



Born To Be A Vet

Dr Sangeeta Vengsarkar is a veterinary doctor par excellence, says **Farzana Contractor**. She grew up listening to medical jargon right since she was a child. Everyone in her family was a doctor! Dinner table conversations included words like Ebstein anomaly and Eisenmenger's syndrome, Tetralogy of Fallot... it was a given that she would take to medicine one day

Photographs : **Farzana Contractor**

"My dad was my entire world, I am what I am because of him, it was he who inculcated love of animals in me. My earliest memory is him taking me to Chowpatty to play with dogs on the beach," begins Dr Sangeeta Vengsarkar, whose name also includes Shah, married as she is to Dr Nimish Shah, radiologist and head of department at MGM Hospital at Parel in Bombay. Sangeeta, an extremely soft-spoken person is devoted to caring for animals and I can easily picture her as a gentle child, stroking dogs in the street, picking up stray pups, bringing them home to care for.

"I did exactly that for my entire growing up years and I have to thank my dad for that. He encouraged me to do so. And the one place he took me to regularly, from the time I was two years old, was the zoo, Rani Baug at Byculla. Even the superintendent had become a close friend of his simply because of our frequent visits to the zoo. Those are my most cherished memories," says Sangeeta her voice breaking with nostalgia for it is only a few years ago that she lost her dad, the well-known, well-respected cardiologist, Dr Avinash Vengsarkar. A pioneer in cardiology in India, he was part of the team in the UK, under Dr Helen Taussig when the first heart transplant took place. Dr Sangeeta Vengsarkar Shah comes

from a family where everyone practiced medicine. Her grandfather, father, uncles, aunts... And they were not just doctors and surgeons but super specialists in their respective fields; cardiology, neurology, pathology orthopedics... It was therefore a given that Sangeeta would also become a doctor. And she did. But there was a twist there. She became a vet!

"Oh my God, I remember that day so clearly. I was 14 and had just finished my 10th standard when I informed everyone at home that I was going to become a vet. My mom had a fit! She could not believe it. Likewise my aunts and uncles. Except, they went silent. And then tried to reason. In their family everyone was a 'human' doctor, she should also pursue the same... But for all of Sangeeta's soft-spokenness and gentleness, she is a toughie, and in those days, even a feminist (she refused to learn to cook, why could her brother not cook, she would demand of her mum) and she did not, would not give in to their coaxing to reconsider her decision. Fact is, at age 11 in class VII, she knew she wanted to be an animal doctor. Just as she knew at age five that she wanted to be in the world of medicine, when her dad took her for the very first time, to the KEM Hospital, where he was head of the CVT centre and she fell in love with the smell of spirit. "Till today, I love that