

family & pets pulse

IT was 10 minutes past four and I was sitting on the top step of the staircase in the corridor. I didn't know whether my tears were because I was relieved, exhausted, sad or all of them. I couldn't cry inside my flat. When a few tears did flow the night before, Ladoo, with her grossly distended abdomen, clumsily rose from her bed and waddled over to comfort me. I yearned to pick her up when she put her paw on my knee. But I couldn't because I was afraid of putting pressure on her chest which might cause her to gag.

For the last five months, Ladoo was unwell. The most terrifying moment was on Jan 11, 2013. She woke me up at 5am and demanded I take her downstairs. After she evacuated her bowels, she couldn't move. When I picked her up, I saw something I'd never seen in the eyes of my normally reckless dog — fear. The question was clear: "What's happening to me? I'm scared."

When she could see that I was equally frightened, she began to panic. Her tongue hung out, her gums became pale and she started to fade away. I hugged her close and started to pray. When we arrived home, I lay her down on a towel and used a syringe, without the needle, to force 100Plus down her throat. That gave her some energy and I repeated this regularly until we saw the veterinarian.

MEDICATION FOR LIFE

In the next few weeks, after blood, urine and ultrasound tests plus an X-ray, the vet finally made a conclusive diagnosis: The dachshund I named after an Indian sweet had incurable congestive heart disease. The best I could do was to manage the signs and symptoms when they occurred. The vet also said, "She has to be on medication for life."

In the many nights after this, I wondered about how long "for life" would be. With Ladoo resting her head on my lap and trying to sleep, I surfed the Internet to understand this condition, find treatment options and suitable medication. I also learnt that sense of hopelessness a mother feels when her child is ill.

One night, Ladoo's girth became larger by the hour, filling up with fluid. Her skin was painfully taut which made it impossible for her to sit, lie down, walk or rest. While we waited for morning to come so that I could rush her to the vet, I held her close and did the only thing I could: I prayed. And as I watched the ceiling fan rotate, I vowed to write a story about the impact she'd had on all our lives.

LADOOHUGS

Let's start with the main man in our lives — my father. I've always known that daddy was a gentle man. With Ladoo, though, he was desperately tender. Ladoo knew this, too, and manipulated him for her benefit. How she defied me, jumped up and leaned her paws on his knees when she wanted food she wasn't supposed to eat from him. With Ladoo looking all soulful and pathetic, daddy gave in and fed her. Guilt-ridden, neither of them made eye contact with me.

From the start, my mother made it a rule that Ladoo couldn't enter the master bedroom. Nothing is cuter than our dachshund standing at the threshold of the said bedroom, stretching her long body and neck to peek at what my mother's doing inside. Still, when Ladoo was scheduled to undergo a medical procedure, my mother refused to go to work until Ladoo was home, safe and sound.

When my cousin visited, she brought along a special wish list — my 6-year-old niece's demands, written in pink, included



In happier times the writer with her beloved Ladoo.

this: Photos of Ladoo. Mr Beh, who reupholstered our sofa, delivered a new set of cushions and something more — a custom-made bed for my extra-long dog by joining two old cushions together.

Sometimes, if you took Ladoo onto your

lap, you might have experienced what I call "Ladoo Hugs". She'd lean into you, place her paws on each shoulder and rest her snout there. With her whole body against yours, if you were lucky, she'd even sigh contentedly for you.

OVERWHELMING SUPPORT

When Ladoo died on Good Friday (March 29, 2013), I was surprised by the overwhelming support I received. There was the contractor who insisted I remain composed as Ladoo wouldn't want to see me sad. The newspaper delivery guy rang me at midnight and half-scolded me by saying: "How did this happen?" Condolence cards were delivered and flowers placed on Ladoo's grave. My 6-year-old nephew ordered me to get another dog, exactly like Ladoo to replace her. How could I explain to this sweet child that Ladoo could never be replaced?

I shared all this with the vet and added that for nine years, it had always been "Aneeta and Ladoo". He quietly responded

with: "Aneeta, for nine years, it's been 'Ladoo and Aneeta'".

In hindsight, I'm grateful for where and when Ladoo died. She died in my arms, surrounded by the people who loved her most in Alor Star. She no longer needed to endure the humiliation of living from not being able to control her bowel movements to being exhausted because she couldn't eat or sleep. Had she died in my flat, I'd have driven home with a dead dog lying on the back seat of my car all the while praying I wouldn't be pulled over for speeding.

My mother says that Ladoo must have done some good karma to be loved this much, even though more than three years have passed since she died. In fact, I think the opposite is true: I must have done some good karma for the many blessings my bundle of sunshine brought me. I miss her but take comfort in the words of a writer-friend: The pain and sadness eases with time but the bond will remain forever.

The b n g, hard goodbye

More than three years after the death of her dog, **Aneeta Sundararaj** reflects on the impact her dachshund, Ladoo, had on the lives of those around her

