

The animal kingdom could earn me friendships

BY NAFHA MAANI

I have moved back to a location where I used to live many years ago. Apart from the protected green belt forest around the village that is not allowed to be cut or changed, the demography of this place has changed.

What used to be single houses on a farmland are now demolished and turned into buildings with six apartments or more. This has increased the village's population.

The elderly population remains steady in number, but there is a good number of younger couples who are now living here. Apartments are cheaper to buy and easier to maintain, and most people prefer to buy rather than rent one.

When I used to live here, I had four neighbours in the land around us; now there are more than 40.

So, one would think that it is easier to find new friends, although we all have family, friends, neighbours and the neighbourhood is something else.

Knowing your neighbours not only helps you spend a good time with them. They can be helpful in case you need a quick troubleshooting which can be a missing onion in the middle of cooking or watering one's plants when on travels.

So, what happens when your next-door neighbours are not as approachable as you wish them to be? You will look further, in the next building or further, but from my experience, it is not easy to find new friends. People come from work and want to prepare dinner, finish chores, and just relax in their bed, or spend time on phones and tablets. Who needs other people to talk to when we have devices talking to us without the expectation to talk back?

However, at least here in Europe, human beings are also becoming more and more suspicious about others; at the back of their mind is a question about why do you want to be friends with them.

I lived this experience when a friend told me it took her and her husband two years of friendship with us to finally confirm that our friendship was just for the sake of being friends without any ulterior motives.

A few days ago I was walking in the little forest behind my house.

I met a friend who has a dog. We chatted a little bit and then sat on a bench. At this point, people who were passing by would stop and seek permission to pat the dog.

Concurrently, my friend knew almost every dog that passed by, by name, and she was telling me about the characteristics of these dogs, and ones that she should keep her dog away from because they are troublemakers.

As we were chatting, a young couple approached and timidly asked if they can pat the dog a little bit and my friend approved.

So, they were patting her as if dealing with an art object of great value.

Thereafter, they thanked her for allowing them to play with the dog and they left while their heads kept turning to say goodbye to the dog. It was a romantic situation.

I had been thinking that when I passed by people, I would wear a big smile and a kind face, hoping that the conversation would go beyond pleasantries, but that rarely worked.

The only solution seems to be sharing my life with one of the animal kingdom, so that perchance I become popular and gain new friends.