

HEALTH



How I Find Balance

Laura-Lee Brenneman, 40, director, growth and transition capital, BDC, Ottawa

WHEN I FIRST SAW DRESSAGE, it was love at first sight. It's like horse ballet — it's a sport of precision, grace, balance and complete harmony. You can't *make* a 1,400-lb. animal do anything — the only reason it is willing to do something like trot in place is that there's a relationship between the two of you. Balance is different for everybody, but this is how I deal with my stress and find joy in my life. You can have the worst day on the planet but when you walk into the barn, you leave [your bad day] at the door.

My partner's name is Kumara, which means sweet potato in New Zealand. The first time I rode her I had been looking for a horse to lease — I got on, and she just floated; we got on together like peanut butter and jam. Later, I discovered when she was for sale, six or seven people had come to try her, and she had bucked them all off — but I didn't experience that until later. This year, after working very hard with my coaches, I was able to train her up to the Grand Prix level. There are only 50 or 60 Grand Prix horses in Canada and very few adult amateurs who compete at that level — I'm very proud to have gotten here while having a successful career.

I'm also an avid runner, and have run nine marathons and 11 half-marathons, and one half-Ironman. Outside of that, riding and my family (I have a four-year-old son who likes to come to the barn with me and to all the horse shows), I don't have time for much else, but I wouldn't have it any other way. I feel blessed to have a very understanding, supportive spouse and a flexible employer that helps out when I need time to go to a show — it takes a village to make it all work. — *As told to Wendy Haaf*

STRESS-BUSTING TIP OF THE MONTH

Write it out

GETTING THE CREATIVE writing juices flowing may help you perform a worrisome task more efficiently. In a Michigan State University study, researchers monitored the brainwaves of chronically anxious college students as they performed tests. Prior to the test, about half wrote about their worries and the other half wrote about what they did the previous day. The result: the first group performed the test more efficiently. Researchers found that writing about emotions reduced the amount of cognitive resources spent worrying and left the brain with a better ability to perform the task at hand. — *Martha Beach*



He shoots, the pulse soars

THE WINS AND LOSSES OF A HOCKEY game are more than exciting; they can actually have a great effect on heart health.

A study designed and conducted by two secondary-school students at Royal West Academy in Montreal used Holter heart monitors to assess how Montreal Canadiens games affected viewers' cardiovascular system. The emotional stress and excitement of viewing a game on TV caused a 75% increase in heart rate, while watching a live game created a 110% increase. The jump was noticed most when there was a score for the team (25% likely to raise heart rate) or against (15%), or when a game went into overtime (40%). — *MB*