

## NEW JERSEY JEWISH NEWS

### This vet makes house calls

*by Elaine Durbach*  
*NJJN Staff Writer*

As if the life of a suburban pet wasn't cushy enough, now there's a veterinarian who makes house calls.

Dr. Faith Krausman, a Montclair vet traversing the region in her carefully equipped "Vet-on-Wheels" ([vet-on-wheels.com](http://vet-on-wheels.com)) van, said clients often sigh with envy over the treatment their pets receive. "It's a pity it isn't this way for people any more," she said.

Krausman treats animals in the comfort of their own environment. She said she offers concentrated one-on-one attention, away from the germs and distractions of other patients. In the past few days, she and her assistant have traversed the region, checking on a dehydrated iguana, a pre-diabetic Great Dane, and an emaciated cat, among many others.

Of course, having a vet and her assistant make a house call, with the sometimes significant travel time involved, costs more than an office visit. Krausman charges \$65 for a visit, compared to the \$54 average cost at the hospital where she works three days a week. For those in need, she offers the easiest payment terms she can, but few people balk at the cost.

"You can't put a price on love," she said.

The benefits of a house call are enormous for both owners and their animals, Krausman explained, stopping off in Maplewood (just to talk — this home had no more than guppies).

"It's so much easier — especially for the elderly, not having to put their pet into a carrier and get it to the office. And the animal is spared the trauma involved, of being transported, and the noises and smells of other animals and disinfectant and medications. For the small animals, like rabbits or

hamsters, it's particularly helpful. They can have a heart attack just from the fear of all those strange smells.

"When you treat an animal at the hospital, it can take hours before they calm down. At home, they bounce back almost at once," she said.

A gentle, no-nonsense person, Krausman has the same intense regard for her own animals — which currently include Deputy Dog, a mutt; Floyd and Gin, cats; Mike II and III, hamsters (Mike I died); Gerri, cockatiel; Max and Stephanie, rabbits; Petey, parrot; Moe, Larry, and Curly, frogs; and three fish as yet unnamed — as she does for others' pets. A while back, though financially strapped at the time, she agreed to a \$10,000 treatment for her aging cat who had lymphoma. He died en route to the hospital, just as they were crossing the George Washington Bridge into Manhattan. "It was kind of poetic," she said.

Though her husband, Ron Kaplan, a writer who recently joined the staff of NJ Jewish News, and daughter Rachel, 11, have a more moderate take on animals, they go along with her passion. For example, there was the blind frog Krausman brought along on their vacations because it had to be hand-fed. "It couldn't see where its food was," she explained. "We'd keep it in the closet in the hotel room and hope it didn't croak while the maid was in the room."

Recently there was a little bird Krausman brought home from a pet store she visits to care for ailing creatures. The chick needed prolonged care, and having watched it return to feisty good health, Ron and Rachel were as reluctant as Krausman to give it back. "I think we might make a deal. The bird probably costs less than the medical care I provided," she said.

### From city to farm

Krausman's passion for animals goes back to her early childhood, growing up in Brooklyn. Her father, who died when she was six, taught her how to care for the sickly dog they had adopted when she was a baby. It lived until she was 14. Her

mother later linked up with a man who was a magician. Faith became the caretaker of the creatures he used in his show, including rabbits and doves. She began studying animals of various kinds and breeding them. "I had them all in my room," she recalled. "My mother allowed it as long as I kept them all clean."

She attended Brooklyn College and the State University of New York at Binghamton, before enrolling in the four-year veterinary science course at Cornell University in Ithaca, NY. Along the way, she worked for a summer as a farm hand, milking cows, bailing hay, and scrubbing the farmer's kitchen floor.

Her scientific curiosity has grown, along with her experience with both pets and their owners. In a paper she presented in 2001 at an international symposium on human and animal interaction in Rio de Janeiro, Krausman described her observations of the effects a pet's health has on the well-being of elderly owners. "I had the statistics analyzed, and the correlation was quite amazing," she said.

With the increasing isolation faced by many people, especially the elderly, animal companionship is growing in importance, she said.

In her van Krausman carries a meticulously assembled mobile medical kit, so she can measure vital signs, administer shots, and provide treatments. There's a tiny blood pressure strap to use on a cat's paw, a heart-beat reader that hooks up to the telephone, and seldom-used muzzles of various sizes. If an animal needs more complex tests or surgery, she refers them to the hospital where she works. More and more sophisticated medical care is being offered for animals, including up-to-the-minute services like MRIs and laser and laparoscopic surgery, and, she said, owners are willing to pay for such treatments.

Despite her commitment, Krausman is careful to keep a balance in her life. She has been playing the saxophone since her teenage days and is an avid runner — which is how she met her husband.

“One of the ways I avoid burnout and set my limits is by making time for my hobbies, things I love to do,” she told students in a career day talk a little while back.

For Krausman, her motivation is the same as ever — a drive to ease animals’ suffering, for their sake and their owners’. “It’s a mitzva,” said Krausman, whose family belongs to Bnai Keshet in Montclair, “and the response you get is just wonderful.”

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