

OCTOBER 6, 2013

LIFE & TIMES

NEWSUNDAYTIMES

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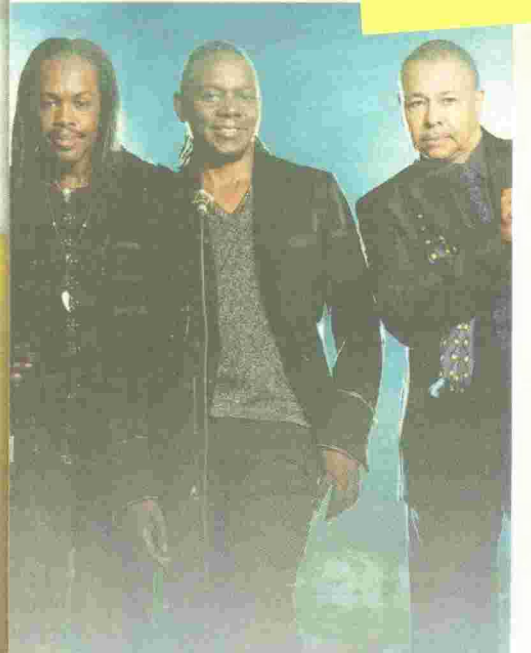
ART OF A SPECIAL KIND

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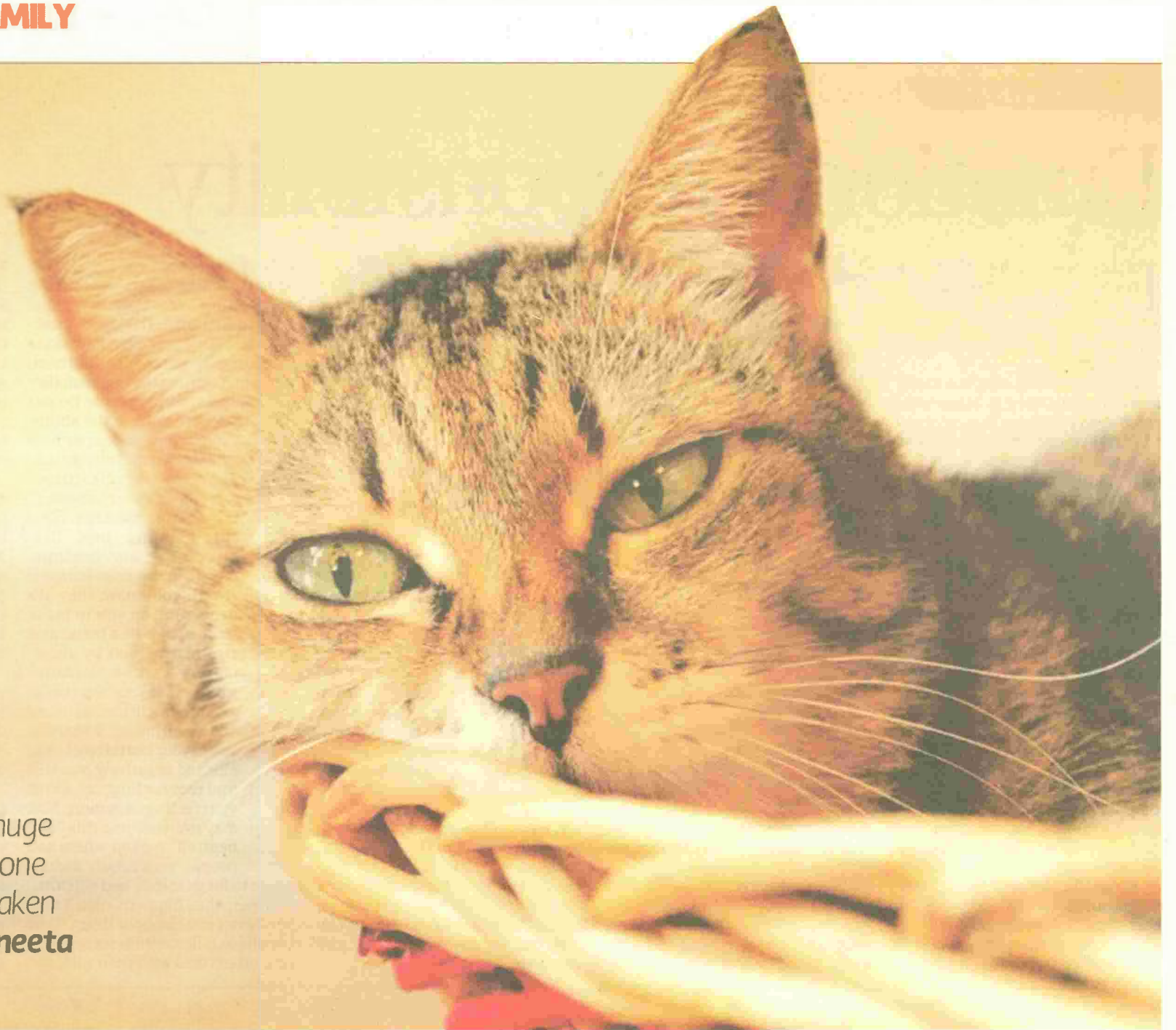
Unconditional 1 love

Pet ownership demands responsibility and commitment
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LIFE&TIMES **FAMILY**

No petty affair

Having a pet is a huge responsibility and one that needs to be taken seriously, writes **Aneeta Sundararaj**



“WHEN a client brings a new pet into my clinic,” says Dr. P. Ravinderan, 57, a veterinary clinician and surgeon in Alor Setar, Kedah, “the first thing I tell them is that getting a pet is a responsibility that can last up to 15 years or more.”

Pyo Ng, 28, Media and Humane Education officer for SPCA Selangor couldn't agree more. To commemorate World Animal Day (Friday) SPCA Selangor's theme this year is 'Somewhere Out There'.

“We focused on what everyone can do to improve the situation, which certainly comes back to responsible pet ownership. We need to be responsible for our pets and make sure that their welfare is well taken care of,” says Pyo.

Ravinderan elaborates by saying that people don't realise how huge this responsibility can be. Even minimum care will still cost money. Gone are the days when you can just give scraps of food from the table to the dog or cat. You should buy proper food and all pets need regular vaccinations, deworming and other sorts of care. A dog, of course, will need daily exercise. He adds that while a small dog, like a poodle, may not need to be walked every single day, it still needs to be groomed. One cannot disregard this just because it's going



“You know, pets are like special needs children, only with four legs.”

Shenaaz Khan

to cost money.

Promotion of the well-being and responsible ownership of animals are some of the hallmarks of the Animal Welfare Bill 2013. According to the provisions of the Bill, every pet owner must make sure that their pets have a suitable environment in which to live. These pets should exhibit normal behaviour patterns for their species and must be protected from pain, suffering, injury and disease.

Shenaaz Khan, 38, president of the Malay-

sian Animal Welfare Society says: “You know, pets are like special needs children, only with four legs.” While the majority of pet owners are responsible, Shenaaz says that children don't know fear. “Most of them will walk up to a dog or cat and play with them. When you find a child who's afraid, chances are it's the parents who are afraid and have passed that fear on. When they see Shere Khan the dog, they'll say things like, 'Don't touch,' 'It's dirty,' or 'It'll bite you!’,” she says.

“We all grew up with dogs and cats around us. Nothing happened to us. But have you seen today's parents? They're the ones who will take their children to the park to play, but they'll be wet-wiping the seesaw because it's dirty.”

An owner of four cats, Pyo feels heartbroken each time she hears stories of irresponsible pet owners. “The most common ones are those where a family will come in with their cats and say that the main reason they're surrendering the cat is because one family member is allergic to animals' fur. One family gave up a Persian cat. It had just had kittens. It's when when people bring kittens and puppies that we're really sad. These new-born animals in the shelter risk falling sick and, sometimes, contract fatal diseases. Often the families who surrender these puppies and kittens can help us rehome their pets by asking around first. But they're not bothered. They just don't want to have anything to do with the animal.”

Equally tragic are stories where a family breaks up and no one wants the pet. “One woman brought her dog to our shelter,” says Pyo. “She drove a luxury car and we knew she had money, but she refused to pay the

surrender fee. We asked her if she could ask a friend or perhaps she could help find the dog a new home. She argued with us and then, suddenly, without a word, she left the shelter. A while later, we found her dog abandoned near the housing area. Poor thing. It was crying, traumatised and confused.”

Nicola Smith, 43, recalls how much the arrival of a pet means. “I agreed to baby-sit Ebie (a dachshund-terrier mix) for a friend who had gone abroad for about six weeks.”

She shakes her head. “Now, we have to consider its needs, first. I have to wake up far too early because it needs a walk before I go to work. Now that it's a habit, it won't settle down until it has gone for its walk.”

Then, there's protocol that visitors have to follow when they visit. “I tell them to let it sniff them first,” says Nicola. “Once it's comfortable, which only takes about three seconds, everyone's fine. When we knew that Ebie was going to stay with us for a few weeks, I invited our neighbours over for a meet-and-greet session.”

Not against keeping pets in apartments, she does admit that it can be difficult as there's no garden for the dog to run around in. “Also, I think you should have two so that they have company.” But two dogs in such a small space? “I don't mean two big dogs. Two small ones,” she says.

With Ebie settled down on her lap, Nicola continues: “You can't do impulse buying where pets are concerned.” She tells the story of a young couple who watched *Eight Below* one night and bought a huskie from the pet shop the next day. “They live in a one-bedroom apartment and this is a tropical country. They had to leave the air conditioner on



K9 team member from the Royal Police Force and his handler.

all day." Sadly, when the dog grew too big for the one-bedroom apartment, the couple was forced to give the dog to a family with a large house.

Responsibility plays a part when the pet is dying too. Ravinderan says: "When an animal is suffering, despite how sad the situation is, there's no point in trying to prolong its life.

You have to let go as there's only so much we can do."

Despite the enormous responsibility that comes with looking after a pet, every pet owner says the same thing: The unconditional love from this "four-legged special needs child" far outweighs the responsibility of looking after it.

FREE TREE, ANYONE?

THE Free Tree Society is based on very simple principles - they take seeds, sprout them, look after the seedlings, then they give away healthy little plants to the public for free. By giving away plants for free, they hope to encourage a whole slew of other green goals.

In conjunction with World Animal Day, which fell on Friday, the Society is giving away trees for free so animals too can enjoy a better environment. Head for Jalan Limau Purut in Bangsar, KL to do your bit for a great cause.

FREE TREE GIVE AWAY



IN CONJUNCTION WITH WORLD ANIMAL DAY, FREE TREE SOCIETY WILL BE GIVING AWAY TREES FOR FREE TO CREATE A BETTER ENVIRONMENT FOR ALL ANIMALS.

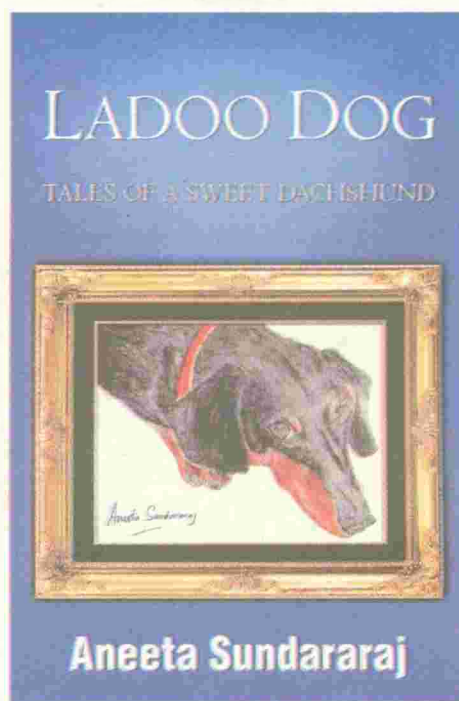
OCTOBER 4: 1-5
OCTOBER 5: 10-5 2013



Abandoned kittens at the SPCA looking for a home



Ebie and Nicola Smith.



LadooDog: Tales of a Sweet Dachshund

To raise funds, SPCA Selangor is selling copies of the writer's latest publication, **Ladoo Dog: Tales Of A Sweet Dachshund**. The book (RM15 each) can be obtained from the SPCA Selangor (www.sPCA.org.my) or Cansurvie Centre Malaysia Berhad (www.cansurvie.org.my).