

Vet Science graduates: It's all in the family for us!

Posted on April 24, 2019



Dr Ninke Voigts and Dr Bianca Voigts who graduated recently

Two graduates from the University of Pretoria's (UP) Faculty of Veterinary Science recently shared with Primarashni Gower why veterinary practice is in their blood.

Dr Ninke Voigts

PG: What made you decide to work with animals?

Becoming a vet has been a lifelong dream. I've always been passionate about animals, and despite flirting with the idea of a few other careers, I always came circling back to being a vet.

PG: Tell me about your family of vets.

My father's older brother, Dr Hugo Voigts, is a vet. He is compassionate and treated our family pets throughout my childhood. His oldest daughter, Dr Bianca Voigts, also studied veterinary science. She graduated with a master's in Tropical Health. I decided to study veterinary science a few years after Bianca; then Bianca's sister, Kirsten Voigts, decided that veterinary nursing was the path for her.

PG: Did you feel pressured to follow in your family's footsteps?

Quite the opposite. Uncle Hugo and Bianca told me how long and difficult the course is and that I should really take my time to consider if I really wanted to study veterinary science. Uncle Hugo outlined the difficulties of a vet's life – long hours, working after hours, being on call, as well as all the emotional difficulties involved. My mom also asked me several times whether I was sure that this was what I wanted.

PG: What was it like growing up with vets as family members?

It meant that I knew what a vet was from a very young age, as Uncle Hugo would come to our house to give our dogs their vaccinations and other minor treatments.

PG: What aspect of being a vet do you love?

I love figuring out what is wrong with the animal and what to treat. I especially love seeing the animal again at a later stage and seeing how well its doing.

PG: What area of vet science do you plan to go into?

I enjoy general veterinary practice in small animals (dogs and cats); that's where I'm likely to stay. I have an interest in animal behaviour (small animals) and may want to do some additional courses in that.

PG: What pets do you have?

I have Basset Hound, Tiida, who is living with my parents on their farm, and I recently adopted a kitten, Jupiter. We also have four other family dogs and a family cat (she used to be mine when I was at school, but adopted my mom when I left home to go to university).

PG: Does your family talk about animals at the dinner table?

Yes, mostly because I seem to have forgotten how to speak about anything other than vet-related things! Being rather isolated at the Onderstepoort Veterinary Science Faculty at UP with other vets does that to you, but also because my father farms with sheep and cattle.

PG: Describe your experience as a UP student.

My first year on the main campus was an amazing experience – I'm really glad that we get to study one year on the main campus. Of course, Onderstepoort was special in a way that you can't understand if you haven't studied there. The farm vibe set-up seemingly transports you out of Pretoria. The lecturers are supportive and always willing to help, no matter what. The smaller campus also creates a more intimate experience where the strongest bonds of friendship are formed.

Dr Lesleigh Rous



Dr Lesleigh Rous (centre) with her parents Dr Charmaine Rous and Dr Gavin Rous

PG: What made you decide to work with animals?

I grew up in Colesberg with all kinds of pets, from tame springbuck and a zebra to a pig. As a child, my parents allowed me to have any animal that came across my path; in fact, I got my first pony before I could walk. I had a guinea pig breeding programme. When I was in primary school I used to tame budgies for people. So becoming a vet was just the natural next step in life.

PG: Tell me about your family of vets.

My parents, Gavin and Charmaine Rous, studied at Onderstepoort. My father comes from Colesberg and his father, Dr Robin Cole Rous, was a veterinarian there. My parents took over his practice, the Karoo Veterinary Hospital, after he passed away. He was one of the founding members of the South African Equine Veterinary Association and was the first vet to perform an elective caesarean section on a horse as well as cranial surgery on sheep for cyst removal. My father was an equine vet but now treats a wide range of species, from tigers to racing pigeons and game. My mother is a small-animal veterinarian.

PG: Did you feel pressure to become a vet?

No, there was nothing else I ever wanted to do.

PG: What was it like growing up with vets as family members?

It was wonderful. There was always something exciting to see or do, and I was privileged to experience many aspects of the veterinary profession before I got into it myself. As a young vet and student, my parents encouraged me to trust in my abilities, and guided me in certain surgeries and procedures from a very young age, which was a big plus when I got to veterinary school.

PG: What aspect of being a vet do you love?

I love having the ability to make a difference in an animal's life, and I find it rewarding to see an owner's reaction on being reunited with a newly healthy pet.

PG: What area of vet science do you plan to go into?

I love mixed practice [treating all species of animals that are brought into the practice] but I have a soft spot for equine surgery, so I am hoping to join a mixed practice and perhaps specialise in equine surgery one day.

PG: What pets do you have?

I have a couple of horses, a Staffie called Buddha and a Maine Coon cat called Toulouse.

PG: Does your family talk about animals at the dinner table?

Yes, of course! And they often make other dinner guests feel quite out of sorts when talk turns to various surgeries and ailments witnessed throughout the day.

PG: Describe your experience as a UP student.

I enjoyed Onderstepoort: it was like studying on a farm. Student life there was a lot of fun and I made friends I will cherish forever.

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Published by Buyi Nkonyane