LEAVING EARTH

Edith, partner of Jean Robinson

(Salt Lake City) Edith died suddenly in November of an apparent stroke. Jean & Edith were a team ever since May of 2022.

Emma, partner of Bee Lufkin

(Salt Lake City) Emma died suddenly on December 22nd. She had visited just the day before at All Saints Episcopal Church, where the congregation was donating their December contributions to ITA. Emma was only 4 years old. Bee & Emma (Bee's 4th ITA partner), had been a team since March of 2024.

Finn, partner of Lynn Bacon

(Bozeman)

Lynn sent us these two great photos of Finn enjoying a de-stress event at Montana State University in Bozeman on December 1st. The very next day, December 2nd, sweet Finn died suddenly of a collection of fluid around his heart. Lynn & Finn were an ITA team since October of 2017, and Finn would have been 10 in January.

SWEET ANECDOTES

A Valuable Gift Given

Yesterday (12/3/25) at Utah Cancer Specialists, I met a patient and her daughter who were full of personality and enthralled with Max, and grateful for his presence.

The patient, probably in her 80's, gave me $2, with thankfulness.

It was unbelievably touching, and I promised her I would get it to ITA."

– Jean Revord & Max

A Fan Club Forms

We take Fitz to the Marian Center/St. Joseph's most Monday afternoons. Fitz gets carsick and it's really close to our home so we always walk there. He now has a fan club that meets up after his Monday "shifts." There's a 9-year-old girl, Gaia, who waits for him to walk by her house every Monday afternoon.

In early November, I met Gaia when I was walking home with Fitz. We chatted for a few minutes, I told her about Fitz's work, and I gave her Fitz's card. She has been outside of her house waiting for us to walk by every day since then that Fitz has worked! She'll always say something like "I thought he would work last Monday, but you didn't walk by," so she must be waiting outside of her house every Monday evening in case we come by.

Yesterday when we were walking home with Fitz, Gaia was of course waiting outside of her house, so we crossed the street to say hi to her. This time her mom came out to meet us, too. As she walked up, she said "I've heard a lot about Fitz!"

I thought that would give you all a good smile!

– Tegan Tingley & Fitz

That Magic? It's Oxytocin!

We now know that the essence of what happens when our animals connect with their clients is the "oxytocin effect," the flooding of the body with those feel-good hormones. The definitive book on the subject to date has been *Made For Each Other,* by Meg Daley Olmert, which was published in 2010. It was the first book to explain how the chemistry of attraction and attachment flows through—and between—all mammals to create the profound emotional bonds humans and animals experience. Mutual gazing between people and their pups *increases oxytocin levels in both species*, leading to a positive feedback loop, research suggests. Stroking a therapy animal also stimulates the release of oxytocin.

This phenomenon is becoming more widely known; this past June, Stacey Colino wrote about it in the Washington Post:

> If you've ever felt better after getting a hug from someone you love or petting your dog, you're no stranger to the oxytocin effect. Many people are craving that calming sensation, given the constant barrage of stressful news.
>
> Often called the "love hormone" or the "cuddle hormone," oxytocin is produced in the brain's hypothalamus and acts as a chemical messenger. It promotes feelings of love, bonding and well-being. It also impacts the peripheral nervous system, which carries information from the brain to the rest of the body, said Alicia Che, an assistant professor of psychiatry at the Yale University School of Medicine who conducts research on oxytocin.
>
> As a result, the hormone can influence sensory processing, pain perception, regulation of body temperature, social interactions and more. "Oxytocin works in the brain and body," she said.
>
> Yet, it's sometimes misunderstood. Due to its roles in childbirth and breastfeeding, "oxytocin had a reputation as a female hormone, but it's not. Both men and women have oxytocin, as well as receptors for the hormone throughout their brains and bodies.
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> Oxytocin is nature's medicine because it affects every known process, even the microbiome. It's everywhere, doing everything. If you're healthy, your body will release oxytocin.
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> Depending on what's happening to trigger oxytocin release, the effects can kick in within seconds or minutes, experts say.
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> "Oxytocin can lower blood pressure and reduce stress reactivity," noted Evan MacLean, an associate professor of veterinary medicine and psychology at the University of Arizona. "It can turn down the volume on that stress signal," which can help you feel calmer physically and emotionally, he said.
>
> In addition, oxytocin has been shown to reduce inflammation and has antioxidant

Oxytocin ... (cont.)

properties, Carter said, both of which can protect the body and facilitate healing during illness or injury. "People want to know how to live a long life and one of the answers is to facilitate the oxytocin system," Carter said. "Oxytocin is turning out to be the antidote to stress."

A surge of oxytocin can increase empathy and lead to positive social behavior, said Paul Zak, a behavioral neuroscientist and professor at the Claremont Graduate University and author of "The Little Book of Happiness." "When we are more empathic, we are nicer to be with and that leads to better social connections," he said.

Some of the effects of oxytocin are so powerful that the hormone is being investigated as a nasal spray for physical and mental health conditions, including anxiety and autism, and severe irritability in people with disruptive behavior disorders, and disruptive mood and behavior disorders. It has been shown, with varying degrees of success, to have pain-relieving effects when administered as a nasal spray.

Use of an oxytocin nasal spray combined with psychotherapy may have a greater effect on reducing depressive symptoms in people with mental health disorders than either treatment alone, a recent study reported.

But oxytocin nasal sprays aren't ready for prime time because more research needs to be done to determine efficacy, the right context or conditions for using it, and how to control the dosage, Che said.

Extra benefit for us: turns out that when you volunteer at a charitable organization, a school or senior center, being of service to other people—called prosocial behavior—it also stimulates an increased production of oxytocin, according to a 2022 study.

So there you have it—and it's important to know that there is strong science behind animal-assisted interactions. But they're still magic!