

Goodbye Dear Dr. Sophia Yin

Dr. Ernie Ward, DVM

Ernie has more than 20 years of experience in the veterinary industry and is a well-known veterinarian, media personality and author. He is also a founding member of IDEXX's Pet Health Network team.

"You've got it all wrong."

Those are the first words I remember my dear friend, [Dr. Sophia Yin](#), telling me about a common animal training technique I had mentioned during a lecture. That was about fifteen years ago and it still bugs me.

It still bugs me because not only was she absolutely right, but also in that moment I began questioning everything I'd been taught about animal behavior and training. I'm sure she had this effect on many of us during her career. Come to think of it, I can't remember Sophia ever being wrong about anything. That's what makes her loss so devastating for so many.

Over the years Sophia and I collaborated on a wide variety of projects. We always made time to catch up when we were lecturing at the same conference, many times in all corners of the world. Her smile, quirky laugh, and energy always evaporated any lingering jet lag and boosted my mood. We always talked about my Ironman events, her latest behavior breakthrough, and the great opportunities our beloved veterinary profession held. Even though both of us have pushed many vets outside their comfort zones over the years, it was only because we shared the same deep belief that veterinarians can be so much better. That's what I'll miss most about Sophia, her dedication to making the world better for pets and people.

Many will write of her many professional and academic accomplishments, her awards and recognitions, and her contributions to animal behavior. I want to share with you how real she was as a friend.

I was putting together a television program a few years ago and needed an animal behavior expert for a segment. Naturally I called Sophia, as I always did. I outlined my idea for the story, she improved it, and we discussed logistics. Apparently I seemed a little hurried,

distracted or stressed. Hey, she's a behaviorist trained in these sorts of things. Anyway, in the midst of checking plane schedules and hotel accommodations, she lanced me. "But Ernie, are you having fun? Aren't you always telling me to enjoy the moment?" Whoa. Once again, she was right. In that moment she allowed me to decompress, regain my composure and start having fun again. Very few people can do that. On second thought, that's what I'll miss most about my friend.

I'm not sure how long I'll have to fight back the tears whenever I think of her. We'd spoken not long before her death about her involvement in a big project I've been working on for the past two years. There's no one to take her place. She was that unique. She was that special.

Animals have lost a compassionate voice. Veterinarians have lost a tireless leader. I've lost a dear friend.

Goodbye, dear Sophia. Animals are better cared for because of you. I'm a better veterinarian and person because of you. The world is a better place because of you. I will miss you.