

**D**uring Dr. Belle Nibblett's five-year stint as a veterinarian in Fort Wayne, Ind., she helped many clients — especially elderly ones — deal with the long-term illnesses and eventual death of their pets. As a result, the small animal practitioner has several four-legged namesakes romping around in homes throughout the state of Indiana.

"Because I helped them, the new pet is called Belle or some variant thereof," says Nibblett, a resident of small animal internal medicine at the Western College of Veterinary Medicine (WCVM). "I'm very honoured by such things, of course."

And although she's now far away in Western Canada, Nibblett still values the relationships that she developed with clients and their pets while practising at two veterinary clinics in Fort Wayne. In fact, she still keeps in contact with many of her former clients.

The human-animal bond — between clients and pets as well as between veterinarians and pets — is something Nibblett values and understands. "It seems so cliché in a lot of veterinary writing right now, this talk about the human-animal bond. And yet, for most of us, that's truly what it's all about."

Nibblett's link to the veterinary profession began in 1996 after she finished her Bachelor of Science degree at Bishop's University in Lennoxville, Québec. "Veterinary science was the logical choice," says Nibblett, who completed her four-year veterinary degree at WCVM in 2000.

One early moment that influenced her career plans came when Nibblett was a teenager growing up in Veregin, Sask. She and the family dog were running near railroad tracks when a train struck and killed the Irish setter. Nibblett had yelled a warning, but her dog hadn't responded — a tragic event that also sparked the veterinarian's passion for obedience training.

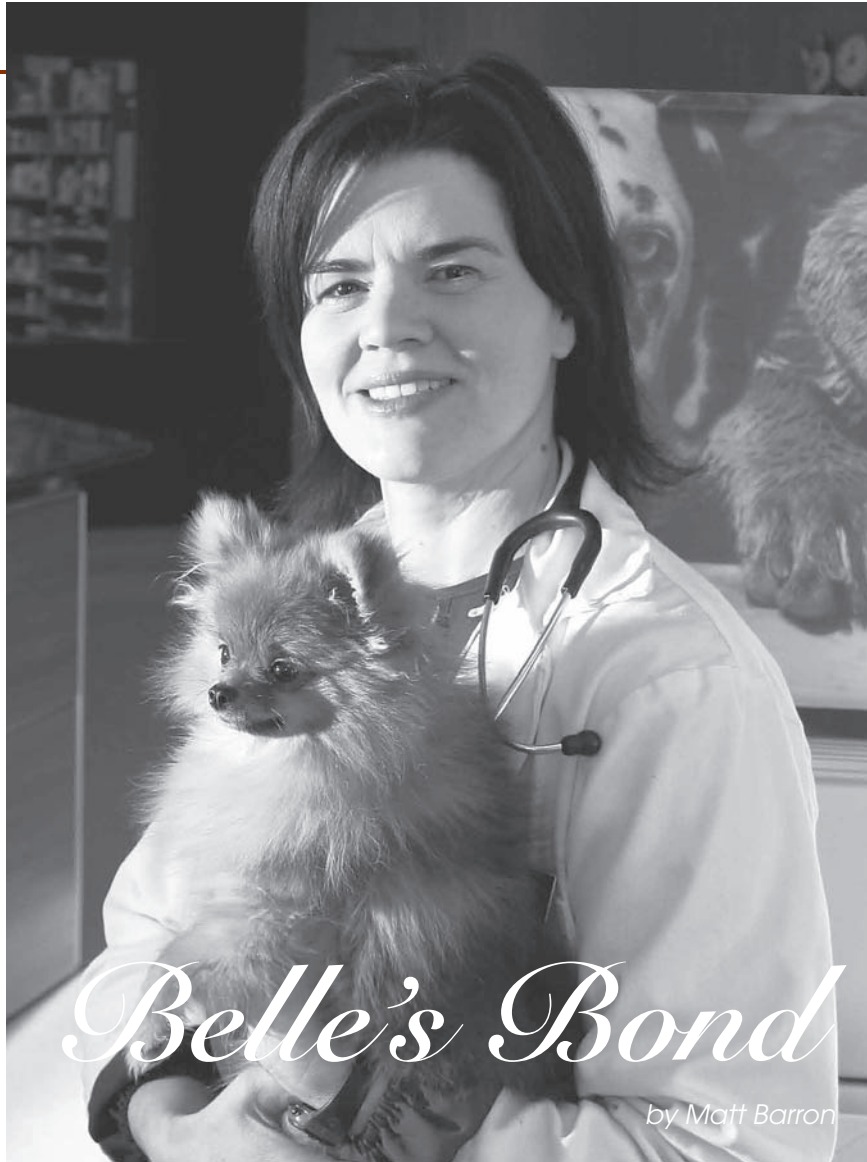
"I had a love of animals, and when I got two dogs following this incident, I wanted them to be absolutely mechanistic in their obedience — and they were. Spectacularly well-trained. But my current dogs have almost no training," admits Nibblett with a smile.

While living in Indiana, Nibblett's experience broadened from dogs and cats to more exotic animals such as orangutans and even snow leopards. Working as a relief veterinarian at the Children's Zoo in Fort Wayne, Nibblett carried out such procedures as skin sutures on a snow leopard — an unfortunate injury that occurred during transport to its new home halfway around the world.

Nibblett also worked part time as a night-shift veterinarian at a bustling emergency veterinary clinic, dealing with everything from seizures, infected uteruses and chocolate toxicity cases. It was the ideal place to sharpen her emergency skills and to learn how to work under stress. "The biggest veterinarian emergencies you can have: I saw them all in one night," she says, laughing. "Or it seemed that way, some nights."

While she liked working with large animals, Nibblett's love of dogs and cats eventually influenced her decision to specialize in small animal internal medicine. "I enjoyed my exotics, my skin cases and my eye cases, but I felt I would be too restricted in any one of those specialties. Internal medicine would allow me to see the broadest array of cases."

After years of hard work, the goal of working as a specialist is within Nibblett's grasp. Once she writes her qualifying exam for the American College of Veterinary Internal Medicine (ACVIM) and completes her residency at WCVM this summer, she will travel to the Caribbean island of St. Kitts and teach veterinary students at Ross University.



## Belle's Bond

by Matt Barron

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Eventually, she will likely return to practise in a private clinic where other specialists in internal medicine, surgery and cardiology work as a team. Nibblett also hopes to be involved in research projects alongside her teaching and clinical work — an interest that grew during her Master of Veterinary Science (MVetSc) program over the past few years.

But ultimately, Nibblett's motivation stems from the bond between pets and their owners, between animals and herself.

"I so value what that relationship can bring to the lives of my clients as well as what it's brought to my life," she says. "As a teenager, it helped me to learn about caring for another creature that's completely reliant on you for their needs. And then as an adult, I've come to appreciate that these creatures give you all of their attention without asking for anything in return." **V**

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