Dr Vellayan and his animal kingdom
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When he was diagnosed with asthma in 1972, his parents were concerned. They believed asthma was a bad thing, but Dr S. Vellayan knew different. He was determined to prove that asthma could be managed with proper care.

He began to research asthma and its treatments. He read every book he could find and took his information to his professors and doctors. They were skeptical at first, but they eventually agreed to support his research.

Over the years, Dr Vellayan continued to study asthma and its effects on the human body. He was able to develop new treatments and techniques for managing the disease. His work helped improve the quality of life for many people with asthma.

Dr Vellayan's dedication to asthma research has earned him many awards and recognitions. He has been named a Fellow of the American Thoracic Society and has received a number of other honors for his work.

Dr Vellayan is a true inspiration to those with asthma. His determination and hard work have made a real difference in the lives of many people around the world.
With a dad like Dr Vellayan, life at home was far from ordinary, and the kids would never know if the box under his arm held a toy, or an orphaned animal in need of care.

“When his pet hamster died, my son asked me to conduct a post-mortem on him” laughs Dr Vellayan.

While the well-being of the zoo animals was his primary responsibility, much of his spare time was spent on research in the hope that studies on captive specimens would benefit the conservation of wild populations. He cited his work on diseases in leaf monkeys as an example.

Among his notable contributions over the years are the establishment of the zoo’s Animal Hospital in 1990, the establishment of husbandry protocols with the assistance of colleagues, students and volunteers, especially with regard to preventive medicine, and mentorship to students who have had the zoo as their training ground.

Over the years, he notes that there seems to be an increased interest in the veterinary profession, in particular wildlife medicine and conservation. This he finds extremely exciting and a far cry from the way things were 30 years ago.

“This is probably a result of greater awareness about wildlife-related work. Today, finally, it is considered a well-respected career choice.”

Dr Vellayan has himself given many career guidance talks in local universities in the hope of inspiring young Malaysians to work for animals.

Although he is retiring from the zoo, he has no plans to retire from the field. In the pipeline are private exotic animal practice, consultancy work with zoos, teaching and training.

Malaysia is a country where wildlife experts are few, despite the fact that the country has almost 50 zoos and is one of the 12 megadiversity nations of the world.

In the course of his time working with wildlife, Dr Vellayan has touched and inspired many. He can be credited in part for an increasing number of students keen to work with and for wildlife.

His one regret is perhaps not spending enough time with his loved ones.

“But I will make it up to them,” he says, “now that I will have more time on my hands.”

Knowing him though, there won’t be much time wasted before those hands are working with wildlife — what he loves and knows best.