

Episode 50 | The Story I Didn't Want To Share and The Vet Med Lessons It Revealed

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The story I had absolutely no intention of ever telling anyone, that's what I'm sharing in Episode 50.

Welcome to the Joyful DVM Podcast. I'm your host, Veterinarian, and Certified Life Coach, Cari Wise. Whether you're dealing with the challenges in Vet Med, struggling with self-confidence, or you're just trying to figure out how to create a life and a career that you actually enjoy, you'll find encouragement, education, and empowering concepts you can apply right away. Let's get started.

Hey everybody. Welcome to Episode 50. Today, I'm going to share a story that I hadn't planned on sharing. Whenever it comes to me deciding what I'm going to talk about weekend and week out, what I'm going to share with you, weekend and week out, it's very intuitively led for me. So I kind of take inventory of what's been going on in the world, what's been going on within the Joyful DVM community, the things that have come into my awareness, and usually I find a message in there that really lights a spark for me to share.

Today, as I was considering my options on what I wanted to talk about, this story, this experience that I recently went through just kept coming up and I couldn't, for the life of me, figure out why on earth I would need to share this with you until I started playing it in my mind what it was that I would say, and so hang with me here as we go through this story, this tale because I think that it's going to be something that you can really relate to especially in the veterinary community where things don't always turn out the way that we think they're going to.

Here's what happened. Last week, one evening, it was a trash night and so it was time to take the trash out. We have a gravel driveway so I decided to walk out with my husband. I don't ever do this. This is not how we do things. I gathered the trash and the final things to put in the trash can, and then he hauls it down to the end of the driveway. So for whatever reason, it was a nicer day, I decided just to walk with him. So we walked down to the end of the driveway. As we went, came to turn around to come back, I decided to walk over to the garden. Again, not something that I do. There's not really anything going on in the garden. It's just now starting to get warm here; not a lot going on, but I went ahead and I walked over there and we have raised beds in this garden. As I walked through and I kind of glanced at what was there, I walked back to, I have two that are dedicated to where I plant flowers and one of them was very overgrown from last year. I had never pulled the weeds and stuff out. So I kind of walked over there and I looked down and in the corner of this bed was a baby rabbit - bunny, tiny - like laying there on his back kind of flailing and I'm like, what in the world are you doing here? This makes no sense. So I picked it up and I'm like looking around and it didn't have its eyes open and it was warm and I thought, this is the weirdest thing. So I put it back down because, you know, mother rabbits usually hide their babies and leave them for long periods of time. I started looking for a nest. Let me paint the picture. I'm looking out the window at the garden boxes. So these things are like 18 inches tall, 12 to 18 inches tall I'd say and they're metal and then they have dirt in them. He's like four inches from the top of the lid; so intentionally in here. As I'm looking at in all the foliage and all the

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stuff that's there and it's starting to get dark, and I think there has to be a rabbit's nest here. How does this rabbit get here? I have no idea. I was so torn. I'm like, do I take it inside? Do I leave it outside? Like, what do I do? I was conflicted for sure and so I left it. Bottom line, I decided to leave it. I checked it was warm. I checked it was hydrated. I'm like, I don't know why you're here. I don't know where you're supposed to be, but you're warm and I'm leaving you. Then, of course, I worried. Did I do the right thing? Should I go back and get it? Like, what do I do? I also know that my history of raising baby bunnies is like zero. I've never successfully done it in all of the years. So all of these things are going through my mind. Of course, I'm doubting my decision in all of these things.

Let's fast forward to the next morning. The next morning I go out and I checked. It's there and it's dead. So this is why on earth am I sharing this story with you. So you may be thinking right now exactly what I was thinking when I see this dead baby bunny sitting in this flower bed. Why the hell didn't you take this rabbit inside? You killed it. You left it there. I felt terrible. Absolutely like gut-wrenching grief at that moment, like, just so sad over the fact that this bunny was dead and that I had made the wrong choice in leaving it there. It hung with me. It's still like when I think about this bunny being dead, it still makes me very sad that this bunny is dead.

As I've kind of lived with this over the last few days, I've really struggled with like, why did that happen? I think that this is so important for us because we often struggle with the reality of what is when things happen that we don't understand. We want to know why. We want to know, why did this happen? How could it have been prevented? Why did I do that? Doing that, a few things kind of come up that I've really been able to sit with as I've gone through this, because what I also know, independent of this personal experience, this thing that I've gone through, I also know that the way that I feel about this situation is not created by the situation itself. I know this - Think, Feel, Act. I know that my grief is not created by the dead bunny.

Let me just take a second to tease that apart. The fact that this bunny died is not what causes me grief. The dead bunny doesn't cause me grief. Here's how I know this is true. If dead bunnies cause human grief, then we would all be grieving all the time. If this dead bunny cause human grief, then you guys all would have been grieving along with me over the last few days. Even though right at this moment, you may feel some grief over that, it's not because the bunny is dead. It's because of what you believe about it. It's because of what I believe about it. I grieve it because I don't want animals to die. When it all boils down to it, I don't want anybody to die. So anytime people die or animals die, I grieve. I'm sure many of you do too, but grief wasn't all of it.

As I've sat with it and I've just watched the experience of it through the lens of remembering that we are not our experiences. We have experiences and then we are people, but we are not our experiences. Our experiences don't define us. As I've kind of gone through this and experience this and thought about this over the last several days since this occurred, I still keep coming around to

the why. Why did this happen? And what's happening with me because it did? So grief for sure, but it was more than just grief. The worst of it wasn't even the grief. The worst of it, as I look at it now, and as I've taken the time to pick it apart, the worst of it isn't the sadness over the passing of this bunny. The worst part of it is, is the judgment, is the shame, is me blaming myself for the death of this bunny. I would not be at all surprised if when you hear my story and you heard the part where I told you that the bunny was dead if you didn't jump to judging me as well. This is what we do.

So then the bigger question is why. Why am I judging myself? Why are you judging me? Why do we judge our clients? Why do we judge each other when things don't go the way that we want them to go? It's because we just want it to be different. When we jump to the judgment, we come up with the reason why. If I judge myself for this bunny being dead, then I have an answer to the why. Why did the bunny die? Because you didn't take it inside... Because you didn't do more to try to save it. But friends, it's all false. We don't know that taking this bunny inside would have resulted in any kind of different outcome. When we do this, and this is so important for us to see is when we judge others, we think that if they had done something different, that the future would have turned out in a different way. We have zero evidence that that is true. We cannot predict the future.

I think judgment gives us such an interesting opportunity to see where we think we can control what happens in the world and we can't. Of course, we're going to have opinions of things that happened before, but we want to use some caution here in believing that we're powerful enough to have changed the progress. To change the events that came in the future simply by doing something different. It's an argument with the past that we will never win because the only truth there is what actually happened. So what actually happened, the factual framework of what happened with this bunny was I saw, I found a bunny in a flower bed. I did not take that bunny inside. That bunny died. My brain wants to connect all of those things. I want to judge myself in that connection. If I had taken it inside, it wouldn't have died. But notice that requires me to predict the future and I can't. There was no guarantee if I had taken it inside, that it would have lived. If I want to get real technical here, given my history and being able to raise baby bunnies, I have a 0% tracker. They have never lived. It has never worked.

So why do I tell you this? I tell you this because I think it's very easy for us to judge ourselves harshly. In that judgment, we think we're predicting the future. We think that if we had done something different then there would have been a different outcome. We turn all that in on ourselves. In that blame and in that judgment, we conclude that we're terrible people for leaving the bunny outside. We're terrible veterinarians for not taking a different step with that case to get a different outcome. But we never know guys. We never know, but what we do know, and what I know is true for me is that at the moment when we are faced with these decisions, we make the best decision that we can with the information and resources we have available at the time. We have to allow ourselves to find some peace in making the best choices that we can and then also find some relief in letting go of the

outcomes. We make the best choices that we can, but what happens next is never something we control. We can't control the world. We can't control the universe. We can't control the events that happen.

In this story, in sharing this with you, I think it's just really important for us to recognize how much of what we believe about ourselves get tied up in the judgments that we make of ourselves. The judgments that lead us to predict the future. As we start to kind of shake the foundation of this house of cards, it all starts to topple down. I'm not a terrible person. I don't think. I think my motives are good. I like my reasons. It made sense to me to leave it there. It sucks now a hundred percent, but in that emotion, in this experience, I can also see how I was mentally taking this event and turning it into something about me. I'm not a fundamentally bad person for the choice I made. You are not a fundamentally bad person for the choices that you make. We are so eager to find ways to convince ourselves, quite honestly, that we're good people. That we're doing the right thing. That we're on the right path. We're so eager for that, that we stick these little bits of measurement in all the places where they don't exist. You've heard me talk about this before with clients that are happy and patients that get better. Like if we have those two things, we feel like we're doing veterinary medicine right. But those two things are not reliable indicators of success or failure, of good or bad, or right or wrong when it comes to our lives and us as human beings overall. In that eagerness to find some proof that we're doing our lives the right way, we start to put a lot of influence and importance on things that just don't matter and on the things that we will never control. As I look at this situation and I ask the question why, "Why did this happen?", this sucks. "Why didn't I do something different? Why do I feel so much judgment and shame and regret over this? Why do I also feel so sad?" As I asked those questions, I can start to understand them a little bit more. But if I didn't have space, if I didn't have the awareness of knowing that the way that I feel in any given situation is created by what I'm believing about the situation, that I would absolutely 100% conclude that I feel all of these things because this baby rabbit is dead and it's my fault that it's dead, that would be the conclusion that I would draw. There's nowhere to go from there. It would require me to control all the things to keep this from happening again. That's what lots of us do. That's what I did.

For years and years and years and years and years in my life, I try to control all of the variables so that I never ended up in situations where I felt terrible, where I felt uncomfortable or suffering or whatever it is, anxiety, regret, judgment, shame. It doesn't work. I always still experience those emotions.

When we try so hard to control all the things, to avoid feeling those emotions and we fail at it, meaning we still feel the emotions, if we don't have that understanding of what's really happening, we turn that on ourselves. We aren't cut out for this job. We aren't cut out for this life. We're doing it all wrong. We've messed up our futures. I want you to know that's just absolutely not the case. We are not our experiences. We are not. We are humans. We are souls in a body on this earth in this

given period of time. We are here for a reason. Our souls will continue after this physical body experience here on earth is over. Our souls are infinite. It goes on and while we are here, we are meant to learn. We are meant to grow. That is the whole point of this and our growth doesn't stop once we are no longer here. If we can start to take a look at our experiences through the lens of growth, that can help us a little bit in answering why.

The initial reason or the initial question of why - why does this happen - comes from a self-protective place. Why does this happen? We want to know why so that we can prevent it from happening again. But remember that requires us to be able to predict the future which we can't do. So instead, a better question rather than "Why did this happen?" is "What am I supposed to learn here?" and that's where I went with this experience of mine. What am I supposed to learn here? Why did this suck? So there better be a good lesson here because this feels terrible. So what am I supposed to learn here? Perhaps what I was supposed to learn was that no matter how hard I try to control everything, I'll never control it. I think the greater lesson that I was supposed to learn was the example and the self-judgment and how I really didn't want to share this story. I wasn't going to share it probably with anybody. My husband knew about it cause he lived with me. Aside from that, I probably would never have told anybody about this. Why? Because of fear of judgment - fear of other people judging my decision to leave that baby bunny where it was. We're humans. We don't want other people to think badly about us, but we only want that because, underneath it, we're already thinking badly about ourselves. We're already questioning our own decisions and if other people have voiced the same thing, it's like proof that we were right. But guys, we're all wrong. All completely wrong. We're not our experiences. We are absolute. We are perfect. We have everything that we need and we're just experiencing the human experience. Part of it is going to include situations where we have an emotional reaction that isn't positive. That doesn't mean we're doing it wrong. That doesn't mean we're doing it wrong at all. It just means we have an opportunity to learn something. So when bad things happen, my dad always used to say, should happen, and I love that saying, that should happen because I think that's true. But as I've gotten older and I've thought about it more, what he was really saying was like stuff happens and you're never going to know why. Knowing why it happened isn't the point. The only reason we ever want to know why something happens is because we believe we can prevent it from happening in the future. We're wrong about that because we're just not that powerful. Instead, when things happen that we don't understand, the better question we can ask ourselves is, "What am I supposed to learn here? How is this going to help me? How do I want to experience this?", and just witness ourselves experiencing it.

I think the most freeing and fascinating part is when you allow yourself to be a witness of your experiences. So what I mean is instead of being all caught up in the grief and the shame and the guilt over this situation, which is what I wanted to do, by all means, I can feel that pull is real and that's kind of our normal default, but instead of just allowing that, what I did was I just asked myself, "What am I supposed to learn here?", and I allowed myself to watch myself, watch me as if I was outside of

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myself - watch me going through this, watching me experience all the emotions, watching me experiencing the phases of grief. It's been so fascinating because when you throw a question out into the universe, I don't care what the question is, when you throw that question out there and you leave it unanswered, it's one of the best gifts you can give yourself. Your mind will start to gather all the potentials of the possible answers for you. It also wants to try to believe there's a right answer and a wrong answer. As this all happened, I found the bunny and I left it there and then the whole night I'm like, why is the bunny there? In my mind, I'm like, how did it get there? Why is it there? It was warm. Why was it warm? I couldn't find the nest, but it must've been there. So like, my brain is trying to solve this thing. That is not how it should be. So I recognized and we all recognize in these moments that there's something different than it should be, and we try to figure it out, try to solve it. So my mind just kept working and working and working it. Then the next morning I go out there and I find it and it's dead. Instantly beating myself up. Instantly grieving and still trying to solve the problem. Why was it there? But it's an unsolvable question. How did it get there? Why was it warm? It didn't make any sense. So I, throughout the day, as I kind of ponder like all these different ways, how it could have gotten there. Maybe there was a Hawk and it found the nest and it grabbed one of the rabbits and then it dropped it in the flowerbed. I'm telling you, my brain tried to figure out all different kinds of ways to figure this out and I just didn't have a solution. Then that made me feel even worse because I'm like, well, if it did get dropped there, then there isn't a nest there, then I did leave it to its own devices and it probably died because of exposure because I left it. Of course, we're right back to the blame and then the brain tries to solve for that. But if it had actually been grabbed by a Hawk then it was probably injured and then it was probably going to die anyway.

So you see, the brain is trying to solve this. It's trying to make it different than it is. It's all this happening here. A thousand different paths of thought to try to get to a place where I end up with a result that's different than what it was. That's not going to happen. The result was a dead rabbit. Every road leads to a dead rabbit. It doesn't matter how many different twisty paths my brain wants to take to get there. Every road led to that. So it was really fascinating to watch that over the next few days, as I allowed myself to be sad and to recognize the judgment and then to just be the watcher of all the different ways that my brain tried to solve this problem. It was a problem that wasn't solvable. There was nothing to solve there. It was simply an experience. It was what it was.

I went back out later the next night. So I'd gone out the next morning and found it and then I took it and I buried it and then I went back out there again. I'm like, I'm missing something here. It's just my gut feeling. I'm missing something here. What am I missing? How did it get there? My brain could not let this go. So I went back out there and I'm looking around and back in the flower bed and I'm digging around, digging around, digging around, and I found the nest in the flower bed with live viable bunnies in it. I don't know why this one was out of the nest. I'm still trying to solve this, right? This piece of information I will never have, of course instantly let's go right back to judgment. Why didn't I find that? I should have found that the night before. If I had found it and put it back in the nest,

it would have lived or it was in the nest and I startled the mother as I walked up and she, it was latched on and it fell off and she didn't know it and she left it. We are such creatures of habit in trying to blame ourselves for things that we don't control. Who knows? She may have kicked it out. We know from an animal behavior kind of perspective that happens too, right? Litters of creatures that the mothers push away the weak ones. Could have been that as well. I don't know. The truth is, I will never know, but what's fascinating about it is to watch how my brain continues to try to solve for it. So why? It's trying to solve it because the emotional experience is uncomfortable for me. It recognizes the discomfort and whenever there's discomfort, we're always trying to find a way to get away from it. Guys, there's nothing to get away from here.

In all of these moments, when we feel uncomfortable, we are not our experiences. Feeling uncomfortable doesn't change the foundation of who I am. Feeling uncomfortable for you, when you experience discomfort or regret or shame or guilt or anxiety, does not change the foundation of who you are. You're experiencing that as part of your human experience, but you are still you. At your core, you are still you. If you aren't solid in who you are, and this is something that you figure out over time, if you really feel lost and you really feel like you are your experiences, your opportunity is just to figure out what are you about. Why are you here? What do you believe? All of these things make a big difference because if you know a few basic things at your core, if you believe them at your core like you're here for a reason, like your journey is intentional, like everything happens the way that it's supposed to, even the things that make no sense always have a lesson. If you believe these foundational things, then as life comes at you and you live through these experiences, they don't get integrated into who you are. They are simply lessons to learn; opportunities to share wisdom with others; opportunities to connect with people who have experienced similar things. When we share more about the way that we feel and the way that we experience the world, it helps us to normalize that. What most of us do is what I wanted to do, which was just to keep this to myself. I don't want to come out here and tell the world what had happened. I didn't want to tell them because I was already judging myself over it. I don't want to tell you because I know that you're going to judge me too, some of you and that's okay. It's totally fine.

By now, in the world of Joyful DVM, I'm used to the judgment. That part I really am okay with. But the self-judgment, I don't like that at all. I didn't want to come out here and tell you this, but I think it's important for you to hear it because, at the end of the day, I know that I just did my best. I know that you guys, when things don't turn out the way that you want them to turn out, I know that I know that I know that you did your best too. I know in those moments that it's so hard for you to allow yourself to see that you did your best. It's excruciatingly difficult to separate the outcome when it is something that you didn't want it to be from your efforts. They are different. You put forth your best effort, independent of what the outcome is, and this is so important for you to realize that you are not measured as a human by the outcomes that are produced. You are measured as a human only by what you believe about yourself and you make decisions based on what you know is true about you.

I know you don't make decisions in your life from a place that's intentionally meant to harm anybody else. But when things turn out badly, your brain automatically wants to try to tell you that story, and if we believe it, then that increases our anxiety. That increases our depression. That increases the likelihood that we won't keep going in our lives, that we will retract, that we will retreat, that we will stop because we recognize at a primal level that it's uncomfortable. In that, the lowest levels of our brain discomfort meet certain death and so, therefore, if you are uncomfortable, you should not proceed. That is not how this life works. We can be uncomfortable and recognize, yes, I'm uncomfortable, but I'm going to keep going anyway. I'm uncomfortable, but I'm learning a lesson here that is going to be powerful and useful for me as I move forward in my life, in my journey, and in my purpose. These are such important things for us to remember.

So even in the smallest things where you want to punch yourself in the face over an outcome that is different than what you had hoped it would be, I hope that you'll just take a beat and just remember you are not your experiences. That at your core, you are still you. That you are here for a reason. That things happen intentionally for us to grow through, to learn from, to share with others so that they can grow and so that they can learn. It is only through these experiences that we all learn more about the world and about each other, and about how we can make a more sustainable and equitable environment for all of us. This is how this planet gets better. This is how we heal all of the damage that's been done. But if we can't start with ourselves by just allowing ourselves to be human without judgment, allowing ourselves to have experiences without making them mean terrible things about ourselves, we're going to have a really hard time sharing that message with other people.

I hope this has been helpful for you guys. I hope that you'll leave here thinking a little bit about yourself. When you notice the next time that you want to judge yourself, give yourself a minute to recognize that the only reason you're judging is because you think that if you'd done something different, that the outcome would have been different than it was. Recognize that you're trying to predict the future, which is a power that you don't have, hopefully, that will allow you to allow yourself to just be a little more human. Give yourself a little more grace and compassion, and just keep doing the best that you can because that was all that was ever expected of you in the first place.

I love you guys. I'll see you next week.

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We can change what's possible in Vet Med together.