# LIFE IS BEAUTIFUL

*Sometimes, gratefulness and a positive outlook on life can really uplift you and those around you. Tagged the ‘Jingle Queen’ of India, bagging over 7000 jingles and medleys­ (Remember Sha Sha Sha Mi Mi Mi from Shamitabh? Yep, that’s her), recording artist CaraLisa Monteiro talks about her difficult days as a child, challenges she faced growing up, her unplanned music career and developing passion for fitness, all with a constant smile on her face…*

GROWING UP

 I was barely two when my mother was diagnosed with a rare muscle inflammation disease called polymyositis. She was on steroids for the longest time and eventually died of lymphoma (blood cancer). Later Giselle, my sister, passed away with breast cancer in 1997. She was only 26. She had had a feeling that something was off but since we weren’t really well to do back then, and coupled with fear she didn’t get her condition checked at the offset; she passed away within a year of being diagnosed.

Not having a mom is difficult. Thankfully, my grandmother and my aunts (mom’s sisters) stayed single and took care of us. Other than that there was the financial burden. Whatever little was there went into medicating both Mom and then later Giselle. Times were hard ─ I only wore hand me downs right until the time I graduated.

MUSIC PRACTICALLY RUNS IN HER BLOOD

Mom loved to sing and she was a really good singer ─ they used to call her the ‘Nightingale of Dadar’ and Dad was arguably the best bass opera singer in Asia. So for me, music was an integral part growing up. I have always loved Gospel, and Whitney Houston has always been my idol. However, my aunts wanted me to graduate so that someone would employ me, but I wasn’t really great at academics.

Fortunately for me, Giselle was doing music professionally alongside her social work and I realized I could do it too. I will always be grateful to Ehsaan and Loy for calling me for my first jingle. I don’t know how this tag, ‘Jingle Queen’ came along. I like calling myself a recording artist and that’s what I’ve been for close to 20 years now.

GETTING FIT

When I was 30 years old, I weighed 88kgs. I had blood pressure and mild cholesterol issues, I ate unhealthy. That is when I went to the doctor and he asked me if I was willing to change my lifestyle or go on meds. I primarily started working out simply because I didn’t want to go on meds!

My husband is a big motivation factor. He looks at exercising very differently. For him, everything is competitive, even if it’s against himself. Training with him changed my outlook completely. Now the focus is to lift heavier, stretch further, running longer, harder and faster. And I realized exercising helps you look good in your clothes but training helps you look good without them. There is no greater motivation for a girl than to wear clothes she always wanted to and she can!

Running came about very strangely, I had been a member of premium gyms for a while and since I never played any sport growing up I hired a personal trainer and they all told me I was big boned! My husband, who is sport obsessed, told me that in 6 months I would lose 25kgs and that road running was going to be a part of the routine. That’s the last I had of a personal trainer. The first time I ran I could only run three kilometers. It took me 3 months to hit the 10 km mark. I was never on Twitter till recently and I got on to share updates of my run from Mumbai to Pune. I think @caralisa and @caralisamonteiro was taken, so keeping in mind my then obsession with putting in miles, I made the handle @runcaralisarun and it kind of stuck!
Running is now an integral part of my life. I try and run between 2 and 3 times a week and generally run about 50km a week.

BUT FITNESS ISN’T JUST PHYSICAL, IT’S MENTAL TOO

I think physical wellbeing is a balance of eating, resting and training. Running is a great de-stressor by nature. I’m wired to be chill, I don’t stress easily. I’ve lived the hardest years of my life as a child. As a woman without a Godfather and someone who hates PR, I’ve done well for myself. I have a peaceful life, respect of peers, a husband who’s supportive and eccentric and my dog Slayer who loves me unconditionally. And unlike the rest in my family, I have got the gift of life. So, I think being grateful is the key to mental wellbeing …which I stand by.

TALKING ABOUT CANCER AND HER CHARITY

Having lost so much, I’ve learnt that life is too precious and short to waste on insignificant things. Starting with myself I try to keep things as real as possible every day. Relationships and doing things that satisfy you are more important. I would like to create a legacy, no matter how small, that will affect someone else’s present and future positively and help them.

When mom and Giselle passed away I realized that we had absolutely no money for their treatment and often through the church and friends and relatives the bills were paid. Post my mother’s demise, Dad was depressed and he walked out on us. With my aunts being secretaries there was only that much money that was being made. I was too young to be able to contribute. That’s when I decided I needed to do something to help people when I am able.
Angel In Disguise, my charity for cancer, is the extension of that dream. I help people without them necessarily knowing I helped them. Like an angel in disguise would!

Cancer can often times be cured by a healthy lifestyle, not eating processed food and not being stressed all the time. I think the immediate support system needs to come together and fight it. 50 percent of the fight is in the mind but the treatment of cancer is so aggressive that its effects are pretty damaging to anyone. So it’s said that it can either make you or break you. Even if it does break you, you are being given a shot at a second life as a cancer survivor. I know some amazing people who have survived cancer and others who are constantly changing lives.

*CaraLisa credits her success to her family. Her aunts for sacrificing their lives so that she got a fair shot at one. They also never pressurized her into taking a 9-5 job. Her sister Giselle for teaching her at a young age that it is important to give back and her husband who taught her the importance of going out and helping others.*
“..And lastly our dog Slayer, who no matter what, teaches me how blessed I am to be alive, to have a roof and three meals a day. Life is simply awesome.”