

Fred McGavran

### **Mother's Recipe for Happiness**

Cocker spaniels are replaceable; mothers are not. That is why I urged Mother to cuddle with Lucas one last time, as he lay upon the electric table waiting for the end. The poor thing had not been right since she tried to restore him to health with a mixture of vitamins and herbs after backing over him in the driveway on her mid-week run to the health food store. This last visit to the veterinarian was particularly traumatic for her, because she had always considered herself an expert in natural healing. I had spent much of my youth going through human trials with her.

The kindly veterinarian allowed soon-to-be mourners a few moments alone with their pets, telling us to push a button as we left the room to signal "all clear". He would then flip the switch before anyone had time for second thoughts, and another troubled life would spark off into eternity. I followed his directions faithfully, catching his eye and smiling as I came around the corner.

"How's mother taking it?" he asked pleasantly, as he sent enough current through the two of them to electrocute all the ax murderers in the country.

In the face of such a tragedy, the police were satisfied with a tearful "She was right behind me," and the fortune that Daddy had wrested from his clients before a heart attack wrested it from him was mine. Everyone said it was the nicest dual species funeral they had ever seen.

Fortune had smiled on my first adult adventure, but the stock market did not. This was the era of the "Nifty Fifty", stocks propelled to grandeur in the bull market of Lyndon Johnson's Great Society and the Vietnamese War. I enlisted a broker who had made a fortune for his clients in 1968, put everything into his hands and set out for Antwerp to research my monograph on the lap dog in Northern Renaissance iconography. I diverted to Florence, then Nice, than several winters in Paris that I have never been able to separate. When I returned to the old manse, assured that the *Yale Renaissance Journal* would publish my piece in consideration for a one hundred thousand-dollar donation, I found my world upended. The cook had given her notice, the yard was overgrown and

the maid had sold Mother's high-finned purple Cadillac to pay the gas bill. The Nifty Fifty had departed as quickly after Richard Nixon as Faberge after the Czar.

One cannot live long on tax losses. One cold winter afternoon, as I rummaged through the garage for one of Daddy's hidden bottles, I found Mother's notes on Lucas' formula. In a passable copperplate script, she recommended beta-carotene for digestion, ginseng for quick energy, hellebore, a natural insecticide and antidepressant, for fleas and melancholy, flaxseed oil as a purge, magnesium for muscle tone, mandrake root for sleep and willow bark, a natural source of aspirin, for pain. Her signature ingredient was eucalyptus, a natural decongestant, to insure a healthy wet nose. Oddly, she had omitted the dosages, which may explain poor Lucas' failure to respond satisfactorily. He had, however, exhibited some memorable symptoms, including periods of wild exhilaration followed by increasingly deep comas, and emitting the brightest yellow urine I had ever seen.

Our country was itself in a crisis of self-confidence, seeking to recover from Vietnam, Watergate and the long bear market of the Seventies. Like poor Mother, every politician and economist knew the ingredients for the cure, but couldn't quite get the dosages right. As I looked over the dusty shelves of vitamins and supplements, inspiration struck: we may not have enough money for schools and hospitals, but we have enough for our pets. I would formulate a "special supplement" for dogs, testing Mother's best scientific thinking against a few trials on strays, then go to market.

I was so excited to discover that the neither the Food and Drug Administration nor anyone else regulated "natural" products that I mortgaged the house, obtaining enough to replace the departed Cadillac with a sixty-eight Volkswagen and put the cook back on the staff. Her "sauce chasseur" was famous for gluing anything it touched into a granite-like mass and would be perfect to bind my formula. And then to work. Surely a few weeks in the garage with mortar and pestle would produce the right mixture, and my fortune would be restored.

How wrong I was. I replanted the herb garden and spent weeks grinding and sifting and pouring exotic mixtures into gelatin capsules sealed with "sauce chasseur". To field test the results, I secreted a capsule or two in the evening's garbage, kicked over the can and waited for the neighborhood dogs to gather. Sometimes they dropped

happily onto the grass, to recover the next morning as oblivious of the night before as their owners. Other times they just dropped. Occasionally they raced wildly through the neighborhood, crashing into cars and telephone polls or bounding through picture windows. Worst of all were the nights they wouldn't go near my day's work, even if it was wrapped in bacon or hidden in a chicken bone.

Soon the neighborhood was bereft of strays, and people were whispering about some maniac poisoning the dogs. Perhaps I should have paid more attention, but what entrepreneur is deterred by criticism, and how many dog lovers can recognize anaphylactic shock in a canine? Concentrating on my research I paid little attention, until the evening two enormous German shepherds loped up the drive and pawed at the garbage can. I knew immediately something was wrong. In a country still paralyzed by lack of trust, these could only be scouts for the local SWAT team. So instead of a vitamin, I offered each part of my steak. As the officers burst from cover, M-16s at the ready, the animals were happily gobbling the best filets the cook had prepared in weeks. After apologies all around, I promised to stop feeding steak to stray dogs, and the police removed me from their list of suspects.

It was now mid-summer with no real progress to report. I only had a few more months before the bank would become agitated about my "late" mortgage payments, the newspaper would cease delivery and poor cook would return to the Veterans Hospital. I was in Mother's favorite health food store, scouring the shelves for new ingredients, when it hit me how many different vitamins there were. Apparently none of them worked, because in addition to vitamins, the user was encouraged to take supplements for a host of vitamin resistant problems. Why not, I thought, have three formulas: a multi-vitamin for all dogs, plus a supplement for overactive dogs and another for inactive ones. I'd call them "Basic Bowser"®, "Happy Boy"® and "Good Boy Night-Night"®.

Psychologists had preconditioned the public to the dangers of hyperactivity, and everyone recognized the threat of depression. All you had to do was diagnose your child with one or the other, and there were amphetamines and counselors for the children and support groups for the parents. I put every vitamin in the alphabet into my basic formula plus magnesium, flaxseed oil, eucalyptus and an extra dose of beta-carotene. Beta-carotene was a stroke of genius, because it simplified locating an animal after an adverse

reaction. It was also the inspiration for my slogan, “Never Lost Again.” Then I added hellebore, iodine and willow bark to “Good Boy Night-Night”® and ginseng, mandrake, caffeine and a smattering of trace elements to “Happy Boy” ®.

I took my first batch to the health food store and settled back to enjoy the fruits of my research. Instead I became the most reviled person in local history. Sometimes I fear pet owners misdiagnosed their charges, giving the calming mixture to melancholy beasts, inducing a deep and sometime endless slumber. Others must have mistakenly administered my stimulant to overactive ones. Soon the media were filled with traumatic stories about dogs that bounded madly through home and garden spraying yellow streaks, or snoring sedately for days at a time, oozing bright yellow urine onto priceless oriental carpets. Within a week of my first sale Dan Rather had interviewed me for a 60 Minutes story on pet abuse, the local prosecutor charged me with cruelty to animals, and an angry mob ransacked my laboratory. Fortunately they spared the Volkswagen.

So I let the cook and the maid go again, retrieved the last of my vitamins from the health food store, copped a plea to one count of walking an unleashed dog and set out for the coast in the VW. Let the bank have the family home. Who wanted to live in a town where science was despised, and the hydrants, sidewalks and even the mailman's socks were dyed canary yellow? Yet I could not escape a sense of guilt. Where had Mother and I gone wrong with our formulae?

The thought of poor Mother brought back the tenderest moment from the funeral, when mourners filed slowly past the two matched caskets, reaching out to pat Lucas one last time. No one, however, patted Mother. Suddenly I understood: we Americans love dogs more than we love people. Beside a cow pasture in Iowa I stopped and danced.

On the long drive West I had plenty of time to reconsider my business plan. Keep the products the same, but relabel the packages for people. If the FDA didn't care what was in “Natural Basic”®, why should I? In a landfill outside Omaha I found enough 35mm film containers to hold my stock. I was a success from the moment I first opened my suitcase above La Jolla Cove. Californians know a good thing when it comes in a familiar package.

So did the DEA. Imagine their surprise when it turned out the contents really were vitamins. Sporting a wispy beard, gold chain and Nehru jacket, I appeared on all

the San Diego stations after my acquittal, oozing equanimity and deep sympathy for the ignorant and misguided authorities. Within days I had an army of look alikes selling door to door from suitcases. Now I am bigger than Kinko's®, and like them my doors never close.

Some say my formulary inspired the hang glider craze of the early seventies, or at least encouraged their use when diving off cliffs. Throughout our great national parks, snowmobilers breakfast on handfuls of "Natural Basic Plus Ozone"® before chasing grizzlies out of their winter lairs and wolves away from caribou. Skin divers reported a beautiful high below two hundred feet as long as they didn't exceed crush depth and survived the bends on the way up. To prolong the experience a Midwestern osteopath reintroduced the hyperbaric chamber, where patients and thrill seekers are subjected to pure oxygen under eye-popping pressure as a cure for myriad conditions. In conjunction with "Natural Basic Plus Ozone"®, hyperbaric oxygen therapy produces astonishing pyrotechnics. Many patients exhaust their coverage on it, much as teenagers spend all their allowances on The Beast® at the amusement park.

Concerned parents calm their teenagers with "Natural Basic Plus R"®, supposing it contains Ritalin. In fact it contains riboflavin plus enough melatonin to knock out an elephant. Rebels who don't like sleeping through class fish it out of their Cheerios®, exchange it for "Natural Basic Plus Ozone"® and defy gravity with impunity from their skateboards. I am the inspiration, if not the inventor, of gravity sports.

Several years ago I heard that my original pet formula had acquired a cult following. A few cases of "Basic Bowser"® turned up at a flea market in Santa Monica, where connoisseurs bid it up to \$5,000 a case before the police confiscated the shipment. This led me to reintroduce my pet vitamins in their original wrappers, complete with the now famous "patent pending 1973" legend. I have sold over ten million cases with no fear they will ever injure any yellow pissing animal. Californians know enough to keep the good stuff for themselves. Thanks to me, the streets of La Jolla are paved with gold.

I still enjoy tinkering with the formula to keep up with the times. Instead of hellebore, I now use St. John's wort in my hyperactivity formulary. I have substituted ephedra, a popular naturally occurring amphetamine, for caffeine. My sense of timing is remarkable: I replaced iodine with ginko biloba, a natural palliative and herbicide, just as

it was coming into its own. Beta-carotene and ginseng remain constants. In memory of Mother I put a dash of eucalyptus in every product, even though its efficacy as a restorative is not well documented. Every capsule is still sealed with “sauce chausseur”. After investing several million in focus groups I changed the packaging from film rolls to Baggies®. Sales tripled.

Several years ago I added coral calcium as filler, only to learn that it had more beneficial properties than alcohol. By luck I had anticipated free radicals, the greatest threat to American health since halitosis. Like Lever Brothers with Listerine®, the health food industry created a disease to meet the product’s needs. At our present rate of consumption the Great Barrier Reef will be mined flat by 2012. My customers don’t care, and neither do I. If other industries can sacrifice the environment for corporate profits, why can’t we use the excrement of shellfish for something that makes us feel really good?

Now I live in a mansion overlooking the sea and receive New Age media beside the pool as tan as a Celini bronze, posed in the nude with my caduceus. They find that deeply reassuring. Dietitians offer accolades, and students of pyramid sales write papers about me at business schools. My picture has been on the cover of *Time* and *Forbes*; Donald Rumsfeld invited me to join the Defense Policy Board. Through it all I retained my interest in the Northern Renaissance iconography. Sometimes I hint at endowing a museum larger than the Getty with more money than Armand Hammer siphoned from the old Soviet Union. In less than a generation healthcare has surpassed fossil fuels as our largest industry. Don’t tell Rummy, but we never needed Iraq. How happy Mother would have been.

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