

PET PALACE

people & their pets

Look out for the Arab Times series, the Pet Palace, and read about how people and their animals enrich each other's lives.

The Palace welcomes submissions by our readers. If you'd like to tell the world about your pet, send us a photograph and accompanying article for publication.

— Editor



A child plays with his dog at the end of a day at the Funda Nenja dog training initiative on Sept 22, in Mpophomeni, South Africa. (AFP)

By Susan Njanji

When Thobani Gasa took his puppy for obedience training a few years ago it was just for fun. But soon his own behaviour started to change thanks to his canine companion.

Many townships in South Africa are notorious for gang-related violence but in Mpophomeni, near the southeastern town of Howick, pet dogs are helping lead the way to a more peaceful future.

On a hot Friday afternoon with their dogs in tow, dozens of children filed neatly into the grounds of the Zamuthule primary school for the weekly training session.

"I was part of the gangs, but this programme changed my life," said Gasa, 20, now a trainer.

"When I started learning about dogs, I started to focus on the dogs and abandoned gangster life."

Eight years ago, volunteer dog trainer and retired teacher Adrienne Olivier start-

ed teaching children how to treat pet dogs. Every week some 100 children aged between eight and 15 go with their animals for the training she pioneered.

The project, which is called "Funda Nenja" — Zulu for "learn with the dog" — has helped to nurture kinship and respect between humans and their dogs in the township in southeastern KwaZulu-Natal province.

"Coming here has taught me to treat dogs with respect," Sihle Dubazane, 13, said, while caressing his four-year-old crossbreed, Lion. "A dog has to be treated nicely, it has blood, it can feel."

In a classroom nearby, children and their puppies sat quietly on cream-coloured rubber mats, listening attentively to a tutor.

In the playgrounds outside, children and their dogs are clustered into three classes — ordered from beginners to seniors, depending on their dog's level of obedience.

A better understanding of animal behaviour has helped the youngsters to understand their own.

Violence against or involving children in South Africa is alarmingly common, according to several children's charities.

A 2016 study revealed that in some parts of South Africa more than half of children are abused by caregivers, teachers or relatives. Children who experience or witness violence are at a significantly heightened risk of becoming abusers themselves later in life, according to the June report of the Cape Town-based Children's Institute entitled "Out of Harm's Way?".

Vuyani Dube, 11, has been taking his dogs to Funda Nenja for just three months and already his family has noticed the change in his behaviour.

"He wasn't this disciplined and he wasn't this responsible," said Siphesihle Dube, referring to his nephew as he walked back home from the school with one of the family's three dogs. (AFP)

Kuwait



Colorful sunrise reflecting on clouds and water in Jahra Pools Nature Reserve creating a surreal painting. (KUNA)

New Look

Ministry of Education established many educational institutions in other Arab countries

Yacoub strives to update entire system of education

This is the 10th in a series of articles on Dr Yacoub Yousef Al Ghunaim, a writer and scholar, former minister of education. — Editor

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By Lidia Qattan

Special to the Arab Times

With the implementation of the new policy at the Ministry of Information in 1964, Yacoub became subsequently member of the Strategic Planning Board, member of the Joint Board of the Radio and TV stations, and member of the "Arab Cultural Heritage Board."

Many sophisticated equipment were brought-in, the number of staff was increased and the scope of both TV and Radio stations was greatly expanded.

For the first time TV and Radio broadcasting was organized on a scientific basis, programs were scheduled in advance of time and the performing arts were made to emerge on to a new cultural plane of importance.

Transformed into a synthesis of symbols that livened the memory of the life that used to be, the old folklore was brought forth in all its eloquence and simple nobility; so presented it becomes the stepping stone to a more refined aspect of culture.

At the same time the increase of local TV plays and the production of a variety of new programs on TV and radio stations, gave them both a new importance in international media, which became evident from the many

first prizes they both received at Arab International Festivals.

Incidentally during the development of the TV station, among the new equipments was a TV broadcasting station on wheel, which for some reasons it was never used while the Belgian engineer was in charge?

When he went on leave, the Kuwaiti engineers used it to broadcast live an important soccer match.

From that incident groups of young Kuwaitis were trained to work the sophisticated equipments; many were sent abroad for crash courses in broadcasting technology and programming.

Yacoub himself got engaged in a tour of meetings and conferences to expand his knowledge in the field.

An important part of his tour was at the BBC broadcasting station in London, (UK), where he gained useful insights in advanced broadcasting methods and technology; in Moscow and in Monaco he attended conferences

and international festivals.

In the reports he wrote at the end of each trip, he added his own observation and suggestions which were implemented in his work.

Surprised On the 17th of May 1965, Yacoub Al Ghunaim was in his office at the TV station when he received a call

from the Minister of Education, Khalid Mus'ud Al Fahad requesting to see him.

Yacoub was expecting to be consulted on something concerning his ministry, but when he entered his office, he was surprised to be offered the position of Undersecretary at his Ministry.

Taking to his new assignment with characteristic steam, Yacoub was pleased to discover that many of his staff was old friends from his early school days, or colleagues at the Shuwaikh Secondary School.

During the first month on the job he attended his ministry morning and afternoon, delving into piles of files and reports to become fully acquainted with what was needed to be done.

His new position endorsed a challenging and taught responsibility, but that only spurred his initiative to succeed in doing his best.

One of the problems he soon was to deal with was the distribution of an increasing number of students and teachers to the various schools.

The system of teaching and the curriculum had also to be revised to keep in step with new local needs by adopting new methods of education.

At the time of his appointment the ministry's original scope and involvement had become greatly extended through the years.

Established on strong foundations by the brilliant intellectual, Abdul Aziz Hussein Al Tarkait and his able undersecretary, Feisal Al Saleh, by mid sixties the whole system needed reorganizing to meet new demands in

the job market while aiming at future developments.

Urbanization in Kuwait at this time had reached far and wide; new cities were born; the population had increased dramatically; the social, cultural, political and economic life of the country was fraught with unprecedented needs.

The student population having increased astronomically since the early fifties needed new schools and many more teachers.

A new curriculum was to be adopted along with innovations in the system, aimed at developing those skills most needed in industry and technology, in commerce, in the media, in the fields of culture and in the social and politics sectors.

In tackling each problem objectively the first step was to start the scholastic year on schedule, which was being delayed by the late arrival of text-books from Egypt and teachers from abroad.

Concerning schoolbooks, the ministry sought to provide them in time conforming to its need; those imported from Egypt were not of the standard required, they lacked most information concerning Kuwait and many of the appellatives used in the text were unintelligible to local students.

Striving to update the entire system of education Yacoub held meetings with the heads of the various departments, the result of those meetings was the implementation of a strategic plan.

Different boards were formed, each responsible for writing a schoolbook on a specific subject to be taught in school.



Dr Yacoub Al Ghunaim

Concerning the arrival of teachers on schedule, their contract was set on the first of September instead of the 15th, as it used to be.

The work at the ministry itself was divided into four sectors, each headed by an assistant undersecretary. New administrative boards were set up, each according to its field of specialization to deal effectively and swiftly with different problems in its department.

By implementing this strategy the ministry avoided the effect of a centralized administration that was hampering the flow, causing lag and creating more problems instead of solving those already existing.

To keep in step with new educational developments and to benefit from the successful experiments from

abroad, cultural agreements were carried out with 30 countries, for the exchange of information and official visits.

The ministry also took part in establishing many educational institutions in other Arab countries, to strengthen cultural relations.

Though Yacoub never forgot his intention of getting his Masters degree and PhD he was too busy in his job to satisfy his personal intent:

There were meetings and seminars to attend, and open discussions to be carried out on reports based on extensive researches done by experts in every field of education, some of those reports concerned innovation on school curriculum, others were dealing with the school and family environment and their effect on students, still others held important suggestions useful to the whole educational system.

Incidentally it was during those meetings that for the first time students were involved in the discussions and their suggestions were taken into careful consideration.

To gain maximum advantage from the experience of others, the ministry, in conjunction with the UNESCO, sent a group of young men to visit schools in Europe, another group was sent to China, to Germany, and to the UK.

The reports from those visits gave an insight on a variety of educational methods, which, combined to individual suggestions were useful in the implementation of reforms in the system.

To be continued