

Dr. Justine Lee: What I'm Thankful For

Dr. Justine A. Lee, DVM, DACVECC

Justine has more than 18 years of experience in the veterinary industry and is a board-certified emergency critical care veterinary specialist and toxicologist as well as the CEO and founder of Vetgirl. She is also a founding member of IDEXX's Pet Health Network team.

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As Thanksgiving approaches, I like to take the time to reflect back on all that I'm thankful for. (In reality, we should be thankful more than one day a year!).

I'll start by writing about the dedication at the beginning of my dog book [It's a Dog's Life... But It's Your Carpet](#). This humorous, Q&A book on dog ownership took a lot of time to come to fruition, and my dedication to all those that I was thankful for is listed below:

To my parents, who taught me that perseverance, hard work, and faith pay off...

To the thousands of dogs and cats that I've treated, and the good (and occasional bad) owners that came with them - for making me who I am today, and teaching me and reminding me why I love what I do...

To JP, the best dog ever, for teaching me that success isn't measured by society,

but by the joy of a tail wag.

To all my friends, family, relatives, and acquaintances who've always hounded me for free vet advice... this one's for you.

In an excerpt of my acknowledgements at the end of the book:

To my family, who encouraged me along the way, but more importantly, put up with me - thank you for all your advice, support, and tolerance.

To Jane (BFF), for teaching me and showing me, by example, just how essential compassion, communication, and the human-animal bond are. I want to be reincarnated as your next dog.

To all the wonderful friends and colleagues along the way who thought I was insane to take on yet another project...you know who you are (yes, I mean you). From helping to come up with humorous vet questions, to working in a coffee shop, to reading the first few manuscripts ("can you proof these 100 pages by say, Wednesday?"), to pet sitting JP, to helping me escape and go play - thank you.

To the handful of extra-special patients that I've had (you may see your name interspersed through the book!) - for teaching me that life is short, but a dog's life is even shorter, so live and love hard.

But there's more to it than that...

Below, a list of all that I'm grateful for in relation to my veterinary career:

- For always having the dream - since I was 7 years of age - to become a veterinarian... I'm grateful because I have no idea what else I would be!
- For having parents who let me buck the Chinese norm of going to medical school (to become a "real doctor") and let me pursue my passions of becoming a veterinarian.
- For getting into Cornell University College of Veterinary Medicine, where I felt my training

was top-notch.

- For having incredible mentors along the way, who taught me the importance of a) physical examination skills, b) learning from your mistakes, c) never making the same mistake twice, d) how to take it to the next level.
- For my intern mates at Angell Memorial Animal Hospital and resident mates at University of Pennsylvania, who helped support me and teach me... and be a shoulder to cry on.
- For having some incredible pet owners, some of whom I still keep touch with.
- For having been blessed with the opportunity to train at some of the top programs in the world, which trained me to practice the highest quality of medicine while still being able to provide practical "real-life" medicine.
- For being on the other side of the table - having had to bring my own beloved dog to two veterinary schools for diagnosis and treatment of his brain tumor. I'm thankful for this experience because it taught me the importance of the human-animal bond, what it's like to hear the words "Your dog has cancer," how devastating it can be, and how people actually do want to hear the answers to "What would you do if it was your dog, doc?"
- For having so many opportunities in veterinary medicine.
- For the incredible team of veterinarians and veterinary technicians who I work with, without whom I couldn't do my job.
- For the gift of euthanasia, which is not readily available in human medicine, so I can alleviate pain and suffering in pets.
- For a job that is more than just "playing with puppies and kittens," but rather, about [ONE](#)

[health](#) and being able to incorporate public health, human health, and the science of veterinary medicine on a daily basis.

I wouldn't trade it for the world. And I'm grateful I have a job I'm passionate about and still love after a decade and a half of practice. Here's to the next few decades...