

Utilizing the Ancient Wisdom of Cultures to Heal Animals

A Special Interview With Dr. Juliet Decaestecker

By Dr. Karen Shaw Becker

Dr. Karen Becker:

Hi, I'm Dr. Karen Becker. I'm so excited that Dr. Juliet Decaestecker is nominated for a Game Changer award from a lovely woman named Nisha. Game Changers are how our community celebrates the amazing souls around the world doing important, blessed work with animals, saving the animals within their own communities, stepping forth, and doing what they can to make the world a better place for animals.

I have Dr. Juliet with me today to talk about the work that she's doing. Congratulations, Dr. Juliet, on your Game Changer award, and thank you so much for taking a few minutes today to talk with me.

Dr. Juliet Decaestecker:

Thank you. Thank you very much for Nisha for this award. Actually, I was astonished like, "Ooh, what's happening to me?" What I'm doing as a vet, like I say, it's life. It's a passion. "How did I become a vet?" Well, I would say I became a vet and that would sound a little bit like stereotype like we say. It's like when I was a little child, I knew I wanted to work with animals. I wanted to work in the field with animals and help them and then heal them.

I started to touch any animal around me, to ask around, "Can I help you?" follow vets around. Then at one day, I could go join vet school, so I joined vet school actually in the French part of our country, because I'm from the north part of the country. The north and the south of Belgium can be two different parts because of different language. I went abroad. I went abroad to the south part of my country. There I studied veterinary medicine at ULJ, at Liège University.

I have to say these were six years of, yeah, was really nice to learn everything. It's kind of when I started working that I realized there is something more. "Will I be doing the same thing day in, day out, prescribing the same anti-inflammatory antibiotic, the same kind of protocol medicine?" I have a symptom or I have a multitude of symptoms, and then I had to prescribe a drug or a multitude of drugs. When the symptom would disappear, everybody would be ready. It was a little bit something that happened in my head until I was following a veterinarian, and he was treating a dog with acupuncture.

I had to feed the dog, at that time, kibble biscuits. That's not what I'm doing anymore. I had to feed that little dog some kibble. The time he would put the acupuncture needles in that little dog that was coming into the consult room limping. I said like, "Ooh, that is strange. What are these needles going to do?" My own story is that I'm brought up in a family of pharmacists and doctors, not only them, but I'm a little bit the black sheep of the family.

They would sell homeopathic alternative medicine. That is not something that you can believe in. Then actually, I would say, I saw that little dog walking, and actually kind of nicely running out of the consult room. I said like, "Hmm, that must not be a placebo effect," like what my family

would be telling that doesn't work and whatever. I started to be interested. I called one of the pioneers of acupuncture, Chinese medicine in Europe, Dr. Emiel Van den Bosch. I called him and I said, "I want to learn about this alternative medicine," which now I would consider as the medicine.

The occidental medicine that I have learned at vet school is for me, now, the alternative medicine. The traditional medicine of Chinese medicine was the first one I got in touch with, Dr. Emiel Van den Bosch, he told me, I didn't know him at all. In one sentence, he told me very briefly, "If you want to learn, you have to learn the basics." You have to have a good, solid, basic background to be solid enough in front of the veterinary community, because you will have to be a good, how do you say, occidental medicine vets. You have to know and interpret your x-rays.

You have to be integrative, but at the other hand, you will be integrating a new way, not a new way, but another way of diagnosing, and actually seeing patterns, and going for the cause of a disease. He said, "Go for the base of basic knowledge." I went to study acupuncture, traditional Chinese medicine with human doctors and osteopaths. I was the only vet there. It was really interesting, because being the only vet, I said like, "Hmm, that's interesting. We're also animals." Look at everything, all symptoms. I was looking at my mother-in-law, I was looking at my husband, I would be looking at the people around. You start just to live your medicine, and then it becomes a passion.

You live and then you realize that acupuncture for me is just my surgery. I make things moving. I will make that the chi is free flowing, but that's my surgery. Then I need more. I need my Chinese herbal medicine, because what I don't have in the body anymore, I will put it in with herbs, I would say. That's a concentrated form of food. The third branch of Chinese medicine was nutri-therapy, Chinese nutri-therapy. I kept on studying, I kept on learning, and I started treating. Now it would be, it was in 2013 that I got graduated in Chinese at IVAS (International Veterinary Acupuncture Society) in Chinese medicine.

I realized, hmm. That's interesting. Before, I have been on trip around the world with my husband for nearly four years. We drove around the world with our own car. Our red line was to go and encounter endangered species in their natural habitat. I wanted to show the world that we are part of a big ecosystem, and it's not only about building a school, helping a hospital. I wanted to help the animals to survive in what they would eat, their environment, the forest and where they were living.

I said, "If I can help the animal, I will make a better world for the humans around." That was our red line. We had four intense years, a university of life, I would say. Actually, after being to the University of Veterinary Medicine, I had a life experience of driving around the world with the car. I got the chance to work with indigenous people, with local people, healers. Whenever I could sneak in the kitchen, I would see that with simple herbs and simple remedies, remedies that were growing in their environment, they would do amazing things. Simple, but knowledge that we have a little bit lost that was here.

Dr. Karen Becker:

Yes.

Dr. Juliet Decaestecker:

That is for me, 90% of traditional medicine, if it's Celtic medicine, if it's Ayurveda or global Indian medicine, if it's Chinese medicine, if it's North American knowledge, it's for me, 90% the same. I got that chance to see that on the field. I became a real field vet. I have what I have. I have the environment in front of me. Different filters, different temperature, different way of doing. That's actually the vet that I became. After the trip around the world, we came back to Belgium. I got my kids, I got four kids, but not all on the same time.

I got the kids, and we had also the chance to go and live for five years in India. I went living for five years in India where I was looking to consult. I had the authorization of, because there was an agreement in between Belgium and India that I could work as a consultant. I actually was a white veterinarian working in India. Then I saw how occidental medicine has been pushed around the world so much that actually, I was a strange, white, Belgian veterinarian that was actually honoring, and actually reusing their ancient knowledge, because I went to studying it.

I was interested in knowing more about that codified Ayurveda, but also Tibetan and Unani and folk medicine that only spreads from word to word with the local healers. I learned that and I integrated it in my medicine. I was really happy to see a neem tree in front of me, and use the neem leaves, and say, "This is what we are going to use to help out with the wound in front of me." If I would say, that is actually a little bit a hectic, chaotic life part, I would say, but helping out, learning, using what I have around me, never stopping learning, made me to the veterinarian I became.

I had the chance to join the BVAS team, so the Belgian Veterinary Acupuncture Society, who is actually teaching acupuncture, the nutri-therapy, Chinese nutri-therapy. Actually, now I'm teaching too, which is really something lovely, because I can share that little experience, and the experience we still have every day in practice to other veterinarians. That's a little bit who I am.

Dr. Karen Becker:

That's amazing. Yay for Nisha for helping, for telling me about you, so that I can help get the word out. What my hope is, Juliet, this is wildly inspiring to me in that you had this amazing opportunity of meeting local, indigenous healers, using the resources they had in their own community, to fix the animals that needed help in their own community. What a beautiful, life-changing experience that would be. Now, you're sharing that experience with others. You're teaching others, and in turn, transforming their lives.

What a beautiful, I'm going to call it a career, but what a beautiful passion in that you're helping animals through using local, indigenous, natural medicines, and the wisdom behind that medicine that came from the local healers telling you about it. It's a beautiful circle. Juliet, where, right now, you're doing some teaching and you're doing some clinical work? Right now, where are you, and what does your day look like, or what do your months look like in terms of what you're doing?

Dr. Juliet Decaestecker:

I'm back in Belgium since two and a half years. The latest trip we were in India for five years. It's now two years and a half that I'm back in Belgium. That has been two and a half years that

we have been building our straw bale house. We are building our house. At the same time, I'm consulting. I'm consulting most of the time as an integrative veterinarian.

I'm mostly a second line veterinarian for people who don't know me because most of the people get to know us because really, they have nothing else. They say, "You are the last resource." It changes too because we have first line clients too, but I have different places where I work.

Dr. Karen Becker:

Good.

Dr. Juliet Decaestecker:

One day a week, I would be in that center and then another day of the week I would be working with my colleague, an osteopath colleague. Yeah. Then also I have weekends that I will be teaching, or I have hybrid courses of teaching going on during the week. I actually am an independent veterinarian. My week can be very, how do I say, variety?

Dr. Karen Becker:

Various.

Dr. Juliet Decaestecker:

I actually mix practice with the teaching. For me, it's really important to keep the practice, because the practice is how also I evolve and how I can actually share what's happening. Also, other daily consuming job is I try to be there for the kids as much as possible because the way I live, the way we eat, the way we build the house, we would say it's the whole permaculture wisdom. It's the whole lifestyle that will make me, if I'm good, that will make me a better veterinarian. I have to work on that too. Yes.

Dr. Karen Becker:

What a beautiful life you are creating, not just for your family, but for the veterinary profession locally that you're able to teach other veterinarians, work with your colleagues, and help the animals around you. Amazing all the way around. Juliet, two questions. What's the response from, because as an integrated veterinarian in the U.S., the first 20 years of my career was primarily seeing animals that were so sick that other vets have either given up, written them off, or that the clients have been told, "There's nothing more that we can do."

Then the owner investigates some, I don't want to call it alternative therapy, but the owner comes up with, "You know what? Maybe I should try western herbs, eastern herbs, Ayurvedic herbs, maybe I should try acupuncture, maybe I should try nutraceuticals. Maybe I should try all of the other things that we have available." Then the owner ends up finding a whole, brand-new system of medicine, but not on the referral of the veterinarians they've worked with.

What's the barometer of the veterinarians in Europe being open? You're sharing those patients, sometimes you're sharing them with another veterinarian. Has the attitude or has the barometer of your colleagues, are they respectful? Are they inquisitive? Do they want to learn about what you're doing? Are they asking questions? Do you still feel like there is a little bit of discord

between conventional veterinarians, and I'm going to call what you're doing common sense medicine.

It's the wisdom of the ages that you have learned that you are applying to practical medical situations. Is there tension, or do you feel like things are opening up to start a conversation professionally that would allow us to better work together?

Dr. Juliet Decaestecker:

Well, I would say, I think it's the same as in the U.S. still. I feel that with the years and clients get to know you, you get results. We don't do miracles, we just help people out. We have so nice willing owners to, how do you say, when they are in those hopeless end stages-

Dr. Karen Becker:

Yes.

Dr. Juliet Decaestecker:

-it needs so much of time. That's the hardest thing as a vet to tell the owner, "You will jump in the sea with me. Hold on. We'll guide you. It won't be a quick fix with two needles or two herbs." This is the first thing, what takes a lot of energy for me as a vet to explain them during my first consultation, second consultation to keep them on, to guide them.

Once you have these results, actually, I always say when they need to do a blood test again, or I say, "Now we have to get an x-ray, go back to your vets." I try to start a conversation. I, most of the time take the phone, because email and so on, even if we have to explain sometimes Chinese medicine diagnosis, it's so different as what we have learned in vet school that I take the phone, and I start a nice conversation with the veterinarian. I explain them, "This is this. We do this." I try to be respectful to say whatever normal medicine or they still want to continue, "Well, please go to your vet."

I have to say, I have veterinarians who opened up most of the time through the clients that not referred, came to me, were happy, got back to their veterinarian. The aim was for me to stay humble and to say, "Let's see. Do you want to understand some more about it?" No, it's fine for me too. Now, I have veterinarians who will refer to me. It's changing, but I have to say, I wish it would be changing. I would be saying, is it really changing? I have to say, with some vets, it's changing. I think some in the younger generation, if we can teach it really early on.

Dr. Karen Becker:

Yes, yes.

Dr. Juliet Decaestecker:

That's, for me, the most important.

Dr. Karen Becker:

Yes.

Dr. Juliet Decaestecker:

The older generation, well, some of them got stuck in protocols. I cannot blame it. It's the pharmaceutical business around them too, about all the benefits as I would say. It's easy. It's easy to just give something and then say, people go, "I see you again." I'm happy when I have been following a client for a few months, and then I don't see them again. I just have a Christmas card because then I know the animal is fine. That's what I learned in India. We know veterinarians, the doctor doesn't exist. There's healer or they're owners who have a lot of cows, and they know it because they observe cows every day.

Their knowledge comes from generation to generation. Everybody can be its own doctor. We can all be our own veterinarians. That is what I want to learn, how do you say, I always miss the word learn and teach in English. I would say, this is what I want to teach my clients to say them, "You can be. You are the vet. I'm a guide."

Dr. Karen Becker:

Yes.

Dr. Juliet Decaestecker:

If they get this, they don't see me as a second vet or whatever. They see me, "Oh," I guided them to a pathway so they can also interpretate what their normal vet would say. I would say I wish it was more easy. Sometimes with nutrition for example, it's really hard. Sometimes you see a report coming back, you should consult a real nutritionist, because if I say the tomato growing in the United States is not necessarily the same as here. A tomato in aquaponics is not the same because you need the soil bacteria in there. You need the soil nutrients.

Then people will say, so sometimes we get lost because it's just a big gap of what I've been learning, and what I've been experiencing, what I've been reading, and what those vets never had. I cannot blame them.

Dr. Karen Becker:

Right, right.

Dr. Juliet Decaestecker:

Sometimes they simply don't know.

Dr. Karen Becker:

Yes. What's wonderful is that the conversation in many instances can happen. Juliet, the beautiful thing is you've got young veterinarians, doctors, you've got young people coming to you wanting to learn. That is our best point of power in that knowledge transfer from you to the next generation can come about, because of younger veterinarians understanding that this wisdom of the ages needs to be taught from one person to the next. You're doing that, which is another beautiful gift to the next generation of veterinarians, which is wonderful.

Dr. Juliet Decaestecker:

Yes.

Dr. Karen Becker:

You're doing this blended, living life while practicing, while healing animals, and helping families understand their environment, and the intricacies between health, and healing, and relationships, and our earth, wherever we're at, all of those dynamics you're living on a daily basis, which is wonderful. What do you love most about this truly holistic way of living life and practicing all blended together? What do you love most about that, or about what you do?

Dr. Juliet Decaestecker:

The most? The word holistic would come out, whole. I always say happy pet, happy owner, or happy me, happy doctor, happy energy, happy animal. Everything is linked. We are all linked together in whatever profession we are doing. By treating the animal and making a change in the animal's life, because that animal is so bonded to the owner, can be most of the time the mirror of the owner of what's happening around. It's so nice to see that animal going better. Then the nicest thing for me is that the owner starts to ask me, "Is that the same for us? Is that also something that would apply to us? Can it make us better if we go on that part, if we open us to that part?"

Then I say like, "Yes," and this is when I feel the happiest. You don't always succeed. We need that network of colleagues. We call ourselves common-sense veterinarian, holistic veterinarians. Sometimes when we don't know, we have to be able to call and to say, "What do you think?" If you tell this the owner too, but at the end, there is a result, there is something better. The quality of life is better. Not the quantity, but the quality of life of the animal is better.

Then the owner is also happy. They are more happy, the family is more happy, the kids in their family are more happy. They start to think about what they are eating, how they are living. I think this will make for me, I think already answer your last question, I think this is for me, most of the time that I would say this is what I see for my children. The choice of having them at home, I had home birth, and also, it's part of my life that they will have a better world.

Dr. Karen Becker:

Yes.

Dr. Juliet Decaestecker:

I'm only a little drop, and I'm happy that my passion can contribute to that, maybe, better world. It's maybe just the way I'm seeing the world, but I feel that after a few years of practicing, well, I don't see it anymore as a dream. I see that actually that little drop is there and does something different.

Dr. Karen Becker:

Each of those lives that you are touching, and helping to heal, and/or providing an opportunity for the animal to heal themselves through providing indigenous herbs, or allowing people to see what needs to happen for their animals to get better, you're healing the animal, but in turn, potentially healing families, healing their environments, healing communities, healing the earth.

That's done through gentle teaching and an awareness that was also taught to you that you are in turn teaching to others.

It's really beautiful. What you're doing is really wonderful. Those drops that eventually create ripples that eventually create bigger waves. I think that the circle of what you are doing and the influence is far-reaching and wonderful. I'm so very thankful that Nisha nominated you for a Game Changer award. Dr. Juliet, if someone wanted to learn more about what you're doing or get in touch with you, do you have a website or a Facebook page?

Some of my doctors say, "I don't have any of that," and that's okay. If you have information or resources, if people wanted to learn more from you, where would they go?

Dr. Juliet Decaestecker:

I have that, actually. I would be also the doctor, "I don't have," because what you are doing is wonderful, because we as vets, we never learned all about that communication and so on. People find you and you do the vis-à-vis, like we say in French. Yes, when I was in India, people told me, "You need to have a website."

I made actually a website for India, and I still have to adapt it back for my work here in Belgium. My website is www.Dr-Juliet.com. Yes, I have a website, or people can just find me on my email address, but most of the time they can find me by my name and doctor, how do we say-

Dr. Karen Becker:

Is it dash?

Dr. Juliet Decaestecker:

Yeah, [Dr]-Juliet.com. That's my website. Still will adapt with what I'm actually doing the last two and a half years in Belgium too. There, you can know more about me and actually my story also will be on that website. Yes, that's how you can know more about me.

Dr. Karen Becker:

It's wonderful. What you're doing is inspiring to me, inspiring to the beautiful people that nominated you, but what a blessing and what a tremendous local resource, Juliet, for the families, two-legged, four-legged furred families. How wonderful that you are sharing your wisdom and your knowledge with your community.

What an amazing opportunity for the people around you to see healing responses come about through using this indigenous wisdom through a multitude of different channels that you've learned about. It's really inspiring and wonderful, and I'm so very thankful that Nisha took the time to nominate you. Congratulations on your Game Changer award, and it was really an honor to connect with you.

Dr. Juliet Decaestecker:

Thank you very much. Thank you very much.