



Taqiyudin's parents Zainal and Hamisah at the cat hotel and shelter in Sijangkang.

The Taqwa Animal Shelter is home to 24 cats and three dogs.





TAKING A STAND FOR ANIMALS

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GROWING up in Sijangkang, Selangor, like many other village children, Dr Muhd Taqiyudin Zainal Ulum had for company birds such as ducks and chickens that his parents reared. It was during this period that Taqiyudin built an awareness of animals as his parents, both teachers, encouraged him to be kind towards them.

At 16, Taqiyudin came across a stray cat and promptly adopted him. The fact that the cat was three-legged made no difference to the young Taqiyudin, who lovingly named him "Tripod".

Recalling the time, Taqiyudin said, "Tripod was an energetic cat, completely unhampered by what most people would consider a disability. I only had him for three months as he died from poisoning from one of the house insects that turned out to be poisonous to cats."

"Due to the distance from my house to the city, Tripod died on our way to a veterinary clinic."

"The incident stoked a determination in me to be a champion for strays like Tripod and other similar animals. There are just too many abandoned animals roaming our streets."

When Taqiyudin's schoolmates struggled to decide on a course to pursue at university, there was only one course he was interested in — veterinary medicine.

Graduating from Universiti Putra Malaysia in 2012, Taqiyudin served at two different places before establishing his own veterinary clinic in Setia Alam last year.

"I receive cases on a daily basis of stray dogs and cats. Some have been poisoned, some were involved in motor vehicle accidents resulting in traumatic injuries. Be it a cat or a dog, I do my best to treat every case to the best of my ability, bearing in mind the Veterinary Surgeons Oath that I took prior to earning my qualification."

The oath is something he takes seriously, knowing full well it comes with a lifelong obligation and responsibility to care for all animals regardless of species.

"Therefore, it means that even as a Muslim, I must care for and treat dogs, and also pigs, if the occasion requires my expertise. There will always be issues related to this understanding, or rather misunderstanding, that a Muslim should not touch these species of animals, but I am trying to educate those around me that we can become better people by helping animals."

"Our ability to empathise should not be reserved only for other human beings or selected species of animals. As long as we cleanse ourselves properly (surtu), which I do daily, I do not see an issue with treating dogs. I handle about three to four cases a week, mainly emergencies but also other treatments such as wound care, vaccinations and deworming, as well as make house calls for ill dogs."

Taqiyudin's parents, Hamisah Kamaruddin and Zainal Ulum Ahmad Kasah, have been extremely supportive of his passion. They understand his motivations because they have seen him persevere through his studies and dedicated himself to animal welfare from the very start. Part of their compound in their village home has been converted into an animal shelter; one of the residents, Boy, is a canine cancer patient.

Taqiyudin also keeps cats at his clinic together with puppy, B-jay, an amputee as a result of an accident.

These were strays that were brought in by Good Samaritans to the clinic to be treated. However, as no one claimed ownership of the animals, Taqiyudin was left to continue caring for them.

"I established Taqwa Animal Shelter to provide a safe space for strays while finding them more permanent, loving homes through adoption. I can't leave them out in the streets where they could be poisoned again or get involved in another road accident. I am campaigning for '1 Home, 1 Pet', which I feel is something that is perfectly within my ability to inculcate, first, among those around me," said the 28-year-old fondly known as Dr Taq.

Caring for the many animals takes up

all of Taqiyudin's time, not that he is complaining. Besides running his clinic full-time, there are shelter animals under his care both at his clinic and at his parents' place.

Also, there is his Cat Hotel, which is in full swing during the Raya season.

"I built my Cat Hotel in my parents' compound in Sijangkang so that I do not have to make two trips daily to my clinic in Setia Alam when I am home for Hari Raya. With this Cat Hotel, I can be near both my family and pets that are under my care."

"I believe that by helping animals, we are actually doing ourselves a favour. As human beings, we too improve spiritually and emotionally as we care for animals. I wish that Malaysians would be mature enough one day to stop antagonising dogs. Stop harming them, and definitely stop leaving out poison-laced food for them in false kindness."

"If we cannot afford to care for them, or cannot spare a moment to care, leave them to those who are better equipped to do so. Animals have the right to live, as we all do. If we want to achieve the status of an advanced society, we must mandate a certain level of compassion for animals to truly wield the position of a developed nation."

Taqwa Animal Shelter currently houses 24 cats and three dogs, and requires about RM2,000 monthly to run.

"While our main motivation has always been to put animal welfare first, we must consider our own limitations to comfortably house the animals. There are regulations in place that owners must comply with before they can send their animals to the shelter. This is to avoid our facilities from being overwhelmed due to a lack of space and resources," Taqiyudin said, adding that the shelter could always do with public donation in cash or kind, volunteering and adoption. Contact details of the shelter

are available at its website www.taqwaanimalshelter.com.

Being a compassionate person that he is today, Taqiyudin credits his parents: "I am where I am today because they have prayed hard for me and supported me throughout the years."

"To successfully juggle so many roles for the animals, I also thank my eight siblings, generous sponsors, supportive friends, the Sijangkang Village Development and Security Committee, as well as the neighbourhood Jamiul Ehsani Mosque. I wouldn't be able to go it alone. Stand tall for animals; stop animal abuse!"



The vet takes Boy out for a walk.