

BY CHERILYN DEVRIES

## Lorca Smetana, owner of Montana Dove Releases, lives life as a celebration

If you have the chance to ask Lorca Smetana about her past, better pack a lunch and be prepared to laugh. A lot.

Her far-flung adventures seem to be too many and too diverse to fit into one 40-something lifetime, but here she stands, refusing to choose one path and actively finding ways to connect the many she has started.

She has tales of injuries from earthquakes and championship-level fencing competitions, Euro-trotting with the Czech National Kayak Team as a translator and logistics coordinator, flying stunt kites in France, managing a nonprofit that provided free flights for cancer patients and playing ping-pong with Eastern European monks.

"There are times that I look at the variety in my life and think, 'Why can't you just focus?' But I have the confidence and conviction of knowing that there are things that will not come into the world unless I make them," she said.

A tour of the 20-acre property just west of Four Corners that is home to Smetana, her wildlife photographer husband Dusan and their two children, Misa and Natalia, proves that there is always something in the making in Smetana's life.

Items in the home she and Dusan built in 2004 include a 100-year-old banjo she plays for her family and during occasional local performances. Nearby, one desk holds her calligraphy pens, ink and paper for miniature illustrations based on 17<sup>th</sup> century Iranian texts. Another contains thread, needles and wire she uses to make intricately embroidered insects.

Outdoors, it's more of the same. A mahogany sea kayak sits in a shed, requiring another 30 hours of handwork to float. There are gardens for play, curiosity and feeding the family, and homing pigeons — Dusan's passion — soar overhead.

His pigeon racing stock is bred for speed and endurance, as well as for their pure white color. They are the stars of Lorca's business, Montana Dove Releases. Folks hire

her to bring these beautiful birds to special occasions like weddings, memorial services, graduations and public events, where she lets them spin and glide before they head for home.

"I'm able to take the birds and contribute a powerful, non-verbal experience for a life-



Photo by Dusan Smetana

changing moment in people's lives," she said.

Given that Smetana speaks fluent English, French, Czech and passable Spanish, it seems ironic that she chose doves to transcend language.

"The white dove is sacred in every one of the great religions and homing pigeon racing happens all over the planet," she said. "It's an instant connection everywhere I go, with anyone, no matter what I'm doing."

It's a pretty safe bet that Smetana would give author Malcom Gladwell fits. In his book *Outliers*, he champions the idea that a person who invests 10,000 hours in a single skill or area of study would be considered an expert. Smetana wholeheartedly embraces an opposite theory. She seemingly wants to take her one life and find 10,000 wildly diverse, enchanting things and make them her own.

Smetana details her current adventures on her blog, *Cantica*, at <http://lorcasmetana.wordpress.com/>.

**BALANCE:** What do you consider your greatest strength?  
**LS:** Seeing the biggest picture. What if each person on earth has their 10,000 fabulous things (A Taoist concept)? My time on earth is to identify and appreciate my 10,000 fabulous things, some of which are people, some are objects, some are sounds, and so on. This is the mandate — things have to be included in the world, so I have to make some of them. Everything beautiful is an invitation. Every making is a thank you. In this way we enlarge our own experience and the experiences of others. This is what I see as a strength.

**BALANCE:** What do you consider your greatest weakness?  
**LS:** Weaknesses? I have weaknesses. Veined forearms. Dockhands. Ice cubes in the bath. Cucumber and mustard sandwiches. Leaning. Footstools. Long-held trumpet notes. A hand holding a hip. Books falling off the bed. Fire trucks. Ferry accidents. The 10,000 things.

**BALANCE:** What is your favorite book?  
**LS:** Right now, Ianto Evans' *The Hand-Sculpted House*, Graham Greene's *A World of My Own*, Reif Larson's *The Selected Works of T.S. Spivet*, and Christopher Morley's *Parnassus on Wheels*.

**BALANCE:** Who are your heroes/role models?  
**LS:** Abigail Washburn — singer, banjo player and Chinese legal scholar  
 Janine Benyus — president of the Biomimicry Institute  
 Jonathan Meiburg — Falkland Islands ornithologist and ethereal lead singer of the band Shearwater

**BALANCE:** What is the key to balancing your family, work, health and personal matters?  
**LS:** Using a modified 6th century monastery schedule, colorful and evolving organizational systems and keeping chickens, which sends me out on a silent and solitary walk each night to close them in.

**BALANCE:** What's your dream job?  
**LS:** The bones are here. Freelance international research and writing for a powerful and creative educational foundation, ceremonial white dove releases with and without singing, singing at hot springs, blogging, permaculture food production. The only thing lacking is building the serious Lorca workspace/stillroom. That will be heavenheavenheavenheavenheaven.

**BALANCE:** What do you most want to change about yourself?  
**LS:** I used to wear glasses and was told I don't need them anymore. I miss them, and I miss that seriousness.

**BALANCE:** What's the best advice you've ever used?  
**LS:** From my mother, once: "What you want is something narrow, but fertile." This has been unbelievably helpful in a broad range of contexts.