

smell. But I must say, the rebel in me was very strong and I feel bad that I let my mother down. I can understand how she felt, for forty years ago vets as a species was pretty unheard of in India!" laughs Sangeeta. Just for your info, Salil, her brother can cook and is an established laparoscopy surgeon. And till today Sangeeta can't cook.



Famously she even burnt up some eggs that she was once trying to boil for her young son, Ahan, who in exasperation said, "You must be the only mom in the world who can't boil even eggs!"

Well, that apart, we can thank our stars for all of Sangeeta's childhood zoo encounters and experiences (she would actually go down into the snake pit with the handler to play with the snakes and she has even cuddled baby cubs) that no doubt put her on the vet track, for she is a damn good vet, responsible and reliable, with an old world style of working.

Which takes us back to her dad. It was he who instilled in her the importance of auscultation. Which is nothing more than the art of listening to the heart, with a stethoscope. "According to my dad, 80% of the diagnosis should get established by physical examination and auscultation. I still practice that. Touch, feel, press, probe, ask questions... Unfortunately these days the reliance is totally on machines," says Sangeeta who spent two years before graduation, visiting her dad's clinic after college hours, just sitting there absorbing, listening to patient history, watching her dad at work.

Sangeeta, incidentally is a cardio specialist. And there is a reason why she went in for higher studies in this field. She once got home a dog from the street to who her dad got very, very attached. Phoenix, he was called.

Dr Avinash Vengsarkar simply doted on him; Phoenix became the centre of his existence. So much so, that if patients objected to his pet's presence at his clinic, he would politely tell them, his dog stays, they could look for another doctor! One day he felt Phoenix was not breathing right. And he did not want to go for his walk either. So he took him to the animal hospital at Parel where they told him his dog was just getting lazy. He trusted them but soon after Phoenix while out on a walk with Sangeeta, just fell and died. Her dad was shattered. And convinced Phoenix had had a heart problem which went undetected because in India, unlike abroad, they weren't aware that dogs can suffer from heart problems. This was in 1987.

Sangeeta narrates, "That was terrible. My dad was as British as possible and not one to show his emotions. Yet, one day many weeks later, I found him crying in his office. I could not bear it. I still had to complete the last six months of my studies which involved research and I decided to do my thesis in Cardiology." And thus Sangeeta Vengsarkar became the first Canine Cardiologist of India.

But it was her dad who recommended that she go abroad to understand their level of expertise, their standard of operation. "Go to the best," he told her. Which prompted Sangeeta to send her thesis to the renowned Dr Larry Tilley in New York with a request that she wanted to work with him. "Come," he replied. And she went. And gained hands-on experience and immense knowledge too through complicated case studies, for Dr Tilley's office received reports from around the world. From here, thanks to Dr Tilley, Sangeeta went to work with another famous vet, Dr Rebecca Gompt at the University of Tennessee, where she studied Echo Cardiology.

Once back in India, she re-started her general practice which was set up in this old-world bungalow that she had grown up in at Shivaji Park. Till today her clinic is right there and it is only now, 32 years later that Sangeeta has actually opened a new clinic at Kemps Corner and it has even got a name, Urban Pet Centre! Finally we,

the South Bombay pet parents will not have to trudge all the way to Shivaji Park as we have been!

In August, this year, Sangeeta is also all set to open a Canine Cancer Care Centre at Khar. Says Sangeeta, "The three most common causes for premature deaths are renal, heart and cancer and I would like to address those issues." Well, please do and bless you.

Sangeeta has compartmentalised her life pretty neatly. A teacher who gives lectures on cardiology to vets, she accepts invitations to travel to different parts of India just six times a year. Once a year she goes overseas for the World Veterinary Conference and since these are always held at wonderful venues she combines it with a family holiday. The last one was in Copenhagen and Sangeeta loved it! "I was the first Indian speaker to give a lecture on cardiology at an international conference. My dad would have been so proud..."

In Bombay her daily routine is gym at 6.30 am, breakfast with her 80 year old mom at her home in Shivaji Park. After which she is at the clinic seeing her doggie patients until 3 or 4 pm. Then she spends quiet time studying reports etc and leaves the clinic to reach her home in Parel by 6.30 pm. She winds down either reading, a passion with her or listening to Indian Classical music, an even bigger passion. Dinner at 8.30 and to bed by 11.30.

All her social life happens in Alibag, where her dad had bought a plot and made a rustic home, decades ago. She has all of five friends there and sailing across for the weekend is sacrosanct. Alibag is Sangeeta's lifeline. Relax, read, unwind, walk the dogs, work the garden. "The best part of my time at Alibag is walking the dogs. I put on the timer and walk them exactly for half an hour. I think it is very important for people to walk their dogs themselves. I would not trade this time for anything in the world," concludes Sangeeta.

For someone who always brought home abused dogs and dogs in pain, when, where and how did Weimaraners happen? I ask my final question. "Oh that happened when Ahan was five years old and Nimish and I were



visiting another vet friend of mine, Feroze, in Poona. His dog just had had a litter and I saw this most beautiful girl pup who we simply had to get home. And we did, it was Anais, my first Weimaraner! After she passed away, we missed her so much that we decided to get the same breed again. And we got Carlos and Chelsea. They are lovely dogs though a bit high-strung. They like to stay aloof, are quite quiet and are very intelligent. They don't like people that much and like to hang with their own set of friends. They can even appear to

be rather arrogant, though they are not..." concluded Sangeeta.

I have this theory that each of us represent an animal. And I always play this game with myself when I am in a crowd trying to match people and animals. I always thought Sangeeta reminded me of a Mudhol. It was only now I realised it was actually a Weimaraner. And I am sure there can't be a better compliment. I wish somebody would tell me I remind them of a Lhasa Apso! But that is wishful thinking, they are just soooooo cute! 🐾