

## Equine Job Groomed Manitoba Student for Vet School

This summer, Chantel Dunlop of Seven Sisters Falls, Man., was standing in a warm-up ring at Calgary's Spruce Meadows when she read an email message confirming her acceptance into the Western College of Veterinary Medicine (WCVM).

"I remember crying out, 'Oh my God!', and I started to feel shaky," says Dunlop, who was working as a groom for Olympic medallist Jill Henselwood's show jumping team. "I'm pretty sure people were wondering why I had that goofy grin on my face."

Dunlop began the four-year veterinary program at the WCVM in mid-August. She and her classmates received an official welcome to the college and the veterinary profession during a white coat ceremony on Sept. 21, in Saskatoon, Sask.

Her love for horses began when she read the *Heartland* series of books in Grade 5 and knew she wanted a horse of her own. She bought a quiet Arab gelding named Sam with her own savings, and two years later, she purchased a second horse — Image, an appaloosa gelding. She competed with Image in everything from barrel racing to show jumping.

Owning horses gave Dunlop her first taste of veterinary medicine. When Sam got his leg stuck in the hay feeder and ended up in bad shape, she followed the veterinarian's instructions to the letter and was praised by the practitioner for her efforts.

"Knowing that I had helped my horse feel better so he was not only able to walk again but also to be ridden — that was an amazing feeling."

Dunlop completed a Bachelor of Science degree in biology at the University of Winnipeg where she helped to create and lead the Pre-Vet Club. With connections made through the organization, she worked as a groom for a polo player and then found another job grooming at Winnipeg's Assiniboia Downs. Armed with that experience, she got a job at Henselwood's farm near Oxford Mills, Ont.

"I grew up watching Jill ride, so I applied for the groom position, but I didn't think I would get it because I had no experience grooming show jumpers at that level," recalls Dunlop. "I told them that, but I also said that I would work hard and that I'm very eager to learn."

It was a gruelling, physical job with long days. Dunlop usually took care of four to seven horses at home and three to five at shows, along with responsibilities that ranged from taking care of the animals' basic needs to grooming and tacking to checking them over for injuries and applying first aid.

Dunlop travelled with her horses to shows across the continent and was in charge of making them look show-ready and bringing them to and from the ring. She also worked closely with the farrier and veterinarian.

"The biggest challenge was the pressure of being excellent. You're working with very expensive amateur horses and some million-dollar international horses. You can't afford to miss anything with these animals because for some riders, their careers are depending on it."

Dunlop rose to every challenge. She particularly enjoyed representing Canada at the Nations Cup in Mexico, and it was a dream come true to be at Spruce Meadows and working alongside international riders.

After graduation Dunlop sees herself working with performance horses or eventually taking a residency in a horse-related specialty such as equine sports medicine.

Dunlop is grateful for all the support she received from her family and coaches. She also appreciates the skills and qualities she gained — attributes like confidence and a willingness to work hard.

"The show world is such a fast-paced environment, and it helped me manage my time well — that will help me excel as a veterinary student," says Dunlop. "Being thrown into unfamiliar situations made me learn how to problem solve and think quickly on my feet. I learned there's a solution to everything, and horses won't wait for you to figure it out."



**Photo of Chantel Dunlop:** <https://www.flickr.com/gp/wcvmtoday/N42R97>

**Photo credit:** Christina Weese

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**Manitoba-based students, WCVN Class of 2022**

Mackenzie Blandford, East St. Paul, Man.

Rialyn Combate, Winnipeg, Man.

Brooke De Koning, Neepawa, Man.

Chantel Dunlop, Seven Sisters Falls, Man.

Carmen Girard, Winnipeg, Man.

Kate Green, Winnipeg, Man.

Chris Jermey, Moosehorn, Man.

Robert King, Winnipeg, Man.

Svetlana Ponsin, Winnipeg, Man.

Luke Pura, Winnipeg, Man.

Matt Remple, Morden, Man.

Korie Ruppe, Winnipeg, Man.

Jessica Seaford, Winnipeg, Man.

Marianne Sytnyk, Oakburn, Man.

Natalia Wycislak, Grande Pointe, Man.