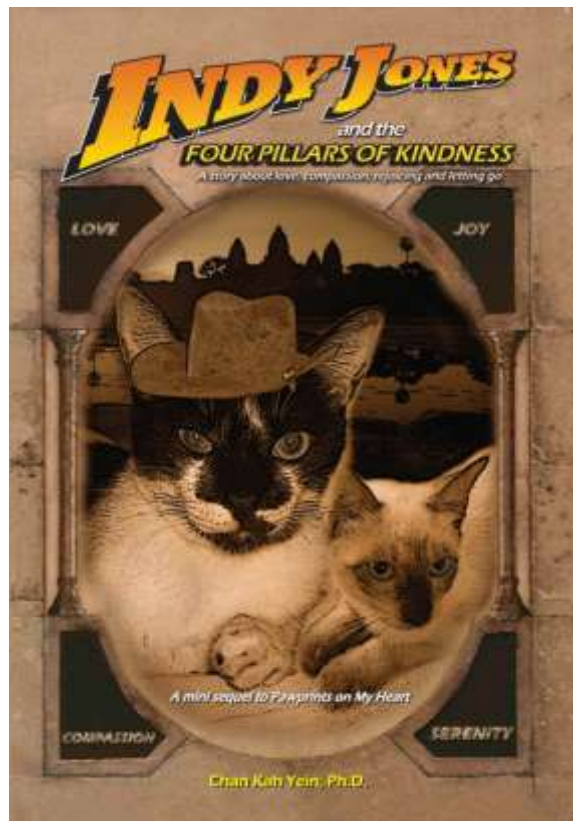


INDY JONES & THE FOUR PILLARS OF KINDNESS

A story about love, compassion, rejoicing and letting go



A mini sequel to Pawprints on My Heart

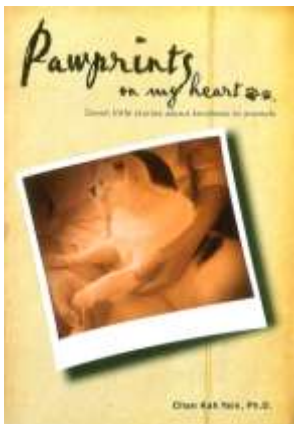
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ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Chan Kah Yein holds a Ph.D. in Mathematics Education and teaches mathematics to college students.

With a deep passion in caring for animals, she founded and coordinates AnimalCare, a group dedicated to providing for the wellbeing of animals. She also rescues and fosters abandoned animals.



Kah Yein gives public talks regularly on cultivating compassion to animals, and 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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All her e-books can be downloaded free at <http://tiny.cc/paws>

Also by the Author

Books

Pawprints on My Heart, 2008
Seven Little Stories about Kindness to Animals

Little Steps, Joyful Steps, 2008
The Humble Beginnings of a Dhamma Speaker

A Kite in the Wind, 2008
Embrace Simplicity, Travel Light in Life

Audio Talks in CDs

How to Practise Right Livelihood and Still be Rich, 2006

Kindness to Animals, 2007

Awakening Kindness, 2007

Creating Heaven in an Imperfect World, 2008

Dewdrops from My Heart, 2009
A Treasury of 28 Talks

If you have found these books and CDs beneficial, kindly pass them on.
A Gift of Love and Kindness Goes a Long Way

***This book is dedicated
in loving and joyful memory of
Kimba
and to the many animals who have graced our lives
and taught us the true meaning of
unconditional love.***



***Wherever you are now, Kimba,
may you continue to bring joy and happiness to
those around you, just as you had, to me.***

***You are my "Super Trooper"
Shining like the sun,
Smiling, having fun,
Feeling like a Number One!***

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Provided it is done without any changes to the text, this book may be printed in whole or in part for free distribution only (strictly not for sale). However, the author would appreciate being informed by email: chankahyein@gmail.com

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

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, so many times.

To my husband, Teng Bee, and children, Ming-Yi and Jia-Wen, thank you very much for sharing the joys (and the responsibilities!) of helping me bring up all the animals I have rescued in the past few years. I know the house is always in a mess. I do feel terrible at times, but thank you for assuring me that our pets bring so much more joy than trouble. And thank you for capturing our pets’ antics on camera. The enchanting photographs certainly bring back beautiful moments and wonderful memories.

To my friends, Judy Chua, Chin Kah and Yuen Foon, and my teachers, Mrs Wong Yew Choong and Uncle Vijaya Samarawickrama, thank you for your patience in providing generous feedback, and helping me proof-read my drafts. Special thanks to Judy for the very thorough editing, Chin Kah, for reminding me to write from my heart, and Li Lian, for sharing my passion in promoting awareness in animal protection and helping me get pre-publication feedback and comments on this book.

To everyone who has read my earlier books and written to me to encourage me to continue writing, I thank you very much for your support. Thank you too, for letting me know how my earlier books have touched your hearts, and for all your constructive feedback. I did not think that I would be writing another book, but your encouragement and support changed my mind.

To all the donors who have so graciously sponsored the publication of this book, thank you for your generosity. May you receive an abundance of life’s blessings for making this gift available to so many people.

And to all the animal-friends whose paths I have crossed, and whose lives I am sharing now, thank you for giving me the opportunity to practise love, compassion, rejoicing and letting go.

kahyein

28th March 2009 (Earth Hour 2009)

P.S. I started writing *Pawprints on My Heart* one year ago, on 29th March 2008 (Earth Hour 2008). *Indy Jones* is my second tribute to Earth Hour.

Save the Earth. Be kind to all her beautiful creatures.



Prologue

Pawprints on My Heart was my first book. It contains seven little stories about my pets and the animals I had rescued over the last few years.

Since the first publication of *Pawprints*, I had received a lot of feedback, including those from little children, asking for a sequel. There were also many emails from readers who shared with me how deeply the seven stories had touched their hearts. Some wrote to tell me their own stories too, while others said that after having read the stories, they too would like to do their part in helping animals in whatever ways they can. I am truly thankful for all this feedback. Knowing that *Pawprints* has been well-received makes the effort of writing it very worthwhile.

Pawprints has now gone to many countries around the world. To date, a total of 9,000 copies have been published. My thanks goes to all my friends who have so graciously sponsored the publication and distributed it far and wide.

This book, *Indy Jones and the Four Pillars of Kindness*, is a mini sequel to *Pawprints*. It talks about how four beautiful virtues of kindness help us cope with the many challenges that come when we rescue animals. I consider it my privilege to have been given the opportunity to care for Indy and Kimba, two kittens from the street, who had come into my life under different circumstances. These four virtues certainly make our moments in life more meaningful, especially in trying and difficult times.

If this story touches your heart, please pass this book on to others. Remember that this book is a gift from the donors to you. Let one good turn deserve another.

P.S. It would be good if you could read *Pawprints* first, so that you would be familiar with some of the older pets mentioned in this story.

The Four Pillars of Kindness

It is often said that this world is so imperfect, yet, if we embrace beautiful and wholesome virtues of kindness in our lives, we can create heaven in this imperfect world.

I call these beautiful virtues the *Four Pillars of Kindness* because practising them enables us worldly beings to live in a truly heavenly existence in the here and now.

The *Four Pillars of Kindness* are:

Love

Compassion

Joy

Serenity

Love

The greatest kindness of all is a mother's boundless, unconditional and protective love for her child. If we can shower a mother's love on all living beings, our love would be boundless, unconditional and non-discriminatory. It is boundless because we are reaching out to all beings. It is unconditional because we do not love with conditions attached or expectations of reward or reciprocation. It is non-discriminatory, and this means it is given to all and not through selective choice or to one more than the other.

If we realise that all beings are subject to the same vulnerability and mortality where all of us suffer from pain and eventual death, and all of us also appreciate being loved and cared for, then it makes sense to extend our love to all beings boundlessly, unconditionally and without discrimination. Just as we love our family and friends, let us widen our circle of love and kindness, and extend these feelings of goodwill and caring to encompass all living beings.

Compassion

Compassion is how a mother's tender heart quivers at the pain and suffering of her child when the child is sick. A mother is willing to do anything to alleviate her child's suffering. As with boundless love, we also develop compassion to all beings who suffer pain and despair. A compassionate person cannot possibly be cruel to any being.

Joy

Altruistic or appreciative joy is the happiness one feels when others are successful. This happiness is observed most explicitly at graduation ceremonies when parents beam with pride and joy at their child's success. Parents would always want their children to do better than them, and they rejoice when this happens. If we practise altruistic joy in

our relationships with others, we would be free from the destructive emotion of jealousy.

Serenity

Serenity (or equanimity) is found in a tranquil, balanced and calm mind that is rooted in wisdom and insight. It is the ability to accept things as they are in the here and now – the ability to let go. Serenity culminates from the encompassing practice of love, compassion and altruistic joy and is hence usually regarded as the pinnacle of these four beautiful virtues of kindness.

Serenity is how parents feel when they eventually let their children go after having brought them up with all their love and care. Parents can only do their best for their children, and there comes a time when they have to let go and let them be free to lead their own lives, and continue loving them from afar. In the same way, serenity is always practised with love, compassion and rejoicing.

Serenity (or equanimity) should never be mistaken as indifference, which is a type of apathy or withdrawal. Being serene or equanimous does not mean that we do not care – we do, and we should. When we open our hearts to offer as much love, compassion, and rejoicing as we possibly can, we can choose to do so without expectations. In the end, we have to recognise where the boundaries actually are, what our responsibility really is, how much we can do, and where the source of happiness truly lies – it lies in being able to live in the present moment and to do the best we can, and then, to let go, and accept what comes. An understanding of destiny helps, that all beings have their own destiny, and that there is a limit to what we can do when helping our fellow beings. When we practise serenity and are able to let go, we are being kind to ourselves too, because we are cultivating non-attachment for our own peace of mind.

Let me now take you through this story where these *Four Pillars of Kindness* helped me cope with the challenges of raising and taking care of rescued animals, and made the experience so much richer and more meaningful.

I could not have slept tonight if I had left that helpless little creature to perish on the ground.

- Abraham Lincoln (1809 – 1865)

In reply to friends who chided him for delaying them by stopping to return a fledgling to its nest.

The Kitten in the Drain

31st May 2008

I received a call from two friends asking if I could help disseminate an email to my animal friends' e-group. A lady had just rescued a little kitten from a drain, but she had to be out of town for one week, so she needed someone to help foster the little one. Unfortunately, no one responded to my call for assistance, so I had to do the needful although I was already fostering eight cats at that time. From the description given, I gathered that it was a very tiny kitten. From past experience, I knew that kittens below the age of one month have a very high mortality rate if separated from their mother.

So, the first thing next morning, my husband, Teng Bee, drove me to the lady's house. The little kitten was in a shoebox and appeared to be quite alright. He was only slightly bigger than my palm, with very unique black and white markings all over his body. He had big black eye-patches around both eyes extending down to the nose which made him look like a little badger, or like he was wearing a mask. How cute, a little bandit! It made me think of the Mask of Zorro. Interestingly, he also had a white Harry Potter "lightning scar" on his forehead. What a unique-looking kitten, I thought.

I examined him and there did not seem to be any signs of injury. One eye was already open, the other was squinted. I suspected a possible eye infection. We had brought a little basket along so I placed him inside the basket, brought him home and waited for the vet's clinic to open. I wanted the vet to assess his age and condition so that I would know how to care for him.

The vet said the kitten was probably about two weeks old, and appeared to be alright except for the infected eye which was totally red. When the vet pressed it, blobs of greenish pus the size of his eyeball flowed out! It looked quite ghastly. According to the vet, the eye was badly infected, and sometimes in such cases, the whole eyeball might even drop out! The only thing the vet could prescribe for such a small kitten would be an antibiotic eye-drop. Other than that, I would just have to feed him milk regularly. I got him de-wormed too.

"What are you going to call him?" the vet asked, for registration purposes.

"Indy," I replied.

We had just watched the legendary Indiana Jones' latest movie, *The Kingdom of the Crystal Skull*. I had to give him a survivor's name. Indiana Jones survived a nuclear blast in the movie. Yes, this little fellow shall be called "Indy". He will be a survivor.

Indy Jones, the Survivor

Indy lived up to his name. The next day, he gained 10g, and even started crawling around the room, making a lot of noise. I had looked after newborn kittens (separated from their mothers) before, and I knew it was necessary to stimulate their bellies and private parts to help them urinate and defecate because they were too young to do it by themselves. I did this for Indy after every feed, and all seemed well.



Little Indy Jones, wearing the mask of Zorro, with Harry Potter's lightning scar on his forehead.

Indy gained another 10g the next day. The infected eye improved and was no longer red. But my daughter, Ming-Yi, noticed that when we stimulated his urination, what came out appeared to be milky. That was not normal. Also, he was not as active as he was the past two days – he slept most of the time. I took that as his body's natural reaction towards recovery, so I left him alone.

Since bringing Indy home, I had been playing the chant of loving-kindness (the *Metta Chant*) for him as often as I could to help his recovery. This *Metta Chant* had worked wonders on all my pets, especially when they were sick. I believe the chants and prayers from all faiths create positive vibrations, and are therefore, healing and comforting.

However, the following day, Indy's condition took a turn for the worse. The milky urine had changed to thick mucus, and Indy was very, very weak. We rushed him to the vet's, and he was diagnosed as having a severe bladder infection. A bladder infection for a kitten this small was extremely bad news. The vet tried to take his temperature, but the mercury in the thermometer did not even budge. His body temperature was subnormal. His condition was critical. There was nothing much we could do except to give him the safest oral antibiotic, and continue feeding him regularly with the hope that his own immune system could fight the infection. His greatest enemy would be cold, so I would have to keep him very warm.

The vet also explained that "ascending" bladder infections (that means, coming from an external source) for male kittens are extremely rare. It is common in female kittens, but not male ones. So he suspected that Indy's bladder infection could be "descending", and that meant that his other organs could be infected and now the infection had gone down to the bladder. If that was the case, it was more worrisome because it could even mean that his kidneys could be infected as well. Kidney failure is fatal, especially for a kitten of this tender age.

Poor Indy...he had been found in a drain, and we did not know what he had picked up from the drain. We did not even know how many days he had stayed inside that drain.

Hanging by a Thread

That night, I camped beside Indy's cage. I had to warm up the hot rubber gloves every two hours to keep his cage warm enough and replenish his hot water bottle. The next morning, Indy was still very weak. The only good sign was that he was still drinking his milk, fed through a syringe. The vet had said that if any young animal stops eating, that would be a very bad sign. Indy was still eating. I hung on to that glimmer of hope.



Drink, little one...



Indy, in his "hospital bed".

During this time, I still had to go to work and give talks at the Buddhist centres. It was very difficult for me to leave the house each day knowing that Indy was still in a critical condition, but responsibilities had to be fulfilled, and life had to go on. We would just have to find the mental strength within us to cope.

That week I had to go out to give three talks. It was very hard to tear myself away from Indy when he was still so sick. While giving the talk, I had to cast my worry aside, put on a smile and give my best to the audience. This was a true test of present-moment living, which is also what being equanimous is all about. I remember the moment when each talk ended, I would quickly check my handphone, preparing myself to receive bad news from home. And each time, I was very, very relieved that there was none.

The following day, Indy looked even worse. I could sense that his life was hanging by a thread, and I prepared myself for the worst. He was almost lifeless except for the occasional movement and his soft breathing. There was not even so much as a squeak from him. Every time I lifted the curtain from his cage to check on him, I heaved a sigh of relief to see him still breathing.

The next day, I saw a slight improvement. Indy appeared to be stronger. All is not lost. Not yet. Indy Jones, live up to your name, please!!

And he did. By evening, he showed clear signs that he was beginning to recover. He could come out of his cage and walk a bit, dragging his feet. Earlier at the vet's, we had noticed that his head was slanted to the left. The vet said it could be due to an infection of the Eustachean tube, but let us not worry about that now. Take care of the bladder infection first. Now, the left slant of the head had become worse. Poor little Indy could only turn to his left because of the weight and the slant of his head, and was thus only

able to move in circles. We felt quite helpless watching him move round and round, and I wondered if there was already a permanent damage to his ability to walk straight.

I felt so sorry for the little tyke. An eye infection, a severe bladder infection, and now an ear infection, and a possibility that he may never be able to walk straight again? What destiny did he come with, I wondered. And at that moment, I thought of the hundreds, maybe thousands, of stray kittens who probably suffer the same plight as Indy. How many can we help? Yet we must. This reminds me of the story of the little boy who was saving starfish on the beach. Thousands were stranded and he was picking them up one by one, and throwing them back into the sea. "But there are so many of them. Would it make any difference?" an adult asked him. "It would, to this one" the boy answered, as he threw one more starfish into the sea. I hoped I was making a difference to Indy's life.

While I was feeling sorry for Indy, our little friend was certainly no quitter. By night time, we saw him trying very hard to straighten his head by forcing himself to turn to the right. We could see how hard he struggled just to straighten his head. Oh wow....you *are* a fighter, aren't you, little one? Good for you, Indy Jones! Fight on...

Indy Bounces Back

Having not had sufficient sleep for a few nights, I got up late the next day, and only came downstairs at 7.00am. A big and pleasant surprise awaited me. Indy was complaining by making a lot of noise! He wanted to come out of his cage. He was demanding for milk. He wanted warmth – his rubber gloves and his hot water bottle

had gone cold by then. I just could not get up the night before to do it because I was too exhausted. But Indy was alright. What a relief!



Indy, ever determined to recover. Notice the slant of his head to the left.

The first thing Indy did when I let him out of his cage was to turn to the right! It almost seemed as though Indy was showing me, "Look! I can straighten my head, I can turn to my right! I'm ok." I cheered him on. You're great, Indy. Attaboy, that's the way to do it.

My animal-rescuer friends, Agnes, Yuen Foon and Sumitra, rallied around to offer advice and encouragement. Sumitra offered to give me some liquid spirulina which had been proven to work wonders to boost the immune system of tiny kittens. I was very thankful for all this moral and physical support.

During this time, my twelve year-old poodle, Bobby, who had helped look after every single one of my rescued kittens, rose to the occasion again. Bobby would sleep in the room, keeping a close and constant watch on Indy all day. Bobby has consistently shown love and compassion to all my rescued kittens. I am so very grateful to Bobby for his magnanimity.



Hi, little fella, you feeling better now?



Lift your head up, Indy. You can do it!

Living in the same room was also Vixey, a jet-black rescued kitten who had survived a brain trauma and is now physically challenged. Although she suffers from physical retardation which has affected her growth and physical functions, she is mentally very alert. In fact, later, Vixey became Indy's "big sister", and took upon herself the task of training him to do his "business" in the bathroom and teaching him how to eat and drink from the food bowls in the kitchen.

When Indy was first diagnosed with the bladder infection, many friends offered comfort. Others offered words of wisdom, advising me to practise equanimity and not get emotional over it. "After all, all things are impermanent," they reminded me, "you should be able to reflect on that and let go". I understand and am grateful for all the advice given.

However, to be equanimous does not mean surrendering to destiny, sitting back and saying, "Ahh...this is destiny. Let it be." And so, I practise equanimity where I let go and accept what is inevitable only after I have exhausted all efforts at providing the best that I can to salvage a difficult situation.

If we talk about showering love and compassion on all living beings just as we love our own child, we would want to do our best to help all suffering beings. Just as we would go all out to alleviate our child's suffering when the child is sick, likewise, we ought to do this for all beings, with no discrimination. Love and compassion are beautiful only when it is put into real-life practice with sincerity and effort.

Wolf Makes a Disappearing Act

Two days after Indy was brought home, Wolf, one of my cats, did not come home. Most of my cats stay at home though sometimes, they do wander around outside the house. But all of them come home for food a few times a day. We noticed that Wolf had not come home that day. To make matters worse, there was a huge thunderstorm that evening, and we were worried he was stranded somewhere.

The next morning, we went out searching for Wolf. We went down into the drains and checked up the trees as well in case he had climbed up and got himself stuck between the branches, but Wolf was nowhere to be seen. A neighbour said she had seen him down the road that afternoon. So the next day, I printed flyers and distributed them to the houses in the neighbourhood, seeking the help of neighbours to inform me if they had spotted him anywhere.

We did not know why Wolf had disappeared. He could have gone off pursuing a female cat, which male cats his age (slightly more than one year old) are apt to do. Or, he could be jealous of Indy, and feeling insecure, decided to run away. If it were a Valentino act, I was told, that he would eventually return if the pursuit turned out to be unsuccessful. I did not want to think negatively, so I hung on to the possibility that he would return.

The first few days of Wolf's disappearance, I really bore the anguish of a mother who had lost her child. For the first time in my life, I could truly empathise with parents whose children have gone missing. I started imagining where Wolf might be, if he were hurt and in pain, or hungry and cold. Or, maybe he was trying to come back, but could not find his way home. The more my mind entertained such thoughts, the more my mental anguish grew, and I knew that was not a wise thing to do.

Friends again offered advice and reminded me that all things are impermanent and subject to change. Change is the only truth in life. So, why couldn't I just accept this truth with serenity and equanimity, and get on with life, they asked me. It was good for me to reflect on this, but I still felt that practising love and compassion means putting in all efforts to make things right. We cannot simply jump onto the bandwagon of "being equanimous" and let go too quickly without doing all that we possibly can. If we do that, it would be using equanimity as an excuse for indifference.

So our flyers went into every postbox in the neighbourhood, and we continued our search for Wolf for weeks. We drove around the neighbourhood at night, and sometimes we would see in some alley a cat who really looked like Wolf, but upon closer scrutiny, it would turn out to be another cat. The colour would be correct, but it would have the wrong tail, or patches in the wrong places. We kept our hopes up, but we were also prepared that we might never find him again.



One of our last photos of Wolf.

My friend, Sharon, tells me that equanimity arises naturally, when wisdom arises and we see things as they really are. In layman's terms, this means accepting what is. Equanimity is not something that can be forced upon us when we are still unable to see things as they are, or when we have not done our best yet. Being human we still have many weaknesses, and we would still worry and feel sad. But let us not allow these emotions to push us into a state of helplessness.

This is where the practice of boundless love helps. Boundless love is a very positive feeling. It soothes our hearts, keeps our hopes alive, and provides a place of peace for us to return to where we can say to ourselves, "I have done all I can, out of love and kindness for others. Now I have to love myself and be at peace."

Wolf never did come back. After several months, we consoled ourselves that he had probably found another home elsewhere and wherever he is now, we hope he is well and happy. Perhaps one day, he would still return. If not, we wish him well. We have already tried our best. It was time to let go now. It was time to be equanimous. It reminds me of Reinhold Niebuhr's Serenity Prayer: *Grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change; courage to change the things I can; and wisdom to know the difference.*

Even today, months after Wolf's disappearance, I still think of him often. Whenever I do, I picture him in his new home, having a happy and comfortable life. Some friends tell me there have been cases where cats return to their homes after years, and some even travel across long distances to get home, so perhaps Wolf may still come home one day? Perhaps, but I am not pining for his return. Whatever comes, let it just come. In fact, I prefer to think of him living very comfortably and enjoying life somewhere. For all you know, he could be just living in another house down the road!

Indy Jones Grows Up

After his bladder infection, and with the help of two courses of antibiotics, Indy recovered day by day, and was soon a healthy and robust little kitten. True to his name, Indy, he was a very adventurous kitten, exploring every nook and corner of the house, climbing up cupboards and window grilles. He was also extremely playful and could hardly stay still. Unlike cats who moved around stealthily and gracefully, Indy was very boisterous and rather clumsy too. He would dash around the house and bump into the furniture, and when he jumped down, he would land with a loud thud on the floor. But he would never hurt himself (just like Indiana Jones!). Once in a while, a hard bump

might knock him out a bit, and he would appear slightly stunned, staggering a little. But before you know it, Indy Jones is up and about again, and dashing all over the house!



Look at my "inkheart". Nice?

The markings on Indy's body became more prominent as he grew bigger. Very often, I was tempted to change his name to Zorro because of the black mask around his eyes. And sometimes, the Harry Potter lightning scar on his forehead reminded me of how he had survived against the odds when he was just starting out in life, just as Harry Potter had. As he grew bigger, we also noticed that there was a big black patch shaped exactly like a heart on the left side of his body.

Ming-Yi called this "Indy's inkheart". So, here was a kitten (who looked like a badger), named Indy Jones, with the markings of Zorro and Harry Potter! Little did we know that our Indy would indeed live up to his name and the "inkheart" on his body – he grew up to be a very compassionate cat.

A Cry in the Alley

11th July 2008

One night, a few weeks after Wolf's disappearance and Indy's recovery, I told Ming-Yi that perhaps it was time for us to pack up the little cage as I did not think we would be fostering another abandoned kitten again. We cleaned up the cage and folded it, and just as I had placed it neatly in the storeroom, I heard a loud cry in the alley at the back of my house. It sounded like a desperate shriek for help, so I opened the back door, and looked out.



Our visitor from the alley, after a thorough midnight bath!

From the dark alley, a small whitish kitten with the brightest blue eyes I had ever seen came scuttling out from the drain. She took one look at me, and before I knew it, ran and jumped straight into my arms, as though asking for help. I scooped her up and instinctively brought her into the house. Ming-Yi looked at me in astonishment and I told her, matter-of-factly, "I think we need the cage again."

The little ¹blue point kitten was totally infested with fleas, and we had no choice but to bathe her (she looked so demure, we were sure she was female). It was already midnight, but rather than to risk getting all our cats infected with fleas, we had to clean her up. After the bath, we dried her with the hair dryer and fed her some food. She slept in the cage all night, accompanied by Indy and good-old Vixey. We named our newly-rescued kitten “Belle”. She looked very sweet, and the black patch around her nose made her look like a little koala.

The next day, I brought Belle to the vet’s for a check-up. As we waited for our turn, she lay on my lap and fell asleep very contentedly. As I felt her soft and warm body on my lap, it amazed me that this little kitten had only known me a few hours before, and here she was, lying on my lap as though she had been my long-time pet. She felt so comfortable with me, and so did I, with her.

The vet took one look at Belle and told me laughingly, “Your Belle is a boy!” We came home and re-named him “Kimba”, taken from *Kimba, the White Lion*, a cartoon my children used to watch. From Kimba’s teeth, the vet estimated him to be about four months old.



No terrorist behaviour is allowed in this house, please ...

That morning, Kimba was very hostile to our other cats. We guessed he must have been living as a street-cat all this while, hence, the defensive feline behaviour. He hissed at everyone, probably to make sure that nobody dared to bully him. But the wonderful thing was that none of my cats retaliated or responded to his hissing. Even the two feline elders, Cow and Bunny, did not retaliate at all. They merely looked at him and walked away calmly. I was quite proud of my cats – to be able to walk away and not respond to roughish behaviour is quite an achievement, especially for a carnivorous animal. Even we humans cannot control our ego at times! Ahh...treat your cats with love and kindness, and they will become loving animals too.

Even though Kimba was hissing at everyone, the most puzzling thing was that he never attempted to leave the house. I had expected him to go back to the streets or to his home (if he had one), but he made himself very much at home, sleeping on the cushions, as though he had lived in our house all his life. He felt perfectly comfortable.

¹ The blue point cat belongs to the Siamese cat family. It has vivid blue eyes and definitive points on its mask, ears, legs and tail.

However, his hostile behaviour had to change because none of our cats were hostile. So I sat him down and had a good talk with him. “Kimba,” I said. “if you want to stay here, you have to behave. No terrorist behaviour is allowed in this house. Everyone here is your friend. Ok?”

I thought it would take me many pep-talks before Kimba understood, but again, he surprised us. It did not take him long. In fact, he stopped hissing that very day!

Kimba adjusted himself very easily to the house and definitely felt completely at home. He even learnt to use the bathroom – thanks to good-old Vixey’s training! It still puzzles me to this day how comfortably (and quickly) he had settled himself into our home.



Dinner time! For humans, as well as cats.

From Day One, he followed me everywhere, and slept with me every night, on my bed. He would be on the kitchen slab when I was cutting up vegetables, and would politely “ask” for a piece of leafy vegetable to play with. Then, he would toss it up into the air and watch it land on the floor. He loved doing that. His favourite vegetable was the mushroom. Whenever I cooked mushrooms, one piece would be reserved for Kimba.

Within a very short period, Kimba became my best friend at home, although he was the latest addition to the pet family. Somehow, I felt he was destined to meet up with me. The funny thing was that he was Wolf’s colour, so I could not help wondering if he had come to “replace” Wolf. We even joked that perhaps Wolf had gone to Kimba’s house (if he had one), and had traded places with him.

The New Best Friends

Indy had come as a lone kitten but now, Kimba became his playmate. The two got on like house on fire, as though they were brothers, and it was extremely heartening watching them play all day. They would be wrestling with each other, and the next moment, they would be sleeping contentedly, side by side. Sometimes they even hugged each other to sleep. “These two are as good as twins, do you think they are somehow related?” Teng Bee would exclaim. He loved watching them – they were great de-stressors!

At other times, they got into mischief too, but they would always do it together. Once, both of them were sniffing at something very fascinating on the floor – it was a dead rat! One of the older cats must have brought it in from outside, and Kimba and Indy had a wonderful “educational” experience, investigating this interesting specimen. The pair was simply inseparable.



The happy "twins" – the Koala and the Badger?



Hey bro, what's interesting up there? I'm coming up too!

Indy and Kimba brought us so much happiness by just being who they are, and it made us wonder why two kittens who were unrelated could get along so wonderfully, while we humans cannot. Watching the two of them, one cannot help but feel happy for them that they had found such beautiful companionship in each other.



Hey, watcha staring at? He ain't naughty, he's my brother.



The family that eats together, stays together – Bobby, Indy, Kimba and Vixey.

Although Kimba would be playing all day with Indy, he still found time to accompany me whenever I was home. He was always around me. Unlike Indy, Kimba was such a gentle cat, very demure and supple. He could play very boisterously with Indy, but with me, he was as soft and light as a feather. Every morning, I would wake up to the gentle touch of Kimba beside me. And he got along marvelously with the other cats, and Bobby, too.

Two Kittens and a Few Grains of Rice

17th August 2008

One Sunday afternoon, I had just returned from giving a talk in Klang when I received a call from an acquaintance saying that she saw two newborn kittens abandoned in a box by the roadside. It was already past noon when she called me. She had seen them when she went jogging early in the morning, and they were still there at noon time. I asked her if she could foster them but she said she could not because she was already looking after several cats. Well, I had the same constraint too, but I could not just let them be after knowing the situation, so I drove over to take a look.

I found the box, and inside were two tiny kittens with their eyes still tightly closed, and a few grains of rice sprinkled beside them. The rice grains were already cold and hard. Who could have possibly done such a thing, I wondered. The poor little things were huddled together and could not even move...they would never survive on their own. So I brought them home. Out came our reliable cage from the storeroom, and Ming-Yi and I took turns to look after them.

Luckily we had rescued them in time, and they were not severely dehydrated yet. We decided to name the cream-coloured one Creamie and the other Crackers because he was extremely noisy!



Creamie



Crackers

Creamie and Crackers lived in the room, together with Vixey. Indy was extremely curious with these new additions to the feline family. He would come into the room and watch me feed them.

Kimba, however, was not too pleased with them. He came in to take a look too, but would go off in a huff. I suspected a tinge of jealousy, because he was now no longer the baby of the family. But Kimba continued to accompany me and still slept with me every night. He just refused to step into the room whenever I was feeding Creamie and Crackers. Sometimes he watched from outside the door and if I called him, he would run away. His behaviour reminded me of a jealous sibling when a new baby comes

home! Or in this case, two new babies! Kimba had yet to develop altruistic joy – he was jealous! Perhaps he needed another pep talk?



Feeding the kittens with a syringe.



The nursery - Spot one dog and three cats!

I knew we could not keep Creamie and Crackers because of space constraint, so I had to look for an adopter for them. My friend, Cathy, helped me look for adopters and found a nice girl, Nurul, whose family loved cats. Nurul was very eager to adopt them but she would have to wait until Creamie and Crackers could feed on their own. For now, they still had to be hand-fed and still needed daily stimulation for their urination and bowel movement.

Tragedy Strikes

2nd September 2008

It was Tuesday night and I had just finished dinner. I went outside to throw the rubbish and Kimba had followed me out to the dustbin. As I was opening the lid of the dustbin, I saw him walk across the road and just then, a neighbour's car was driving past very, very slowly. Because the car was so slow, I was very sure Kimba had already crossed safely over to the other side, and it certainly did not look as though the car would have hit him. But the moment the car passed, to my horror, I saw Kimba's body jerking spasmodically on the road, with blood spurting out from his mouth.

The driver did not even know she had hit Kimba. I stared in total disbelief at what had happened. I immediately rushed to Kimba, and carried his writhing body back into the house. It looked really bad now as thick blood was spurting out continuously from his mouth. His body was in convulsions and he was struggling frantically as I laid him down. I felt very helpless. Being alone at home, I quickly called my friend, Chin Kah, for help, but I knew Kimba could not be saved even if we could rush him to the vet's. The injuries were far too severe.

I laid my hands on his struggling body, and radiated loving thoughts to him. Although I was in a state of shock and panic, I remember saying to Kimba, “Don’t struggle, Kimba, please don’t struggle. Be calm, be at peace, please be at peace now.” I was pleading for Kimba to be calm, for his sake as well as mine. It must have been merely minutes when Kimba calmed down and breathed his last, but for me, those few minutes seemed like an eternity that night because of my sense of helplessness and panic.

I sat there with Kimba, with my hands still on his soft and warm body. I was still radiating loving thoughts, but I was aware that he was already gone because he was very still. I was “thankful” that he did not have to suffer or struggle for too long, but I was in a state of complete disbelief that Kimba had left me in such a tragic way.

By now, Indy and my other cats had come round to see Kimba. I wondered if they knew that Kimba had been hit by a car and that he had passed away. I was too shocked to cry as everything had happened too fast and unexpectedly. Indy came round, sniffed at the lifeless body of his best friend and walked away slowly. My heart cried for Indy. He had lost his newfound playmate...and his brother.

Chin Kah arrived minutes after Kimba passed away. I was in a terrible state of shock and disbelief, and pleaded with him to check if there was still a glimmer of hope that Kimba might still be alive and could be saved. Chin Kah placed his ear over Kimba’s body and tried to detect signs of heartbeat but there was none. It was also obvious from the severity of the injuries that Kimba was gone. He had lost a lot of blood – there was no pulse and no signs of breathing anymore.

Since there was no space in my garden, Chin Kah offered to take Kimba back to his house and bury him in a little cat cemetery in his back garden. Chin Kah feeds stray cats, and over the years, some had passed away and they were buried in his back garden. I did not want to let Kimba go and wished I could stay with him for a little while longer, but I knew we had to do the needful. Together, we said our prayers for Kimba. Then, Chin Kah told me to say goodbye to Kimba. I touched Kimba’s body gently and thanked him for having brought so much joy into my life. I heard myself saying softly, “Bye, Kimba, bye...”, but at the same time I was shaking my head and thinking, “No, no, this is not happening, this is not real.” Finally, Chin Kah wrapped Kimba’s remains in brown paper and carried him to his car. As I watched the car drive away, I said a final goodbye to my little Kimba and my heart broke into a million pieces. This was by far, the most traumatising experience of my entire life. I had never experienced anything this tragic and heart-wrenching before.

I remained in a state of shock that whole night. I remember methodically cleaning up the space where Kimba had lain, washing away the pool of blood, and trying to be as brave as I could. I did not want to be in touch with my feelings at that time because I knew the only thing present was an intense and excruciating pain. And at one point, I almost fainted. The accident had been extremely tragic and unexpected, especially when it did not even look like the car could have hit Kimba at all. And I had been right

there, barely three metres from the scene of the accident. It seemed surreal. Just as Kimba had come into our lives in a strange way, he had now left us suddenly, without any warning whatsoever, in an equally strange way.

After changing my blood-stained clothes and washing up, I sat on the sofa and held Indy close to me. That night, I did not let Indy out of my sight. It was past midnight when Teng Bee came home from work. When I opened the door, all I could utter was, "Kimba...died." I could see how terribly shaken he was when he heard the news. Kimba had also stolen Teng Bee's heart in this relatively short time that he had lived with our family. I could not bear to describe Kimba's condition to Teng Bee that night because I wanted him to remember Kimba as he was during happier times. It is strange how the whole picture is vivid and clear in your mind, but you just cannot bring yourself to put it into words.

That night, and on subsequent nights, I suffered from paranoia. I carried Indy with me everywhere I went, making sure he was within sight all the time. I did not know how long this paranoia would last, but I was grieving and in despair, and I had to ensure that Indy would be safe. The other cats were street-wise, but Indy was not, and he was just learning to extend his boundaries beyond the gate.

The spot on the road on which Kimba was hit had been blood-stained that night. Teng Bee tried to wash off the patch the next morning, but the brown stains remained for a few weeks. It was very difficult for me to drive back every day, to see those stains and be reminded of that tragic night. I was also paranoid that the same fate might happen to my other cats. Although they were street-wise, accidents can happen. Kimba had come from the street and he was certainly street-wise. Yet, he had been hit.

I battled with the decision of locking up all my other cats for their own safety. But what kind of life would they have, being caged up for life? Cats roam, and they like to be free. It was a very difficult time for me. I was very badly affected by Kimba's death, and I worried for Indy's safety because he was just beginning to wander out of the gate. Should I curb his freedom to ensure his safety? I finally decided I would train Indy to stay indoors by closing all the windows whenever there was no one in the house to monitor his movements. It might not have been the wisest decision, but at that point in time, I had to do something, if only for my own peace of mind.

The very next evening after the accident, I had to give a talk at Ming-Yi's university. I gathered whatever courage and energy I had left, and went. I had decided not to tell Ming-Yi yet because I had not even come to terms with the tragedy myself, and I did not want Ming-Yi to grieve by herself in the university. After the talk, Ming-Yi came over cheerfully and asked me, "Mummy, how are all the cats, Mac and Bobby? Everything ok?" I smiled and said, "Yes. They are ok." I lied. But I did not know what else to say, given my own mental frame of mind at that time. We finally broke the news to Ming-Yi when she came back that weekend. She cried her heart out, but she was able to accept

the reality of the situation and come to terms with it. My daughter definitely has more equanimity and serenity than me.

My Super Trooper

A few days after Kimba's accident, I came home from work and as I alighted from my car, Teng Bee was sitting at the patio, smiling. He told me to look behind the plants. Huddled amongst the plants was a small blue point kitten who bore a remarkable resemblance to Kimba! I scooped the little thing up and hugged him tightly, and found myself calling him, "Oh, Kimba, Kimba, Kimba..." and for the first time after so many days, I cried. I allowed my tears to flow freely and for that brief moment in time, I felt I was hugging Kimba. My heart felt that someone had turned back the clock and Kimba was still alive. But of course my mind knew it was just wishful thinking. As I knelt there, hugging the little kitten, I cried my heart out.

Teng Bee said that in the morning, as he was having breakfast at the coffee shop, this little blue point kitten had come to him and refused to move away. After Teng Bee had fed him some *char siew* (roast meat), the kitten followed him as he left the shop. Seeing the remarkable resemblance to Kimba, he decided to bring him home to show me. My first reaction was that the kitten may have his own home, so it would be best to take him back to the shop. However, Teng Bee was very sure he was a stray, so he said I could keep the kitten if I wanted to. I knew he was doing this for me because he saw how badly I missed Kimba.

We let the kitten into the house, but he felt extremely uncomfortable and scared. After a few hours, I saw how uneasy he was, so I told Teng Bee that it was best to take him back to the shop. He would be better off there, I was sure.

I could not help recalling how comfortably and confidently Kimba had settled into my home when he had first come, compared to this timid little kitten now. Kimba was meant to stay. This one was not.



Kimba sitting below the "Catwalk", with Bobby and me.

That weekend, barely four days after Kimba's passing, Ming-Yi and I attended a dinner and dance function in support of a youth organization, the INCOVAR. Life had to go on. There was no point in staying home to grieve. Towards the end of the function, there was a presentation by the D2Y choir and they gave a beautiful rendition of ABBA's *Super Trooper*. The moment they sang the song, I saw, in my mind's eye, Kimba trooping down our little catwalk in the garden. We had built a little ledge

for the cats to walk on in our garden and we called it the “Catwalk”. Kimba loved to troop along this path whenever he accompanied me in the garden. It was an extremely adorable sight. That night, as I listened to the lyrics of this lively song, I visualised Kimba trooping down the catwalk, and it gladdened my heart. I felt, at that moment, that Kimba was already in a much better place. And I rejoiced.

*Shining like the sun, Smiling, having fun,
Feeling like a number one.*

Music certainly hath charms...to soothe a pained heart. My friends later commented how well I had recovered from mourning for Kimba because I seemed happy at the dinner that night. Little did they know that I was merely putting on a brave front and the full impact of the after-effects of the trauma had not even begun to manifest itself yet.

Coming to Terms with Reality

For many weeks after that, I was still badly traumatised whenever I was alone and the tragedy replayed itself in my head. I would recall every single detail – the sight of Kimba struggling, the massive loss of blood, and my own panic and fear. It had not been exactly a peaceful death although my loving thoughts and prayers had calmed Kimba down towards his final moments.

My friend, Aaron, consoled me that although Kimba had died tragically, at least he had not died alone as most animals would, especially those who had died in road accidents. And Kimba had passed away surrounded with loving thoughts and prayers. “It could have been worse, you know,” Aaron said. “sometimes, even we humans don’t have the privilege of having someone radiate loving thoughts to us when we are dying. Kimba was “blessed”, in that sense.” I know. I ought to be thankful that I was able to do something for Kimba in his final moments.

Kimba had only been with us for barely two months, but during this time, he had really endeared himself to us. I continue to be puzzled by the unexpected (and strange) circumstances in which he had come into my life that night, from the alley, where he jumped straight into my arms, and how he left me, also very unexpectedly. As I played back the sequence of events on that fateful night, it really looked like Kimba had walked straight into the path of that slow-moving car. That was the strangest part of the whole incident. Why would any cat do that? A flurry of thoughts crossed my mind. Did he know his time was up and he had to go? Was he upset that my attention was diverted to Creamie and Crackers? Had he felt neglected? It is “amazing” how the mind works,

and how we can be drawn into unwholesome thoughts if we allow such thoughts to arise and dominate us.

I finally decided that perhaps Kimba had known, somehow, that his time was up and had chosen to go that night when I would be around to “help” him, by radiating loving thoughts to him. I would never know, of course, but animals do have special senses which we may not know about. Granted, this is all mere speculation. But it is a way to console myself and make some sense of the entire incident.

If all things happen for a reason, perhaps Kimba had come into my life because he was destined to do so or just to reconnect with me, but only for a short period. Perhaps he had come for some lessons from me. We would never know. I am glad that during his short stay with us, Kimba had been transformed from a street-cat into a very loving, peaceful and happy cat.

I missed Kimba terribly. I missed his presence in the kitchen, and I felt very sad knowing that nobody would ever be taking my vegetables or mushrooms to play with anymore. For weeks following his death, I found myself calling my other cats, “Kimba”, only to quickly check myself that Kimba was no longer with me now. Everywhere I went, I felt his presence very deeply.

Every subsequent Tuesday night after the tragedy, I would check the clock and at about 8.00pm (the time of the accident), I would say prayers for Kimba. I must have done this for at least seven weeks or so, just as some families would do for their departed (human) relatives. Wherever he was then, I hope he would receive these prayers and rejoice in knowing that I was still thinking very fondly of him.

Big Brother Indy

Indy missed Kimba too, and I felt very sorry for him. The other cats were too old to become his playmates. I felt very sad as I watched Indy wander around the house aimlessly all by himself. He seemed very lonely. However not long after, Indy became



Big Brother Indy with Creamie and Crackers



Rub-a-dub-dub, three kitties in a tub!

very attached to Creamie and Crackers. Some male cats have been known to be hostile to newborn kittens and might even harm them. But Indy was very gentle and caring to the kittens. This was quite unexpected given his extremely playful and boisterous nature. From being a frolicky little kitten, Indy had been completely transformed into a mature and protective big brother to his new wards. Indy would sleep beside their cage at night, and he hardly left them during the day. He would lick their urine and faeces regularly, as a mother-cat would. Indy devoted his time totally to these two little ones. Having just lost Kimba, I did wonder if Indy had plunged himself into this task to escape his loneliness. Or did he just have a big heart, living up to the “inkheart” on his body? Whatever it was, I was very glad that Indy had found something new to do.

Learning to Let Go

For weeks after the tragedy, life had to go on, and I continued with my talks even though my heart was very heavy. The graphic details of that fateful night would replay itself in my mind very often. Although I constantly reminded myself that “this too, shall pass”, I did not know when it would. I realised that I was still very attached to the tragedy and was unable to let go yet. I was aware of this, but I could not see the point in forcing myself to let go when I was clearly not ready to do so. “Take your time to grieve,” my friend, Dr Phang, advised me, “it is a natural process.”

Psychologists tell us that one goes through several stages in the grieving process: denial, anger, bargaining, depression, and finally, acceptance. I found myself going through these stages, minus the anger. I was not angry with what had happened, just very sad. Although I knew the driver of the car, I harboured no anger towards her as I knew it was unintentional. Till today this neighbour is unaware that she had hit Kimba that fatal night.

I was in denial for weeks. And I bargained even though I knew it was futile. Can I turn the clock back? Why did I take the rubbish out at that hour? Why did I not stop Kimba from crossing the road? Such questions kept crossing my mind. If I had not been mindful of their unwholesome nature, I would have allowed them to flood my thoughts and thus, sink deeper into denial and depression. I was aware that the accident had already happened and there was no point in dwelling in the past or asking “why” questions. Acceptance would be the only way out of my depression.

Throughout this period, I sought solace in my faith. I remembered what Sharon had told me when Wolf went missing, that equanimity would arise naturally when wisdom is present. We are taught that our attachments are the cause of our sufferings and miseries. As such, I knew that if I allowed myself to be engulfed by incessant unwholesome thinking, I was strengthening my attachments and this would plunge me further into depression, and recovery would take much longer. Letting go is the answer.

Letting go of these attachments is the key to peace and happiness. I knew I had to replace my unwholesome thoughts with wholesome happy thoughts, such as how Kimba had brought cheer into our lives during his very short stay with us, how we had given him a happy life and his wonderful friendship with Indy. It required much effort to maintain these wholesome thoughts as the graphic reminders of the accident were still extremely painful. Time will heal with effort and patience, I reminded myself.

This too, shall pass...

As I reflect back on the entire episode, I realised that my practice of serenity and equanimity during that period was far from satisfactory. That was why my grieving process took a long time. It is good to know our weaknesses so that we can focus on them to improve ourselves. Adversities do make us stronger and more resilient in the end.

On the other hand, I also realise that animals, while they do grieve, are able to let go and move on with life much faster than us. In this way, they are certainly more adept at present-moment living than we are and hence, have less mental suffering. Of course we humans always claim that animals are less intelligent and are therefore not capable of more complex thoughts and emotions. We may be right. But, here is the paradox: Is it good to be able to think and reason so much if these thoughts and emotions are negative and they bring us pain? Whereas things that truly matter – joy, beauty and inner peace – they arise from within. We do not need to *think* in order to enjoy these positive feelings. Perhaps we humans do think too much, and the wiser option is not to reason ourselves out of our miseries, but to still our minds and get back to that inner peace that has always been there.

Wisdom arises...when the mind is still.

More Letting Go...

I had initially found it extremely hard to give Creamie and Crackers up for adoption. I could not help worrying if they would be well looked after. But after Kimba's tragic accident, I knew a linked house was no place to raise too many cats. It was just not safe enough. With Wolf gone, I still had eight rescued cats, and that was already a handful. If I kept these two, I would have ten. I knew I would not have the space, time or financial resources to care for this many. I decided then that Indy would be the last cat that we would keep. If we ever rescued more, we had to ensure that there would be willing adopters.

Creamie and Crackers were going to live in a *kampung* (village) house. It was Nurul's (the adopter's) grandmother's house. We had visited the house earlier. It was a typical village house on stilts in a big compound with lush greenery located on the outskirts of Klang. There would be plenty of space within the compound for the kittens to roam about. With Kimba's tragic accident still fresh in my mind, the village certainly looked safer than our urban neighbourhood. At least it had fewer cars. More importantly, the family who was going to adopt them loved cats.

The night Nurul came to take Creamie and Crackers, Indy was sick with mild diarrhoea which could have been caused by his licking the ablutions of his wards. Poor little Indy. I had earlier explained to Indy, Vixey and Bobby that Creamie and Crackers would be going to their new home, but I doubt if they understood.



Bye, little ones... Be good in your new home now.

When Nurul came into the house that night, Indy ran upstairs and stayed in my bedroom as though he knew what was going to happen. After giving Nurul clear instructions on what was needed to be done for the kittens, and giving her a supply of milk powder and kitten food, it was time for them to go. Ming-Yi and I carried Creamie and Crackers up to see Indy, to say thank you and goodbye. Vixey and Bobby came out to the porch as I accompanied the kittens to Nurul's car. And then, they were gone.

Shortly after they left that night, Indy came down and went out to the porch. He sat alone, staring into the night sky. Later, Vixey joined him. I watched them both that night – Indy and Vixey, sitting by themselves on the porch. I think they were both waiting for the kittens to come home. The air was still and an atmosphere of melancholy pervaded the stillness of the night. I went out and joined them. Although I felt sad, yet, as I looked at the vast expanse of the night sky, a sense of inner peace came over me. In the quiet solitude of the night, Indy, Vixey and I were together in our thoughts.

Giving up Creamie and Crackers was difficult for me. The next few days I did worry if they could adjust to their new home, or if they had problems feeding. I called Nurul to check on their progress. I also reminded her to get Creamie and Crackers neutered when they are old enough. Soon after, I knew I should leave them in peace, and be happy that they have a new home now. And here is where serenity and equanimity comes in – the willingness to let go when the time comes. This was my first time giving up my rescued kittens for adoption.

As my animal-rescuer friend, Yuen Foon, has often told me, love, compassion, altruistic joy and serenity are essential supports for those who rescue and foster abandoned

animals. Fostering and looking after abandoned animals is a very intense experience. When you rescue them, they are usually not in the best of health or condition, sometimes even in a critical condition, so you give them an abundance of love and compassion. As they recover and grow healthily, you rejoice with them. Then the time comes when you have to hand them over to their new home, and serenity gives you the strength to let them go. And the strength to carry on.

Life Goes On...

Indy missed his wards and so did I, but life had to go on...for both of us. Life did go on, and it was quite eventful too.

Bobby (my twelve-year old poodle) went missing for half a day and we scoured the entire neighbourhood, looking for him. He had never been out on his own before and we worried he would not know how to come home. With the help of Cathy, Chin Kah and a neighbour, Mrs Ng, we combed the entire neighbourhood, stopping to ask passers-by if they had seen him. It was late afternoon when Mrs Ng finally spotted him in an alley and that was after almost nine hours of searching. The rain was pouring at that time, and the moment he saw us, he just started running away! I guessed he must have been in a state of panic. We literally went on a wild goose chase around the neighbourhood but could not catch him at all. This twelve-year old poodle was running with the strength of a racehorse! Finally, Bobby came home by himself. We were so relieved!

As a result of her brain trauma, Vixey suffers from physical retardation, hypothyroidism and life-long constipation. Once, she constipated for too long until we had to bring her to the vet's for a full-scale enema with manual evacuation of her bowels. She was so



A family feast in the kitchen.

dirty after the enema that she needed a beauty bath and ended up (literally) smelling like a rose! Now, I give her daily laxatives and tummy massage (oh wow...life *is* good, isn't it?). She would still need enemas every now and then to clear her bowels. It is very heartening to know that despite her physical retardation, Vixey was able to look after (and train!) Indy and Kimba, and she also looked after Creamie and Crackers. One may be physically challenged, but one can still make oneself useful (humans would do well to learn this too).

Bunny was once down with very high fever, and could not move for two full days. That got us really worried because Bunny has feline immunodeficiency syndrome, a condition

where his white blood count would drop significantly during infections resulting in slow recovery. Bunny was given subcutaneous saline and to our surprise, he was up and about in no time at all. And I had a very tough time feeding him his antibiotics for two weeks! It was a daily battle – you can still see the battle scars on my hands and legs now.

Recently, Cow got attacked by the neighbourhood bully-cat and came home with some wounds on his face and head. *Minyak gamat* (sea cucumber oil) did the trick and he recovered after a week. Cow, despite being our eldest cat, has been known to be a bit of a hypochondriac since he was young, so during that one week, he behaved exactly like a “patient” and only slept on the cushions and our beds. Even after his wounds had healed completely, he still came to show me his wounds and ask for his *minyak gamat*. Just as children (and sometimes, adults!) need attention, so do cats.

Polar has decided to be an outdoor cat, but comes home for all her meals. Her daughter, Cleo, still waits dutifully for her to come back every day, and they would have their meals together. Tiger and Little Chief decided they had had enough of catfood, so they eat dogfood now, while Mac and Bobby (our two twelve year-old dogs) eat catfood! When you have eight cats and two dogs living under one roof, life is....well, never boring.

A few weeks back, a new neighbour moved in behind our house and they brought with them a beautiful cat which they kept locked up in a small cage all day in the backyard. On the first night, the cat was meowing very pitifully, and Cow came to me and kept nudging me towards the back door. From the expression in his eyes, I could sense that Cow was very concerned and probably could not understand why any cat would be kept locked up in a cage. “Come on, let’s go rescue that poor cat!” I could almost hear him say. “Why is that cat locked up? Why can’t it be free like us?” Cow was really puzzled and upset. Well, Cow, you get to sleep on our bed and you have never known what hunger is. Most importantly, you know you are precious to us. Some cats are just not as lucky as you are.

The next few nights, Bunny expressed his concern in a similar way. Subsequently, he kept going out into the alley every night to keep this poor cat company. But Bunny is rather big, so he can jump out into the alley through our back grille, but he cannot jump back into the house. Hence, Bunny would end up spending the whole night outside in the alley. Come morning, the moment he hears the sounds of my footsteps, he would mew loudly asking me to let him in! Good old Bunny – he is so strong and muscular, but has a heart of gold. Big, strong...and friendly!

Now, Bunny, Tiger and Little Chief take turns to sleep on the pillar in our backyard to keep this poor cat company at night. I am touched that my cats feel compassion for this cat even though it is not one of ours. Boundless love...loving across boundaries. The poor cat still mews pitifully every night and sometimes another neighbour would shout

at it. Poor thing...I hope the owners would let it into the house soon. Or perhaps, buy their cat a bigger cage where it can move about more. It probably feels very lonely at night too.

Indy Turns One

Soon, Indy would be one year old. Like all my other cats, he is also neutered, and although he does roam out of the house occasionally, he stays indoors most of the time. At the most, he would just sleep on the patio, enjoying the warmth of the morning sun. I was told that neutered cats are generally more home-loving. Also, perhaps the weeks of locking him indoors after Kimba's demise had trained him to be a home-loving cat now. He is still as playful as he was before, and would sometimes tease the older cats to wrestle with him, especially Little Chief, who is closest to him in age. Otherwise he is quite contented playing with strings, dried leaves or whatever he can lay his hands on (which includes sweet-wrappers, cockroaches and lizards!).



Indy Jones, wearing his little hat, prowling on the Catwalk.



The one and only... Indy Jones!

Indy has turned out to be our most obedient cat. While cats tend to be more aloof and snooty compared to dogs, Indy did not seem to have this feline arrogance in him. He is very obliging, and never fails to welcome us home at the door whenever we return home (just as dogs do). Once, he was sent outside to the patio as "punishment" for stealing food in the house, yet he never attempted to come inside the whole day although the windows were wide open. We felt so sorry for him, so we told him he was forgiven. The first thing he did when he came inside was to make a quick dash to the bathroom...to ease himself! Vixey had trained him so well that he only does his "business" in the bathroom and no where else!

Indy is also my kitchen companion now and has appointed himself my official food-taster when I cook. And he plays with my vegetables too but only the green leafy vegetables, not the mushrooms.

Sometimes, when Indy lies quietly by himself, I look deep into his eyes, and wonder what is on his mind. I wonder if he remembers his old friend, Kimba. Or Creamie and Crackers. Perhaps he does. But I hope he remembers all the pleasant times they had spent together, and how happy they had been.

Epilogue

All things are impermanent. All things will change. The only way for us to reduce our own suffering and dissatisfactions in life is to accept this impermanent nature of reality and all existence, and let go of our attachment to them. But in the process of doing so, embracing love, compassion, altruistic joy and serenity makes life more bearable and meaningful.

Indy came to me with several life-threatening infections, but with love and compassion, we did our utmost for him, and now, we celebrate the fact that he is healthy and growing well. Kimba came into my life, bringing my family so much joy, but left suddenly, and I have to accept this reality with serenity and equanimity. Perhaps I should rejoice that I had the opportunity of having given Kimba much love and compassion during his short stay with us, and I would like to believe that these experiences have brought him much happiness. Wolf left home on his own, and I can only hope that he has found a new home and is well and happy. Creamie and Crackers came into my life for a short period too, and again, these beautiful heavenly virtues helped make the encounter, though short and intense, a beautiful one.

What will happen in the future now? No one knows. I have eight cats and two dogs to look after, and they are subject to the same vulnerability and mortality as we are. During good times, my pets give me an abundance of joy. Yet, nothing stays permanent. We are always told that life is uncertain and death is certain. This is an undeniable fact of life. We can never be truly prepared for what challenges life brings upon us. But whatever comes, we know we can only do our best, and shower as much love, compassion and rejoicing as we can. Then we have to let go, be contented and be at peace with ourselves for having done our best. Every moment should be embraced with kindness – kindness to others, and kindness to ourselves. Then, with serenity and total acceptance, we let it go.

This too, shall pass...

And we shall strive on, supported by the *Four Pillars of Kindness* and create heaven in this imperfect world.



It's all about love, compassion, rejoicing, and letting go

*One day at a time – this is enough.
Do not look back and grieve over the past, for it is gone;
And do not be troubled about the future, for it has not yet come.
Live in the present, and make it so beautiful that it will be worth remembering.
- Ida Scott Taylor (1820-1915)*



Yes, here comes Indy Jones!!



Well, heroes have to sleep, too....



No, I don't want the limelight!

Indy's Friends

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



Bobby, the most magnanimous of them all.



Mac, friend to every single cat



Cow, big brother of the family



Bunny, fierce outside, a real "bunny" on the inside.



Polar, mother of Wolf and Cleo



Ever-majestic Tiger, extends goodwill to all, like Gandhi.



Wolf, blue-eyed big brother of the second generation



Cleo, stylish little princess of the family



Little Chief, ever playful and fun-loving



Vixey, survivor of brain trauma, with eyes as bright as stars.



Kimba, Indy's best friend



Creamie & Crackers, Indy's wards

Animals are such agreeable friends – they ask no questions, they pass no criticisms.
- George Elliot

Post Script

Shortly after the publication of *Pawprints on My Heart*, I began receiving telephone calls, smses and emails from people who wanted to bring stray puppies and kittens to me for adoption. I explained to them that I live in a linked house and my hands are already full with two dogs and eight cats. But some of them would not take “no” for an answer. There was even a case where this person informed me about some abandoned kittens somewhere and insisted that if I do not rescue them, they would die. I offered to teach her how to foster the kittens, but she would not hear of it.

My purpose of writing *Pawprints* was to encourage others to extend their compassion to animals in whatever ways they can, within their capacity. It need not be fostering work alone. Help can come in various ways. So please allow me to make a humble request here that fosterers should not be used as a dumping ground for rescued animals. Let us all work together responsibly, and see what we can do to bring some relief to these animals. For example, in the event that a fosterer agrees to look after a rescued animal, the least the rescuer can do is to help look for potential adopters to ease the burden of the fosterer. Otherwise, very often, the fosterer ends up being the adopter as well.

From my experience so far, there are many animal-lovers out there who are willing to foster abandoned animals but we desperately need volunteers who will carry out the task of rehoming these animals once they are independent. This is definitely an area we would like to see more participation in from those who empathise with our work. We need “rehomers”, please.

The TNRM Programme

I am well aware that not many of us have the space or time to bring stray cats into our homes and look after them for life. After reading *Pawprints*, quite a number of people wrote to me asking how they can help in other ways. I would like to share with you here, a wonderful programme which I learnt from a friend in Singapore.



Chek Wee and Koon King

Dr Tan Chek Wee is a medical doctor with special interest in Community Geriatrics. In the morning, he helps the elderly sick. In the afternoon, he visits the terminally ill, and at night, he helps the cats.

This remarkable doctor and compassionate animal-lover runs a programme called TNRM which stands for “Trap-Neuter-Return-Manage”. Stray cats are captured by luring them into traps. Then they are sterilised and once they have recovered (which could be just a day for males and maybe two for females), they are returned back into the community. This frees the rescuer from having to adopt the cat into his or her home. Rather, what the rescuer does is to prevent the stray cat from reproducing and this reduces the population of strays in the community. There is also a panel of veterinarians who work together with the rescuers and charge a discounted rate for sterilisation. But that is not all. While some fosterers carry out their own TNR, Dr Tan’s programme has the additional “M” component where the entire community collectively manages and looks after these “community cats” even after they have been sterilised and returned.

Dr Tan tells me, “In my housing estate alone, a few residents and I started trapping the cats here about four years ago, and by now we have achieved almost 100% sterilised “community cats”. We prefer the word “community” as there are people who care for them by providing food responsibly – this means any leftover cat food is removed to avoid littering. The people in the community also bring these cats to the vet for sterilisation and to treat illnesses. Besides this, they assist the town councils in looking into complaints about cats. Town council officers often do not have the correct know-how to apply humane and effective solutions to address complaints from the public, often resorting to unnecessary and ineffective culling. The number of cats has reduced significantly and the existing cats are now healthy looking. The residents, if not fond of them, are more tolerant of their presence too. The town councils also save costs by reducing the need to engage pest controllers to cull the cats.”

Although there are animal shelters, these are really the last resort for stray animals because many shelters end up euthanising them due to space constraint. Dr Tan shares with me the success they have achieved in Singapore. He says, “In Singapore, we are

very active in applying TNRM in our communities and recently the SPCA reported a significant drop in the number of cats “surrendered”, this is very likely a result of increasing sterilisation by the common people. If we can reduce abandonment, the number of cats will be significantly reduced. We believe this humane method of reducing cats will increase tolerance amongst human, and with lesser complaints, there will be less propensity by government agencies to kill the strays.”

I also shared with Dr Tan that some people are rather concerned about taking away the reproductive ability of animals. However, think of what would happen if the stray animals are allowed to breed uncontrollably. They are at risk at being run over by vehicles, ill-treated by humans, or worse, captured and euthanised by the authorities. Euthanasia is an extremely terrifying process for any animal. Recently I read a write-up on what actually happens during euthanasia in shelters. I cried. You would, too. In view of this, sterilising both the males and females is definitely a lesser evil. In fact, it may be one of the most compassionate things we can do for the stray animals.

I have also had people (especially women) expressing concern that female cats, just like we humans, may also wish to experience motherhood. As a woman myself, I empathise with this, but from my observation, I noticed that mother-cats often abandon their offsprings after about four or five months (once the kittens are independent). So, perhaps, for them, the “joy” of motherhood only lasts for a short period, and after that, they get on with their lives again – and their children become strays. There is also the possibility that the entire process is purely instinctive for them. Furthermore, I have also read from certain websites that mating is actually painful for the female cat. Undoubtedly, frequent pregnancies and giving birth are definitely taxing on any female animal (humans included). A female stray cat can produce up to four litters in a year – this means an increase of twelve (or more) stray kittens.

I am extremely impressed and inspired by the work of Dr Tan Chek Wee and the many volunteers in this TNRM programme. What he has done is to educate the people in his community and they now work together, in one spirit, towards one goal – reducing the population of the strays *and* caring for the existing ones. It is the managing and ongoing care for the community cats that make this programme very compassionate and meaningful. I hope you or your organisation will consider adopting this humane and compassionate programme in your own community. I also hope that government authorities may consider this as an alternative to capturing stray animals and putting them down. After all, aren’t we aiming to become a more compassionate, humane and loving society?

Culling and euthanasia of healthy stray animals is NOT the solution to the stray problem. Sterilisation and responsible management is. In 1997, a stray cat sterilisation project carried out in Bukit Merah, Singapore, revealed that 96% of the public preferred sterilisation and responsible management to culling. This is because it is more humane, kinder and promotes a more caring and gracious society.

Even if we cannot find a group of like-minded people to work with, we can always start it off as our personal project, on a small scale. Remember the little boy who saved starfish? He had the wisdom to know that we *can* make a difference, no matter how small our action may appear to be. So, for a start, let us do what we can within our capacity. Mother Theresa's timeless reminder to us: *We cannot do big things. We can only do small things with great love.*

Start small. And if I may quote Dr Tan, "Every starfish saved is a sentient being saved."

AnimalCare – Working Together for the Animals

May 2009

The dumping of more than 300 Pulau Ketam dogs on Pulau Selat Kering and Pulau Tengah will go down in history as an extremely sad episode, especially in the hearts and minds of animal lovers and compassionate humans.

This tragedy happened because the stray dog population on Pulau Ketam exploded out of control and the people thought dumping them on two faraway islands was the solution. Rescue missions were then mounted by animal caregiving NGOs to save as many dogs as possible and rehome them.

We hope this tragedy will never be repeated.

Statistics show that dogs and cats multiply so fast that a pair of stray dogs or feral cats (and their offsprings) can each create a colony of more than 60,000 new animals in 6 years (a geometric increase when breeding is uncontrolled). It is no wonder that the stray population can explode to abominable numbers within a short period of time.

The solution to the population explosion of stray animals in our community is NOT shooting, euthanasia or dumping.

The solution is sterilisation (neutering the males and spaying the females) so that the existing strays will not breed further.

AnimalCare

Working together for the animals

AnimalCare is an animal protection group dedicated to relieving the suffering of animals and providing for their wellbeing in the true spirit of unconditional loving-kindness.

Our Mission

- 1. To encourage people to be caregivers to animals.*
- 2. To promote the spaying/neutering of stray animals and other projects to help animals.*
- 3. To cultivate compassion to animals through education.*

How you can help and participate

- a. Be a caregiver to stray animals, ie. one who feeds, spays/neuters the animals, and continues looking after them in a responsible manner. If you require help in spaying/neutering, please contact us.
- b. Be a supporter of our cause – tell your friends about this project, encourage them to start a similar programme in their own communities. Educate children from young to be kind to animals.
- c. Be a donor to our fund.

The stray animals need OUR help.

Let us work together to create a more harmonious and peaceful community for humans and animals.

For further information, please contact: chankahyein@gmail.com

Website: www.myanimalcare.org



A Voice for the Animals in Parliament

The Righteous King shall give protection to both human beings, as well as to the birds and the beasts.

– *The Buddha.*

King Asoka (c 304 – 232BCE) of the Mauryan Empire began his reign as a ruthless conqueror but after witnessing the immense suffering and devastation that the Kalinga War had brought to the people, he decided to renounce all forms of aggression and cruelty. The great king then embraced Buddhism and put Buddhist teachings into practice as public policy in his government.

These were some of the many noble deeds of King Asoka in relation to animal welfare:

- Forbade unnecessary slaughter, mutilation, hunting and sacrifice of animals
- Built hospitals for animals
- Planted banyan trees along the roads to give shade to animals and built watering holes for animals
- Protected 24 types of animals
- Protected mother-animals and their young for six months in enclosures before releasing them back into the wild
- Assigned officers to feed wild animals in the jungles
- Reduced the number of animals slaughtered daily (for food) in his palace from 2000 animals to just 2 peacocks and a deer. Very often, the deer was spared. Sometimes it was purely vegetarian diet for the palace.

Subsequently, many of the kings of ancient Sri Lanka and Thailand emulated King Asoka. They built the first wildlife sanctuaries in the world, and some even became veterinary surgeons. State protection was granted to animals. Because the kings set an example, the people followed suit. They avoided hunting and fishing and were largely vegetarians. This marked the glory of the *Cakkavati Kings* (Righteous Kings) of ancient Sri Lanka.



Beauty, brains and all heart

That was then. What about now? On 22nd November, 2006, the world was stunned when *Party for the Animals* won two seats in the Netherlands' House of Representatives. This event made history as it was the first time animals had representation in Parliament in modern times. Their two MPs – Marianne Thieme, 36, and Esther Ouwehand, 32, have since made waves in their steadfast objective to create a more humane world – for animals, as well as humans.

The *Party for the Animals* is a Dutch political party that aims to improve the position of animals in the society. It was founded to promote an awareness of the way in which humans treat animals and to emphasise that this needs to change – in the interest of not only the animals themselves, but also humans and the environment in which we all live.

The *Party for the Animals'* platform is built around the belief that both animals and humans are living creatures with emotions and a conscience and therefore, animals have the right to be treated with respect by humans, regardless of whether they are in the wild or are kept in farms or homes. The party believes the extent to which a human society is "civilised" can be measured by the way in which its members treat other living creatures and the natural environment in general.

"Our party's highest priority is to end all animal suffering. People who treat animals in a civilised manner, will treat each other in a civilised manner", says party chairwoman, Marianne Thieme, who was voted Political Talent of the Year 2006 by the Dutch parliamentary press. The lawyer-turned-animal-rights-activist is very outspoken and passionate in her beliefs. She even wrote a letter to the Dutch Prime Minister objecting to the Queen of Netherlands serving *foie gras* to guests at a state dinner for international dignitaries. *Foie gras* is derived from ducks and geese that are force-fed until their livers, abdomens and oesophagi are damaged. Her complaint resulted in the Queen having the item removed from the palace menu!

Part of the party's campaign is to educate consumers to shop intelligently and compassionately by choosing brands that are animal and environment friendly. Thieme says, "The public hardly suspects that their purchase of cosmetics, pet food, toothpaste, eggs and other common items have, in all likelihood, caused some form of animal suffering. Is this morally justified when alternatives are easily available? A lot of animal experiments consider only commercial interests. We want to ban all animal experiments as soon as possible and we are seeking funding to find more alternatives for consumers."

Most people are not aware that almost all eggs come from battery hens. These are hens confined in cages so small they can hardly move. The stress causes them to mutilate each other. To prevent this, farmers cut off their beaks without anaesthetics. Billions of male hatchlings that are of no use to hen factories are thrown alive into a grinder. The castration of pigs without the use of any anaesthetic, as well as the inhumane clipping of their tails and teeth are commonplace. Then there is also the culling of livestock when there is an epidemic of disease. And the list goes on.

We have been letting economic interests prevail over ethical and moral considerations when it comes to animal welfare and the interests of nature and the environment. These human-centred (selfish?) actions are now hurting the planet. Animal factory farming alone is responsible for 18% of the greenhouse gases, which is more than the

carbon footprint of transportation worldwide. If only people would just reduce their meat consumption, this would not only help brake global warming but it would also free enough grains (used to feed the factory farmed animals) to feed the poor and starving. There would be fewer cries from the slaughter houses, and fewer hungry people in the world. Thieme is forging ahead with her plans. “We want a constitutional amendment, guaranteeing animals the right to freedom from pain, fear and stress caused by humans. Let’s begin with easing the suffering of the hundreds of millions of cows, pigs and chickens stuck in factory farming”, she said. Thieme feels success in the Netherlands could help the movement elsewhere. One of the party’s aims is to be an inspiration for other countries and animal rights activists.

The fact that the *Party for the Animals* is now the fastest growing political party in the Netherlands is testimony that more and more people are conscious and supportive of championing animal rights. This certainly augurs well towards creating a more humane, compassionate and healthier society.

Motivated by the success of *Party for the Animals*, political parties representing animals have now been created in Austria, Germany, Brazil, and Spain. There is also a possibility of founding a *Party for the Animals* in the United States, the United Kingdom, France and Canada.

There is hope yet.

The Righteous King shall give protection to both human beings, as well as to the birds and the beasts.

So must we.

The greatness of a nation and its moral progress can be judged by the way its animals are treated. To my mind, the life of a lamb is no less precious than that of a human being.

– Mahatma Gandhi (1869 – 1948)

Please visit the following links:

<http://online.sfsu.edu/~rone/Buddhism/BuddhismAnimalsVegetarian/AnimalFriendlySriLanka.htm>

<http://www.partyfortheanimals.nl/>

<http://www.goveg.com/>

<http://themeatrix.com/>

<http://loveusnoteatus.com/>

Recommended reading:

Norm Phelps (2007). *The Longest Struggle – Animal Advocacy from Pythagoras to PETA*. Lantern Books.

*Let no views of profit, no compliance with custom, and no fear of the
ridicule of the world, ever tempt thee to the least act of cruelty or injustice
to any creature whatsoever.*

~ Humphrey Primatt (1736-1779)

*I hope to make people realize how totally helpless animals are, how
dependent on us, trusting as a child must that we will be kind and take care
of their needs... [they] are an obligation put on us, a responsibility we have
no right to neglect, nor to violate by cruelty.*

~ James Herriot (1916-1995)

*Until we have the courage to recognize 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 (1907-1964)

*Compassion for animals is intimately connected with goodness of character
and it may be confidently asserted that he who is cruel to animals
cannot be a good man.*

~ Arthur Schopenhauer (1788-1860)

*Animals cannot speak, but can you and I not speak for them
and represent them?*

*Let us all feel their silent cry of agony
and let us all help that cry to be heard in the world.*

~ Rukmini Devi Arundale (1904-1986)

Where there is love, miracles do happen.



Indy Jones & the Four Pillars of Kindness is a story about the adventures and encounters of a little kitten who was rescued from the drain and given a second chance at life.

Chan Kah Yein, Ph.D. narrates the story, with heart-warming simplicity, humour and an honest reflection into her own weaknesses and strengths as she copes with the challenges that come with looking after and raising rescued animals. She writes with clarity and conviction, illustrating how love, compassion, rejoicing and letting go, come together to make her experiences more meaningful and so much richer.