

My desire to study veterinary medicine arises from a childhood encounter where I failed to rehabilitate a malnourished stray cat, watching it die helplessly. That experience and an encyclopaedia about cats given to me by my parents prompted a lifelong passion in animal welfare, especially how animal disease and suffering can be managed. Growing up, I bury myself in BBC wildlife magazines, pore over books by James Herriot, and devour National Geographic documentaries. It is my hope as a veterinary physician to channel my twin interests of animal sciences and wildlife conservation into improving animal welfare.

I had the good fortune to work at the National Zoo in Malaysia as a volunteer. The opportunity allowed me to work closely with indigenous animals like the tapirs, lemurs and giant tortoises. Working on the wildlife enrichment programme for snakes, where I helped refurbish their enclosure with dry branches and wild orchids, taught me that preserving the natural behaviour of captive animals is crucial to their survival. Time spent at the Zoo Hospital trained me how to handle animals with mange and exposed me to the delicate care needed for infected rabbits to prevent them from going into shock. Most interesting was the practice and perseverance required in animal husbandry. I intend to deepen my knowledge in this field with a work placement in a farm and turtle conservation centre next year.

Besides the National Zoo, I also shadowed a veterinarian. I was in awe of the many ways veterinary medicine can contribute towards the well-being of animals; from the birth control of cats and dogs in spay operations, to the treatment of their infections using antibiotics and surgery. I learnt that cancer risks vary in mixed breeds and pure breeds due to differences in their gene pools. I witness a Labrador undergo multiple operations for benign eye and abdominal tumours, and survived, but a cat diagnosed with stage four cancer did not. The cat's case in particular stood out for me. Despite months of treatment, there were no signs of clinical improvement and the owner and veterinarian came to a mutual decision to have it euthanised. It became clear to me then that clinical outcomes are not always positive, and the priority then becomes easing the animal's suffering. Being fluent in English, Malay and Mandarin helped tremendously in developing my interpersonal skills, because it enabled me to communicate with pet owners of different backgrounds.

At school, I was elected president of the Interact Club and assistant head prefect in my fifth form year. My leadership and team-management skills matured from organising major community service projects at a local hospital and for the Paws Animal Welfare Society. I also represented my school at a national science competition, which put scientific concepts and principles I learnt in class to the test. While extra-curricular activities were a central component of my secondary school life, I was also determined to excel academically. My hard work culminated at the end of the year with my school's Principal's Award and a full A-level scholarship by the Ministry of Education Malaysia.

Outside school, I enjoy singing and playing the piano, of which I have a Grade 6 qualification. Music helps me wind down after a hectic day, but the love of music was also the reason I entered a national singing competition. Placing third, however, was a pleasant surprise. At college, I lead the performing arts club. My leadership and team-management skills were once again tested when I had to organize a musical, which consists of 40 cast and crew members, in the midst of preparing for my A-Levels examinations. As stressful as it may get at times, all of it moulded me into the confident and self-assured person I am today.

I am fully aware of the demands that a course in veterinary medicine entails, but I am positive that I have the ability, passion and drive to overcome the challenges that lie ahead.

Editors note

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Vetty love,

May Yean 🌻