VetRap is an annual newsletter produced by the Students of the Canadian Veterinary Medical Association (SCVMA) Committee and distributed to all members of the SCVMA.
NEW CVMA INITIATIVES TO SUPPORT RECENT VETERINARY GRADUATES

The Canadian Veterinary Medical Association (CVMA) is committed to supporting recent veterinary graduates while they transition into their new career. The CVMA is continuously strategizing and identifying resources to help recent graduates overcome the challenges they may face. Below are some of CVMA’s recent initiatives.

CVMA MEMBERSHIP DUES REDUCTIONS FOR RECENT GRADUATES

Members who maintain uninterrupted membership after graduation throughout a consecutive three-year period are eligible for a tiered annual membership dues (AMD) reduction as follows:

- **Year of graduation**: Complimentary half-year membership (July-December)
- **Year 1 after graduation**: 75% reduction of the regular AMD plus a complimentary C.E. voucher for the CVMA Convention
- **Year 2 after graduation**: 50% reduction of the regular AMD
- **Year 3 after graduation**: 25% reduction of the regular AMD

CVMA’S MENTORING PROGRAM

Veterinary graduates face difficult challenges while starting their new career. Gaining hands-on experience, performing surgeries, diagnosing correctly and providing proper patient treatment are just some of these challenges. Coupled with that is the lack of experience and confidence interacting and communicating with clients and colleagues.

To help recent graduates settle into professional life and overcome these challenges, CVMA created the CVMA Mentoring Program which connects CVMA members who want to provide support to final year DVM students, recently graduated members and veterinarians in their early career.

The CVMA has mentors waiting for you. To learn more about the CVMA Mentoring Program and to find out how to register as a mentor or a mentee, please visit the CVMA Mentoring Program section under the Practice & Economics tab in the CVMA website (canadianveterinarians.net).

EARLY CAREER DVM RESOURCE HUB

Starting your new career as a veterinarian is a very exciting and challenging time of your life. To help early career DVMs on their path to a successful career, the CVMA has created a dedicated section of the website which contains resources compiled specifically with your needs in mind. To access these resources, please visit canadianveterinarians.net/early-career-dvm-resource-hub.

VETERINARIAN HEALTH AND WELLNESS RESOURCES

There has been a wealth of discussion on the topic of wellness in veterinary medicine over the past few years and it is important that we keep this issue at the forefront. The CVMA created a new section on the CVMA website called the Veterinarian Health and Wellness Resources. There you will find pertinent resources and information from numerous sources to help support the personal well-being of veterinarians and veterinary students, with a focus on education, awareness and prevention. To access these resources, please visit canadianveterinarians.net/veterinarian-health-and-wellness-resources.
As vet students, we are all looking for where we fit and what kind of medicine we would like to practice. Some have known their whole lives and others will search for their best fit long into their practicing years. After years of small animal experience, I figured out where I wanted to apply my future veterinary skills the year before I started at the Atlantic Veterinary College (AVC). I decided to go in a different direction and work with wildlife in zoos, despite the controversy surrounding them. After my first year, in an attempt to gain any sort of wildlife experience, I searched for a summer internship and unexpectedly ended up in the most beautiful American mountain range working with the most elegant creatures: birds.

My official title was “veterinary extern” at the Teton Raptor Center (TRC). The TRC consists of a few historic barns nestled in a small town against the base of the Grand Teton mountain range. From far, you wouldn’t know it is a dedicated bird organization until you see a yellow diamond on the driveway saying, “Caution, Look for Hawks and Owls.” After you park you are generally greeted by at least one eagle, a goshawk and either an owl or a red-tailed hawk on the path to the main office which is located in an old, converted horse barn. In the western backdrop are beautiful mountain peaks with two small, parallel barns contrasted by open fields to the east. I spent most of summer rehabbing injured raptors in one of these barns.

Upon arrival, I didn’t know much about birds aside from what we learned in school. That quickly changed as their rehab coordinator and rehab intern immediately put me to work. Within days, I learned how to prepare food, clean mews and handle some magnificent birds, such as red-tailed hawks, great horned owls and American kestrels. Within weeks, I was doing physical exams, radiographs, fecal and blood smears, and learned how to give fluids and medications to raptors who want to talon anything that moves. I learned how to write case studies and protocols and wrote one for completing CBCs by hand for a comparison project between species. Our senior avian educator also taught me how to speak about and properly hold our birds for their education programs. Within a month, I felt like I had a new family and a new passion.

Each day was something new. I didn’t mind being on-call and going on rescues became an exciting adventure. Some days were spent quietly in the clinic and others I hiked through the forests of Idaho searching in vain for an injured raptor that didn’t want to be found. No matter whether the hotline was silent or full of messages, I spent every day trying to help these amazing, specialized birds. I must admit my favorite days were seeing Dr. Heather Carleton at the Jackson Animal Hospital. Participating in and watching difficult veterinary procedures such as resetting wings and legs, debride and closing wounds and putting joints back into place on animals with delicate skeletal systems and easily damaged feathers really showed me how skillful veterinarians can be.

Eventually, I worked for all three branches of the TRC; education, rehab and research. I was most surprised by how much I enjoyed the research. My first project was bald eagle banding which consists of one person climbing into a tree to get the bird, another person banding it and another person taking measurements and drawing blood for DNA testing. It was a unique and exciting experience! From there, in an effort to involve me in all the facets of the TRC, I began helping the song bird banding team twice weekly and learned how to extract birds, process them and band them according to Monitoring Avian Productivity and Survivorship (MAPS) protocol. I even wandered around the woods looking for great gray owl fledglings for a day! After eight months sequestered on a Canadian island and studying indoors, there is nothing better than days spent outside in the majestic Tetons with great people and beautiful birds.

Aside from the sunshine and seeing my dad all summer, as a veterinary student, my summer experience was invaluable. Now I feel very comfortable handling and treating a variety of injuries in large raptors but I also feel comfortable handling small birds too. I’ll never be a veterinarian who turns away someone’s injured or sick budgie. Whether treating an injured wing, educating people or banding birds in order to look at their survivorship, I was always learning and being inspired by the many graceful birds. Thank-you to the passionate staff at the TRC and the wild and captive birds of Wyoming. I’ll always remember my floats on the river, the gorgeous view of the Grand Tetons and my amazing summer that has without doubt greatly benefitted my veterinary career.

PICTURE CAPTIONS:
- View of the Grand Teton Mountain Range from The Science School in Kelly, WY. This was one of our MAPS banding sites.
- Me with Mendel. He was a hybrid between a Vermiculated Eagle Owl and a South African Spotted Eagle Owl.
- A Northern Flicker.
OUR FIRST INTERNATIONAL INTERNSHIP ADVENTURE

Before participating in our first international internship, two of my friends and I just finished our fourth-year at the Faculté de médecine vétérinaire (FMV) and our theoretical class journey. We were excited to start our fifth-year but a little afraid of what was in store for us! We finished our practical work in small animal surgery and badly wanted to practice our skills. We always wanted to do an international internship, spaying dogs and cats somewhere south but we never thought Belize would be the best and worst classroom imaginable!

We wanted to go on an adventure with an organization that could provide good educational support, mentor us and help us with language barriers. When we met Marie-Josée Simard, one of the founders of Fondation Aide Vétérinaire Internationale (FAVI) and found out they were leaving for Belize at the beginning of July, we knew it was perfect for us. Like many people, we had little to no idea where this small country was, nor what we were going to discover there!

We fundraised, which slightly reduced the trip cost and then we booked our flights in June and were ready to go! We flew over Canada and the United States and after waiting for our transit in Miami and after a few hours into our last flight, we had our first views of Belize. We saw the green and blue colours of the ocean, the barrier reefs, the lush forest and the small villages connected by little trails and roads. It was mesmerizing and absolutely beautiful.

Belize is on the eastern coast of Central America, and fortunately for us, it’s the only country in Central America whose official language is English – there are a lot of Spanish-speaking people in the North, since it is right next to Mexico. We later discovered that even though English is the first language, it is mostly Kriol English, which isn’t always easy to understand. The population of Belize is about 300,000 people, all from different backgrounds and ethnic cultures. We visited two different communities. The first one was in the North, in Sarteneja, where the Mestizos, the descendants of a Spanish community, were living. The other one, more south-eastern, was Hopkins, where the population was mainly the Mayas, the Creoles, and the Garifuna people.

The heat and humidity were intense as we placed our feet on the landing strip. We picked up our luggage and were ready to go, or so we thought! If you’re planning to travel and do international veterinary medicine, listen to this piece of important advice: NOTHING goes according to plan! Customs seized our suitcases containing our medicine and other essential equipment for surgeries. After nearly two hours of arguing with customs, we finally had our supplies back and were ready. Time to hit the road, first stop: Sarteneja!

After a good and well-deserved night’s sleep, we were ready to start the surgeries. When we arrived at the front of the community centre, there were a lot of people waiting for us. It was not the first time that the FAVI was in Belize; the foundation tries to go at least twice a year in order to significantly impact the small community. We had a pre-op table, another one for the surgery and a big tarp on the ground for the post-op. A good set-up you would think, however, the whole surgery is under injectable anesthetic; no gas,
no surveillance, only antagonistic drugs and a lot of confidence in our dosage. The surgical fields are surgical rags with a hole in the middle, all the instruments are chemically sterilized, all the windows are open, kids running around, sweat on our foreheads, dogs barking everywhere; it was quite the shock! Most of the population in the north speaks Spanish but fortunately, we had a few voluntary Canadian expatriates who helped and hosted us and did the medical and surgical appointments. We only had a couple of drugs but what most people wanted was ivermectin and vitamins. We had really cool medical cases that are rarely seen in Canada; canine transmissible venereal tumor (CTVT), Cuterebra and tick infestations (more like tick plague) and A LOT of worms! One of the craziest cases was a pregnant female dog with a foetus outside of the uterus, completely adhered to the bladder, intestines and other organs. Although it was an amazing surgery, it took a lot of time and we had to stop all other surgeries. How we wished to have had an ultrasound before we started this surgery!

Even with all the medical wonders, what really made this trip were the people we met. What remains in our memories are the locals that helped us during our duty days; the curious kids and teenagers and their parents, who always wanted to cook and bring us food and who wanted to share every part of their culture with us.

After a few days, we left this wonderful community and travelled south to Hopkins where the environment was more familiar. We were working at the Hopkins Belize Humane Society, a village shelter already in place. There, we met three students from Guelph who were doing an internship. All seven of us worked together on various cases, like a sick rabbit and parrot. We also took care of a litter of adorable puppies whose mother died.

With the Humane Society, we tried to do “Trap, Neuter, Return” (TNR). TNR was good and bad because many of our catches were already neutered, which was good but meant less practice for us; not good. We also caught a few possums that we quickly released in the wild!

One of our greatest encounters was with a family that sold crafts and souvenirs in the street. They adopted two of the orphaned puppies that we took care of. When we met the kids, they were so proud to show us their dogs. The relationship between pets and humans is different there from what we know. Dogs and cats usually go outside without a leash or identification and wander all day before coming back for food at night. But they care about them so much and animals are a really important part of their family.

This was an eye-opening trip for all of us. We discovered new ways of living, met amazing people, and helped two communities. We practiced a lot of technical skills that are not always taught in school and we will never be afraid of a little bleeding again, nor a tick in an ear. More importantly, we learned a lot about ourselves, each other and our relationship with pets. As a practicing vet now, I highly recommend an international internship to anyone in vet school. You’ll have the time of your life!
One of the best experiences I’ve had as a veterinary student has been participating in Straw Day, an annual event held at the Chippewas of Kettle and Stony Point First Nation (KSPFN). Straw Day was started in 2007 by Alison Bressette, who grew up on the reserve and is the founder of the Aboriginal Community and Animal Advocacy Connection. At the first Straw Day, Alison distributed 10 bales of straw out of her hatchback in the community centre parking lot, waving people in and explaining that the straw was to help keep their dogs warm through the cold winter months. This created space for further discussion about animal welfare; for example, how most domestic dog breeds today lack the thick fur coat of dogs traditionally kept by Indigenous peoples in Canada as sled dogs, protectors, and hunting companions. “It was really a part of awareness,” explains Alison, “bringing awareness and a way of practical teaching, instead of giving somebody some literature, saying, ‘you should do this and this and this.’ It’s a really gentle, respectful way of just teaching somebody something. Because if you haven’t necessarily been taught or raised or learned these things about animals, how are you to know?” The event has grown each year, with over 75 bales distributed in 2015 as well as pet food, cat and dog shelters, and accessories (collars, leashes, beds, and toys). Although this may seem like a simple concept, there is something very special about Straw Day, and the significance of this event extends far beyond animal welfare.

In 2011, Alison met Danielle Boes, then president of the Community Outreach Program (COP) at the Ontario Veterinary College (OVC), beginning a partnership between the COP and the Chippewas of Kettle and Stony Point First Nation. Every year since then, OVC students have contributed their veterinary knowledge to Straw Day by speaking with community members about topics including heartworm, spaying/neutering, pet housing, and bite prevention. These issues had been identified as important in this community, where heartworm prevalence was high, many pets were kept outdoors year-round, and animal bites were a safety concern, particularly for small children. Since 2012, the COP has also assisted with organizing and providing volunteers for a spring pet wellness clinic which brings a team of veterinarians to the reserve, offering physical exams, heartworm testing, vaccines, deworming and spay/neuter referrals.

Alison emphasizes how important it is that veterinary professionals share information with First Nations people as they would with any client, empowering them to make informed decisions about the care of their pets, and helping to build the community’s capacity to care for its animals. She explains, “The awareness part of just the Straw Day alone has been huge in the respect that community members, you find now, are more openly discussing, talking, asking questions about animals.” At Straw Day, I was struck by the pride that community members have in their pets and their desire to provide the best care possible for them, despite economic and logistic barriers (for example, many community members do not own a vehicle, there is no public transit, and the nearest veterinary clinic is a 20-minute drive away). When trust is fostered and information is shared in a respectful manner, it becomes clear that wellness care, spaying and neutering, and heartworm prevention are all examples of things that community members very much want for their animals but previously did not have access to due to a lack of information, resources, services, and transportation.

A big part of the success of this partnership is the relationship-building that occurs when the club returns to the community on a regular basis to help out with Straw Day and the wellness clinic. “The fact that the club is consistent with going every year and showing our dedication to the community is key,” explains COP President Shannon Finn, “It’s awesome when people come back
annually and we get to see familiar faces." Alison remembers that when students began visiting the reserve in 2011, there was initially some apprehension among community members; however, over the years she has observed these barriers starting to break down in an atmosphere of mutual respect, partnership, and trust. One of the best things about initiatives like Straw Day is that students volunteer right alongside community members, with each person contributing their own skills and knowledge.

Alison expressed the deeper meaning that all of these changes have for her: "To me, it’s a part of Truth and Reconciliation – building bridges between people, where there’s been segregation." Children and families are very welcome at Straw Day, and it’s especially significant that parents come to this event because of the importance of inter-generational teaching among First Nations people. Alison explains, “Some bring their kids, but then what they do is they take everything home and then they teach their children instead of, let’s say, me going into the school once a year and trying to teach children about animal welfare. It’s better coming from the parents. With residential school, children were taken from their homes, as early as five years old, sometimes babies. They may have grown up their whole life and they didn’t have the chance to be taught by their parents, in particular, empathy and compassion. Because what they ended up experiencing was the opposite of empathy and compassion. And so this is another way that parents teach children empathy and compassion towards something outside of themselves. And, in turn, that actually develops into other areas of their lives. So Straw Day isn’t as simple as bringing straw; there’s a huge, bigger picture around it.”

The COP is working to better understand this bigger picture and the role that we, as veterinary students, can play within it. Our First Nations Committee leader, Amy Weber, has been working with the University of Guelph’s Aboriginal Resource Centre, arranging informative discussions to enhance our knowledge of First Nations people and cultures. Our partnership with KSPFN has continued to grow this past year as the COP has taken on new initiatives with the community. In the fall of 2015, we hosted our first annual doghouse building competition at the OVC (sponsored by Purina). Students built and decorated 8 beautiful doghouses, which were later distributed to families with dogs on the reserve. Last December, the club collaborated with KSPFN to raise funds for the spring pet wellness clinic, selling baked goods prepared by club members alongside beautiful artwork and crafts handmade by Alison.

There is so much work still to be done, and although every community is different and there is no one-size-fits all approach to veterinary outreach, I believe that a great deal can be learned from this partnership. Dr. Shane Bateman, faculty advisor for the COP, explains, “It’s critical to begin this work from the right place in your heart – from a place of respect, curiosity, admiration, and a willingness to learn. It’s about checking your biases about what it means to live in these communities, and leaving them at the door.” I asked Alison what advice she had for veterinarians and veterinary students interested in working with First Nations communities. She emphasized how important it is that this work grows out from within the community itself, and in the direction that the community wants it to go. It is very helpful to start by finding someone within the community that you can partner with, whether it’s an individual, a local organization, or community health representatives. Alison explained how introducing oneself properly within the etiquette of First Nations communities means going before Chief and Council, explaining who you are, what you are proposing, and what your long-term goals are: “Seek out the community health reps, other organizations, properly introduce yourself to Chief and Council – that is a huge, huge part, and saying that we’re here to develop a relationship and partnership, not ‘we’re coming in, and this is the way that you’re going to do it, and you better do it the way that we think it should be done.’” In closing, I think that these words from Alison are relevant to anyone looking to make a difference in the world: “Don’t let people stand alone. When somebody is there, trying to do something, help be that support. I actually have that now, and I’m so grateful for that.”
During the past school year, I joined forces with four amazing classmates, Aaron Mooi, Sacha Malkowski, Jenny Pelchat, and Julia Wyatt, to fundraise for a Global Vets trip to India. Global Vets is a Western College of Veterinary Medicine (WCVM) student-run initiative that is dedicated to granting its members the opportunity to utilize and expand their veterinary training through providing aid around the world. Our trip was titled «One Health Initiative in Southern India: participating to enhance public health, productivity, and animal welfare through veterinary medicine practices.» It was a big goal, but we fundraised tirelessly every week from the beginning of October until the end of April. We ran various events, including bottle drives, bowling nights, bake sales and a coffee table at the WCVM. We also applied for many grants and scholarships and were grateful to receive support from the WCVM, University of Saskatchewan, and the Shastri Indo-Canadian Institute. By May 5, 2016, we were packed up and on our way to Southern India!

Our first stop was a town named Ooty in Tamil Nadu, where we participated in the Worldwide Veterinary Services (WVS) International Training Center’s Animal Birth Control Clinic. This WVS clinic plays a large part in «Mission Rabies» by controlling the local free-roaming dog population. According to the World Health Organization, 36 per cent of the world’s yearly rabies deaths in humans occur in India, which is largely due to the amount of contact between people and infected dogs. We recognized this as an important One Health concern as it is affecting public health and animal welfare. At the International Training Center, we learned that the most economical way to control rabies transmission was to vaccinate and neuter as many free-roaming dogs as possible. During our first 12 days in India, we were able to make use of and expand on our surgical skills as our team successfully sterilized and vaccinated 90 dogs. This trip provided an ideal opportunity to implement and understand the impact of the One Health Concept that the WCVM strongly encourages. I was inspired by the WVS’s efforts and impressed by the amount of research they have done to maintain a sustainable strategy in reaching their goal of eradicating rabies in the area. This part of the trip was my favorite because I developed both my surgical and analytical skills as a veterinary student.

The next week, we remained with the WVS to participate in a Mobile Donkey Clinic. This took place in many small villages around Mettupalayam, where working donkeys are commonly used. Many donkey owners have misinformed «well-intentions» in terms of caring for their donkeys. For example, bloodletting and branding are two methods of care that are still believed to be therapeutic. These procedures are done with the best intentions towards the donkey, but, unfortunately, all of them are painful and typically lead to infection and more harm to the animal than good. During this week, we successfully vaccinated and dewormed 167 donkeys while also educating their owners on proper animal welfare practices. Additionally, we clipped, cleaned, and treated various acute trauma wounds and chronic injuries. Our team was grateful to engage in first-hand experiences with a local veterinarian who provided a high standard of care with minimal technology. We believe that this Mobile Donkey Clinic not only improved the donkey’s welfare, but also served to increase productivity for their owners.

After the Mobile Donkey Clinic, we worked with the «India Project for Animals and Nature» to provide free veterinary care to the local Masinagudi citizens. For a week, we provided many services, including treatment of various wounds, gastrointestinal cases, a “Mission Rabies” vaccination drive, and sterilization surgeries. Additionally we got the opportunity to assist in complex surgeries, such as a scapulectomy on a dog who had an old, dislocated humerus injury. For many of us, this was a life-changing week where we could not have asked for a more hands-on experience.
We then travelled out of Tamil Nadu to the beautiful state of Kerala where we visited the Kerala Veterinary and Animal Science University (KVASU) located outside of Kelpetta. During our short stay, we got to experience what being a veterinary student in India is like. We were very impressed by their beautiful campus found within a mountain range and their modern clinical equipment. I will admit that we were surprised how similar their curriculum and research was to ours in Canada. This part of our trip proved to be very important as creating international contacts is becoming crucial in the world we live in today, especially in the medical field. We were grateful to the students and professors of the KVASU for allowing us to build a professional relationship and gain a new perspective of international research and academia and help us to realize this profession’s diversity.

The last week of our trip, we travelled north to Jaipur, Rajasthan to work with «Volunteering with India» at their elephant reserve while staying with a host family. The working elephant is controversial but the government of Rajasthan recognizes that this is many people’s only source of income so they reserved 30 hectares of land specifically for elephant housing and care facilities. Viewpoint aside, these animals deserve the best care possible. The majority of the work consisted of aiding local people with the daily maintenance and healthcare of working elephants (such as feeding, watering, and bathing). While spending time with the elephants, we learned more about their behaviour and welfare concerns. The «Volunteering with India» team also allowed us some time away from the animals to volunteer at a women’s shelter and children’s school. I feel that during this last week of our trip, we got to meet more people and truly experience India’s unique culture.

We may not have had time away from our busy work schedules to have the traditional tourist experience in India, but I wouldn’t have changed a thing. If I wasn’t involved in this Global Vets trip I wouldn’t have found myself roaming the streets of a tiny Indian village looking for free-roaming dogs or trekking my way through a coconut farm vaccinating donkeys. To the people asking, «Is it worth all the time fundraising throughout the year when I should be studying instead?» I would say yes, it absolutely is. Working alongside local veterinarians from India gave us a perspective of the profession that we would otherwise never have been exposed to in Canada. I also believe that some of the skills I developed in India and that we need as future veterinarians cannot be taught in a classroom. As a group, I can confidently say that this project greatly contributed to our future careers as veterinarians while simultaneously benefiting the animals and people of India.
I set out to write this article about the exhilaration that comes from applying years of classroom knowledge to actual cases in final year. I had pictures to include of a cosmetic dehorn I did during my first rotation in the real world – a task I only did once on one side of a dead head. I suggested using meloxicam in a horse because I remembered it from a research presentation given by the class ahead of me. I experienced broken calf legs, putting catheters in the auricular arteries of white-tailed deer and standing equine castrations galore. I was now immersed in real veterinary medicine! But what became apparent as my fingertips hit the keyboard was that something more than blood, guts, and surgical glory was moving me to write. I sank into my chair, leaned my head back, and sat idly as the incomprehensibly overwhelming impression of my entire experience in vet school washed over me.

The first reverie was the out of place sensation I felt heading into fourth year. At the University of Calgary – Faculty of Veterinary Medicine (UCVM), we do our clinical rotations at various practices, rather than a teaching hospital, which meant that our class went from sitting within arm’s reach to being scattered throughout practices in Alberta, British Columbia, and beyond. In the blink of an eye, I was separated from this tightly knit family; formed through years of good times and bad – a steadfast and impermeable Red Rover team. It was rare to go a day without being together. I never imagined how foreign it would be to abandon the mundane routine of walking into class and seeing every face. I was so anxious to fly the coop; I couldn’t wait to set my skills free on the world of practical veterinary medicine with unwavering resolve. But once I’d escaped the nest, and settled into my new reality, I found that the muted moments – the ten-minute lull in the twelve-hour mixed practice work day, or the brief gaps in my excess of confidence where I lay in a pool of utter ineptitude – were increasingly difficult. Those quiet spells amplified something that had been silenced by my enthusiasm for fourth year. I never imagined how foreign it would be to abandon the mundane routine of walking into class and seeing every face. I was so anxious to fly the coop; I couldn’t wait to set my skills free on the world of practical veterinary medicine with unwavering resolve. But once I’d escaped the nest, and settled into my new reality, I found that the muted moments – the ten-minute lull in the twelve-hour mixed practice work day, or the brief gaps in my excess of confidence where I lay in a pool of utter ineptitude – were increasingly difficult. Those quiet spells amplified something that had been silenced by my enthusiasm for fourth year. I never imagined how foreign it would be to abandon the mundane routine of walking into class and seeing every face. I was so anxious to fly the coop; I couldn’t wait to set my skills free on the world of practical veterinary medicine with unwavering resolve. But once I’d escaped the nest, and settled into my new reality, I found that the muted moments – the ten-minute lull in the twelve-hour mixed practice work day, or the brief gaps in my excess of confidence where I lay in a pool of utter ineptitude – were increasingly difficult. Those quiet spells amplified something that had been silenced by my enthusiasm for fourth year. I never imagined how foreign it would be to abandon the mundane routine of walking into class and seeing every face. I was so anxious to fly the coop; I couldn’t wait to set my skills free on the world of practical veterinary medicine with unwavering resolve. But once I’d escaped the nest, and settled into my new reality, I found that the muted moments – the ten-minute lull in the twelve-hour mixed practice work day, or the brief gaps in my excess of confidence where I lay in a pool of utter ineptitude – were increasingly difficult.

I started wondering what my class of 2017 littermates were up to, so I reached out with stories of the raw rural practice medicine I was immersed in, only to find that my texts were a holler into an empty cave. It was nothing like the daily face-to-face conversations we had shared up until just weeks ago. A few hours would pass and all that would trickle in would be the odd “cool!” and “sweet!” – it was like trying to tell the story of a half-remembered dream and realizing that it just isn’t as profound if no one is there to share it with you. Later in the summer, I wandered the halls of WCVM with some professors, and smiled to myself as they hurried to find their graduation pictures on the wall. Decades out of those halls, and they still point to each classmate and gleefully tell stories of the times they shared in vet school. They grin as they ponder aloud, “I wonder what he’s up to today.”

Throughout our years in academia, we continuously hear the voices of those in years ahead of us saying, “Enjoy it while it lasts,” and though I’m sure hearing something similar from me will fall on many deaf ears, I can find some solace in knowing that I tried. I’m only months out of the classroom, and I already know that those people to your left and right are to be cherished. It’s more than commiseration when a glassy-eyed gaze is shared in a tedious lecture. It’s more than sympathy when you witness a classmate break down in tears as they crumble under the weight of trying to balance school, work, and family, and personal time. It’s more than the silence shared when innately restless bodies finally relax over a beer after a final exam. It has become overwhelmingly obvious that four years of this journey is more than enough time for multiple people to touch your life and leave their fingerprints on your heart.

During my time at UCVM, I’ve stretched my cognitive capacity and my comfort level to heights I never knew possible, not only with the curriculum, but also with my personal connections. Going to school to be a part of this profession, though emotionally and physically draining at times, has produced this marvellously distinct tapestry of shared goals, struggles, and inside jokes. I wouldn’t give up these years for the world, and I know the relationships I’ve cultivated will carry me through the rest of my days.