



MARTHA JOLICOEUR

From Riding to Real Estate

By Molly Sorge

Martha Wachtel Jolicoeur didn't grow up with horses. In fact, her family didn't even have pets. But Martha's best friend rode, and one day she went to watch as her friend showed her pony at a horse show. Martha was hooked.

"I remember being enamored by the fact that you could have this wonderful connection with an animal, and the competition, because I liked sports," Martha said. "I was like, Wow, this is the best thing in the world because you have the relationship with the animal and you can compete."

She lobbied her parents to be able to ride, and while they were reluctant, they signed her up for lessons at a barn in Westport, Connecticut, where they lived. Martha learned the basics and started showing with that barn. "I used to wish for a pony on the wishbone at Thanksgiving," she recalled with a laugh. "We got a pony, and it was used in the riding school, and then I got a show pony, and it went on from there." After two years, she moved to ride with Ronnie Mutch at his famed Nimrod Farm in Weston, Connecticut.

She showed ponies and junior hunters while riding with Ronnie, then started training with George Morris when she was 15.

"I saw George training at a show and I thought, *This is a whole new world, the way he teaches*," Martha said. "He had to audition me to see if he'd take me, and he did take me. George told me that I'd probably only ride for a few years and then get interested in boys. Because he said that, I got so angry that I made sure that I continued riding until I was 45 years old!"

Martha enjoyed much success as a junior rider, especially in the hunter divisions on a horse named Movie Star. As she transitioned to the amateur ranks, she ventured into the jumper ring. "When I first started in the jumpers, I was scared, but I wanted to do it," she said. "At one point, I remember I got scared and I wanted to quit. My father said, 'You can quit, but don't quit while you're down.' That was his biggest mistake, because then I figured it out!"

While riding with Ian Millar and Norman Dello Joio, Martha earned wins in the amateur-owner jumper divisions, then made the move to the grand prix ranks in 1985. "My goal was to be the AGA Rookie of the Year in 1985, which I accomplished," she said. "I wanted to represent the U.S. and show in Europe, which I did. It was an amazing experience."

Photo this page:
"We all speak the same language," said
Martha Jolicoeur of her clients in the horse world.

Martha jumped at venues such as Spruce Meadows, Canada; Aachen and Wiesbaden in Germany; Rotterdam, The Netherlands; and Hickstead, England, throughout the late '80s. She also won classes at the National Horse Show at Madison Square Garden in New York City and the Washington International Horse Show in D.C.

A DIFFERENT PATH

In 1991, life changed for Martha. She married Canadian rider and trainer Pierre Jolicoeur and then had their daughter, Isabel. They settled on a farm in Culpeper, Virginia, and Martha's riding career slowed down a bit.

"I would still get up and ride every day," Martha said. "Pierre was nice in that he always made sure he had one or two horses for me to ride and sell."

Martha started questioning whether she wanted to continue making a career out of riding. "I was a good amateur rider, but I don't think I would have ever been a great pro," she said. "I could ride a good horse well, but I wasn't as good at riding a tough horse. As a mother, I also had to think about the fact that I might get hurt doing it."

When Isabel was an infant, Martha had started selling real estate on a small scale. "I liked to get off the farm and go talk to people and see beautiful places. So, real estate was a good fit," she said. Pierre encouraged her to broaden her horizons by developing her real estate career while remaining an amateur rider. "I don't know that it was my first choice back then, but I'm very grateful now that that's the way it went," she added.

She spent 15 years in Virginia combining real estate with riding and showing, but felt like her real estate business wasn't as successful as it could have been because she wasn't devoting all of her time to it. As a result, she decided to dive full time into real estate. In 2005, the Jolicoeurs sold their Virginia farm and moved to Wellington, Florida. Martha hung up her saddle and focused on building her real estate career.

"It was a huge life decision to stop riding and focus 100 percent on real estate when we moved to Wellington," she said. "I was very fortunate, because I kept working at it and people knew me from the horse shows. It immediately started to build. When someone was looking to have a winter base, they'd call me."

NO SHORTCUTS

While she may have hung up her boots, Martha, 59, now applies many of the lessons she learned in her riding days to her current real estate career.

"George taught me that there are no shortcuts and that the best way to do something is the right way, and I think about that all the time," she said. "And Ian also had a great saying, that 'Winners never quit, and quitters never win,' which I also live by."

Martha sees quite a few similarities between her life as a rider and her career as a real estate broker. She compares securing the right property for a client to a trainer matching the right horse with a rider.

"Having property listings is a little bit like having horses in your barn," said Martha. "Each has a unique character, and you have to find the right match. My biggest satisfaction comes from being able to put the right person with the right property, or selling the right property to the right buyer, and making those people happy. It's sort of like finding a needle in a haystack, but when it all fits, it's so rewarding."

When Martha first moved to South Florida



Martha Jolicoeur

in 2005, the equestrian community was on the upswing, as the expanding Winter Equestrian Festival was inspiring riders to create a Wellington-area base for the winter, leading them to rent, build and buy properties.

“Since I hit the ground with real estate here, I enjoyed it from the very first moment,” Martha said. “The market was strong at that time, so it really became a goal to succeed in real estate as much as it had been to ride on the team.”

Martha applies the discipline of her riding days to her professional life. She’s very organized and structured about her days, starting with a workout or yoga before heading to her office.

“Sometimes it’s so busy, I’ll make over 100 calls a day. Sometimes, I don’t hear anything for a whole day. It fluctuates so much,” she said. “I’ve gotten used to it, with time. I used to take it all very personally. Sometimes I wouldn’t be able to sleep, worrying about this and that, and now I’m much more able to put things aside and not worry at the end of the day. I understand that it’s all ups and downs and it’ll even out. It’s a lot like riding in that you have to enjoy the highs, learn from the lows and focus on your average.”

That emphasis on the average serves Martha well, as the equestrian property market in South Florida is quite seasonal. Approximately 85 percent of her business is done in the winter months so she’s able to relax a bit during the summer, travelling to horse shows both in the U.S. and internationally to keep up with her clients.

Over the years, Martha has branded Martha W. Jolicoeur Farms and Estates into a thriving business and was named the No. 1 Florida agent for 2018 by Douglas Elliman. She loves her career because it represents the best of both worlds, as she’s combined her passion for horse sport with a job she loves.

Horsewoman Jesse Pasmore has been a client of Martha’s for more than 15 years and appreciates her integrity and honesty. “I am very particular, and she just rolls with it,” Jesse said. “She just gets it. She knows that horse people are all crazy, that we all have unrealistic goals and expectations when selling, and that when buying we want to be as cheap as possible. She just reels you back into reality very kindly. She does what she does so well, and she has a great team helping her, which is instrumental in making it all work.”

Photos top to bottom:
Martha applies the discipline of her riding days to her professional life.

Martha, left, and Sharon Loayza, presenting the Leading Lady Rider award to Jennifer Gates.

Photo by Sportfot



LIFE IS GOOD

Martha may not show herself anymore, but she still spends plenty of time in the horse world, as many of her clients show at the 12-week Winter Equestrian Festival (WEF). A long-time WEF sponsor, Martha presents the weekly Martha Jolicoeur Leading Lady Rider Award immediately following the grand prix each weekend. She began sponsoring the Leading Lady award at WEF in 2010 and has also expanded her support to other shows such as the Upperville Horse Show in Virginia and the National Horse Show in Kentucky.

"It was my favorite award to win in my riding days," said Martha of her decision to sponsor the Leading Lady title. "Maybe you don't win the grand prix but if you're consistent, you're rewarded. It makes someone happy, and I really enjoy doing it."

Martha herself resides in a waterfront home on Lake Greenview in the heart of the community where she makes her living. She and Pierre divorced in 2015, but he lives nearby and they have an amicable relationship.

"We're a great parenting team," said Martha, noting that their daughter, Isabel, recently

“ It was a huge life decision to stop riding and focus 100 percent on real estate when we moved to Wellington. ”
~Martha Jolicoeur

graduated from law school and now works as a lawyer in Miami. "When anything happens, we call each other and talk about it."

Exploring life outside the office, Martha went on an African safari last year and is now learning how to golf and scuba dive with her boyfriend, Dr. Stephen Norton, who is a dentist based in Delray Beach, Florida.

"I am content now," Martha said. "Life is good. I was competitive about being at the top and having the best listings and most sales. I've built a strong team and I have wonderful clients, both of which I'm extremely grateful for. I'm keeping the business strong while being able to enjoy life a little bit more — at least in the summer!" **S**

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Photos top to bottom:
Martha Jolicoeur rode at the grand prix level, including at the Washington International Horse Show, with Sweet Lullaby.
Photo courtesy of the Washington International Horse Show

Martha has combined two loves, real estate and the horse world, into a successful career.