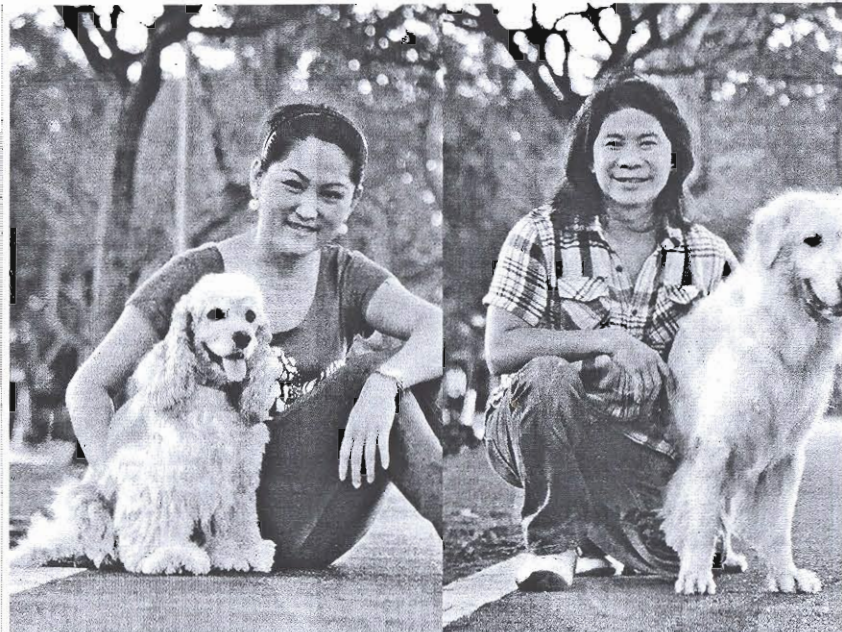


# It's therapeutic!

Pet owners share the joys of owning a pet with **Intan Maizura Ahmad Kamal and Sushma Veera**

**D**OGS are wonderful animals. And I don't even own one. But, of late, they've been in the headlines for the wrong reasons. Thankfully, there have been no signs of cat catastrophes yet. But seriously, talk to any pet owner and he or she will tell you that the joys of having pets far outweigh any inconveniences.

They give unconditional love and adventure. They teach us to care deeply, and make us happy. All they ask in return is our commitment towards their wellbeing.



Michelle and Andrew believe that their dogs are great motivators



Cute... but practical?

## Feline fascination

"We love animals. We can't live without them!" exclaims Intan Zarina Bahrin, when I asked about her menagerie of cats and rabbits that she keeps around the cosy confines of her lovely apartment in Bukit Antarabangsa. "I've had pets for as long as I can remember."

The 40-year-old mother of three beams as one of her cats, Mojo, slides over for a stroke. Lifting him up lovingly, she shares: "We always had cats when I was growing up. It started with my late mum because she loved animals. We would take in strays and look after them. And over time, our 'collection' grew. We also had rabbits, hamsters, guinea pigs, the lot."

### PET BENEFITS

Having pets is great when you're trying to instil a sense of responsibility in the children. Says Intan, a housewife who has a voracious appetite for reading, kids can recognise how they can affect the lives of others by feeding and caring for animals. "Our cats eat three times a day," shares Intan. "My second boy, Arif Marzuqi, who's

11, will feed them in the morning before he goes to school.

Arif Firdaus, my eldest, will feed them in the afternoon before he goes to school. Then, it's Arif Ridwan's turn when he returns from school, so everybody's involved. The rabbits are Didiwa's responsibility. He'll feed and give them water. But cleaning the litter box and the cages are my responsibility because I don't want them touching the mess."

Having a family pet also reaches the kids' hearts of unconditional love, companionship and accountability.

"It doesn't matter whether you have a cat, dog, ferret or hamsters. The positive relationship that can develop from an animal is fantastic for kids, regardless of age."

Even adults benefit from having pets. "Adults have been known to have lower cholesterol and blood pressure as well as being able to deal with stress more effectively when they have a family pet. It's lovely when you return home after work and the cats greet you at the door, purring. It's very

therapeutic. You feel relaxed and forget your problems."

### PET CHALLENGES

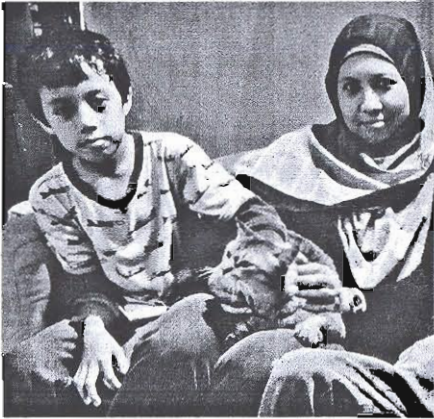
"I don't feel that living in a condo makes it any harder to keep pets," refutes Intan when I say that it's probably easier to do so when you live on a landed property. "In fact, condos being a great for cats. I purposely chose an indoor breed so that I don't have to worry about taking them out all the time."

Cats that go out also bring in fleas and ticks, she says. And if you don't pay attention, your house may become flea-infested. "Then you have to call pest control to spray the house and send the cats to the vet for a flea bath."

### CAT LOVE

"I have a fridge magnet that says 'When you call a dog, they'll come to you. When you call a cat, they'll look at you and say 'I'll get back to you,'" giggles Intan. "My cats are really happy animals. They get to sleep on the bed. They have their own chairs and bowls. And my rabbits have become their pets!"

Intan Maizura



Intan (centre) uses pets to instil a sense of responsibility in her kids

## Puppy love

**PHOTOGRAPHER Andrew Boyce and his wife Michelle are doing "parents" to their dogs — 6-year-old iMac and 5-year-old Latte. The former is Penang's Andrew's much-loved golden retriever, while cocker spaniel Latte is Michelle's "bubby".**

Michelle, who works in the advertising section of her husband's photography business, used to be scared of dogs but grew to love them after her husband acquired the then 2-month-old iMac.

"I had to lie to my wife when I first brought him back," chuckles Andrew. "She was just so scared of dogs... so I concocted a story!"

Glancing merrily at Michelle, Andrew continues: "There was a family who bred dogs and they needed someone to do a photoshoot of their dogs so that they could post the pictures online and sell them. Because I shot the photos, I was offered one of the dogs at a discount. I chose the golden retriever puppy, but I never told my wife how I got it."

Andrew has always loved dogs since childhood. "My brother and I grew up with dogs," recalls the owner of the Nikonian Academy in Kota Damansara. "We are not rich so we never owned any pure breeds. We always wanted to know what it felt like to own one."

iMac is a pure breed, says Andrew, proudly. Pure breeds tend to have certain dominant characteristics. For example, a golden retriever, loves to fetch things, so Andrew doesn't have to do much to teach that skill to the dog. The cocker spaniel, meanwhile, is known to love following people around, and that's pretty much what Latte does."

### TEACH THEM WELL

It's important that you train your pets well, says Andrew. "When they do something wrong, let them know it's

wrong. If your dog bites something, rake that very thing from him and smack him on the mouth with it. Then show it to him and tell him again that he mustn't do it. Then you purposely leave that thing there and stare at him. I do this to iMac and I find it an effective way of teaching him.

Getting your pet's attention is vital, he adds. "The worst thing to do is to hit your dog. He won't understand. Just stare at him and say 'no' — firmly. Many dog owners don't do that. They just buy the animal and then expect it to have gone to school and graduated!"

### JOY OF HAVING PETS

Nothing beats having dogs to come home to, the couple agrees. Michelle concedes: "There's never a day that goes by that we don't talk about our dogs. We look forward to seeing them at the end of a long day at work."

Grinning, Andrew pips in: "Dogs can be very good motivation — in everything. Couples like us look forward to returning home early because of them. Otherwise, we'd probably still be at work, finding all kinds of excuses to linger."

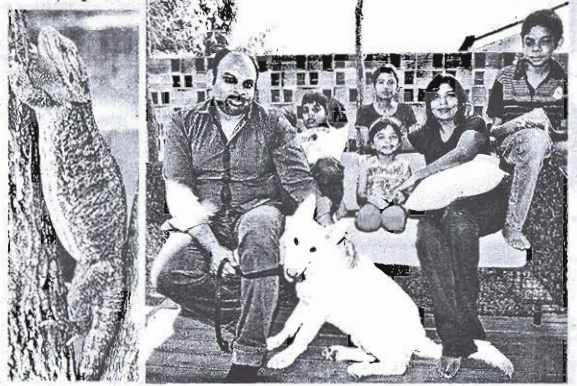
His wife, jokes Andrew, pretty much confides all her problems to Latte. "But my dog is more independent and doesn't layan me so much! But it's a great dog because it's not so demanding, so it's ideal when you have little time to spare."

That said, dogs do get depressed if you don't spend time with them, adds Andrew. "They're sensitive creatures. Sometimes if I argue in the house or speak to each other in a harsh tone, iMac would go to the kitchen and face the wall and not want to look at us. Sometimes when I'm too busy for him, he'll sulk."

Grinning, Andrew continues: "Our dogs are great. They're so friendly that it's worrying. They're the sort that if they were to see burglars breaking in, they'd probably say: 'hey, come here, let us show you where the silverware is!'"

Intan Maizura

## Pet joys



The bearded dragons are said to be adept climbers

(From left) Melynn Kenny holding on to Volta, Julian, Mischa, Jaya, and Joel with his pet lizard. Their housekeeper, Suyanti joined in, standing behind Mischa

Picture by MUSTAFA KAMAL

"COME on Volta, give the heels back! It is none of yours!" From his expression, five-month-old Volta has no such intention. Instead, he tries taking it to the kitchen. But before he can do so, Jaya Kenny grabs it back.

"As Jaya makes her way back into the house, she's shocked to see the cheeky and playful white Alsatian there. "See, now you can see his true colours," she says, trying to chase the dog out.

Despite it all, Jaya says the joys of having a dog are countless, that having a pet completes the family.

"Owning a pet can be a positive, enjoyable experience for the family. But it also comes with responsibility and commitment," says the mother of three.

The family from PJ only got Volta three months ago, and almost immediately, everyone loved the

canine. "Since my children are still young, I do the bulk of caring for him. But they're a great help, especially my five-year-old daughter, Mischa Judith. The boys, Joel Mitchell, 13, and Julian Matthew, 10, often accompany their father when he takes Volta to the park."

Although playful, Jaya says the Volta knows his boundaries. If he enters the house, he sits at the corner, watching her cook. "We're hoping to train him on obedience but it will take time."

Besides Volta, they also own a bearded dragon named Zilla. A bearded dragon is a species of agamid lizard and is often kept as a pet.

Her husband Melvyn, 45, says Joel wanted a pet for his birthday. "He wanted either a lizard or a snake, so, we decided on Zilla, a safer bet," says the architect.

Jaya describes Zilla as very

observant. "Initially, I was afraid to touch it and Joel keeps asking me to do so. After a few weeks, I got the courage to carry him. He's not dangerous," says Jaya.

Jaya says that he's free to move around the house and his favourite spot is by the fish pond. "As long as he does not get in Volta's way, he is fine," smiles Jaya.

As much as it's fun to have pets at home, Jaya says it's not cheap maintaining them.

Volta's diet comprises canned dog food mixed with dry food. The vet also makes house calls when it's time for Volta's injections.

As for Zilla, he enjoys eating vegetables like carrot and mustard leaves, as well as worms. "Having Zilla and Volta is fun and they certainly reduce our stress," she adds.

Sushma Veera  
sushma@nst.com.my

## PET TIPS

WALK into a pet shop and chances are you'll end up wanting to buy every cute animal there.

But don't. Curiosity quotient shouldn't be your primary driver for making a purchase. There are other factors to consider first, advises Dr Low Beng Keong, a veterinarian at the Sri Damansara Pet Medical Centre.

"Consider the species of animal you want and if buying for kids, whether it's suitable for them. Whatever your choice, bear in mind there will be a maintenance cost (medical, food and other expenses). It's also important to have some knowledge of the breed because certain breeds give you certain characteristics."

If you don't live in a sprawling



Consider many factors when choosing pets, say Dr Low

home with an equally sprawling garden, best get something small and easy to handle, adds Dr Low, the owner of a French bulldog.

"Cats are a good idea as they're generally easier to manage and know where to go and pee. You just have to give them a litter box. If you're getting cats, get the short-haired species first

because they're lower maintenance. Dogs, however, have to be trained. Some are more stubborn than others so that may be a problem if you live on the 19th floor. Still want a dog? Do some research. What kind of character do you want your dog to have? Do you want a guard or a play dog? Maintenance is also higher for long-haired breeds."

When choosing a pet, opt for the most active, advises Dr Low. "The one that looks quiet and docile at the shop is harder to decipher. You can't tell whether the pet is quiet because it's docile or he's quiet by nature. Also, if by nature the pet is docile and quiet, it may be harder to train."

At the end of the day, if you're intent on getting a pet for the family, ensure that there's lots of interaction with it. Pets are happier this way. [ntst.com.my](mailto:ntst.com.my)



Picture by ANDREW BOYCE, INTAN MAIZURA, MUSTAFA KAMAL