

What Moves You?



For its 2016 Conference, the NAVC asked veterinary professionals to share their stories:

What drives you?
What inspires you?
What moves you?

Throughout the year, *Today's Veterinary Technician* will be publishing veterinary technicians' answers to these questions.

What moves you?

Do you have a story you'd like to share? Send it to us at TVTech_submissions@NAVC.com.

Submissions should be approximately 500 words or less and may be posted on our website or edited for publication in the journal.

Tell us your story!

"If I hadn't taken those leaps of faith and stepped out of my comfort zone, none of those opportunities would have been possible."

—Kathi L. Smith

Knowledge and Discovery



Kathi L. Smith, RVT, VTS (Oncology)
Portland Veterinary Specialists
Portland, Maine

I've never considered myself a writer. It's not something that I'm comfortable doing. So the first time Lynne Johnson-Harris (aka editor in chief of *Today's Veterinary Technician*) asked me to write about what moves me as a veterinary technician, my answer was a resounding "NO." "I'm not a writer," I said. She said, "Please?"

The second time she asked, I said again, "I'm not a writer," and again, she said, "Please?" Well, Lynne isn't just the editor in chief, she's also a great friend to whom I owe a great deal, both personally and professionally. I thought about all the times she has said "yes" to me. So here I am.

Love of Learning

Learning moves me. Each day I seek to learn something new. That wasn't always the case. Many times in my past, I didn't take opportunities that were afforded me, and as the adage goes, you don't regret the things you did, you regret the things you didn't do. As veterinary technicians, we can get into a rut of doing the same thing day after day. If we don't challenge *ourselves*, push *ourselves*, and motivate *ourselves*, boredom, burnout, and regret can set in.

For many years, I did my job and did it well, but I didn't necessarily know the "who, what, when, and whys" of it. Then I had an epiphany. Suddenly, I wanted to know everything. I learned to ask questions—like a 5-year-old. When I started working with my doctor (who is one of the smartest people I know), I asked a million questions. Every day. To the point that she would look at me and say, "Stop talking." I started reading, voraciously. Journals, texts, online searches, you name it, I read it. It was amazing how things started to click in my head. I started looking at my job in a whole new light. It was more exciting, more interesting, and more personally satisfying. I now have my own library at home that focuses on my favorite specialties. My husband says I'm not allowed to go to the book section at conferences without adult supervision. I have learned to delve into diseases like a detective. When a patient comes in with a condition unfamiliar to me, I read about it to understand it better. I have gained confidence through reading and researching. Learning energizes me. It makes me a better technician and employee. I have more to contribute, I know that my doctor and teammates value my expertise, and I am ready to teach and counsel clients.

Love of Challenges

Challenging myself moves me. That wasn't always the case either. Like I said, it's easy to get into a rut. However, after having many years of being a technician under my belt, I felt like I needed to do something. I wasn't quite sure what, but I knew I needed to stoke the old fires. My career was in the "burning ember" phase. I wasn't unhappy with what I was doing or where I was, I just wanted to add to it. So I decided to jump into the deep end of the pool.

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The first 12 feet I jumped into was being part of the formation of the Veterinary Technician Cancer Society. I even went on to become the president. Since that time, I've also been a charter member in the oncology specialty of the AIMVT (Academy of Internal Medicine for Veterinary Technicians), a member of the AIMVT Executive Board, and the president of the academy in 2010. (Apparently my bossiness can be an asset when it's used correctly!)

The next jump was more like a cannonball. I was asked to speak to a group of Canadian technician students on hematology. At that time, the idea of public speaking was not even on my radar. That was for all the other really smart technicians whose sessions I attended at conferences. Well, I had another epiphany: Public speaking could be a HUGE new challenge. Have you ever have words spill out of your mouth that you were powerless to stop? That was exactly the situation. I said "yes."

Still, although I had a pretty good background in hematology and loved it, I was worried that I had to speak for 4 hours. I felt like I'd been asked to solve world peace. I couldn't imagine coming up with 4 hours of information and delivering it in a fashion that would keep someone awake. But once I started researching everything I would want to learn about hematology, things just flowed like honey on my oatmeal. Challenge and learning in one fell swoop! Life was good...until I got to Canada and was informed that the students hadn't had any hematology yet. My 4 hours went really fast, and I did their entire semester on hematology in an afternoon. I have since had the privilege of sharing my love of hematology, cytology, oncology, and infectious diseases with technicians at numerous outstanding national conferences. If I hadn't taken those leaps of faith and stepped out of my comfort zone, none of those opportunities would have been possible.

Love of the Laboratory

Laboratory studies move me. When I first moved to Maine in 1992, my husband worked at IDEXX in customer service and tech support. As they developed new products, the hospital I worked at (and still do) had the opportunity to

test all the latest kits and machines. We were able to give instant feedback and play an integral part in the advancement of diagnostics. To this day, all I have to hear is, "Would you be willing...?" and I get excited because I know eventually something valuable will come from it.

I love cytology. If I could aspirate masses all day and look at them under the microscope, that would be my perfect job. There is nothing more exciting than getting an excellent diagnostic specimen (to me, anyway). I love looking at cellular characteristics. I love trying to evaluate whether it's a benign condition or a malignancy. I love knowing that I have a good-quality sample and that I'm helping the doctor give the client a better idea of the diagnosis and prognosis while they wait for the pathologist's confirmation. I even love the fact that my teammates tease me about my very specific lab procedures. It's okay—I know why I do things the way I do them. It's totally logical. As I have always said, "Do you want an answer or the answer?" I stand firm in my neuroses.

Love of the Profession

I am grateful to be a dinosaur in the world of veterinary medicine. I'm from an age that used Unopette and hemocytometers to do CBCs; thiopental, Metofane, and esophageal stethoscopes for anesthesia and monitoring; and dunk tanks for developing radiographs. I have witnessed incredible advances in the diagnostics and treatment of diseases that are on par with those in human medicine. Through it all, I've never lost my wonder at the field of veterinary medicine.

For example, venipuncture never ceases to amaze me. It totally moves me even after all these years. Especially on really hairy or obese patients, when you can't actually see or feel the vein, but you know where it should be and the needle just slides in like butter. I'd be lying if I didn't admit that I like having people ask me to "hit the vein" that they either haven't been able to get or don't even want to try.

Lastly, knowing that I've made a difference in a patient's life moves me. When a client comes in knowing that their beloved pet will most likely succumb to its disease, I want them to know I care. That I'm able to answer their questions, no matter how trivial they seem or how many times they've asked the same one. When they aren't sure how to handle a specific situation, they know that I'm part of a team made up just for them at that moment and help is always there. That I'm able to help provide the best quality of life for as long as possible and, when the time comes, to help them make that difficult decision to humanely intervene, and know I'm still there for them.

For these reasons and many more, just *being* a veterinary technician moves me. ■