VETERINARIAN ROUTINELY WENT BEYOND THE CALL OF DUTY

Doc Eames: An old-time vet

Henry P. Eames was the last of the old-time veterinarians in the Manchester area. He was a special personality in a special era. His memory persists as a pleasant and positive influence on the people whose lives he touched. And he touched a lot of lives.

One time I told Doc a sad story about a good vet I know who actually passed away after falling from his horse on his first call in his own home community where he had

from Missouri, learned to his sorrow that in Michigan, "lun- ching" an animal has only to do with its future reproduction, not

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its future life — or absence thereon.

Doc said that, like my vet friend, he was not only devastat
ted by his terrible mistake, but also completely humiliated. He felt like a failure in front of the clients and his colleagues. He told me that he had learned from this experience and was determined to improve his skills.

Lorrie watching and yelling advice, but this time, he didn't insist. Maybe he as a vet to an entire animal — not just a horse that had been kicked by a horse that dog, and who needed special medical attention for the pain. He said he was now keeping the animal virtually immobile and couldn't even think of coming. He also said they were able to do the right thing. But he reminded me that if I had the right tools to do the work, he would have had to work with the vet to cut the hole in the side right into the lungs or stomach for the betterment of the horse.

This was a horrible prospect that I had read about as a 4-H kid, and I was very glad I had never had to experience it. But I was glad I had never had to experience it. But I was glad I was able to call the vet and didn't have to do it myself.

As I was about to leave, Lorrie said goodbye and went back to the barn for her next job.

The next morning early, Lorrie was surprised to see her car drive into the barn lot. She went out and said, "I didn't know you were coming back this morning."

He then said Doc a bit sheepishly, "I didn't think the mare would be all right. But I was glad you were here."

Of course he was exactly right. Lorrie appreciated his readiness and ability to help her, and was grateful.

The story of Doc Eames is one of the many that make up the history of Manchester. It's a story of how a man, his skills, and his dedication to his patients, can make a difference in the lives of the people around him.
Dad's work on my horses. The thumb looked awful. It had swollen immensely and the sausage like portions that the unfortunate physician had tried to stitch together had swollen outward and split, such that the entire wound looked as though it had never been sewn together at all. I shoved the old bandage back down over the thumb, and went outside to help Doc.

He had brought with him that day a brand-new graduate of his alma mater, Michigan State University. She was a tall young lady with a confident expression on her face. On the way out to deal with the horses, Doc saw the bandage and asked me what I had done to my thumb. I explained, pulling the bandage off to show exactly what I was talking about.

Doc looked at the wound in alarm, and said, “Good grief, Dick, you’re not going to lose that thumb, are you?”

I shrank from the suggestion, quickly slid the bandage back on, and said, “Don’t even mention it!”

We finished the horses, and Doc returned to his car and started putting away his gear with the new young vet at his side. Suddenly, Doc straightened up out of the back seat of the car, stared at me a moment, and said, “Hey, I know exactly what you need for that thumb!”

Somewhat taken aback, I murmured uncertainly, “You ... do?”

He said emphatically, “Yes I do!” And he named to the lady vet some medicine I had never heard of.

She stared at him in horror, her mouth open and visions of lawsuits dancing all over her expression. But he stuck his face right at her and insisted, “That would work, wouldn’t it?”

She reddened and turned away, saying something soft and vague under her breath. Doc wasn’t having that. He scurried around in front of her and stepped right up to her face, saying from a few inches away, “That would work, wouldn’t it?”

She tried to turn away again.

Her face was crimson. She stammered and twitched, and finally muttered something like, “Yes ... maybe ... I suppose ...”

Satisfied, Doc whirled in my direction. “Have you got a clean jar?”

I said I thought I could find one, and he said, “Bring it!”

I did, and Doc reached down into the darkness of the back seat of his sedan and with his left hand dipped something messy out of a large container. Coming back out he grabbed the jar from me and rubbed his hand across its top edge, leaving a large and nasty smear of some kind of yellow, greasy stuff dangling inside the top edge of the jar.

Handing the jar back to me he said earnestly, “Keep a lot of that all over your thumb and it’ll be well before you know it.”

I thanked him and stared at the ugly mess in the jar as they drove away. I went into the kitchen and stared at it some more. How could I find out about this stuff? I sure couldn’t ask my doctor. Did I dare use it, even if Doc said I should?

Eventually I held the jar up to my nose and sniffed. Something familiar went gliding up my nostrils, and I paused in amazement. I said out loud, “Hey, I know what this is!”

And I did. It was Bag Balm, the same wondrous ointment I had used on the udders of the cows I milked by hand growing up in Illinois 30 years before and hadn’t encountered since. I took off my bandage straightaway and smeared that wonderful stuff all over my throbbing thumb. In seconds, the thumb started losing its painfulness.

I kept the stuff on it until the swelling went down and that big welt wound began to disappear. Then I made a mistake. I went on another trip, and, thinking my wound was healed, I left the ugly jar of Bag Balm at home. The thumb swelled up and “burst” again. I could scarcely wait to bathe it once more in that marvelous soothing Bag Balm. I did that, and the thumb got well, just as Doc said it would.

I told Lorrie about all of this when it happened, of course, and swore her to secrecy, explaining that in this litigious age, someone might take umbrage at learning that Doc was not restricting his doctoring to the four-legged kind of mammal. She understood. So she told only one friend, the widow of one of my colleagues at the University of Michigan.

Unfortunately, this widow’s daughter had married a local farmer. The widow told only the daughter, the daughter only told the farmer-husband, and the farmer-husband told only one other farmer. Inevitably, and fairly soon, I started hearing farmers and their wives saying to me behind sly smiles, “Hey, Dick; I hear Doc Eames is treating humans now! You know anything about that?”

When I related this story to Doc’s wife, Jean, recently, she laughed and told me about a fisherman who rang their doorbell one cold, rainy Sunday morning with a fish hook stuck right through the lower part of his nose. She said he stood there in the door and the little bit of fishing line still stuck on the hook swung out and back in with every breath he took. Doc fixed him up, too.

He was an old-time vet, that’s all. Regardless of the wonderful things modern vets might be able to accomplish with all the advances in technology, you’d best not count on them coming through in the particular ways Doc did in these stories.

There won’t be any more like Henry P. Eames. And that’s just the way it is.

- Richard D. Alexander