved for entirely different reasons to their poorer cousins, the erythrocytes (red cells). Though rarer in number, Leucocytes combat infection, instigate tissue repair and inflammation, process antigens and regulate antibody memory, while red cells mostly transport oxygen.

A clear case of aristocracy riding on the back of the bourgeoisie.
The eye is the window to the soul.
When it is cloudy, we clear it.
When it is swollen, we reduce it.
When it is sticky, we anoint it.
When it is red, we salve it.

And the eyes, too, we should treat no differently.
I am always stunned to see those rare cases when a client comes to me with a large tumour that has a dog attached to it. Such owners are rarely fussed by the problem, the pet is often nonplussed by my concerns, and surgery rarely discussed. Usually the client just wants a worm tablet.

Obviously the conspicuous is not always visible.
Many a vet has purchased his first Mercedes or BMW through the services of Rottweiler owners, who spend a small fortune rectifying the many genetic disorders of this breed: hip dysplasia, OCD, entropion and chronic skin disease.

Personally, I prefer Japanese motor cars.
The treatment of Hardware Disease is not about retail therapy at Bunnings, but I prefer the latter to the former, which often involves delving into the murky realms of a cow's paunch. Invariably that piece of wire is long gone, the damage is mostly irreparable and the farmer often inconsolable.

Often the money is better spent on a new electric fence.
There are few cancers more aggressive than an osteosarcoma, more malignant than leukemia, or more pathogenic than a lymphosarcoma. Most cancers have a reputation for occasional remissions but frequent recurrence, and invoke fear and trepidation in both lay persons and veterinary practitioners alike.

Benign cancers occur between 22
\(^{nd}\) June and 22
\(^{nd}\) July.
I cannot comprehend what incites a dog to eat spoiled food, roll in faeces, pass wind indoors and consume its own vomit.

You can take the dog out of the bush, but not the bush out of the dog.
Though science can tell us how we are born, it cannot tell us how to live.

Though religion can tell us how to live, it can't tell us how not to die.

Thus have I a healthy respect for both.
Universities, with all their political foibles and peccadilloes, still honour learning and intellectual passion above wealth, race, religion or gender. They are places which still actively pursue democratic debate and frenetic study, run by a strict code of ethics and propriety.

Universities are monopolies ruled by benign dictators.
"Ode to Joy"

I used to get my 'happy pills' and hold them in my hand and when I looked at them, they were crying. I used to give Chloe her 'happy pills' and together we would sit under the mango tree and remember happier times. I used to be unhappy, but now I am sad. Chloe used to be anxious but now she is blue.

If we're a Prozac nation, God save us from Viagra.
To my Darling Downs…

…you, who captured my heart with your green valleys, your endless plains of yellow wheat, and warm-eyed sun-baked farmers, with a dingo-fence which stretches out as long as Summer, with a sea of sheep shimmering in the Spring morn and cattle musing the winter fields with their bellows, and where roads are lined by grain silos like giant exclamation marks on a frosty morning’s vigil.

Beloved land, who stole my professional innocence.
Coffee was invented specifically for primary life-support. Without it, all human creativity, commerce and enterprise would be in a vegetative state; decayed and artificial. Recently, I have found a direct causal link between serious coffee consumption and the advent of the industrial revolution.

By the third morning coffee, I am almost human.
One of the world's largest vet practices was operated by the illustrious Dr John Aubrey of Queensland, Australia. When he retired in the 1990s, there were over one hundred vets working in his territory.

Not only have our clients' demands expanded, but also our capacity to meet those demands.
Big fleas have little fleas, upon their backs to bite them. Little fleas have littler fleas, and so on... ad infinitum.

If this is true, why are fleas so indestructible?
'Tasmania...'

...where snow is the first thing to greet you on an early spring morning, and water arises sparkling clear from Jurassic forests; where the locals often say 'I'd like to go to Australia one day' and farmers' feet are land taxed; where the worms have mortgages, and the dogs are all called 'Bluey'; where your services are paid for in potatoes and the women flirt outrageously.

One day perfect, the next day... Paradise.
Stereotypy is a tendency to think or act in a rigid, repetitive and often meaningless way. How often do we examine our thoughts and discard those which, though they have served us well in the past, now only hinder that higher goal?

Ideas are like clothes: we replace or repair those which are worn, to let us be seen 'at our best'.
"He wore his heart on his sleeve like a general, and every night his wife court-martialled him."

An ability to remain emotionally detached is what allows a vet to treat a patient objectively. This talent, like a double-edged sword, explains why we sometimes find it difficult to feel connected with friends and family.
It is said that 'all's fair in war, business and love.' In war one has the right to kill an enemy physically, in business financially, and in love emotionally. Little wonder it is we have failed to find true peace, meaningful enterprise or deep love.
People complain that there can't be a God, because God wouldn't let the world get into the state it is. Yet people complain if they are denied free will.

God must get tired of listening to our whining.
Why is it that people assume there is immortality in genetic cloning?

Even if you could make a hundred Mahatma Ghandis, you can't clone spirituality or charisma.
Life is a journey full of obstacles, potholes, boggy pits, obstructions, dead ends, rivers to be forded, dark forests to traverse and mountains to be climbed in order for us to reach that 'promised land' which lies not without but within.

Wisdom is that state when Truth has lost its innocence.
A Daschund sat up on a two-story ledge, looking at a Pug down on the ground below. 'Come down and play,' said the Pug, but the Daschund refused. Five times the Pug asked the Daschund to come play and each time it refused. Finally the Pug asked why.

'Because,' said the Daschund, 'I don't want to end up with a face like yours.'
"Life is like a horse-ride"

At the start of a ride a stallion may buck and kick, but usually only for the first mile.

When galloping at full speed, keep a tight hold of the reins.

Beware the hidden spooks, for in the dust is logic over instincts found.

When surmounting an obstacle, know when to lower your head and dig in your heels.

A horse when blinkered might not see the race, but he can still win the cup.

When trotting home, let the steed lead.
"When all things return to the One, even gold loses its value. But when the One returns to all things, even the pebbles sparkle."

Zen

There is the human aspect to being a vet which transcends professional and financial success. Let us therefore delight in a life which finds truth in the 'everything' and wealth in the 'nothing'. 
"The pessimist contends that there is nothing to do but work, nothing to eat but food, nothing to wear but clothes."

Benjamin King

Being happy is purely a matter of choice, independent of security, power or circumstances. If you feel your life is a living Hell, you can choose to change it. There is nothing unattainable in life that cannot be achieved through hard work and positive visualisation.
"She ran the whole gamut of her emotions from A to B."

Dorothy Parker

Within five minutes of meeting a new client, she confessed to me her entire medical history from childhood measles to a recent battle with breast cancer. Yet she was outraged when I informed her that her dog had fleas. In spite of my assuring her it was a minor problem, I have never seen this client since.

Some people love drama only when it's their own. Some people, long as it's not their own. Others like myself, when it's confined to the stage.
After three years of sleepless nights worrying about the financial stability of my new practise - where I felt I was working just to pay my employees and keep food on the table - I finally realised that something had to give. I took a holiday and started paying myself a wage.

One works on one's business, not in it.
‘There goes a bloke of such different looks, dress, attitude, mood, drive and expectation that we have nothing in common but our humanity.’

Why is it I always dread that certain client who manages to inexplicably bring out the worst in me, or the patient who never fails to give me a difficult time with a comparatively routine procedure?

A pebble in my shoe is a constant reminder I am walking on land, not water.
"The louder he talked of his honour, the faster we counted our spoons."

Ralph Waldo Emerson

A vet I once knew bragged to me about how he loved animals and how his clients believed he was the nicest man they knew. A few months after his wife left him, I found him arguing with a client, then later abusing a patient with his fist.

Anyone can be a saint on sunny days.
You'd have to be deranged to enjoy pregnancy testing 200 cows first thing in the morning. You're irritable from a midnight calving, your body feels like lead and you've got clients waiting back at the clinic. Your only inspiration is that in eight hours time, you'll be sipping Cabernet Sauvignon with a romantic date who you hope isn't allergic to divorcees or that chlorophyll stain on your arm.

Five years of university, a broken marriage, three car wrecks and an addiction to legal drugs. Maybe you are not perfect, but you're a vet and proud of it.
Sally Macintosh was the flashiest vet I ever met. She dressed the part, said all the right words, was right on the ball diagnostically and had a rapport with clients that was legendary.

Obviously there is more to a magnificent bird than great plumage.
When I was a boy, I witnessed my dog being run over by a friend's car. In a small country town with no vet, all I could do was watch my pet die in my arms. Ten years later, I still nursed anger toward that friend, despite his apologising to me at the time of the accident.

Don't let your karma run over your dogma
A psychiatrist friend of mine once described a case of predatory aggression, where his hospitalised patient spent the entire consultation bargaining for a decent meal. After listening to this, I replied I too once had a case of predatory aggression, but that my patient spent the entire consultation trying to kill me. My patient ended up having to be euthanased, whereas his required further counselling.

Only in the vet world is eugenics still legal.
There are two types of pain; acute and chronic.
Acute pain is a natural teacher of avoidance. It protects the broken limb, the ailing heart, and forces us to rest awhile for healing to occur. Chronic pain, however, is a sign of deeper problems - often unresolved or unsolvable.

When to pain management - first numb, then plumb and finally make dumb.
"I was amazed at when turning twenty five how wise my father had become."

Mark Twain

After suffering a midlife crisis, I went to my family for solace. My father spoke at length about his bad back, his ailing heart and dim sight. Failing him, I went to my mother who commented, 'Well Jim, time to make new dreams.'

Losing the plot is a good reminder that we all are writers of our own fate.
"Depend upon it, Sir, when a man knows he is to be hanged in a fortnight, it concentrates his mind wonderfully."

Samuel Johnson

On the evening before my first exam at uni, I neither studied nor worried about the morning's test. I slept well, rose calmly, had breakfast and topped the class. For the next five years at Uni I tried to repeat that lucky day, only to find myself sleepless and nervous before exams, and getting only average scores for my efforts.

How does one regain the bliss of innocence?
If all diseases were eradicated and every imperfection eliminated from the animal world, what a wonderful utopia it might be.

But even then, there would still be dogs blind to traffic lights and cats who bask perilously on high-rise balconies.
I concede to children what are their inherent gifts; simplicity, clarity, honesty, forthrightness, and an unrelenting belief in the impossible.
If youth but knew what age could do
If time were mere science fiction
If love untold could speak profound
   How golden would be creation
When I first opened my practise, I was not only the vet, but also the practise manager, receptionist, nurse and cleaner. Though at first resenting it, I came to realise the humility of multi-tasking.

The only job where you get to start at the top is digging a hole.
Though frail of age, a vet colleague I knew continued to work part-time as a vet. He said it was a good excuse to get away from his wife, but deep down I knew he missed the contact with people. Until a year before he died, he chatted with his clients, perused the vet journals and told me fascinating vet tales during our lunch breaks.

Death comes to those who wait. Others go out to greet it.
From a quiet verandah overlooking paradise on evening's fall, when the phone has stopped ringing and my patients have been bedded down for the night, I chance to think of other vets I know throughout this majestic red land, who are also looking forward to dinner after a day's work. Such a thought makes me smile.

There is always joy in unity of experience, however subtle.
We work on creatures great and small,  
and all circumstances which befall  
our troubled patients one and all,  
who require us, on beck and call,  
to be Jack of all trades and master of all.
About the author

Jim Euclid was born in the tropics of Nth Qld (Australia). After graduating from the University of Queensland, he worked for 5 years in mixed veterinary practise before undertaking a PhD. He has written and performed numerous plays, a collection of which were published in Trial of the gadfly and other plays. He now lives in Melbourne, where he divides his time between small animal practise and writing.