

7 Dogs, 700 stories...



Judith Bidapa's dowry was a pet Doberman and that rightly has placed her on the cover of the inaugural issue of Furs, Fins and Feathers.

-Adithi Mathews



One meeting with the effervescent Judith Bidapa and you realise quite quickly, that it's her energy that enables her to juggle the many roles of an actor, equestrian, teacher, mother and animal lover. After fifteen years of teaching English, Art, Social Studies and Theatre at Bangalore's Mallya Aditi International School, she traded in her chalk for a pair of gardening gloves and is currently spending her time taking care of her garden at the Bidapa's Yelahanka farmhouse.

On entering the farmhouse you are first greeted by two very well groomed mongrels- Ingi and Dusty, who Judith calls her 'avanth garde' guards. As you approach the main entrance of the bungalow you hear more barking, and sense the animal hierarchy in the Bidapa household.



Her tastefully done house could well feature in any interiors magazine, and her three beautiful dogs – Leo, Cindy and Ella add charm to the house they belong in. With two more stray puppies added to the already existing brood, Judith seems content with her seven

furry friends. Judith who is married to India's foremost style guru and image consultant Prasad Bidapa jokes that her dowry was a pet Doberman. "When I got married I went to my in- laws place with a suitcase in one hand and a leash in the other. We always have a good laugh about Judy's dowry," she says.

She also goes on to recount her experiences as a child with her first dog 'Punch' and a few more dogs from the street who waited to be fed by her eagerly every day. "We were three kids, me and my friends and we used to go from door to door with a dish asking for milk for the dogs. Everyone would put a bit of milk in our dish and two slices of bread with which we used to feed all the dogs. When I look back I think what guts I had to go from door to door asking for milk for dogs."

There is a little story behind each of Judith's five dogs, all of whom are named after her favorite celebrities from the west. They, are as distinctive as the names they carry.



Leonardo DiCaprio, Age: 5 years, Breed: Boxer

Named after the Hollywood heartthrob, 'Leo' is most suitably called the 'gentle giant' and is without a doubt one of Judith's favorite dogs of the lot. The boxer was given to her by her family after she lost her mongrel 'Batman' to a road accident. "Batman's death devastated me as for three whole days I could not speak. That's when Prasad went and got two pups to cheer me up. My whole family- my mother, kids, and husband got me two boxer pups as they are my favorite breed. I was so upset that I was not ready but when I saw them I melted and that's how the smiles came back." she remembers. She also adds that he is the most helpless of the lot and a chatter box, who loves to chat with every visitor who comes to the Bidapa household.



Cinderella, Age: 3 years, Breed: German Shepard

The most active and the playful of the lot is Cindy, who came to be a part of Judith's life when a colleague of Prasad's could not keep her after she moved into an apartment. "She was three years old when she came home and she adjusted so beautifully like she always belonged here" she says. One thing distinct about Cindy is that she hates motorcycles and bicycles and turns into a fierce dog on seeing or hearing one.

Ella Fitzgerald, Age 2, Breed: Cross between a Labrador and German Shepard

The non fussy eater of the gang, with a face 'only a mother can love' is the loud 'Ella' named after the jazz great 'Ella Fitzgerald'. 'She has all the wrong features of both breeds' says Judith, 'Her legs are short, body too long and fat and a short neck, but she is the most softest and sweetest of the lot' she adds.



Ingi and Dusty Age: 1 year, Breed: Mongrel

Named 'Ingi' which means ginger in Tamil and 'Dusty' after actor Dustin Hoffman the two mongrels are

Judith's watch dogs who alert the other dogs. "I found them in a drain when I was driving to school one day, and I told myself to drive and not look. I ended picking them up and got them home hoping to find a suitable home. But they stayed on." she says. Judith is also caring for two more stray puppies which were rescued recently by Prasad. In between feeding them and giving them de-worming medication, she is also looking for homes for the puppies but knows they might stay on like most of her other dogs have in the past.

In conversation, Judith also reveals that she is planning on getting back to her first love -theatre. Having embraced theater in the 70's, she has worked in plays written by Ben Elton, Girish Karnad, Agatha Christie and P.G Wodehouse. But, Judith recall's the stage adaptation of Charles Webb's 'The Graduate' as being her most challenging role till date.



"That was the last production that I worked in with director Kevin Oliver where I played the role of Mrs Robinson. The production was chastely done where the lights were dimmed at the exact moment when the robes were taken off." she says

Also an ace rider, Judith has taught in one of the premier riding schools in the country -The Embassy International Riding School. Having grown up and been around pets all her life, she strongly believes one cannot measure the benefits of having pets and affirms that there should be a law where every child gets a pet. "I would have one of every kind of animal in the house given a choice. Just like Noah's Arc, but I don't have the space and people to help take care of pets."

On her wish list next is to get a mongoose recounting the reason being Rudyard Kipling's short story, 'Rikki-Tikki-Tavi'. But before signing off, Judith reveals someday she would love to train to be an animal therapist and also work with sick people.