

Catherine the great  
by Eileen Geeson

Sometimes the simple act of loving a pet can lead us to tread into the deepest and most controversial unknown territory imaginable.

When two of Catherine O'Driscoll's canine friends died at a very young age, she wondered why. This seemingly candid question led to years of complex soul searching and research into what was going wrong to the detriment of our animals.

Catherine founded Canine Health Concern following the death of her dogs, and has spent the last 14 years searching for ways to help us improve our dogs health, open the eyes of the veterinary profession to greater understanding and a more flexible viewpoint, and to bring about a truer and more balanced relationship between veterinarians and people who care for dogs.

The CHC campaign may have been initiated out of grief, and the need for knowledge and understanding, but it has grown into a unique foundation on its own merits and truths without any help from governing bodies. It has been blessed by the contribution of vets and scientists that are willing to share their valuable learning with like-minded people that believe there is more to health than administering a few potentially harmful drugs, or vaccines.

Although Catherine may be an established thorn in the side to some vets who walk around with their heads in the sand, or do not have the individualism to seek out more than they learn in training school, she does stress that she is no substitute for any professional veterinary treatment, and that the health of the dog requires thought and action on other elements such as food, drugs, stress, etc. and that the support of a skilled vet is mandatory for the health of animals. Catherine does, however, suggest that the greatest benefit will be achieved if we choose our vet with care, to enable us to work alongside them.

I asked Catherine if she would share some of her experiences with us, and talk about the foundation that is Canine Health Concern.

'It began on the 2<sup>nd</sup> September 1991, when a four-year old Golden Retriever called Oliver died. Had he been a human child, he would have had a chemistry set and conkers in his pockets. He was full of life and happiness. He was the light of my life, and his sudden death plunged me into deep grief. I asked every vet I met for the next two years why he had died. No one was able to tell me why a seemingly healthy young dog should suddenly become paralysed in his rear legs and die. Then I met a homoeopathic vet who told me that, in his opinion, Oliver had suffered a classic vaccine reaction.' Catherine told me.

'At the same time, I was sent a scientific paper by a vet and researcher called Jean W Dodds, and the paper indicated, also, that Oliver had suffered a vaccine reaction. By now, Ollie's littermate, Prudence, had been diagnosed with leukaemia, and Dr Dodds' paper indicated that this, too, could have been caused by a vaccine. My other dogs were also in trouble: Chappie had thyroid disease, Sophie had crippling arthritis, Gwinnie had allergies, and Samson was diagnosed with autoimmune disease. All of these are tied, scientifically, to vaccine damage.

There was also a man in America, who believed that pet food was, in effect, fast food, or junk food for dogs, had sent me an article. He claimed that pet food could not promote health. He made perfect sense to me. So I asked another question about pet food and vaccines . . . 'Why had nobody told me?' I had been a 'responsible' dog owner. I did everything my vet told me to do, which included annual shots and 'complete and balanced' pet food. Yet my dogs were dying around me.'

Catherine told me that she then changed them over to natural food and stopped vaccinating, and their health improved dramatically.

'My ex-husband John Watt is a statistician and a business consultant. He suggested that we do some independent research, free of commercial bias, to find out why modern dogs were so sickly. Unfortunately, we weren't known in the dog world, so getting dog owners to fill

in our questionnaires proved difficult. We formed Canine Health Concern to explain firstly why the research was needed, and then to share our findings with fellow dog lovers.'

I wanted to know where Catherine found the strength to endure the criticism and scepticism of those who disapproved or opposed her research.

She explained that she wanted to give up, at least once a week for the first eight years. 'I don't suppose anyone likes to be unpopular, and I was very unpopular. I used to be invited to lecture, and people would sit in the audience metaphorically waving garlic and crucifixes at me. I'd get heckled, and my personality was routinely ripped to shreds.

'People didn't like what I said, or how I said it. But every time I thought about giving up, I had an action replay in my head of Prudence dying of leukaemia, and I couldn't bear the thought of this happening to other young dogs, with nobody standing up and speaking for them.

I also couldn't bear the thought of the owners going through this. In truth, I was so grateful to my dogs for the love they gave me that I was prepared to die for them. I know – crazy woman! They say that God can use our faults, and I have lots of them!' says Catherine.

I wanted to know why Catherine thought that when the science was out there, why had it taken so long for people to realise about the stress our pets have to endure and begin to ask questions about why so many of our pets die young?

'I think that most of us rely upon what we are told by 'experts' a little too much, without realising that experts are human too, and can get it wrong just as much as anyone else can. I think that wealthy corporations selling into the pet market have millions of pounds to spend on advertising and sponsorship and public relations, and to pay for biased research, and it's hard to see the truth through all that.

'There has been a huge fast-speed juggernaut crashing through our society, telling us that science and man-made food and drugs are better than what nature has designed over millions of years to sustain life. We are beginning to realise slowly that this isn't the case – but it's hard to stop speeding juggernauts. There's a fundamental problem with science: it has given us lots of answers, but it has also shown us that we don't know much at all. We are all the guinea pigs for an imperfect model called 'science', and we tend to question when it goes wrong.' She says.

CHC has hundreds of people who are members, many of whom have stayed with us for the last 14 years. These members give their emotional, moral and financial support. 'Without them I couldn't have carried on. On a practical level, we are always desperately short of funds, and hampered in what we can do as a result. I frequently despair that it is taking so long for people to understand the science and to know that annual vaccination is totally unnecessary and potentially harmful; and that dogs need real food to thrive . . . and then a dog lover will contact me and say or do something that makes my heart sing, and we're off again. I am also very blessed to have Rob Ellis, a true dog lover, running CHC with me now, and doubly blessed that we'll be formalising it soon by getting married.'

I asked if Catherine thought the whole aspect of animal welfare and health is now more widely questioned than ever before?

'Yes, definitely, there have been huge advances in the past decade. There's a real swing towards natural feeding for dogs, and hardly anyone in the know vaccinates annually any more. Some of us, myself included, don't vaccinate at all, and we have incredibly healthy dogs to show for it.

We are at a stage now where we can point at the results of raising dogs without too much intervention from multinationals, and the dogs are proving us right. We just need to get through to the ordinary pet owners now, and try to prevent their own personal disasters from unfolding.'

When medical interventions have warnings about adverse reaction, why, I wanted to know, are there still some people who advocate that there are none?

Catherine told me: 'People identify with their belief systems; to the point that they often believe they *are* their beliefs, so if you challenge a belief, individuals experience fear and this often provokes anger and denial. Imagine what it must feel like to have spent five hard years being educated into a particular healing system, only to be told at the end of it that your education is faulty. If you let that thought in, then you can no longer do the thing that guarantees you a livelihood. So you go into denial for a period. Then the bravest people risk

it, and start looking for the truth, trusting that everything will work out in the end. It's the human journey. I am proud to say that I know many vets who are on that journey'

There have been seminars held all over the world at which Catherine has been a guest speaker and I asked what had instigated her international seminars?

'I was invited! We go anywhere and speak to anyone if it gets the message out there, given the time and the resources. It's also why we've started the UK based Foundation in Canine Healthcare programme, to spread the natural healthcare and husbandry message in a structured way,' she says.

I wanted to know more about the other aspects of health care that she teaches, such as Emotional Freedom Technique (EFT) and Reiki?

She told me: 'I believe that there are several factors that determine health status in dogs, namely genetics, diet, vaccines, harmful medications, environmental toxins, and stress.

If you get the food right, then the dog is going to be able to withstand most challenges, and even sometimes prevent genetic faults showing themselves. If you don't imbalance the immune system by vaccinating, then they stand an even better chance of remaining healthy. If you get these two things right, then you are unlikely to be giving your dogs drugs such as NSAIDs and steroids which cause debilitating side-effects without resolving the root problem. The immune system and the emotions are mirror images of each other, and malnutrition and vaccines can render dogs unable to deal with stress, which then makes them ill. Many of the complementary therapies such as Emotional Freedom Technique, the flower remedies, homoeopathy and so on, can actually deal with the stress, or imbalance, that lies beneath many illnesses. Dogs also live in homes with human beings who are themselves subjected to all sorts of stresses, and the dogs pick up on that stress. So if we learn, through our dogs, to take better care of ourselves emotionally, then both humans and the dogs are going to be healthier. It's a jigsaw, and all the pieces slot into one-another.'

And how does she see the future for our beloved pets?

'I see a future in which vets embrace many of the complementary therapies and use these before they resort to drugs, although drugs do have a place in certain circumstances. It is probable that they will treat humans and animals side-by-side because we are all connected and impact each other. I see the human race realising that the food we eat, whatever the species, is largely responsible for our health status. I would like to think that we dump vaccines in favour of a more holistic approach, where our emotional, physical and spiritual well-being is attended to before we fall apart and try to fix it with drugs which, ultimately, don't fix it.

'When I look around, I do see that the world is slowly becoming a better place. Much of the pollution started at the time of the industrial revolution has been cleaned up, for example. We don't force children down chimneys any more. There are people all over the planet, speaking up for the voiceless, or actively doing something to right wrongs.

'At one time we didn't have freedom of speech. Now we do. Even the animals are being heard now, and people are queuing to learn animal communications. So, adding all of this together, I reckon we're heading in the right direction. One day, every animal will be known to be equal but different to every human being – and we will all act as voices for the voiceless. We won't sit back and let some expert call the shots, or allow the multinationals to bully us to the grave. We'll work with specialists from our own places of knowledge, and the animals will benefit as a result. As I've said many times, our animals look at us with love and trust in their eyes, not at a man in a white coat. It is a truly wonderful journey when we slowly learn how to be worthy of that trust.

For more information about Canine Health Concern please email [Rob@Carsegray.co.uk](mailto:Rob@Carsegray.co.uk) or take a look at the website [www.canine-health-concern.org.uk](http://www.canine-health-concern.org.uk) or phone 01821 670410

Catherine O'Driscoll is the author of - The Golden Retriever Companion. Who Killed the darling Buds of May? What Vets Don't Tell You About Vaccines, and Shock to the System.