



DID YOU KNOW THAT NURSE

We asked you to share your hidden talents with us and were pleased with the more than 100 responses about personal passions outside of the profession.

BY KIMBERLEY KEARSEY

JOHANNE CHANTIGNY doesn't consider herself an adrenaline junkie. At first glance, you may disagree. The former ER and ICU nurse – who also once cared for acutely ill patients traveling by air ambulance – has voluntarily jumped from more than 560 airplanes. She's free-fallen at 120 km/hour towards 35 other skydivers to help break provincial and national records for group skydiving. She's even strapped a camera to her head to film the once-in-a-lifetime moments most could only dream of experiencing.

Professionally, Chantigny is a primary care nurse practitioner in Ottawa. But in her personal time, she tempts fate and tests gravity with a kind of regularity that begs the question: what is she thinking? And she's just one of several nurses we've recently met who find themselves explaining to surprised colleagues the motivation behind their unusual passion.

"I've heard people say they don't think nurses should be risk-takers," the 48-year-old admits. "I've heard that a lot actually...and at first I thought 'what kind of message am I sending to be in this

Johanne Chantigny (right, in blue) skydives over Arnprior, Ontario.



NEXT TO YOU IS A

SKYDIVER?

COMPETITIVE LATIN & BALLROOM DANCER?

WORLD CHAMPION VOLLEYBALL PLAYER?

PAINTER?

sport? I'm teaching people about preventive medicine and how to be safe, meanwhile I'm skydiving." This contradiction, she continues, is one that, upon reflection, really isn't a contradiction at all. "My training ensures that I'm as safe as can be," she explains. "I stay current in my sport and I know when not to skydive. I know when I'm not 100 per cent...and that makes me less of a risk taker. I'm not purposely putting myself in harm's way or being careless."

Chantigny recounts in vivid detail the first time she stepped onto the wing of an airplane thousands of feet above the ground. The instructions were simple: open the door, climb onto the wing, arch your back, let go. Most people would be terrified at "open the door" but for Chantigny, it's "just so natural." Her nursing background, she suggests, is what taught her how to embrace – or more importantly control – that rush of adrenaline that surges through her veins at 13,000 feet.

"The interesting thing is that these [flight, emergency and ICU nursing] can potentially induce adrenaline but you have to be the

type of person who can knock that down. Working in the ER and ICU teaches you how to maintain a level of calm when there seems to be chaos around you."

Chantigny explains that the world of skydiving is anything but chaotic. Divers choreograph every movement and consider the timing of every step before the plane leaves the ground. "You're watching your altimeter (on your wrist to measure how far you are from the ground). And you're making sure you're performing everything within the small window of time you have. Your free-fall is only 50 seconds when you're leaving the plane at 13,000 feet," she notes. That's less than a minute to ensure you haven't made any mistakes. Like nursing, there's little room for error. "If you're not afraid and not quick to react, you could be a danger to yourself and others. Being afraid is what's going to keep you safe."

Chantigny admits that fear wasn't an issue the first time she jumped. She and her brother had signed up for training to do a solo skydive. "I was getting anxious and the tension was building up,"

she recalls when the wind picked up and there was talk of postponing. "When they said it was a go...I was just so happy that it didn't really cross my mind to be afraid."

That was eight years ago, and Chantigny hasn't looked back since. Her motto: Always smile when you jump. For this competitor, it's almost impossible not to. In fact, when she jumped for the first time, her grin was so big – and her mouth so dry from the excitement – that her lips were stuck to her teeth all the way down to the drop zone.

MARIJA BOJIC remembers a time when she couldn't walk up a flight of stairs without being completely winded. She was doing shift work on the neurometabolic unit at Toronto's Hospital for Sick Children. "I spent all my time doing my shifts and recovering from my shifts," she remembers.

At 40, Bojic is now a clinical nurse specialist who focuses on nursing education, and is in better shape than she's ever been. She's also the proud recipient of several first-place trophies for Latin and ballroom dance competitions at the provincial and national levels.

"I would like to inspire all nurses to pursue something they love...and to commit to it. I do believe that many nurses focus all their time on work and recovering from work and sometimes forget about staying fit and taking care of themselves."

Bojic knows what it's like to lose yourself in the inactivity of everyday life and work. She has two children and at one time worked the graveyard shift, leaving home when her husband returned from his 9-5 job. She thinks back to something one of her Ryerson University professors told her when she was studying for her license in Canada (she is originally from the former Yugoslavia). She quotes that professor: 'Nurses need to take care of themselves first if they want to take care of other people.'

"We're really good about patient care and giving to others, but when it comes to us, sometimes fatigue takes over and we don't do things for ourselves that we should have or could have done," she adds.

Competitive dance isn't for everyone, Bojic admits. At least 10 hours every week is dedicated to dance, more when she and her husband are preparing for competition. In 2008, the pair won top prize for ballroom and Latin dance in the Ontario Open

competition. They practised for three hours, four to five times each week in addition to taking classes to learn both the ballroom and Latin choreography. That's a considerable commitment for someone who initially said no to competition, but was convinced by her husband to get involved. What are you doing instead, he asked. Watching TV?

"I got stronger, my posture improved, I started to feel better, to look forward to classes. I wasn't looking for excuses not to practice. We started to travel and we've collected so many trophies...we have



Marija Bojic with her husband Zoran

them all displayed in our living room," she says proudly.

Colleagues are always intrigued to hear about Bojic's travels, and to see photos of the pair dressed in costume. Her goal now is to qualify nationally in the championship category (one level above gold) for both ballroom and Latin dance. It's an achievable goal; especially considering the pair took home gold in the pre-championship category for Latin dance at the 2009 Canadian Closed competition. That was an especially rewarding win, she remembers, because

it was close to midnight when they danced in the finals. Bojic says she will continue to practice and will stay fit as she prepares for that milestone. That shouldn't be hard for someone who's always loved to dance. "You can be more passionate about other things in your life when you're passionate about something, and do it well."

ELLEN CATHERWOOD always loved to paint but gave up her dream 25 years ago. She was in her mid-30s at the time, and the mother of two. She knew that being an artist meant financial insecurity. Plus, she had tried her hand at oil painting and didn't like it. Instead, she began to think about a career and furthering her education. She decided to pursue nursing. It was the safe choice since she knew

she'd be able to practise close to home. By 2004, Catherwood was working in the ICU at Timmins and District Hospital. A colleague approached her and pleaded with her to enrol in a beginner's water colour class that was in danger of being cancelled due to low numbers.

"She dragged me along to my first class," Catherwood recalls with a hint of irony in her voice. "I hadn't had any interest before that. It was the first time I tried water colour or even looked at it. I fell in love with it from the start."

Seven years later, Catherwood is an established water colour artist with her own business in Timmins. She is president of the Porcupine Art Club and a member of the Portrait Society of Canada.

"It's almost like meditation," she says of her time at the easel. "You start painting and you don't notice time passing...it's a real escape from the stress at work."

Catherwood's proudest moment as an artist came three years ago,

when she was accepted into the prestigious Canadian Society of Painters in Water Colour. To become a member, you need to be elected by a jury of other members. She's since become northern Ontario regional director for the society, promoting water colour in Barrie and beyond, and supporting members in some of the farthest reaches of the province.

Although she didn't dedicate much time to painting until later in life, Catherwood always envisioned

herself getting back into it. "As I raised a family and worked in a nursing career, time for any kind of art was short..." she says. "I used a camera to capture my world with the intention of one day turning these photos into paintings." And that's now how she does most of her commissioned work. She starts from a picture and chronicles her progress online for clients. She does mostly portraits and landscapes, concentrating on images that evoke ideas from the past or feelings of nostalgia.



Last piece of the puzzle, by Ellen Catherwood



Lesreen Romain (centre)

PHOTO: HENRIETA HANUSKOVA

“In my first year, I did 40 commissions,” she says, noting that it was tremendously stressful and something she’s “...never going to do again.” One or two commissions at a time; that’s her limit these days. And it’s something she adheres to if she wants to maintain a healthy balance between commissions, show pieces, painting for pleasure and part-time nursing work in the ICU.

“They have been the best supporters I could ask for,” Catherwood says of her nursing colleagues. “Many have commissioned work from me and a lot of them have my paintings on their walls. It’s an honour.”

When she does a portrait, Catherwood likes to know the individual. The finished product, she says, is more engaging when she knows more about the individual and their personality.

Each year, Catherwood donates several paintings to charity. The Cystic Fibrosis Society is consistently on the receiving end of her generosity, but she has also donated commissioned work and reproductions to UNICEF, the Humane Society and the Arthritis Society of Canada.

LESREEN ROMAIN hates to lose. So, it’s a good thing she’s such a powerhouse when she’s behind the volleyball net. The Uxbridge RN has an impressive record when it comes to a sport she describes as one of the most technical to play. Not only is it intensely physical, it also requires a great deal of mental strength, the 44-year-old mother of four says. “You have to keep focused to win.”

Romain’s determination and focus is certainly evident when you consider she’s been to Sydney, Australia and Calgary, Alberta to compete in volleyball at the World Masters’ Athletic Championships. She was also a star athlete when she studied nursing at Centennial College. In fact, she travelled – and won – at provincial and national tournaments throughout her four years of nursing. She brought home three gold medals and one silver, helping to break the school’s historically poor record at the Ontario championships.

Romain says one of her most memorable experiences was arriving at the Sydney Olympic Park in 2008. “It was absolutely amazing...to actually be there and to be able to play in our sport,” she recalls. “It truly was like being at the Olympics. We did opening ceremonies... there were 28,000 athletes...we were in our Canadian uniforms... representing Canada.”

They made it to the finals to face Brazil that year. Romain doesn’t like to dwell on the fact that she and her teammates headed home with silver rather than the coveted gold medallion. “We didn’t play badly,” she recalls. “We played an amazing game. But they were just a little bit stronger, a little bit taller, and a little bit quicker than we were. I think it worked out as it should.”

Romain compares the skills she uses in her practice as a surgical nurse and clinic manager in Durham region to the skills she uses on the court. “Volleyball isn’t for everyone, nor is nursing,” she says. “You have to have that passion for it.” For Romain, that passion for sport began before she even finished high school.

Over the years, Romain tested her skill at track and basketball before finally settling on volleyball as a mature player and as a coach to kids in their early teens. “When you’re teaching young kids (12-15 year olds) you can see how bad they are to begin with,” she says with the brutal honesty of a true coach. “But I have to tell you, from years of playing and watching people develop, you can have someone with absolutely no coordination and absolutely no skill, and they will be your star player in two, three years. I’ve seen it happen.”

Romain plans to compete in the World Masters’ Athletic Championships one more time (in Turin, Italy in 2012). She’s committed to training and staying active, fit and healthy. She offers up the same advice to other nurses. “I would encourage any athlete who really has a passion for any sport to pursue it and do whatever they can do to get to the highest level of achievement.” **RN**

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