

## Pet stories

BY KEE ANN JEE

Pet grooming is important, but it is cheaper to do it yourself.



WHEN we talk about pets, most people usually start thinking of dogs. After all, the saying goes that dog is man's best friend. But have you ever wondered why this is so?

Dogs used to be seen as house guards but these days, a lot of people turn to them and consider them companions. It is no wonder that more and more people are owning dogs.

Fact is, pets can provide man the sort of companionship another person can't. Sure, it might sound like a ridiculous statement but it's true. Just look at how much people are spending on their pets these days. Pet food can cost up to three times the cost of feeding another human being! The next time you head out shopping, drop by a pet shop and see how much the food and accessories for these toys costs – I bet you'll be shocked by the prices.

The money spent on the pets is not my main concern. It is the companionship that shakes me. The bond between one



The fluffy white Fifi

man and another is now replaced by a pet! Those who lost their hopes on the person they love, or who lost their loved ones turn to pets to mend their heart.

Sometimes, they rather choose a pet over another human because of ownership. You can own a pet, but you can never own a human. Human is thought to have a liberal life no matter how hard you try to control him or her. At least pets will always be by your side, no matter what you are going through.

This perfect companionship for human isn't seen from physical attachment but also emotional. Many a time, we look for a companion to express our feelings, our frustration, our depression, not because we do not have a solution but rather to relief the desperation of pouring out our

feelings inside. Saying it out to another person often has its consequences. Your confidant might be overwhelmed by your words, or worse, use it against you. Talk about it to your pet – your secrets are guaranteed to be safe.

Personally, I love pets but used to worry about the kinds of troubles they may cause. Yet, now, I have found the courage to own a pet. I keep Fifi not because I've lost hope in relationships, I am concerned about not having a close companion. I keep her because I feel excited every morning when I wake up, wondering what she is up to.

Of course, with ownership and companionship, there are responsibilities and sacrifices that come with it. So far, it has been all worth it.



Pet food and accessories can be very expensive.



Kee Ann Jee and her pet, Fifi.

## A friend in need

BY JUNIE LIM

SOME time ago, my friend heard the shocking news that his pal had committed suicide.

Apparently, the 15-year-old boy decided to end his life by jumping off from a 17th floor building at 2am while everyone was asleep. Surely, the first reaction to such fatal news was unanimous. "Why? Why did he do it?"

Then again, there's no way anyone of us could have answered that question. Not when he was already dead.

Although I never got to know this person, I have had known people who are close to me with depression. Hopelessness and helplessness hung on to them so much so that they consider suicide as their only option. Fortunately, through friends who really cared and supported them during their unhappy moments, they managed to look at life in a different light.

It was a struggle to go through this journey with them. When I was in a close proximity with a person who was unhappy all the time, I can't help but feel depressed too. My company wasn't exactly needed; I was suddenly having to suffer their temperamental mood swings.

Sure enough, there were times I wanted to avoid them and there wasn't anything else I could do. I had my own anxiety and exams to worry about; so why should I be bothered with hopeless people who do not even want to help themselves?

Then I wonder why I need friends after all. What are friends to me? Were they merely clubbing companions? What about my friends who are in desperate need for a pair of listening ears? What kind of friend have I become?

I once read a psychologist who was quoted to have said that suicide is not an act, it is a process. People don't just go jump off a tall building because they were suddenly encapsulated in a moment of sadness. Chances are people do show obvious signs of a suicidal attempt, and these people might be the friends that we know of.

One of the things we as friends can do is to help them see that ending their lives is not the answer to problems. Suicide is a permanent solution to a temporary problem. If they can regain this kind of perspective, it is much easier to see that no matter how bad things seem, there are always happy events and changes to look forward to life.

Anyway, the most important thing is not about becoming a professional counsellor. No one comes to you if you are not their friend in the first place.

Through the hardships of befriending difficult people – namely those who are moody, ignorant, critical, and those who are naturally weird – I learn the true meaning of loving people. It's not an easy task to be a compassionate friend – a person who loves at all time.

Who said being a good friend is easy?



Sometimes, being there for a depressed friend helps to ease the pain a little. – Filepic

## Sounds of music

BY TAN HUI KEE

IT WAS 7.45pm and the crowd was moving ahead to UCSI recital hall to make sure that they were not late for the annual orchestra performance.

It is a concert that many people have been looking forward to because this is the first time the UCSI orchestra will combine with the UPM orchestra to perform on the same stage, featuring one conductor from each university. Conductor Isaac Chia, from UCSI, saw this as a good learning opportunity.

"This is a rare chance that we can actually combine people of two universities and produce something interesting," he said. "Moreover, we are able to share the resources from both universities and be able to play more variety of repertoires."

This year's highlight was the famous pieces from *Mother Goose Suite (Five Piece for Children)* by Ravel and an original work written by Isaac Chia named *Ride*.

The concert started out with a piece named *Grand March* from *Aida* which was conducted by UPM's Mustafa Fuzer Nawl. From the title itself we can tell that it will sound grand and majestic, and with over 50 players, the sound was just magnificent that almost blown the audiences away!

Subsequently, the concert goes on with a piece by Tchaikovsky named *The Slavonic March*,

this time conducted by Isaac. The mysterious rhythm of the piece reminded me of some scenes from the Disney's cartoon *Aladdin*. Later on, the concert continued with the one of the highlight pieces, *Ride*.

"This is actually one of the pieces that I selected and arranged to perform by the orchestra," Isaac explained. "This was taken from a collection of 12-pieces where each piece represents a Chinese zodiac character. In this case, it will be horse."

According to the conductor, he wrote this piece from the perspective of ancient Chinese on horse. He believed that horses were one of the important sources during wartime. However, this piece not only represents horses on war field, but also depicts the scenery and tensions felt during that period. The piece was played in perpetuate rhythm and driving momentum that eventually filled the hall with resonance, which brought me to one of the landscapes in Disney's cartoon *Mulan* where she was fighting in the war, with firecrackers and gun shots around her.

After an hour long of thrilling performances, the concert ended with *Beethoven's Symphony No. 1 in C Major, Op.21*, conducted by Mustafa. "It was a fun and exciting journey working in an orchestra," replied Lisa Chia, the concert-mistress. Lisa said that her musicality has improved since she started playing in orchestra. "I noticed that I was more sensitive towards



Students from UCSI and UPM collaborated in a concert under the baton of Isaac Chia and Mustafa Fuzer Nawl.

sound around me because playing in an orchestra required lots of ensemble skill. For example, we need to listen to each other and react immediately if anything goes wrong."

However, Lisa hopes that students would

appreciate this learning opportunity and commit themselves in orchestra because some of the attendances were low during rehearsals time and hope that everyone will co-operates to make a better orchestra group.



Eric playing the piano at 1-Utama Shopping Complex.

## Talented Eric

BY JESSIE LIM

AT THE beginning of this semester, I made a new friend named Eric. He is a very talented piano player so when he made me guess what course he was studying, I immediately thought of music.

I was wrong. This surprised me because I would imagine that someone with his talent in playing an instrument, composing his own songs and uploading his own videos on YouTube would pursue a music degree. Instead, he is studying Business IT.

So I started to wonder – why would he not study in an area where he is abundant with talent?

After all, Eric was born with the natural ability to play music by ear; hence, he can play songs after listening to them for two to three times. His first time playing melody on the piano, and without even being taught, was when he heard one of Disney's theme songs at the age of six. Ever since that time, Eric loved playing piano and took up lessons a few months later. Presently, Eric composes his own music. The

first time I saw him play, my jaw dropped instantly as I have never seen someone, besides Maksim and Jim Brickman, have fingers so agile and flexible, drumming the keys with such feelings and passion.

So why didn't he exploit that talent, which would have given him an advantage in his career, but instead choose something totally different?

He said that he did not focus on having a music career because, being the eldest son of the family, he wished to have a more stable career. In addition, since he is a self-proclaimed 'gadget freak', he is very interested in new technologies and things that are related to that.

He is confident that he can be successful in this field, as the scope is wider compared to music, as he can set up his own online business, or having choices to work in big corporate companies in either business or IT sector. But he also tells me that he enjoys this course.

Eric adds that in Malaysia, there are not many options in music as careers but to teach. He feels that chances are slim. He may be lucky if he is given a chance to perform in bands,

orchestras, or playing piano at launches or functions. As for Eric, since he is focusing on Business IT, he is not worried about wasting his talent as he is planning to be a part-time composer, and hopefully he can send his compositions to recording companies, at the same time play for bands, performing in shopping complexes and hotels.

So you see, for Eric, having a talent does not necessarily mean that one has to turn it into a

career. However, there are many people in this world – singers, athletes, dancers among others – who have talent their talent by the horns and nurtured it to mould the people they would become. The decision remains yours to make.

As Eric summed up our interview, he said: "Just like singing, you might be a singer and earn millions, but that does not mean that everyone that sings well has to be a singer".

## An eye-opening experience



Michelle (left) with a caregiver and a child from the shelter.

BY MICHELLE LIM

RUNNING around while clutching the new lion that she received earlier that morning, Serene smiled while being 'pursued' by the big brothers and sisters from the Social Sciences and Liberal Arts Association (SSLAA) of UCSI. For many SSLAA members, that was also the first time they had met anyone living with HIV.

If they had any preconceived image of what the Women and Health Association of Kuala Lumpur (WAKE) House would look like, that all changed the moment they stepped in. The image of sick children living in dilapidated houses disappeared and colour slowly filled their vision when they met the children in the shelter.

WAKE House is a shelter for women, children and transsexuals who are HIV-positive. Speaking to one of the women there, I learnt that the House rarely received visitors. It was a surprise for them when we came over to their shelter to talk to them and to entertain them with some songs and small chats.

She also talked about how infected people like her were marginalised in the society, which leaves them with no choice but to isolate themselves in the shelter. Strict rules were also made for these occupants, where they were not allowed to leave the house or to even go out by themselves to do what they want. Life is harsh for them, but they grin their teeth and move on with their lives.

Although the children at WAKE are too young to understand the complexity of HIV, they may have already felt the rejection and

discrimination in the world even before they can even understand what HIV means. And the agony does not stop there. They would face much more problem when they grow up and finally understand what living with the disease means.

We, the members of the public can actually do something for these patients. Although there is no cure yet for AIDS and HIV, there are ways to slow down the deterioration of the body of these sufferers. These people may be living with the disease, but they are still healthy people. As long as they receive good food and keep themselves healthy, their chances of developing AIDS would be severely lowered.

We can help these people with just minimum effort. Like me, if you are a student and you are not financially stable enough to contribute, you could assist in various other ways such as to volunteer your time at WAKE House, help the people there to do their house chores, play futsal or badminton with them.

While playing with the children at WAKE House, I discovered something really special. The children here are very caring and loving towards each other. Although they do have little squabbles and fights from time to time, but the children at WAKE House know how to share their toys with each other. It seems as though they understand that there would not be enough toys to be given to each of them and they have to share with each other.

Can we all, the public, do our part in alleviating their pain and suffering? The very answer resides in your very heart. But if you were to ask me, I would say "Why not?"