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I became a veterinarian in 1978, and decided to specialize in veterinary dermatology. Little did I know at the time that my specialty would give me the opportunity to work with and live with one of my favorite breeds, the West Highland White Terrier (Westie). During my residency at the University of Florida, a tiny Westie puppy was donated by her breeder to the school because of cleft palate. I adopted her and named her Bobby Sue. When she turned about 2 or 3, she developed signs of atopic dermatitis. We performed intradermal skin testing and used an allergy vaccine to control her disease and she did quite well. Bobby Sue was followed by

Kandy, also an atopic, and eventually little Miss Tessie Belle, a Westie given up to rescue for her severe skin and ear diseases. Each of my Westies have had allergy testing and immunotherapy which proved successful for control of their disease. My Westies have taught me a lot about canine skin disease, but more importantly about what great little dogs these are.

Skin diseases while rarely life-threatening are a significant cause of discomfort for Westies as well as other breeds. Since atopic dermatitis is a life long inflammatory disease, it is important for those of us in the veterinary profession to try to understand it and devise ways to help these dogs and their devoted owners. By living with atopic dogs, I understand their needs more completely and I try to translate this understanding to the management of my patients.

My hobbies include photography, hiking, bird-watching, dog and parrot rescue, gardening, bonsai, orchids, and most recently, beer-making! Our family currently has two dogs adopted from rescue organizations, a Golden retriever cross amazingly without skin disease, and a deaf atopic and food allergic French bulldog. Still waiting for that next Westie to come along! We also have 6 parrots, including an orange winged Amazon, a one-legged feather-picking Congo African Grey, a Quaker, a sun conure, and two budgerigars.