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More than just pets

Wheel Power by ANTHONY THANASAYAN

Animals make great companions for the disabled and elderly.

NOT many may know this but World Animal Day is observed on Oct 4 every year. On this special day, everyone is encouraged to reflect on the unique bond of friendship that animals share with human beings.

I believe the disabled, the elderly and the sick appreciate the wonderful companionship that animals provide more than anyone else.

Whilst all animals are capable of providing animal-assisted therapy, no animal does this better than dogs. Canines are non-judgmental, highly trainable, obedient and totally devoted to their human companions.



Dogs not only help out but provide wonderful companionship for the disabled and elderly, often giving them the motivation to go on.

My friend, Cecelia Ayadurai, from Kuala Lumpur vouches that Pepto is her reason for living.

Rescued as a two-month-old pup from the Ulu Langat jungles in Selangor seven years ago, the mongrel is her closest friend.

Pepto's company is all the more meaningful to Cecelia, 60, as she is an amputee who lives alone. Pepto sleeps on her mistress' bed in

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their air-conditioned room, and enjoys home-cooked meals every day.

“What I do for Pepto is only a fraction of all the positivity that I get from her,” says Cecelia.

S. Gopalasingam, 74, is another friend of mine who sleeps with his canine companion in his air-conditioned room.

Maxi, his two-year-old golden retriever, is not particular about his diet. Apart from dog food, he is quite content to eat whatever his master gives him. Maxi’s treats come in the form of fruits such as papayas, apples and bananas.

Gopal goes for long walks with Maxi every morning.

“Walking and exercising is much more fun when you have a companion,” he says.

Gopal, who has been living alone since his wife passed away in 2001, says that it is Maxi who gives him the strength to carry on living.

“As a diabetic, I have to take special care of my feet to avoid getting cuts or bruises,” he says. “Wounds are potentially dangerous for diabetics as they take a very long to heal.

“When Maxi came along, he gave me the motivation to stay as healthy as possible so that I don’t end up in hospital.”

Gopal’s case illustrates the remarkable benefits of animal-assisted therapy for the elderly.

This year, I decided to spend World Animal Day with Gopal and our dogs.

I drove to Shah Alam where Gopal and Maxi live. Inside my car were four canines: Vai, my 12-year old Rottweiler, nine-year-old Soo, Golden Retriever; Biman, a four-year-old Alsatian, and a four-year-old Shetland sheepdog that belongs to my buddy Andrew Martin. All four dogs packed themselves into the back seat of my car without any fuss.

As I drove the 25km to Gopal’s house, I noticed that many drivers slowed down to have a peek at the tail-wagging canines in my car.

It was then that a frightening thought crossed my mind.

What if these wonderful animals hadn’t come into my life? It would have been a very different picture surely – one with me stuck in bed, having given up on life. Animals rock!

• For more information on animal-assisted therapy, call 012-220 3146 or visit petpositive.blogspot.com

