The veterinarian–client bond emerges in many different forms. Before the following case, my rapport with clients was almost exclusively professional. This experience showed me the potential depth of the veterinarian–client relationship.

Fatal complications never become routine or less upsetting to veterinarians or clients.

My client Mary was extremely attached to her 19-year-old Warmblood broodmare, which had developed unilateral mastitis characterized by extreme pain, swelling, discharge, occasional lameness, and even pyrexia. During a 6-month period, aggressive diagnostics and medical treatment were performed, but unfortunately, the mare’s condition worsened and required surgical intervention.

The mare was placed under general anesthesia for a mastectomy. The surgery went smoothly, but the mare experienced catastrophic complications during recovery. Despite assistance, the mare was extremely violent when attempting to stand and developed incisional hemorrhage and respiratory distress. The mare was stabilized appropriately, and a second surgery was considered to identify the hemorrhage. However, the mare unexpectedly experienced an acute neurologic insult characterized by excitation, collapse, and seizure. Immediately afterward, she was recumbent, comatose, and unresponsive, with fixed, dilated pupils. Despite medical intervention, the condition did not improve, and the mare was euthanized.

Fatal complications never become routine or less upsetting to veterinarians or clients. I expressed my deepest condolences to Mary and conveyed the unfortunate circumstances and the measures that were taken to save her favorite mare. As we stood together sobbing, I was unsure how Mary would react to the situation. Then she simply stated, “Mike, you did everything you could. We’ll see you at the usual time next week because there’s a lot of work to do at the farm.”

Mary continues to be one of the practice’s A-list clients, my biggest supporter, and a personal friend. Surprisingly, on several occasions, she has expressed to me her condolences regarding her mare. The outcome of this case could have negatively affected our relationship; instead, it did the opposite, showing me the potential depth of the veterinarian–client bond. While I wouldn’t wish for my colleagues to experience the clinical complications of this case, I hope that every veterinarian experiences a similar heartwarming connection with a client at least once.

The veterinary profession allows us to work with the animals we love while building long-standing relationships with their owners. I consider myself extremely fortunate to be a member of this profession and to have learned to value my bond with patients and owners.