

FAREWELL TO A FOREVER FRIEND

Text by Dr Lee Yik Voon

Dr Lee is a GP practising in Macpherson. He is also a member of the current National General Practitioner Advisory Panel. He is a pet lover at heart who is the proud owner of a dog, and regularly feeds neighbourhood community cats. He also enjoys playing online war games and thinks that playing Pokemon Go is a good form of exercise.



"My Bobo lies over the ocean

My Bobo lies over the sea

My Bobo lies over the ocean

Oh, bring back my Bobo to me"

Bobo was a five-year-old Cairn terrier abandoned by his previous owner when I first met him. I brought Bobo home after two failed attempts at adopting a dog from the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (SPCA). Both times, I was way at the bottom of the wait list. The third time, I rushed down with my son during lunchtime to be first in queue. Bobo seemed to be telling me to choose him and give him a chance to be my friend forever. I did, and we were so happy that day. Good things come to those who wait.

The initial challenges

Getting the basic needs was the first challenge. Feeding was easy – we just stuck to what SPCA did. Although after a while, he got bored with kibbles and welcomed more fresh food. He liked softer food and refused hard stuff – almost like a human who prefers to be managed in the correct way with the right expectations.

Training him to pee and poo was the key initial challenge. Should we train him to do it at home or outside? After some training, he started to pee and poo only when he was brought to the grassy areas. Whoever walks him has to carry a poo bag to pick the poo up after him for proper disposal. Seemingly, it is not only the dogs who need to be trained; the humans

who walk the dogs also need to have better civic mindedness. We need to set good examples to our young and other pet owners.

My time with Bobo

I often thought that he was the best dog because he attacked only his toys. He left everything else alone. He is unlike what I have heard about other dogs who destroy furniture, slippers and shoes. He liked to befriend other dogs by wagging his tail furiously and would react violently when other dogs try to bully him. He was not attention seeking and would wait patiently for me to complete my work and give him a tummy rub every night. He appreciated tummy rubs by kicking his legs in the air.

Every Thursday after clinic, I brought Bobo to Marina Barrage for his late-afternoon walks. He received lots of attention from students. They would volunteer to walk him but he would always walk them back to me. He was mine and I was the only one in his life. Meanwhile, we caught lots of Pokemon at Marina Barrage despite him urging me to move on while I had to stop to "catch them all". Similarly, in life, we have competing interests and often we will have to make difficult decisions.

At the age of 11, he developed symptoms of cough and retching phlegm. I brought him to see two veterinarians. One told me that there was nothing wrong with him while the other told me that he was just getting old. Do we do that as medical practitioners as well? Do we

try hard enough to come up with a working diagnosis or just attribute it to ageing or an overreaction to simple symptoms?

In loving memory

Bobo passed on abruptly one night while waiting for me. He only managed to wait for my son to get home to see him one last time. I went home late that night as I had to attend our Council meeting.

I have another regret as I read from anecdotes by veterinarians that dogs are afraid of dying alone. He was my best buddy for the last six years and I was not there for him in his last moments. The next day was spent looking for the pet crematorium; somehow I took many hours to find the place despite having the address and the help of the GPS.

Everything that is sad went with him. Only he can trigger off any more sadness. What used to be and have been are no longer there. Promises from others are no longer that important when he is gone.

My moods lifted somewhat six months later. Although I got a new puppy a few months after I lost Bobo, she is not a replacement. I see her as someone to keep my mind distracted. I see Bobo's urn every day as I have placed it in my living room to remind me of my closest buddy.

How many true friends can you expect in your lifetime? A handful or less is all we would expect to have. I have anecdotes from my patients who find it so difficult to make friends that they can trust. That is because they were disappointingly tricked and cheated time and again.

Bobo is selective of his human company and people who are shunned are upset. Why is it wrong if we behave like that? Can't we have our own preferences for company and not have to be inclusive? Why can't we have flaws? Why can't we accept that or must we be socially acceptable and politically correct all the time?

Run free, my boy; I know that you will be waiting for me at Rainbow Bridge when my time comes. ♦

