

How I  
became...

# a VETERINARIAN



Andrew D. Brosig/The Daily Sentinel

Bud, a 4-year-old boxer belonging to Margaret Maynard, left, of Nacogdoches, greets veterinarian Dr. Wendy Blount on Wednesday in the examination room at Eastex Veterinary Clinic in Nacogdoches. Blount knew from a young age she wanted to be a veterinarian, following in her older sister's footsteps, she said.

## Woman's love of animals leads her into veterinary career

*EDITOR'S NOTE: This is the first in an occasional series titled "How Did I Become?" Some local businesses in the area are having difficulty filling certain jobs, so we will talk to people in some of those positions to see what path they took to get there.*

**BY ERIN PRADIA**  
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**F**or veterinarian Wendy Blount, watching her sister's uncanny charm with animals lead her into the field of veterinary medicine.

Blount graduated from veterinary school in 1992 and has been a practicing veterinarian for 20 years. She currently

When she was about 6 years old, Blount's older sister Diana "Didi" Culp took in a baby robin.

"It didn't even have feathers," Blount recalled. "The bird traveled on the next family vacation — about 500 miles to a family reunion."

The bird grew up and flew away, but it would come back every summer to visit.

"It sort of imprinted on her," Blount said. "It would fly down and land on her shoulder and walk around the house. It remembered her always."

But that bird was not the only animal attracted to Culp. From the time she was a small child, stray animals flocked to her.

"Stray animals came to her when we

were growing up," Blount said. "Squirrels, bunnies and birds, any kind of young animal — she would just find them."

Culp decided she wanted to be a veterinarian when she grew up and got a job working at the Anne Arundel dog and cat clinic in Maryland.

"She became a veterinary technician — like a veterinary nurse and dog trainer," Blount said. "She did that for 20 years, then was an animal control officer."

Culp later got her master's in psychology and has worked in humane education since.

However, a job at the veterinary clinic was just the start for Blount.

"I am two years younger than her," Blount said. "When I turned 16, I got a job working at the same place and I fell in love with it."

Blount's early days at the veterinary clinic were spent cleaning out kennels. Eventually she was able to help restrain dogs and help the vets perform their treatments and examinations, she said.

"I knew if I pursued it, I would go into a job where I woke up every day excited about going to work," she said.

Her family moved to Houston while Blount was in high school and she attended college at Rice University.

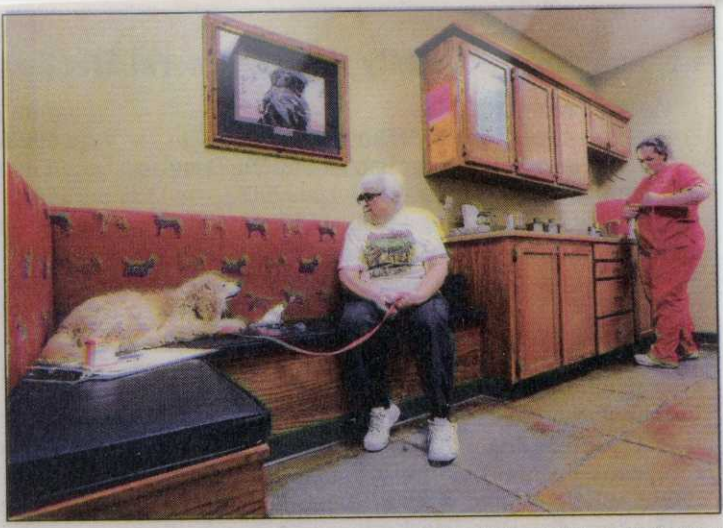
"I really wanted a liberal arts education, so I got a degree in art and art history, but I also took biology classes," Blount said. "They didn't have all the classes I would need to go to vet school at Rice, so I went to Texas A&M for a year and finished my pre-vet requirements."

Blount also went to veterinary school at Texas A&M.

"I am glad I did it that way, I learned a lot of good things in art school," she said.

After veterinary school, Blount practiced for a few years, then went back to Texas A&M for a residency in small animal internal medicine.

"That's just dogs and cats internal medicine," Blount said. "We learn about all kinds of animals in vet school. But when you do a residency, you focus a little bit more."



Andrew D. Brosig/The Daily Sentinel

Ben and his person, Kathleen Conti, wait while Dr. Wendy Blount sets up to examine Ben's eye Wednesday at Eastex Veterinary Clinic in Nacogdoches. Helping a person and their pet, which are often considered members of the family, gives Blount a sense of satisfaction at the end of the day, she said.

There are currently about 20 specialty areas vets can pursue, and more are being added all the time, Blount said. One of her career goals is helping develop the shelter medicine specialty.

"There is so much to do, and so much to learn," Blount said. "I am actually working with a new program with the American Board of Veterinary Practitioners, to produce a specialty in shelter medicine."

It has been reported nationally that rural areas struggle to find veterinarians.

"Rural vets have to work longer hours for less pay," Blount said. "However, there are benefits to living in the country, which makes it more 'worth it' for some of us."

It has been difficult for practices in Nacogdoches and Lufkin to find new vets to hire, Blount said.

"Some look for years before hiring someone," Blount said. "Many move on after a few years, and don't settle here."

Derek Grant, veterinarian and owner of Ward Animal Hospital, agreed that finding new hires for his clinic is difficult. The last two vets he hired were from Michigan and Mississippi, as well as a part time vet who graduated in Oklahoma.

"In a rural area, we don't have our own after hours emergency clinics," Grant said. "In Houston, you can

make a higher salary and not have to work after hours as well."

Family and home keep vets like Grant in the Nacogdoches area, he said, but he said the economy has made it a little easier, because there are not quite as many job openings in larger cities.

"We like what we do, we wouldn't do anything else," Grant said. "But some of us veterinarians are getting old and we want to find people to replace us."

It is especially difficult to find vets who want to take care of larger animals.





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WENDY BLOUNT  
VETERINARIAN

Of the 120 vet students currently at Texas A&M, probably only 10 or 12 want to go into large animal care, Grant said.

For now, Blount exclusively treats smaller animals.

"That is what I was most comfortable with and familiar with, so I gravitated toward it," Blount said. "Though, I did think about doing a general practice. I enjoyed working with the horses while I was in vet school, but decided to focus on one area."

Treating smaller animals such as cats and dogs is mainly done from the clinic. Vets who treat larger animals will do house calls, Blount said.

"That's just not typical when you treat dogs and cats," she said.

A typical day for Blount starts about 8 a.m., making the rounds and examining all the pets who are staying in the hospital.

"The rest of the morning is a trade off between surgeries and seeing scheduled patients," Blount said. "We aim to get lunch sometime between

noon and 2 p.m., but sometimes we don't."

Blount sees patients for the rest of the afternoon until about 5:30 p.m.

"All day we have to deal with emergencies that come in," she said. "We are also responsible for recording everything that we do. It works better if you jot things down as you go along, rather than trying to remember everything that happened at the end of the day."

Ultimately, the vets must prioritize, getting the more important things done earlier in the day and working their way down the list.

"It's not always clean," Blount said. "It can be a messy job, but that's okay. Soap and water fixes most of those problems."

The vets take turns being on call throughout the night and on weekends for emergencies.

"I get home around 6 or 7 p.m., and then start again in the morning," Blount said.

At the end of the day, Blount's job does bring her satisfaction.

"Many people consider their pets to be a part of their family," Blount said. "My favorite thing about being a vet is having a situation where someone brings their beloved pet to me and they have a problem and we work together to make it better."

There are many areas veterinarians work, however, from a host of different animals, including reptiles, birds, large animals and small, to jobs like meat inspectors or public health.

"I would advise someone who wants to become a vet to find a veterinarian that is the sort of veterinarian that they want to be and go work with them and learn and see if that is what they want to be," Blount said. "If traditional practice is not for you, there are a lot of things that you can do."

Nacogdoches County