



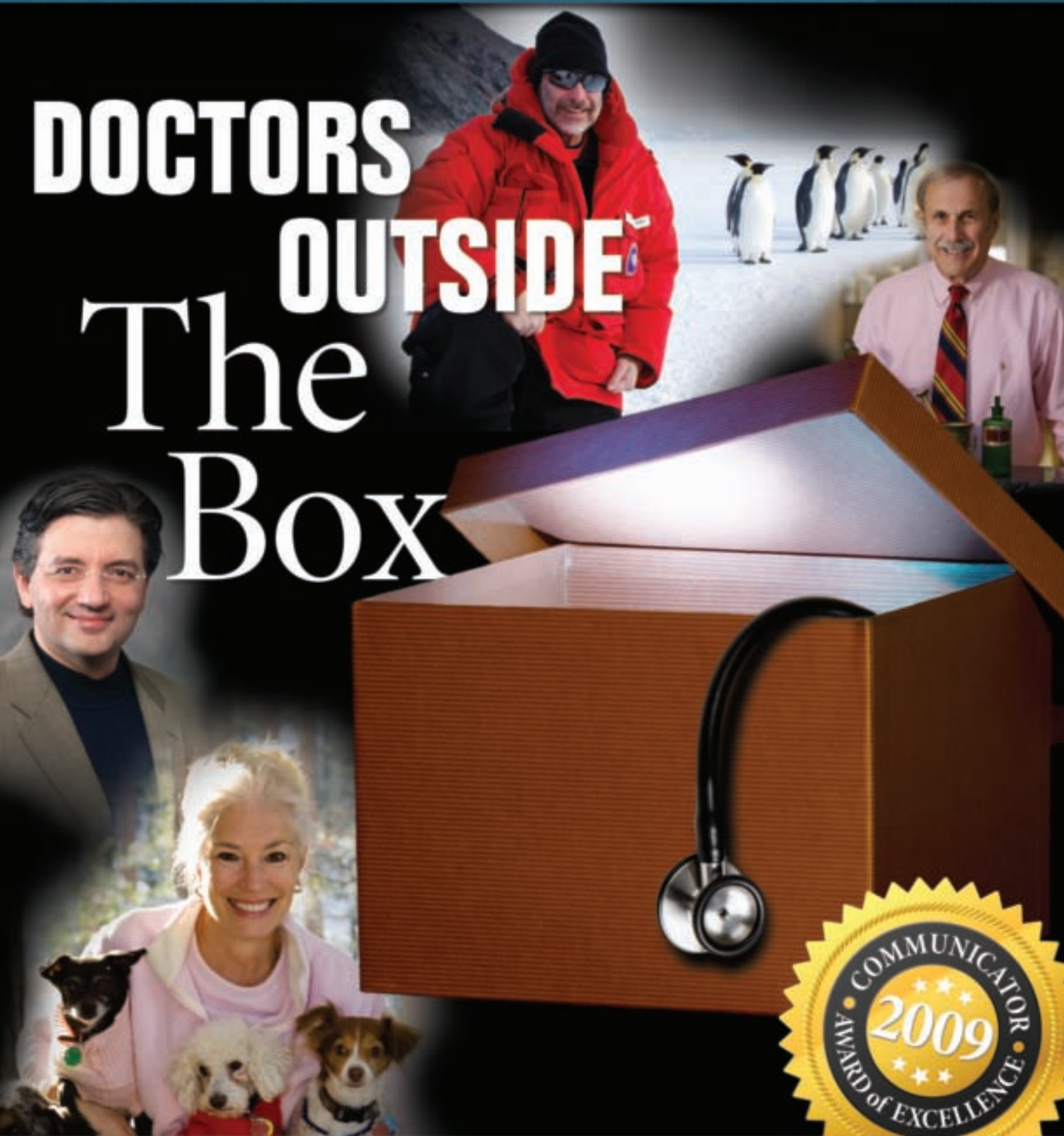
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DOCTORS OUTSIDE The Box





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By Sharla Dudley

Deborah Wilson, MD: Advocating for All Creatures Great and Small

“I hold that the more helpless a creature, the more entitled it is to protection by man from the cruelty of man.”

— Mohandas K. Gandhi

AS A CHILD, Dr. Deborah Wilson collected and cared for a menagerie of animals, from guinea pigs and birds to snakes to dogs and cats.

California, in a family that wholly embraced animals and instilled within her a love of all creatures and the passion to protect them

Dr. Wilson acknowledges that while their work is important, simply belonging to national animal advocacy organizations isn't always enough.

Today, as a Board-certified gynecologist, she runs a successful gynecology practice in Scottsdale – and the Feathers Foundation, an animal rescue and adoption organization with sanctuaries in Prescott and New River, and an extensive volunteer network.

Dr. Deborah Wilson grew up in Santa Barbara,

from abuse and suffering. Both her grandparents and her mother were vegetarians and lovers of all creatures great and small. “My mom was a lost animal magnet,” she says. An early family memory for Dr. Wilson involves a St. Bernard that her mother brought home; the dog was eventually placed with a new family, but not before it created

some domestic drama by crashing through a plate glass window in the house.

Before college, she attended Joan Baez and Ira Sandperl’s Institute for the Study of Nonviolence, where she lived in a commune with other institute members. Most members were vegetarians, and many kept pets. During this time and throughout college she worked at veterinary hospitals. While she originally thought to pursue veterinary medicine, many of the practices she witnessed on a daily basis, such as tail-docking and ear-cropping, convinced her otherwise. “Much of veterinary medicine and certainly the public’s attitude toward those practices have now changed. At the time, though, I could not in good conscience,” she says, “pursue a career where I would of necessity have to perform procedures I felt to be cruel and inhumane.”

Medical school and the

subsequent decision to specialize in obstetrics and gynecology felt like a natural transition. In medical school at George Washington University in Washington, D.C., she was able to keep two cats that shared a tiny apartment with her.

Although raised to be a vegetarian, as an adult, she made the decision to become a vegan because “once you begin to delve into animal rights you realize the exploitation doesn’t simply stop with animal slaughter for meat.” She acknowledges that as a physician, many of the technologies and materials that she relies on in her practice may have used animal testing in their development. However, it is important to her to be “as pure as possible” in not relying on products that exploit animals.

This lifestyle choice has also influenced her selection of what animal advocacy organizations to support.

Dr. Wilson is involved in the Humane Society of the United States (HSUS) and People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (PETA) because both are vegan organizations. She has great respect and admiration for her friend Wayne Pacelli, the president and CEO of HSUS.

She acknowledges that PETA members' more radical actions generally get media attention, but along with organizations such as HSUS and Farm Sanctuary, they accomplish legislative work that she sees as vital to making real change in the way animals are treated, particularly in agribusiness and wildlife. "I can save as many individual animals as is possible for one person, but in order to alleviate more suffering, legislation is where it's at." She proudly cites the 2006 passage of Proposition 204 in Arizona as a legislative success; the ballot measure prohibits the confinement of calves in veal crates and the confinement of breeding pigs in gestation crates. This and another ballot in California were legislative efforts heavily promoted by regional animal advocacy groups as well as HSUS and Farm Sanctuary.

Dr. Wilson is a member of the Physicians Committee for Responsible Medicine (PCRM), and friends with Neal Barnard, MD, the

founder and president of PCRM, with whom she attended medical school. Among other aspects of health care such as preventive medicine and higher standards for human research, PCRM promotes alternatives to the use of animals in medical research, a commitment that dove-

tailed with the goals of animal advocacy organizations such as HSUS and PETA.

As the Founder and Director of the Feathers Foundation, Dr. Wilson established two sanctuaries, the Circle L Ranch in Prescott, and Circle M (Mountain) Ranch in New River, and plans to open a smaller one in Phoenix in the next few months.



Dr. Wilson with some Feathers Foundation family members.

Dr. Wilson acknowledges that while their work is important, simply belonging to national animal advocacy organizations isn't always enough. While one may be aware of agribusiness' cruel realities, "you find out that

there's an auction farm right down the road that sends horses to be slaughtered in Mexico," and you can take immediate action in your own backyard. She did. The Circle L ranch in Prescott now houses 70 horses.

The beginnings of the organization were simple enough. "My rescues began with parrots and dogs that

I sheltered when I had a second home in Flagstaff," she says, "but we began to accumulate unadoptable dogs and Premarin mares, so I found property in Prescott for a reasonable price." Thus Circle L ranch was born. In 2004, the Feathers Foundation achieved 501c3 status, and now maintains a website featuring the organization's activities and adoptable animals, ranging from cats and dogs to horses and goats.

"My goal is to move more toward legislation," and to that end "I vow not to take anymore animals, but..." she sighs, "there is always someone calling with a special case."

As Dr. Wilson describes some of these special cases, it is clear that her sympathy extends to the humans who have been forced to give up their pets. She has a special empathy for elderly in hospice care who are panicked over the fate of their older pets. With the recent downturn in the economy, "there are oppressive amounts of animals being abandoned because their owners have lost their livelihoods and their homes." She recounts the story of a woman, Betsy, who lost her home and was forced to release her dog, Quincy, to the county shelter. As owner-surrendered animals at shelters are usually in danger of imminent

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mother-to-mother service available to help answer your patient's questions about giving their baby the best start. The program helps new moms and moms-to-be understand the benefits and challenges of breastfeeding and provides support to successfully breastfeed. Moms-to-be can talk to women who have practical suggestions for making breastfeeding an enjoyable bonding experience for the whole family. WIC also offers an expanded food package for moms who exclusively breastfeed their babies to help encourage breastfeeding. For more information on the breastfeeding food

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This article was brought to you by the Maricopa County WIC program. They can be reached at (602) 506-9333 or wic@mail.maricopa.gov. Check out their Web site at http://www.maricopa.gov/Public_Health/Community/WIC/wic.aspx.

Dr. Wilson

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euthanasia, Quincy had fortunately been rescued by Circle L. Six months later, Betsy had reestablished herself with a job and shelter, and she sought out the fate of Quincy; Circle L was able to reunite them.

Dr. Wilson received her specialty training as a resident at St. Joseph's in Phoenix, and now specializes in minimally invasive gynecologic surgery.

While she chose to go into obstetrics to deliver babies, she finally gave up obstetrics side of practice in order to focus on gynecology surgery. The two aspects of her practice began to

conflict, long hours combined with busy nights, and the unpredictable nature of deliveries compromised the surgery schedule.

She also co-teaches a national course on laparoscopic hysterectomies for Gyrus/ACMI, a subsidiary of Olympus Company, instructing classes two days each month for up to 15 physicians.

Asked if her four children inherited her love of animals, Dr. Wilson replies, "Yes, all of them," and proudly shares a picture of her new grandchild, two weeks old. **AM**

Interested in learning more about Dr. Deborah Wilson's Feathers Foundation? Visit www.circlel.org.

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