

## The Journey Through Vet School — Meet Porch Potty's Official Veterinarian Jennifer Sawyer



by Melody Keilig

If you've been with Porch Potty for a while, you may know [Vet Jenny](#) through our blog. We're lucky to have her expertise on various pet care topics and wish her luck in her vet career.

She's contributed excellent posts on [pet obesity](#), preventing [canine heat stroke](#), spaying and neutering, and her [Kibble Katcher review!](#)

Recently, Jennifer has been working hard studying and taking her finals as a 4th year student at veterinary school. She sat down with Porch Potty to discuss her journey, from dreaming of becoming a vet to creating her website, blog, and social media sharing expert advice about pet care.

So, if you're interested in learning more about pet care from a vet student's perspective or if you're applying to vet school, check out what Jennifer has to say about her experience!

**Melody:** We're meeting for the first time, obviously. So, how would you introduce yourself to someone like me who doesn't know you?

**Jennifer:** So, my name is Jennifer Sawyer. I am a fourth year veterinary student graduating in April. My licensing exam is in just ten short days, but yeah, that's my kind of identity.

**M:** Do you have any certifications you want to talk about? Any degrees?

**J:** Yeah, so I got an honors degree in biology. I majored in biology and minored in chemistry. So bachelor of science and yeah, still working on the DVM [Doctor of Veterinary Medicine]. I got it from Wilfrid Laurier University in Waterloo, Ontario, Canada.

**M:** What interests you about animal medicine?

**J:** For me, the reason why I went into the field is because I feel like animals can't truly advocate for themselves. So, I've always wanted to kind of be part of a team that helps advocate for animals, and I feel like veterinary medicine really allows for that.

And then another driving factor for enduring industry was because I love the human animal bond.

*I love fostering that, and I feel like in vet med, you can make a really positive impact on the human animal bond by keeping their furry family members happy and healthy.*

**M:** Have you always wanted to become a veterinarian?

**J:** Yes, ever since I can really remember. Like, at probably four years old, it's always been the goal. So every decision in my life has been geared towards this.

**M:** So now it's kind of come full circle in a way. You followed that path up until, you know, your whole life up until now.

**J:** Yeah, exactly. It's finally coming together. It's been about ten years of university to get here, so I've been a professional student for a long time, so yeah, it's finally piecing together.

**M:** How many years of vet school have you had to go through?

**J:** So it's four years of vet school, and then you have to kind of at least start an undergraduate degree. So an undergrad degree is four years. If you go to a school that allows you to get prerequisites for vet school, kind of like, ahead of time, then you can maybe apply after your second year.

Because I went to Laurier, it was set up a little bit differently, and I knew I wanted to complete my full degree, so I ended up doing just over four years for that as well.

*If you want to specialize as a vet, like, if you want to specialize in surgery, neurology, whatever it is, an extra four to six years.*

**M:** So, what is your specialty?

**J:** I'm doing general practice. So similar to, like, a family doctor, so kind of a little bit of everything. We still do surgery, neurology, dentistry, all those fun things, but just not committed to one field. I did originally want to specialize, but after ten years, I think I'm ready to just kind of get into practice.

**M:** Is there something that you prefer to do over the other?

**J:** I have an interest in emergency medicine. I love being there for clients in a time of need. So I've been there myself as a pet owner, and I know how important it is to be there as a veterinarian for the client and the patient.

And then also, I just like general practice. In general, you have a relationship with the clients, so I really like that ongoing relationship. That's one of my favorite things too.

**M:** Do you get to work with all kinds of animals then, or just more common pets, like dogs or cats?

Rewards



**J:** When we're in [vet] school, we have to learn about large and small animals. Dogs, cats, and then livestock, and then we also have to learn, like, fish and exotics and things like that. So, for me, I would prefer to do dogs and cats. I like horses and cows, but I just don't think I'm made for that. I did do that a little bit this past summer, but yeah, dogs and cats for me. And then some clinics around here do dabble in exotics. So I would be interested in that as well because I love those little tiny critters too.

**M:** Growing up, were you around animals a lot? Did your family have a lot of pets?

**J:** Yeah, so growing up, we always had family dogs. We've had a few. We had a cat as well, so we definitely had them in my life. And of course my grandma and grandpa and everybody, they always had dogs, too. But I didn't grow up on a farm or anything like that. And no one in my family works in the animal industry.

**M:** What are your future plans with being a veterinarian?

**J:** So my future plans, of course, are general practice and hoping to also work in emergency on the side. I'm not sure if that's something I'll go right into as soon as I graduate. Not too sure. So far, a lot of things are up in the air because I'm busy studying. I haven't really figured out exactly where I'm going to work geographically, but there's many opportunities, so I feel like general practice will be my main interest.

*I also would love to continue my journey on social media with vet med. It's just kind of like educating clients and helping them in any way that I can. I really like having a platform, so I look forward to growing that as well.*

**M:** I was on your website and I found it interesting that you've been documenting your time in vet school. You've been sharing tips and sharing experiences. So, what made you decide to start sharing these experiences and along with starting a website and blog?

**J:** I just kind of wanted to share my experience with other people. Also, I found that when I was trying to get into that school, being someone who didn't go to, like, the vet school for undergrad, like, I did it at a different school. So I felt like my resources were really limited. I had really no insight into how the application process worked except for whatever was on the university website, which was really challenging.

I felt like I did have to apply multiple times to get in. I applied three times, so I just didn't know much about the process. And I thought if I could help anyone else in any other way, future vet students kind of, like, foster that and help guide them and hopefully help them to try to get in, I just felt like that would be really fulfilling for me.

And, yeah, just sharing my love for animals and educating clients, I just felt like it would be a really cool way to do that, even beyond being a vet, is by having a blog and doing it on Instagram. I'm also a pretty outgoing person, so I really like sharing things with people online, and I like being, like, a real person and not, like, glorifying things.

*I really wanted everyone to have a realistic look into what it's like to be a vet student and how they can get there.*

**M:** So you're saying that to get into vet school, sometimes it's as strict, or people think that they have to have all these perfect grades?

**J:** Basically, vet school is, or a lot of people say, that it's more competitive than getting into medical school. Because there are fewer vet schools in Canada, you have to apply to the province that you reside in. So not every province even has a vet school. So that kind of limits your options.

But also, for instance, I'm in Ontario, and I thought about applying to PEI [Prince Edward Island], but I can't because I don't live there. So I would have to move there and live there, not as a student, and work for a year and then be able to apply there, but then I wouldn't be able to apply to Ontario. So it's very limited in that regard. And then if you go internationally to the [United] States, there's definitely some vet schools, but the prerequisites are very different for each school.

So while you're putting all your eggs in one basket, trying to get into one school, you're kind of missing those other baskets for the other schools. And then in regards to perfect grades, you do need extremely high grades to get in. It doesn't mean that your entire university career has to be amazing. Mine certainly wasn't, but your most recent grades have to be high. And now from my school, the average to get in, I believe last year was almost 95. So, it's pretty competitive.

**M:** Wow, I never knew that it was a competitive field.

**J:** And the class sizes are small. So, in my class, there's 120. Every vet school I think in North America, they're looking into increasing their class sizes right now, so they can only increase by, really, a couple of seats. So it's very slow, which is also why we have this strain on the industry, because we just can't get enough people out and graduated.

**M:** So what's the process like? After you graduate from vet school, do you just start applying to different clinics, like, sending your resume kind of thing?

**J:** Like I said, I'm in my fourth year. So, right now you have to pass the North American Veterinary Licensing Exam while you're in your fourth year, and then either in December or in April. And then once you graduate, you have to pass your state or provincial licensing exam prior to graduating. You also have to pass finals, which for me is like two exams for large animals, I think they have a bit more and then yeah, once you graduate.

So, a lot of my classmates have already started signing contracts. Because there is such a strain on the industry, vets are in high demand. One of my classmates signed last year, and one of them signed in first year. And then there's a lot of us who are just kind of waiting until our minds are more clear and we're not studying all the time. But yeah, you just kind of start applying or they kind of seek you out.



**M:** What has been the most challenging part of vet school?

**J:** That's a good question. I think the most challenging part is the constant studying. I feel like there's so many parts that are challenging, so the constant studying, it can be very isolating. And I did do part of that school during the pandemic, so that meant that a lot of it was online for me. I felt like that was nice because I didn't have to commute to school. But also isolating because you don't get to see your friends and things like that.

Another challenging part of that school is that they kind of make you into a very Type A person when you're trying to get in, because you need those high grades. Once you get in, they tell you to forget about your grades, to just kind of focus on the experience and, of course, still pass.

But you have to become okay with not getting A pluses anymore because you probably won't because it is a lot of information. So that was something difficult to overcome.

*I honestly think it was the sheer amount of content in the studying that would be the hardest for me. Because you are learning sometimes about things that you maybe you didn't quite picture yourself learning about initially because I didn't think I'd need to know cows so in depth, for instance, because I was going to be small animals.*

So, that's been tricky. And becoming comfortable with large animals because we do have to work with them on campus. And I can't say I had really ever done it before, so that was tricky, too, but it was fun.

**M:** With your tests, is it like partially written exams and then partially hands on, you're actually treating the animal?

**J:** Yeah, exactly. So, throughout the year, we have tests every week, probably two to three a week. Not in my clinical year like this year, but other years. Two to three a week. And then midterm season starts in the beginning of October, and it just never ends.



And then you have your finals, and then at the end of the year as well, with our written finals, we have something called OSCE. And so those are in person. And you do a physical exam on a cow or a horse and a dog and cat. You get one small animal, one large animal, and then you have to do a physical exam in front of them and report your findings. So those are our in person kind of exams. Otherwise, most things are multiple choice or written.

**M:** You've written blogs for Porch Potty covering topics like the Porch Potty, pet obesity, heat stroke, spaying, and neutering. What's another pet topic that you would want to write about or love to write about that you feel that more pet parents should know?

**J:** I think that this would be a good one to write about, but would also be extremely challenging because it's so multifaceted. But nutrition, because I feel like that's a really up and coming topic right now. I feel like there are many different opinions on what is right and what is wrong.

*| There's a lot of misleading information on the internet and it's very accessible. So, unfortunately, a lot of people read it and develop opinions.*

In regards to nutrition, beyond that, more specifically, I would say raw diets, grain-free diets, those kinds of boutique diets that aren't your classic kibbles, I think that would be a really good topic to delve into because there just isn't enough accurate information on the internet.

**M:** How do you handle an animal that has never seen you before in their life and they're reacting to you because they're terrified?

**J:** Whenever a reactive animal comes in, it doesn't upset me or anger me or anything like that. I truly see it from their point of view. I can really imagine what they're feeling. And I really put myself in their shoes. So something that's really great, that is kind of becoming more popular is fear free medicine, which, I mean, that would be a good article in itself. So with animal behavior, because I feel like that can be really misinterpreted, as well.

*| I am fear free certified. I think you need to upkeep it every single year, so I probably need to do that again now. But basically with fear free medicine, it's like when the pet comes in and if they're not going to allow you to do anything, we're not going to push them.*

We like to try to get them [dogs] to come in as many times as possible for just treat visits or happy visits to try to get them out of that reactive response. But if all else fails, part of fear free medicine is providing an anti-anxiety medication or sedative. So something like Gabapentin or Trazodone. They're very mild. A lot of people, they get a little worried about giving their pet something, right? But I would 100% do it. I've seen it done so many times. It's extremely safe.

One of the drugs doesn't even have a toxic dose. So what we recommend, if you try it at home, see how it goes. Best case scenario is they get sleepy. That's just kind of what we're just going for, like a chill, relaxed vibe. And we recommend that you give that the night before you come the morning of, and then when they come, hopefully that brings down their anxiety.

**M:** I had written a blog post about pet first aid kits. So, what would you have in your pet first aid kit?

**J:** I would have, speaking on [pet] nails, corn starch. Because when you cut a quick of a dog's nail, it'll bleed like crazy. So, in a clinic, you have something called Kwik Stop, but you can use corn starch, that often works. Vet wrap, and then gauze. The gauze wrap and the gauze squares. Gloves for you, alcohol, or like an iodine tincture... chlorhexidine scrub.

If you were really excessive, maybe clippers. You could put in clippers if you need to clip a wound. Yeah, I feel like a gauze you could use as a tourniquet, too, so I wouldn't say you need a tourniquet...cotton swabs.

**M:** Did you say "clip" a wound?

**J:** Yes. If you have a wound and you need to keep hair out of it, then usually one of the first things we do if there's a wound, whether it's like a dog bite or maybe the dog is just licking too much and it's created a little bit of a bacterial infection. We will trim it with clippers like with a little buzzer just to keep it clean.

If you enjoyed Jennifer's journey through vet school and excellent advice to other people who dream of helping animals, check out her website, [Vet Jenny](#), and social media (@vetstudentjenny) to learn more about becoming a vet!



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