

Malaysia

Woman receives Rotary award for noble work in saving strays

BY ANITH ADILAH
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Mak Intan remembers the names of all her furry kids, numbering over 1,000, some which she has raised since they were kittens and puppies. — Malay Mail pic

PETALING JAYA, Jan 23 — To love is to care unconditionally. For 68-year-old Halijah Idris, her love for strays is second to none.

Halijah, or Mak Intan as she is fondly known, has been taking care of stray dogs and cats with her late husband Muhammad Azmi Ismail (better known as Pak Mie) for close to 30 years.

Recollecting when she first met Pak Mie, Mak Intan said she was still married to her first husband, Ramli Shafi'i, when they moved next door to Pak Mie's house in Alor Setar in the late 1980s.

When Ramli was on his deathbed, he made Pak Mie promise to look after Mak Intan as he was worried about her well-being.

"I have always loved animals and when Pak Mie asked me to marry him, I told him I will only say yes on one condition - he must not stop me from caring for strays.

"Oddly enough, he only smiled and told me we can go ahead and save strays together," she said, adding that was when she knew they were soul mates.

The duo tied the knot in 1989, and two years later, they opened their shelter and started rescuing homeless and sick animals in Alor Setar.

"We did not have the heart to leave them on the streets knowing they might not make it the next day," she said.

"We named the dogs based on where we found them. If we rescued a puppy from a tree, we would call him 'Kok' (short for *pokok*), from inside a drain, 'Kang' (short for *longkang*) or on the streets, 'Lan' (short for *jalan*)," she said.

Pak Mie died last March aged 58 following a stroke. But Mak Intan continues to care for their 700 dogs, 200 cats, four monkeys and two foxes at their Tanjung Bendahara shelter.

"When Pak Mie was alive, I was in charge of cooking, cleaning the compound and giving medicine to the sick animals. He would go out on errands, buy food and get medicines for the animals.

"Now that I'm alone, I have to do everything on my own.

"It is especially hard on me after he's gone," she said.

Mak Intan had since hired two workers to assist her with the running of the shelter.

Thanks to her seven-year experience as a medical assistant during her service in the military, Mak Intan has been able to reduce medical expenses by nursing her furry kids back to health when they fall ill.

"When the dogs are hurt, I stitch their wounds. The same goes when they need vaccinations. I would order vaccines in bulk and administer the shots myself," she said.

Every month, Mak Intan requires a hefty amount to sustain the shelter, mainly to cover the cost of food for the animals.

"The dogs alone need six to seven 20kg-packs of dog food daily. One pack of dog food is about RM150. That does not include canned food for puppies," she said, adding that a can could easily cost her RM4.50.



On days when Mak Intan serves rice as an alternative for dog kibble, she requires 100kg of rice to feed all her furry friends.

There are days when she has to scour leftovers at nearby hawker centres to feed the animals.

"Their meals come first. Even when I am tight on budget, I have to make sure my babies have something to eat. After their meals are the next thing to worry about is their medicine and my workers' salaries," she said.

The mother of three said she is also glad that her children, army major Badrul Hisham, 45, Rosita, 40, and sales assistant Roslinda, 35 supports what she does.

"Badrul and Rosita live in Kuala Lumpur and Perak but they often visit me at the shelter. Roslinda, who lives in Alor Setar, helps me di weekends," she said.

Mak Intan said she was lucky to have met some generous people who frequently donate money or food to the shelter, including Dr Jezamine Lim, the wife of local comedian Harith Iskander and Datuk Khalid Muhammad Jiwa, husband of songstress Datuk Siti Nurha Tarudin.

Even though she still receives negative remarks from the local community who consider caring for dogs as taboo, she chose to keep head up as she is continuing her late husband's legacy.

"Of course, it saddens me when people refuse to shake my hand at gatherings, or refuse to sit next to me because they claim I reek c dogs.

"But, at the end of the day when I go back to my furry kids, I am happy. I will continue taking care of these animals for as long I can," s said.

Mak Intan's noble work was recently recognised by the Rotary Club of Petaling Jaya when she was named one of the recipients for th "Dignifying A Profession Award".

"This award is for Pak Mie, not for me. Unfortunately, Pak Mie is no longer with us today, but I want to thank everyone for their contir support," she said, teary-eyed, at the award presentation ceremony in Subang Jaya on Tuesday.