



Figures. Dr. Brar cooking carrot halwa, a popular dessert in India (1). An aluminum foil painting that Dr. Brar made when she was 17 years old, which is on display in her high school (2). A selection of Dr. Brar's modeling photos (3). Screengrabs from some of Dr. Brar's scientific videos (4).

AN EYE FOR THE ARTS



Threading a suture needle or an embroidery needle, chopping a cataract or a carrot, facing a complication or a camera, I aspire to do it all in style.

BY SHEETAL BRAR, MBBS, MS, FPRS, FC

Ever since I can remember, I have had a particular affinity for the kitchen out of all the other rooms in a house. I grew up in a typical middle-class family in India, in a homey and humble environment. Mothers in those times dedicated themselves to homemaking, and teaching daughters how to cook was considered an essential part of domestic training. I remember my mom telling me, “Even if a woman becomes the prime minister, she should know how to cook food.” She also quoted, “the way to a man’s heart is through his stomach” and many other similar proverbs to inspire me to become a good cook and, thus, a good future wife.

COOKING

Whether thanks to my mom’s efforts

or inherent in me, I developed a keen interest in the culinary arts. Cooking became my favorite hobby (Figure 1). As soon as I got home from school in the afternoon, I would complete my homework quickly so that I could devote my evening to cooking a good meal for my family—typically a mini buffet of different types of curries, chutneys, loaves of bread, and desserts. After a couple of years, I was an expert cook, and I started to find it rewarding when guests would show appreciation for the meals I prepared. I, however, never looked at cooking as a serious interest that I could pursue as a career. Female chefs did not exist in India at that time.

I still love to prepare my meals despite a busy schedule, and I seldom eat out. Driven by my mantra of “food by mood,” I cook and enjoy

a variety of cuisines such as Indian, Asian, Continental, Mexican, and Mediterranean. I love experimenting with food. Making my favorite foods is therapeutic and exhilarating.

FOIL PAINTING AND CROSS-STITCHING

When I entered high school, I developed an interest in foil painting and in cross-stitch, a form of embroidery my mom used to do. Unlike most of my other classmates who enjoyed outdoor games, I preferred to stay indoors and pursue these hobbies. One of the aluminum foil paintings I made when I was 17 is still on display at my high school (Figure 2). I enjoy art, but I was not interested in pursuing it as a profession.

A doctor himself, my father always encouraged me to pursue a career in

medicine. Unfortunately, when I entered medical training, most of my hobbies fell by the wayside because I could not devote the time necessary for their refinement. For most of my years at Christian Medical College in Ludhiana, India, and through two fellowships, I stayed in hostels, where it was nearly impossible to find the time for my art.

MODELING

To break the monotony of my work commitments during fellowship, I briefly took up modeling. I wanted to try something new and totally different, something that would add a dimension to my life and personality. My decision was driven largely by friends and well-wishers who admired my height and features for their European characteristics—good modeling material, apparently! Even though I knew modeling was not my cup of tea, I took part in some semiprofessional photo shoots (Figure 3), which garnered a lot of admiration on social media. I was even approached by some companies to model for their products.

My attraction to show business was short-lived. It soon became clear to me that my purpose in this world was to become an ophthalmologist in good standing and serve my patients. That said, I still enjoy having my photo taken with high-definition cameras and appearing on-screen. That's why I like to feature myself in my scientific films, several of which have won awards at film festivals at annual meetings of organizations such as the ASCRS, ESCRS, Asia Pacific Association of Cataract and Refractive Surgeons, and Asia-Pacific Academy of Ophthalmology (Figure 4). This approach gives my videos a personal touch and allows me to indulge my enjoyment of modeling for the benefit of science and patient care.

CONCLUSION

So, here I am, a half-baked chef, artist, and model but a fully baked surgeon, trainer, and researcher. Even though my pursuit of extracurricular interests has waxed and waned throughout my life, I am happy with the choices I have made and glad that I can still pursue some hobbies. My faith has played a big role in my efforts. I am grateful to my family, especially my husband, Dr. Harmandeep Singh Brar, MBBS, MS (Surgery), DNB (Neurosurgery), for his constant support and my mentor, Dr. Sri Ganesh, MBBS, MS, DNB, FRCS, for his encouragement and providing opportunities to pursue my biggest passion, ophthalmic surgical training and research, which can change the lives of my patients and trainees. There is no greater satisfaction than this for me. ■

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