

Cover design by Sukhi Hotu

This book is dedicated in loving and joyful memory of

Vixey



A gutsy girl with a heart of gold

About the Author



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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

Indy Jones and the Four Pillars of Kindness, 2009
A Story about Love, Compassion, Rejoicing and Letting Go

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*

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Last but not least, I wish to thank everyone who has supported all my books and written to me with constructive and encouraging feedback. Thank you for letting me know how my stories have touched your hearts. It means very much to me.

With love and gratitude,

kahyein

March 27, 2010 (Earth Hour 2010)

Rainbow Bridge

The title of this book was inspired by the concept of Rainbow Bridge, a mythological place to which a pet goes upon its death, eventually to be reunited with its owner. Apparently, the legend is modern as it was created by someone (unknown) between 1980 and 1992 but it has some similarities with the Bifrost Bridge of Norse myth, which is also about a bridge that leads to heaven. As far as I know, Rainbow Bridge has no reference to any particular religion.

Here's a write-up on Rainbow Bridge:

Just this side of heaven is a place called Rainbow Bridge.

When an animal dies that has been especially close to someone here, that pet goes to Rainbow Bridge. There are meadows and hills for all of our special friends so they can run and play together. There is plenty of food, water and sunshine, and our friends are warm and comfortable.

All the animals who had been ill and old are restored to health and vigor; those who were hurt or maimed are made whole and strong again, just as we remember them in our dreams of days and times gone by.

The animals are happy and content, except for one small thing: they each miss someone very special to them, who had to be left behind.

They all run and play together, but the day comes when one suddenly stops and looks into the distance. His bright eyes are intent; his eager body quivers. Suddenly he begins to run from the group, flying over the green grass, his legs carrying him faster and faster.

You have been spotted, and when you and your special friend finally meet, you cling together in joyous reunion, never to be parted again. The happy kisses rain upon your face; your hands again caress the beloved head, and you look once more into the trusting eyes of your pet, so long gone from your life but never absent from your heart.

Then you cross Rainbow Bridge together....

Source: <http://www.petloss.com/poems/maingrp/rainbowb.htm>

Rainbow Bridge is a lovely and comforting allegory for pet-owners to help them deal with the loss of their pets. It consoles them that their pets, especially those who die in pain, are no longer suffering but are whole and healthy again. The concept itself may not strictly be acceptable from the point of view of many religions, but taken in the right spirit, it can provide some degree of psychological solace to pet owners trying to cope with the death of their pets.

Most people believe that the ultimate and final state of being for everyone is one that is beautiful and perfect where there is no more suffering. Rainbow Bridge fits this description, in certain ways. But let us look a little deeper beyond the mere physical description of Rainbow Bridge. To me, Rainbow Bridge gives animals the right to love and to feel, and it gives them the dignity that they rightly deserve. It also depicts the loyalty of pets (which all pet owners would testify to), that even after death, they wait for their owners before finally crossing over.

Rainbow Bridge is a beautiful myth, but its message is powerful. It is about equal rights for animals and treating them with respect. After all, when we talk about love and compassion, we are always looking at seeing the whole of the phenomenal world as one. Only the ignorant will see us as separate, and discriminate. When we attain the wisdom and enlightenment that is deep within us, we will realise that we are, in essence, one.

Ekknath Easwaran, the founder of the eight-point Passage Meditation, explains that the ultimate discovery in meditation that leads one to self-enlightenment is the realisation that the earth, nature, our fellow creatures and ourselves are in a grand harmony. Upon attaining this state of consciousness, conflicts, separateness and division cease, and love, wisdom and peace reign supreme.

Albert Einstein, the great physicist, writes, "A human being is a part of the whole, called by us, "Universe," a part limited in time and space. He experiences himself, his thoughts and feelings as something separated from the rest - a kind of optical delusion of his consciousness. This delusion is a kind of prison for us, restricting us to our personal desires and to affection for a few persons nearest to us. Our task must be to free ourselves from this prison by widening our circle of compassion to embrace all living creatures and the whole of nature in its beauty. Nobody is able to achieve this completely, but the striving for such achievement is in itself a part of the liberation and a foundation for inner security."

And inner peace.

Rainbow Bridge

(Inspired by a Norse legend)

*By the edge of the woods, at the foot of a hill,
In a lush green meadow, where time stands still,
Where the friends of man and woman do run,
When their time on earth is over and done.*

*For here, between this world and the next,
Is a place where each beloved creature finds rest,
On this golden land, they wait and they play,
Till the Rainbow Bridge they cross over one day.*

*No more do they suffer, in pain or in sadness,
For here they are whole, their lives filled with gladness,
Their limbs are restored, their health renewed,
Their bodies have healed, with strength imbued.*

*They romp through the grass, without even a care,
Until one day they start and sniff at the air,
All ears pricked forward, eyes dart front and back,
Then all of a sudden, one breaks from the pack.*

*For just at that instance, their eyes have met,
Together again, both person and pet,
So they run to each other, these friends from long past,
The time of their parting is over at last.*

*The sadness they felt while they were apart,
Has turned into joy once more in each heart,
They embrace with a love that will last forever,
And then side-by-side, they cross over...together.*

Author unknown

Source: http://home.acceleration.net/clark/PaperVu/quoter/rainbow_bridge.jpg

Prologue

Life is uncertain, death is certain.

I know this is not exactly a very happy way of starting a book, but this statement rings true in our existence. No matter how good life is going, sooner or later we would all have to face death or help our loved ones face it.

This book is a compilation of my own journal writings of how I helped three animals face imminent death, how I helped a stray cat, on the verge of dying, regain her health and confidence until she could run free again, and how a young pet could be taken away so suddenly, without warning. I have chosen to write in a journal form because it documents the day-to-day happenings, the feelings, the emotions and the decisions I have had to make that coloured the entire journey I shared with my five friends. It tells of how we need not be afraid of death because death is very much a part of life, and it is an event that we should handle with acceptance, strength and serenity.

My other reason for writing this book is that through my experience in animal charity work, I have encountered many people who opted for euthanasia for their dying pets because they were made to believe that it is a merciful way of ending suffering. While I empathise with people who opted for this because their pets were in excruciating pain and there was no more hope of recovery, I also know for a fact that some people opt for it out of ignorance or, sad to say, convenience. Those who do so out of convenience, I urge them to examine their conscience – do we have the right to end another's life for our own selfish reasons? But for those who have done so out of ignorance in the past, and not knowing how to care for a dying pet, I share with you, in this book, how I did it with mine. And I hope you can draw inspiration from my experiences so that you now have a choice when faced with a dying pet in future. Make the compassionate choice, please, and help your pet die with dignity.

I also hope, in sharing my personal heartfelt experiences with you through these journal writings, you will find greater strength within your own heart when you have to help a loved one, human or animal, face death. Helping someone die is a very intense experience. It teaches us lessons about life, tests our compassion to the fullest, and gives us the opportunity to be more confident and to prepare ourselves to face our own death with dignity when the time comes.

And it *will* come.

Earth, Teach Me

*Earth teach me quiet ~ as the grasses are still with new light.
Earth teach me suffering ~ as old stones suffer with memory.
Earth teach me humility ~ as blossoms are humble with beginning.
Earth teach me caring ~ as mothers nurture their young.
Earth teach me courage ~ as the tree that stands alone.
Earth teach me limitation ~ as the ant that crawls on the ground.
Earth teach me freedom ~ as the eagle that soars in the sky.
Earth teach me acceptance ~ as the leaves that die each fall.
Earth teach me renewal ~ as the seed that rises in the spring.
Earth teach me to forget myself ~ as melted snow forgets its life.
Earth teach me to remember kindness ~ as dry fields weep with rain.*

An Ute Prayer

Joanie of Ark

The soul would have no rainbows, had the eyes no tears. – John Vance Cheney

This story is about a female stray cat, whom I named Joanie, and how she was rescued from the brink of death against all odds. It is a story about perseverance, love, care, will and devotion in nursing a sick cat and literally bringing her back to life. From a dying state, Joanie regained her health and strength until she was able to run free again.

August 2, 2009

It was 5pm this evening when one of our volunteers received an SOS call from Aunty Kiew, a feeder on Old Klang Road. It seemed one of her cats was having trouble giving birth, and she said it was an emergency as it looked like the cat was already dying. We rushed to Aunty Kiew's and found the poor cat in a box. She was heavily pregnant, but lying motionless.

From there, we sped off to the hospital, and the vet in attendance, Dr Goh, immediately took an X-ray. What the X-ray revealed was far worse than what had met the eye.

According to Dr Goh, the kittens in the womb were already all dead and had probably been dead for some time. There was a bit of bone sticking out of the cat's vagina, and it was the decomposed remains of the leg of one of her foetuses (stuck while being delivered). The foetuses had already decomposed inside her uterus, and everything had turned septic and was now in a gaseous and highly toxic state.

Dr Goh advised us that the prognosis was really bad, and the chances of saving her were extremely slim. The surgery and treatment would cost quite a bit, and he was not even sure if she would survive the surgery.

There were no two ways about it. I said we would have to try. So I told Dr Goh to go ahead with the surgery. It was the lesser of the two evils - if we did not remove the foetuses, the cat would die a slow death, and she was already in great pain as it was.

A surgeon, Dr Lim, was called in, and we waited while the two vets performed the surgery. We prayed and sent positive thoughts to the poor cat.

After what seemed a long time, Dr Lim came out and said the cat had survived the surgery, but the prognosis was still very bad. First, her insides were in such a terrible state that her uterus as well as part of the surrounding tissues had already decomposed. The vets removed as much of the decomposed tissues as they could so much so that there was hardly any tissue left for suture. It was like tofu (soft beancurd), the surgeon told us – every part that he sutured just kept breaking up. So he finally folded the skin, sutured it and covered it with some fat so that, in case the suture did not hold, the fat might give it some protection. Second, based on the extent of septicaemia, Dr Lim thought the cat might have already been in this terrible state for two weeks (can you imagine her suffering?), and he could not be certain how much toxins there were and the extent of damage the toxins had caused her other organs.

A blood sample had been taken, and it would be sent to the lab to determine the condition of her other organs tomorrow. Dr Lim said she might not even pull through tonight. But they had tried their best. We went in to see her, and Dr Lim showed us her eyes. He thinks brain trauma had already set in (or could have been in existence earlier, we would never know) because one eye was dilated, while the other was not.

We are thankful to Dr Lim and Dr Goh for having put in all their efforts to save her. Dr Goh said they would call me tomorrow should her condition take a turn for the worst. Whatever it is, I will visit her tomorrow when the hospital opens.

The cat has been given a heavy dose of painkillers and is on intravenous drips (antibiotics, etc). She is not in pain. The vets have done their best, and all that is left now is...to pray.

As I was driving back from the hospital tonight, I decided come what may I must give the cat a name. The name "Joan" immediately came to mind.

Joan of Ark - a fighter with an indomitable spirit. Her name shall be "Joanie".

When I reached home, my daughter, Ming-Yi, asked me how the cat was. I heaved a sigh and said, "It doesn't look too good, but we have tried." At the back of my mind, I am prepared for the eventuality that she might not survive through the night since both vets said the chances of her surviving were so incredibly slim. I pray that nature would be kind and do the needful. If she is meant to go, please let her go peacefully, and please do not let her suffer.

For the first time in my life, I witnessed such intense suffering. For Joanie to survive, we need nothing short of a miracle. Reflecting on this episode, and as I send positive thoughts to Joanie now, I think of the thousands of strays out there who are suffering every day. How many can we rescue and help? More than ever, I see the urgent need to actively promote the spaying and neutering of stray animals. It is one of the most effective ways to solve and reduce the problems of the suffering strays.

Suffering exists. This is an undeniable fact. And we must help as much as we can.

August 3, 2009

I kept tossing and turning last night. My heart was with Joanie. My only prayer for her was that she would not need to suffer – whatever that meant - getting better or going over to the other side, I would leave that to her destiny.

When I awoke at the break of dawn, I felt very anxious - did she survive through the night? Or has she already passed on? I drove to the hospital in anxiety, and prepared myself for the worst. As I entered the hospital door, I half-expected to be told that she had passed on in the night but hoped I would not need to hear that.

Dr Goh saw me, and the first thing he said was, "She's a fighter!"

Phew!!

Joanie had made it through the night!

Dr Goh fed her some water and a bit of wet food with a syringe, and Joanie ingested some of it. Being able to eat, no matter how little, is always a good sign with sick animals. Her body temperature was still subnormal, so she was put on a heatpack. Her whole body felt very cold to the touch.



Fighting for her life

Dr Goh was still very concerned that the sutures might not hold because her insides were so terribly messed up. Her tissues were all dead so there was hardly anything left to suture onto after her decomposed uterus was removed. To be fair to me, he cautioned that sometimes they would show some improvement but still succumb after a few days. I understood that every moment of her being alive was already a miracle, and the vets had done everything possible for her.

I went back to the hospital this evening to see Joanie, and spent two and a half hours with her. The prognosis was still bad. She was not eating. I managed to feed her about 3ml of water and just a very, very tiny bit of Hill's Science AD, one of the most commonly and highly recommended canned wet food for recuperating animals.

Her blood test results were in, and, as expected, they did not look good at all. Everything pointed towards severe dehydration, possible starvation and toxemia. It could also be some other problems. But we would never really know because no one knows her history. However, Joanie is a real fighter, and she is hanging on. I could feel her will to live.

While I was there, I massaged her gently, with the hope that her body might respond to human touch. I was told that sometimes the body becomes "lazy" and loses the will, or even "forgets" how to function, but the compassionate human touch can reactivate the body's capacity to live again. An animal-loving friend used to tell me that animals fight to live on if they know we love them and want them to live. They actually do it for us.



*I want you to fight and live on, Joanie.
I'm coming to see you tomorrow, you hear?*

August 4, 2009

Miracles do exist, if you believe...

I was pleasantly surprised when I reached the hospital this morning. With some coaxing, Joanie could sit up on her chest all by herself, and she even ate, quite a lot too, when I hand fed her slowly, over one hour.

Every moment that she is alive is a miracle. Yesterday, she was down and out, and the only sign of life in her was her breathing. Today, she is sitting up!



A living miracle...for now.

Her ability to sit up and eat is a very encouraging sign, but the worrying thing is her bloated abdomen. This is what the vets did not want to see as it could mean that the sutures did not hold and have ruptured, hence, causing bloating. At this point in time, we do not know the cause of the bloating until an X-ray is taken this evening. The bad news is that, if it has indeed ruptured, there is absolutely nothing the vets could do anymore since a repeat suture could not be done (there is simply no healthy tissue to suture onto anymore!).

Joanie is already on antibiotics, and our only hope is that the antibiotics would combat any possible infection. I prefer to hinge onto the good signs and continue radiating positive thoughts to Joanie. The vets say she is one fantastic fighter!

I returned to the hospital this evening. Joanie looked very lethargic. I put her on my lap and sang softly to her, and she seemed quite comfortable. I hand fed her some food too, and she ate quite well. As in the morning, it had to be done very slowly.

Earlier today, Dr Goh had done an ultrasound scan to ascertain if the distension of the abdomen was due to any fluid. To our relief, Dr Goh and two other vets concurred that there was no evidence of fluid in her abdomen. It was just a full bladder – she was not urinating. We noticed some urine yesterday, but she could have just leaked it, and not actually urinated.

Since her uterus and the "tube" leading to the vaginal opening have turned necrotic (septic), there is a possibility that the septicaemia has affected her ability to urinate as well. We are all hoping this has not happened. Dr Goh has also given her a tablet to stimulate the muscles with the hope that she would be able to urinate later, failing which they would have to poke a needle into the bladder and drain the urine out.

Dr Goh again reminded me that I have to take things one day at a time because with Joanie's case, anything could happen. Before I left the hospital, I told Joanie she must try to urinate.

Upon reaching home, I received a call from Dr Goh. My heart missed several beats as I took the call, thinking the worst had happened. He started by saying they were about to drain her urine when

Joanie urinated all by herself! Phew...and hooray!! Though she did it lying down, it was still a good sign as it (hopefully) means she has not lost her ability to urinate and that part of the body is still functional. Dr Goh said that she urinated "a lot" too, and so he thinks the distension of the abdomen could be due to enlarged mammary glands (caused by her pregnancy) or to stretching of the skin (both of which are harmless). Still, he is not too optimistic yet and told me to be prepared for the worst.

August 5, 2009

This morning, Joanie lay on my lap while I fed her, and she urinated on me! Every little thing that Joanie can do now is a milestone because we still do not know, at this point in time, the extent of damage the toxins has done to her body. Any one of her organs could have failed or could be failing.

I spoke to Dr Lim, the surgeon who operated on her, and he said that we also do not know if anything was still rotting inside her because the tissues were already necrotic. She might heal eventually, or she might just take a turn for the worst. Right now, he said, Joanie is still in a very "dull and depressed" state. This is not an encouraging sign.

Although she is eating and urinating, this does not necessarily mean she is getting well yet. It is still too early to tell. Sigh, and I thought all the small improvements are glimmers of hope. However, Dr Lim said that if Joanie improved further in the next few days, he might consider taking her off the drip or even discharging her.

But here comes the next big question: Who is going to look after her? She cannot be returned to the street. She will need to be confined for a least a few more weeks so that her condition can be monitored. However, Dr Lim warned me that whoever fosters or adopts Joanie has to be told that they would be getting (allow me to quote him verbatim) "a car with a rotten engine". That's hard talking, but those are the facts.

Joanie is a stray, fed by Auntie Kiew. Joanie has never had a home, but she needs one now. I called Auntie Kiew and asked if she would be willing to foster Joanie. She said no - she did not have the time.

Sigh, it looks like I would have to do it. That's the thing with rescue work...you often end up looking after the animal that you have helped save.

This evening, Joanie defecated. Now, this is such a grand achievement because it means that she has not lost her ability to urinate and defecate. We sometimes take defecation and urination for granted, but for someone who has trouble executing these basic physical needs, being able to poo and pee is a great gift! This reminded me that we must never take anything for granted, and that we must always be grateful for everything we have got.

I hand fed her again, and she ate everything up, but she was merely swallowing whatever I put into her mouth. There does not seem to be any desire to eat yet. She also could not stand up. I can only hope that it is because she is still weak. My friend, Sumitra, offered to give me some spirulina for Joanie. I checked with Dr Goh if it was alright, and he gave me the go-ahead.

Meanwhile, I have been frantically looking for a fosterer or adopter for Joanie, asking all my friends to help look for one. It can be very rewarding looking after a cat with special needs like Joanie. My experience with Vixey, my special pygmy ("retarded", in layperson's terms) cat, is a very rewarding one. Vixey suffered brain trauma and it took a year before she showed any signs of improvement from her retardation. We have a very special relationship now – an "understanding" that goes deeper than words can ever describe.

But there has been no takers for Joanie.

August 6, 2009

I went to the hospital as usual this morning, and the vet in attendance said to me, "Joanie hissed at me today!". Hah...another good sign! The spunk is returning to her. In fact, she hissed at the vet twice as he was cleaning her up! Joanie could also walk into her cage all by herself. She ate quite a bit too, when I hand fed her. For a cat who was at the brink of death, all these were milestones for celebration.



Fierce little thing, aren't you?



Sitting up all by herself.

This evening, Joanie's latest blood test showed a marked improvement. From very bad readings initially, all her readings have come back to normal now (except for two, which were almost in the normal range).

Joanie has literally "come back to life" after undergoing an ordeal so terribly unimaginable - obstructed labour and having dead fetuses decomposing inside her uterus. Under the medical expertise of the vets, and with all the positive healing energy and loving thoughts from everyone who was rooting for her recovery, she survived moment by moment, each one a miracle.

This evening, Dr Lim, the surgeon, said she was ready to be discharged. I was taken aback as this was totally unexpected. He said her blood test results showed that she could be taken off the drip already, and she had no reason to remain in the hospital. However, she had not fully recovered as this would take time. She would still need to be confined and to be under medication (along with a lot of love and care, of course). Her sutures need to be removed later.

So, finally, the worst is over. Joanie can go home!

But where *is* home?

Joanie did not have a home. She was a stray that was fed by Aunty Kiew and the latter could not foster her.

August 7, 2009

I decided last night that I will foster Joanie, at least until she recovers. After all, she has shown such an indomitable fighting spirit and for all that she has been through, she certainly deserves to be loved and cared for.

So, after six long days at the hospital, Joanie can finally go home today, and “home” will be my home for now. Before I left for the hospital this morning, I talked to all my cats and explained to them that I would be bringing a sick cat home. So, could they please be sympathetic and let her stay and recuperate?

I was very worried my cats would get jealous and run away from home. That just happened a few weeks ago when I brought home Felix, a stray we had picked up from the street when he was suffering from flu and an eye infection. Six of my cats packed their bags and left home. I had to quickly transfer Felix for boarding at the vet’s, after which the prodigal gang started coming home!

I went to the hospital today with a carrier to bring Joanie home. And what do you know, she walked into the carrier all by herself, as though saying, “Ok, I’m all ready. Take me home, please.”

I played Josh Groban’s Italian songs in the car, and Joanie was quiet throughout the ride home. She was very different from all my cats, who would groan in distress even in the short 1 km ride from my house to our nearest vet!

We reached home, and I brought Joanie into the house. The rest of the cats were sleeping cozily so I tiptoed in as quietly as I could and went straight to the back room. Bobby (my 13-year-old poodle) got all excited as usual and sniffed happily. Bobby’s excitement gave Joanie a fright. She went on the defensive and threw a tantrum! She refused to come out and latched her claws tightly onto the carrier. It took a lot of coaxing, and I had to politely ask Bobby to please go out of the room before I could finally drag and carry Joanie out. Very strong girl, this Joan of Ark!

I then put her into the cage which I had set up in the room, which, by the way, is Vixey’s official residence - Vixey has three bungalows (cardboard boxes) and two baskets in this room. She allows the other cats to visit, but they cannot so much as even step into any of her bungalows. It is an unwritten rule that all the cats respect and abide by. They only get to sleep in the old litter boxes. It still surprises me until today that all the cats, even our alphas, Cow and Bunny, who terrorise the rest, do *not* bully Vixey at all. I would like to believe that they *know* Vixey is special; hence, they respect her for being so.

You will read about Vixey in the next story, but, for now, in a nutshell, Vixey is a physically-challenged cat we rescued along with her brother, Wii, at a rubbish heap. They had been dumped. Vixey had brain trauma after eleven days with me and, subsequently, displayed symptoms of retardation, the cause of which could be the trauma, congenital, or both. Technically, she is “retarded”, both

physically and mentally, but I have my doubts about the mental part. I think she is incredibly smart and completely capable of feeling and caring. You will see why I think so, as you read on in the next story.

Vixey was curious about Joanie at first but, later, decided she should get angry, so she migrated to the dining room and sulked in her "other bungalow" beside the piano.

Soon, the other cats woke up and came into the kitchen. I quickly "bribed" them with wet food. After they had their fill, I took them in one by one and introduced them to Joanie, explaining to them that she is sick and needs nursing care, so could they please let her stay? None of them hissed, but they were not too happy either. Joanie was on the defensive, though, and eyed them suspiciously. I don't blame them. This must be so hard to understand for all of them.

"Who is this new person taking up space in *our* house?", my cats must be saying.

"Where is this new place, who are all these new people, and one of them isn't even a cat!! He barks!", Joanie must be wondering.

I'm keeping my fingers crossed that none of my cats will pack their bags and run away (again). Otherwise, I would have to send Joanie for boarding, and go back and forth to nurse her.

I fed Joanie and found that she had good appetite. She licked the food off my hand. I gave her the spirulina as well. She spat out half of it, though I guess she needs to learn to like the taste since it's berry flavoured.

I was a little worried earlier when all my cats went out leaving only Vixey (who was still sulking) and Indy (the only cheerful one). Later, Cow and Bunny came back, and I quickly bribed them with wet food again. Wii and Tiger, both grey tabbies like Joanie, seemed to have no problems with accepting Joanie. Bobby was ever so happy and willing to make friends, but Joanie was not interested in this "other species that barked". Not yet.

Vixey finally decided there was no point in sulking too much, so she came back inside the room and went into her favourite bungalow. But she still wasn't too happy, so she casually peeped into Joanie's cage (by the way, Joanie has decided she likes to sit *inside* the litter box!), and then, left the room again in a huff.



Hmm...



Bobby, the most dependable one.

After dinner, I gave Joanie her medications. Whatever I do for Joanie, Bobby would watch close by, as he had with all the other kittens I've brought back to nurse for the past three and a half years. Bobby is a very caring dog.

Earlier today, when my husband came back from work, he took one look at Joanie and said, "She's got charisma...so confident!" Oh yes, Joanie certainly has charisma, and she's got an unbelievable fighting spirit too. I did not name her "Joanie" for nothing, you know.

Tomorrow, I will need to buy a digital rectal thermometer to monitor her temperature every day. If her necrotic insides get infected, the first sign would be a fever, and I'd have to bring her back to the hospital immediately.

So far, she's okay. Eating off my hand. No more force-feeding.

I have to take a slight detour now and tell you another story...

For more than a week now, I have been trying to find a fosterer or adopter for little Xiao Li, a spunky little stray kitten, barely two weeks old, who had been rescued from Bandar Utama by Yen Ling.



When first rescued from the drain, covered with oil, slime and moss. The poor little thing thought the cloth was her mum and tried to suckle.



After being cleaned up...I look quite pretty, don't I?

According to Yen Ling, she simply *had* to rescue this little girl because, believe it or not, the little tyke had fallen into the oily and mossy drain a total of *three* times; each time, struggling to keep her head above water. And, each time, the mother-cat would just stare at her and would not make any attempt to pick up the little one. Finally, Yen Ling had no choice but to rescue her, or she would keep falling into the drain and meet with her death.

No one has offered to foster or adopt little Xiao Li even though she looks so adorable. Yen Ling is quite desperate now as her relatives whom she stays with do not want a little kitten in the house.

Tonight, an idea occurred to me.

Joanie has lost all her kittens, and perhaps that is one of the reasons why she is depressed (which mother wouldn't be, cat or human).

Xiao Li, on the other hand, had a mother who did not care for her at all – that's almost like not having a mother. Xiao Li is only about two weeks old, and that would be how old Joanie's kittens would have been, had they survived.

Why don't I put Joanie and Xiao Li together and see if they can establish a mother-daughter bond? I know there would be risks as some mother-cats have been known to bite (or even devour) other kittens, but I would be very careful.

I pondered upon this all night.

August 8, 2009

The more I thought about my (crazy) idea, the more it seemed the right thing to do. Call it gut feeling, if you like, but it just felt right.

So I called Dr Goh and asked him if I could do what I had planned, and he said I could try. But he also said that Joanie could be in this depressed state due to the amount of toxicity and bacteria inside her, causing severe dullness, and thus, introducing Xiao Li to her might not help at all. But, there was no harm trying.

I then called Yen Ling and discussed it with her. Both of us decided we would try it. It would be a visit first, and we would see how Joanie responds. If she reacts in a hostile manner, we would abandon the idea.

So, at about 4pm, Yen Ling brought the little tyke and all her paraphernalia over to my house. This included her little styrofoam bed, napkins and kitten milk. Vixey was one of the first ones to come out and meet our guests. See, I told you, who says Vixey is mentally retarded?



Yen Ling, Xiao Li, Vixey and me.



Watch your step, little one...

Now, the big test...how will Joanie react?



There is hope yet...

Joanie wasn't quite interested, but she also did not hiss at little Xiao Li, who, incidentally, is a bundle of energy (and noise!). Joanie went to the furthest corner of her cage, and faced the wall!

Later, we saw Joanie getting curious. She got closer and sat facing the little tyke. By then, the little bundle of energy and noise was fast asleep. Joanie looked on, as a mother would, her child.

August 9, 2009

Joanie still cannot squat to urinate and defecate, she just does it lying down. So I have to clean her a few times every day. This morning, after cleaning her up, I left her outside her cage, and, when I came back, she had already walked (!) by herself to Vixey's bungalow - to pay respects and say "thank you" to her landlady?



Thank you, Vixey.



This is so warm and comfy!

Really, Vixey has been exceptionally magnanimous, sharing her room and space with not just one but two new "tenants" - Joanie and Xiao Li. I even had to take one of her bungalows out to the kitchen because there is no more space in the room now, with two cages.

Later, Joanie started exploring the room. She soon discovered "Vixey's heater" (which, incidentally, is our modem-router), and sat comfortably on it. We suspect Vixey has hypothyroidism and needs heat because, since young, Vixey has liked all the hot spots in the house, i.e. the hi-fi set, the electrical sockets and, finally, this modem-router. This modem-router is Vixey's favourite post, and now Joanie has taken it. Oh dear, I hope Vixey does not mind. Time for some sweet-talking about the benefits of sharing...

I still dare not put Xiao Li together with Joanie unsupervised because I'm not sure how Joanie would react. Meanwhile, Vixey seems alright with perky little Xiao Li bringing some life (and lots of noise!) to the otherwise quiet room. After all, we must remember that this *is* Vixey's room. Even I am merely *renting* a space for my laptop and books!

My other female, Cleo, however, is not too happy. Cleo is also tri-colour, like Xiao Li. In fact, the two look pretty much alike, especially the black-stockinged legs. Both look so stylish! Maybe Cleo is not happy because of the similarity in their colour. You know how it is when two women happen to wear the same dress?

I still do not know what to do with Joanie later on, when she has fully recovered. Do I return her to Aunty Kiew? Aunty Kiew cannot look after her now because Joanie still needs nursing care. As for Xiao Li, the vet says she is only about two-and-a-half weeks old. The mortality rate of kittens this age is still quite high. They need nursing care. A friend rescued four, and three didn't make it. Another friend rescued three, and two didn't make it. It is not easy looking after very young kittens.



Why are you wearing my dress?



Just do the needful first.

Are Joanie and Xiao Li destined to stay with me? Or are they just passing through?

One day at a time...

And continue bribing my other cats to accept the two new boarders!

August 11, 2009

Yesterday, I was concerned that Joanie had not urinated for more than 24 hours, so off we went for a car ride to the hospital again, amidst Josh Groban's serenade of Italian songs.

At the hospital, Dr Goh was very pleased to see Joanie. He checked her and was worried about the rather unusual bulge of her tummy. We all knew an abdominal bulge was the last thing we wanted to see on Joanie as that could indicate that the sutures inside had ruptured and fluids were leaking out. To be safe and sure, Dr Goh decided we should do an ultra-sound scan to determine just what was causing the bulge. Two other vets came in to see the images. It turned out that it was her intestines! Also, the ultra-sound indicated that Joanie had a full bladder. Why is she not urinating? It could be due to the loss of ability of the muscles to contract? Finally, the senior vet told me I should observe Joanie and record her behaviour as much as possible because that would help the vets determine how best to help her. For example, does she squat? Is she straining?

So, we had three vets attending to Joanie yesterday – quite a VIP, won't you say? Dr Goh told me everyone in the hospital knows about Joanie now. Joanie of Ark, the great survivor, the one who beat the odds.

Joanie did *not* pee last night or this morning, so I brought her back to the hospital for treatment and observation again. She was given a medicine to relax the sphincter (a circular muscle that controls the orifice for urination) so that it can "open up". If this did not work, then some medication to help muscle spasm would be given. The last option would be to drain out the urine.

I asked Dr Goh what is best for Joanie after she fully recovers. Should I return her to Aunty Kiew or keep her? My only worry is that Joanie would escape from my house and run back to Old Klang Road *and* get lost along the way (that would be the biggest nightmare of my life). Dr Goh said that's really a very difficult decision because many factors had to be considered.

We know that once a cat vacates her territory for too long, another would take its place, so Joanie might not be accepted anymore over there by the colony. I was also worried that if I return her there, she might run back to *my* house (which is a nightmare, because it's just too far away). If I keep her with me, she might also run back to Old Klang Road (depending on how good her memory is) – also equally nightmarish. Gosh, what a dilemma...

"It's really up to Joanie," Dr Goh said, and that's so true. I wish Joanie could talk and tell me what she wants. But Dr Goh finally quipped, "It's unlikely she would run back to Old Klang Road...unless she can take the bus!"

Meanwhile, on the home front, the little terror, Xiao Li, is terrorising everyone in the house. Coincidentally, I asked my husband what "Xiao Li" means in Chinese, and he said there are several meanings, ie. Little Beauty, Little Strength, or Little Terror. I decided it must be the third one!

By evening, Joanie had urinated at the clinic. The two medicines had worked (one "opens up" the sphincter; the other contracts the muscles). So I went over and drove her home. I will have to continue giving her the medicines for seven days. After that, we'll take her off the medicines and see if she can do it herself. I have also been checking her temperature with the rectal thermometer regularly to make sure there is no fever.



Xiao Li welcomes Joanie back home.

We'll take it one day at a time for now. Hopefully, there's no major "damage" inside. Joanie needs to be on AD to help her recover. Today, after coming back from the hospital, she finished almost three-quarters of a can. The vet said a good appetite is always a good sign. Way to go, Joanie!

We have also decided to change Xiao Li's name to Suki, in honour of the freedom fighter of Burma (Aung San Suu Kyi), and also it means "be happy" in the ancient language of Pali. She's certainly a very happy little thing!

August 13, 2009

Two nights ago, Joanie became restless when she tried to groom herself and could only lick the plastic collar. Poor thing. It is so important for a cat (especially a female!) to groom herself, and Joanie must have got really irritated that she could not reach certain parts of her body. She turned hostile and took it out on poor Suki. Luckily both were in their respective (next-door) cages. Joanie growled and hissed at Suki and put her paw through the bars, attempting to scratch the little tyke (she could not reach, of course). Suki was too young to know what danger is, and obviously didn't know what was going on, and went on happily making noise in her cage! Suture removal for Joanie was supposed to be tomorrow, after which the collar has to be kept on for two more days.

Yesterday, since we were at the hospital again, I asked Dr Goh if her sutures could be removed so that her e-collar could be taken off sooner. Upon checking, Dr Goh said the incision had healed very nicely, so suture removal was done yesterday itself. Another blood test was taken, and the results are "okay", but she still needs to be monitored. Due to some reason, her platelets and white blood cells

are a little higher than the maximum while her red blood cells have dropped very slightly (not significantly, though). The vets still cannot tell at this point what could have caused it (for all you know, it could be just stress due to the car ride), but they assured me there is no cause to press the panic button yet.

Joanie was given another course of antibiotics. The vets think there could be still some infection inside because of the extent of toxemia earlier on. She is also put on Neurobion for her nerves.

I noticed Joanie seems more confident now. Having been a feral cat, she still has all her survival instincts. She even hisses at me, at times. I suppose that's a good sign?

By this afternoon, there was still no urination, so I had to take Joanie to the hospital again. The surgeon, Dr Lim, examined Joanie and explained the prognosis to me. Here's the worst possible news: Joanie's urinary tract may be badly damaged because that part of the uterus leading to the vulva (for females, the urethra is joined to this tract) was already dying (or dead) due to the extent of the decomposition. If that is the case, there is actually nothing the vets can do to repair or reconstruct it again. So, all we can do is to hope that the damaged part will heal with time. We need to send positive healing energy to Joanie for this to happen because there is no medication for this. In the event that it does not heal, let's hope at the very least Joanie can still leak the urine out. It won't be voluntary urination (as in healthy people like us), it would just be leaking out when the bladder is full. All it needs is for me to clean her up every time this happens, and that is not a difficult thing to do. I am more than willing to do this.

If none of these happens, a bloated bladder can lead to kidney damage. Dr Lim explained that while it may be alright not to defecate for a few days, any animal *must* urinate every day. A third alternative is to drain out the urine, but this cannot be done on a daily basis.

Meanwhile, Joanie did not seem to be suffering or in pain. In fact, she seemed quite happy and contented. Very calm and at peace. She is so, so strong. Dr Lim reiterated that Joanie *is* a miracle case. He never expected Joanie to even survive the surgery or the next crucial days, but she did. He just wished Joanie could have met us earlier - we would have brought her in, and all these complications would have been drastically reduced.

But never mind. What is....is.

We do the needful now. I had to board Joanie at the hospital for 48 hours for the vets to monitor her progress. While Joanie was gone, we all missed her. Little Suki went into the empty cage, looking a little lost. Aww...

Later this evening, I was on my way to deliver a talk, so I thought I would just drop in to see Joanie on my way there. Surprise, surprise, the vet said I could take her home. Joanie had already urinated! As I was running late, I had no choice but to take her along to my talk, so we had a cat at the talk! Good opportunity to talk about the miracle of loving-kindness although that wasn't the topic for the evening. Joanie seemed very calm and contented at the talk. She even wagged her tail. It must be the calming and positive energy of the place.

After we came home, I "cheated" a bit on time, and took out her e-collar. It is supposed to be first thing tomorrow morning, but I figured a few hours less won't make much difference. She had been so

frustrated with it. After I removed the e-collar, Joanie began grooming herself and this lasted three hours! She left no spot on herself ungroomed. Multiple times too!

Well, women will always be women! And, anyway, wouldn't *you* groom yourself if you had not bathed for more than ten days? I don't know about men, though.

After having satisfactorily groomed herself, she settled down, and brave little Suki squeezed herself into Joanie's cage and confidently went to suckle. Both seemed very happy and contented.



A picture paints a thousand words.

I hope our plan works. Although Joanie has no more milk, the suckling would give her emotional fulfilment and maybe, help her get over the loss of her own babies. Suki also has the love of a mother now.

Both are fast asleep.

Isn't this lovely? Nature has answers to everything. We just need to trust that nature knows best.

August 14, 2009

I brought Joanie again to the hospital today for a check-up. Dr Goh was a little puzzled because he noticed that Joanie seems to urinate only when she is at the hospital. He thinks (and I hope he is right) that it is a behavioural problem and not a physiological one.

When we came home, Vixey, who normally does not leave her official residence, came all the way out to the living room as I stepped through the door with Joanie in the carrier. Perhaps a bond is developing between Vixey and Joanie?

Suki, too, was so happy to see Joanie; she clambered all over her and then settled down to suckle. This lasted for one-and-a-half hours, with Joanie looking on, like a proud mother would.

I just learnt that coconut water works wonders for urinary problems. I've asked Dr Goh and he said there's no harm trying though there's no scientific veterinary research done on this yet. So I bought coconut water for Joanie today. I also took her out into the garden to let her get a feel of some sand,



Hello, Joanie, are you alright?



Mummy's home!

hoping it would make her urinate, but she just sat on it. Nothing happened. I even bought some chicken meat and cooked for her, thinking that she might prefer her former "diet" when she was a stray, but she merely licked up all the soup and left the solids untouched.

This morning, I was busy doing my work, so I left Joanie and Suki in the kitchen in their new home (per kindness of Vixey - it's Vixey's Summer Palace in the kitchen). Whenever Suki wandered off, Joanie would walk over and pick her up by the scruff and bring her back, just as any mother-animal would.

Suddenly, I noticed Suki walking into my room, so I quickly went out to check on Joanie. Horrors of horrors, Joanie was missing!! I had sprained my ankle very badly yesterday, so I limped all over the house looking for her. I looked under the sofa and everywhere else. I was so worried she might have gone out through the window and was on her way back to Old Klang Road. Horrors!! Please, no!

Joanie was nowhere downstairs, so I had to trudge upstairs. Sprained ankle or no sprained ankle, I made my way upstairs and started looking around, and there she was! Phew!! She was happily sitting under my son's bed. I tried coaxing her to come out, but she was adamant. There was also no way I could get her out because she was right smack in the middle of the underside of the bed. If you stretched your arm in, you would not be able to reach her. Cats have a knack for doing this, don't they? You can never catch them if they don't want to be caught. So I trudged downstairs again, ouch, ouch, ouch..., and brought her litter box, food and water up, and left the fan on for her.

After a few hours, I managed to finally "coax" Joanie to come out from under the bed, ie. I pulled her out, and, in the process, I have some scars to show for it!

August 16, 2009

Yesterday evening, I witnessed a "miracle"! To most of us, defecation and urination are often taken for granted, or, we might even be too shy to talk about such things. But for Joanie, it's a totally different ballgame altogether.

I had fed her some coconut water, and after that, as she was lying on my lap, I told her that she must urinate, or else we would have to go to hospital again, and I cannot drive because my ankle still hurts. Then, I went to take my bath, and, when I re-entered the room, I saw her in an unusual position, with her two front paws balanced on the side of the litter tray (which she uses as her bed). Then, I went closer and saw she was actually squatting and defecating. I kept very still and praised her, "Good girl, good girl..."

There was a lot of faeces. Then I said, "Alright Joanie, after this, you must pee as well, okay? please....you must try." Then, she squatted lower and stayed for what seemed "a long time". When she moved again, to get out of the litter tray, she flicked off some water from her feet, and there it was, folks - the whole tray was filled with pee! Pee, glorious pee!!

I don't remember ever feeling so happy cleaning up cat pee and poo, all in the same tray.

Today, I can see that Joanie is becoming more motherly. She lets Suki suckle all day, and is very protective of her. Dr Goh told me that although, technically, Joanie has no milk anymore, sometimes the suckling can make her produce milk again. The milk production does not come from the ovaries

(Joanie had a total hysterectomy to remove the uterus and ovaries); it is from the brain. That is why suckling can stimulate milk production again. I don't know if there is milk, but little Suki is so happily suckling. Whatever it is, the emotional bonding is helping both of them.

Joanie is still not fully recovered. That part of the tissue connecting the urethra to the vulva was already dying due to the extent of septicaemia. We are now hoping that somehow, it will heal. To hope that it will regenerate is...well, too much to hope for. We would be happy enough if it heals and she can urinate daily. If she cannot, it could lead to severe kidney problems.

The good sign now is that she could squat to urinate - that's voluntary urination. Earlier on, the vets and I said we would already be so happy even if she just leaks it out. So, we have a bonus now!

The vets continue to be amazed at Joanie's recovery. Until today, they say Joanie is a total miracle. Every day of her being alive *is* a miracle.

Yes, miracles do happen, sometimes, if you believe and work towards it. And even if it doesn't and things do not work out as you wish it would, at least you've tried your best, and that's all that counts.

August 17, 2009

When I came downstairs this morning, I was pleasantly greeted by Joanie who had ransacked her litter box completely. When I checked, she had urinated on her towels - a whole lot too, some even spilled into the tray under her cage. And this is unmistakably Joanie's because Suki was in her own cage all night.

Is it the coconut water? Dr Goh doesn't think so, but he has asked me to keep all the "constants", ie. the medication, the coconut water and the chicken soup (for the soul? no, for the bladder!!). Do anything, as long as she urinates, he had said.

Now, let me tell you something rather interesting that happened last night. I was burning the midnight oil, trying to finish marking my exam papers, and it was already past midnight when I decided I must sleep. But Joanie and Suki were still happily tucked inside Vixey's favourite bungalow, both sleeping like babies. I thought I should leave them be, but I was also worried Joanie might run away in the night. My husband and I talked at length over this and finally decided we should put them back in their separate cages.

When we went into the room, believe it or not....

Joanie was walking back into her cage...all by herself! You tell me....can she read my mind?

This morning, after breakfast for the twosome, Joanie and Suki decided they wanted to move into Vixey's bungalow again, this time with Vixey inside.



Here's Vixey sleeping comfortably in her bungalow.



Three's company... Vixey moves out.



It's ours now.

Both of them barged right in, and oh dear, poor Vixey thought three's a crowd, so she moved out. Poor Vix. Never mind, Vix, you still have your Summer Palace in the kitchen.

I'd say Vixey has been extremely magnanimous in sharing her space and all her houses with Joanie and Suki.

What a great cat! And who says she is mentally retarded? Well, all the vets say so, based on her medical tests (blood tests and X-rays), but don't we know better?

Vixey, as I've written in Pawprints, is like Yoda. You'd never really know how much she knows.

But she knows...

August 19, 2009

Joanie had urination problems again, so I took both Joanie and Suki to the hospital today. I thought Suki could do with a check-up as well.

Dr Lim examined Joanie and said there is actually nothing much they could do except to observe her and....wait for her to urinate. He also checked Suki and dewormed her.

Joanie had another blood test taken (this is now on a weekly basis to monitor her status), and it was "okay", "normal" for a cat who has gone through such



Suki's first car trip with Joanie.

a terrible ordeal. The results also show that there is still some infection inside her (from the white blood cell count), so Dr Lim advised putting her on antibiotics for a total of four to six weeks from the time of the surgery. It has only been two weeks.

However, Dr Lim was not too happy that I have been putting Suki so close to Joanie. He said Suki, being a stray kitten, could be a carrier of diseases, and Joanie's immune system is severely compromised, so she could be easily infected. Furthermore, he said I should not even allow Suki to suckle, because in the event that there is milk, the milk would be laden with antibiotics, and this would affect Suki's growth. I had not thought of this possibility.

Just before I took them back, Dr Goh came in, and he too examined Joanie. As we laid her on the table, Dr Goh massaged her gently, and, within minutes....yes, the miracle happened...she urinated! And a whole lot too.

Then, as I carried her to the sink to wash her up, I felt some faeces coming out, and, yes, she defecated as well!

Dr Goh exclaimed, "Wow!! This is nice poo. I really like this poo!" It was very well-formed and certainly passed as "healthy poo". Any pee and poo from Joanie is always a welcome sight *and* smell! We joked that perhaps it was Dr Goh's voice that triggered the urination, or was it the aluminium top of the table? Or the gentle massaging that he had done?

We'll never know. I don't mind purchasing that table or recording Dr Goh's voice if that's what helps Joanie to urinate!

After we came back from hospital, Joanie seemed to be distancing herself from Suki. I wondered if she understood what Dr Lim had said, that it is not wise to put Suki and Joanie together.

Well, most people would chide me for anthropomorphising animals (that big word means "humanising" them, assuming that they feel as we humans do), but I'd quote Shakespeare on this "There are more things on heaven and earth that is dreamt of in your philosophy". We think we know so much about animals? We think they cannot feel or sense or even understand what we say? Well, think again...

August 20, 2009

This morning I came downstairs and let Joanie out from the cage as usual. She came out and sat under the coffee table in the living room. This has been her favourite spot for the last few days. I remember going upstairs to get something and, when I came down, she had disappeared. I thought she had gone upstairs; I searched every nook and corner, but she was nowhere to be seen.

I spent the next few hours scouring the neighbourhood looking for Joanie. I went on foot and by car around my neighbourhood, calling out her name, but she was nowhere to be seen. As I searched, I consoled myself that Pole (our oldest female, but very independent and has chosen the feral life) also once went missing for five days, but she finally came home and still comes home now. However, her son, Wolf, went missing but never came home. Sigh...

At noon, Cow and Bunny followed me on my rounds. About four houses down, Cow was there in the drain, and seemed to be telling me something, so I quickly got down into the drain and looked. There, about 4 m away, was a cat, and it was a tabby!! I know there are at least two more tabbies on the road (they are Tiger's friends) so I wasn't sure if it was Joanie. I called her name, and the cat looked in my direction. She was inside the drain but under the driveway of a house, so it was too dark for me to know for sure if it was Joanie.

I called several times, and she looked in my direction. As I approached her, she moved further away. Because I was alone, there was nothing much I could do except to wait, and I used my handphone to call Ming-Yi to come and help. Perhaps we could block off the drain on both ends and "corner" her until she comes out. But Ming-Yi was still asleep and did not hear the phone.

I must have stayed in the drain for twenty minutes just watching the cat. She looked at me and did not budge. Finally, I decided to quickly run home and get Ming-Yi to help. We got a can of mackerel and each got into one end of the drain. The cat was still there. Ming-Yi shone a torch at her, but still we could not be sure if it was Joanie.

Knowing a cat has tremendous patience, I decided to crawl into the drain and get her while Ming-Yi blocked off the other end. The drain was incredibly slimy and very narrow, and I could barely get in. I was on my hands and knees and there was rough concrete debris, animal faeces and "other things".

I must have crawled about 3 m into the drain when I encountered pieces of wood supporting the pavement above from collapsing. These pieces of wood hampered me as it made the space half the size, and I could barely get through. I had to use my hands to clear off the cobwebs, but I was very near the cat now. Then I saw those familiar markings on the head. It *is* Joanie!! And I saw the white paws too (on the hind legs). I was so excited, and so incredibly relieved that she was safe.

Just when I was about to catch her, Joanie made a dash through the pieces of wood, whizzed past me and ran off. Sigh... It was so near. We tracked her for awhile after that, still inside the drain, and, by the time I got out of that slimy drain, Joanie was nowhere to be seen again.

Ming-Yi then ran back home and got Suki. She carried Suki up and down the road with the hope that Suki's scent or mewing might attract Joanie out and make her come home, but there was no sign of her still.

It rained all afternoon. By evening, I had already distributed flyers, and talked to as many neighbours as I could regarding Joanie. No one had seen her. Pole, Cow, Bunny and Tiger (all my senior cats) followed me on my rounds to look for Joanie. We even took Suki down the road again, hoping her mewing would attract Joanie out of her hiding place.

I comforted myself that perhaps Joanie preferred the feral life, living in the drains where she feels more comfortable. Sometimes we think sleeping on a soft blanket and being served mackerel and Hill's Science AD is a grand luxury. For us, maybe, but not for the cat. They know what they want.

Perhaps Joanie is sick and tired of sitting in the house. Perhaps she is sick of being force-fed the antibiotics. Perhaps she knows she has healed and she knows she does not need the medication anymore. Still, I prayed that Joanie had just gone for a day out, and that she would return for food later in the evening. I must have looked into all the boxes and under the beds more than ten times today; each time, hoping I might see Joanie...peeping out at me.

This *is* suffering...for me.

Some of my friends reprimand me for not caging my cats, but cats are independent and free-roaming creatures. They will not be happy being caged up. None of my cats are caged up, unless they are sick. It is my decision not to cage my cats, even after Kimba passed away in a tragic car accident right before my eyes. I know there are risks that come with this decision, but I believe they will be happier being free.

It is ironical that my husband predicted that Joanie *will* run away once she is healed. He said he could see that in her eyes, that she is a free spirit, and wants to be so. "She is just waiting to run..." were his exact words.

Of course I hope Joanie would return. I know she has that homing instinct, because she went missing from her colony for four to five days when she was living in Old Klang Road, but, when she was suffering from obstructed labour and needed help, she went back to Aunty Kiew and "asked" for help. Aunty Kiew also told me that Joanie is a very "unsociable" cat and would not allow her to pat her, or go near, even though Aunty Kiew had been feeding her for two years.

I have to console myself now - If Joanie does not return, I know she has healed and prefers a free life. If Joanie is in pain, is hungry or misses Suki, I am sure she would return. But I also know that if a cat does not want to be found, you will never be able to find him or her. Joanie has lived her entire life as a feral cat. Maybe she prefers to be so, and is not happy living inside a house. It is her decision, and I have to accept this.

Wherever you are, Joanie, please be safe and happy. If you prefer to be a feral cat as you were before, I can understand and respect that. But be safe, please.

It is now almost midnight. I am doing my best to maintain my composure. A friend consoled me by saying that Joanie might have been stressed in the house (especially when she felt so insecure in the presence of all my cats). Perhaps, she might recover faster being the free spirit that she used to be. For all you know, she could not urinate and defecate because she needed a private place to do it, certainly not in a cage, in full view of everyone! I hope he is right.



My new mummy?

Meanwhile, Suki and Vixey both miss Joanie. And so do I.

Please come back soon, Joanie.

August 21, 2009

I spent the whole day searching for Joanie again today. This evening, it was Cleo who alerted me that Joanie was under the pavement inside the drain. I quickly jumped into the drain, and I saw a cat running away, straight down and turn ninety degrees right into another drain leading to the corner house down my road. She behaved in the same way this afternoon as well. Assuming that it is Joanie, at least I know she is near.

I've consulted friends to ask for ideas on how I might be able to get her to come home. Putting food out won't help at all because my cats would instantly eat it all up. I don't know what else to do now.

We took Suki down the road again in the evening, but Joanie did not appear.

Joanie has been in my house for almost two weeks, and on the first five days, I was with her for many hours in the hospital each day. She knows her name, and she knows me.

At dinner time, the TV was showing Disney's Peter Pan, and, when it came to the part where Wendy was singing to the Lost Boys about a mother's love, all my defenses broke down, and I went into the kitchen and cried my heart out.

I think I saw Joanie thrice today. I am very sure it was her the first time in the morning, but the next two times I'm not that sure. However, from her movements, I'm quite convinced that it was her. I went out again just now to look for her, after dinner. I thought, being nocturnal, she might come out at night. Throughout the day, in all the times that I saw her, she was inside the drain, never once on the road. Maybe she wants to be in the "wild" again, and sleeping on a blanket inside a cage just isn't her cup of tea.

Ming-Yi kept Suki company just now, and we brought down two soft toys for her. Now, she is fast asleep inside the big cage - Joanie's home ever since coming back from the hospital.



*This is where I've seen her run into each time.
It is a drain leading to the corner house on my road.*



Keeping Suki company.

Tomorrow morning, I have to give a talk. This won't be the first time I'd have to put on a brave front for the audience and deliver a public talk. I did that when Wolf went missing, when Indy was fighting for his life and when Kimba was tragically run down by a car.

As I sit here now, I can only hope Joanie is inside that drain (in that corner house), because I caught a glimpse of her using that route twice today. Maybe she has found herself a "home" there and is comfortable. I certainly hope so.

My friend from Singapore Community Cats, Chek Wee, a medical doctor and also a cat-lover (he taught me about TNRM), advised me to think of Joanie having an exciting adventure now. He says worrying does not help, and he is absolutely right.

I figured the only way to console myself is to accept the fact that Joanie needed my help when her life was hanging by a thread and when she needed nursing care. Now that she is well enough, she has decided to return to her feral life, and I should be able to let her go.

Just as I'm writing this, Auntie Kiew sent me a text message to ask about Joanie. Call it good or bad timing, I don't know. I have not heard from Auntie Kiew for quite some time now. So I told her what had happened. Auntie Kiew merely said, "Oh, so naughty!" And she told me Joanie sometimes would disappear too, over in Old Klang Road. Then she said, "Ahh...she is a stray, that's the way they behave."

I guess Joanie enjoys the feral life. And Auntie Kiew said if I could catch Joanie, perhaps I should take her back to Old Klang Road and let her have her old life again.

One day at a time, I suppose. Be safe, Joanie, wherever you are now (I hope you are in that drain, safe and sound, and dry).

August 22, 2009

It is ironic that I noticed a change of behaviour in Joanie after the last visit to the hospital. Dr Lim, who examined her, had said two things. First, that it may not be advisable to put Suki with Joanie because Suki came from the street and may carry diseases. Second, that if ever Joanie starts producing milk, I must separate them because Joanie's milk would be laden with antibiotics.

Immediately after that trip, Joanie started distancing herself from Suki, and that is why Suki began to room in with Vixey, squeezing herself into Vixey's basket and sharing Vixey's router.



Seeking new comfort in Vixey.

Isn't it strange how these coincidences happen? I shall postulate no more lest I be termed a fool. One of my vets used to say I make a big mistake humanising animals. He says they don't think like humans. We'll never really know, will we?

Pole (Cow and Bunny's sister), incidentally, accompanies me whenever I go searching for Joanie. The moment she hears my voice (calling for Joanie), Pole would come out from under a car or from the bushes or from someone's house compound, and follow me. Pole leads a feral life but comes back several times a day for food in the kitchen.

Wherever you are, Joanie, be safe and happy. I miss you terribly, of course. For the last two weeks, I had been coming downstairs every morning and the first thing I do is to check on you, feed you and give you your medication, and to rejoice that you were getting better every day.

I will miss all our trips to the hospital where you will be in the carrier while we both listen to Josh Groban belting away his Italian songs. I am glad you feel well enough to be on your own now.



I need comfort too.

August 23, 2009

This morning, I told Joanie's vet, Dr Goh, that Joanie has left my house. I waited until today, just in case she came back. Also, I was more composed then. Yesterday, I was fluctuating between breaking down and putting up a brave front, and the slightest word would swing me to the former.

Of course Dr Goh was surprised, and we talked at length. We both finally came to the conclusion that it is Joanie's decision on what kind of a life she wants. Dr Goh consoled me by saying that we had already done everything possible for Joanie, and the comforting thing he said was this: "She must be feeling great since she wants to be on her own again." Yes, I hope so too.

Last night, I emailed Chek Wee. He said something very wise when I said I was worried since Joanie is supposed to be still on antibiotics: "Sometimes the body immune system is better than antibiotics, and staying in a stressed environment may be more detrimental to her health." Now, that is also comforting to hear.

It also made me realise that, while we humans think Joanie is better off sitting on a soft towel in a cage, she may have been so uncomfortable and stressed because this is not the life she wants or is used to. Maybe to her, sitting inside a drain *is* a luxury, being free to roam is a luxury. Even my own Cow and Bunny, who get to sleep on the bed and sofa, sometimes prefer sitting on the hot tar road under a car, or in the drain. They actually like it.

It is just like what a vet used to tell me, that statistically zoo animals live longer than animals in the wild, but are the zoo animals happy? Sure, they have food and shelter, but are they happy?

It all boils down to present-moment living and quality of life. It is not how long we live but what kind of life we lead, moment-to-moment.

August 24, 2009

Hong Yee, Aunty Kiew's friend, offered to bring Aunty Kiew to my place to help look for Joanie. So this morning, both of them came.

We patrolled the neighbourhood, and Aunty Kiew used her usual "cat call" (*meow, meow, peeet....*) to get Joanie to come out. We split up and an Indian lady told Hong Yee she had seen Joanie this morning in her backyard. I was so excited when I heard this, and I quickly ran back to get a flyer to give to the Indian lady. She confirmed it *was* Joanie that she had seen. I was elated!

We continued looking while Aunty Kiew called. Soon, we were separated, and suddenly Hong Yee's phone rang. It was Aunty Kiew, and Hong Yee's eyes gleamed.



Joanie, it is you!!

"You found her??", I heard Hong Yee say, in Hokkien. My heart skipped several beats. Oh please, please...yes, please.

YES!! Aunty Kiew had managed to entice Joanie out. She was on the next road. So, Hong Yee and I rushed over there. Gosh, I couldn't believe my eyes...it *was* Joanie!!!! I didn't know whether to laugh or cry... Aunty Kiew signaled for me to get some food. So, I ran home to get a can of wet food, Joanie's favourite, and her food bowl. I brought the carrier too with the hope we might be able to catch her and take her home.



Joanie looking at us.

Aunty Kiew was standing so, so close to Joanie, and yet she could not catch her. I handed over the can of food to Aunty Kiew through Hong Yee. I was afraid Joanie might associate me with "those nasty pills she pops down my throat each morning", so I did not want to frighten her away. Aunty Kiew put some food on the grass, and Joanie happily ate it.

How I wished I could just go over and hug Joanie and hold her in my arms again. How I've missed Joanie.... But I knew I should not approach her. I called her softly from afar. That was such a heart-wrenching experience...



Stay, Joanie, please stay...

After Joanie finished eating, Aunty Kiew tried to approach her slowly, but she quickly went inside the drain. Hong Yee and I blocked off the drain on one end, while Aunty Kiew stood guard on the other end. Joanie was right there, inside the drain. I was determined to catch her then. No way is she going to escape from us again.

But Aunty Kiew suddenly got up to stretch herself and in one split second, Joanie ran right past her. Joanie was gone! Again!!

Later, we brought Suki too, hoping to entice her out. Suki mewed and mewed, but Joanie would not come out. We then went back to my house, and later we were out again, to the same place, and Aunty Kiew used her cat call. Joanie came out again, but Aunty Kiew could not catch her.

We dared not be too aggressive in trying to catch her as that would only frighten her away. You can never catch a cat using force, Aunty Kiew said. And she is absolutely right. Aunty Kiew had been feeding Joanie for two years, so Joanie would respond to her familiar cat call.



Sigh...where is she??

Well, we did not manage to catch Joanie, but at least we know she is alright, and we even managed to give her a meal. For that, I am relieved and thankful.

I went out again in the evening, with a can of sardines, to the exact spot where Joanie had come out from this morning. I looked inside the drain on both sides, but she was not there. I brought a little bowl and left some sardines there with the hope that she might come out to eat. Then, I went to the back alley to check. This evening, the neighbourhood cats (strays as well as home pets) had all come out for their evening sojourn. So, I ended up giving them a treat of sardines instead! I must have fed about ten cats in all, and, after the treat, all of them followed me, like an entourage of cats tailing behind me. It must have been a really comical sight.

I then went back to where I had left the bowl of sardines for Joanie. I found two white cats (with collars) happily licking up the last traces of sardines from the bowl! Well, never mind. At least I got to give these cats a treat.

I can only hope that Joanie has decided to live in that drain, as long as she is safe. It will be a bonus too, if I get to feed her every day. I'll be thankful for these little blessings in life – knowing that she is safe and sound.

August 26, 2009

I had a totally mad day today and have been on my feet from morning till now, giving a public talk and sending a cat for spaying at our panel vet. Hong Yee had brought Aunty Kiew again, and, before I reached home, Aunty Kiew had already spotted Joanie. This time she was on my road but one block down. According to Aunty Kiew, Joanie saw her, and ran off.

We looked around further, but it started to rain. Quite heavily too. Aunty Kiew left some kibbles but I know the neighbourhood cats would quickly munch it all off.

I guess (and hope) Joanie would be able to find food, somehow. There are lots of kind people in my neighbourhood, and some houses leave food out for the stray cats.

September 5, 2009

Every single day, I have been making at least one trip down the alleys and the road at the back, going to the spots where we had sighted Joanie, and leaving food in many spots. I have not seen Joanie ever since.

I have seen many, many stray cats. Some are even home pets. And I feed them. Each time, when any cat looks into my eyes, I automatically ask, "Have you seen Joanie?". There is even a Jack Russell in one of the corner houses, and he knows me pretty well by now. "Have you seen Joanie?", I would ask him, too.

I do my rounds and always end up in that special spot where Aunty Kiew managed to feed Joanie when Hong Yee and she came. I leave some food there. Always. Of course the food would be eaten, probably by other cats. But who knows...



Feeding the strays in the alley.



That special spot.

November 13, 2009

I have just completed writing Joanie's story. It is way past midnight. I miss Joanie very much, and I think of her often. But I have learnt to let go.

I do not know where you are, Joanie. Sometimes, I'd like to think that you are just down the road somewhere, living happily by yourself. I hope you have found your space. Sometimes, my imagination runs wild, and all kinds of fearful thoughts fill my mind, and I quickly brush them off since thinking negatively does not help at all.

Whenever I drive alone and I play Josh Groban's songs, I can feel your presence in the car with me. When I take a walk in the neighbourhood, I remember very vividly the last time I saw you. Are you watching me from somewhere, Joanie?

You were with me for hardly a month, yet you left a deep impact in my heart. I will never forget your indomitable fighting spirit. You taught me that with hope and love many things are possible, and we *can* defy the odds.

Be happy, be safe and be free, Joanie.

I do keep a glimmer of hope that perhaps one day, we shall meet again...



*You've brought me so much joy, Joanie.
I will never forget you.*

My Piggy-Vix

The true harvest of my life is intangible - a little star dust caught, a portion of the rainbow I have clutched. – Henry David Thoreau

This is the story of a pygmy cat, Vixey, who survived brain trauma, and subsequently suffered from physical retardation and growth hormone deficiency leading to her eventual passing. But, despite all her shortcomings, in the span of just two years, Vixey helped nurse little rescued kittens, shared her space with another adult female cat, and brought tremendous joy to my life.

October 2007

It was Sunday evening. Ming-Yi received a call from her friend, Tsu Ming, who lives near the playground saying that he had found two kittens near the rubbish heap beside the playground, and asking if we could we go over and see what could be done.

Ming-Yi and I went over and true enough, two tiny balls of fur were right there beside a heap of rubbish. One was a grey tabby and the other, a jet black kitten. The grey tabby was spitting at us, obviously protecting the black one, who seemed very quiet and docile.

I squatted down and approached them, and the grey one became even more aggressive. Wow...heroic spirit in such a small little guy, I thought.

“What are we going to do with them?”, Tsu Ming asked.

I was not quite sure at that point, but I sure knew we could not possibly leave them there. It was the monsoon season and there were torrential rains every evening. The rain would sweep the two little ones away.

I stopped every person who passed by and asked if they would like to adopt the kittens, but everyone shook their heads.

We’ll bring them home then, I told Ming-Yi.



The little Oh Cho Mau.

So, that’s how Little Chief (later renamed Wii) and Vixey came to live with us. Both kittens were playful and active, as kittens ought to be. Vixey (the black one) was particularly active and very adventurous. She was the girl. Aha, a tomboy?

I called Vixey “Oh Cho Mau” (messy little cat, in Cantonese) because she had an incredibly ravenous appetite as well and would bury her whole face in her food and come out looking like...well, an “Oh Cho Mau”!



Vixey's favourite spot in the house.

One thing I noticed about Vixey was that she loved hot places, but it must be electrical in nature. She loved to sleep hugging electrical adaptors or at her favourite spot in the house, on top of our hi-fi player. I did not pay much attention to this, though. We merely joked that she must have been an electrical engineer in a previous life.

All was well with the two kittens until after eleven days. On that fateful evening, I heard a scream in the kitchen. I rushed in and saw thick blood spurting out from Vixey's nostrils. Bobby was right beside her, trying to help. I scooped Vixey up, put her in a litter box and rushed her to the vet's.

At the vet's, they put an oxygen mask on her and waited for the senior vet, Dr Vijay, to determine what was wrong with Vixey. Dr Vijay listened to her chest and did not detect any puncture of the lungs. He then put her on the floor, and she could only turn to the right. Even when put against the wall, she could not turn to her left at all. Dr Vijay surmised it was brain trauma, and the only way to treat a kitten this young would be to put her on steroid drips. The other alternative would be to bore a hole in her skull and drain the fluids out, but this procedure would most probably kill her because she was just too tiny.

I asked if I should send Vixey for 24 hour monitoring since her condition was so critical, and I was told that I could, if I wanted to. But the only 24-hour pet hospital was in downtown Kuala Lumpur and it was peak-hour jam in the evening. I then decided I would let Vixey be treated at Dr Vijay's clinic, and place my entire trust in his judgment and expertise.

Vixey was boarded there for the night and put on drips. Dr Vijay told me that he would give her three days to show "some signs of improvement". If she did not, he suggested that she be put down. Dr Vijay believes that animals should not be made to suffer needlessly, so euthanasia is an option for him. We differ in our opinions on this issue, but we respect each other for our beliefs.

I went back feeling very, very sad. I could never ever opt to put any animal down. I was determined that even if Vixey could only eat, sleep, urinate and defecate, I would bring her home and nurse her for life. For me, I cannot make the decision of putting an animal down without its consent. How can I be sure it won't recover one day? Medical science is sometimes not conclusively accurate.

However, having said that, I truly empathise with people who have to make the painful decision of consenting to euthanasia for animals that are experiencing excruciating suffering where death is imminently near and certain. I prayed I would not have to make this painful decision in three days' time.

That night, my heart was entirely with Vixey. I wondered how she was coping. I hoped she was not in any pain at all. Get well, Vixey. Please get well. Dr Vijay had told me that kittens have a remarkable ability to recover because they are still growing.

The next morning, I went to the clinic, and there was Vixey with the drip catheter stuck in her little paw. She lay there, so lifeless. I stayed with Vixey for hours until evening. I brought my little prayer book and chanted healing verses for her while my tears flowed continuously. So much suffering in

one so young. Why?? It must be karma. Accept it and do your best, I told myself. Don't ask questions which have no answers. When I left the clinic in the evening, Vixey still lay paralysed and comatose.

The next day, my son, Jia-Wen, and I went to see Vixey first thing in the morning. When we approached her cage, we saw her wagging her tail! She was awake and she recognised us! We were overjoyed. We thought this was what Dr Vijay would qualify as an "improvement". However, the vet in attendance explained it was not so. They needed more significant indications. One good sign was that Vixey was still eating. We had to syringe in the wet food, but she ate it all up. My little Oh Cho Mau still had her voracious appetite!



When is my sister coming home?

I went back and brought Wii to see his sister. Wii huddled up to Vixey and lay beside her. Remember Wii had protected Vixey at the time we found them on the rubbish heap?

That night, we kept Wii company. Poor little Wii...he was very lonely without Vixey.

As I washed the cats' feeding bowls, I picked up Vixey's bowl and wondered if I should keep it away. Then, I stopped myself. No, I am leaving your bowl here, together with the rest, Vixey. You get well and come home, and be my Oh Cho Mau again.

Day Three was D-Day and I went to the clinic with trepidation in my heart. That day was the day Dr Vijay would decide if Vixey had shown sufficient "significant improvement". In any case, I had already decided I would bring Vixey home with me, come what may. Absolutely no euthanasia.

When I saw Vixey, my heart sank completely. She seemed very weak. Still, I sat beside her cage, and chanted for her. Ming-Yi had come along too, having just returned for the weekend from university.

By late afternoon, Dr Vijay came up and said to me, "You can take Vixey home." What?? According to him, Vixey *had* shown the "clinical improvements" that he wanted to see, and I could take her home! Wow...I could not believe my ears! Vixey could go home!

I rushed home, got all my chanting CDs out and prepared her cage and basket. "Vixey's coming home!!", I told all my cats.

I brought Vixey home that evening and Wii was very happy to see his little sister again. We put Vixey in the cage, but she could even walk out to the newspapers to urinate.

That night, Wii slept next to Vixey.



I'll look after you, Vixey.

Vixey soon regained her health, very slowly. Everyone at home pampered her to the fullest.



Vixey, Wii and me.



Vixey lying on Bobby.

We gave her lots of baskets. And each basket would be decorated with flowers.



Vixey, her baskets and her flowers.

May 31, 2008

I received an SOS from a friend who lived nearby. She had just rescued a little kitten from the drain behind her house, and she could not look after him. I emailed all my animal-loving friends, but none of them could foster the kitten either.

So, my husband drove me over, and we brought the little one back.

I called him "Indy", after the legendary hero, Indiana Jones. A survivor's name.

Within days, Indy became very sick. I took him to the vet and the poor thing was discovered to be



Indy, when first rescued.

suffering from an eye, ear and bladder infection, which was very critical. His eye infection was so bad that big blobs of pus oozed out when the eye was pressed. His ear infection was so bad his head slanted to one side, and he could only move in anti-clockwise circles. His bladder infection was the worst. When it was pressed, it excreted mucus, not urine. Dr Vijay could only shake his head in disbelief.



Indy, hanging on, but ever determined to get well.

Indy was given antibiotics and his life hung by a thread for about a week. For the first few days, he could not even move, and the only sign of life in him was his soft breathing

But the little tyke really lived up to his name and recovered. He had a fighting spirit which I truly admired in one so small. We saw how he struggled to bend to the right side when his head was slanted to the left. Indy had unbelievable spirit!

By then, Vixey was about eight months old. During the first few months, she did not improve much. She spent all her time with me, in *our* room. She

hardly ever ventured out of the room except to use the bathroom or to eat in the kitchen. Her life pretty much centred around our room, the kitchen and the bathroom. We would bring her to the living room but she would quickly run back to our room at the back.

As time passed, she gradually improved. There was life in her again. She started playing with us in her own special ways. When I came home from work, she would always be out in the living room waiting for me to come through the door. But the moment she saw me, she would scuttle back to the room, waiting for me to run after her. She also trotted upstairs at times. We noticed a few special things about Vixey. She seldom moved, but, when she did, she moved at lightning speed. "Now you see me, now you don't." But she hardly played with the rest of the cats – her socialisation was with us. There seemed to be a certain "respect" accorded to her by the other cats. None of them dared to bully her.

We also noticed she had a very powerful and almost authoritative stare. We joked saying that Vixey was like Yoda. All she needed was to stare, and she would get what she wanted. Indeed, Vixey did resemble the Jedi master, Yoda. Due to her underdeveloped growth, she had a rather flat face, and she remained very small-sized.

Every morning, Vixey would greet me, sometimes on the landing of the stairs, sometimes at the foot. I looked forward to this very much.

Coincidentally, one of the soft toys we gave her was a black pig my father had bought Ming-Yi. Vixey resembled this black pig in many ways, hence, I gave her the nickname "Piggy-Vix".

We noticed that right from the time we brought her home, Vixey always looked for really hot places to lie on. She started with the hi-fi set, and when she grew too big to squeeze into that space, she went for the electrical adaptors. From



Piggy-Vix and the soft toy.

those, she graduated to the modem-router. However, she only liked electrical “hot spots”. She never liked the rubber hot water bottle. The vet explained that she needed heat because she was probably suffering from hypothyroidism. But why electrical heat – that, we didn’t know.



Babysitter to Indy.

It was very touching watching Vixey take Indy under her wing, and look after him. Indy took to Vixey very naturally and looked upon her as an older sister.

Vixey even cheered Indy on when he started walking after recovering from his illnesses.

When Indy joined the family, things changed for Vixey. In Indy, she found a purpose for life. Vixey took it upon herself to train and look after Indy. She would take Indy to the bathroom to defecate and urinate, and bring Indy every morning to the kitchen to the food and water bowls. Vixey became Indy’s nurse and nanny.



Bobby, Indy, Kimba and Vixey.



Come on, Indy. You can do it!



Cow, Bobby, Bunny, Vixey, Tiger and me.

July 11, 2008

It was quite late at night when I told Ming-Yi I thought we should fold up and keep the cage since it looked like we would not be fostering any kittens anymore. Indy was already about three months old now and was free to roam in the house.

So we folded the cage neatly and placed it in the storeroom. As soon as we had done that, we heard a shriek in the back alley. I opened the back gate and out came a blue-point kitten from the drain, and before I knew it, he had rushed straight into my arms.

I instinctively brought him into the house, and noticed he was covered with fleas. Ming-Yi and I bathed and dried him. That was how we ended up with Kimba, who became best of friends with Indy. The two got on like a house on fire, very much like twin brothers. (For the full story, please read *Indy Jones and the Four Pillars of Kindness*).

Vixey welcomed Kimba to live in her room, just as she had done with Indy. Again, Vixey took it upon herself to train Kimba to eat in the kitchen and use the bathroom. Vixey was the big sister again.



He ain't heavy, he's my brother.

The relationship between Indy and Kimba was unbelievably close. They would play all day, dashing around the house, getting into mischief and when tired, both would literally “drop dead” and sleep side by side. It was pure joy watching them.

Besides being Indy's new-found friend, Kimba shared a very special bond with me as well. I am amazed until today, how Kimba trusted me enough to run straight into my arms on the night we took him in, how he lay on my lap the next day when I took him to the vet's, and how he chose to sleep with me on the bed every night. I believed Kimba had come to me with a strong karmic link.



Hey, Kimba...



Kimba accompanying me as I prepare dinner.

August 17, 2008

I received another distress call that afternoon. A lady had found two kittens in a box, abandoned by the roadside. She was a rescuer herself, but due to some reasons, she did not want to pick them up. By the time I reached the place, the kittens had been there for hours already. They were motionless and dehydrated.

So, I did the needful and brought them home, and Creamie and Crackers joined our family. Again, Vixey welcomed them into her room. By now, Vixey must have got used to her role as nanny in the house.



Creamie and Crackers.



The room became a nursery again, with the arrival of the latest two kittens.

September 2, 2008

It was after dinner, and I was taking the rubbish out to the bin when Kimba followed me out. He normally did not do that, but that night, he decided he should.

I watched Kimba as he crossed the road over to the other side. Just then, a neighbour's car drove towards Kimba's direction. The car was very slow, and I was sure Kimba had already crossed over safely.

To my horror, after the car had driven past, I saw Kimba's body jerking on the road with thick blood spurting out from his mouth.

I lost Kimba that night, in a very tragic and unexpected accident.

Indy became very forlorn after that – he had lost his best friend and playmate. However, very quickly soon after, he decided to play the role of big brother to Creamie and Crackers. Indy would lick and clean the kittens several times a day. He stopped dashing all over the house as he used to, when Kimba was with him.

Instead of Vixey becoming the nanny to these two, Indy took over that role.



Big brother Indy.



This is the water bowl.



Bye now, little ones...be good.

With Kimba's tragic accident, I realised a linked house was no place to keep so many cats, so I made the painful decision of putting up Creamie and Crackers for adoption.

The night the adopter came to take the two little ones, Indy ran upstairs to hide. It seemed to me he knew what was going on.

After the adopter left, Vixey and Indy went out to the porch and sat under the night sky. I sat with them, and in the solitude of the night, we were together in our thoughts.

Within a short span of time, we saw Kimba, Creamie and Crackers come and go. Indy was alone with Vixey again. I believe the two of them shared a very special bond.



Me and my big sister.

December 2008

Sometime soon after Creamie and Crackers had left, Vixey began to develop constipation problems. I tried various oral laxatives. They would work for a while, and soon after her problem would return. After a few weeks, I had to resort to bringing her to the clinic for an enema. Vixey looked very weak and her tail was totally limp.

Vixey's first enema was a difficult one. The enemas could not make her defecate, and the vet had to manually evacuate her bowels. The vet even said she was probably losing the mobility in her lower half and might have to depend on enemas for life. Megacolon had already set in. This is the situation where the colon has distended so badly that peristalsis is no longer possible. Vixey was now suffering from chronic constipation. All these frightened me. How was I going to cope with Vixey's medical needs?

After the enema, Vixey simply refused to eat. I was very worried about her and did not quite know what to do. She was already having megacolon and eating problems. What next? When Vixey first had brain trauma, Dr Vijay had already told me that we would never quite know the extent of damage the brain trauma had caused. Growth hormone deficiency would be one of the consequences. Hence, her growth would be retarded and her organs underdeveloped, and they would degenerate faster than a normal cat's.

I knew Vixey was starting to degenerate and medical problems would surface. I was very worried I would not be able to help her should her condition take a turn for the worst. I was also still trying to come to terms with Kimba's tragic death. The emotional turmoil took a heavy toll on me, and I went into severe depression.

April 2009

Vixey's constipation problems did not improve. I had to give her laxatives every few days, and soon I learnt to administer the enemas myself. Whenever I did the enemas for her, she would quickly run to the window, jump out into the garden and stay there. I believe she did not want to dirty our floor because she could not control her defecation. We were very touched at how considerate she was. Every few weeks, I would bring her to Dr Vijay for a full-scale enema to clear her bowels when my own home enemas failed.

During this time, I was recommended to a lady who does physiotherapy on animals. There was a chance that massage might help Vixey. I was game to try. So, I made an appointment and brought Vixey to her house in Petaling Jaya.

At the gate, we were greeted by no fewer than four huge dogs who barked very loudly. Vixey was in her basket and did not flinch at all. She was as cool as a cucumber, just like Yoda.

The physiotherapist showed me how to massage Vixey. She explained what the T-Touch Therapy was all about, how sometimes, certain parts of the body became "lazy" and stopped functioning. The role of touch therapy is to wake the body up so that it starts living again. Besides this, she also suggested that I might want to try BARF (Bones and Raw Food) for Vixey. It might help since it is more natural and wholesome.

That afternoon, after coming home from the first physiotherapy massage, Vixey defecated all by herself! Poo, glorious poo!!

I massaged Vixey myself at home, fed her raw food (which she liked) and brought her to the physiotherapist for another massage as well, but it did not seem to work for her anymore after that. That was the rather frustrating thing about Vixey's condition. Her body would respond positively to every new treatment, but it would not last. When a friend suggested probiotics, I tried that too. It would work for a few weeks, then it was back to square one.

I finally decided to bring Vixey for a full medical check-up at the animal hospital in Kuala Lumpur. X-rays and blood tests were done, and the results showed spinal chord injury in the area that controlled urination and defecation (that explains her constipation problems), and her kidneys and liver were also not functioning well. The senior vet who attended to Vixey said she was a "pygmy cat" (a dwarf), and he said they usually have short lives because the organs are all underdeveloped and would degenerate quickly. The X-rays also showed bone chips in her gut, and the vet told me I should never give raw food to Vixey. That's another dilemma...just what should I feed Vixey now?

The vet gave Vixey a warm water enema, but it did not work. Subsequently, I had to bring her back for two consecutive days before they finally managed to get her to defecate. Vixey was then put on Folic Acid and Neurobion, as supplements for her nerves.

With the new medications, Vixey seemed to improve. Her otherwise dull and lifeless eyes began to glow. We also noticed that her fur took on a very healthy shine. She could also defecate all by herself, and the need for enemas reduced. I remember how I would look forward to seeing her faeces in the bathroom every day. However, this lasted for about two months only. Then, it was back to square one again.

Vixey became more quiet and withdrawn. She would sleep most of the time, but she never failed to welcome me home from work and first thing every morning when I went downstairs. But, there was no more playing catch. However, her eyes were still shining very brightly and her fur, glowing. That gave us hope.

Despite the fact that Vixey was diagnosed to be "mentally and physically retarded" by the vet in Kuala Lumpur, I knew for a fact that her mental faculties were still very strong. Vixey could communicate with us. She could make us understand what she wanted. For example, she was very fussy about drinking only fresh water, and, when she wanted this, she would just go to the water bowl, stand there and look. Somehow, we would sense she was there, and one of us would walk over and change her water for her. She did the same thing with fresh kibbles (straight from the container). All she needed was to *look*. And she would get what she asked for! Yoda power!



Two bright beautiful eyes, and a healthy, shiny coat.



Ming-Yi feeding Vixey her medicines.

June 2009

Around this time, Indy suddenly fell very sick. We took him to the vet's, and he was suspected to have been infected with a blood parasite. Somehow, Indy seemed to want to recuperate in a quiet place, hence he went upstairs to our shrine room and slept there by himself. We brought food, water and a litter box up for him.



Indy and big sister, Vixey.

Vixey must have known Indy was sick, because we found her trudging upstairs (which by now, was a bit of a struggle for her) to visit Indy. We watched Vixey lick Indy all over. It was a very touching sight – the big sister looking after the little brother she had brought up.

Vixey had a heart of gold.

August 2009

Joanie was a stray cat who was suffering from obstructed labour when we rescued her. Against all odds, she survived a high-risk surgery. No one could look after her, so I brought her home. Again, Vixey rose to the occasion and shared her room with Joanie.

Soon, little Suki came to live with us. Suki was only two weeks old, also rescued from the drain. We decided to pair Joanie with Suki in the hope that a mother-daughter bond might be established. Our plan worked and Joanie and Suki became very comfortable with each other.

Vixey opened her hearts to both of them and even allowed them to use her many “bungalows” (the cardboard boxes which she loved to sit and sleep in). They would barge into her bungalows while she was sleeping, and Vixey would just walk out and let them have it without ever so much as a protest hiss.

She was truly a Heart-of-Gold. She rose above common feline pettiness.

About twenty days after having been nursed back to health, Joanie ran away. Being a feral cat, she probably decided she was well enough to go back to the street. Suki lost a mother-figure, and she sought comfort from Vixey.

Vixey's favourite spot in the house was the modem-router. This was perhaps the hottest spot in the house, and she lay there all day. I would be doing my work on my laptop for hours, and Vixey became my loyal companion. I was never alone. Vixey was always there with me.



Suki, eating with Vixey.



Vixey allowed Suki to climb all over her.



Suki stayed close to Vixey all the time.

September 2009

By now, Vixey's condition was deteriorating. The oral laxatives did not work anymore and I had to give her an enema almost every four days or so. When this failed, off we went to the vet's, and it would be a whole day affair there. Sometimes it would take two or three enemas before we managed to clear her bowels.

Very often, I would help Dr Vijay handle Vixey. It pained me to see how hard it was to get her faeces out. It must have been a very stressful process for her.

Although Vixey was not in the best of health, she was still eating quite well. She was on a special diet, Hill's Science KD, specially formulated for the kidneys. However, her favourite food was bread and buns. The moment she heard the familiar sound of the plastic wrapper, she would appear from nowhere and wait to be fed. Nobody gets to eat bread or buns in the house without giving a tiny bit to Vixey.



May I have some, please?

Vixey's Final Days

October 1, 2009

About one week ago, I decided to bring Vixey to another vet. I was already at my wits' end, not knowing what to do for Vixey. A blood test was taken and the results showed elevated creatinine and urea levels. This indicated a kidney problem, though not critical. The vet recommended a highly-effective non-toxic kidney supplement from France. I had heard of this supplement before, and my internet search revealed an excellent track record in boosting kidney recovery. So, I bought a bottle and started Vixey on it.

Vixey reacted very well to the supplement for the next two days. She could even defecate on her own, and I was very encouraged. However, on the third day of taking this supplement, Vixey started losing her appetite. I thought it was a healing crisis, so I thought I should give it a day or two. The next day, she refused to eat again, and showed absolutely no interest even in sardines or Suki's food (which she loved). I had to force-feed her.

This morning something very worrying happened. Vixey could not walk in a straight line anymore. It was as though she was in a drunken stupor. She had completely lost her taste for food too. She only drank water.

Suki knew something was wrong, and accompanied Vixey everywhere, even licking her all over.



Suki eating up Vixey's food.



Suki accompanying Vixey as she drinks water.

I rushed Vixey to Dr Vijay immediately after work at 12noon. According to Dr Vijay, Vixey has a neurological problem. Something is definitely affecting her brain because she cannot walk properly. Ataxia has set in.

Dr Vijay pressed her bladder to express some urine, and, even before he could collect any sample, Vixey had emptied her bladder entirely. He quickly syringed up the urine and ran a urine analysis. Her urine was turbid, and this clearly indicated a bladder infection and the urine test confirmed it.

A blood test has to be done on her kidneys and liver, so I have made an appointment for Vixey at another clinic in Puchong which has the machine that can produce instant results.

Before we left the clinic, Dr Vijay reminded me that we already knew Vixey has a neurological problem when she had the brain trauma two years ago. Perhaps that problem is acting up now. It was a matter of time. From the tone of his voice, I sensed he was not expecting any good news. I knew he was indirectly telling me to be prepared for the worst.

Whenever I bring Vixey to Dr Vijay (which is quite often), he has always told me, half jokingly, that I had "interfered with nature" when I rescued Vixey from the rubbish heap and again, when I got her treated for brain trauma. We have been twice lucky. I pray we will be lucky again.

As I drove Vixey to Puchong this afternoon, I reflected on all the good things Vixey had done in the last year. Despite all her health problems and her physical limitations, she helped me look after Indy, Kimba, Creamie & Crackers and, now, Suki.

My fears were confirmed after the blood test in Puchong. Her creatinine and urea readings have both shot up really high. And a blood smear confirms the presence of a bad infection. The prognosis is that Vixey now has a kidney and bladder infection, which again, is not "normal" in a cat. Everything "abnormal" seems to happen to Vixey, because we just do not know what neurological problems she has. The bottom line is, Vixey was never a "normal" cat.

Based on the recommendations of the two vets, the best possible treatment for Vixey is to put her on IV-drips with antibiotics to combat the infection.

It was tough deciding where to board her for the IV-drips. Each clinic has its pros, but I finally decided to board her near me, with her regular vet, Dr Vijay, who knows her entire medical history through and through. I will also be able to visit Vixey as often as I like, and spend time with her.

Dr Vijay packed me off (in good faith) when they were preparing Vixey for the IV-drip because he knew it would be too stressful for me to watch and hear. He would try his utmost not to put Vixey under a sedative because any form of drug is bad for her. I hoped Vixey won't struggle too much.

I drove back to the clinic as soon as the IV-drips were inserted. Vixey was lying on a hot water bottle which was placed in her basket. Whenever Vixey was at the clinic, even for the enemas, the vets always put the entire basket into the cage. They knew she loves that basket.

The moment Vixey saw me, she complained by grumbling! The IV-drip must be really very uncomfortable. However, the vet said she did not put up any fight when he inserted the drip. She was totally cooperative. Good girl, Vix.

I stayed with Vixey for almost two hours until closing time.

Dr Vijay explained that the immediate treatment is to put her on a water drip to flush out all the toxins from her kidneys and bladder. Hence, she is going to pee a lot.



My brave little Piggy-Vix

And she did while I was there.

I had brought her favourite Cookie Monster shawl. When Vixey saw it, she immediately came out of the basket to lie on Cookie.

Vix was very responsive as I chanted positive healing prayers to her. Her tail moved in perfect rhythm to the chanting. She even made little Vixey-noises when I spoke to her. I also left a small little battery-operated prayer device in her cage so that there would be continuous chanting for her.



Vix on Cookie Monster.

While I was there, she must have wet herself three times, and, each time, she would shuffle about and move to a dry place. I had to change her towels for her. Vixey is very fussy about cleanliness.

Finally, nothing beats sleeping inside her security basket.

Get well soon, Vixey. I'll come see you tomorrow.

As I was about to leave the clinic, Dr Vijay explained that kidneys are non-generative. It is rather strange how Vixey contracted this kidney infection all of a sudden, especially when I had just started her on the supplement which has an excellent track record of boosting kidney recovery. Vixey's condition is not severely critical, but it is alarming. We hope and pray that this treatment will work, and she will recover soon.



Get well soon, Vixey. I'll come see you tomorrow.

October 2, 2009

Today, my husband and I brought Suki and Indy to visit Vixey. Suki and Indy were also due for vaccination, so it was two things at one go.

Indy, being such a homebody, was very nervous and completely stressed out even in the short car ride (hardly 1 km). He did not dare to even come out of the carrier, so we held the carrier close to Vixey. The moment Vixey saw Indy, she got excited and moved towards him.



Hi, Indy...



Suki happily stayed in the cage with Vixey.

Vixey was very happy to see Indy and Suki. She made little Vixey-noises.

Later, it was feeding time for Vixey. The vets feed her four times a day. For now, it's force-feeding because Vixey still refuses to eat. According to Dr Vijay, Vixey must eat, with this kidney ailment. It's the only way to sustain her.

So we force-fed Vixey, and she put up a fight, as usual. The vet in attendance joked that it is still "good" that she can fight. It seemed last night, Vixey bit a hole in the plastic tubing of the drip, so this morning, it had to be changed. I helped restrain her while the vet changed the plastic tubing but I wasn't strong enough to hold her down, so another vet had to be called in!

I went to visit Vixey again at noon. This time, she was grumbling again, and she even shook her paw (which had the drip) in a clear sign of protest! And made a lot of noise.

We won't know if the treatment is effective until another blood test is taken three days from yesterday.

Meanwhile, we can only pray and hope for the best.

Dr Vijay explained that upon recovery, I might have to learn how to give her "dialysis" in the form of a subcutaneous injection of fluids.

Well, one day at a time....

Get well soon, Vixey, and please eat your food.

As I sat on the floor next to her cage, I remembered doing exactly the same thing two years ago when little Vixey had the brain trauma and was on the drip for three days. At that time, she was almost "comatose". It was really touch and go, but she pulled through.



I don't like this thing in my paw!

October 3, 2009

How's Vixey doing today, I asked Dr Vijay as I arrived at the clinic today.



Ok, that's better...fresh water.

Well, according to Dr Vijay, the clinical signs are good. She is eating, but still has to be force-fed.

In her typical style, when she saw me, she went to her water bowl, sat in front of it, and looked. I knew she wanted fresh water.

I spoke to Dr Vijay, and he said I could probably take Vixey for a blood test on Monday. If the readings come down, we can then plan on the next course of action – I could take her home, and maintain her on the subcutaneous fluids.

I spent as long as I could with Vixey this evening since the clinic will be closed tomorrow (but the vets will be coming in to feed the animals).

Vixey was her usual self, complaining about the discomfort of the drip. While I was there, I must have changed her nappies at least four times. She wets herself a lot because of the drip, and that's a good thing, because the whole idea is to flush out the toxins from her kidneys with water. The urine also looks clearer now, but again, we cannot be sure.

Judging from her clinical signs, she ought to be ready for a blood test on Monday afternoon. From there, we would decide on the next course of action.

I stayed with Vixey until closing time. Before I left, I told her I will not be able to see her tomorrow since it is Sunday, but the vets will come in and check on her.

"I'll see you on Monday, Vix. You get well soon, ok?"

October 4, 2009

I had to give a public talk this morning. When my talk ended, there was a missed call and a voicemail on my phone.

It was from Dr Vijay. It seemed Vixey had taken a turn for the worse this morning. Significantly, too.

I must have called Dr Vijay at least four times before I finally got him on the phone.

He explained that Vixey's neurological signs this morning were five times worse than what it was when I first brought her in. She was displaying severe signs of ataxia again (lack of coordination in her movements), that meant something had gone very wrong with her brain. Dr Vijay said he had given Vixey medication to address that problem in the morning. From then, it was just wait-and-see.

I asked if there was anything else I could do for Vixey, and he said there actually wasn't. Kidney failure can lead to these neurological signs. Her kidneys were probably failing.

But the strange thing was that Vixey was doing well on the treatment and had shown good improvement. We were already planning on bringing her for a blood test on Monday.

But with Vixey, the strangest things could happen.

I was in shock, but I had to think of what to do. My heart feared the worst was going to happen soon. So I decided to ask Dr Vijay to let me transfer Vixey to the hospital in Petaling Jaya where I could stay with her today (it is open on Sundays). Dr Vijay agreed and I drove to the clinic immediately.

I rushed upstairs to Vixey's cage and found her lying motionless, with some white froth at her mouth.

I ran down and called Dr Vijay. He rushed up with me and brought Vixey out onto the table. He checked her heart.

"I'm so sorry," he said.

Vixey was gone.

I cried my heart out, and, in between sobs, I told Dr Vijay I did not want Vixey to go alone. I knew her end was very near, but I wanted to be with her when she went. Now, she was gone.

Dr Vijay consoled me and told me that he doubted that Vixey had much mental consciousness even when he saw her this morning. Her ataxia was already very bad, and her eyes were "bobbing". He said Vixey would not have even recognised me this morning.

So, I saw her for the very last time last night when she was still very mentally alert and appeared to be getting well.

We always console ourselves that our loved ones want us to see them well before they leave us. They do not want us to see them suffering because that would make us very sad. I consoled myself that Vixey did that for me. Vixey did not want me to be sad. Always so considerate, right up till the very end.

Dr Vijay left me alone to be with Vixey.

I hugged Vixey and held her for a long time. I apologised for not being there with her in her last hours, and I thanked her for all the joys she had brought into my life.

Although I believe that rebirth is immediate, that once the spirit leaves this body, it is already reborn in the next, but we just cannot help feeling that the spirit is still around us when the body is still there. So, we still want to say our final goodbyes.

Dr Vijay finally came up and gave me a cushioned basket to bring Vixey home. I asked for a contact to arrange for Vixey's cremation and was given the number of Mr James Kho of Pet Memorial Services.



You're home now, Vixey.

I drove home with Vixey, and carried her into the house. I brought Vixey back to our room and laid her next to her favourite hot spot – her modem-router. This is my room as well as Vixey's. For the last two years, Vixey had spent a great deal of time with me here in this room.

All my friends who follow my blog have been very concerned about Vixey, so I sat down at my laptop and wrote this posting. The title is "Vixey is in a better place now":

Dear Friends,

Vixey passed away this afternoon. Her kidneys must have failed, and caused the severe neurological deterioration this morning. She did not suffer any prolonged illness.

I want to express my thanks to everyone who has been praying for Vixey. Thank you so much for your kindness.

Vixey knows she was dearly loved by everyone who knew her, whether in person, or from her story in Pawprints, and the little episodes in this blog. She was truly a gutsy girl with a heart of gold.

Vixey is in a better place now.

I have arranged for Vixey's last rites this evening in Puchong Perdana's pet crematorium. My family and I, and all our pets, are now saying our goodbyes to Vixey, and wishing her a safe journey to a beautiful place where all beautiful people go to.

I placed Vixey in *our* room. All my books were written in this room. All my talks were prepared in this room. And Vixey had been my faithful companion all this time for two years. I spend many, many hours in this room each day. And whenever I looked away from my laptop, right there, on my left, would be Vixey, sitting on the modem-router, her favourite spot. And I'd call her, "Piggy-Wiggy!", and she would always, always respond with the wag of her little tail.

All the cats, and Mac and Bobby gathered around. They seemed to know what has happened as there is a melancholic air in the house. One by one, they came to see and sniff at Vixey. I put on the chanting CD, and I sat with Vixey at her favourite spot.



Vixey's brother, Wii.



Bunny saying goodbye.



Bobby was with us all the time

Suki did not quite know what was going on although we brought her to say thank you and goodbye to Vixey. Indy, on the other hand, was clearly upset when we brought him to see Vixey. He struggled to go away, so I let him be.

When Vixey was first hospitalised this round, I had wanted to have a photo taken with her in the house, but we did not have time. And I had told myself, Vixey would be coming home, and I would surely have a chance to take a photo with her.

This photo shows Vixey at the clinic on the second day. I guess this is the last photo I will ever have of Vixey and me. You probably cannot see Vixey in the photo because I was wearing black pants. That's my little black beauty.

It was always difficult to take a photo with Vixey because she was never comfortable being carried. She liked being stroked and patted, but not being carried. Dr Vijay had said Vixey probably had some pain somewhere.

All this while, although I did not tell anyone, I was well aware (and I had been told by every vet I had brought Vixey to) that her lifespan would not be very long. Vixey had a growth hormone deficiency and her organs were all under-developed, thus they would fail sooner than the average cat's. I had already been told about this and was thus, in a way, always prepared for this to happen one day. I recalled what Dr Vijay said to me when Vixey was admitted four days ago, "Remember we knew this would happen? Just that we did not know when? Maybe it's happening now."



My last photo with Vixey.

I did not want to take his word for it because I wanted to keep my hopes high, but I was prepared for the worst. At the back of my mind, I also did not want Vixey to suffer from any prolonged agony of pain. If this is it, and if she has to go, I hoped nature would let her go peacefully and painlessly. But before that happened, I would definitely still do everything possible to save her.

Then, Vixey started improving after being put on drips and this gave everyone hope, including Dr Vijay. We were already talking about having her blood taken on Monday and assuming she could come home, and I would be learning how to give her her dialysis jabs myself.

But suddenly, everything took a turn for the worse this morning. Her neurological signs became very bad, her eyes starting "bobbing" and she was already mentally "off". I did not see all this as the clinic was closed today. Dr Vijay related this to me. Maybe it was for the best that I did not see all this. It would have shattered my heart.

So, that was what happened. It was time for Vixey to go, and she went quickly. I am comforted to know that there was no prolonged suffering. That would have been extremely heart-breaking for me.

When James Kho, the proprietor of Pet Memorial Service, finally arrived at our doorstep, it was time for Vixey's final journey.

I whispered to Vixey that we all had to go, and brought her to the car. My husband, Ming-Yi and I would bring Vixey to the crematorium.

As we were about to leave, Indy came...finally. Indy was no longer upset.



Indy saying goodbye to his big sister before we left for the crematorium

At the crematorium, we all said one final goodbye, and I placed Vixey back into her favourite basket (not the one you see in the photos). It is a smaller one. The one with her pink flowers.

Her cremation was accompanied by the soft chanting of the Metta Chant. That is the chanting that had been accompanying Vixey each time she got sick.

Animals have no religion, and they don't need to. But they understand and appreciate love and kindness. In return, they give us unconditional loyalty and faithfulness. Even when you scold them and reject them, they come right back to you and still love you. What better religion can there be than that?

I believe in immediate rebirth. It is comforting when you do, because you know the moment life ends in this body, it is already reborn in another. And what you see before you after life has expired is just

an "empty shell". The "spirit" (or consciousness, or soul, or whatever we wish to call it) is already reborn elsewhere.

My husband said Vixey's "tour" as a cat is meant to be a short one. She just came back as a cat to pay a karmic debt, and, now that she is done, she is off to a better realm. Vixey's going to be reborn as a lady of great substance, he said. And that's because she lived her (this) life as a lady of great substance.

We reflected on everything that reminded us about Vixey, the unforgettable things she did. Despite all her medical problems and her retardation, Vixey not only did not give us any behavioural problems, she was an extremely considerate cat. We would never forget how Vixey would always jump out to the garden (something she never does on ordinary days) and stay there because she did not want to dirty our floor after every enema. Vixey was the only cat who knew how to use the bathroom, and she trained all the kittens under her to use the bathroom too.

We talked about how Vixey had taken care of every kitten that I had brought home to nurse. Indy benefited most of all. Vixey practically brought Indy up, taught him how to use the bathroom and took him to the food and water bowls in the kitchen to eat. Vixey accepted every kitten that I brought back to nurse. She had never even once hissed at any of them though, for a cat, they were infringing into her territory. Kimba, Creamie & Crackers, Suki and even Joanie were all allowed to share her room and her space.

Vixey truly had a heart of gold.

She will be reborn as a person with a heart of gold, and she will do great things in life.

I will miss Vixey very, very much. It is going to be very hard for me in the next few weeks, but life has to go on.

And life *will* go on....

I will do two things in memory of Vixey. First, I am going to reprint Pawprints On My Heart so that the message of kindness to animals will reach out to more people. Second, AnimalCare will carry on with its work as usual. We have not rested a single day since we started and we will not rest. There are many animals out there who need our help.

My dear little Vixey,

*May you have a happy life now, in a much happier existence.
You did great things in this life, despite all your shortcomings,
You will do great things in your next life.*



*Vixey passed away on
World Animal Day,
October 4, 2009.*

I am grateful that one of the benefits that have come out of starting AnimalCare is that all of us who think and feel alike can come together on the same platform to share and care, not only for the

animals, but also for ourselves. We may come from different religious and cultural backgrounds, but as animal-lovers, we all belong to one universal religion - KINDNESS.

Isn't that enough?

October 5, 2009

It is Monday. Just three days ago, I thought at this time, right now, I would be bringing Vixey to Puchong to get her blood test done, and then she would be discharged and we would all go home. I even envisaged writing a posting entitled "Vixey's home!!", and we'd have happy photographs taken.

Instead, what I had to do today was something I had not expected at all. After work, I went to settle Vixey's bill at the clinic, and collect the little Tupperware of food I had brought for her while she was hospitalised. The vets at the clinic were very sympathetic and kind.

Then, I came home to wait for Vixey's ashes to be brought home to me.

James Kho, who runs Pet Memorial Service, just came, and here are Vixey's ashes.

I had not expected Vixey's ashes to arrive in such a beautifully-packaged little basket. I am very touched and thankful to James Kho.

Judging by my short experience since yesterday, from the time I called James whilst I was at the clinic to the cremation and until now, I can feel James' sincerity in this honourable work that he has chosen to do (pet cremation and burial). He is very tactful and empathetic, and there is absolutely no false pretence in him. None at all. He is very, very sincere. And most importantly, he loves animals, and he has chosen to do this simply because he cares, for the pets and their owners.



Fragrant chrysanthemums for little Piggy-Vix

The fragrance of these yellow chrysanthemums now permeates the air, and I know Vixey is in a better place already.

I am planning to clear a little spot in my small garden and bury Vixey's ashes there when Jia-Wen returns home on Wednesday. He has not said goodbye to Vixey yet. Our body is from nature; so from dust to dust, to nature we shall return.

But our spirit will be released when this body dies, and it will soar high if we have led a pure and useful life. And in this manner, the spirit soars up the spiral of existence until finally, it achieves total freedom from all pain and suffering.

Vixey is soaring high now.

And for those of us who are still here on Earth, it's time to get back to life, and do something useful for others...

October 5, 2009

The whole house has been unusually quiet today. It is so strange. When Vixey was around, all she did was to sit on the modem-router, and she hardly made any noise at all. Yet, her presence was felt very strongly.

Now that she is gone, suddenly, the house is so, so quiet and still. The air of melancholy is still prevalent. And Indy has been exceptionally quiet the whole day, too. Suki, on the other hand, has been acting a bit crankily.



It's just Suki and me now, in our room

I remember reading in an article that cats do grieve when one of them dies in the colony. They grieve, just as we do.

What I miss most of all is seeing Vixey on the modem-router as I do my work in the room. I also miss the mornings when I went downstairs and Vixey would be there at the foot of the stairs waiting for me without fail. Then, we would play our little hide-and-seek.

And I would certainly miss hearing Vixey jump from the router each time I changed the water bowl. Vixey loved fresh water. She only drank fresh water, and she taught Indy that too.

And, in all the emails I have written today, I still wrote about Vixey in the present tense. I had to make the effort to change all the verbs into the past tense.

October 6, 2009

I decided to come home in between work today because I wanted to spend some time alone, and also to let Suki out of the cage.

As I was reaching the house, I noticed the two cardboard boxes (which were Vixey's bungalows) which we had put outside the house were still there. Ever since Mac (our 13 year-old dog who refused to be toilet-trained) came inside the house, he has been pee-ing on all of Vixey's bungalows, and we have to change the boxes every two or three days. These two boxes were put outside because they were full of Mac's urine and I had thought of throwing them away and getting new ones for Vixey last week, before she was hospitalised. The garbage collectors had not taken them yet.

I looked at the boxes and sentimental emotions overcame me, so I decided I'd take them back into the garden. As I was taking them through the small gate, a yellow butterfly, with the exact same colour as the chrysanthemums on Vixey's ashes, fluttered past me, almost touching me, through the small gate. Its yellow colour shone and gleamed in the sun. It was so, so beautiful.

The beautiful little butterfly fluttered so very joyfully and happily about my garden. It circled around, went towards Cow, Bobby and Bunny, as though sprinkling little pixie dust on them. It was like a happy little fairy.

As I stood there watching the yellow butterfly, tears just kept streaming down my face, and I found myself saying, "Vixey, I know this is from you. You're in a happy place now, Vixey. Thank you for telling me." In that very moment, I experienced an undescrivable feeling of joy and beauty.

The yellow butterfly then flew into the neighbour's garden and, at that precise moment, a big golden dragonfly flew past, right before my eyes. It was so magnificent and there was an air of majesty about it. The yellow butterfly and golden dragonfly transformed my entire garden into...paradise. Yes, that would be the word I would use to describe what I just saw and felt. Paradise. Paradise in all its majestic splendour.

As I stood there in the sun, watching the beautiful little butterfly doing its dance of life and the handsome dragonfly flying past with majesty and confidence, my tears flowed. But those were then tears of joy. The moment felt like an eternity.

I have just witnessed a beautiful phenomenon and received a message from Vixey. Vixey wants me to know that she is in a very beautiful place now, and she is happy. Although the entire event lasted only minutes, I stood there completely entranced and enthralled by the splendour of it all.

It was sheer magic.

My mother had always said that after someone passes away, a butterfly will be the messenger to carry a message from the deceased. Normally it would be a white butterfly, they say. But Vixey has always been special. So she sent a bright yellow butterfly instead!

I can feel the message in the deepest part of my heart. It is telling me that life is beautiful, and life has transcended to a happier and higher plane of existence now. I can also feel that Vixey is telling me not to be sad anymore because she is free from suffering and she is very happy now.

Life continues. And life is beautiful.
It is a message of love and joy. And of life.
Vixey is now a great being, in a beautiful realm.

Vixey has just communicated with me. And I am so deeply touched. It is a feeling that cannot be described in words. It has to be felt.

Vixey, my little Piggy-Vix...thank you!

You're in paradise now, aren't you?



Vixey's messengers transformed my entire garden into a paradise!

This evening, I attended an interfaith workshop and met my teacher, Uncle Vijaya. I told him about the butterfly and dragonfly phenomenon, and he said, "Now, this I believe, I really do", and he told me about the little white butterfly at this mother-in-law's wake. Coming from such a wise, learned, scholarly and spiritual person, I am comforted to know that we share the same feeling about butterflies being messengers from our dearly departed. I was almost afraid that my learned friends would pooh-pooh at me (again) for being a sentimental old fool.

Sometimes we humans think we know everything about life, and that everything has to be scientifically-verified and proven to be true before we accept it. To this, I would just paraphrase Shakespeare who said, "There are more things in heaven and earth than is dreamt of in your philosophy." So, no, we think we are smart, but we don't know everything....not yet. Coming back to the butterfly, Uncle Vijaya said it's Vixey's way of telling me I have to let go and move on now because she is in a better place. So, I need not be sad anymore.

October 7, 2009

The yellow chrysanthemums that James Kho had put into the basket with Vixey's ashes were beginning to wither. A clear reminder of impermanence and how all of Nature, which includes us, will also wither away and die.

I almost never buy cut flowers because I prefer flowers to grow naturally...and die naturally, not prematurely by being cut, but today I decided to make an exception. Jia-Wen will be coming back, and I wanted Vixey's basket to have fresh flowers, so I stopped at the florist after work and bought two stalks of orange chrysanthemums.

Upon reaching home, I sprinkled water on the flowers, cut them short, and replaced the withered ones in the little basket. Till today, I have not opened the little urn yet. Somehow, it seemed disrespectful to do so, but today, I thought I would.



Suki sniffing at the fresh flowers

What I saw inside was again what I would call a labour of love. James Kho had made the effort of arranging Vixey's bones very neatly in the little urn.

I'm not ready to bury Vixey's ashes yet. I know she has sent the yellow butterfly and golden dragonfly to tell me to let go because she is in a better place, but I still miss Vixey very much.

No words can ever describe the special bond we shared - Vixey and me.



Vixey's bungalows are still in our garden.

As I sit in the garden with Indy, Suki and Bobby with Vixey's bungalows, I reflect on how much we can do to bring happiness to others each day of our lives. Life is uncertain. Cherish all your loved ones while you still can. Every moment is precious.

The yellow butterfly did not come today. But it's okay. I already know.

October 14, 2009

Indy has been behaving quite crankily for the past week. A few days ago, the neighbour called me and told me Indy had gone into their house and was too terrified to come out. I had to go over and carry

him back, and he was trembling. Poor Indy. He must be feeling the loss of Vixey. After all, it was Vixey who looked after him since he joined our family as a little kitten.



Indy never leaves Suki out of his sight, especially when Suki gets time out in the garden.

However, Indy is still ever watchful of naughty little Suki, following her every footstep. I am glad they find comfort in each other now.

Ming-Yi was saying the other day, Indy has lost two best friends already. Kimba passed away suddenly after living with us for hardly three months. And now, Vixey is gone. We really feel for Indy. It was quite obvious he missed Vixey very much the first few days after Vixey left us.

We will never know when we are taken away, so while we are still here, make every moment count. Kimba did. Vixey did. And now that they are gone, they leave behind happy memories that still touch us deeply. They are indeed...pawprints in our hearts.

My little Piggy-Vix, I know you are now somewhere in the universe, in a much happier and higher plane of existence. But I will always feel your presence with me. Most of all, I will always remember what a magnanimous "person" you were – you taught me that despite one's shortcomings, whatever these may be, one can still be a useful person and make a positive difference in the lives of others.

November 13, 2009

Our 13-year old dog, Mac, passed away two days ago, after a short illness. James Kho did the cremation for us, and Ming-Yi wanted Mac's ashes to be scattered in the sea.

It has been more than a month since Vixey passed away, and I felt it was time for her ashes to be scattered as well. So we arranged for James to come to the house to collect Vixey's ashes yesterday morning.

The scattering of the ashes was done in the afternoon, off the jetty of Port Klang. At about that time, there was a heavy thunderstorm in Subang Jaya. I don't know if it was caused by lightning, but Vixey's favourite modem-router short-circuited.

Call it a coincidence, but we think our little Vixey, with her Yoda powers, zapped the modem-router, from somewhere in the universe.

"I'm leaving now, and I'm taking my router with me."

My friend had a slightly different interpretation: *I think dear Vixey visited your home that day, her spirit hovering fondly over all the familiar places in a silent goodbye gesture. And as she paused and lingered fondly at the router which had provided her frail and ailing earthly body with so much warming comfort, the energy present had caused a shortcircuit. You know, I think your already richly blessed home received yet another great blessing, dear friend.*

Vixey, I've always known you were special, and you came for a reason – to teach me about life, and to remind me that there are many things we would never be able to reason or understand, but, if we look deep into our hearts, the answers will be right there.

And we will *know*.

Just as you did.



I decorated the basket with yellow chrysanthemums and jasmynes.



My Piggy-Vix and me.

Mac, the Small Wonder

There is a way out of every dark mist, over a rainbow trail. – Robert Motherwell

Mac, a little Pomeranian, came into our lives when we brought him home as our pet 13 years ago. Mac had an interesting life, watching my children grow up, causing chaos every now and then, making his mark in our lives and colouring it in ways that was typically Mac. Towards the end, Mac displayed great tenacity and strength as he fought degenerative illnesses bravely till the end.

November 1996

My children, Ming-Yi and Jia-Wen, were eight and six. They had been asking me for a pet, and I had been putting it off because both of them were still quite young then, and might not be able to take on the responsibility of owning a pet yet.

Having said that, I also knew the tremendous happiness and wonderful lessons about life that owning a pet can bring to a child's life, so we decided that we *would* look for a suitable pet.

I took my children to the animal shelter, hoping to find a small dog that we could adopt. Jia-Wen said he was afraid of big animals and wanted a little dog, the tinier, the better. Unfortunately, all the dogs at the shelter were local breeds which would grow very quickly into fairly big dogs.

So, we next went to the petshops and chanced upon this shop which was owned by Dr Walter, a vet. It so happened that he had with him two six-week-old mixed poodles and a Pomeranian. Jia-Wen immediately took a liking to the smaller of the two poodles, the male. So it was decided that we would take this little one. Then Dr Walter said, "You have two children, and normally children won't share their pets. How about one for your daughter?" So Ming-Yi looked at the Pomeranian and decided that he would be her pet. We also learned that this Pomeranian, who was also about six weeks old, had been returned by his previous owner. We did not know why. I knew Pomeranians were very yappy dogs, but Ming-Yi found him completely adorable, so we went home with two little puppies in tow. That was November 16, 1996.

Jia-Wen called the poodle Bobby, which incidentally was his baby-word for anything small and round, and Ming-Yi called her Pomeranian Simba, which was subsequently changed to "Mac", after MacGyver.

Shortly after bringing them back, Mac came down with the flu. It was quite worrying at first, but he



The day Mac and Bobby came to our home.

soon recovered and bounced back to good health. Little did I know that Mac would turn out to be an extremely resilient little pint-sized dog, and that was the only time he fell sick...until the end of his life.

Bobby was much smaller than Mac, and Mac would bully him during mealtimes. We noticed that Bobby was a little confused (lacking awareness), not quite knowing what was going on, but he certainly knew what he had to do to stop Mac from bullying him...eat!! So Bobby polished his food for the next few weeks until he became pear-shaped, and, in no time, Bobby had grown bigger than Mac.



Mac was a lot bigger than Bobby.



Mac bullied Bobby till no end.



Bobby ate, and ate, until he became pear-shaped.



*In no time, Bobby grew much bigger.
And from his baby-light-brown, his fur became off-white.*

Through the Years

Mac and Bobby, and our lives became closely intertwined. We were a family of six.



Frolicking in the garden.



Birthday celebrations.



Ming-Yi and Mac.



The children's gatherings.



Eat, Mac, eat!



Mac learning the piano?



Fun and laughter.

Whenever we travelled, during the years when my husband was with MAS, we would send Mac and Bobby 200 km back to Ipoh for babysitting at my parents' home. My parents doted on the two, just as they did on their grandchildren. I remember calling back from our holiday destinations to speak to my parents, Mac and Bobby, and my mother would tell how the two of them would wait for us at the door, and how their ears would prick up the moment they heard the sound of a car engine. After my husband left MAS, I said no more travelling, please. It was too stressful for *me* to leave Mac and Bobby!



With my mum in Ipoh.



My parents' visits.



Mac had always been my father's favourite.

Many years later

All was fine in our household with Mac and Bobby until the two started fighting too ferociously. It was a territorial problem. Mac started marking everywhere and simply refused to be toilet-trained. But our main concern was the fighting between the two of them.

So we had no choice but to separate them. Bobby, being toilet-trained, would live inside the house, while Mac would occupy the backyard, which was shaded and had a wire fence so that he could watch the goings-on in the alley.



Canine World War in the house.

Mac enjoyed having his own space then, without Bobby bullying him. We called it “Mac’s Kingdom”. Whenever we let Mac into the house, the fighting would start again, and Mac would rush to get back to his kingdom where he felt safe. So Mac lived in the backyard and his friends were the alley cats.



Mac in his kingdom, and his little flower-pot house.

Much later, my father made him a little house, designed out of an overturned flower pot.

The only time Mac had ever harmed any animal was by accident. It was an injured bird in the garden. Mac was curious and accidentally harmed the bird by pawing it. Even when the squirrels came to share his food, he allowed it and co-existed happily with them. When the cats came later, Mac became good friends with them. In fact, sometimes, the cats bullied him!

Sometime in 2004

Mac was very happy in his kingdom until a new family moved into a neighbouring house. For some reason, Mac was very distressed by their voices and he would bark whenever they talked.

After one week, we received a warning from the local authorities that a neighbour had put in a complaint against our dog for barking. The officer came to our house to check, and, surprisingly, Mac who would normally bark at strangers, kept totally silent. We explained to the officer that Mac was disturbed by the new neighbours, and we hoped in time, Mac would get used to their voices.

But that did not happen. So, we tried putting Mac in the front porch, but he could still hear the neighbours and continued barking. When we put him inside the house, Canine World War would

break out with Bobby. Poor Mac was so stressed out. He just wanted to get back to his kingdom where he felt safe. So, we had no choice but to put him back there.

A few weeks later, we received another visit from the officer. Apparently, another complaint had been lodged against Mac. This time we invited the officer to come into our house so that he could hear just how loud the neighbour's talking was. The officer understood our predicament, and even quipped that we could report the neighbour instead, for disturbing our dog's peace! We did not do that, of course. An eye for an eye would make the whole world blind.

To make peace on our part, we decided to build a concrete wall that would act as a sound barrier between Mac and the neighbours. So, a wall was built, but that did not work either. Mac could still *hear* them, and he continued barking whenever they talked. And Mac had tremendous lung power! He could bark non-stop for hours on end. The barking eventually became a habit...and a pain to everyone. We truly felt bad that Mac was disturbing the neighbours. We had tried everything, but we could not stop his incessant barking. He simply had no affinity with them.

Sometime in 2005

Although Mac never got sick ever since the flu during his infancy, he developed arthritis as he aged. Sometimes he even had momentary seizures, but, with Mac, you could never be sure if he was pretending. Mac wanted attention, so sometimes he would cough or go into a seizure only to "recover" ever so quickly after he got what he wanted!



Mac was always active and energetic.

Ever since living in the backyard, his senses became so much sharper; he would know exactly what was going on inside the house, especially when we started packing our things to make a trip to Ipoh. And he would start barking to make sure we took him along, which of course we always did.

He would also know if someone had come to our gate, even before the person rang the doorbell. Of course, he knew which one of us came back, by the sound of our respective car engines, and he had different "welcoming barks" for each one of us.

After awhile, everyone knew Mac from his barks – the tiny dog with the lung power. You might not see him, but you'll certainly *hear* him!

September 2009

Many years passed. The family in the neighbouring house still could not stand Mac's barking and grew increasingly disturbed by it. Finally, we had to let Mac stay inside the house with Bobby. We had hoped that Bobby and Mac would not fight so badly anymore, both having aged by now.

So Mac came inside the house, but he was not very comfortable and could not quite find his space. Bobby was still bullying Mac, and we had a hard time stopping all their fights.



A happy romp in the sun.



But it ends with a fight.

Mac's Final Days with Us

October 20, 2009

From his usual buoyant self, Mac suddenly became lifeless yesterday. He lay under the armchair and slept for hours. This morning, he looked really sick and could not move at all, so I asked the vet to make a house call since I had two other cats (Cleo and Tiger) who needed medical attention. The vet took one look at Mac and said he would have to take him back for blood tests and put him on drips.

I went to the clinic after work in the afternoon, and, what do you know, as I walked through the door, I heard his familiar non-stop barking. Aha...Mac seems to be well again! This morning he could not even move a limb, and now he is barking incessantly again? That was fast!



Mac looked much, much better than this morning.

Mac was in a metal cage, and he was probably complaining because it was cold. So I placed newspapers and a towel in for him and he was happier.

He has been put on drips, and I guess the rehydration helped him feel much better.

We are now still awaiting his blood test results to decipher just what is wrong with him.

October 21, 2009

Mac was doing much better this morning after the few hours' drip. His blood test results show an elevated urea level and slightly high readings for the liver. But his creatinine was normal, so that's a relief (it's not the kidneys).

This evening, when I picked him up after work, he looked a little down again. Not wanting to take chances, the vet agreed that I should send him to the pet hospital in Petaling Jaya (which has better facilities) to do a more thorough check-up, maybe even an ultra-sound.

So, off we went to PJ, battling the notorious Federal Highway jam.

At the hospital, we noticed Mac was walking with a hunch. An X-ray was taken, and it showed spondylosis on the spinal chord – this is an extra bone growth that fuses two vertebrae. With Mac being a 13-year-old dog, it is hard to tell if this is due to aging or an injury (he could have fallen down the stairs, etc.). The X-ray also showed some calcification in the liver.

The vet suggested that we board him for a night, put him on drips again, and repeat the blood test so that there is a basis for comparison. Meanwhile, he is being given steroids and antibiotics.

Get well soon, Mac.



Mac needs the collar, in case he bites the tubings. He ate wet food when the helper fed him by hand.

October 22, 2009

Mac looks much better today. He seemed to be back to his old self this morning, barking non-stop. When I was at the hospital, I saw the tubings all entangled and twisted so badly that I doubted the fluids could even flow through. Well, that's typical of Mac - that's the way he is, so it was rather a....good sign!

If Mac sits quietly, something is terribly wrong and you would worry!

The plan for Mac now is to repeat the blood test to make a comparison with the first test done at the clinic. To put it in a nutshell, the prognosis now, based on the X-rays is it is all degenerative illnesses. But the blood test results would reveal more this evening or tomorrow.

Mac has to be boarded for at least three days to enable more efficient monitoring of his condition.

October 23, 2009

Mac's blood test results show an overall improvement on his urea and liver enzyme readings. So, he will come home tomorrow, after two more doses of the steroid jabs.

The moment I saw him today, he barked and complained non-stop - that's Mac, back in action again! The vets said he is "very well-behaved" with them, and hardly makes any noise, but the moment I started walking up the stairs to where he is boarded, I could already hear him barking. His voice was also hoarse. This was probably due to too much barking, or he was faking it for attention! He has a knack for doing this.

And when I closed his cage door to go home, he banged the e-collar on the door as a sign of protest. Yup, that's Mac alright!

The vet said he can go home tomorrow morning. He'll be put on supplements for his degenerative illnesses, and, perhaps, a repeat blood test would be needed after a week to check on his liver readings, just to be sure.

October 24, 2009

When I reached the hospital today, Mac was sleeping in the cage. I spoke to the vets and one of them told me she knows why Mac's voice is hoarse (yesterday, I told her Mac's voice was very hoarse). It seemed yesterday, the moment I left the hospital, which was about 1.30pm, Mac barked *non-stop* at regular intervals until 7pm.

Hmm...well, that's Mac. It may seem surprising to other people, but not to us. Mac has been doing that all his life. My mum has always been amazed at his "lung power".

So, back to Mac's homecoming....here are some photos below. I was told Mac needs to be caged (in the smallest possible cage to prevent him from moving) for about a week since he still has to rest his body. So we set up our smallest cage...



And the first visitor was none other than...yes, Suki!



Indy and Cow decide to play bodyguard.

October 31, 2009

It was our monthly trip to Bentong this morning, and I brought a group of new volunteers up to visit the dogs over there. Just as I was about to leave for home, I received a phonecall from Ming-Yi.

Ming-Yi had taken Mac to see Dr Vijay because, yesterday, there was a lot of mucus in one eye, and it looked very bad.

I was very alarmed because Ming-Yi said, "Dr Vijay says Mac is actually dying already...". And Ming-Yi said we had two options: Either we let Mac be and don't do anything, or we give him a more comfortable life by giving him painkillers and antibiotics, but these medications might shorten his life because it would affect his kidneys and liver.

I immediately decided we would opt to give him a better quality of life since he was already nearing his end. Dr Vijay needed a medical report, Mac's X-rays and the list of medications he had been given in the PJ hospital. So I made a phonecall to the PJ hospital to get his documents ready while I rushed back from Bentong.

I brought the medical report and X-rays to Dr Vijay and learnt that, apparently, Mac has many, many old-age related problems now. As with humans, we too will face many degenerative problems when our time is almost up.

Mac has hip dysplasia and joint, heart, liver, spine, tooth and eye problems. What we thought was just old-age mucus in his eye was actually a ruptured cornea which is infected with pus now. I had noticed some mucus when I admitted him at the hospital earlier on, but I guess no one suspected it was a ruptured cornea. Even this morning, when Ming-Yi brought Mac, Dr Vijay thought it was just



*Mac while boarded at the clinic.
The left cornea had ruptured.*

old-age mucus until closer examination revealed it was a ruptured cornea. The treatment for this is enucleation, but Mac would not be able to take the anaesthetic. He might not wake up from it.

Mac also has rotting teeth that needs to be extracted, but this requires anaesthesia as well. However, seeing how calm Mac is, Dr Vijay vet said he is already in so much pain, perhaps we could try extracting the teeth (which were already loose) without using an anaesthetic. I also think Mac can withstand the pain as he is an extremely tough dog.

Dr Vijay also explained that, from what he could see, Mac is actually suffering from pain. But the thing with Mac is he is such a tough guy, you'd never know if he was in pain because he would never whine or complain. It was just not his style. Dr Vijay said, based on the extent of his degenerative illnesses, it might be wise to put him on painkillers.

To cut a long story short, Dr Vijay told us that Mac is dying, and we have three options: First, the one he knows I would not choose. Second, relieve him with painkillers and antibiotics so that he feels more comfortable, but these drugs might shorten his life because they will tax his liver and kidneys. Third, let him be, and let him live out his natural life, but he would be suffering in pain.

I decided to choose the second option so that Mac's remaining days can be lived out with less pain and suffering. Quality vs quantity – I would opt for quality.

I brought Mac home at about 7pm this evening after his teeth had been extracted. The vet in attendance managed to remove five of Mac's rotting teeth, and he did not put up a fight at all. And that's without anaesthesia.

That's one tough guy we're talking about here...he can really withstand pain. But these were all rotten teeth, so they were also loose already.

Many years ago, I had brought Mac to a vet to have him checked and was told he was too old to go under anaesthesia for tooth scaling, and I would just have to let it be.

Anyway, we have to do the needful now. This evening, Dr Vijay gave me a list of instructions on how to care for Mac. First things first, we would have to make him eat. He had already lost 20% of his weight, and that is not a good sign. If we fail to make him eat, he might starve to death.

The good news for now is (yes, it's moment-to-moment living now) Mac ate when we hand-fed him!

As long as Mac eats, that's good enough.

We had a hard time giving him his medicines after all - he put up a fight!

He also needs an eye drop and ointment every two to three hours. Dr Vijay says the ruptured cornea will not improve because enucleation is the only solution. So, it is good enough if it remains as it is without getting any worse.

November 1, 2009

Mac only ate once upon coming back from the hospital. But he vomited everything out, undigested after a few hours. He has stopped eating since, and this is not a good sign. Dr Vijay thinks it could be due to all the pain he is having. We hope the extraction of the five rotten teeth would relieve some of his pain and he will eat again. Otherwise, he has already lost 20% of his weight since last week, and he would be starving to death. He refused his dinner last night and his breakfast this morning, but I gave him liquid spirulina and glucose.

If he still does not eat, the next thing to go would have to be his infected eye. This would require anaesthesia.

I will cross that bridge when I come to it.

Moment-by-moment...

November 2, 2009

Mac is still not eating the AD. I have no choice now but to feed him liquid spirulina (thank you, Sumitra) at regular intervals. At least that's some protein going in, which is easily digestible.

Last night, I decided to try giving him eggs, so I syringed some raw egg and fed him. He ate a bit of that. This morning, he ate half an egg by himself. I called Dr Vijay and he advised me to half-boil the eggs in case of salmonella in them.

Surprisingly, Mac's eye "looks" better after the regular application of the antibiotic eyedrop and eye ointment. But Dr Vijay had told me it would not get any better. We are just preventing it from getting worse.



Mac lapping up some of the half-boiled egg by himself.

So, it's day-by-day for Mac now.

I'm doing my best to keep him as comfortable as possible.

Mac is really a tough guy. The toughest I've ever seen. Never one to ever complain. He has a tremendously high threshold for pain.

Hang in there, Mac ol' boy.

November 4, 2009

Mac is now eating AD, but in very small doses. I force-feed him a few times daily. He is a really resilient and tough little fellow. His eye has not deteriorated, so that's really good. Even though Dr Vijay told us he must be in great pain with all his degenerative illnesses (his spine, his eye and his hips), he doesn't show it at all. I'm amazed at his resilience.

Now, every morning when I come downstairs, it's palliative care for Mac. That's what you do when you have sick pets. For better or for worse, you nurse them and look after them as best as you can.



Here's Mac under the armchair.

November 9, 2009

We were told last week that Mac was dying and his ruptured cornea would not heal. The eyedrop would just prevent it from getting worse, and it would be good enough if the condition of his eye remains status quo.

After more than a week's medication and nursing care, Mac seems much better now. Last night, he even barked and attempted to ward off Bobby's invitations for a fight!

The pus from the ruptured cornea has actually shrunken very significantly.

He still has to be hand fed three times a day, though, but he is eating AD now. He is also on liver supplements, Neurobion, Baytril and painkillers. I also give him liquid spirulina.

I hope Mac feels better - I think he does, judging from his behaviour. His appetite is increasing too.

Ming-Yi came back home for her year-end holidays a few days ago, so she has been looking after Mac since then.

November 10, 2009

We are quite happy with Mac's progress thus far. The pus in his eye has shrunken considerably and, sometimes, it is hardly noticeable. Of course we know that eye is probably blind already, but Mac can walk and still find his way around the house.

He ate very well tonight and finally finished his can of AD.

Bobby has been trying to pull him out from under his armchair, and we have to restrain him. Bobby must be missing all the fights!

Mac seems to be quite okay. Ming-Yi says the painkillers seem to be doing a good job. He looks much more cheerful and happier. Not so depressed.

November 11, 2009

I came downstairs this morning at 7.30am and found Mac lying on the mat. I felt his body. It was warm, but there was no more heartbeat. There were some ants around his mouth. His eyes were slightly open, but he looked very peaceful. I called his name and nudged him. There was no response at all.

I knew Mac had passed away. He looked very peaceful. I closed his eyes gently, and said to him, "Close your eyes, Mac, close your eyes..."

I went upstairs and woke my husband up, and then, Ming-Yi, who had been sleeping on the sofa every night, keeping Mac company downstairs. Ming-Yi was shocked, and she cried. But she said she found Mac gasping for breath for a short while at about 6am. Mac must have just passed away.

It has been two weeks since Mac first fell sick. He fought on bravely till the very end, and even had a good meal last night. He finally finished the can of AD he had been eating since he became sick.

In the past few days, he regained his energy and could bark. He would bark each time he wanted to urinate so that we knew. And, even though he was in pain and was hunching (due to the spondolysis), he made the effort to move from the mat to the marble floor to urinate and defecate.

As Dr Susanna Brida, a vet-acupuncturist had just recently told me, when pets still have their energy, they can choose when they wish to go. In fact, I had also just arranged for Dr Susanna to give Mac acupuncture tomorrow. But Mac is already gone now.

Mac chose to wait for Ming-Yi to finish her exams so that she could come back and look after him in his last days. Ming-Yi looked after Mac for five days.

He chose to go this morning, after a brave struggle with degenerative diseases.

Mac is already reborn now. He spent his final days surrounded by family and friends, in peace and with lots of love.

I am going to have a hard time saying, "I have one dog now". Mac spent 13 with us. He was such a spunky little guy, with tremendous "lung-power", and he was also incredibly sharp in his senses.

We will definitely miss him.

Later, Bobby put his paws on Mac and nudged him. "Get up and fight, friend, come on...". I had to take Bobby away, but he kept going back to nudge Mac. I guess he does not understand what death is.

A few nights ago, one of our volunteers, Mary, came over to give Mac some "Dharma pills" from her Guru Rinpoche. I gave Mac a pill that night itself. I'm sure it has helped him regain his wellbeing and be more at peace.

Dr Susanna heard about Mac's passing because I had to cancel the acupuncture appointment for tomorrow, and she said Mac had lived his life gracefully until the end, and she knows that as we mourn our loss, Mac is happily united with friends, able to move freely and full of energy once again! In fact, Mac is probably causing havoc right now in some other part of the universe!



Bobby licked Mac's eyes for a long time. We realised later, that Bobby was actually trying very hard to wake him up.

Yes, Mac is happily prancing (and barking non-stop!) on Rainbow Bridge with Vixey looking on, and Kimba as well.

I arranged for Mac's cremation at Pet Memorial Services in Puchong Perdana this afternoon at 12.30pm.

My parents, who now live in Bukit Rimau, wanted to pay their last respects to Mac before his cremation.



*My father with Mac,
while my mum looks on.*



*Bobby is telling my mum something,
and she is consoling him.*



Bobby was near all the time.

Soon, James Kho of Pet Memorial Services called to say we could bring Mac on his final journey.

Mac's final journey and last rites:



At the crematorium, we say our final goodbyes.



Best friends and sparring partners of 13 years.



My husband and Mac.

Just think, some humans don't even have the privilege of having family around them in their last journey...

James placed Mac on a trolley, and wheeled him into the furnace. We all said our goodbyes as we watched the ignition and the door close.

Ming-Yi had decided she wanted Mac's ashes to be scattered in the sea. James will do the final scattering off Port Klang, in the same place where human ashes are scattered. He hires a boat out for this purpose.

We also decided we would let him scatter Vixey's ashes as well. It has already been one and a half months, and it is time to let go now. James will pick up Vixey's ashes tomorrow from me, and scatter them together with Mac's.

After an hour, the cremation was done. James wheeled Mac's bones and ashes out for us to see. They were very white and neat. Coincidentally, the moment we finished viewing Mac's ashes, the sky suddenly broke and there was very heavy rain. The Malays like to call this "hujan rahmat" (blessed rain), and it often happens after a significant event.

For Mac, it wouldn't be "rest in peace" because, knowing him, he would already be up and about, running around, barking non-stop in another part of the universe.

So, bark on, Mac! But don't drive your new neighbours up the wall, please!

November 15, 2009

For the past two weeks or so, the first thing I did every morning after feeding the cats would be to attend to Mac. I had to hand feed him his AD, syringe in his liquid spirulina, then feed him his medicines - the liver supplement, the nerve supplement, his antibiotics and painkillers, and mouthwash.

When doing it, I would always think that it is no different from looking after an elderly family member who needs nursing care. I looked upon it as an opportunity to serve someone in need.

Today, I don't have this privilege anymore.

But I am comforted in knowing Mac no longer has to suffer the pain of all his degenerative diseases now.

He is whole again now, somewhere else. He is happy.

James Kho came to collect Vixey's ashes this morning. He will be scattering Vixey's and Mac's ashes in the sea this afternoon. As I handed over the basket containing Vixey's urn (with yellow chrysanthemums and jasmines), I also passed a bouquet of red chrysanthemums to James. "This is for my dog", I said, and he smiled.



Flowers for Mac.

James will scatter Vixey and Mac's ashes off the Port Klang jetty this afternoon.

Be free and happy, Mac and Vixey!

How time flies...in our Circle of Life.



Baby Mac, 13 years ago.



In loving memory of Mac.

Suki, Princess of Mischief

It was the rainbow gave thee birth, and left thee all her lovely hues. – W. H. Davies

Suki was rescued from the drain, and brought to me as a surrogate daughter for Joanie. In her short but extremely sweet life, Suki earned her place in the family, and brought untold joy to all of us. She came, she saw, and she conquered our hearts. Then, she left.

October 2009

After Vixey passed away, Suki and Indy became the very best of friends. While my older cats would protest and sulk whenever I brought back any small kittens for fostering, all of them accepted Suki into the household. It must be “affinity”, something we won’t quite understand nor can predict.



Suki saying hello to Bunny, our biggest cat.



With good old Bobby.

Right from Day One in August 2009, when Suki was brought to me by Yen Ling, she became part of the family. She also proved to be very mischievous, but in a most adorable way.

One of her favourite mischief was what I call her “coup de tat” missions. Her favourite place in the house was the rocking chair. But this was also everybody’s favourite. Suki had her special way of “taking over” the chair...from anybody.



Here’s Bunny, our alpha cat, lounging on the chair. Suki climbs up and starts to copy whatever Bunny does. This makes Bunny very uncomfortable.



Within minutes, Bunny gives up, and our little conqueror gets the chair, all to herself.



She even tries the trick with Bobby.



And succeeds!

Her antics brought so much joy and laughter to all of us. She was truly a live-wire, and a good one at that!

I remember on one occasion I was away giving a public talk when my husband could not find Suki anywhere in the house. He spent almost an hour calling out for her all over the house, looking under all the furniture and even inside every single cupboard, but she was nowhere to be found. Thinking she might have sneaked out of the house, he started searching outside, and it started to rain quite heavily. My husband got really worried that Suki might have hidden inside a drain and would be swept away by the gushing water, so he crawled into the drains to look for her. There was totally no sign of Suki. Finally, my husband pressed the panic button and sent me a text message. I rushed home immediately and the moment I stepped into the house and called her name, she appeared from the staircase, and walked, very calmly and nonchalantly towards me! That’s how mischievous Suki was.



Suki loved to climb.



Climbing up a chair, when younger.



Climbing the back grille, under Indy's supervision.



Climbing the front grille.



Help! I'm stuck!



*Another favourite place is next to the No Fear Buddha.
How apt: Suki indeed had "no fear"!*

Suki had a free run of the house, with all the windows shut. We confined her for five months to train her to stay indoors. But we knew she loved the garden. Each time the older cats played in the garden, she would look longingly from the closed windows. So, under supervision, we allowed her to frolic in the sun. Indy always kept a close watch on her.



Indy took Suki under his wing.



Bobby helped as well. Everyone was very protective of Suki.



Whenever Suki got to play in the garden, she would chew on leaves.



Animals belong in nature. Some things just don't change.



Indy taught Suki how to climb trees.



She learnt very fast.



*I made it to the top!!
I don't need supervision anymore!*



But Indy always kept watch...and was never too far away.



Suki enjoyed her time-outs in the garden very much.

Indy has this idiosyncrasy – he would only drink water straight from the tap. Suki found this very interesting and wanted to learn the art.



Just how do you do it?



Aha! Got it!

Suki was taken for spaying when she was about five months old. Indy was very, very concerned where we were taking Suki, and he tried to open the lock of the carrier.



Help me! Let me out!

Suki became the mascot of AnimalCare, the volunteer group I founded to help stray animals.



Lookie there...who is that?



Every night as I update my blog on our work, she would always sit with me.

Suki was the inspiration behind the design of our first T-shirt. We could not decide on a corporate colour, so I sent Suki's photograph to our designers, and I said I wanted her Calico-colours to be featured on the tshirt.

Suki always got very excited and would "help" me check stock whenever new stock arrived. Checking stock and labeling tshirts was always a joyful activity because Suki would be prancing all over the bundles of tshirts and playing with the strings. Our tshirts sold out in



The quality control supervisor at work.

every batch. This helped replenish our fund and we were able to help many animals in need.



We will always carry the "Suki spirit" as we help other animals in our work.

After a few months, Yen Ling came to visit Suki.



My, my, you're such a big girl now!!



As with all happy kittens, she made her mark in the house.

After she was spayed, we started to open the windows again, and let her play in the garden and the porch. Initially, we had a hard time preventing her from going out onto the road. All the older cats would be out trying to get her back. But after some time, she understood and would only sit on top of the car in the porch. With the windows open, going outside was no longer so enticing (as in the "forbidden fruit" being sweeter). Suki spent a lot of time indoors, especially on her favourite rocking chair and with the No Fear Buddha. Whenever she went out through the window, she would lie on top of the car in the porch. So we thought it was safe to leave the windows open.

We were wrong.

On the evening of January 30, Jia-Wen and I went out to buy some things, and when we got home, Suki was nowhere to be seen. I went out searching for Suki from evening until late at night.

January 31, 2010

After hours of search last night, I finally discovered, from two neighbours, that Suki had probably been hit by a car yesterday evening, shortly before the rain, when I was out with Jia-Wen.

I had already feared the worst when I began looking for her because Indy and Cow kept sniffing on one spot on the road, about one-and-a-half houses away from mine. Then, Cow went across the road and sniffed on the grass. I already had a very uneasy feeling then.

But I wanted to keep my hopes high even though I had sensed the worst. Suki never used to stray far. She was always either inside the house or on top of my son's car in the porch. I had locked her inside the house (closing all the windows) for five months to train her to stay indoors.

At midnight last night, a friend came by and helped me locate Suki, based on where Cow had sniffed. We found Suki.

All of us are completely devastated by this sudden loss. Suki was very precious to us, and so well-loved by everyone who knew her.

I can only console myself that being born an animal is not "fortunate" because an animal endures much suffering (even though we try to give them a comfortable life and all the love we can), and Suki's lifetime as an animal was destined to be a short one. She came back as a cat to pay her karmic dues, and it has all been paid now. She is off to a better existence where there is less suffering. The same reasoning applies to us humans too. We are also not very fortunate because we do experience suffering in various degrees. After we pay our karmic dues, we will also go on to a better existence. Life spirals upwards until we finally attain a state of everlasting peace and happiness.

Suki had a short life, but it was filled with so much love, joy and laughter. And she definitely brought us so much happiness, too. People (and this includes all our furry friends) come into our lives for a reason, and we only have but moments with them. We have to make these moments happy ones because we will never know how long our lives would last. We cannot fight destiny. The universe decides.

The realisation of the impermanence of every life is precisely what makes it precious. And that is why we have to take care of moments.

I console myself now that Suki is in a better existence and she is free from pain and suffering.

I went through shock and denial last night because it happened so unexpectedly. I can only cry my heart out now, as I write this. Crying heals. Writing heals. Knowing that there are caring friends heals.

My husband is equally devastated as well. He said I should not adopt anymore kittens because an urban housing estate is just not safe for cats and kittens. We have noticed a few fast drivers on our road. I had decided I should not take in anymore kittens when Kimba passed away, but I accepted Suki because Yen Ling was really desperate at that time and no one could foster her.

A cat's life is not meant to be lived out in a cage; he/she needs to roam - that is the nature of cats. They decide on their territory, and they would only roam within these boundaries, but *they* decide, not us. Yet, urban housing estates are just not safe enough for our furry friends. And even if we live in the countryside, there would be other dangers and risks. This is reality, the nature of our life - there is suffering, and life is not perfect. We can only do the best we can.

I need some time to mourn this loss and to come to terms with it.

I will definitely miss Suki very, very much.



Suki will always be close to my heart.

February 2, 2010

Suki did send a white butterfly, but in a most unique and practical way.

It was Saturday night, and I was going up and down my street looking for her, without knowing she had already passed away. During the five hours as I was searching, I sent text messages to a few friends, asking for help.

One of my friends told me much later that a white butterfly had actually settled on her windscreen when she stopped to reply my text message that night. Apparently, the white butterfly fluttered around her windscreen for sometime before it left. Suki had sent her a message. You don't often see white butterflies at night.

Suki must have said, "My owner is too distraught, she can't find me. She needs help."

Strange, isn't it? Some things just cannot be explained by science and logic alone. You just have to believe when you see it.

Two days after Suki passed away, I was asked to help foster a newborn kitten who was, believe it or not, two days old. I took on the task and named the little one Babykit. Perhaps it was Suki who sent Babykit to me to foster. It's her way of saying, "Hey you, get on with your work!"

Well, Suki had always been so special. And she always got things done her way.

So, Suki sent a white butterfly to my friend with a specific message, and she sent a baby kitten to me, also with a specific message! She must have said, "What butterfly? No butterfly for you. You get a whole kitten!"

Our girl had always done things in style, with pomp and galore.

My dearest Suki, you are immortalised on our AnimalCare T-shirt. You are now our official guardian angel. And you will always be my guardian angel.

Suki has decreed that I must get on with my work here. I hear you, Suki. I'm on my feet again.



This is my last photo with Suki. I am glad it is a happy one.

February 11, 2010

A few days ago, I was asked to help foster six rescued kittens. One of them bore a remarkable resemblance to Suki.

My husband and Jia-Wen insist that she be named Xiao Li, which is Suki's original name given by her rescuer, Yen Ling.



The little look-alike.



Just like Suki, Sooks is also co-editor of my blog postings.

Xiao Li is still with me now, awaiting adoption. She answers to the name “Sooks”, which is my nickname for Suki. Incidentally, Sooks is *almost* as mischievous as Suki!

As a friend would remind me always, whenever we help any animal now, imagine Suki watching and nodding her little head from Rainbow Bridge, and beside her would be all the animals we have helped before but are now departed.

Suki came, she brought us so much joy and laughter, and then, she left. Perhaps she was meant to have a short life as a kitten. But it was certainly a very sweet one.

The spirit of Suki will live on in me, and in our work to help the strays and rescued animals.



In loving memory of our beloved Suki

Wendy, an epitome of courage

Be thou the rainbow in the storms of life. The evening beam that smiles the clouds away, and tints tomorrow with prophetic ray. – Lord Noel Byron

Wendy was rescued from the dog pound on the day she and all the other dogs were due to be euthanised. She contracted distemper, a very deadly viral disease, and we exhausted all possible treatments to save her life. Wendy battled on, with a strength that belies her soft demeanour, and with peaceful acceptance of her fate.

December 2009

Word had gone out that 40 captured dogs would be euthanised in one of the dog pounds in the Klang Valley. Most of these dogs were abandoned or lost pets. Animal welfare groups rallied round, trying to find ways to save these dogs. Our volunteer group, AnimalCare, does not do rescue work per se because we do not have the expertise nor the skills to do so. We also do not have a sanctuary to house these animals. We only do what we can, and that is to sponsor the spaying-neutering of stray animals through our panel veterinarians, help in their medical needs, and publicise animals up for adoption through our blog. But the photographs of those 40 dogs tugged at my heart, and I felt a great need to do something for these poor dogs.

For more than a week, I negotiated with a farm in Bentong if they would be able to take in some of these dogs. This farm is far from ideal in terms of facilities, but, to me, between euthanasia and getting a last-ditch chance to live out one's natural life, I choose the latter. The dogs on the farm roam freely in a natural surrounding, and they are fed daily. But that is all they get – a chance to live out their natural lives. It is the survival of the fittest, in a way, as nature has intended, for all of us.

Three days before the deadline, the management of the farm agreed to accept these dogs. But they had one condition: I would have to get a vet to examine the dogs and bring only the healthy ones. This is because there are other dogs on the farm, and their wellbeing has to be taken care of. I totally understood this requirement, and I agreed.

After making the transport arrangements, we paid a visit to the pound one day before the deadline. To our horror, there were not just 40 dogs as reported. The number had swelled to almost 100! New dogs had been captured and brought into the pound. Healthy dogs were kept together with the sick ones, and it was a most pathetic sight. Every dog looked at us, asking to be rescued and taken out. It was heart-wrenching. We rescued 11 puppies and a nursing-mother, and handed them over to Malaysian Dogs Deserve Better (MDDDB), a dog welfare organisation.

December 15, 2009

Today is the day of the big rescue. A friend lent us his lorry, and we headed for the pound. Two vets went along to help us identify the healthy-looking dogs. The dogs were checked for skin lesions, cough, nasal and eye discharge, and some had their temperature taken too. It was raining, and that



Putting the dogs in cages.

hampered our work. Finally, the vets identified 36 healthy-looking dogs which could go to the farm. We carried them into cages which were then loaded onto the lorry, and we left for Bentong.

As we travelled to Bentong, it was very difficult for me to shake off the image of the dogs that we had to leave behind. But my hands were tied, there was no way I could have taken all of them out. We could only do what we can within our limited capacity. That is the reality of life.

At the farm, the dogs were separated by gender and put into two enclosures. I had already arranged for a vet to go up to Bentong this weekend to get the females spayed first. The SPCA also volunteered to examine the dogs and get them vaccinated after that.



The enclosure for the females.



Spaying up at the farm, five days later.

After the Rescue

Of the 36 rescued dogs, three of them, Sean, Tara and Wendy, were later found to be distemper positive. Distemper is one of the most deadly viral diseases that infect dogs. Previously, veterinarians would euthanise distemper dogs, but now with advanced modern medicine, distemper is no longer a death sentence; it is treatable.

Based on what I have learnt from a few vets, distemper has five possible symptoms: (1) cough (2) nasal discharge (3) diarrhoea (4) skin lesions (5) neurological signs (twitching). There is a test-kit for distemper, but it is sometimes unreliable. Therefore, a dog with any three symptoms is assumed to be distemper positive and will be treated for the symptoms. There is no cure. The virus remains in the body for the rest of the dog's life, and may sometimes flare up again in later years. It is partly because of this that veterinarians used to insist that distemper dogs be euthanised. The only way to

keep the disease at bay for an infected dog is its own strong immune system. Unvaccinated purebreds usually have very low resistance to distemper and will normally succumb to the disease. Local breeds, on the other hand, have a better chance of survival because of their stronger genetic make-up.

On the day the females were spayed, Tara tested positive for distemper. We immediately isolated her from the rest and kept her in a cage in the cowshed on the farm in Bentong. The next day, we got a package of medicines from MDDB, and I started her on it.



Tara, under isolation in the cowshed

On this same day, the SPCA team came up to check on the dogs and five dogs were found to have either nasal or eye discharge. These five dogs and Tara were taken back from the farm immediately for treatment.

Sean was one of these dogs, and although he appeared healthy and very energetic, he too tested positive for distemper. Wendy was one of the five, but Wendy's distemper test results were negative. She merely had some nasal discharge, and so she was put on antibiotics.

Sean, being the youngest, was the first to recover from distemper. He only had cough and diarrhoea, and, through it all, he appeared to be as fit as a fiddle and did not display any signs of being sick at all. Tara got better initially, but took a turn for the worse and stopped eating. She had to be put on drips for a few days, but she soldiered on and got better. My mother looked after both of them during recovery, and both have been adopted now. The other dogs whom we brought back have all been adopted as well. None of them had distemper.



Sean with my mother.



Tara, adopted.

Wendy was not as lucky as Sean and Tara. When we brought her back, she tested negative for distemper and was only treated for nasal discharge with antibiotics. However, after two weeks, she developed diarrhoea and a slight cough. We quickly brought her to the vet's for treatment. The diarrhoea and cough subsided, but in a matter of days, she began to twitch. Twitching is one of the surest signs of distemper. We had to transfer her to another clinic where there was an isolation ward.

From then, Wendy's battle for survival began. It became our battle too, or, more accurately, it was our race against time to save Wendy's life.



Wendy in my car, on the way to the isolation ward.

January 18, 2009

It has been one week since Wendy was transferred to this isolation ward for treatment. She has been on and off the drips. She seems to be gradually getting thinner and weaker, but the hopeful sign is that she is still eating. Her appetite is, in fact, quite good. She finishes all her AD (given by the clinic) and, whenever we bring her boiled chicken, she eats it all up. She also tries to stand up although she is already ataxic. She is losing her coordination and easily stumbles and falls. It breaks my heart seeing her twitch, but I can see she has a strong will, and I know she is not going to give up that easily.



Feeding Wendy at the clinic.

January 26, 2009

The vets said they have done everything possible for Wendy, and there is nothing more that western medicine can do for her now. Over the past few days, I sent out appeals for reiki and energy healers to do distance-healing for Wendy. I believe in complementary medicine. Western medicine sometimes cannot cure all, and spiritual medicine can help. From the many people I had written to, one reiki master, Trevor Lee, replied and said he would like to do hands-on reiki for Wendy.

Today we had the first reiki session for Wendy. Trevor said Wendy needs very much to feel a sense of belonging; Wendy needs a home. She also needs to feel wanted. This is what is missing from her life right now. I know every dog wants very much to have a loving home. But I have not been able to find anyone to adopt Wendy even before she fell sick.

January 31, 2009

Wendy responded well to Trevor's first two sessions, but, on the third day, she rejected the healing. Trevor felt that perhaps Wendy was feeling better and decided she did not need the healing anymore. Or, she could be undergoing a healing crisis and experiencing some discomfort. So, on the third day, there was no reiki. Instead, we took Wendy downstairs for some sunshine and a walk. She was quite ataxic, but she managed to walk the entire length of the shoplots and back, stumbling every few steps of the way. After the walk, we fed Wendy again, and she ate everything up. Wendy's appetite had improved after three days of reiki, and we rejoiced at that.

Trevor said Wendy needs encouragement to get well. So I appealed for well-wishers to visit Wendy if they could. The more love she receives, the better her chances will be of getting well.

Over the next few days, a few well-wishers went in to feed and spend time with Wendy. Her appetite is still very good, and she enjoyed a change of menu from the usual boiled chicken to fried egg and canned fish. We even took her for walks.



Trevor with Wendy



We used a sling to support Wendy.

February 2, 2009

As of yesterday, Wendy has suddenly stopped eating. Whenever an animal stops eating, it is always a bad sign. I was also informed by the vet that many people had come to visit Wendy, and some had instructed the vet to euthanise her. I was quite appalled hearing this. Wendy was rescued by us, and here we are doing everything we could to get her better, and there we have these people coming in to visit her, but sending her such negative vibrations. Sigh...I had to write another posting in my blog appealing for visitors *not* to visit if they felt she should be euthanised. Their negative vibrations would only jeopardise all our efforts at trying to get her to recover. There is a big difference between sympathy and empathy. What Wendy needed was not sympathy, but compassion. And compassion is never given out of pity, but out of empathy. It is a very positive, loving and healing emotional feeling.

Wendy is in a very critical condition, but we have not given up hope. Her eyes are still bright and alert and she still wags her tail whenever we visit. She may have stopped eating, but her will is strong. She is fighting on and the least we can do is to encourage her, in a positive and wholesome manner.

February 6, 2009

Wendy's condition has worsened. We deliberated for hours today, on a decision for Wendy. Earlier on, the vet had strongly urged us to give the order to have Wendy euthanised. He said there is no more hope of recovery for Wendy, so we should not let her hang on anymore.

We could all see that Wendy is deteriorating fast. The bathroom is certainly no place for Wendy, whether to live on or....to pass on. But none of us could foster Wendy because we all have our own dogs, and the virus might spread to our dogs. Furthermore, Chinese New Year is just around the corner, and we have to move Wendy out before the New Year because the clinic will have many pets for boarding as their owners headed home for the holidays.

I was under a lot of pressure to give the order for euthanasia. Some people told me it was the most compassionate thing to do for Wendy since there was already no hope for recovery. I thought long and hard. I have never had to even consider this option for any animal before, and I used to dread the day when I would be faced with this extremely difficult and painful decision. I visualised how it could be: I would be holding Wendy while the vet gave the two jabs – one to sedate, one to kill. No, I had no right. I simply had no right to take away a life. I remember what a spiritual teacher had once said. He said there was no right or wrong about euthanasia, but the consent must come from the animal. Ask the animal, he told us. Look deep into the animal's eyes, and you will know the answer.

Each time I visit Wendy, I do look into her eyes. What I see is her very strong determination. I know she has not given up. She is fighting and hanging on, for some reason. Yet, I do not see a struggle. I only see a very strong will. And I see peace, calm and acceptance. Sometimes we think that animals cannot handle pain and suffering? We may be wrong.

I do not know what the right thing to do for Wendy is, but I do know that I have no right to end Wendy's life, or anybody's for that matter.

I had earlier arranged for acupuncture for Wendy, but seeing her deterioration now, I felt the needles might give her weak body a shock. So instead of trying something new, I asked Trevor for more reiki sessions for Wendy. Trevor said he could do a seven-day healing for her, and I agreed. We can do all kinds of healing and treatments for Wendy, yet what Wendy really needs at this point in time is love and care. She needs a fosterer, and a home.

This evening, the universe provided an answer. Lim, one of the volunteers who had been helping us feed Wendy, stepped up and offered to foster Wendy. He said he had already developed a bond with Wendy after so many days of feeding her, and, although he knew Wendy may not recover, he does not want Wendy to remain alone in the bathroom at the vet's. He wants Wendy to see the blue skies and breathe fresh air again.

So, we now have a fosterer for Wendy, and Lim will take Wendy home tomorrow and see her through her days. It is like when our human relatives are dying and the doctor says there is no hope, we bring them home so that they may live out their days in peace, surrounded by love and care. We will give Wendy palliative care.

Trevor suggested that I explain in my blog why we opted for giving Wendy palliative care instead of euthanasia. He said perhaps we could help change the conventional mindset of resorting to euthanasia for dying animals and those with no hope of recovery. There is another option – palliative care.

So, here's what I wrote:

When we are faced with a dying animal and we have exhausted all avenues of treatment as we have now, with Wendy, is euthanasia the most "compassionate" option?

I don't know.

As I've always said, there is no right or wrong in this. There is only the "best possible option".

Let me share here, why, after much deliberation and consideration, we opted for palliative care for Wendy.

Euthanasia will put a quick end to Wendy's suffering right now. However, we believe there will be a next life for Wendy. The fact that she is suffering now means she is undergoing a karmic payback for some reason. We can end her suffering now (because we do not want to see her suffer and it pains us tremendously), but she would still have to undergo a similar suffering in her next life. Hence, euthanasia does not actually "end her suffering". It merely postpones it to the next life. She would have to endure the suffering again, in a similar degree, in her next life.

When we see people suffering (people here includes animals, of course), as a fellow living being on earth, it is our duty to help alleviate that suffering. That is why we do what we do: we sponsor the medical treatment of sick animals and we do our best to find them homes. In doing so, we provide some relief to that suffering. We give them a helping hand.

For Wendy's case, it is no different. We gave her every available treatment and have now exhausted all avenues. What else can we now do for Wendy except to make her as comfortable as possible and to help her through her final days in this life? That is why we opted for palliative care for Wendy. We do not know if euthanasia would really be "helping" Wendy because we are merely postponing the suffering to her next life. Since we are already brought together now, in this life, perhaps we can do more good for her by helping her through and letting nature take its course.

The universe knows more than we would ever know. It is sometimes so very difficult to accept pain and suffering, and we wish we could snuff it out instantly and suffer no more, yet suffering is

inevitable. That is a fact of life. Acceptance of that, and doing our best to help, may, to some degree, help lessen that pain, for us, and for the ones we are helping.

In Thailand and Bali, as far as I've been told, there is also no euthanasia for animals. No matter how sick the animal is, the vets teach the caregiver to provide comfort and nursing for the animal and see the animal till the end. Even in India and Sri Lanka, I was told that euthanasia is not readily available.

Believe me, it pains us tremendously to see Wendy in this state. We are her primary caregivers and we really want the very best for her. If we do not care for her, we would never have gone this far, trying every available treatment for her to make her as comfortable as possible.

Animals have an innate ability to decide when they want to go. There must be a reason why Wendy is still hanging on. We do not know this reason. Yet, we have to respect it. In doing so, we suffer tremendous pain too, and acceptance is the only way to help us, and to help her.

February 7, 2009

I was away in Bentong today, rehoming a dog to a farm, so Lim discharged Wendy from the bathroom that had been her "home" ever since she came down with distemper. The first thing Lim did when he brought Wendy home was to place her in the garden to get some fresh air and to get a feel of being in the natural world again.



Back to nature.

According to Lim, Wendy seems to be at peace. He was even able to feed Wendy some water at regular intervals, throughout the day. He spent all day with Wendy today, talking to her.

We will continue to pray for Wendy's wellbeing. Our lives are all deeply interconnected, and we will never know how much an animal really knows. We hope Wendy can feel the love that we are sending her and all our good wishes so that when it is time to go, she goes knowing that we respect her and her life as we would our fellow human's, because her life is just as precious as any other being's, and deserves to be treated so.

I remember what Trevor had told me repeatedly ever since his first reiki session on Wendy. He said Wendy wanted very much to belong. Wendy needed a home. We all knew Wendy would not have very much longer to live. I wanted to fulfil Wendy's wish, so I asked Lim if he would *adopt* Wendy. Give her a home, and let her have a sense of belonging. Lim agreed.

February 8, 2009

I did not have time to visit Wendy today as I was busy all day making arrangements for the fostering of six young kittens. But I had found out last night, upon my return from Bentong, that Lim was not

allowed to take the drip set for Wendy. So, this morning, I made several phone calls and, by afternoon, I managed to get one of our panel vets to make a house call to reinstall the drip for Wendy. Wendy has been clenching her teeth tightly ever since she stopped eating. Although Lim said he would drop water through the side of her mouth, only the drip could provide sufficient nutrients for Wendy.

When the vet put the drip on Wendy this afternoon, he lifted her body, and a lot of pus and blood oozed from the side of her body that she had lain on. None of us had ever nursed a dog in lateral recumbency (lying on one side) before, hence we did not realise that bedsores had developed while she was boarding at the clinic. Wendy was also feverish, so the vet gave her an antibiotic jab.

February 9, 2009

I was very troubled all night and this morning. Lim informed me last night that Wendy's breathing had gone very fast and he asked me to be prepared for the worst.

This morning, again, the news was not good at all. Lim said it was just a matter of time then, as she looked very, very critical. I had to go to work, and my work is such that I cannot cancel my classes. So, I could only pray and send loving thoughts to Wendy. I put on the loving-kindness chant on my computer as I was doing my work, and radiated love to Wendy, each minute expecting a text message to tell me the bad news. At one point, Lim said Wendy had lost consciousness.

At 11am, Wendy was still hanging on. It led me to reminisce about my childhood dog, Remirth: how Remirth had waited for my mum to return home before breathing her last. Immediately, the thought occurred to me that perhaps Wendy wanted to see me before she passed on.

So, I sent a text message to Lim saying I would be visiting Wendy after work today, at 2pm. Lim told me that when he mentioned to Wendy to hang on and wait for me, Wendy moved her mouth and made excited noises, as though she was trying to say something.

I finished my class, rushed back home to feed two kittens I was fostering, grabbed two towels (to be used as a pillow for Wendy) and drove to Lim's house.

When I saw Wendy, I knelt down and stroked her and told her I had come to see her and what a brave and strong girl she has been. Even Lim expressed his admiration for Wendy's mental strength. "She is so, so strong", he said.

I know. I know Wendy has incredible strength.

As I stroked her, her eyes opened. Although her fur was stained with pus and blood from a few infected wounds, she was truly a picture of peace and serenity. Tears streamed down my eyes, seeing her condition, but Wendy's eyes were open, and I did not want her to see me crying.

I had brought two soft towels to serve as a pillow for Wendy, so I carefully lifted Wendy's head and placed it under her so that she would feel more comfortable lying down. I fed her water with a pipette, and she swallowed. Then, she kept opening her mouth, as though she was trying to say something. She even made whiny noises.

It suddenly occurred to me that perhaps Wendy wanted to eat...? Wendy had stopped eating almost one week ago, and she took a turn for the worse after that. I quickly asked Lim to go out and buy Nutripet (a multi-vitamin food paste for recuperating pets) from the nearest vet. We would try to feed her.

Lim rushed out, and, while we waited, Wendy kept opening her mouth. It had been one week since she last opened her mouth (even the vets could not pry it open for medicine). It was obvious that she was asking for something. So I pipetted water and she swallowed it all. I could almost feel that she was saying, "But I want more, I'm hungry! I want food!". So, I called Lim again and told him to also buy a can of AD, and a spray for all her wounds. And I told him to please hurry, because Wendy was extremely hungry!

While we were waiting, I chanted for Wendy, and, each time when I stopped, she would make a whiny noise, asking me to continue. So, I chanted continuously to her. I also talked to her, and she seemed to enjoy the conversation very much.

When Lim finally came back, I quickly squirted some of the food paste (it was another brand, but never mind) onto my fingers and rubbed it onto Wendy's teeth and gums. I added some water to it, and Wendy opened her mouth and swallowed it!

Wendy was eating!!

I then opened the can of AD, and placed very tiny pinches of the wetfood onto her teeth, and slowly she began to swallow.



Feeding Wendy

Bit by bit, bite by bite, I fed Wendy the food paste and AD, plus water. She ate!!

Wendy was definitely eating. It was only small amounts, but she was eating!

I spent almost three hours sitting with Wendy, talking to her and feeding her bits of food. I must have fed her a total of five small "meals". She could only take very little bits of food at a time, and she would rest in between.

After feeding her, she did not make those whiny noises anymore. She seemed happy and satisfied. In between feeding, I also cleaned and sprayed all her wounds. I hope this spray would help prevent maggots from forming in her wounds.

Before I left, I told Wendy what a good and clever girl she has been, and how strong she is. I promised her I would see her again, and told her that she must eat. Wendy was quiet, and, truly, she was very

calm and peaceful. I truly marvel at her strength in enduring all the pain and discomfort she must be going through.

I drove home, feeling relieved and quite contented - the first time in the last few weeks, as far as Wendy's case was concerned. When I drove to Lim's house today, I did so with a very heavy heart, thinking seeing Wendy would be a very sad and tearful experience for me. But that was not so.



Truly a picture of peace and serenity.

Wendy made me so happy today because I was able to do something for her.

Wendy, you are just so wonderful. You are so incredibly strong, and just so, so special. I believe you are here to teach me a very precious and valuable lesson. And I want to learn that lesson from you.

I drove straight to the vet's clinic and asked if he could make another house call tonight, to give Lim the antibiotic liquid which can be injected through the catheter of the drip. Wendy has an infection and has been feverish since last night.

As I sit here now, at my computer, I see a comment from one of the readers of my blog postings. She has sent me the lyrics of "You'll Never Walk Alone". It brings tears to my eyes because the lyrics are so apt. The lyrics of the song make me reflect on today's unexpected turn of events, and I realise something. I was not the strong one today. Wendy was. She was telling me, in her own unique way, that I would not be walking alone. She was with me. She would show me the right way to do things: never give up, always do your very best. Search deeply in your heart, and you will know what is right.

I felt Wendy's strength and determination today, and I learnt a great lesson.

Thank you, Wendy.

February 10, 2009

According to Lim, from the time I left Wendy yesterday until today, she had been sleeping soundly. She had not woken up at all. This morning, he informed me that Wendy appeared to have slipped into unconsciousness and was no longer responding to touch or sound.

I was prepared for this, and I had an inkling that perhaps Wendy had just wanted to let me feed her, spend some time with her, and, now, she is preparing to take her leave. This happens, sometimes. They suddenly get better to make you happy, and then they go peacefully. It's called the "sudden revival" before death.

Until 11am, Lim said Wendy was still in that unconscious state, but she seemed very peaceful. So, I said I would still go and see her after work, and that would be about 12.30pm.

I grabbed a quick lunch and headed off at 12.15pm, but was caught in a massive jam on the highway. The lyrics of the song "You'll never walk alone" was ringing in my ears, and I found myself singing it,

dedicating it to Wendy as I queued in the jam. Tears streamed down my face, and I told Wendy that she is not alone. So many people are wishing her well. Many readers of my blog have written to me with strong support and encouragement. Everyone is rooting for Wendy's recovery.

The jam was quite horrible, so I told Lim I would be late, and, guess what, he said Wendy had just woken up, and he would start to feed her first.

When I reached the house, Wendy was wide awake, and eating!

We carried her into the shade, and I continued feeding her small amounts. Like yesterday, Wendy made a noise whenever she wanted food.



Feeding Wendy chicken essence

Today, we fed her chicken essence as well. She loved it so much, and kept asking for more. So, it was chicken essence, AD and the nutrient paste. In between feeds, I cleaned her wounds as well. Her fur had hardened due to the coagulated pus and blood that had oozed from the bedsores. It would take time to gently clean off this residue, and we will do it gradually. It is not of paramount importance at this time. It does not look pleasant, but treating her bedsores is more important, and we have povidone iodine for this purpose.

Her face is blackish because of the stains from the pus and blood two days ago. We have to do what's important, and that is to feed her on demand, and to provide good nutrition for her.

Little by little, I managed to clean off some of the blackish-brownish stains after feeding her, but it would take some time before she looks clean again. No hurry. Her skin is now very tender and raw, we don't want to cause any laceration or more wounds on her. Cleaning has to be done very, very gently.

Wendy was quite happy today, and she finally ate up half a can of AD, spread out over two hours. This is already a big improvement from yesterday. Her twitching has also reduced, and is milder today.

As I fed her, over the two hours, I told her lots and lots of people are wishing her well, and that we all think she is an incredibly strong and smart girl. And that everyone wants to see her well again. I told her we'd get her all cleaned up soon, and we'll go for walks in the sun after she gets well. Since she moved out of the clinic, she gets a daily dose of the morning sun, which seems to be doing her a lot of good.

I was told Wendy slept after I left, and is still sleeping soundly now. Looks like she is going to sleep until tomorrow?

Well, Wendy is certainly one dog who knows *exactly* what she wants. She decides, not us. We try our best to understand her needs and attend to them. We are just here to help her, and provide all we

can to make her comfortable and assist her in achieving better wellbeing. We are not here to dictate how her life *should* be.

Wendy still has a very long way to go. For those of us who have been with her, and seen her at her lowest, we rejoice that she is finally eating again now. Every small step is a *huge* achievement.

And as I've always said, we only have moments. We can only take care of moments.

I had beautiful moments with Wendy today, and I rejoice in that experience.

We thank everyone who is rooting for Wendy. Your positive vibrations help tremendously. Please continue sending healing energy to Wendy. She can definitely receive it. She is such a special dog.

February 11, 2009

Wendy was still asleep when I reached the house today. She was under the bougainvillea tree, where she is every morning. So, we carried her cage back into the shade at the side of the house.

Yesterday, I found out from Dr Vijay that a mat would be good to provide some cushion for her. We bought her one yesterday evening. It isn't the most ideal way to prevent bedsores, but it helps. A friend suggested that we use swimming floats to improvise a "floating bed" for Wendy. We will certainly do that for her.

Lim managed to feed Wendy tiny amounts last night, and a little bit more this morning. So, I guess that was why Wendy did not eat much this afternoon. We gave her some fish (for a change of taste), and she was excited for a little while. Still, she did not eat much. Maybe it is because she had already eaten some earlier in the morning.

Just like the previous two days, she would make a noise whenever she wanted food. And when she had enough, she would just close her eyes and sleep.

I cleaned her sores and applied povidone iodine on them. Except for one stubborn sore, the rest seemed quite minor. But we don't know if sores are already developing on the good side now, so the "floating bed" would be really timely and very much needed.



Massaging Wendy

I also managed to gently slough off some of the dead and hardened fur on her. Certain parts look much cleaner now.

After feeding, I massaged her two hind legs, just to get the circulation going.

There is a table fan blowing towards her 24 hours a day, and you'd have noticed the mat she lies on now. The mosquito netting is necessary to prevent flies from disturbing her and sitting on her wounds.

Well, it's one day at a time now. We are doing everything we can to make her comfortable and to encourage her to get well. But something tells me that Wendy has her own plans, and none of us can figure this out except her. She'll somehow get us to do what she wants.

We thank everyone who is helping with very useful advice. We certainly need it as this is our first experience with a dog with such special needs. But here's a very interesting sharing from my friend, Chek Wee. He remembers reading in one of James Herriot's many stories that once the renowned veterinarian euthanised a sick animal. The animal did not die. Instead, it went into a deep healing sleep, got up and was healed!

How did *that* happen, one wonders....

And we humans think we know all the answers?

We can only hope that Wendy went into a deep healing sleep last week when she stopped eating, and she is now on the road to recovery.

February 12, 2009

This morning, while I was at work, Lim sent a text message saying he managed to feed Wendy some food. She ate. Then, to our delight, she defecated. We all cheered. Lim cleaned her up and she even wagged her tail, saying "thank you". She appeared to be contented.

Then, Lim then went off to market, and, when he returned, Wendy's twitching had stopped and she was not breathing anymore. But, her body was still warm. It was just a matter of about half an hour that Lim was gone.

Wendy had passed away.

She probably did not want any of us to see her going, so she chose to go after a good meal, and after she had emptied her bowels. She wanted to go "clean".

Just yesterday, Chek Wee told me it could be a "sudden revival" before death (Wendy's sudden improvement from her lateral recumbency and non-eating state). And I knew he could be right. Many humans do that, I've seen a few cases. But I preferred to keep my hopes high and ride on optimism.

On hindsight, Wendy probably wanted to give me a chance to feed her, care for her and look after her before she passed on. We probably have a strong karmic connection that had to be completed in this lifetime, together. It is done now.

In the past two weeks, I was under severe pressure to give the order to have her euthanised. In my moments of weakness, I was "this close" to succumbing, but I knew that even if I had agreed and when the time came, I would have stopped the vet and said "No". It is not about religious beliefs or even values. It is simply because I felt I had no right to give the order to end anyone's life. It is not my calling. It is that person's (animal's) calling, or the universe's. It is not mine.

Life is to be respected, not destroyed or terminated, no matter how hopeless it may seem to be. This is just my personal view, which I have never claimed to be *the* right view. I have always been a person who relies more on my heart than my head.

I want to thank everyone who has lent their support during this crucial period. Some of you were there for me, even though you did not quite agree with our decision of saying "no" to euthanasia. Thank you for respecting our decision. Thank you for respecting Wendy's decision.

There are two people I want to thank for giving me their very strong and unbending support as I went through this extremely trying period. First, it's Wani, of MDDB, who shared with me her experience in dealing with dying dogs, and her strong conviction about no-euthanasia. Second, and no less, is Lim, who was the only person who offered to foster Wendy and who strongly believed that Wendy must be allowed to live out her natural life. I must also not forget those who have written very supportive comments in response to my postings on Wendy. Some are strangers, and I can't thank you all personally, but please know that your support is priceless and is most appreciated.

A few fellow animal-loving friends chose to keep their silence, which was probably their show of disagreement over our decision. I heard them too. We respect each other for our difference in opinion. That ought to be the way. We know so little about life, so, how can we claim who is right and who is wrong?

The first thing I did this morning when I received news of Wendy's passing was to go to the bank, and make our pledged donation to a scalded dog who is now being treated by MDDB. The donation is made in loving memory of Wendy. We transfer the merits accrued from this deed to Wendy, and wish her a safe journey to her next existence, in a much better and happier plane.

Wendy has taught us, in this short time, the meaning of strength, endurance and acceptance. She accepted her illness bravely, and endured all the discomfort calmly. She hardly complained of any pain throughout her illness, never yelping or whining in agony. She was always an icon of peace and serenity, quietly accepting what is, and letting nature take its course.

Wendy, we salute you with our deepest and heartfelt respect. You are an inspiration to us all.

Wendy decided to go today, after giving me the opportunity to look after her fully for three whole days. I thank Wendy, from the bottom of my heart for according me this priceless experience, and for giving me the joy of seeing her well again. In those three days, Wendy received 24 hours non-stop loving-kindness chanting, and was in a pleasant environment surrounded by green grass, fresh air and the beauty of nature.

Walk on now, brave one, with hope in your heart, knowing you are loved and respected by all of us who wish you well in your next journey through life. Hold your head up high, and walk on...

Goodbye, but only for now, dear sweet Wendy.

We will meet again one day, in a better existence.

**Wendy passed away on 12th February, 2010,
after a brave one-month battle with canine distemper.**



*Photo taken on 15th Dec 2009
when we rescued Wendy.*



Wendy's final resting place.

Epilogue

I still miss Joanie when I go out feeding the stray cats in my neighbourhood. Sometimes, I would see a grey tabby staring at me from afar, and I would wish it were Joanie. Many a time, I have called out, "Joanie? Is that you?" with hope in my heart. But it is always some other cat.

I miss Vixey very much too. Sometimes, when I am alone in the room, I still look to my left, and I can feel Vixey's presence. I know she is with me in spirit, from that higher place she is residing in now.

And believe it or not, in spite of all the troubles it has caused us, I do miss Mac's incessant barking! The house is so quiet now, without it. He and his barking had become an inextricable part of our lives. 13 years is a long time...

Suki's aura is still felt very much around the house. So many things remind me of her. All her toys are still in the house, her cage is still in my room, now used for fostering little kittens just like her before.

As for Wendy, I am thankful that I did not succumb to pressure from so many people to have her euthanised even though her condition had deteriorated very badly. I know if I had, I would regret it all my life. I am glad I saw Wendy through till the end and allowed her to choose her own time to go, when she was ready.

Joanie, Vixey, Mac, Suki and Wendy have left significant and memorable "pawprints" on my heart. Every now and then, the wonderful memories of how they had lived their lives become sparks of inspiration for me: Joanie, with her indomitable strength and confidence; Vixey, with her unassuming compassion and kindness; Mac, with his resilience and tenacity in coping with the less than perfect conditions of life; Suki, with her adorable and ever-so-mischievous ways; Wendy, with her admirable courage and her dignified acceptance of her fate.

*You can shed tears that she is gone,
or you can smile because she has lived.
You can close your eyes and pray that she'll come back,
or you can open your eyes and see all she's left.
Your heart can be empty because you can't see her,
or you can be full of the love you shared.
You can turn your back on tomorrow and live yesterday,
or you can be happy for tomorrow because of yesterday.
You can remember her only that she is gone,
or you can cherish her memory and let it live on.
You can cry and close your mind,
be empty and turn your back.
Or you can do what she'd want:
smile, open your eyes, love and go on.*

David Harkin

Life Never Dies

by D. Hunt

*Life never dies, although we live
In midst of change and death,
Only the forms shall pass away,
And not the spirit's breath.*

*The consciousness can never die,
Although it seems to fade,
It doth but pass to other forms,
Which thoughts and acts have made.*

*"There is no death" all nature cries,
The rose will reappear,
Its petal will more perfect be,
After the winter drear.*

*The tiny bird that lifeless falls,
A victim to its prey,
Returns again in higher forms,
Upon its upward way.*

*From life to life more high and free
The myriads forms evolve,
O may we learn to know the truth
This mighty riddle solve.*

A Special Dedication to all Rescuers

Source: <http://www.recycledrotts.org/mem/bridge.html>

Unlike most days at Rainbow Bridge, this day dawned cold and grey, damp as a swamp and as dismal as could be imagined.

All of the recent arrivals had no idea what to think, as they had never experienced a day like this before. But the animals who had been waiting for their beloved people knew exactly what was going on and started to gather at the pathway leading to The Bridge to watch.

It wasn't long before an elderly animal came into view, head hung low and tail dragging. The other animals, the ones who had been there for awhile, knew what his story was right away, for they had seen this happen far too often.

He approached slowly, obviously in great emotional pain, but with no sign of injury or illness. Unlike all of the other animals waiting at The Bridge, this animal had not been restored to youth and made healthy and vigorous again.

As he walked toward The Bridge, he watched all of the other animals watching him. He knew he was out of place here and the sooner he could cross over, the happier he would be.

But, alas, as he approached The Bridge, his way was barred by the appearance of an Angel who apologized, but told him that he would not be able to pass. Only those animals who were with their people could pass over Rainbow Bridge.

With no place else to turn to, the elderly animal turned towards the fields before The Bridge and saw a group of other animals like himself, also elderly and infirm. They weren't playing, but rather simply lying on the green grass, forlornly staring out at the pathway leading to The Bridge. And so, he took his place among them, watching the pathway and waiting.

One of the newest arrivals at The Bridge didn't understand what he had just witnessed and asked one of the animals that had been there for a while to explain it to him.

"You see, that poor animal was a rescue. When he was rescued, he was just as you see him now, an older animal with his fur greying and his eyes clouding. He passed on before he could be rehomed, so he only had the love of his rescuer to comfort him as he left his earthly existence. Because he had no family to give his love to, he has no one to escort him across The Bridge."

The first animal thought about this for a minute and then asked, "So what will happen now?"

As he was about to receive his answer, the clouds suddenly parted and the gloom lifted.

"Watch, and see." said the second animal.

Approaching The Bridge could be seen a single person and among the older animals, the whole group was suddenly bathed in a golden light and they were all young and healthy again, just as they were in the prime of life.

A second group of animals from those waiting, came to the pathway and bowed low as the person neared. At each bowed head, the person offered a pat on the head or a scratch behind the ears.

Then, the newly restored animals fell into line and followed him towards The Bridge. And they all crossed The Bridge together.

"What happened?"

"That was a rescuer. The animals you saw bowing in respect were those who found new homes because of his work. They will cross when their new families arrive. Those you saw restored were those who never found homes. When rescuers arrive, they are allowed to perform one, final act of rescue. They are allowed to escort those poor animals that they couldn't rehome on earth across The Rainbow Bridge."

If you are a rescuer, please do not despair if you have not been able to save or rehome every single animal who has crossed your path. Take comfort in knowing that every animal whose life you have touched has benefited in more ways than we would ever know.

We Shall Surely Meet Again

*We first met on a cold and lonely night,
You found me abandoned, a pitiful sight;
Without hesitation, you took me home,
From then on, I was never left alone.
Day and night, you stayed by me,
You lifted my spirits and set me free;
Your gentle hands and tender heart,
Kept me secure as my constant guard.
Though you urged and cheered me on,
Alas, my weakened body could not last that long;
One day, my heart grew weak as you held me tight,
I breathed my last in your arms that very night.
I know you gave me your very best,
You looked after me without any rest;
Do not weep for me, my dear friend,
We may be separated, but this isn't the end.
For now I stand on Rainbow Bridge,
Waiting eagerly for the day you'll reach;
Though my life on earth was very short,
You made it sweet with your loving thought.
Remember me and keep your spirits high,
Between us, there will never be a goodbye;
Thank you for being my dearest friend,
One day we shall surely meet again.*

Chan Kah Yein



AnimalCare is a charity that promotes caregiving to stray animals and helps in their spay-neuter and medical needs.

Our Mission

- 1. To encourage people to be caregivers to animals.**
- 2. To help in the spaying-neutering and medical needs of stray animals.**
- 3. To cultivate compassion to animals through education.**

How you can help and participate:

- a. Be a caregiver to stray animals - feed the animals, get them spayed/neutered and continue looking after them in a responsible manner. If you require help in spaying/neutering, please contact us.**
- b. Be a volunteer - help foster and rehome rescued animals, and contribute your expertise and skills so that we can work together to provide more help to the animals.**
- c. Be our supporter - tell your friends about our work and encourage them to start a similar programme in their own communities. Educate children from young to be kind to animals. Donate 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.

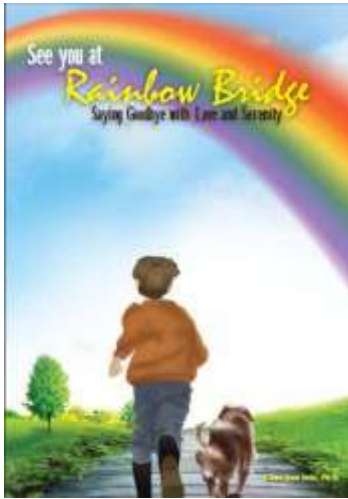
For further information, please contact: chankahyein@gmail.com

Website: www.myanimalcare.org

Love never dies



For every living being who comes into our lives, one thing is for certain – whether by voluntary separation or death, parting is inevitable. In *See You at Rainbow Bridge*, Chan Kah Yein shares with us how she coped with an adult feral cat who was nursed back to life by her and finally chose to run away and be free again. Kah Yein also relates the last days of the lives of three animals, a pygmy cat, a 13-year-old Pomeranian and a stray dog dying of distemper, and how she did her utmost to help them pass away with dignity and lots of love. She talks about how much joy a little rescued kitten brought into her household, and how the kitten was taken away very suddenly. Kah Yein hopes that her sharing would prepare us better when we need to face loss and death in life.



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If you wish to find out how you can care for animals,

please visit www.myanimalcare.org

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Thank You!