



# AN EVENING WITH Manny Vasant

Subir Banerji & Russ Ladwa share an evening with Manny (Manjul) Vasant



“*Man is stronger than the strongest beast, not physically, but in inner wisdom. Failures and disappointments in life are just common and sometimes may be even rewards in disguise by the way of future successes. Don't let this little disappointment involving a delay of six months, in your goal, rob you of your “peace of mind” – so vital for your many battles in future.*”

Excerpt from a letter written by Manny's father to his brother Kishor during a temporary disappointment during his medical course.

These words are a constant source of strength and solace to Manny at all times. As he successfully made it to the Gillmans Point, the official certification point at the top of Mount Kilimanjaro, these words were still echoing through his mind as they always do. He believes that a man's job is to do one's best - the result, to a certain extent, is irrelevant and certainly out of one's control.

Despite a busy schedule Manny found time to meet with us. Over dinner we chatted freely and he was very generous about sharing his many stories, both good and bad! His experiences through life, it seemed, have acted to catalyse his strength to achieve the success he now has and rightfully deserves.

Manjul believes that the Asian Odontological Group (AOG), as it was called then, was officially launched in 1982 at a social gathering at the YMCA Croydon which Manny had organised for Asian dentists. Some 70 or so dentists attended this function. A social event at Guy's Hospital paved the way for regular events in the AOG's calendar. Soon

after this event, Raj Rayan launched a newsletter which really became the voice of the AOG. It was Manny, who wrote a letter in this newsletter and suggested that the name be changed to Anglo-Asian Odontological Group. Even in the early days he had the vision that this group would one day be prominent in the national scene, indeed with potential for international recognition.

Born and brought up in Tanzania, Manny obtained a place to read dentistry in Bombay at one of the oldest dental schools in the country - The Nair Hospital Dental College, a colonial British institution. At the University, by coincidence, he met his old high school classmate from home, Meena who was to later become his wife. On qualification in 1972, due to the political climate in East Africa, Manny was forced to come to England and re-qualify to be able to register in the UK. This, he did in a record time of four months. The difficulties of overseas graduates wanting to register to practice in this country was experienced first hand. Many of his contemporaries could not take the stress. Many sought other jobs such as bus conductors or clerks for survival. Some qualified up to 20 years later - others were not so lucky. One or two even lost their bottle completely. The stress and the frustration was too much. For a man of high principles, it was only natural that he take up their cause.

On qualification, he got married in Croydon, Surrey and set up a home there. This was to become a meeting, eating and teaching place for those who followed him. To this day, Manny continues to run courses for them - albeit, these have now progressed to better and bigger venues. Manny quietly, but persistently, continued his crusade for a level playing field. This could not have gone unnoticed. The International Qualifying Examination launched in year 2001, by the General Dental Council is a welcome change.

Manny was president of the AOG in 1994 and amongst others, along with Raj Rayan and Ruby Austin, a founder member of the Central London MGDS Study Group. He has remained a strong advocate of postgraduate education with a career pathway for general practitioners firmly in mind. Running two busy practices himself, how he finds the time to fulfil his

many commitments of being a vocational trainer, VT advisor, lecturer, examiner for various examinations - the list is endless and is highly commendable. Since 1997 Manny has been appointed to become a Regional Advisor (University of London SW Thames VT Scheme). Fighting against all opposition for his principles and beliefs seems to be the driving force behind this dynamic man.

A committed family man, his daughter is an optometrist and his son is now following in his footsteps, at GKT Medical and Dental School, London. Manny has been and continues to be, a mentor to many practitioners, guiding them through the Faculty examinations. He also lends the benefit of his considerable experience to help colleagues write articles, organise lectures or set up practices. He remains grateful to his first principal Dr Harris Yee-chong of Mitcham Surrey for offering him an opportunity of a job after (unsuccessfully) having knocked on several doors. Subsequently, his second principal, Dr Lalit Bandlish London, encouraged him to carry on with his passion of taking post-graduate education and allowed him to make his frequent journeys to the USA.

Successful in the American Board Examinations and having obtained a licence to practice in the state of New York, early in his career, he has friends on either side of the Atlantic. When asked for advice from professional colleagues, one can always say that "I don't know the answer to that but I know a man who does" and then refer them to Manny who is willing to help. Whether he is on a squash court, golf course, at surgery or lecture podium, the essential ingredient is that he "enjoys" what he does, this seems to be the common denominator for his success. He remains highly respected in the professional and academic circles.

Sharing time with him at a restaurant across the road from his practice was a highly pleasurable and informative experience. Achieving what he has so far one would expect that he has deserved to take things easy. Hearing what he has planned for the future however, it seems that he is not one to rest on his laurels.