

By ANN HINES

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GETTING BACK ON THE HORSE

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All of us have felt the cold fingers of fear running down our spine. We know how physical the three primary responses to fear really are: We might freeze, take flight or fight. Overwhelming fear can win out over us, or we can recover our freedom and mobility. It's a hero's journey traversed by us all. The Nike slogan "Just do it!" reverberates with the power and strength it takes to shatter the chains that hold us back.

My son Taylor told me about his first experience with sky diving on his 18th birthday.

"I do have that teenage desire to do the most extreme thing possible, but I only take calculated risks," Taylor said.

"I'm not into doing stupid things like driving a go- cart off a roof.

"So when I wanted to go skydiving, I did some research. I found the

instructors' certifications and number of jumps on the web. MY instructor had logged more than 12,000 jumps, so I knew he was experienced and knowledgeable.

"The whole experience is so amazingly surreal!" Taylor said of his first jump.

"There's no way at all that the mind can comprehend that you're about to jump out of an airplane.

"While I'm staring down 15,000 feet with my toes draped over the metal platform, I say, "That's a long way ..." and before I can say... "down!" the instructor pushes both of us out of the plane.

"The feeling of moving from 0 to 120 mph in under three seconds is a pretty big rush. They tell you to yell if you can't breathe, and then you can take a breath in.

"Once you reach terminal velocity, the feeling of falling becomes the comforting sensation of floating. It's like floating through a limitless void of bliss."

Believe it or not, the anticipatory fear of jumping from 15,000 feet can actually feel the same in the body as any fear, including falling from a

horse.

Once you've had a bad fall, it takes perseverance and support to become confident again.

I spoke with Jodi Jones who owns Renaissance Ranch in La Selva Beach.

Her words of wisdom can be helpful for all of us trying to get back into action following a trauma.

Jones talks about how important it is for people to understand exactly what happened when they fell, from start to finish.

As a therapist and member of the local Red Cross Disaster Mental Health team. I know the need we all have to retell our story in order to recover from any traumatic event.

Jones encourages her students who take a fall to tell people about it right away.

"After a fall, there's a delayed adrenaline rush from three to 10 minutes later, followed by physical trembling and internal shaking," she said.

"Then the next few times you try to get on a horse, you don't know how to ride."

Jones calls the feeling of not being able to get control of your spine and

Please see H0RSE on Page 82

Cont from page B-1

muscles, the “jell-o response”.

It shakes your confidence. But it’s important to recognize that this is a natural process that you have to go through- or the fear will win.

You need a support person whom you trust to help you override your body’s fear responses a little bit at a time, in tiny increments that will set you up for success.

But no matter how much support you have, the bottom line is, “It’s you who has to say, “I’m going to get through this!” Jones said.

“I really do think that those who successfully overcome fear are those who push beyond their comfort zone.”

“Then there’s the flight response. When I get put in a position that scares me-like my horse bucks-I get angry.

‘I still have that adrenaline rush, but then I consciously turn it into an offense. There is a lot of power in that offense. It’s taking control of the situation.

“But the challenge is not to stay there, but to go on with your plan-to continue taking action instead of freezing”

Jones tells her students that fear will spring back anytime you have a trigger moment that brings the memory back. It could be a sight, a smell a sound.

She tells them to expect it and to be pro-active. “If you know it’s going to happen, and you have a plan

to address it, you're ready for it when it does," she said.

Then you're on your way to breaking through. St. Francis of Assisi sums up this hero's journey for us: Start by doing what's necessary, then what's possible, and suddenly you're doing the impossible.

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