

## For the Love of Horse!

Dear Connie,

**M**y wife, Diane, is horse crazy. She bought a horse last year and her life revolves around it—riding in the mountains in the summer and in an arena in the winter, grooming, feeding and training it, and spending a small fortune on tack and trailering. I went to pick her up at the barn a couple of days ago and she was actually talking to the horse! As if the horse understood her!

She wants to go on a pack trip next summer instead of taking the children to see their grandparents on the coast like we've always done, and I'm about to put my foot down. Sometimes I think she loves her horse more than me. What do you think?

Sincerely, —Martin

Dear Martin,

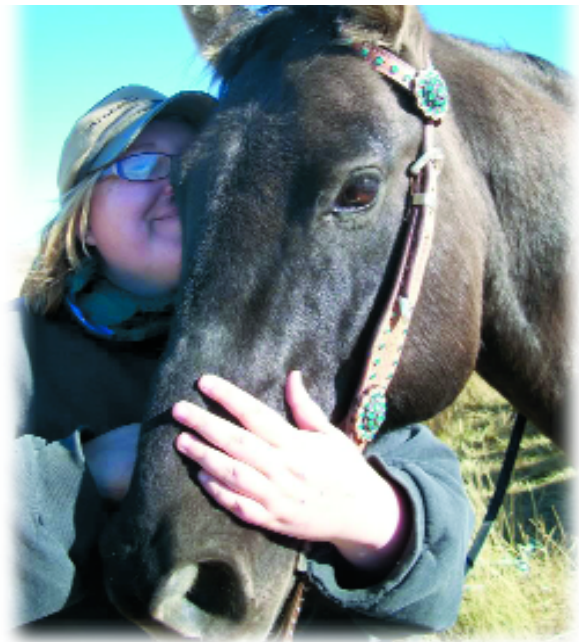
**I** can understand your hurt over the feeling of being replaced by a horse. Here are some questions to ask yourself:

- Does Diane know how you feel? If you've told her, what was her response? Empathetic? Dismissive? Puzzled?
- How was your marriage before she became horse crazy? Were there any conflicts about having



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Social Work. She went on to graduate from the Barbara Brennan School of Healing, and Society of Souls, a kabalistic school of healing. She is the author of "Gathering the Soul, a True Story of Spiritual Healing." Pathwork ([Pathwork.org](http://Pathwork.org)) and Imago Relationship Therapy ([www.GettingTheLoveYouWant.org](http://www.GettingTheLoveYouWant.org)) are two easily accessible sources for the theories upon which much of this column is based.



independent activities in addition to ones you participated in together?

- Have you been jealous of her friendships?
- Is it possible that your wife turned to a horse to fulfill a need that wasn't being met in her life?
- How important to you is the money being spent on the horse? Is it your money, hers, joint?
- Is she neglecting your children, or you?

A heart-to-heart conversation with her may help you to understand what having a horse means to her. Hopefully, it will also help her to understand and have compassion for your hurt and jealousy of the relationship she has with her horse.

There's another important consideration. Many women are drawn to horses because horses symbolize power and freedom. And, horses are sensitive animals, able to respond to the energy of people around them. They can understand words, too. The relationship a woman (or a man) has with a horse can be a close one, developed through spending time with the horse—feeding, grooming, training, riding. Understanding the body language of a horse, teaching the horse to respond to particular signals, developing a mutually trusting relationship with a horse, can all be deeply gratifying experiences. Yes, there's a lot of time and work involved, but many people seem to find great joy and pleasure in it. The human/animal bond, whether it's with a horse, a dog, or some other creature, can be one of the most important in life. Not a substitute for human relationship, but quite special in its own way.

A horse can carry one deep into wilderness, into beautiful, awe-inspiring places that are difficult to

get to on foot because of the time required. This can be life enhancing. Backcountry horseback riding with a group is very popular in Montana, partly because of the fun of riding one's horse in the mountains, partly because of the camaraderie.

So Diane's passion for her horse is not at all unusual, especially in Montana. Perhaps after you hear what the experience of having a horse means to her, you will be more accepting of it. And, if most of your activities have been as a couple, you might want to consider developing a special interest of your own. It is healthy for couples to enjoy separate activities in addition to those they participate in together.

If, on the other hand, you learn that your wife's horse relationship and activities are a way of escaping some aspect of your marital relationship that is difficult or unsatisfying to her, couple's counseling would be a good idea. So rather than putting your foot down, I would suggest that you take Diane's challenging new behavior as an opportunity to understand one another more deeply with the goal of greater fulfillment for both of you, individually and together. ■

*Good luck, Martin! —Connie*

### ***Do you have a relationship question?***

E-mail [mtlionlady@gmail.com](mailto:mtlionlady@gmail.com), or call 406-582-7450 and ask! E-mail sent to Connie is read only by Connie Myslik-McFadden, MSS, LCSW, and will be held in strictest confidence. No identities will be published.

Disclaimer: The responses to questions in this column are for information only. Never disregard professional advice or delay seeking it because of anything you read here. Working with a skilled professional is highly recommended.

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