



Kelowna's Own Kelsey

story by Shannon Linden

She's an athlete with an international profile, but this Okanagan woman is most at home where she grew up, in the orchards of East Kelowna.

She may be only 23-years old, but Canadian superstar ski cross racer, Kelsey Serwa, has collected a lifetime of experiences.

She's stood tall atop podiums, the weight of winning medals draped around her slender neck; she's stood shoulder to shoulder in support of teammates she calls family; and she's withstood the gut-wrenching grief of losing one of them in a tragic racing accident.

World Cup champion, X Games gold medalist, and 2010 Olympian, Serwa's impressive titles are telling of an ambitious athlete shaped by the sport of skiing, but her natural ease, sweet smile, and upbeat attitude, speak of a girl who remains grounded.

Close to her parents and committed to her boyfriend (former Canadian ski cross competitor and current big mountain skier, Stan Rey), she is the granddaughter of Cliff Serwa, co-founder of Big White Ski Resort.

Named a member of the Canadian Women's National Development Team in 2007, she successfully raced down slick slopes, but it was a switch to the freestyle sport of ski cross that made her heart sing—and the world take notice.

Ski cross competitors employ strength, agility, endurance, and speed to negotiate naturally occurring and artificially enhanced terrain. Racers take turns and jumps of different sizes, flat sections and traverses, as well as rolls, banks, and ridges—all of which are found on any other ski slope. But while recreational skiers can stop, leaning on their poles to admire the view while alleviating the scream of lactic acid surging through their quivering quadriceps, ski cross competitors can't quit. After a qualifying round, 32 of them

move on to compete in what are known as "knockout" rounds, in which groups of four fly from the gates to the finish line, the top two advancing to the next round, until four or five races later, a winner is finally declared.

"Embrace being a woman, it's a powerful thing. Be beautiful, be confident, be strong, be brilliant, be assertive, be the better half....be you!"

Since skiing onto the scene, Serwa has been unstoppable. Spurred by the roar of the hometown crowd, she was awed by the energy and enthusiasm of Canadians who crowded to watch her finish fifth at the 2010 Olympics in Vancouver, while teammate, Ashleigh McIvor claimed the gold.

Serwa carried over her Olympic success with a spectacular start to last season, winning the X Games one week, followed by gold at the 2011 World Championships. Sweetness turned sour, however, in the final of the Alpe d'Huez World Cup, when Serwa suffered a bad landing, rupturing her anterior cruciate ligament (ACL).

Surgery and recovery forced her to sit out the remainder of the World Cup season and then early spring brought

sadness of another kind when teammate, mentor, and friend, Nik Zoricic died in a terrible crash while racing in Grindelwald, Switzerland.

"I miss him," Serwa says. "I looked up to him." A charming, handsome man with an infectious smile, Serwa recalls that even at his funeral service, people joked there were a lot of women in the crowd.

In a profoundly touching blog post (kelseyserwa.ca), she says, "I think what I have learned from this is that you can't take the people around you for granted. If you love them, tell them everyday. ...Live your life to the fullest each day, leave nothing on the table, and fall asleep each night with no regrets."

Certainly Serwa strives to honour this lesson. "Sometimes I'd rather curl up on the couch with a peppermint tea, my kitty and a cozy blanket, than battle -30 degree blizzards." But then she remembers: life is too short not to give her all.

During the summer she settles into physiotherapy studies at Okanagan College, mountain and road bikes, swims, catches up with friends, dines out, and "takes advantage of everything Kelowna has to offer."

Of course that includes the fabulous



Photos: courtesy Alpine Canada

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fermented grape, but what's a glass of wine without a little cherry tomato and bocconchini salad with balsamic reduction?

"That's my all-time favourite food," Serwa concedes. "Although I'm proud to admit I am a sucker for ice cream, especially vanilla if I can garnish it with some fresh raspberries and blackberries picked from the garden."

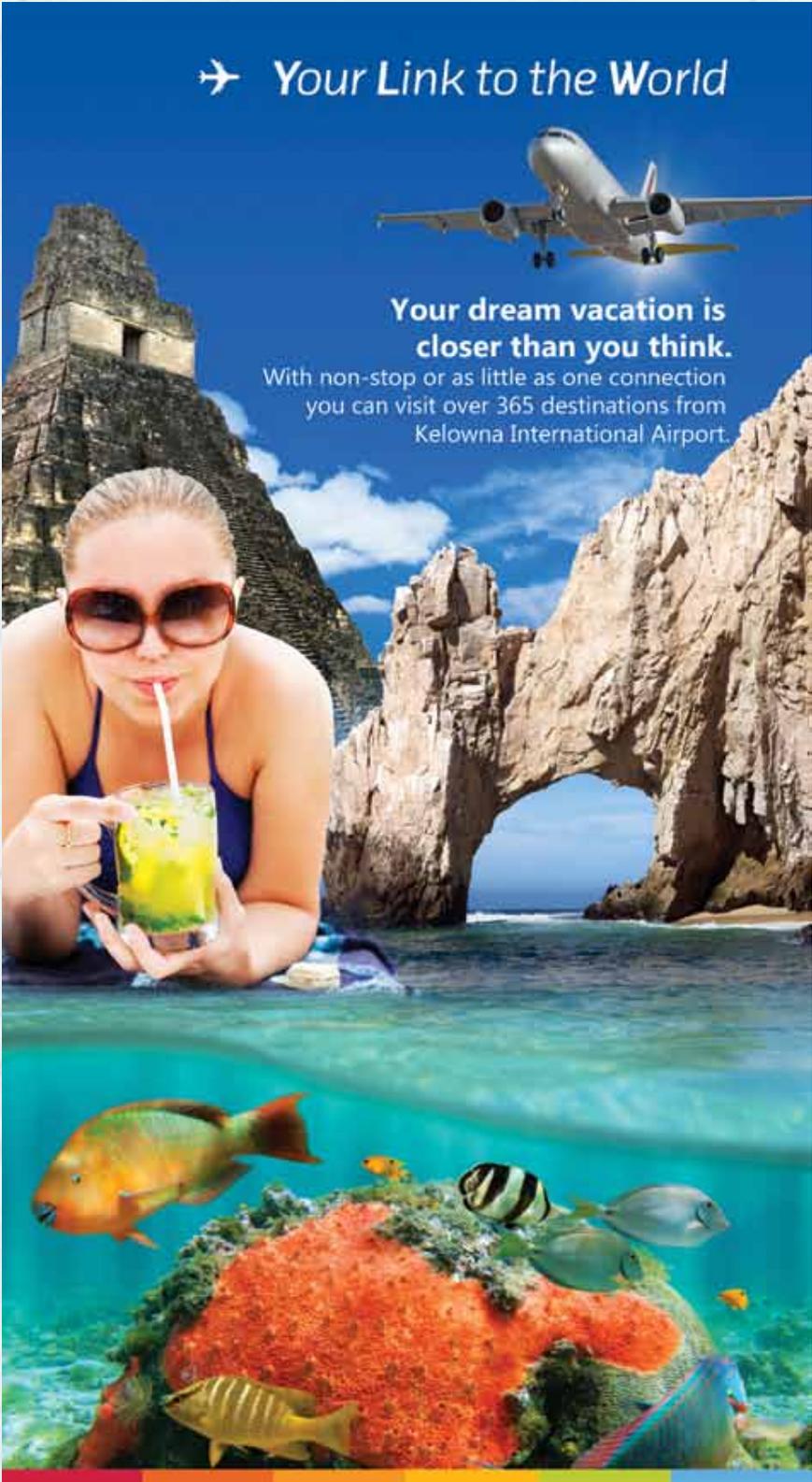
Ever active, Serwa's not too concerned about her weight; Naturally pretty, she doesn't indulge in a detailed beauty regime.

While she admits she always has Chapstick in her ski jacket ("nobody looks good with dry, cracked lips!"), Serwa takes a "less is more" approach to glamor.

"Most people gravitate toward happy individuals, so an easy way to look your best is to let your happiness show through your beautiful smile!"

The skier nicknamed K-ser is glowing these days. In love, feeling healthy, she has her sights set on becoming the overall World Cup champion and an Olympic gold medalist.

If her favourite quote by Eleanor Roosevelt is any indication—the future belongs to those who believe in the power of their dreams—Serwa is well on her way to the top, racing her way down the slopes of life.



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