



# Friday

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## In a pickle

How our driving styles lead to traffic woes **30**



■ SHAWARMA FOR THE SOUL

# Monkey business

Eddie the monkey wears a permanent grin on his face. You can tweak his nose, tickle him or bounce him on your knee, he won't complain. He is the most friendly monkey you can meet. He is also soft by nature, floppy and has dacron where his heart should be. But that's okay. It makes him what he is – an adorable soft toy created by Dulhani Lakmali. Lakmali, known to family and friends as Mali, has created many friends for Eddie all of whom sell like hot cakes even as they bring a smile to people's faces. Eddie and his companions are a part of Mali's Sandu Star collection.

"My son Sandaru Sithija was born two years ago and everyone calls him Sandu, which is Sinhalese for 'moon'. I was a housewife at the time and shared [and still do] a good friendship with the Townsend family who are from England but live in Dubai. They have two daughters, Ella and Clara. The Townsend family have always been aware of my creativity and the daughters suggested that I start exercising it. They knew that I loved making dolls and stuffed animals as a child. In a bid to encourage me to take the first step, they bought me enough dacron and socks to get me started on a project. I decided to create a monkey because these animals remind me of my hometown in Kandy, Sri Lanka. My first sock monkey turned out to be a success because it was the first piece that sold at the ARTE souq. That encouraged me to take up this craft seriously. I made an entire collection of sock monkeys that go under the name of Sandu Star, named after my two-year-old son."

Lakmali has previously experimented with silver carving as well as creating felt figurines but it is the sock monkey that won her heart – as well as the hearts of her friends and later customers. "Sandu Star Collection

has changed my life by enabling me to express my creativity. It's only after you attempt a project that you can really begin to know your true potential," she says. "The best thing about this aspect of my life is that it helped me be surrounded by people who encourage me. My husband, Manju Prasanna, comes home from work and helps me fill the socks (with dacron) while I sew on the hands and legs to the body."

Lakmali attributes the success of her simple creative endeavour to the Townsend daughters. "Ella and Clara even write short stories to accompany each of the sock monkeys so as to add character," Lakmali explains. "At the ARTE souq, I present the Sandu Star Collection with the stories on individual cards attached to each sock monkey. Visitors love to read the stories and it helps them in their decision of which one to take home.

One such Sandu Star Collection story reads:

"Hi. My name is Rosie and I come from London. I'm a real girly-girl and I love all things pink. My bedroom is bright pink and most of the clothes I wear are pink except for when I go to school. My favourite foods are chocolate and strawberries but I eat

most types of food, except for fish.

I love to dance and I take ballet lessons each week where I have met a lot of new friends. At home I am always dancing and my sisters get annoyed with me. On the weekend after I have done my homework, I spend time with my friends at the swimming pool. Please take care of me and I promise to take care of you."

Lakmali admits that there is an ulterior motive to creating the Sandu Star Collection. "The extra money I earn from my craft has helped my husband and me set up our home in Kandy. Times can be tough and I'm grateful that I can generate an income from something that I love doing," she says.

Will Lakmali start making other animals native to Sri Lanka? "I would like to branch out a bit more and experiment with more creative ideas and try my hand at making animals such as elephants. Currently I am working on creating sock rabbits."

The question is: would sock monkeys Eddie, Rosie and the rest be willing to share the limelight with other sock animals? So far they seem to be enjoying it all to themselves! ■

For more information visit [www.artedubai.etsy.com](http://www.artedubai.etsy.com) or e-mail Dulhani Lakmali on [sandustar@yahoo.com](mailto:sandustar@yahoo.com).

– Preethi Janice D'Sa is a Dubai-based freelance writer

**Dulhani Lakmali with her son Sandaru Sithija, two, who is called Sandu for short. His mother has named her line of sock monkeys after him.**

