

ILLINI OF THE YEAR 2008

Dr. Shelly Rubin – IL '68

Ladies and Gentlemen, I have been overwhelmed by excitement from the time I received the phone call regarding this award until this very moment. My excitement has now changed to fear as I stand before you wondering if a mistake had been made! Could it be possible that I am of the same caliber as previous winners such as Roger Ebert, Carol Marin, Sheldon Good, Roger Plummer, Robert Falls and this year's winners Paul Schrage and Caroline Becker as well as many other outstanding Chicago Illini that have received this award? Well, if it was a mistake ... there is no turning back now ... here I am.

I cannot think of a more meaningful award to me then one from my alma mater. A University that I had been honored to attend and proud to promote for the last 40 years 40 years ... wow that is a long time! Most things that old fall apart as you can see by my hair line...I am certainly beginning that process..

Please visit with me to a waiting room with an elderly lady sitting wringing her hands surrounded by her family members. Suddenly the double doors open and a doctor walks through with surgical gown, cap, and mask untied and hanging below his chin. "Mrs. Schneider, great news! It was a large tumor but I am certain I was able to remove it all. The prognosis is excellent". The elderly woman jumps up, hugs the doctor and begins to cry with joy. "Thank you Dr. Johnson I don't know what to say". "You don't have to say anything". She will be out of recovery in a few minutes and you can visit with her for a short time." Suddenly the same double doors open again and a rolling table comes out with Cindy on her side with IV fluids attached. Yes, Cindy is Mrs. Schneider's boxer.

This type of response that Mrs. Schneider showed to her veterinarian is what happens to me all the time and is part of the reason that I am proud to say that I love what I do every day and have loved it for 40- years.

Why did I become a veterinarian? this is the single most asked question of me. My first answer was because I always felt a special attachment to other forms of life. You know that feeling you get when you see a great movie with a happy ending and tears well up in your eyes? That is the feeling I had when I was around animals. My grandfather was responsible in large part for fostering that feeling by taking his “favorite grandson” to everything having to do with animalsfrom zoos to aquariums to showing me the appreciation of wildlife by supplying food and salt licks for the deer at his Wisconsin home. In addition he never kept a caught fish but gently removed the hook and returned it to the lake. While growing up in a household that did not allow dogs or cats, I always had some small alternative such as birds, fish, hamsters, guinea pigs, and yes, even insects. My parents, while very supportive .. after all their son wanted to be a Doctor ... even if it wasn’t a human doctor had me take a career exam at IIT. Questions on this exam like **“would you rather fly a plane or ride a horse?”** Guess what I chose! I am sure it was to convince my parents that my choice was the correct one and my mother could proudly say the words, “My son the veterinarian.”

My college education began at the University of Illinois at Navy Pier. Yes, Harvard on the Lake. Not having a pre-vet program, I studied the pre med classes until I transferred to Champaign/Urbana. From the very first science class I attended at Navy Pier I was introduced to professors that were caring, stimulating, and convinced me that learning the anatomy of the shark would be of some value some day. Transferring after 2 years to Champaign/Urbana with very little money and seemingly surrounded by thousands of students was my first experience at independence. I lived in the 6 pack – in fact Snyder Hall. I had to work to go to school ... so I started working in the cafeteria ... scraping breakfast dishes, no less. I knew I had to reach out if I wanted to be recognized on campus ... which is by the way what I tell every young student that asks me about going to a large University ... put your hand out and tell them you are there the largeness suddenly goes away once you become involved. So I started utilizing my spare time volunteering at WPGU ... the campus radio station, in the basement of Weston Hall pulling records for the nighttime DJ and then I tried visiting the

Daily Illini office as often as I could At the time I was there, Roger Ebert was the editor What a kind, great and helpful person. Did I want to change my career and become a DJ or journalist? Then my mother could say ... “My son the DJ”. Since the radio station and the Daily Illini offices were close to my dorm ... they were easy to get to for me. But it wasn’t until I visited the College of Veterinary Medicine on the other side of campusout in the corn fields and pasture land where the odors from the South Barns often wafted over campus...the place that I had originally came to the U of I for, that my vision was cemented. I met Dr. Erwin Small, who many of you knew; who was responsible for instilling into me an excitement for this profession that I never knew could be possible. Thanks to Dr. Small I was directed to Dr. Norman Levine, parasitologists at the Vet School, who hired me immediately to work for the next 6 years in his department which literally made it possible for me to financially go through school. Bye , Bye to scraping plates, hello to working with feces and parasites.

So here I am before you today because of my U of I professors, my mentors, who instilled the excitement of the profession in me which has lasted for all of these 40 years. And while they can’t be with me tonight I have never forgotten the part they played in my success.

The author Norton Juster said **“But it’s not just learning things that’s important, It’s learning what to do with what you learn.”** And that is exactly what the University had given me. The knowledge of working with what I learned, to develop the person I am today. My quest for knowledge has never stopped. The knowledge base today in veterinary medicine is exponentially greater than it was 40 years ago and to maintain cutting edge leadership, first class continuing education is a necessity.

My veterinary class of 1968 had 54 students with only 5 women. Today the 28 veterinary schools in the United States are able to accept over 100 students of which, guess what, 80% are women. Today there is a national shortage of veterinarians that is putting the food supply at risk and could hinder efforts to prevent the spread of zoonotic diseases, that is, diseases spread from animals to man. According to a recent report by the Bureau of Labor Statistics, veterinary medicine ranked ninth in the list of the 30 fastest-growing occupations.

So what happen to the radio station and the journalism influences? Just a few months out of school and working at the same hospital I subsequently owned here in Chicago, I was driving to work one morning ... I think it was like 5:30 or 6 am And listening to Wally Philips ... the WGN morning guy. He was number one in Chicago Anyway, a call from a listener came in regarding dogs in hot weather. Why not I called the station, spoke to his producer Marilyn and before I knew it I was on the air talking to the biggest radio star in Chicago history. That was just the start ... I talked to Wally just about every week and whenever an animal story or question came up regarding pets he would call me for advice on the air. I felt extremely honored to be able to educate his listeners since I could get my “passion” about responsible pet ownership out to so many people at one time. I was honored to be on Bob Collins show, Roy Leonard, and even Milt Rosenberg. Again, if you are a WGN fan you would know these icons in radio. This led to other radio stations calling ... after all, there was no pet show in Chicago and no media vet at that time that could spread the word. Dave Baum (WIND) invited me to be a regular guest on his show as well as do some TV with him. Writing, what was one of the first pet first aid books, got me to Regis Philbins show in California where I gave some first aid tips on TV with Betty White ... who is a wonderful animal advocate. Today I am fortunate to be a guest on Steve Dales’ Pet Central Show on WGN Radio fairly regularly. All of this had led to the honor of caring for Oprah’s two wonderful **cockers**, Solomon and Sophie. Unfortunately after many years of illness, Sophie passed away yesterday. Again a frequent question to me... what is Oprah like? she is a wonderful compassionate human being whose pets are, as she says “her children with fur”. I have learned over the years that it doesn’t matter who you are, pets are extremely important in our lives. They supply us with endless hours of companionship, give us unconditional love, are there for us when times are tough and when we are sad or happy. All they want in return is some petting, food, medical care and love. And one thing for surethey don’t live long enough!!!

This was how it all began and continues today, even with my lack of hair. Being a veterinarian and becoming part of the family triangle The veterinarian, the pet, and the owners of the pet are what make us so special. We have a tough job as

companion animal veterinarians ... we need to be able to know the physiology of all pets and determine what ails them ... not by what they tell us .. since they can't talk, but by their symptoms and signs that lead us to a diagnosis; and most important: **Veterinarians are the only doctors who can make animals and people feel better.**

Enough about me and how I got here. I am here representing my wonderful profession of veterinary medicine as if you couldn't tell and especially my College of Veterinary Medicine at the Champaign/Urbana campus.

Veterinarians are involved in so many things ... from protecting the health of livestock to working in NASA and conducting experiments in space to learn more about human and animal diseases.

And certainly not last, but perhaps the beginning The American Veterinary Medical Association (AVMA) took the initiative to encourage the American Medical Association (AMA) to adopt a resolution calling for collaboration on a **One Health Initiative**. The two national, medical organizations will work together on areas of mutual medical interest. That's my profession and you can see why I am so proud of it!

In 2006, 68.7 million American households owned pets.

Because our pets have come from working outside to sleeping in our beds there is a demand for advanced veterinary care. We as veterinarians have increased the life span of pets today by utilizing the latest technology to prophylactically prevent disease. By utilizing the latest in cancer technology pets can live longer with a better quality life. And developments in DNA sequencing and mapping have identified very specific disease markers that can eventually be avoided by careful breeding and selection.

Well, from James Harriott days, things have really changed. The books and TV series brought compassionate veterinary medicine to the eyes and hearts of millions. Today we have Animal Planet that continues this process. In fact the program Animal ER which depicts veterinarians in an emergency veterinary

hospital in Colorado is the number one rated Animal Planet program.... **How proud I am to be a veterinarian.**

And one last accomplishment for me is the respect and friendship of my colleagues and clients ----- many of whom are here tonight. And I quote an anonymous person, **“You know you are a leader when people follow you because they want to and not because they have to. “**

So you see I only carry the torch to light the way for those following me. I stand before you humbly accepting this award not only on my behalf but for all of my predecessors who have made my profession of veterinary medicine one of the finest professions in the world and for all of those that have influenced me to be the best I can be by helping our pets who cannot help themselves.

And finally, behind every successful man there is a woman who puts up with all of his idiosyncrasies. I have such a woman behind me, my wife of 43 years, Paulette. I'd also like to recognize my children. Debbie and her husband Gary who are here tonight and my son David and his wife Becky who couldn't make it due to a speaking engagement my son has in China. All of my kids are Illini and hopefully so will my grandchildren be. I thank them for allowing veterinary medicine to be part of our family.

I'd like to leave you with a final quote that I borrowed from our recent National Meeting:

“Dogs rarely bark at parked cars ----- if no one is barking about what you're doing, then you are probably not doing much.”

Thank You