

A Job Like No Other

Veterinarian's day features highs and lows

By AMY KRONENBERGER
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Dr. Craig Miesse, DVM, and I drove across Mercer County and into Indiana a few weeks ago to call on several farms, mostly owned by Amish people.

I had been looking forward to this day with high anticipation. I have a fervent love for animals and couldn't wait to witness a veterinarian's typical day. I knew veterinary medicine included a dark side — a tragic side in which an animal would be beyond help or perhaps hadn't been treated as it should have been by its human owners. But I also knew of the wonderful, rewarding aspects — the grand, life-saving moments and the birth of new life. As I looked forward to the day, I hoped for the best while steeling myself for the worst.

We traveled down the quiet, country roads toward the first farm, passing an Amish family in a horse-drawn buggy along the way, while Miesse, co-owner of Celina Animal Hospital, spoke passionately about the job that has been the focal point of his life for 36 years.

He said a person needs passion to do the work he does, but one must be careful and learn to balance the job with life outside the office. He noted how difficult it is to say no to a client who calls in the middle of the night about an ailing animal, but sometimes, saying no is necessary.

"If you're not careful, the job can consume you," he said. "Then one day you wake up and you wonder, 'what month is it?'"

Miesse admitted to finding it difficult to balance work with his personal life, confessing his work is his life. His passion was obvious, and the 62-year-old didn't seem like he'd be ready to slow down any time soon.

Most of Miesse's farm calls that morning involved mares' ultrasounds to find out if they were pregnant. Excellent, I thought. I love horses and I love babies. What could be better?

Miesse gave no preliminary explanation of how veterinarians perform ultrasounds on mares or any other large animals. In my head I imagined something similar to a human ultrasound: putting the gel and the handheld device directly on the pregnant belly and the image appears on the monitor. Boy, was I wrong.

My first warning sign appeared in the form of a long plastic glove. Miesse said he had a good reason to cut off his left sleeve as he slid on the glove and pinned it to the rough sleeve edge near his shoulder. Did I detect an impish expression as he smiled at me? Warning sign No. 2.

Still, bravely I followed him to the poor horse now out of the barn and corralled near an enclosed water trough. She tossed her head, her large, innocent brown eyes staring him down with a look of fear and dread. I'm certain she knew Miesse well and wasn't happy about



Amy Kronenberger/Daily Standard

Dr. Craig Miesse, DVM, examines a newborn foal that is having difficulty standing and cannot nurse.

his presence.

Still, with calming reassurances and pats from Miesse and the farmer, she let Miesse approach. He moved her tail aside and calmly inserted his hand into her rectum and pushed his way in up to his upper arm. I involuntarily took a small step backward. I know my expression mirrored the horse's as she continually glanced back at Miesse with peaked eyebrows and a look of horror that clearly said, "you've got to be kidding me!"

Miesse proceeded with polite conversation with the farmer, as though casually standing over the water cooler at the office, discussing the chances of rain that day, all the while pulling feces — easily a pound or two if not more — out of the mare's colon. I inched backward some more as poo splattered on the concrete floor.

When all was clear, Miesse covered the ultrasound device with copious amounts of gel and reinserted his arm. Curiosity drew me closer to within a few feet behind Miesse to get a better look at the ultrasound screen. What looked like nonsensical gray static to me provided a wealth of information to Miesse.

He pointed out a shape on the screen, which was barely discernible from the rest of the static. This, he said, was the uterus. Amid the fuzz Miesse could clearly see that not only was the horse not pregnant but she was also a few days away from ovulation and going into heat.

Miesse removed his arm while I still stood a few feet behind him and the mare. If ever a horse were trying to exact revenge, this was it — for several long seconds.

"Now you can write about what it's like to have a horse pass gas in your face," Miesse said with a laugh. "You just say 'that's right, girl. Get it out.' ... All you can do is chuckle and move on."

With the first mare's exam ending in a negative pregnancy test, the next two horses and then two cows were ushered in for the same treatment. All tests came up negative. I silently pushed away thoughts that I might be a jinx.

The second horse was a bit more feisty and didn't want to let Miesse proceed without at least some resistance. She lowered her hips a few times — a warning sign, Miesse said, that she was about to kick. He said she was not at all happy with him.

"I can't say I'd be very happy with you either if I were in her shoes," I replied.

Miesse allowed himself a small chuckle before bravely proceeding.

The ultrasounds were complete, but Miesse's job at this farm was not. The farmer asked him to look at a fourth mare — one that was not doing well, in visible pain and struggling to walk. As the farmer led her into the enclosure, my heart completely broke for this beautiful girl. I could almost feel her pain as she hobbled. I will not share the details of this horse's sad story for obvious reasons.

Miesse said he could possibly save her but he would need to start work immediately. I hoped the farmer would give him the OK. I wanted to see the horse survive, thrive, be healthy again. I wanted to be a witness to a grand, life-saving moment. But that was not to be.

The farmer decided that due to her advanced age of 25 he would euthanize her instead. This was my first time witnessing a horse being euthanized. I hope it was my last.

Miesse also was upset by the suffering mare. He told me quietly that he gets angry when he sees an animal suffer as a result of human action — or inaction. He never let his emotions show to his clients, however. He always maintained an air of professionalism and performed his job with expert hands.

I had asked him earlier in the day how he handles such situations and how he is able to leave his emotions at the door to get the job done.

"Sometimes you don't," he replied. "You know, you just have to deal with it. You've been working with animals a long time, but it doesn't make it any easier. It affects you."

Later in the day we revisited the subject, discussing the beautiful mare that had lost her life.

"There's the cycle of life, a time to be born, a time to die and that's that," he said frankly. "I don't think you ever fully — like today, that was sad, I thought."

He was right. In the wake of sadness, the cycle of life goes on. We visited the next farm to inseminate a horse that already had a healthy, playful colt at her side. Miesse said horses have an 11-month gestation period, and they prefer to have their babies in March or April. This makes May the ideal time for mating or insemination.

I was given the very important job of holding the mare's tail while Miesse went to work. All the while the curious colt stayed by my side. I was told he was teeth-

ing and, therefore, wants to chew on everything. He seemed to think my jacket was the ideal teething ring and spent the duration of my visit chewing on it. My coat may have been covered in horse slobber and perhaps was a little worse for wear when all was said and done, but I didn't mind in the least. He was so cute; it was worth it. I think I made a new best friend that day.

At the next farm, a foal born just hours earlier was struggling to stand and walk and therefore was failing to nurse. The foal had issues with its joints. They seemed to hyperextend, especially at the knees.

Priority No. 1 was to get the foal the nutrients it needed from mother's milk. Miesse first worked with the baby to see if it would latch to the teat. The sweet thing tried but failed, so Miesse instead milked the horse and fed it to the foal through a tube inserted into its nose. Miesse asked me to hold the small tub full of fresh milk while he sucked it into a syringe for feeding. Despite the small splatter of milk on my face and on my saliva-covered jacket, the experience of helping this adorable, gangling creature was very rewarding.

Miesse told the farmer to keep working with the foal to get it to latch. He also said in time and with proper nutrition, it could recover from its joint issues as the ligaments and tendons strengthen. He whispered to me in confidence, however, that with joint issues that severe, he would be surprised if the foal made it. Heartbreak No. 2.

Our last stop of the morning involved three more mare ultrasounds — more poo, more very scandalized-looking horses. One test confirmed a pregnancy. Miesse pointed out the very noticeable black circle amidst the gray static — the fluid sack containing the tiny embryo. The other two mares were likely pregnant, but Miesse said they were too early on to confirm it with ultrasound.

"Looks like you're not a jinx after all, Amy," Miesse said as though reading my mind from earlier.

Driving back to Celina, Miesse said the best aspect of his job is the feeling of accomplishment after having helped an animal that otherwise would not have survived. The worst, he said, is losing the animal after his best efforts and then telling the client the news.

"There are certain situations, with a companion animal especially, it might be a person's only friend," he said. "How do you tell somebody that's 80 years old, a little lady that's lost her husband to cancer and she's dying of cancer that her little puppy has cancer. I've had that exact scenario happen to me."

As for me, despite the moments of heartache, I think I may have to revisit this fascinating career for a future column, perhaps next time spending time with small animals.

— Amy Kronenberger will spend time with a different professional each month, learn what he or she does and then share her experience with readers. To submit a comment or future column idea, contact Kronenberger at tc@dailystandard.com or at

OSHA designates
Safe + Sound Week

The U.S. Department of Labor's Occupational Safety and Health Administration announce it has designated June 12-18 as Safe + Sound Week, a new nationwide effort that calls on organizations of all sizes in a wide range of industries to raise awareness of the value and importance of workplace safety and health programs.

Joining OSHA to sponsor the effort are the National Safety Council, American Industrial Hygiene Association, American Society of Safety Engineers and the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health. In addition, 85 trade associations, industry and professional groups are partnering with the initiative.

"Our nation has made great strides in raising awareness about the importance of workplace safety, yet more than 4 million workers suffer serious job-related injuries or illnesses annually. We can do better," U.S. Secretary of Labor Alexander Acosta said.

Participating in Safe + Sound Week can help organizations get their safety

and health program started or energize an existing one. While approaches vary, effective programs have three core elements:

- Management leadership that commits to establishing, maintaining and continually improving the program. Managers must also provide needed resources to support the program.

- Workers who help identify solutions for improvements. A workforce engaged in safety and health programs result in higher productivity, increased job satisfaction and strong worker retention, which combine to increase revenues and lower turnover and recruitment costs.

- A systematic "find and fix" approach that calls upon employers and workers alike to examine their workplaces — proactively and routinely — to identify and address hazards before an injury or illness occurs.

Information on how to participate in Safe + Sound Week, ideas for events and resources and details of planned events around the country are available at osha.gov/safeandsoundweek.

The sound of music



Submitted photo

Full Sound chamber group perform for residents at Elmwood Assisted Living of New Bremen. Five Loritsch brothers playing violins, cello and piano offered a variety of music including "Armonico," "Romanze," "Septet for Winds & Strings," "Maple Leaf Rag" and "Now the Green Blade Rises." Residents enjoyed the entertainment and hearing about how the young men learned violin at ages 11 and 16.

For birth, engagement, wedding and anniversary forms, go to [The Daily Standard's website at www.dailystandard.com/forms](http://www.dailystandard.com/forms).

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Writers' club
meets June 17

The Stalene Writers Club will meet at 10 p.m. June 17 at the Mercer County Public Library, Celina.

The suggested composition topics are "graduation" or "change." If time permits, a language arts lesson will follow. The public is welcome to attend.

Monthly drawing
winners named

The Center for Neurological Development's weekly drawing winners for May were Jerry Geier, Celina, No. 390; Renee Jutte, Dickson, Tennessee, No. 201; Gin Peyla, Fort Recovery, No. 787; Rob Bubeck, Rossburg, No. 548; and Mike Pax, Coldwater, No. 331.

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