

Pet Project

Got joint pain? Seasonal allergies? Acupuncturist **Jane Morse** may have a cure for what ails you—if you're a dog or cat, that is.

EVERY WEEKDAY MORNING, Jane Morse leaves her home in Arlington's Buckingham neighborhood and begins making house calls to the half-dozen or so patients on her schedule for the day in Virginia, Maryland and the District. In her bag, she carries dehydrated chicken, freeze-dried liver, dried apple and sweet potato-flavored treats, dozens of slender needles, Chinese herbs, and a separate case that holds a cold laser and special laser-protection eyeglasses.

Morse, 62, is a holistic veterinarian who uses acupuncture, massage, laser therapy and herbal medicine to treat canine and feline patients for everything from arthritis and allergies

to kidney disease. On Saturdays, she sees pets in her office at the Ballston Animal Hospital. But during the week, she goes to them.

Originally from Kennett Square, Pa., Morse grew up around dogs—her father raised springer spaniels—and studied veterinary medicine at the University of Pennsylvania. She stuck to conventional Western practices for much of her career until about 12 years ago, when, inspired by a colleague who had found success using acupuncture to diagnose and treat animals, she began to explore alternative medicine. After studying practical applications for acupuncture in both humans

■ on the job

and animals at the International Veterinary Acupuncture Society based in Fort Collins, Colo., she learned human acupuncture at the Maryland Institute of Traditional Chinese Medicine (now defunct) and Western herbal therapy at the Tai Sofia Institute in Laurel, Md. Now she is studying Eastern herbal therapy through online courses sponsored by the College of Integrative Veterinary Therapies, based in Australia.

Today, Morse uses a combination of traditional Western and alternative therapies to care for her four-legged patients. Her fees aren't cheap (they vary from \$130 for an initial consultation and treatment to \$90 for a follow-up), but many clients see it as a small price to pay for the comfort of a companion who gives unconditional love and is considered family.

What do you like best about your job?

Every animal has a different set of problems to solve. It's fun to strategize with a [pet] guardian, or owner, on how to help that animal. If a dog is having a mobility issue, how can we help [improve] that dog's environment? How can we approach the dog's issue from 360 degrees—nutritionally, environmentally and medically? Sometimes it's a tweak, and sometimes it's more significant. My job allows me to be creative.

What do you say to people who think acupuncture on a pet is ridiculous?

I say, "Have you tried it? Have you tried it for yourself?" It is a luxury, without a doubt. I don't discredit that. But I'm all about giving it a try.

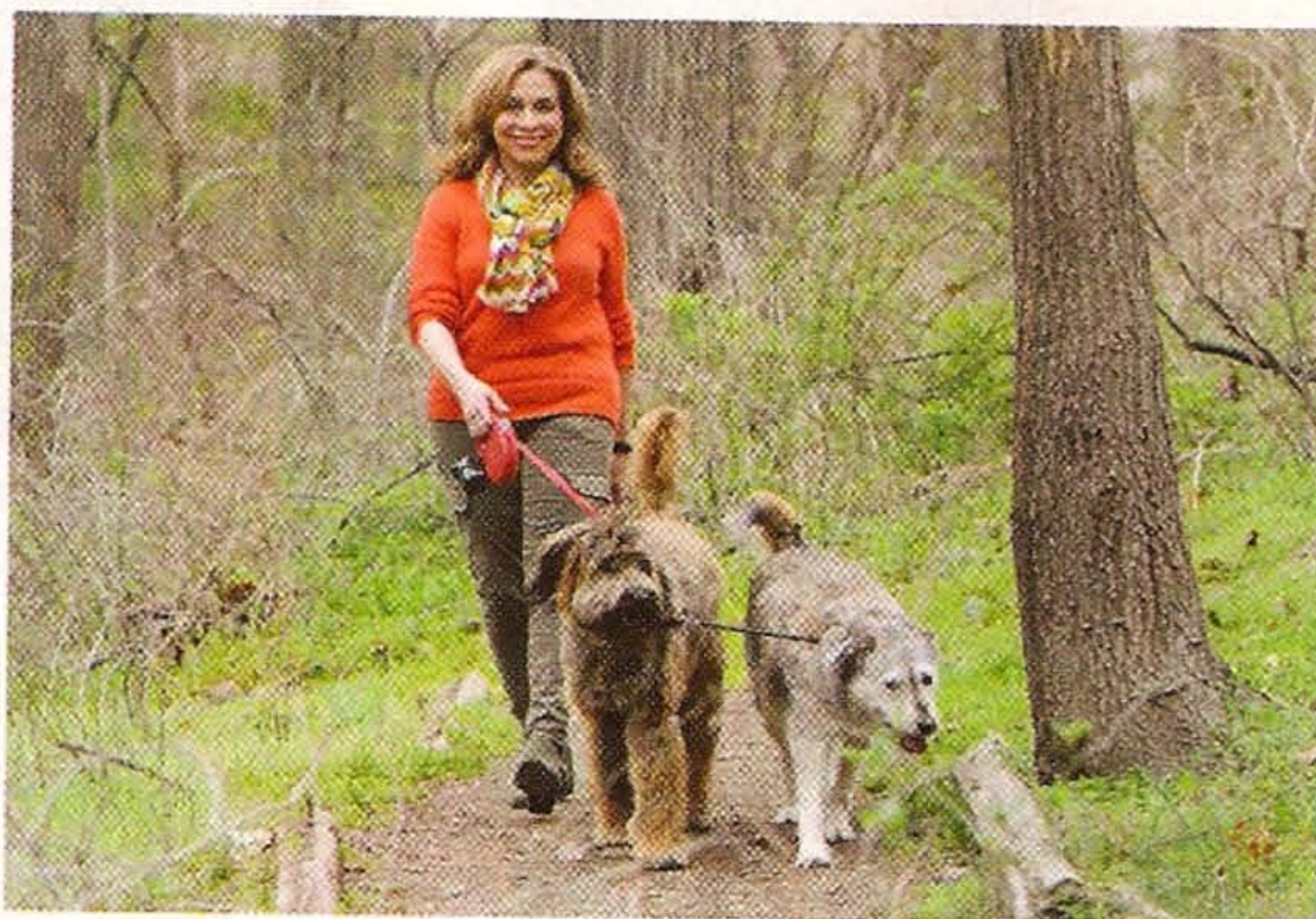
How does acupuncture work?

There are a lot of theories. My summary is that the insertion of the needle produces a micro-trauma; the body responds by producing its own morphine for the pain and prevents pain transmission up the spinal cord. The Chinese perception is that acupuncture stimulates points of lesser resistance in the [body], which helps with [physiological] balance.

So, have you tried acupuncture on yourself?

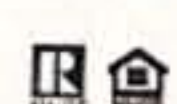
Oh yes! As a student and as a practitioner. I've used it to help relieve hip joint pain and, one time, to help ease pain from a cat bite in my hand. It was a wonderful experience that expanded my thinking and

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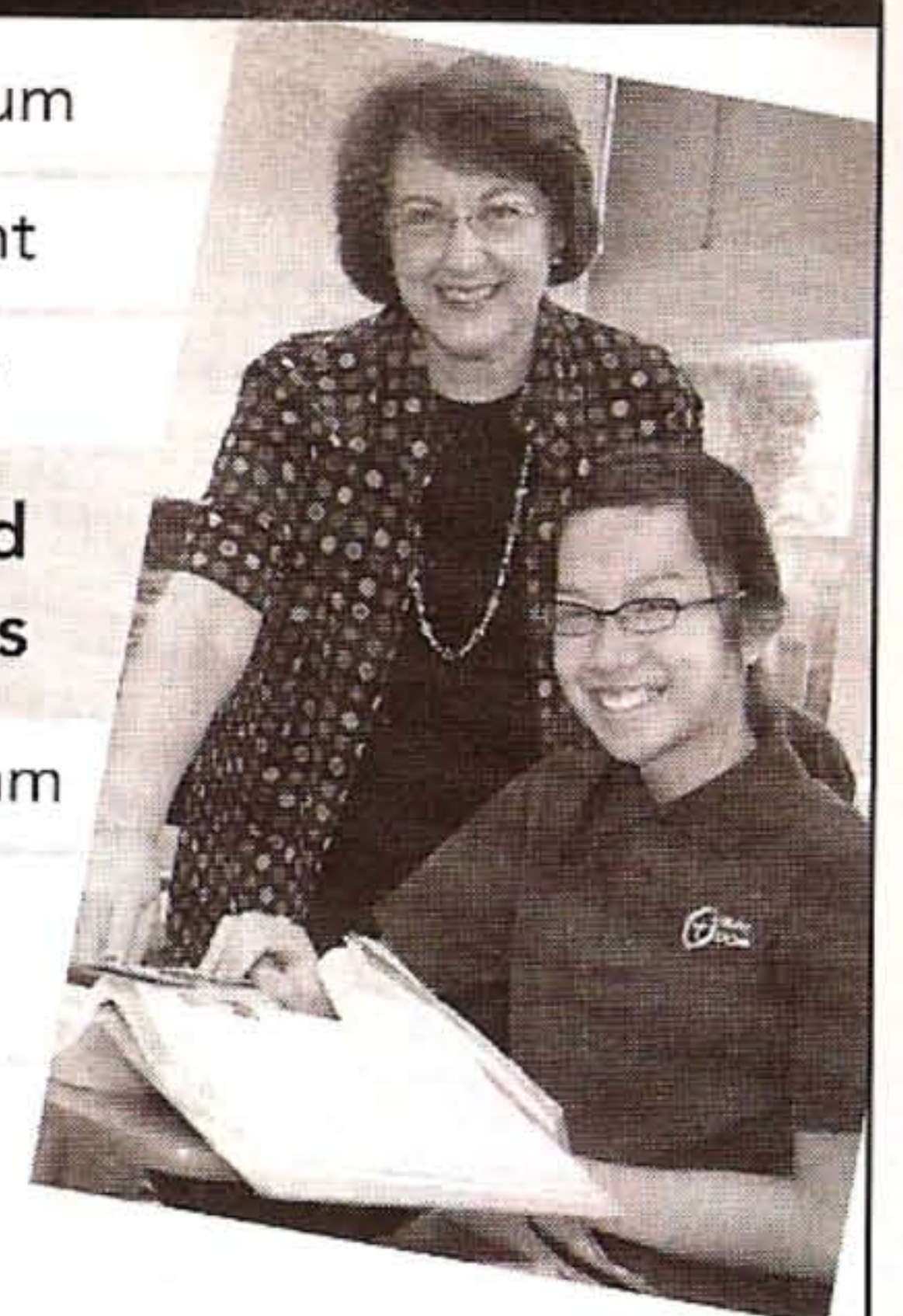
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acceptance of different strategies and approaches to [health] problems.

How do you know if it's working on an animal?

I try to have the owner come up with a real means for testing it. For example, if Fluffy was having trouble getting up the steps, is it easier for her now? Can Fluffy do things [after treatment] that she was able to do 10 years ago but not recently? Or maybe the pet is happier, or the appetite has improved. Benchmark comparisons allow you to have some concrete measurement.

And the dogs and cats allow you to put needles in them?

Some of them love it and let me put nee-

dles in them for 20 minutes. With others, I can only get a few in them.

You mentioned that acupuncture can also be used to help diagnose certain diseases.

I was once examining a cat because she had refused to eat breakfast. I [put pressure] on points on the back that are close to the center of the vertebrae, and as I went down them, the cat suddenly screamed. It turned out the cat had a lung tumor.

You must meet a lot of cute animals.

I do, in honesty, but it's a select group. The animals have to be pretty special for the owners to be willing to put in the time and expense for [acupuncture] care.

How much time do you spend in your car?

I probably drive around 100 miles a day. I have a Prius, and I get a delight out of using less gas. I listen to a lot of NPR.

Do you have any pets? Have you used acupuncture on them?

Currently, I have a 3-year-old cat named Milo and a 6-year-old Chihuahua named Toto. I haven't done any acupuncture on them, as they are young, but I used acupuncture and herbs abundantly and with good success with my two previous dogs, Buji and Simbi, for many years. ■

Bara Vaida is a dog- and cat-lover, as well as a Washington, D.C.-based journalist who writes about health care, technology and lobbying.

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