

# CLOSE ENCOUNTERS OF A DIFFERENT KIND - II

**B. Mohanachandran**

'Blue Cross', Kazhakootam  
Thiruvananthapuram

As a veterinary surgeon, I have often been abused, kicked, and bitten by my patients. Not for any grudge or hatred they bore me, but it was the only way they could react while being subjected to some of the painful procedures. A strong kick from a cow at the most vulnerable of parts can send any vet flying out of the cattle shed. You'll find more callouses on the shinbones of a vet than international hockey player.

The events that follow happened in 1981 during my first tenure as veterinary surgeon at a dispensary in Kadinamkulam. Appu was a rather nondescript dog who stands out from among those who subjected me to such abuse. I've never seen a dog with such a sense of humour. Appu belonged to nobody but the whole village owned him and loved him.

His performance as a stud was extraordinary and the females, of the species often fought fought to catch eyes, as a result you will find many of his offspring in and around Kadinamkulam. But his testosterone level was so high that he started venturing out of the village in search of variety, and the villagers thought that enough was enough and decided to castrate him.

Castration is a surgically simple-enough procedure in which the testicles are removed and the animal rendered neutral. The mantle fell on me. I still do hate having to do it - but when the owners insist, you have no other go. We decided to do it on a Sunday morning.

Sunday came; Appu was given a royal bath and courted into surgery by a horde of well wishers. He behaved like a well brought up child and came in smiling. During those days, short acting tranquilizers were unheard of and we used to undertake minor surgical procedures under local anaesthesia. He was muzzled, lifted on to the table, forced to lie on his back with his legs stretched apart. After grumbling a little while he decided to co-operate and lay still.

In the veterinary profession, the surgeon often has to perform the role of barber, anaesthetist, and

pathologist performing a postmortem. Barbers come first in any surgical procedure and I considered myself quite an expert at it. So preparation of the site was undertaken. Appu's scrotum was scrubbed, lathered with soap and shaved neatly using a razor. Not fully satisfied with my first attempt I had a second go at it till his scrotal skin shone, like a well-polished shoe.

It is not often, a veterinary surgeon gets the chance to show off his shaving skills that too on a dog's adornments. Proud of my performance so far I decided to brief the Sunday morning crowd on the surgical proceedings they were about to witness. I put on the air of an expert surgeon, who has performed countless number of castrations (in actual fact, it was the first I was to perform single-handedly and I was trying hard to keep my hands from shaking).

"A linear incision of about an inch long will be placed on the scrotal skin after infiltrating local anaesthetic under the scrotal skin and into the testicles," I expounded. There was total silence and the crowd drew nearer. "This exposes the tunica vaginalis which is also incised and on applying a little pressure the testicles pop out of the incision."

I turned around, pretend not to see the many eyes popping out of their sockets eager to hear what I was going to say next. "The testicles are then removed by severing the it from the spermatic cord, the avascular portion and the vascular portion are knotted together to arrest any bleeding." "The wound is left open for effective drainage, the scrotal sac shrinks in a weeks time, "I finished. All this while Appu was listening to me with keen interest wagging his tail, in a happy frame of mind unaware of his losing his masculinity a few moments from now.

"O.K. lets start" I said and took the syringe loaded with local anaesthetic in my hand. Everything happened in a fraction of a second, Appu jumped up and took off like a streak of lightning, and the crowd ran after him. Their attempts proved futile, I collapsed into the chair, my image badly tarnished and my spirit

at its lowest, unaware still of the calamities yet to come.

Monday-morning hours are always busy and so the previous day's misadventure was forgotten. After the day's busy clinical routine I was settling down into my chair to do some letter writing, when my eyes were drawn by the sun's rays reflecting off some glistening round object. I couldn't believe my eyes, there was Appu standing by a coconut tree just in front of my door, in a urinating posture exhibiting his shaven ornaments mockingly at me.

I pretended to ignore him but couldn't help look at the end product of my shaving skills through the corner of my eyes. There was a strange expression of superiority on his face as if to belittle the veterinary surgeon in me. I was reduced to the status of an underside shaver that too of a nondescript dog.

It became a routine affair, every morning he would come at the appointed hour to flash those shining globules at me, pivoting on one leg the other extended skywards. Sometimes swinging them like a simple pendulum till I either got annoyed and started howling abuse at him, or until those orbs lost their momentum and came to a standstill. I was mad for revenge, a doctor gunning for his patient sounds ridiculous.

He was due for his next shave, another Sunday morning was chosen. This time he was overpowered and the shaving neatly done. As I turned around and started scrubbing my hand there was commotion behind me, Appu inflicted a gaping wound on the hand of a bystander pinning him down and dashed off the table.

I was reminded of my physics master Mr. Madhu ..... who taught me that light travels faster than sound. The yells of the bystander reached me much later than flash of his freshly polished ords. Days

passed and to add insult to the injury, my favourite flasher now did it two times every day.

We decided to go in for a third attempt myself as willing as the rest. This time around the modus operandi was well discussed briefing given like from a commanding Officer to his subordinates. All possible loopholes plugged, Appu was sedated, and the shaving gone through quickly, I had become an expert at this particular part by now and could do it with my eyes closed. Even under sedation he smiled. Surgery was under local anaesthesia and recovery was uneventful as he walked out of the dispensary like a drunk, still under sedation.

I went away on a week's leave and on my return I was annoyed to learn Appu was missing since surgery. Much to my relief Appu returned with his empty sac in a few days. He was never the same Appu ever again. The lack of male hormones seemed to have had its impact on him. He seemed to develop a lot more fat around his waist, and was no more interested in the opposite sex.

He suddenly developed a sudden interest in taking up night patrolling in right earnest. He soon became a terror to bicycle riders without headlamps or pillion riders, a role strictly meant for the policeman those days. He never came back to the dispensary but every once a while he would come to its rusty gate lean against it and exhibit his shrunken scrotal sac, resembling a dried up lemon to me. All the while keeping a blank expression on his face.

He was never the same old Appu, our loss was greater than his.

*(Previously published in "LEADING EDGE" an English Fortnightly - with permission)*



### **Oral vaccine all set to bite into the rabies menace**

The Animal Welfare Board of India is launching a pilot project in metros and 20 rural areas to immunize stray dogs to prevent rabies. An imported oral bait vaccine will be used under the project recommended by the World Health Organization. This is in view of the heavy financial burden on India as post rabies exposure treatment in humans was costs about Rs 300 crore annually and another Rs 10 crore is spent on animals. Plans have been finalized to launch the WHO-recommended immunization programme on a pilot basis in Delhi and Chennai. It is also proposed to be launched shortly in Hyderabad and other metros. After assessing its efficacy for an year the programme would be extended all over the country. The project would cost about Rs 250 crore annually.

### **APPEAL TO DISTRICT OFFICE BEARERS**

Assistance of district office bearers requested to ensure timely publication of district news, retirements and obituaries. ([editorjiva@gmail.com](mailto:editorjiva@gmail.com))