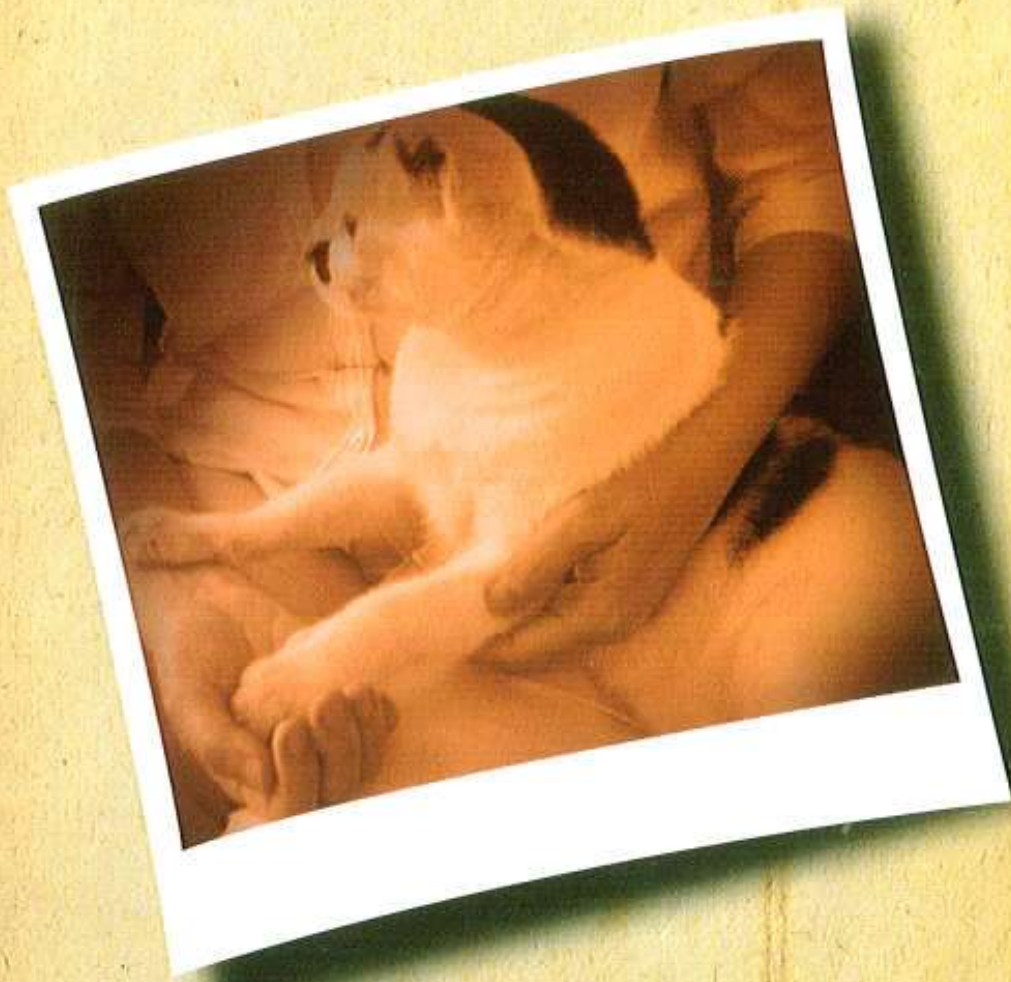


# Pawprints on my heart 🐾🐾

Seven little stories about kindness to animals



Chan Kah Yein, Ph.D.

Design of book cover by Sukhi Hotu

Dedicated to the many animals who have graced our  
lives and taught us the meaning of  
unconditional love  
and  
all animal rescuers and caregivers  
around the world whose work and service often  
remain in anonymity.

In loving memory of my childhood dogs,  
Puffin and Remirth  
and  
my little kitten, Pans.

## About the Author



**Chan Kah Yein** teaches mathematics to college students. She holds a first class honours degree, a Masters and a Ph.D. in Mathematics Education.

She is very passionate about promoting kindness to animals, and she rescues stray animals and fosters them at home. She also gives public talks regularly on ways to lead a simpler and more spiritual life. To date, she has written four books and many of her talks have been produced on audio CDs, all for free distribution.

With a love for all things small and simple, her motto is to embrace simplicity and travel light in life.

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## Acknowledgements

It was Meister Eckhart who said that if the only prayer we said in our whole life was “thank you”, it would suffice. I count myself extremely blessed because I am now able to say “thank you” to so many people.

I was (and still am) extremely overwhelmed by the outpour of support and encouragement received from my friends ever since news got out that I was writing this book. From volunteering their kind assistance in proof-reading, giving me the confidence to write from my heart, to helping me raise funds for the printing of this book for free distribution, everyone has been my source of guidance and inspiration.

Four names deserve special mention: Mrs Wong Yew Choong, Lim Chin Kah, Ong Khing Wee and Lee Li Lian – I am very indebted to you for your help and support. May this gift of love and kindness awaken the compassion in the hearts of everyone who reads this book, and may this in turn bring more happiness to all living beings.

To my husband, Teng Bee, my daughter, Ming-Yi and my son, Jia-Wen – thank you for your patience and understanding in giving me time to work on the passion of my life, and for sharing my enthusiasm in the preparation of this book. It took a lot of time and perseverance to take the photographs of our pets, too.

To my furry family – you are my all-star cast and my inspiration. There would have been no book if you had not come into my life and brought me so much joy. I thank you from the depths of my heart.

With pawprints of love,  
*kahyein*  
12<sup>th</sup> April 2008

P. S. I started writing this book at 8pm, 29<sup>th</sup> March 2008. It was Earth Hour. We had turned off all our lights, and only the fan was on. In the pitch darkness and solitude of the night, I remembered that I had promised my friends that I would write a book on the passion of my life – kindness to animals. So I started writing and finished three chapters that night. After two wonderful weeks of expressing sweet memories in words, undergoing the arduous task of many rounds of proof-reading, the final manuscript was completed on 12<sup>th</sup> April 2008. This book is a tribute to Earth Hour. Save the Earth. Be kind to all her beautiful creatures.



## Prologue

Love and kindness are beautiful virtues in our hearts.

As a fellow living being on this Earth, I have always wanted to do my part in promoting kindness to animals. I have always felt that while there is so much charity for humans, we sometimes forget the animals.

I am not too worried about the animals who live in the jungle. As long as we do not destroy their natural habitat, the jungle animals can fend for themselves, living by the laws of Nature – in fact, we should leave them in peace and not meddle with their natural environment.

My concern is with the animals that have been domesticated by our ancestors and now live amongst us in our concrete jungle. They do not possess the capacity to survive by themselves in our concrete world. They need our help.

*Pawprints on My Heart* is a collection of seven true stories from my life. I hope you will enjoy reading them as much as I have enjoyed writing them.

*Remembering Puffin and Remirth* is a biography of my first dog-friends who saw me grow up from a little girl of eight until I was twenty-two.

*Mother's Day Gifts from Heaven* describes my first encounter at rescuing kittens and how love and unrelenting determination can beat the odds.

*The Big Rescue Operation* is a detailed account of how my friends and I carried out a near-impossible task of rescuing forty-five dogs from being put to sleep at the local pound.

*Tiger's Tales* tells how a little cat fosters peace and friendship with other animals, and shows how kindness begets kindness in a loving environment.

*Farewell, Little Pans* is about the reality of life where we can only do our best and be prepared to let Nature take its course, sometimes unexpectedly.

*The Crow in the Drain* reminds us that even when we face seemingly difficult situations, we still have choices in life. We can always choose to be a little bit more compassionate and not opt for the most convenient way out.

*The Miracle of Vixey* tells how faith and compassion helped bring a little one-month old kitten miraculously back to life from the brink of death.

*Simple Things You Can Do* and *Tips for Homemakers* are the things that my friends and I practise in our daily lives as part of our ways of cultivating kindness towards the animals who live amongst us. I share with you practical and doable guidelines which I live by, not lofty or theoretical ideals.

If these pawprints on my heart can touch and inspire you to think of ways to be a little kinder and a little more loving towards the many animals who live around you, I am gratified and thankful. Opportunities abound for us to practise compassion. We can always do a little better, a little more. We can always strive harder, and higher.

Please help me spread this message of love and kindness far and wide. Share this book, pass it on, talk to a friend, lead the way and set an example by doing little acts of kindness, in your own way, within your means. Every little bit helps. Every act of kindness that comes from the heart matters, and makes a big and positive difference to the lives of others. You will never know the wonderful ripple effect that it creates and how far it can spread.

May you be well and happy, and may you cultivate boundless love and kindness, and reach out to bring happiness to all living beings.

P.S. This book is a gift from the donors to you, so please pass it on after reading so that it may benefit others. Let one good turn deserve another.

## 1. Remembering Puffin and Remirth

*Animals are reliable, many full of love, true in their affections, predictable in their actions, grateful and loyal. Difficult standards for people to live up to.*

- Alfred A. Montapert

May 1971.

Puffin came into my life when I was eight years old. He was given to us by a friend whose dog had just given birth to a litter of five puppies. Puffin was the youngest. He was a mixed Pekinese, a ball of fluffy golden fur. In all ways, he resembled a little lion, the furry Northern Lion of the Chinese lion dance. My brother named him "Puffin" because he was round, like a Puffin bird.

We introduced Puffin to Willie, our cranky old mongrel whose moods were absolutely unpredictable – we never knew when he was going to bite. Willie was kind to Puffin, and Puffin, seemingly unaware of his own age and size, would bully Willie to his heart's content. The cranky old mongrel did not mind. During Puffin's teething stage, he chewed on old Willie's paws and tail, jumping back and forth all over the bigger dog's body as though saying tauntingly, "Hey, com'on, let's fight!" Puffin was only the size of Willie's head, but the two got on pretty well, I would say.



Hail to "The King"

We brought Puffin for all his necessary jabs. Unfortunately, after a few months, Puffin became very sick. The vet diagnosed him as having a congenital and incurable disease with little chance of survival since he was only a few months old. I cried my heart out upon hearing this, but my mother, an ever resilient and a very strong lady, would not give up. She nursed the limp and feverish Puffin day and night. Both of us prayed for Puffin's recovery.

As a result of my mother's dedicated nursing care, or her strong belief that he would recover, or our prayers (or all of them), Puffin made an unexpected and miraculous recovery after a few weeks. The vet was surprised, but happy for us. And life went on joyfully.

After two years, my father decided that Puffin should have a companion, so he brought home Remirth. My father had picked Remirth out from a new litter of puppies from the same friend. According to my father, when he shifted the puppies around, this one always snuggled up to the top of the pile. "That shows she's a leader", he said. My mother named her "Remirth", after her Cocker Spaniel whom she had loved dearly.



Now, Remirth was a mixed breed of Pekinese and Pomeranian, but she really looked rather like a little grey rat when my father first brought her home. Puffin accepted the new addition to the family, but he made it known right from the start, in no uncertain terms, that he would remain “The King”.

Remirth accepted the deal quite happily and played the subordinate’s role until...she grew bigger in size. That was when she started pushing her way through at meal times, gobbling down Puffin’s food before eating her own. But the king, being “The King” would not tolerate such uncouth behaviour, and somehow, managed to discipline Remirth to stay away so that the king would have his fill and move away, before she was allowed to approach the leftovers. Well, a king will always be a king, I guess. My mother said it was probably in his genes. Pekinese were the royal dogs of the imperial courts of China.



Hmm...any rats? Lizards?

Remirth loved to play. She would play with any visiting rats, mice and lizards as well as beetles, cockroaches, and a host of other insects. We lived in one of those colonial bungalows with a big garden which had no fence, so sometimes cows came into our garden to graze. Remirth would play with the cows as well, prancing around them, barking at them playfully. Once, to our utter horror, she even played with a huge cobra which had slithered into our toilet. Luckily, the cobra did not bite her.

My father’s friends, Uncle Renga and Uncle Gopal visited often. Sometimes Uncle Gopal would help look after the dogs when we went on trips. Soon, we heard Uncle Gopal speaking Tamil to Remirth, and she responded...correctly!

Puffin, on the other hand, being “The King”, was aloof. He would not allow ANYONE to touch him except for my parents, my brother and me. Right from Day One, that had been his clearly-laid-down rule. Look at me, call my name if you must, but touch me not. However, without being taught, he somehow knew how to sit up on his hind legs, put his paws together and move them, in a *cheng-cheng* (Chinese gesture of paying homage) gesture. We never taught him. He just knew, and this gesture won everybody’s hearts. Friends and their children looked forward to visiting us just to watch the little lion-dog do *cheng-cheng* and reward him with titbits of food. My grandmother was especially taken in by this gesture, and said it was Puffin’s way of paying respects to the elders. Homage was one thing, but I quietly suspected that the moving paws was Puffin’s way of keeping erect and balanced in an upright position, and since these gullible humans found it SO adorable and rewarded him with food for doing it, well, why not continue doing so? Groundnuts was his favourite snack, and that, he got plenty – from the visitors!

Puffin and Remirth got on well and seldom fought. But occasionally one of them (or both, together) would break some house rules, and my mother insisted that they would have to be punished. "Punishment" was putting them into the cage for a short period of time. Soon, this occurred often enough that Remirth (who broke the house rules more often) would go into the cage voluntarily each time she misbehaved, and even closed the cage door with her paw to save us the trouble of doing it! Puffin, the king, never did so. I mean, how would anyone DARE to punish a king, right? But my mother practised fairness, so when Puffin misbehaved, in he went....by force. Whenever this happened, Remirth would willingly go with him as though accompanying him on his jail sentence. Well, what would you expect – he was the king, wasn't he? However, after a short while, we would see both of them out – free! We were rather puzzled how this could have happened. So we watched them and caught Remirth using her mouth and paws to open the lock. We tried all ways to foolproof the lock, but failed miserably. Remirth was...a Houdini.



My best friends and me (way back in the 70s when I was a teenager)



Hey, look ..... is that their car?

My father was in the government service and this involved getting transferred to different towns every few years. Wherever we went, we stayed in government bungalows, and Puffin and Remirth would adjust to the new house. Their favourite spot in every house would be a lookout spot – somewhere for them to look at the traffic outside, while waiting for us to return home from any outing. And wherever we stayed in, it did not take long for the neighbours to be totally enchanted with our dogs. Children (and adults!) would purposely walk by just to see the two cute little dogs enjoying the scenery and watching the traffic go by.

After many years, my brother and I went off to university. We were very sad to part with Puffin and Remirth but we would call back and say something to them on the phone, just to let them know that we were still around, and well. With us being away, Remirth became very attached to my mother, following her every step, looking after her in all ways. She was incredibly obedient and very caring. My mother adored her tremendously. Remirth understood my mother more than anyone else. In every sense of the word, she was my mother's best friend.

Puffin remained "The King" and kept to his own world. He even had his own little private pent-house, the lower shelf of the television cabinet. My brother called it "Fin's Bin", and it had Puffin's birthday card (which had a picture of a furry dog) stuck on the back. Puffin loved Fin's Bin, and spent many hours resting inside. He also had claws

that seemed to grow too fast, and had to be snipped very often. When he trotted, his claws would make a cute little “tik-tik-tik” sound with the floor. We then would know that our king was approaching. If he was not inside Fin’s Bin, his other favourite place was the coffee table in the living room. He slept ON the coffee table, never mind if there were guests or if drinks were served and placed on the table. The king just sat where he wanted. No questions asked.

Many years passed, and life went on.

On the seventh day of Chinese New Year, on Puffin’s fourteenth year, everyone was back home for the holidays. My brother had bathed Puffin in the morning, and we watched him frolicking in the sun, in his usual cheerful and kingly self. After a few hours, he collapsed. Later, my parents told us that he had collapsed on a few occasions in the previous months, and they had already known that his end was near, but they had not had the heart to tell us. He was not sick, but he was getting very old. Fourteen human years is equivalent to seventy-two dog years.

My father, fearing the worst, brought Puffin into our shrine room. He was very limp and frail. It was all too sudden for us, especially for my brother and me. We both started chanting and hoped that he would recover, but deep inside, I somehow knew his time was up. Our parents came in and chanted with us. Remirth came in quietly, and lay down beside her lifelong companion. We sat around him, listening to his soft breathing, remembering how much joy he had brought us all in those past fourteen years. I had been only eight years old when he had come into my life. Now, I was twenty-two. He had watched me grow up, and now it seemed time to say goodbye.

Puffin breathed his last, very peacefully, surrounded by his whole family, on that seventh day of Chinese New Year – a day which most Chinese regard as *yan yat* (people’s day). A “good day” in the Chinese almanac. My mother consoled us, “It’s a good day for a good rebirth.”

Uncle Renga and Uncle Gopal hurried over to our house. They cried with us as they too had grown to love Puffin very much. They helped us prepare the wood pyre at the back of our house. We took a last look at Puffin, and stroked his silky golden hair. My brother snipped a few locks of his hair and clipped his claws. Even in death, he still had the very majestic look of a little lion. The King. Our King. We wrapped him in a piece of white cloth, and amidst our soft chanting, we cremated Puffin’s remains that afternoon, with full religious rites.

After Puffin’s passing away, Remirth became very quiet, preferring to keep to herself most of the time. It seemed as though she wanted to suffer in silence, clearly missing her lifelong companion. A few months earlier, she had been diagnosed as suffering from an ailment similar to stomach cancer, and she was on medication, since she was too old to be operated on (she was twelve, in human years). After Puffin passed away,

she refused to take her medication, and we had to coax her before she would relent, but it was quite useless. It seemed to us that she had given up, or maybe she just wanted to endure the pain of losing Puffin and of her own ailment. Only she knew. Our hearts went out to her, but there was nothing much we could do except to be with her as much as we could, and comfort her. She was in pain, and vomited often.

It was on the fifteenth day of the second month after Chinese New Year that same year, barely two months after Puffin left us that Remirth walked slowly into our shrine room and lay down. My father signalled for me to go in, and I knew. I stroked her, and then quickly went to call my mother who was still teaching in school. In tears, I only managed to say, "Mummy, it's Remirth....please come back. Hurry. Please!"

I went back to the shrine room, and stroked Remirth's fur. She was quiet and still, but she looked at me, and I said to her, "Please hold on, Remirth. Mummy is coming back to see you. Please wait for Mummy." She understood. And she obeyed. As she always had.

And my mother came back just in time. She knelt beside Remirth, thankful that her dear friend had waited. By now Remirth was breathing very heavily and irregularly, as though struggling. My mother stroked her silky brownish black fur gently, and bade her to close her eyes. My father and I were chanting softly (my brother had gone back to university at that time). After a few minutes, Remirth turned to look at my father, then arched her neck backwards to look at me – it may have been just for a few seconds, but I remember that moment, and it felt like a lifetime. She looked at me with her warm soulful eyes, and I could feel what she was saying: "I have to go now. I am sorry I cannot look after you anymore. Please always take good care of yourself." Then, she looked at my mother, and lastly, at the image of the Buddha, and she drew one long, last breath, and closed her eyes for the last time. She passed away peacefully at the ripe old age of twelve (twelve human years is equivalent to sixty-four dog years), after a short battle with cancer, and after enduring the loss of her lifelong companion.

We cremated Remirth, with full religious rites, as we did for Puffin, and later consecrated their ashes together, in a flowing stream. For a very long time, we missed them terribly. No longer would we hear our king's little trots or be delighted with his *cheng-cheng*, and we certainly missed Remirth's mischievous pranks. My grandmother shared our loss upon hearing the news, but she consoled us, saying that they had lived good long lives, and they are now at peace, in a better place. It was very painful for us to remove their toys and their belongings. After all, it had been twelve to fourteen long years. A lifetime. So we kept their things where they were, exactly. Untouched. For many years. "Fin's Bin" (with the birthday card) is still kept in my parents' house until today.

One day, after a few years when my brother was back home, something struck him. Having had no training at all in Chinese brush painting, he took up one of my mother's many brushes, and started painting. What transpired after a few hours, were two beautiful Chinese brush paintings – of Puffin and Remirth. They were so beautiful and life-like, everyone said, and my brother had painted them purely from memory, without referring to any photograph or picture.



Paintings of love – for eternity

These paintings still hang on the wall of my parents' house now, twenty-three years after the passing of our two very much treasured and lovingly-cherished best friends. Wherever you are now, Puffin and Remirth, may you both be well and happy knowing that we always think of you with much love, fondness and with our deepest gratitude.

An earlier version of this story was published in Silent Cries (2006).

## 2. Mother's Day Gifts from Heaven

*Animals are such agreeable friends - they ask no questions, they pass no criticisms.*  
- George Eliot

7th May 2006.

It was Mother's Day. I was on my morning walk when I found three newborn kittens by the roadside, mewling pitifully on the wet grass. All three were huddling together. I had never seen such tiny kittens before.

Having had no experience with cats, I hoped the mother would return, but deep inside I suspected something fishy because I knew no mother-cat would leave her babies by the roadside. Still, I remember friends telling me that once a human has touched newborn kittens, the mother might reject them. Or worse, a tom-cat might devour them. Hoping neither of those tragic options would occur, I went home, saying a silent prayer that the mother-cat would return soon.

But I was terribly disturbed, and after half an hour or so, I went back to the spot where I had found them. The poor little things were still there – they had stopped mewling by now. I decided there was clearly something wrong. Quite obviously, a human had abandoned them there. A few crows were already perched on the lamp-post above, as though waiting for an easy meal. I went straight to the shop nearby, bought a packet of milk, went home, got a cardboard box and brought the kittens home.

I did not know how to look after kittens, so I called a neighbour (who kept many cats) for help. She came over, and said she did not know how to nurse newborns because her mother-cats looked after their newborns and would not allow humans near them until after a month. The poor little things were mewling, shivering, and their eyes had not opened yet. They were still in the box, outside the house, and that was because my ten year-old mixed poodle, Bobby, was inside. Cats and dogs are not exactly the best of friends, and Bobby had declared himself king of the house thus far. Even Mac, my other dog, preferred to stay in the backyard rather than incur Bobby's wrath. And these newborn kittens were no less than twenty times smaller than Bobby.

I rang several animal shelters and animal hospitals. All of them said, "Oh, you can bring them in, we'll put them to sleep. There is no way they can survive without the mother." I was horrified, but the officer of the animal shelter explained why they had no choice but to do just that. He was almost apologetic and urged me to understand that at this newborn stage, without immunity from mother's milk, these kittens would catch the diseases of other cats very easily at the shelter, and die a horrible death. They were too young to be vaccinated; hence there was no protection for them at the shelter. "Putting them to sleep is the most humane thing to do," he said.

I could not possibly send these poor innocent things to their death. No, there must be another way. So I asked that officer for advice. He was very kind, and he explained to me what I should do, but he cautioned me, "Their chances of survival are *very* slim. If there is even the slightest infection, they would die." He also told me that since they had no mother, I had to play the mother's role by wiping their mouths with a wet cotton wool after each feed, or they would die from a milk rash. I also had to stimulate them to move their bowels and urinate by wiping their tummies and private parts (like a mother licking them) with a warm wet cotton wool. If they did not defecate, they would die from bloatedness. My daughter, Ming-Yi and I decided we would do our best to look after the kittens. Thus began our day-by-day mission to give these little kittens a chance to see the world.

I named them Cow (for his black-and-white patches), Yeti (brownish-grey stripes on white) and Polar (white body with touches of brown-grey on the tail and head). All big names, I told my children, so that they would have a chance to survive. That first day, we fed them diluted packet milk with a syringe. It was a Sunday, and none of the pet shops was open. We could not even get Polar to open her mouth (at that time, we did not know their gender at all – too small to tell). I sent a frantic internet SOS to all the e-groups I knew – *please* give me some advice on what to do! On top of all this, I had to pacify Bobby. Bobby was extremely curious so we let him see the kittens but we could not possibly know if he would attack them, so we had to put the box on top of a cupboard.

We massaged their tiny tummies with wet cotton wool each time after feeding them, and prayed that they would defecate. The officer from the animal shelter's voice kept ringing in my ears, "They will die if they don't defecate." By the evening of the first day, Polar defecated – we were overjoyed. I never knew I would see the day when I was so happy a cat poo-ed all over me!

By early Monday morning (the next day), I had received tons of advice from the e-groups. Packet milk (being cow's milk) is not compatible with a newborn kitten's digestive system – I had to buy formulated kitten milk. They had to be fed every two hours, round the clock. But on weekdays, I had to go to work and would only be back after lunch. I appealed to some home-makers I knew if they could please help me babysit the kittens and feed them in the morning and I would take over once I came back from work. Nobody could help.

On Monday as I left for work, I looked at the little things in the box, fed them with the syringe and prayed, "Please....don't give up. I'll be back real soon." I played the CD of the chant of loving-kindness (the *Metta* Chant), music that had worked wonders on Bobby whenever he was sick. Still, I left home with such a heavy heart, with the animal shelter officer's voice ringing in my ears – "Their chances of survival are *VERY* slim." All day at work, I never stopped radiating thoughts of love and kindness to them. Please,

please be strong. Please survive. Please don't dehydrate. They were so small, they could not lick, they could not even move around. Their eyes were still tightly closed

I rushed home immediately after work. As I approached the box, there was no sound. I was prepared for the worst. Summoning up my courage, I held my breath and peered into the box. What a relief....the little things were still breathing and were fast asleep. I ran back to my car, and sped off to the nearest pet shop to buy the best kitten milk I could find, together with a cute little kitty feeding bottle.



"Yum, yum... milk!"



Ming-Yi on her mid-night shift

Ming-Yi and I took turns feeding them. I would do the afternoon shifts while she (being a late sleeper) would do the midnight shift which sometimes lasted until 2am. And I would take over at 4am the next morning. So we fed them round the clock, compensating as much as we could for the five to six hours in the morning when no one was home.



"Come over, Polar, it's so warm and comfortable."

Then we also prepared their "hot water bottles" – these were pink rubber gloves filled with hot water, wrapped in a handkerchief, to simulate the warmth and comfort of the mother. These gloves had to be changed every hour. The kittens loved the hot rubber gloves and would earnestly snuggle up to them whenever we put in fresh ones. The glove served as their "surrogate mother".



"Wow, you are so tiny..."

Each day was a completely new challenge. Each afternoon, I rushed back home with the same fear – are they still alive? Oh please, please....yes. And yes, the little things were alive, and kicking! Day by day, they grew stronger. Day by day, we breathed a sigh of relief that the kittens were alright.

By now, Bobby had become accustomed to them, and would climb onto the table and watch us feed



them. He was extremely curious, and also seemed very compassionate. As he had lived with us for ten years, I believe Bobby could definitely read our minds. He tried to help – he even found ways to climb onto the cupboard, just to see the kittens. On the eighth day, Polar was the first to open her eyes – they were blue (as all kittens' eyes are). After another two days, Cow and Yeti saw the world for the first time, and saw us. Those were the most beautiful pairs of blue eyes I had seen in my entire life.

At the same time, I was asking practically everyone I met if they would like to adopt the kittens later. I feared that Bobby would be hostile to them and that I would not be able to keep them. I did not have much help in that area. In fact, I received quite a number of nasty responses too. A few young people said to me, "Why don't you eat them?", "Why don't you let your dog eat them?" I was aghast. I was really sad to know that some young people these days can be so heartless. I felt sorry that they did not have any semblance of compassion in their young hearts – what would happen when they grew up? Still, I was thankful for my many friends who rallied behind me to give me hope and encouragement. The friends from the e-group were really helpful – and these were people whom I had not even met.

After a week or so, we suddenly noticed that Cow could not open one eye. Suspecting an infection and remembering that the vet had said that any infection could be fatal (and contagious), I called the vet immediately to ask for advice. It was 6.20pm, and the vet said she would be closing at 6.30pm. I begged her to stay back and wait for me and



"Come on, little ones... don't be afraid"



"I don't know about you, but I'm venturing out into the brave new world..."

she agreed. Driving as fast as I could, Ming-Yi and I rushed Cow to the vet's. It was conjunctivitis, and quite dangerous for a week-old kitten. It could cause blindness if not treated early enough. The vet said the other two would have already caught it by now, so I had to treat all three of them with an antibiotic eye ointment. At home, we took turns, again, to apply the ointment, and thankfully all of them recovered soon enough. The big blue eyes were shining again.

By three weeks, we let Bobby approach them. He tried to lick them clean, as a mother cat would. It was clear that Bobby had accepted them completely as part of the family. That had been my earlier worry – that he might not. But he proved me wrong – good old dependable Bobby! I did not have to look for people to adopt the kittens anymore. I would keep them.

Among the three kittens, Cow proved to be the leader. Even as a tiny little kitten (by now they were living in the kitchen, in a little pet carrier), he would walk all the way out to the living room, and purr at my husband's ear to "tell" him that they were hungry. My husband (who previously had not liked cats) had the greatest admiration for Cow. By now, my son, Jia-Wen, had also taken a liking to them. We re-named Yeti "Bunny" because he behaved completely like a bunny, hopping like a bunny, chewing his food like a bunny – he even looked like a bunny, the only thing missing were the long ears! Polar was the most mischievous, prancing up and down, pretty much like a little monkey!

Bobby took it upon himself to be the caretaker of the three kittens. If they wandered off from the pet carrier, Bobby would carry them back in his mouth and put them back where they belonged. He was behaving exactly as a mother-cat would. Once, Bobby was playing too roughly with Bunny until Bunny decided to "play dead". Bobby was so frightened, he let out a continuous yelp (as though asking for help) to alert me. I came running out and saw Bunny lying motionless on the floor, but the moment I came near enough, Bunny got up and walked away. Bobby (and I!) heaved a sigh of relief.

The three kittens had won our hearts, as well as Bobby's. With their close affiliation with Bobby, they soon learnt to do the down-dog (dog stretch) instead of the typical cat-stretch. They also scratched like dogs (with their hind legs). They even wagged their tails and growled. Once, we definitely heard Cow bark! Having been through the toughest time of their lives together, they were



"Hmm...what interesting things do you have here?"



"Oops...help, please!"

extremely protective of each other. If one kitten was to go missing for a few minutes, the other two would go looking for him/her. It warmed my heart to know how much they cared for each other. Cow was always the first to come to the rescue of his siblings. Even at that young age, he had shown what a responsible "elder brother" he was. And as though paying homage to Bobby for allowing them to stay in the house, he was very tolerant and respectful of Bobby. Many times, I caught Bobby bullying Cow, but Cow would tolerate it and never fight back. This has made my husband respect him even more.

I never knew cats were so intelligent – not only are they mind-readers, they can also make me understand exactly what they want. Once, Cow and Bunny went missing for about ten minutes. It was Polar who alerted us. She came mewling, in a really strange tone. I sensed something was wrong, so we went looking for the other two.

Upstairs, downstairs, in the toilets, under the cupboards we searched – they were nowhere to be found. We went outside the house (by now, they could already jump out of the window and play in the garden) and started searching. I took the bicycle and cycled up and down the road. Ming-Yi searched all the drains. No kitten. I feared the worst.

Then, an idea struck me. I told Ming-Yi to carry Polar and search. It worked. Polar helped by meowing, and within seconds, we heard soft meowing, in reply, from nearby. It turned out that the two mischievous fellows had climbed up a tree in our garden, and got too scared to jump down! Silly us – we had looked everywhere except up!

Each morning, when Bobby and I came downstairs, we would be greeted by the kittens' adorable little meowing and big brown eyes (from blue to brown now). While I cooked



"Good morning, little friends..."

their breakfast, they would wait patiently, together with Bobby. Each day passed so fast, because there was so much to do with the kittens. Sometimes when I watched them sleeping so peacefully, or playing happily and boisterously with each other, I think of the day I had found them by the roadside. Isn't it funny how life works out in mysterious ways, and what seemed like a burden at first, becomes a source of joy? I am so thankful that I had been privileged enough to have found them, to look after them, and to watch them grow up.

By May 2008, Cow, Bunny and Polar would be two years old, and they are BIG by normal cat standards. Cow is the protector of my whole cat family and still sits on the pillar outside the house to wait for all the other cats to come back at night. At other times, he loves the sofa! Although Cow is the big brother of the family, whenever he falls sick or has any injury, he turns into a tame little kitten who would seek attention quite desperately. Throughout the day, he would be "asking" for ointment to be applied onto his wound (even after it has healed), and during his "period of illness", he goes upstairs and sleeps on Jia-Wen's bed all day. We call it "Cow's Hospital Bed".

Bunny has made himself the "alpha cat" of the road. He even has his own alley down the road that no other cat is allowed to trespass. He protects the house and has fought off the bully-cat of the neighbourhood (whom we call Bushy because of his bushy tail and his roguish nature) many times too. When Bunny is not reigning in his alley, he would be at home, resting in his favourite pent-house – the washing machine! But he would only go inside if there were sufficient clothes to serve as a soft cushion. He spends hours sleeping inside it. Maybe we should call it "Bunny's Bin" (reminiscent of "Fin's Bin!").



"I need a rest too, you know..."



"Private! You can look, but you cannot come in!"

Polar became a mother at eight months, and after having dutifully nursed her kittens, she now prefers to spend her days outdoors, but comes back a few times a day for food. Whenever Polar comes back, Wolf and Cleo (her children) would clamour for her attention and affections. The family reunion is a very touching sight.

Polar is very fond of Ming-Yi, and would sleep with her on weekends when she is home from university. In fact, the whole "Pole family" (Polar and her children, Wolf and Cleo) has claimed Ming-Yi's room to be theirs.



The Pole Family reunion

When I first rescued Cow, Bunny and Polar, I remember being told that it would be very difficult to hand-raise kittens and that most would not survive past one year, and even if they did, they would remain smaller in size. They would also be more susceptible to diseases because they do not have the immunity from mother's milk. Knowing this, I am very thankful for each day that Cow, Bunny and Polar remain the healthy and happy cats that they are. I am thankful that love has beaten the odds thus far.

When all else fails, put your faith in love. It works.



My husband, Cow and Bobby



"Now you see me, now you don't!"



"Yes!! Leftovers!!"...and they licked the platter clean.

An earlier version of this story was published in Silent Cries (2006)



### 3. The Big Rescue Operation

*The greatness of a nation and its moral progress can be judged by the way its animals are treated.*

- Mahatma Gandhi

July 2006.

My friends and I received word that a nearby dog pound had conducted a massive crackdown on strays in the vicinity and sixty-five animals were going to be euthanised by the end of that week. A pet rescue group obtained permission to get some of the animals adopted. My friends, Shamala and Kokilavani worked tirelessly for days on this and we were finally left with forty-five dogs, mostly diseased, old, and in pretty bad shape. We already could not get these adopted....where could we house them?

The authorities could not extend the deadline anymore. If we did not transport the dogs out by 3pm that Friday, all would be put down. Word got to (now Venerable Chief)



The dogs at the pound, an hour before the deadline.

Rev Dhammaratana and he very kindly offered to set up a temporary shelter for the dogs at the Ti-Ratana Welfare Home at Desa Petaling. At last, all was not lost. The problem now was to get the dogs out of the pound, and to the shelter.

I asked around for volunteers to provide transport – vans, private cars, any form of vehicles, please. Unfortunately, no one volunteered. Finally, I managed to ask my brother-in-law to help us with his small lorry.

Friday, 1pm.

Five small-sized ladies, Shamala, Kokilavani, Yuen Foon, Agnes and myself, gathered at the dog pound, all ready to rescue the remaining forty-five dogs from certain death. I had asked around for volunteers (I thought we would be needing “manpower” more than “womenpower” for this task), but no one offered except Victor, a 17-year old boy. Victor said to me, “I don’t know anything much about dogs, but I want to help you.” Bless his kind heart. I was so touched.

Although the enclosures were very clean, most of the dogs were diseased. What struck me most was that they were all very sad and depressed, looking as though they had already surrendered to their destiny. It was a very pitiful sight. Most of them were quietly huddled together. However, some were ferocious, ready to fight to the death. These were the ones who had not given up hope. I knew that these dogs sensed what was going to happen. With their sixth sense, they can sense death. They can sense

enmity, and they react. It is just a natural instinct. Looking at these dogs, I was very determined that by hook or by crook, we would have to get them out to safety.

My friends and I talked to the dogs from outside the enclosures, and we assured them that we would bring them to safety. Soon, my brother-in-law and his wife arrived with their lorry and they even managed to bring some cages to help transport the dogs. My brother-in-law had to give up his business for the day just to help me out. However, we knew one lorry would not be enough to transport all the dogs out. Later, by some miracle, another volunteer came with a second lorry.

Our first problem was to get the dogs out. All of them were huge dogs. Many were frothing at the mouth, while some were snarling ferociously. The workers at the pound told us they would use their “usual ways” to get them out. To our horror, they used whips and lassos. They threw the lasso over the dogs and literally “fished” them out of the enclosures. You’d see a dog flying through the air. These were not fish...these were dogs, and large ones too. I felt extremely disturbed at the sight and my heart ached terribly at such cruelty. However, some of the dogs were too smart to be caught that way as they managed to avoid the lassos. By now the dogs had become more defensive and angry, and when the workers went into the enclosures, the dogs reacted ferociously. The workers’ attempts were completely futile. After so much time was wasted, we told the workers to let us into the enclosures. They had no choice but to relent. Time was running short now.

So, the five small-sized ladies went into the enclosures. I was armed with nothing except thoughts of love and compassion. I did not even have a pair of gloves. We knelt down and talked to each dog. Some of us spoke in English, some in Chinese. We told them to trust us, and that we were going to bring them to safety. Somehow, miraculously, the dogs “understood” and they calmed down. And slowly, we carried each one of these ferocious dogs, some still frothing at the mouth, mostly diseased, out of the enclosures and onto the lorry. I had never handled such big dogs before in my entire life, nor have I encountered such ferocious creatures face-to-face. Yet, somehow, I did what I had to do, and I found courage and strength to do it. I still wonder today, how a petite female like me had managed to carry those huge dogs onto the lorry that day.

The workers at the pound looked at us open-mouthed. One of them pulled one of my friends aside and asked, “Your friend can talk to animals??” These workers did not understand the first thing about handling animals, even though they worked there. Animals respond to kindness. It does not matter what language you speak, they understand the language of kindness. But they will attack if they sense fear in you. The key is that if you are afraid, do not even attempt to go near them. Steer clear of them. But if you have love and kindness in your heart, and you know that your intentions are pure, that should give you enough confidence to approach them. For us that afternoon,

we did not even let ourselves be bothered about what kind of diseases these dogs had. We were focused only on rescuing them. Compassion was all we had.

It took us some time before we managed to get all the dogs onto the two lorries. A few of the dogs were really sick and needed medical attention. As we were loading the dogs onto the first lorry, one young couple arrived with their van and offered to help. They were definitely heaven-sent, because we needed a separate vehicle to take these very sick dogs to the vet.

There was also a mother-dog who was captured while she was pregnant and she had just delivered eight healthy, bubbly puppies at the pound two days before. The workers had put her and her puppies in a separate (rusty) cage, but the authorities wanted this mother-dog *and* her puppies to be put to sleep as well. We could not transport this mother-dog and her puppies out that afternoon, so we pleaded with the workers to give them a one-day reprieve and we promised to take them out the next day. Thank goodness they agreed. There was also a cow at the pound and we were told that the cow would be euthanised. I could not understand why a perfectly healthy animal had to be euthanised and my heart really went out to the cow.



The mother-dog and her newborn puppies in the rusty cage at the pound.



All loaded and ready to go on the long journey to safety.



Unloading the dogs from the lorry.

Having loaded all the dogs onto the lorries, our long journey now began. I could see that the dogs were very scared and they did not know what was happening and why they were inside these cages on a lorry. My heart went out to them, and I could only hope that they would somehow “know” we were bringing them to safety. By now, it had started to drizzle and we had to bring these dogs all the way to Ti-Ratana. The journey would take at least an hour especially when the lorries had to go very slowly.



I drove behind the lorry with Victor keeping me company. Bless his kind heart, he was the only person who had volunteered to help me that afternoon. Everyone else was “too busy”. On the way, the rain started getting heavier and at one point, it was so heavy I could hardly see out of my windscreen. Suddenly, without warning, I saw one dog clamber out of the cage (it was open on top) and jump off the lorry. It then scurried to the roadside and disappeared into a nearby jungle. Everything happened too quickly – it was a miracle that the dog did not get knocked down by any car on that road. My car screeched to a stop, and I went out in the rain to look for it, but I failed to find it. I could only hope that it could survive in the jungle. We continued our long journey.

It was amazing that when we reached the Ti-Ratana with the first batch of fifteen dogs, even the aggressive ones had settled down and were docile. This was a far cry from what they were like at the pound. It was obvious that they sensed security and safety in this new place. Or perhaps they were just too exhausted from the long journey to protest!

The volunteers at Ti-Ratana who had set up the make-shift enclosure on the grass had not anticipated the heavy thunderstorm and the whole place was slightly flooded. There was no time to waste, so we made a human chain and began filling the pools of water with sand, broken tiles and whatever we could find there, and we covered the sand with planks and plywood we had found nearby, before unloading the dogs. It was still raining. The enclosure was very low (with zinc roofs), so we had to stoop while we were inside. The few men who were there could not get in at all as they were too big. Hence, it was women power again!



The dogs in their new (and very safe) home.

It was so much easier unloading the dogs now – all were calm, even the ones who had been aggressive earlier. By now the second lorry had arrived, and we carried the dogs down from the two lorries and put them into their new home. Here, we were met by another lady, Ms Lai, and her son, Ken. This remarkable lady calmed the last of the three fiercest dogs by talking to them in Mandarin. It was sheer magic. A petite lady, hardly five feet tall, with a heart of gold...and courage!

Everyone was close to tears by now. We had virtually completed a near-impossible task. A total of thirty-seven huge dogs (excluding the mother-dog and her puppies who were still at the pound) had been rescued, all in one afternoon. Who would have thought six small-sized ladies (and two young boys) would have taken on this task and obtained two lorries, and Ti-Ratana would build a temporary shelter to

house them? Destiny works in mysterious ways. Nature provides, if we strive hard enough. In that way, we create our own destiny.

It was extremely heartening to know that Ti-Ratana already had a wonderful plan in the pipeline. Mr Wellington Ho, the gentleman in charge at Ti-Ratana informed us that six dog trainers had already volunteered to train the dogs together with the orphans at the welfare home. It would be a two-pronged project – training the dogs and teaching the children compassion. The trained dogs would later be put up for adoption. Wellington had also arranged for vets to see to the dogs' medical needs.

By now, the rain had stopped and the orphans gathered around excitedly to help feed the dogs. It was touching to see so much compassion and kindness in the children - they were really eager to help. The Malaysian National Animal Welfare Foundation (MNAWF) had organized for sponsorship of Hill's pet food from Pets Corner Sdn Bhd and veterinary care from Animal Medical Centre. Ms Lai sponsored the feeding bowls.

Our job was done now. I drove home, feeling relieved that a near-impossible task had been completed. After dropping Victor, I went home, took a bath and even managed to

go for a talk that evening. However, I was very sure I still smelled of dog all night! My friends who heard about the rescue donated money to buy dog food. My brother heard about the rescue and donated RM1000 that night itself.



Selphie, her puppies and me.

The next morning, as promised, we drove to the pound to rescue the mother-dog and her puppies. The workers kept their promise of the one-day reprieve. There were no takers for the mother-dog and her puppies, so I volunteered to take them home – all nine of them. I had no idea how I was going to house them in my intermediate linked house, but somehow, I would find a way. And, I was also very relieved to hear that a kind person would be adopting the cow. So she would not be euthanised. Thank goodness for that!



Selphie's little bundles of joy.

So Selphie (that is what we called her) and her eight puppies came home with me in my little *Kelisa* (a small car about the size of a Mini). Selphie was a big black mongrel, only about one-year old. I put her and her puppies in the porch and watched over them that night. The next morning, the moment I came out, she came to me and put her head on my lap. I was very

touched. I knew she was saying “thank you”. I could feel her gratitude. Every morning, the moment I went out to the porch, Selphie would leave her puppies and lick me all over. She would sit with me on the swing, and you cannot help but *know* that Selphie was saying “thank you” in her own ways. Her affections were genuine. She touched me very deeply.

After two weeks, a very kind vet offered to take over Selphie and her puppies. It was definitely better as the puppies needed the care of a vet. We sent the whole family to the vet’s and I remember feeling so sad when we had to leave them there. I could only hope that Selphie would understand that it was for her and her puppies’ own good, and that I was not abandoning her. There was no way I could keep her in my house. Even while she was with me, all my pets suffered. I had to keep the windows locked, and once, Polar escaped and Selphie almost ate her up! Bobby too, felt quite miserable, being under “house arrest”!

The vet checked all the puppies and found that the youngest was severely dehydrated. I felt extremely guilty that due to my ignorance, I did not know how to check the puppies for dehydration (now I know – do a pinch test on the skin). The vet had earlier told me to just leave everything to the mother-dog and that I need not do anything at all except to ensure that the mother-dog was well-fed. I prayed hard that this youngest puppy would survive under the care of the vet.

Every day I called the vet to check on the youngest puppy. After three days, my worst fears were realised – the little one did not make it. I cried my heart out, feeling extremely guilty and could not help but blame myself for having been ignorant. When we reached the vet’s clinic, one of the clinic staff handed the little one to me, wrapped in newspaper. I brought her home in the car, with her on my lap. I was crying all the way home. Earlier, I had called Shamala to tell her the news. Shamala consoled me and told me to name her before burying her. As I was bringing her home, I quietly named her “Selphie Junior”. I told her I was so sorry I could not save her, and I sought her forgiveness for my ignorance.

Upon reaching home, my family and I said prayers for her and we buried Selphie Junior in our garden. I was devastated for days. If only I had known how to check for dehydration and intervened, she might have lived. And Selphie (the mother) was so young and probably a first-time mother. She probably could not look after all eight of her puppies or ensure that each one was properly fed. That is life – I was ignorant, but we learn and become wiser from our mistakes. After a few weeks at the vet’s, somehow, the eldest puppy also passed away due to unknown causes. We later got Selphie and her remaining six puppies adopted. The last I heard, all are doing fine.

Of the dogs whom we sent to the vet on the day of the rescue because they needed medical attention, one had to have a leg amputated. After his amputation, we raised

enough funds to fly (yes, by aeroplane) him to a no-kill animal shelter in Langkawi where he would spend the rest of his days – safe and sound, happily and healthily.

Ti-Ratana later built a permanent enclosure for the dogs. The orphan-dog programme proceeded well. Some of the very sick dogs did not live long, unfortunately, but at least they were attended to by vets and they lived out their natural lives. The veterinarians from Animal Medical Centre had volunteered to provide treatment and look after the dogs. The other dogs who survived were eventually adopted by caring families. My friends and I attended the adoption ceremony and there was even a performance to show off the dogs!



The dogs with their new caretakers in their new home at Ti-Ratana.

So this is the story of the Big Rescue Operation. I do not know if I would ever have the energy or resilience to do it again, but if the need is there, somehow, we find the strength. All lives are precious. If you were to have looked into the eyes of any one of those forty-five dogs that afternoon, you would definitely have seen what I saw – that we all want to live and we fear death. Knowing this, we should never harm or cause others to do harm. I am also reminded by this quote by the English novelist, Anna Sewell, “My doctrine is this: that if we see cruelty or wrong that we have the power to stop, and we do nothing, we make ourselves sharers in the guilt.”

This big rescue operation gave me an inner strength and confidence which I never knew I had. And, how often does one get the chance to save forty-five lives in a day? I am truly thankful to have served my fellow sentient beings.

Saving and protecting lives is a noble virtue. Let us always uphold the reverence for life by doing all we can to honour and respect all life.

### **What happened after the Big Rescue Operation**

After the rescue operation, Mr Wellington Ho took over the care of the dogs. And he did (and is still doing) a remarkable job.

From Wellington’s diary:

*Some of the children at Ti-Ratana helped to unload the dogs from the lorry when they arrived at the centre. It was when I saw the affinity which these two boys had with the dogs that started me thinking in terms of capitalising on this affinity to help the dogs find a home.*

*I had read about the work done by the Delta Society in USA with inmates of a prison helping to train dogs (which otherwise would have been put to sleep) and in the process learned the meaning of compassion and responsibility. Since I had access to people who could help me teach the children about dog training, I decided to organise basic obedience training for the rescued dogs so as to give them added value, as otherwise it would be difficult to attract people to adopt them.*

*The next thing was to look for sponsorship of food and veterinary care for the dogs. I gave Dr Siva a call explaining the purpose of the project, i.e. using the children to help the dogs and, in return, the dogs would be able to help the children develop compassion and responsibility. Dr Siva immediately picked up on the cue and in no time he called me back to say that the Malaysian National Animal Welfare Foundation (MNAWF), of which he was the Vice Chairman, would undertake the sponsorship.*

*A 3-month programme was put in place to give the dogs basic obedience training and an open house was held at the end of the period. Many of the dogs were adopted based on the obedience demonstration which was impressively done by the children during the open house, witnessed by YAM Raja Datin Paduka Seri Zarina Raja Tan Sri Zainal, the patron of MNAWF (now also the patron of Ti-Ratana).*

*There were two objectives when this programme was first put in place, viz. to undertake animal rescue and to develop animal assisted activity as an ongoing programme at Ti-Ratana. Since then, we have dropped the first objective as the responsibility was too heavy for the children. However, we have retained the second objective of developing the animal assisted activity at the orphanage.*

*Today we are still carrying on with the teaching of dog obedience training to the children at the orphanage. Friday nights are dog training nights at the orphanage. We have retained a dozen of the rescued dogs for this purpose. Recently, two of the children participated in a dog obedience competition with their rescued dogs. This was organized by the Malaysian Kennel Association and the children were competing against adults with their pedigree dogs. They did remarkably well and were commended by the judge from Australia (this was featured in an article in MKA's Berita Anjing).*

*The dog training instructors who took turns to serve with me over the past three years at Ti-Ratana are Munisamy Govindaraju, Lily Chong, Richard Ernest, Danny Valhoutte, Looi Siew Teip and Shawn Lim.*

*Until today, Dr Siva and his team are still providing the food and the veterinary care for the dogs at Ti-Ratana.*

Well, isn't this wonderful? Bless their kind hearts.

We all have our roles to play, and we do what we can. When everyone works together and do what we do best, only then can success be achieved.

Let's work together for the wellbeing of the animals.

Let's live together harmoniously and compassionately.

"Love All Life" - MNAWF's motto.

## 4. Tiger's Tales

*Every animal knows more than you do.*  
- Chief Seattle

August 2006.

About half a year after Cow, Bunny and Polar came into our lives, we had another addition to the family. A Japanese lady had heard about my rescue and care of newborn kittens and she called me to ask if I would take over a tiny kitten she had found. The poor little creature had been meowing piteously beside its already dead mother. The Japanese lady could not look after him as she had her own little infant to take care of.

That very afternoon, she brought the little kitten over to my house. I took one look at him, and my heart went out to the helpless young feline... and that was how Tiger came into our lives on that Saturday afternoon in August. We called him Tiger because he had stripes (albeit all grey). Initially his face looked like that of a monkey's, but somehow as the weeks went by, his face actually evolved into that of a tiger's – living up to his name? He even had some an orange tinge around his nose area.

Bobby was very hospitable to Tiger and accepted him instantly. He was clearly excited about this new addition to the household. However, Cow, Bunny and Polar were very jealous and decided not to welcome Tiger at all. Whenever I brought Tiger into the kitchen, the three would go into the living room. And if Tiger was in the living room, they would go out into the garden or migrate upstairs. Cow was the ring leader in this silent protest – he led everyone out. Sometimes as they passed by, they would even growl and hiss at poor little Tiger. As I had no experience with cat rivalry before, I searched the internet for information about cat behaviour so that I could understand them better. I learnt that it was normal for cats to behave as Cow had done. Hostility, jealousy and insecurity were the norm when a new cat joins the household. However, I was confident that the three cats would eventually relent, and they probably just needed time to adjust. So I waited. During this time, Bobby protected Tiger and would shoo the cats away when they came anywhere near Tiger. Good old Bobby – don't you just love him?



Little Tiger



"I love lion."



Having come alone, Tiger had no sibling or friend, so we gave him Lion (a soft toy) as a companion. Tiger loved Lion, and would lie beside him all the time. I guessed with Cow, Bunny and Polar being hostile, Tiger found solace in, and security with, Lion. Until today, Tiger is still very fond of his first friend.

After a week, the protest and hostility fizzled out and Cow, Bunny and Polar decided it was time to make peace. Aha...patience pays. In fact, soon after that, Cow began to take Tiger under his wing, and started giving him lessons on "how to be a cat". We could see that Cow took great pride in playing big brother to Tiger.



"Yes, that's how you sharpen your claws.  
Scratch!"



The teacher and his protégé ... after class.

As Cow took on this responsibility of looking after Tiger, I found I did not have to do much for Tiger except to feed him and make sure he was safe. Cow took Tiger around the house, introduced him to the garden, and watched over him as he learnt to climb the tree outside. At night, Cow made it his duty to sit on the pillar outside the house until everyone came back from their night walks. We noticed that Cow had become the "alpha cat", the big brother of the pack.

So Tiger grew up, guided by Cow all the way. Bobby continued being sympathetic towards Tiger. Perhaps he knew that Tiger had come alone, unlike Cow, Bunny and Polar, so Bobby decided to become Tiger's best friend. The two got along very well and would play together – an odd couple indeed – a ten year old poodle and a two month old kitten!

Tiger had marvelous interpersonal skills. Soon, he got on very well with the cats as well as Mac, who lived alone in the backyard. Tiger would climb out through the kitchen window to Mac's place and actually play with Mac. Mac lived alone, so Tiger must have thought that Mac too had no friend and they could be partners for each other.

Tiger was also extremely tame and friendly. Imagine that, we called him "Tiger" and he turned out to be our friendliest cat! Until today, I have yet to see Tiger fighting with anyone at all. While Cow and Bunny were quite territorial and we often see them



protecting the house from the neighbourhood bully-cat, Bushy, and both had come back with injuries before, Tiger came back intact every time, without a single scratch on him. I have never heard Tiger growling, hissing or hunching his back in defence. He was just so remarkably tame, friendly and trusting. In fact, I have seen Tiger making friends with the other neighbourhood cats. We joked that Tiger went around signing "friendship contracts" with every animal in the neighbourhood.



"Watch your step, little one. I'm right behind you..."



"May I share your food, Mac?"

I often imagine Tiger going around with a pen in one paw and a document in the other asking every animal that he meets, "Would you like to be friends with me? Yes? Oh great! Sign here, please...", and they shake paws (!) after that. I believe he does so (in his own ways, of course) because my neighbour tells me that every afternoon, Tiger goes over to her house for tea, and interacts with her cat in their living room. They even take naps on her carpet all afternoon, and Tiger gets little titbits of tea-time snacks with her cat. Tiger had found a second home, and had become good friends with her cat. Another friendship contract signed...and very successfully too, if I may add.



"Sharing is caring."

One day, however, the friendship negotiations went awry. Tiger had gone down the road to try to sign his "friendship contract" with two dogs in the neighbourhood. These were two medium-sized dogs (a mixed Spitz and a Pinscher) who belonged to a neighbour a few doors away. I was at work, but when I returned, I was told by my neighbour that there had been a big commotion that morning. Apparently, Tiger had gone to that house and had attempted to make friends with the two dogs, not knowing that unlike Bobby, most dogs

are not friendly towards cats (well, how would Tiger have known, he only knew the dogs in our house and both were so friendly to him). And poor Tiger was chased into a corner by these two growling dogs, very ferociously too.

All hell broke loose, hair flew and the cacophonous pandemonium brought some neighbours rushing to the scene. Finally a kind boy in the neighbourhood came to the rescue, broke up the fight, and brought Tiger back to the safety of our house. According to the boy, poor Tiger was shivering and scared to bits. I guess young animals, just like young humans, trust very easily, and it is through bitter experience that they learn the ways of the world and become wiser as a result of it.

I hoped, for Tiger's own safety, that he had learnt the bitter lesson that not all dogs are friendly. I was (and still am) worried that Tiger might attempt to make friends with two more dogs down the road and these were huge dogs – an Alsatian and a Rottweiler! So far, there has been no further mishap but I am still keeping my fingers crossed.

Bobby continues to protect Tiger until today – the two are still the best of friends. And as I watch all my cats growing up, and how Bobby has magnanimously shared this house (and me!) with every animal that I have rescued, I cannot help but admire and respect Bobby for his generosity. From being the king of the house and master of all he surveys, plus being sole owner of me (!!), Bobby now shares the entire house with all the cats – he welcomes every addition to the family with open-hearted magnanimity and sincerity. He even lets Cow and Tiger sleep on my bed, together with him. I realized that when we give unconditional love and kindness to animals, they appreciate it and will in return shower the same on us and the other animals around them. Isn't that just so wonderful, that we can even teach animals to be kind by just being kind to them?



"Hey old friend, wanna play?"



The kindest of them all (and I mean the furry one!).

Animals may be ignorant and lack our (human) intelligence. But in my experience with my pets, I am convinced that they can feel, and they do learn. If we think of what our world needs more today, is it knowledge or kindness? I am reminded instantly of one of my favourite quotes from Richard Carlson (1997), that "it is more important to be kind than to be right". We humans sometimes think that we know a lot and that is what makes us superior to other beings, but what DO we know? Do we know how to be kinder to others? Do we know how to extend our compassion beyond the barriers of our superficial differences? Do we know how to forgive unconditionally and love

boundlessly? Do we know that our differences are not important, and that what is more important is to care for each other?

Some humans have yet to learn this. Some animals know it already.



Bobby, Tiger, Bunny and me.

## 5. Farewell, Little Pans

*Until one has loved an animal, a part of one's soul remains unawakened.*  
- Anatole France

December 2006.

I was a little late in getting Polar spayed, and on the day I sent her to the clinic to get it done, the vet discovered she was already pregnant with three little kittens. It was at a very early stage, and the vet asked me if I would want him to go ahead with the spaying. I said no, absolutely not. These three little kittens had already come into the world through Polar. It was meant to be. They had to be given the chance to be born, and to live.

So we brought Polar back. The poor little thing was hardly eight months old and obviously did not know what was happening to her.

She went through the entire pregnancy without any mishap, and on the night of February 19<sup>th</sup>, 2007, just a few days after Chinese New Year, Polar made peculiar noises, trying to tell us she was in pain. We knew she was in labour and was due to deliver.

Being a first-time mother, poor Polar had no experience at all. And shortly past midnight, she delivered her firstborn, Wolf, beside the piano. Wolf was born almost transparent, being white in colour, and we could see his internal organs. Almost immediately after giving birth to Wolf, Polar took him in her mouth, and carried him to my computer room (which was downstairs), and placed him inside a box. Then she went upstairs into Ming-Yi's wardrobe and about an hour later, delivered Cleo, a stylish little tri-coloured female and Pans, a black-and-white male. In the process of giving birth to the other two kittens, we figured that Polar had forgotten all about Wolf being downstairs. So we took Wolf up carefully, making sure we clad our hands with towels so that our scent would not get onto Wolf. We had heard horror stories of mother-cats sometimes eating up their young if the young had been touched by "outsiders". Polar accepted Wolf when we placed him next to her, and allowed him to suckle together with Cleo and Pans. It was such a joy watching the new mother nursing her babies. It is just so amazing that animals know instinctively what to do. It is we humans who have lost all our natural instincts and need to re-learn what to do.

The next day, a rather amusing thing happened. All of a sudden, Polar became very worried and rushed downstairs to the box where she had left Wolf the night before. She had forgotten that we had brought Wolf to her the previous night. But I guess being so caught up with the events happening, she had become confused with the situation with her firstborn, Wolf.



The ever vigilant mother

Initially we were worried that Cow and Bunny might attack the new kittens, as we heard that such things do happen amongst cats. But Cow and Bunny played the role of “uncle” very well, and came to pay daily visits. Bobby was more excited than ever! He was the grand uncle now!

The three kittens grew up very healthily. It was a far cry from what we had experienced in looking after Cow, Bunny and Polar previously.

As the three of them had no mother, we had to be their mother and there was just so much to do to ensure that they would survive – every day was a new challenge and a milestone. Now, Polar was around, and she was such a loving and caring mother. There was virtually nothing we had to do. Polar did everything from cleaning up her kittens to feeding them. She never left her kittens, not even for a moment. She was the epitome of the perfect mother and we were so proud of her.

Although Polar was extremely protective of her kittens, she allowed all of us to touch them. The three balls of fur grew from day to day. I only had to weigh them every few days to ensure that they were getting enough nutrition from Polar. And of course, not forgetting (after the experience with Selphie’s puppies), I did the pinch test to check for dehydration. Once Bobby came too close to the kittens, and Polar chased Bobby all the way to the back of the house. Her protective instinct was like nothing I had ever seen in her before. That, I suppose, is the mother’s love for her kittens. There was absolutely no fear in her. She confronted and almost attacked a dog three times her size!!

Wolf turned out to be a beautiful blue-point male whom many say really looked like a wolf and Cleo was a petite and extremely elegant tri-coloured female who had black hind legs which made her look as though she was wearing black stockings, all ready to go out to paint the whole town red! Pans was black and white, and had a cute little bent tail. He had the most angelic face you had ever seen. My husband called him “Sweet Face”.

The three little kittens were very close-knit and it was such a joy watching them grow day by day. Their home was my computer room and they were my constant companions as I worked on my talks every day. We set up a little “jungle gym” with boxes and books for them to play on, and they would be climbing up and down, and all over. Of the three, Pans, being the youngest, endeared himself to us all because of his sweet little face. He had a great appetite and grew the fastest, and soon outgrew his brother and sister in size. When we took the three siblings for their first check-up at the vet’s, we brought them in the pet carrier. The vet had taken Cleo out to be examined first, and she was making a lot of noise out of protest. Pans felt he had to protect his big sister, so he stretched his little paw out and tried to scratch the vet. What a brave little

baby brother! At other times, Wolf and Pans roughed it out, as most brothers would – the two got on very well.



"This jungle gym is so much fun!"



"Can you help me up, Brother?"



"Time for a snooze now..."

Everything went on perfectly well until one night, about four months after their birth, one of my neighbours rang me up at around midnight and told me that one of my cats was lying motionless by the roadside, under the coconut tree. We all rushed out, and to our shock, it was Little Pans. I refused to believe it was little Pans. I said, "No, please, this is not Little Pans, no, no, please....". But it was unmistakably Pans, our youngest kitten. He was already cold and stiff by then, and there was a little trace of blood at his mouth.

We brought little Pans back to the house, and a few of the cats came to investigate. Ming-Yi was devastated. This was totally unexpected and we were all in shock. Pans was only four months old. How could this have happened? We were so unprepared. Polar came to see, and I explained to her that Pans was gone. It broke my heart. Wolf also came to sniff at little Pans, and I tried my best to console him. I wondered if I was consoling him or myself. Yet I had to be strong for my children and make some decisions.

Although being at a loss and in shock, I felt I had to take some action. There was no point in keeping Pans' remains overnight, so we decided to bury Pans immediately. Jia-Wen and I dug a hole in the garden in the dead of the night, and we buried him. Tiger, Cow and Wolf came around and stayed with us. I wondered if they knew what had happened. I was totally devastated.

I could barely sleep that night. I had just buried our youngest little kitten. I was still in shock. The next morning, I needed to cry. I needed to mourn the loss. I think I must have cried for two weeks after that. Wolf looked for Pans and he definitely missed him. He would even go to the spot where we had buried Pans and sniff around – that really broke my heart. I do not think Wolf understood that Pans had died and would not return anymore. He kept mewling and looking for him – he had lost his dearest playmate and little brother. I tried to occupy Wolf's and Cleo's attention by playing with them as much as I could. Polar did not seem to be much affected by the loss, but I saw her sniffing at the spot under the coconut tree for many days after that. I did not know what was in her thoughts, but my heart certainly wept for her. She had been such a wonderful mother. Wolf was clearly very sad, and I tried my best to cheer him up and distract him. I reminded myself that life had to go on. The dead are gone now, the living have to continue with their lives. Being the human figure in this family, as one who is supposed to understand things better, I had a role to play.

However, as strong as I tried to be, I became totally paranoid, and every night, I would be out on the road to get all the cats back into the house. I even closed all the windows to prevent them from going out. I was a total emotional wreck. With the help of my friends, I came to terms with Pans' death by reminding myself that we all have to die one day, we just do not know when it would happen. Much as we can accept the fact that elderly or sick people die when they do, it is just so hard to accept when death comes unexpectedly, especially to one so young. Yet, Little Pans' death was a "wake-up" call, a grim and timely reminder that death can strike at any time. We had better be prepared for it, like it or not.

It took me at least two weeks before I finally settled down, found a little peace in my heart and began to heal. It was still very difficult and painful whenever I thought about that night, and thoughts of how Pans had died. Until today, I do not know what happened on that fateful night. Ming-Yi thinks that he might have gone out and attempted to climb the coconut tree and had fallen down as we had found him lying motionless under that tree. Did he suffer in silence or was death instantaneous? These questions continued to torment me for months, up till today. As I struggled to find peace and solace, I finally realised that the only way was to face the truth squarely in the face. Death is a reality in life. Reality is sometimes painful, yet if we mask it, we would only be hiding from the truths. My friends helped me gradually come to terms with Pans' death. There was no easy way out. I had to accept what had happened with strength and serenity. Life has its ups and downs. We ought to be grateful in good



times and graceful in bad times. A well-composed mind such as this makes us more resilient to face the changes in life.

In memory of Pans, my family decided to sponsor one of my talks aptly entitled "Kindness to Animals" for free distribution – and we dedicated the audio CD to him. May this talk reach out to many people, and encourage them to practise love and kindness to animals.

Wolf and Cleo have grown up so much. They are slightly more than one year old now and they are the best of siblings. Wolf still protects Cleo, and would wait at the pillar outside the house at night until Cleo comes back from her night walks. He has to make sure his only sibling is safe.



"Where are you, Cleo?"



"Remember you have each other now."

Little Pans, wherever you are now, I hope you are happy. We will always remember your sweet little face, and your cute little bent tail. Thank you for having brought so much joy to all of us in your short four-month stay with us. Thank you for having made me a little stronger, and hopefully more able to face the vicissitudes of life with calm, fortitude, and serenity.



## 6. The Crow in the Drain

*If a man inflicts a thousand ills upon a beast, it can neither ward him off with speech nor hale him into court. Therefore is it essential that ye show forth the utmost consideration to the animal, and that ye be even kinder to him than to your fellow man.*

- Abdu'l-Baha

May 2007.

It was a Friday morning, a normal working day, and I had just parked my car and stepped out when I noticed a black crow lying by the roadside. It looked injured and was breathing very heavily. It was an unusually big crow.

I had seen injured birds before and had attempted to rescue them. The vet had always turned me down saying that we would normally be doing more harm by causing them more fear and mental stress on top of their injury. The best, I had been told, was to have them put to sleep if they were too badly injured. But the few times I had rescued birds, I did not agree to have them euthanised. Instead, I made them comfortable and let them live out the remaining moments of their lives naturally with the soothing chant of loving-kindness playing in the background. I believe we can use chants and prayers from our respective faiths because whatever that is wholesome and sacred creates positive and healing vibrations. I remember once Bobby's liver was in very bad shape (80% of it had failed), but he recovered quite miraculously with medication, prayers and chanting.

It was barely 7.30am and the vet was not open yet. I also knew from past experience that most vets would not want to treat birds, what more a crow. I felt very sorry for the crow and hoped she (the vet later told me that the crow was female) would pass away peacefully and not have to suffer pain. I knelt beside her on the road and radiated compassionate thoughts to her. I was careful not to cause her further stress, remembering what the vet had told me before (that our attempts at rescuing can actually do more harm than good). Let Nature take its course, I thought. If she was destined to live, I hoped what little bit of compassionate thoughts I sent to her would help her in her recovery.

I stayed with the injured bird, radiating compassionate thoughts to her until 8.00am, and then I left for class. When I finished my lesson at 10.00am, I rushed down to the road and was delighted that the bird was not there anymore. I thought she might have recovered and flown away. But upon checking the drain, I saw she had fallen (or maybe someone had kicked her) into the drain. The drain was clogged up and filled with filthy water and the poor thing was shivering. I was really at a loss – should I pick her up, or would I be causing her greater stress and unwittingly doing more harm? It was really heart-breaking to see the crow shivering in the filthy water, so I jumped into the drain and picked her up. Afraid that my presence would be causing more stress to my injured friend, I quickly left her by the roadside.

Unfortunately, the crow was so afraid that she struggled and fell back into the drain. I decided that it would be better to pick her up again (even though that might stress her further) than to let her shiver to death in the filthy water, so there I went into the drain again. And in the process of doing all this, I now had drain water splattered all over my clothes and face.

I did wonder if a cruel person had actually kicked the poor thing into the drain, but I brushed off that thought. No point in thinking the worst of humans. It does not help at all. Leaving the crow by the roadside would not be a good idea as she might fall back into the drain. So I carried her to a nearby parking lot and left her under a shady tree. I made her a cushion of leaves to lie on and stayed with her until it was time for me to leave for my next class. She was still breathing when I left her and she seemed very much calmer now.

After class, I rushed back to the tree, and the crow was still breathing and appeared to be strong. Seeing her hanging on to dear life, I could not help feeling that I must do more for her, and I felt that maybe she was meant to live after all, so I called the vet and pleaded with her to take a look. The vet was merciful, and agreed. But now how was I to bring the crow alone in my car? She would be struggling so badly. So I drove home and got Jia-Wen to drive me back. I wrapped the crow in a towel and rushed her to the clinic. She did not struggle throughout the entire journey.

The senior vet took a look at her injuries and told me that she was beyond help. There was nothing he could do, and the most “merciful” thing to do was to have her euthanised. I said no, and I asked him to teach me whatever I could do to help the crow. I said I would try. So the vet told me that since crows are carnivorous, and had a high metabolic rate, I must try to feed her some good quality and easily-digestible meat. I bought a can from the clinic and Jia-Wen drove us home.

At home, I made the crow as comfortable as possible in a little pet carrier cushioned with towels, and I played the chant of loving-kindness for her. I also turned off all the lights in the room because the vet said brightness would agitate her. I know chanting works wonders. It had helped all my pets whenever they were sick. The soothing melody and reassuring words also help me cope better when hope seems dim.

Against the backdrop of the chanting, the crow was calm and at peace. I tried to feed her the food I had bought, but she did not want to eat at all. I then left her alone and put some food nearby. After about an hour, I heard some shuffling in the pet carrier, and when I went to look, she stretched herself, excreted some faeces, and passed away peacefully.

I found out recently that crows are as intelligent as chimpanzees (Crows as Clever as Great Apes (2004)). They are superior in intelligence compared to other birds, and can even use tools to solve problems. Intelligence aside, all animals can feel. That, I am

very sure of. The philosopher Jeremy Bentham writes, "The question is not, "Can they reason?" nor, "Can they talk?" but rather, "Can they suffer?" Animals, just like humans, need empathy and compassion, especially when facing death. If we were to just take a moment and look at how animals live their lives, we can see that they do suffer, so isn't that reason enough for us to help them?

This would be the third injured bird I had had to bury. As the vet had said, it is very difficult to rescue injured birds. I realised this too, after having had two other injured birds die on me before this. But when we encounter such suffering birds (or any animal, for that matter), we must do the best we can, out of compassion, to make the dying moments a little more peaceful for these animals.

While many people advocate euthanasia out of "compassion" for animals so that they need not suffer, we could instead ask ourselves, is there a better way? Is there a more compassionate alternative? I asked one of my spiritual teachers, Bhante Henepola Gunaratana, if euthanasia is an act of compassion. He smiled, shook his head, and said, "I think it is just an act of convenience for some people". He told me about the cats at his temple, and how some were old and sickly, and the vet had advised euthanasia, yet Bhante Gunaratana and his disciples had never opted for it. He told me how he nursed his cats, feeding them morphine every few hours to alleviate their pain, and letting them live out their lives naturally and peacefully, as it is meant to be.

So, do we have a choice? Of course we do. I will always remember what I learnt from a very compassionate lady I met at the vet's many years ago. She was there on a regular visit to take her thirteen-year-old dog for his check-up. Her dog was blind and suffering from diabetes. She gave him his daily injections of insulin by herself, and she made sure all her furniture remained intact so that her dog could find his way around the house. She even took him for walks every day, and would drive him all the way to Sungei Petani for baby-sitting under her sister when she travelled overseas. She told me that many friends had reprimanded her for being "stupid", to be bogged down by a blind dog. Her friends advised her to have the dog put to sleep. To this, she said her daughter would answer them, "Would you put your grandmother to sleep if she became blind?"

If we respect and value all living beings as equals, then let us treat animals as not any different from our loved ones. Saving lives is a virtue and a noble act of compassion. There are countless suffering animals out there, giving us the opportunity to save lives as much as we want. We need not look far. Look into your garden, your drains, your kitchen sink. Little beings abound for us to save and protect. If ever we are faced with having to help a dying animal, we must not be quick to opt for euthanasia. Ask ourselves, is there a more compassionate alternative? Usually, there is. I would make the dying animal as comfortable as possible, radiate compassionate thoughts to it, and let it live out its life as it is meant to be.

My friend, Aaron, recently shared the lyrics of a song with me. It is called “Take These Wings”, composed by Don Besig with words by Steve Kuperschmid. It talks about a man who had found a dying sparrow, and as he knelt before the sparrow, the dying bird said these words to him:



*Take these wings and learn to fly,  
To the highest mountains in the sky;  
Take these eyes and learn to see,  
All the things so dear to me;  
Take this song and learn to sing,  
Fill your voice with all the joys of spring;  
Take this heart and set it free,  
Let it fly beyond the sea.*

And later (as the song goes), this man found a baby sparrow who had dropped from its nest. He picked up the little bird and sang the same words to her.

I was very touched by the lyrics of this beautiful and meaningful song. It made me realise that we sometimes think that birds are not as intelligent as the mammals, but do we really know? As I have always believed, intelligence aside, all animals can feel. It is their feelings that make them sentient. And if they can feel, we too must feel for them.

May the crow be at peace now.

May her heart be free and happy.

## 7. The Miracle of Vixey

*To my mind the life of a lamb is no less precious than that of a human being. I hold that, the more helpless a creature, the more entitled it is to the protection by man from the cruelty of man.*

*- Mahatma Gandhi.*

October 2007.

One Sunday evening, Ming-Yi received a call from her friend saying that two little kittens had been abandoned by a rubbish heap near the playground. We went there and found two little balls of fur, one grey and one jet-black, curled up by a pile of rubbish. The jet-black one was almost motionless while the grey one was spitting and hissing at us – a defensive gesture typical of cats. I thought they could not be more than one month old and would never be able to survive on their own. They could not have been abandoned by their mother either as this rubbish heap was in the open air. Only a human could have done this. Not surprising, because more than a year ago, I had rescued Cow, Bunny and Polar not too far from this rubbish heap. Those three had only been about two days old when I found them, and Ming-Yi and I hand-raised them against the odds. They are now healthy and robust, living with us.

Ming-Yi and I stayed with the two kittens for about forty minutes or so, asking everyone who passed by if they would be willing to take them. Everyone shook their heads. It was the rainy season with heavy torrential rains at night and this was already very late in the evening, so I knew we had to take them back, or they would surely die or be swept away into the drain nearby. I went home, brought the pet carrier and took them straight to the vet's for a check-up. The vet said they looked okay, so I got them dewormed and brought them home.

At home, Bobby got really excited. "Another litter of kittens? Hmm....okay, welcome, welcome!", I could almost hear him say. Bobby has looked after every single kitten we have rescued. Bless his kind and beautiful heart. As expected, Cow, Bunny and Polar were not as sympathetic, though. This did not come as a shock anymore after the experience with Tiger. For the first few days, Cow and Bunny were very curious, but they were not exactly very friendly, staying a short distance away from the new litter. They migrated away from the new litter, staying at a distance. Bobby sensed their unfriendliness and stood guard by the cage, shooing the cats away whenever they came near.

We named the grey one, who was a male, Little Chief. I thought a Native American sounding name would be cute, and also because he had been so protective of his sister, whom we called Vixey. Little Chief had been guarding Vixey from the rubbish heap itself, and at home, whenever we fed them, Little Chief would let Vixey eat first. Vixey had a voracious appetite. As she was jet-black, all you could see when you looked at her

was a bundle of fur. She also had black eyes and a black nose, so you could not see much of her features. Because of her voracious appetite, she would climb into the food bowl and bury her whole head into the food. When she finally finished eating and raised her head, you could not make out her face, but only the remnants of food on her whiskers and mouth area! *Oh-cho-mau* (messy little cat, in Cantonese), I would call her, as I wiped the food off her little face and tried to make out where her eyes and nose were.



The *Oh-Cho-Mau* inside her food bowl.



"Ahh...my sauna."

Cleo was badly affected by the arrival of Little Chief and Vixey to the household. Previously, Cleo had always accompanied me at the computer table where I did my work every single night. She would rub her face on the keyboard and ask to be stroked. Now, since Little Chief and Vixey lived in the room, Cleo felt slighted and she decided that she would sit outside in the garden instead. I missed Cleo and hoped she would understand that I did not love her any less. I wished she would return and accompany me in the room again as she had done for the past few months.

As a little kitten, Vixey somehow had a great liking for all things electrical. She would seek out the electrical adaptors and hug them to sleep. Although we gave her a hot water bottle, she still preferred the adaptors. Her favourite spot in the house was an old hi-fi player (which radiated warmth when we turned it on). If we could not find Vixey, we would just look for her at the hi-fi player. She would be snugly settled on top of it, enjoying its electrical warmth. I figured either she was very good at seeking out warm places or (we joked) she must have been an electrical engineer in a previous life. I was more inclined to believe in the latter because she also took a very keen interest in watching my husband repair any electrical equipment. I could almost hear her say, as she watched my husband struggle with the repair work, "Hey, no, no, it's not like that...you're not doing it right. Ask me, I've done this before. I'm the expert."

One evening eleven days later, as I was about to feed Little Chief and Vixey, something terrible happened. I had left the kitchen for a moment to get something from another room when I suddenly heard a horrifying cry from the kitchen. I rushed in and saw Vixey upside down, with thick blood spurting out from her nose. Bobby was nearby, looking very worried and helpless. Little Chief did not seem to know what was happening. I panicked at the sight, and my first thought was that the neighbourhood killer-cat (a new cat on the block, I was told) or Bushy, the bully-cat on the road whom

Bunny had been chasing away, had sneaked in and bitten Vixey. I bundled her up into a small litter box, grabbed my car keys and rushed her to the vet's. As there was a slight jam on the way, I kept sending her compassionate thoughts, one hand holding her, one hand on the steering wheel. "Hang on, Vixey, hang on, please....mummy's here, you'll be ok. May you be well." I could hear my own heart pounding heavily.

The vet on duty, Dr Loh, put her on oxygen and found no bite marks. Then the senior vet, Dr Vijay came and said it was either a puncture in the lungs or a brain trauma - both of which were "bad news" for such a young kitten. If it was a brain trauma, he said either something heavy had fallen on her head or she had fallen down herself and hurt her head. Being so young, kittens might not know how to land on their four feet yet if the height was not optimum enough for them to adjust their body for landing. My guess was that she might have tried to jump up the kitchen cabinet and fallen on her head. I was very sure of that because no object was found on the kitchen floor.

Because Vixey's respiration stabilised, that ruled out lung puncture, so Dr Vijay put Vixey on the floor to determine if it was brain trauma. Vixey could only circle to the right. And when put against the wall to force her to turn to her left, she could not move at all. Dr Vijay ascertained that it was brain trauma on the right side of her brain. That means the brain would start to swell and the swelling had to be controlled by steroids. As she was so small, the amount of steroids that could be given had to be quite minimal because too much might just kill her.

Dr Vijay's clinic was not a 24-hour clinic and the nearest 24-hour one was downtown in Kuala Lumpur. It was peak-hour jam on the roads. I had to make a decision whether to leave her with Dr Vijay and let them administer the steroids immediately but without 24-hour monitoring, or to get her down to KL. I decided to put my full trust in Dr Vijay and told him to go ahead. Leaving Vixey at the clinic that night was one of the most painful things I had to do in my entire life.

I tossed and turned that night. Every hour I woke up, wondering how Vixey was. The poor little thing. She was only a month-old and had had to endure such suffering. Dr Vijay could not give me much assurance too, and that was only fair, because Vixey was so small. But Dr Vijay assured me that this was the best possible treatment and it now all depended on whether Vixey would respond to the treatment. It was now all up to her body. Medicine could only do so much.

The next morning, I was at the clinic when it opened. Vixey was lying very still with the intravenous tube (for the steroids) inserted into her little arm. She looked lifeless. I felt her soft chest breathing – it was still strong and that was the only hope I had. Dr Vijay said it was far too early to tell if she would make it. We needed time. However, Dr Vijay said from his experience, some kittens (being young and hence, regenerative powers still good) would have responded after about six hours of intravenous steroids. Vixey still had not responded after more than ten hours. I was very worried. I knelt down by

her cage, and put my hand on her to feel her breathing. "Get well soon, Vixey, come home and play with Little Chief. Come home and be the *oh-cho-mau* that you are again. May you be well again, Vixey. I'm taking you home soon, ok?" I cried, because she looked helpless and there was nothing I could do to help her except to send her compassionate thoughts and hope for the best.

My friends heard about Vixey and a few did distant *reiki* while others sent compassionate thoughts from afar. Another friend, Chin Kah, came to the clinic to do healing on her. I was very thankful for all the emotional support I received. Dr Vijay said that even if Vixey would show a little bit of progress, there was hope, but if there was any sign of deterioration, he would suggest that we let her go (that means to put her down). I know I could never do that – I had never had to do that before in my entire life and I hope I would never have to make that painful decision. Remirth died peacefully of cancer, and the injured birds that I had rescued died peacefully in my house. I had never agreed to euthanasia before and I hope I would never have to. Please, not with Vixey, please. I was all prepared to take her home and nurse her even if Dr Vijay said all she could do was to eat, defecate and sleep. I would look after her for life. But I hope she would not have to suffer. While I empathise and truly sympathise with pet owners who have had to agree to euthanasia out of compassion for their suffering pets, I know it would break my heart if I were ever faced with that decision one day. I remember the crow I had rescued just a few months ago. The vet had advised that it was best to put her down, but I brought her home instead, and she died peacefully in my house against the background music of the soothing chant of loving-kindness.

Vixey looked paralysed and Dr Vijay could not tell the extent of brain damage or if her brain would regenerate the damaged parts. She had to show some indication of progress first before Dr Vijay could assess her. I understood this, and I knew I had to be patient and hopeful. Allopathic medicine could only do this much. I had to rely on "spiritual medicine" now. Dr Vijay said there was another procedure where they would drill a hole through the skull and drain out the fluids, but that was far too risky on such a small kitten and he would not do it. The procedure itself might kill her. The only hope we had that day was that Vixey was still eating when fed from a syringe. And that she was still alive. Chin Kah, who had come to perform healing on her, said her heart beat was still very strong. At such times when all seems lost, every glimmer of hope is very comforting. I stayed with Vixey until late evening. I had brought Late Chief Rev K. Sri Dhammananda's little red book of verses and recited prayers for her.

Day Two – Jia-Wen and I went to the clinic not knowing if Vixey had survived through the night. When we approached her cage, Vixey mewed and wagged her tail happily. We were overjoyed. She had woken up! She tried to move as well. That, was a huge relief and to my untrained layperson's perception, that was a huge improvement from her near comatose state the previous day. However, the vet who was looking after Vixey, Dr Loh, said it was still not good enough. It was still not the "progress" they were



looking for. She was stable, and had not deteriorated, but she had not progressed either. To Dr Loh, she was still in a critical stage. So we still had to wait. My friends continued to do *reiki* and send compassionate thoughts from afar. I recited as many verses as I could from the little red book to Vixey at the clinic. We also brought Little Chief to see her. He lay beside her, nuzzling her occasionally. Vixey did not show much reaction.



"Sobs... when's my sister coming home?"

Back home, we had to keep Little Chief company. Without his sister, he had no one to play with. The older cats did not want to play with him. Only Bobby kept him company. By now, the older cats were beginning to accept Little Chief. At least they did not resent him so much. They were willing to be around him and even shared their food with him. I knew my cats would finally relent. It was just a matter of time. After all, they had been brought up with love and kindness. I was confident they would display the same kindness to other animals, if given time and space. I also read that whenever there is a tragedy in the house, cats would rally around to give support by staying home. All my cats came home, and that helped me emotionally.

That night I washed the cats' eating bowls and I thought I should keep Vixey's bowl in the cupboard since she would not be coming home for at least a few days more. Or would she ever be coming home again? Then I remembered that I must stay positive and hopeful, so I left Vixey's bowl on the floor. "You're coming home, Vixey, and you're going to step into your bowl again and get your whole face smeared with food." I told myself that my little *oh-cho-mau* was going to come home again and eat from this bowl.

Day Three – Ming-Yi had come back from university, and we went to see Vixey. She appeared very weak again. My heart dropped - I thought that was a sign of deterioration since no progress had been recorded the previous day. I softly chanted prayers for her to listen. She hardly moved at all. By afternoon, Dr Vijay came in and I expected bad news. He had earlier told me that if there was no progress after three days, the best option was to have her put down. I prepared myself for the worst, but was determined to take Vixey home and nurse her for life. Surprisingly, Dr Vijay smiled and told me he thought Vixey was strong enough to be discharged! I was overjoyed – this goes to show how our untrained eye perceives things wrongly. Dr Vijay said she was just tired, but her vital signs were good, there WAS progress, and she could be taken off the steroids after one more final dose. Vixey could go home!!



Welcome home, Vixey!



"Don't worry, Vixey, I'll protect you."

I went home and prepared her cage, got out the hot water bottle, and got all my chanting CDs ready for her. I went back to the clinic and helped hold Vixey down as Dr Loh took the intravenous drip out from her arm. Vixey screamed in protest as her fur got pulled out with the plaster. Strong scream. That was a good sign. Dr Vijay said he could not assure me 100% that she would recover completely at this stage, but he was hopeful that with her young age, she would regain all her faculties. There might be some permanent injury or some degree of brain damage. I wondered if Vixey would ever walk again. Only time would tell.

So that night, we brought Vixey home. Bobby was overjoyed to see Vixey again. All the cats came back to see her too, but Bobby guarded the cage from them again, just in case. I guess Bobby just did not trust them enough. We settled Vixey comfortably on her warm blanket with the hot water bottle in the cage. Little Chief was so excited, he went inside the cage to nudge at her. I prepared a little bed for him beside her cage and he slept there all night.

Day Four - Vixey could eat from my hand and she even tried to stand up and walk a little, only to fall down again. Her balance still was not good. But to my untrained eye,



Notice the bald patch on Vixey's arm where the intravenous tube was inserted.

this was an improvement and I rejoiced. Little Chief continued to sleep beside his sister's cage, guarding her, keeping her company at all times. It touched my heart to see love and caring in one so young, what more in a little kitten. Bobby lay close by too. Seeing so much kindness in my pets, I truly felt that my life was so very blessed.

Day Five - Vixey was sitting up and wagging her tail when I came into the room first thing in the morning. She wanted to come out from her cage. And when I let her out, she walked, faltering at first, then she walked all the way to the newspapers at the far corner of the room (the newspapers served as their "toilet") and did her business there. And then she

walked all the way back to her cage and climbed back into her little bed. Dr Loh called to ask how Vixey was doing and was pleased to hear of her progress.

As I look at Vixey regaining her strength and faculties day by day, I continued to marvel at her miraculous recovery and the power of faith and compassion. When all else fails, spirituality helps. And spirituality, as His Holiness the Dalai Lama always says, is not about what religion you profess. Spirituality is all about cultivating that inherent goodness in us, which all of us have. It is about practising love, compassion and a sense of responsibility to bring happiness to oneself and others.

Vixey's experience taught me the power of chanting too. I had never quite experienced first-hand the solace and comfort that chanting could bring because I had never had to rely on it before. But that night, when I felt so hopeless, chanting brought me solace. I have always believed that allopathic medicine can only do so much. When doctors have done their best, spiritual healing helps very much, if only to bring comfort to our hearts to know that there is always something more we can do for the sick and suffering – to bring forth that love and kindness from our hearts, something which all of us have and are capable of cultivating. And I believe that in Vixey's case, she received so much love and kindness from my friends as well. I am convinced that everything contributed to her truly miraculous recovery.

Until today, I am very thankful to Dr Vijay and all the vets at the clinic for having looked after Vixey, for giving me hope, and telling me things as they were. I could put my full trust in Dr Vijay because he had never given me false hope thus far. When Dr Vijay said there was no 100% assurance that Vixey would recover completely, I knew I had to accept this, knowing that I had already done my best for her, and given her all the spiritual help that I could.

It is now coming to five months after Vixey's remarkable recovery. For the first three months, she appeared to be "stunted" and hardly grew. Her eyes were extremely dull and lifeless. She was very quiet but there was this mysterious, and almost sagely and all-knowing demeanour about her during this time, as though saying, "I may be small and weak, but you don't know just how much I know..." Her looks and demeanour reminded us of Yoda, the Jedi master in Star Wars, so we joked that she might not be growing physically, but she was developing mental powers!

During this time, Little Chief continued to look after Vixey and played with her every day. After the first three months, Vixey began to grow again. It was as though she needed three full months of complete rest to recuperate, and now, she is ready to live (and grow) again. She eats very well now, and is a chubby little ball of fur. She is so pampered that she has three baskets in the house and her private litter box. Little Chief feels left out sometimes, so he looks for his own basket.



"Let's see now...which is more comfortable?"



"It's not fair... I want my own basket too!"

In the day time, Vixey still sleeps a lot, but come nightfall, she would be darting to and fro, and even up the stairs. We call her the little “ninja” – because she is jet-black and she darts around so very fast! Now you see me, now you don’t! And Vixey still loves all things electrical. She has now grown too big to hug the adaptors, so she is going for the router and sleeping by the salt lamps. We are aware that it may not be safe for her to sleep too long near these electrical equipments, and she does not stay too long too. But she still tries to squeeze herself into the space between the old hi-fi and the top of the shelf!

Although Little Chief does not monitor Vixey’s every move now, he still watches from afar. And we suspect that Little Chief does not roam on the road because Vixey is always at home. He does not want to be far away from his sister. Little Chief is still very playful and loves to wrestle with Vixey, and although he is now no less than three times her size, Vixey can put up a pretty good fight! Her eyes are still dull, but are slowly regaining the sparkle of life.



"I'm too small for the adaptors now. I'm going for the router."



Extra Small and Extra Large?

As my fellow animal-rescuer friend, Yuen Foon, once told me, rescuing and fostering stray animals is a beautiful way to cultivate love, kindness and joy as well as strength and serenity. We get the opportunity to cultivate our love and kindness when we rescue and nurse them, and experience joy when we watch them grow up healthily and

happily. Then, when it is time to hand them over to a new family, or when they are sick and we have done our very best for them, and we have to somehow find peace and contentment in our own hearts knowing that we have indeed done all that we can. This is where strength and serenity are needed.

By the beautiful acts of kindnesses bestowed upon her, may Vixey continue to progress day by day. May all my friends and my loved ones, Dr Vijay and his team at the clinic have good health and be blessed with caring friends in their lives, just as I have been this time. Thank you, Little Chief and Vixey, and all my rescued animals, for giving me the opportunity to cultivate love and kindness in cherishing and respecting life.



The joy of looking after rescued cats



"I'm safe and sound, on my Grand Uncle."



And the real hero – BIG Little Chief (now).



Little Vixey, the black beauty.

An earlier version of this story was published in Eastern Horizon (Jan 2008).

## Simple Things You Can Do

*I care not much for a man's religion whose dog and cat are not the better for it.*  
- Abraham Lincoln

I have always been inspired by the words of Mother Theresa – “We cannot do great things. We can only do small things with great love.” I share with you now the small things which my friends and I have done, and hope that you too, would do whatever you can, within your means, to save the animals who live around us, big and small.

### ***Save and protect the little animals in your garden***

Pick up a snail and relocate it to a safer place. Rescue the little insects that have fallen into your water containers. I was at a lunch gathering sometime ago, and while everyone was busy eating and talking, I saw a mother teaching her two young daughters to carefully pick up ants from the floor with tissue paper so that the tiny creatures would not be accidentally stepped on. I was very touched by their compassion and efforts.

### ***Feed the stray animals in your neighbourhood***

All that stray animals need are food and shelter (and love, of course). Let the squirrels feed in your garden. Throw out grains or left-over rice for the birds. If you are feeling generous, buy pet food and give the stray animals a treat. Live and let live.

Whenever I eat at a roadside open-air coffee shop and stray animals come around, I share bits of my food with them (and I make sure I clean up after them). Every time I do this, I get nods of approval and smiles from onlookers. The fact that people appreciate these random acts of kindness shows that they are naturally kind in their hearts. By setting an example, we are making a positive imprint onto their lives. When a ripple is created, it will spread far.

Celebrate special occasions (like birthdays, anniversaries and festivals) by doing these random acts of kindness in your neighbourhood. During the previous Chinese New Year, I went round my near-deserted neighbourhood to feed the dogs who had been left on the porch by their owners. I bought dog food and slid it under the gates for them a few times a day. The dogs were very grateful for the food, as well as the care. There is no need to travel far and wide to save lives – there are lives to be saved right here, in your own backyard. All lives are precious.

### ***Save lives whenever you can***

On her birthdays, a friend of mine goes to the market and buys up animals that are about to be slaughtered. This includes fish, crabs, frogs, and even chickens. Then, she and her husband would drive them to a safe place to be released.



Another friend was driving along the highway one day when, to his dismay, he saw a tortoise laboriously crossing the road. It was a three-lane highway, cars were zooming by at high speed and it would have been just a matter of time before the tortoise was run over. He drove to the side, parked, and got down. Running towards the tortoise, he waved at the oncoming vehicles, alerting them to avoid the tortoise. Then, he picked up the innocent creature, made his way back to his car, and drove all the way to a pond (in a botanic park) to release it. He said that as the tortoise was swimming away, it stopped, turned around to look at him for a few minutes (as though thanking him), and then submerged itself into the water.

I know of a man who rescues rats that have been trapped by his neighbours. When he sees trapped rats being left out in the sun, he implores his neighbours to hand over the traps to him. He then goes to the big drains (where there is ample food) and releases the rats. He too says that the rats would look at him first (as though thanking him) before scampering away. Seeing his compassionate act and his efforts, sometimes his neighbours feel bad and they stop trapping rats after that. Lead by example – that is the best way to teach others. I believe in the inherent goodness of human beings. Everyone has the capacity to be good.

***Foster a stray animal, adopt a pet from the animal shelter or the pound***

You need not spend thousands of ringgit to buy a pet from the pet shop. Adopt one from the street, the animal shelter or the pound. You will be saving a life because some animal shelters and pounds put the animals to sleep due to over-crowding. Stray animals on the street lead a very hard, hazardous and sad life. They may not be pedigrees, but mongrels and rescued animals make the most loyal and loving pets because animals are naturally, instinctively and unconditionally grateful.

***If your pet is free-roaming (especially cats), consider getting it spayed/neutered***

Spaying and neutering are not killing. It is birth control. I am sometimes asked if we have the right to take away the reproductive ability of an animal without its consent. We don't, but if we look at the sad lives of stray animals, how they sometimes starve to death or get run down by vehicles, shouldn't we opt for the lesser of the two evils and get them spayed and neutered so that they would not produce more strays on the street? I come to terms with this decision – I think of stray animals as children who do not know any better about the consequences of reproduction. These "children" would never know, so I have to make the decision for them. I know of some animal lovers who do not have the time to foster stray animals but they are very willing to sponsor the spaying and neutering of the animals. I once had a student who, out of the goodness of her heart, rescued a little kitten from the roadside. I helped pay for the vet's fees and later, the spaying of this little kitten. We can help in so many ways.

In some countries, I read that there are animal shelters that round up the strays from the street, spay and neuter them, and release them with a tag that indicates they have been spayed or neutered (quite similar to the TNRM). Animal shelters cannot possibly



house so many strays, so this is one thing they can do. If the authorities could work together with the animal shelters and would spare the lives of spayed and neutered strays, we would have a more compassionate society. The population of strays really needs to be controlled. Remember that strays lead a very sad and hard life.

***Be a caregiver to the community animals (strays)***

It would be wonderful if you could adopt a stray animal and give it a loving home. But if you cannot, another option is to be a caregiver to the community animals. Start by feeding the stray animals in your neighbourhood, but do remember to clean up after them. Use proper feeding bowls. I know of a lady who would cook a bucketful of food for the strays every evening after work, and she would then go around feeding the stray cats and dogs in her neighbourhood. Later, she would make a second round to pick up all the feeding bowls and clean up the places where the animals have fed in. Feeding the strays is Step One.

Step Two is to get them sterilised. We need to control the stray population. It would be helpful if vets could offer discounted rates for the sterilisation of community animals. After sterilisation, these community animals will be released back into the neighbourhood, and the caregivers continue looking after them by feeding them responsibly or taking them to the vet should they require medical attention. By doing this, we create a harmonious and caring community of humans and animals.

One such programme which has run very successfully is the TNRM in Singapore. TNRM stands for Trap-Neuter-Return-Manage. In this programme, community cats are trapped (using humane means), sterilised, released back into the neighbourhood where the community of caregivers continues looking after them for life. This programme has successfully controlled the stray population and substantially reduced the need for the culling of stray animals by the authorities.

Start by becoming a caregiver by feeding the strays.  
Next, get them sterilised.  
Then, continue looking after them in the community.  
Bring them to the vet if they are sick.  
Live and let live. Harmoniously and compassionately.

***Releasing animals vs Protecting animals***

Releasing animals (especially birds, tortoises and fish) has been an age-old practice in many communities. It is sometimes used to symbolise freedom, peace or as an act of “compassion” to free animals back into their natural environment. However, unscrupulous traders have capitalised on this practice and in these modern days, they purposely trap the animals for the purpose of selling them to be “freed”. Trapping creates much stress and very often, the trapped animals cannot survive in the wild anymore. For example, due to ignorance, some people purchase sea fish to be released in the rivers, and this definitely causes more harm than good because the fish are being

released into a wrong environment. A better and more compassionate practice would then be to *protect* animals in their natural environment, not cause them to be trapped and then released.

***Be mindful of products that contribute to the cruel abuse of animals***

Reduce the use of leather goods as far as you can. Avoid furs and skins. Do we really need that new leather handbag or that fur jacket? Can we use other products which serve the same function but are manufactured without harming or killing animals? The fur and skin industry comes with an unimaginable amount of cruelty and agony to defenseless animals, all in the name of fashion.

Use only cosmetics and skincare products that are not tested on animals. Animal testing is extremely merciless. Little animals are trapped in stereotaxic devices that forbid movement, and chemicals are pumped into their eyes and skins to be tested for “product safety”. One question is if these results are replicable onto humans. We are not rodents and guinea pigs. Biologically we are different.

I decided long ago, in my schooldays that I will not use cosmetics since most brands are tested on animals. I only use soap, shampoo and toothpaste – and only those that are herbal and are not tested on animals. Nowadays, there is a wide range of brands that do not subscribe to animal testing. Better still, for more economical ways, go natural! When we have love and kindness in our hearts, our beauty will shine from within. And smile...it's free of charge!

Eat fresh and natural foods to keep healthy so that you do not need to rely on medicines or supplements that are tested on animals. If supplements are obtained from real food, why not eat the real thing? Go natural!

***Do not support sports and activities that abuse animals***

Zoos, circuses, cockfights, cricket and spider fights, bullfights, horse-racing, hunting and fishing are cruel sports. Wild animals should be allowed to remain in the wild and not kept in unnatural surroundings, made to perform tricks for our amusement or used as objects for competitions. Discourage your friends from supporting and participating in such activities.

***Reduce your meat intake***

Some of the animal factory farms are torture chambers – I have seen video clips of horrendous practices in these farms. While there may be farms which adopt more “humane” methods, what remains unchanged is that these animals are born and bred to be slaughtered for food. What could be sadder than that?

Decades ago, my parents knew a worker at the local abattoir in the small town where we lived. He said his duties at the abattoir include carting the animals to the slaughter ground every morning. He described how the frightened animals would cry and wail,

and struggle very pitifully. These sights and sounds tormented him day and night. Some time later, he decided to learn a new trade so that he could leave his job. Everyone has a conscience. Everyone has a heart. Everyone has a choice.

I know of an old couple who were dairy farmers. One day, their oldest cow had a serious hoof injury which would not heal. In those days, when a cow had such an injury, she would only be good for slaughter. So a man offered to buy the cow from them since she was of no use to them anymore. The old couple refused to sell her, and they said to the man, "This cow has provided milk for all our children for so many years. We will now look after her in her old age." After the man left, the cow limped slowly to the old couple, lifted her injured hoof, and tears flowed from her eyes.

Statistics show that a meat-eater consumes thousands of animals in his or her one lifetime. So every time you opt to eat less meat, you are indirectly saving lives. Demand creates supply.

Eating more fruit and vegetables is definitely better for our long-term health. We are omnivorous – we have a choice. Let our choice of food be a compassionate one. Support your local organic farms. With the money you save from NOT buying meat, you can definitely afford organic vegetables.

By eating less meat, you also help reduce the carbon footprint resulting from animal farming and do your part to save Earth. Meat production contributes significantly to global warming because of the carbon dioxide, methane and nitrous oxide it releases to the environment. The United Nations Nobel Prize Winning Panel on Climate Change lists "Don't eat meat" at the top of their list of ways to save the Earth (Lifestyle changes can curb climate change (2008)).

Albert Einstein says, "Nothing will benefit human health and increase the chances of survival for life on earth as much as an evolution to a vegetarian diet." Eating less meat helps solve problems related to famine, cruelty and the ecology.

Start by cutting down on your meat consumption. Think of the hundreds of lives you are saving by NOT eating or buying meat so often. Rejoice in your acts of kindness each time you successfully reduce your meat intake.

Recently I met a young man who runs a vegetarian food stall with his mother. He told me that he used to be a gourmet chef at a local Chinese restaurant. But after having attended a talk on kindness to animals, he realised that he had been mercilessly killing fish, crabs and shrimps every day at the restaurant, sometimes in very brutal ways. These acts of cruelty tormented him deeply and he had trouble sleeping at night. He sought the advice of a friend and this friend suggested that he transferred his culinary skills to purely vegetarian cooking. Now he is very happy running his vegetarian food stall with his mother. His life-long eczema problem also disappeared, and he attributes

it totally to his vegetarian diet. But most importantly, he is happy and he sleeps peacefully at night. Do we have a choice in life? Of course we do. Let it be a choice guided by love and compassion, which in turn would bring happiness to oneself and others.

In my talks, I show the audience a slide with the picture of a burger which has a life chick sandwiched in between. It is a very cute chick and it looks out very innocently as though wondering why it is being put in between two buns. I put the captions, "Do we have a choice?" This picture has struck a chord in many-a-hearts. Jia-Wen uses it to coax his friends to eat less meat, and has been quite successful in doing so. A few people have asked me for the picture too. They say they want to spread the message for me. I am thankful for their help because it is a message of kindness, and of compassion.

Animals are being born and bred in modern day factory farms to be slaughtered as food. Many of these animals are mere infants, too. Have we ever put ourselves in the place of the chicken, the pig, the fish or the cow, and empathised with their suffering and fear? Here's an excerpt taken from the Vegetarian Society of Singapore's e-Newsletter. It is certainly...food for thought.

*Humans eat other animals for food, even though we humans can be perfectly healthy without eating meat. We continue to eat other animals despite the fact that these fellow animals are thinking, feeling beings who suffer greatly, who are deprived of any semblance of a natural life. Why do we humans do this to other animals? One reason we continue to unnecessarily use other animals for food is that we have the ability to do so; our intellectual gifts have allowed us to achieve dominance over other animals.*

*One way to help humans empathise with the plight of our fellow animals would be to encourage us to imagine another species coming to Earth, a species more intelligent than humans, a species who decide to eat us because we taste so good, a species that can do with us what they want because they are more intelligent. The members of this species don't hate humans; in fact, they think we're cute, at least some of us. Furthermore, this species aren't monsters, any more than we humans are monsters because we eat other animals. It's just that eating humans has become a tradition for them; it's what they're accustomed to. It's easy and convenient; plus, many of their doctors tell them that human meat has lots of essential nutrients. (VSS eNewsletter (2007))*

Remember the movie "Planet of the Apes"? This was a 1968 movie about our future when man had destroyed his own civilisation. The great apes had conquered Earth, and they did to humans what we now do to the apes – keeping them in cages, using them in sport hunting and for scientific experiments. How would we feel if this were to happen? Would we then call the apes savages? Or should we recall that that was what our ancestors had done to them before our time?

*Until we have the courage to recognise cruelty for what it is...whether its victim is human or animal...we cannot expect things to be much better in this world...We cannot have peace among men whose hearts delight in killing any living creature. By every act that glorifies or even tolerates such moronic delight in killing we set back the progress of humanity.*

*- Rachel Carson*

*Non-violence leads to the highest ethics, which is the goal of all evolution. Until we stop harming all other living beings, we are still savages.*

*- Thomas Alva Edison*

## **Tips for Homemakers**

*The soul is the same in all living creatures, although the body of each is different.*

*- Hippocrates*

Much as pests disturb us, we must remember that they have every right to live here on Earth as much as we do. I share with you here, how we can live in peace with the tiny creatures that sometimes pay us a visit, and how we can practise Earth-friendly habits right here, from home.

### ***Cockroaches***

Scatter cloves or put *pandan* (screwpine) leaves inside your kitchen cabinets. The scent will drive cockroaches away.

### ***Ants***

Keep your kitchen very clean. If ants still come, leave them alone for half an hour, let them carry the food bits away. There is no need to kill them.

### ***Mosquitoes***

Blow them away. Apply mosquito repellent on your body. Citronella oil is a good choice. Keep your compound clean. Reflect on the fact that blood IS their food. They too need nourishment to survive.

### ***Termites, fleas and ticks***

Opt for the least destructive mode of control. Think of alternative ways to avoid killing as far as you can. Shop around for the least harmful mode of termite control. Fleas and ticks can be controlled by proper diet (crushed garlic helps).

### ***Rats, lizards and other pests***

Radiate thoughts of love and kindness. When your house is filled with the aura of compassion, you can co-exist peacefully and harmlessly with these animals. Many of my friends have told me that patient and regular practice of just radiating loving thoughts to all living beings makes them more willing to “live and let live”. Say it in your own words. Think loving thoughts and let the feeling be wholesome and sincere. It works. Try it!

### ***Save the Earth – Reduce, Re-use and Recycle***

Remember that the Earth is a living entity. By reducing our needs, re-using whatever we can, and recycling our trash, we are saving the jungle, the oceans, and Mother Earth – home to many animals, big and small.

*Man does not weave this web of life. He is merely a strand in it. Whatever he does to the web, he does to himself.*

*- Chief Seattle.*

## Epilogue

*Perhaps the Animal Spirit is so great that one day it may inspire compassion in the human heart.*  
- Nan Sea Love

People often gasp in surprise when I tell them that I live with three humans, two dogs and eight cats in my house. The animals outnumber the humans, so they rule, I tell my friends. How do you manage? Wouldn't the house be dirty all the time? Don't you have to spend tons of money on pet food and vet fees? I smile and I say, "I manage, somehow...", but I am more interested in telling them how much joy and happiness my big wonderful and caring family has brought to my life.

I wake up every morning, and right there on my bed, Bobby and Cow greet me cheerfully. Sometimes, Tiger is asleep beside my pillow. As I step out of my room, Wolf and Cleo are at the door and they follow me down. At the stairs, Little Chief and Vixey have come up halfway and all of them are saying, "Come on down, we're waiting for our breakfast". Downstairs, Mac, Bunny, Tiger and Polar are all waiting for me with happy barks and affectionate meows.

Yes, I have to clean up their litter boxes and the unexpected mess that comes with having two dogs and eight cats living under one roof. Once, Polar knocked over a tumbler of water onto the keyboard and this fused the circuit in our notebook. Tiger loves chewing on socks (but only the quality ones!), and has since destroyed no fewer than ten pairs of our good socks. And on cranky days, Cow and Bunny still mark their territory on "strategic" places all over the house. But, all these are still a small price to pay for the abundance of love I receive from my furry family.

As I leave the house for work, Bobby and a few cats would see me off. I know Bobby would be faithfully waiting at the marble slab for my return, just as he has been doing for the past eleven years of his life. I count my blessings each day when I return home, and am greeted by Bobby, Mac and all my cats. My husband has often told me that he knows when I would be arriving five minutes before I do because my cats would start coming home through the gate or they would jump up onto the marble slab with Bobby to await the sound of my car and the opening of the automatic gate.

Everywhere I go in the house, I have Bobby and one or two cats following me (my bodyguards). Whenever strangers come to the house, Bobby and the cats are ever ready to "protect" me. Recently when contractors came to repair the house, Bobby, Cow and Vixey (yes, little Vixey!) followed me everywhere. I have never "trained" any of my pets – I only give them lots of love and care. When I come out of the bathroom, I would find at least one cat waiting for me, outside the bathroom door, looking so happy. I could almost hear him or her say, "Hey, I've missed you while you were inside!"



Of course having so many pets come with a price, and that would be the problems I face if I have to travel out of town. I limit my travels as far as I can, and this has not been difficult because I am a home-loving person to begin with, and I derive so much more joy by staying home and being with my big family.

Since the cats are indoors very often, my house is messy most of the time. Gone is my dream of a spic-and-span house where everything is in perfect order. Sometimes when we forget to put the food away, the dishes get pushed onto the floor, and I would have a big mess to clean up after that. Because of that, we now stuff all our food either into the refrigerator or the oven for safe-keeping! I have managed to keep my furniture and cushion covers in tip-top condition after decades, but since the cats came, the furniture and cushion covers are now badly scratched because the cats use these as their scratching posts, and they love it!

So, do I regret having so many animals in the house?

No, not even for a moment.

When I am sad and depressed, Bobby and the cats know, and they would rally around me and comfort me, in their own quiet ways. They would put their heads on my lap and look at me with their big soulful eyes, saying, "It's ok, we're here. We love you." Where can I find family and friends who are able to read my mind and offer me warmth and comfort without expecting anything in return? Where can I find such unconditional love?

I go to sleep with a smile every night knowing that I will always have these precious little pawprints on my heart.

I am so very grateful.

I am blessed.



My inspirations and me hard at work



Time to rest now...

## The All-Star Cast

*One cannot look deeply into the eyes of an animal and not see the same depth, complexity and feeling we humans lay exclusive claim to.*

- Nan Sea Love



Puffin and Remirth, best friends from yesteryears.



Bobby, the most reliable and magnanimous of them all.



Mac, friend to every single cat



Cow, big brother of the family



Bunny, bodyguard of the house and ruler of his own alley



Polar, protective mother of Wolf, Cleo and Pans



Tiger, the tamest and friendliest animal on the road



Wolf, blue-eyed big brother of the second generation



Cleo, stylish little princess of the family



Pans, the little sweet-faced angel who graced our lives for four months



Little Chief (renamed "Notti Wii" because he whizzes around the house all day and plays non-stop)



Vixey in one of her three baskets, the ever-resilient survivor and "Jedi master" who turns into a ninja at midnight

And...



Many thanks to the ever patient photographer,  
Jia-Wen



And my most reliable and able assistant, Ming-Yi



Memories are made of these...

# Prayer of gentleness to all creatures

*To all the humble beasts there be,  
To all the birds on land and sea,  
Great Spirit, sweet protection give  
That free and happy they may live!*

*And to our hearts the rapture bring  
Of love for every living thing;  
Make us all one kin, and bless  
Our ways with Nature's gentleness!*

John Galsworthy  
(1867 – 1933)  
Nobel Prize winner (Literature) 1932



# Be Gentle Be Kind



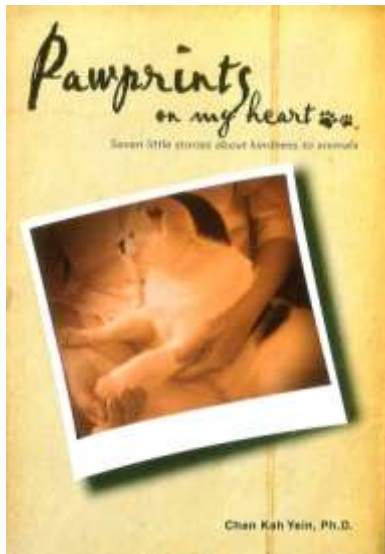
*Pawprints on My Heart* is a collection of seven personal stories about kindness to animals.

Chan Kah Yein, Ph.D., an avid animal lover, writes on her experience with her pets and the many animals whom she has rescued. She hopes that her stories will inspire others to do whatever they can, within their means, to practise kindness to animals. Every little act of kindness that comes from a sincere heart creates a ripple effect that reaches out far and wide.

While charity may begin at home with our loved ones, it must not stop there – it must be extended to all living beings. Opportunities abound for us to practise love and kindness. There are many animals who live in our garden, our backyard and in our neighbourhood – they need our compassion.

If we sincerely and whole-heartedly extend our love and kindness across the boundaries to those with fur, feather and scales, we are practising non-discriminatory and boundless love. When we no longer discriminate between ourselves and animals, and we shower kindness equally on all beings, we bring compassion to a purer and more magnanimous level.

With a deep empathy for all animals big and small, Chan Kah Yein shows how we can make our lives richer and more meaningful as we live together harmoniously as one big family.



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