



An interview with veterinarian  
Dr. Cory Greenfield

## Description

# On why he cares about animals and what owners can do to maximize the health of their pets

By Irwin Rapoport

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If one asked most pet owners if their cat, dog, bird, rabbit or even turtle, tortoise, snake, lizard, etc. is a member of the family, the overwhelming response would be “of course.” Ginger, my family’s Irish Setter, who left us at 15 years old, was a beloved part of the family, and is still missed today.





Cory with a black cockatoo

Ginger was a friendly and intelligent being who knew when you were feeling blue or wonderful. She was very intuitive and there for us at all times, as we were for her. The day we put her to sleep was a sad one, but she gave us the signal that it was time. It was extremely uncomfortable for her to walk, and she was in pain. Ginger loved life and was energetic – she could run and swim for miles, especially at the country house. When I went fishing at an adjacent lake, which I reached by rowboat via a small river, she would follow me to the “secret” fishing spot at a small island close to the shore which was surrounded by weeds. The bass fed on the minnows that abounded there.

The pain we felt when we lost Ginger has never left us and is experienced daily by families and individuals across the globe. Suffice it to say, the vast majority of people and families love their pets and will go to the ends of the Earth to look after them and keep them healthy so they live long and meaningful lives. In fact, many Ukrainian refugees are not leaving their pets behind. Check out this [story](#) on the devotion that people have for their pets in times of war.

Being a veterinarian is not easy, especially when your patients cannot speak and tell their doctor what is ailing them. They can give some signs and utter a few sounds, but that can be insufficient. **Dr. Cory Greenfield, DVM**, who lives in northern San Diego, loves animals and does his utmost to look after them and work with their families. Greenfield graduated in 2010 from Ross University School of Veterinary Medicine and currently works as a small animal veterinarian (dogs, cats, and birds) at a private practice in Del Mar, CA.

Dr. Greenfield recently spoke with Westmount Magazine about what drew him to veterinary medicine, why he cares about animals and what pet owners can do to maximize the health of their pets.

*WM: Did you have pets as a child, and when did you know you wanted to be a veterinarian?*

**Greenfield:** Fortunately, my Mom and Dad were great about allowing us to have pets. Not only was I born into a family with dogs (and have never really lived without one since) but we added cats, birds, lizards, turtles, and several random wild animals that we figured ‘needed’ help. Looking back, it probably wasn’t necessary or appropriate. I always had a fascination with caring for animals. I grew up wanting to work with dolphins and become a marine biologist but didn’t realize that being a veterinarian would be a better fit for me until later in life.

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– Dr. Cory Greenfield, DVM

*WM: How would you describe your love of animals, and what do they mean to you as an individual?*

**Greenfield:** I look at them as I would any other living being on this earth, and since they don’t have a human voice to work through problems they may have, we have to be their voice and advocate for their proper care. After all the global shenanigans we’ve experienced the last several years and thanks to social media, I’ve come to find more trust and decency in animals than in many humans I’ve encountered along the way.

*WM: Do you see animals as objects or sentient beings with a full range of emotions?*

**Greenfield:** It’s tough to discern their ‘emotions’ in the ways that the complex human brain works, but I consider animals to have just as much right to this life on Earth as ours.



Cory at vet school with a donkey

**WM:** How would you describe your training as a veterinarian, and what type of animals did you learn how to treat?

**Greenfield:** It took many years beyond a high school education to gain the tools necessary for earning a doctorate in Veterinary Medicine. In school, there is a curriculum in place to learn all the different mammalian body systems, focusing on pets and farmed animals we would be taking care of for pleasure or food. There are sidetracks you can take to focus on exotic or wild animals. The national accreditation exams would include a little bit of everything.

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– Dr. Cory Greenfield, DVM

**WM:** In your view, what are the qualifications of a good veterinarian?

**Greenfield:** Many people make the mistake of thinking they want to be veterinarians because they like working with animals instead of people, but you have to be a people person to get some of the most important information when working with an animal that can't talk. This history of a case by a good owner/farmer will get you off to the right start in treating an animal appropriately. Good qualifications would include patience, empathy, and a wide breadth of knowledge in the medical field. As a veterinarian, you have to become the internist, surgeon, dermatologist, radiologist, dentist, anesthesiologist, etc. It's a big job to cover all those areas in the medical field.

**WM:** *What do you expect of the people who own the pets you treat, and do most live up to your expectations?*

**Greenfield:** I expect that if they've taken on the responsibility of an animal, they must take all appropriate measures to see after the welfare and well-being of that animal. I would say that most people do a good job of that. Some owners can't afford 'gold-standard' care but there are ways to manage to stay practical and still provide appropriate care for most cases.

**WM:** *How would you describe your style of examining and treating cats, dogs, and birds? Have you found a way to communicate with them and make them feel comfortable?*

**Greenfield:** For sure, there is an obvious language we speak that doesn't have to include words. The more time you spend around animals, the more you learn their language and how to act and react around them. Each pet needs a different approach customized to the situation. Just as with people, there are many different personalities that require different tactics in approach to gain their trust.



Cory spaying the family's new puppy



**WM:** *What could pet owners do to ensure the health of their friends and companions? Do you find that most people ensure their pets are vaccinated and receive annual check-ups?*

**Greenfield:** Vaccinations are very important at the beginning of their life. The older they get, the priorities change. Proper nutrition, weight control and oral care are vital to longevity but many ailments pop up along the way, bringing most pets in more than once a year.

**WM:** *How important is it for people to spay and neuter their cats and dogs, and if they choose to breed them, is there a maximum number of times?*

**Greenfield:** Spaying and neutering are important for population control. But females are 'fixed' more for medical reasons and boys for behavioural reasons. I don't always mind if they aren't, as long as you understand the risks that come along with it and protect your pet properly. When it comes to breeding, I think you should have to have some authorized certificate and prove you know what you're doing and why. Too many people breed their pets irresponsibly, and I have a major problem with that. I wish there was better control over breeding.

**WM:** *Have you had to deal with situations where you saw that animals were deliberately mistreated, and what were you able to do to stop that?*

**Greenfield:** Probably, but at the same time, not really. Everybody has a story, and many situations are difficult to prove. Sometimes, you get that 'vibe' and keep an eye on the cases after they leave your care, but fortunately I work in a nicer area where most people bring you their pet with good intentions.

'...treating them like family will open up many avenues of communication if you're willing to listen, watch, and respond. It takes mutual respect to live in harmony with animals.'

– Dr. Cory Greenfield, DVM

**WM:** *Pet owners feel a great deal of distress when they have to decide to put their pets to sleep. As a person who has to perform the action how do you feel? Do you get a sense that the animals know that the end is near, and how does it feel to look into their eyes as you give them the injection?*

**Greenfield:** I will never put a pet to sleep unless it is in the pet's best interest for the outcome. I'm here to save lives, but I'm also here to ease suffering. You can usually see it in a pet's eyes when the time is right but there are many different situations where euthanasia may be the most appropriate outcome. I wish they were all easy, but they aren't. The process is actually very smooth and personal and tailored to the pet to make sure there is a comfortable transition to the afterlife. Coming to a pet's house is often the most comfortable way for a pet to pass so they don't have the stress of the hospital on their final thoughts. Having their family with them should be a priority for pet owners.

**WM:** *Have you ever been asked to find new families for animals, and have you volunteered to help animal shelters?*

**Greenfield:** Many times I've been asked to find new families, and I do what I can, but there are many more outlets for that type of assistance. Shelter medicine has always intrigued me.

**WM:** *What would you say to people who have a desire to become a veterinarian? What could they do to prepare for their studies and to learn about animals as teenagers?*



Cory with family dogs

**Greenfield:** Ha! I often joke that I don't encourage young kids to follow this dream since financially it has become a poor investment for your future. The cost of education has exponentially grown despite our hours and salaries and expectations in this field. But, if you can make the finances work, be prepared for a lot of work if you have a passion for the animal sciences. Spend as much time volunteering or working around animals in clinical settings to see if that's something you really could see yourself being a part of.

**WM:** *How many pets do you have in your household, and what types?*

**Greenfield:** I have two dogs and two cats. My kids would remind me that we have two fish from the fair as well. We went to the fair eight years ago.

**WM:** *To what extent would you say that animals are speaking to us, especially pets, and are we listening? How can we learn to better converse with our pets? Do you believe that they understand what we are saying to a certain extent?*

**Greenfield:** It sounds cliché, but treating them like family will open up many avenues of communication if you're willing to listen, watch, and respond. It takes mutual respect to live in harmony with animals.

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*Images: courtesy of Dr. Cory Greenfield*

*Feature image: Dr. Cory Greenfield shadowed by his niece for the day*



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