Some consequences of artificial pet foods are more insidious than others — Foul-mouth AIDS comes close to the top of the list. As with HIV AIDS in humans, pets suffering Foul-mouth AIDS are vulnerable to a range of cancers and infections. Our pet carnivores and our finances have felt these consequences for a long time, but it was only by luck that I recognised the condition and gave it a name. Naming things is often the first step on the road to coherent discussion and resolution of problems — once HIV AIDS was named medical researchers could focus on and deal with the threat. By contrast veterinary authorities have either ignored or sought to suppress information on Foul-mouth AIDS.

The August 1991 Waltham Symposium, Clinical Nutrition in Practice, triggered my thoughts (see Chapter 1). I noted that the pet food company speakers and their veterinary audience shared a belief in grain-based, factory-made products. Proponents of natural feeding, from the opposition camp, appeared to suffer problems of New Age mystification. When discussing the needs of pet carnivores they spoke of pureed vegetables and porridge oats processed in the kitchen mixer. Raw bones — raw meaty bones — needed putting back into the debate, supported, if possible, by hard numerical evidence.

Five days after the Waltham Symposium, providence smiled when the opportunity arose to conduct a small experiment. Mr and Mrs Zubrycki visited the veterinary hospital with their terriers Blossom and Tuffy. The Zubryckis doted on their pets. Only the best was good enough — regular worming, vaccinations and a diet based on My Dog, the most expensive canned food from Uncle Ben’s. Unfortunately, despite the owners’ commitment and extensive