

LIFE & ARTS

WHAT'S YOUR WORKOUT? | JEN MURPHY

Urban Zen for a Woman Walking on Air

A New Yorker helps maintain her balance with a rigorous year-round practice on a piece of webbing just 1 inch wide

DUSTIN LINDBLAD regularly causes rushed New Yorkers to stop in their tracks and watch as she balances in tree pose on a slackline strung near the George Washington Bridge.

"Many cyclists and the occasional inline speed skater stop to inquire if I'm in the circus," the 51-year-old freelance designer says.

After more than a decade of doing traditional yoga, Ms. Lindblad took her practice up a notch by swapping her mat for a slackline that's 1 inch wide. For the past three years, she's performed her routine along the Hudson River, earning a reputation among Upper Manhattan residents as the woman walking on air, she says.

Having mastered handstands and tricky arm balances, Ms. Lindblad turned to AcroYoga in 2015 looking for a new challenge. The partner practice combines elements of yoga, acrobatics and Thai massage and involves one partner lifting another into poses. In 2016, she flubbed a pose and broke both wrists. "I couldn't do a handstand for six months," she says. "It was very frustrating physically and emotionally."

Friends in the acrobatics community encouraged her to try slacklining while she recovered. So she strapped on wrist guards and set about improving her balance. Unlike a tightrope, which involves a cable, slacklining is done on webbing, so there is some give to it. She started by sitting and crawling on a 25-foot-long slackline strung 18 inches off the ground. She advanced slowly to standing and doing yoga postures. Now she practices year-round on a 50-foot slackline about 5 feet off the ground.

Ms. Lindblad finds the waterfront setting calming. Mid-spring and fall can get windy, but she says the gusts are nothing compared with the trains that pass by every 15 minutes. "At first I'd fall every time the train passed. But the distraction forces you to look inward and be completely present. It's like a moving meditation. It brings me to the now, relaxes my mind and helps me to reset."

The Workout

Ms. Lindblad split her one-bedroom apartment into an office space and an "acrobatic room." While working at her computer, she takes a three-minute handstand and handstand break every hour. "The balance required to stand on your hands and hold your core and legs tight above you is very similar to the awareness you feel on a slackline, just inverted," she says.

She tries to finish work by 5 p.m. and then heads down to the Hudson River five to six days a week. Before hopping on the slackline, she warms up on the grass by performing squats, splits, ankle stretches,



New York City freelance designer Dustin Lindblad performs yoga on a 1-inch-wide slackline near the Hudson River. She begins her slackline yoga practice with seated positions, below right. She also works on her handstands, below left.



BESS ADLER FOR THE WALL STREET JOURNAL (3)

forward folds and downward dog pose. Her slackline workout begins with seated, kneeling or reclined poses. "This helps orient me to the tension of the line," she says.

She often starts in tabletop pose on hands and knees and will extend her right arm forward and left leg back. Then she switches, doing 15 repetitions on each side. She moves into locust pose, a yoga posture where you lie on your stomach and lift your head, chest, arms and legs off the ground. Then she does boat pose, where she sits and raises her arms and legs to make a V-shape with her body.

A typical sequence might include 10 to 12 poses, including back bends perpendicular and parallel to the line and star pose, a variation of side plank with the top leg extended.

Every second or third day she mixes in a handstand workout. After a series of wrist exercises, she practices seven reps each of four different handstands. She holds her handstands between 10 to 20 seconds, then drops into a back bend and rises up to stand from her backbend pose. "Tuck-ups are the hardest, so I save them for last," she says. Those require her to enter a handstand by jumping off both feet into a tuck position and extend her legs up into a handstand.

To build strength and endurance, she does handstand holds of 30 seconds to three minutes. She ends by standing and dropping back into a back bend seven to 10 times.

The Diet

Ms. Lindblad doesn't eat red meat. She tries to stick to raw foods. Breakfast is oatmeal topped with berries, almonds and a dollop of goat's milk yogurt. "In the summer, I live off of smoothies," she says. Her go-to blend includes kale, spinach, avocado, pineapple, mint and jalapeño. Dinner is usually a kale salad dressed in balsamic vinaigrette or salmon sushi.

The Cost and Gear

Ms. Lindblad spent \$130 on her YogaSlackers slackline kit. She wears Prana and Athleta apparel. She wears Vibram Vi-S shoes (\$85) or Feiyue Fe Lo martial arts shoes (\$70). In the summer, she protects herself from the sun with ActiveIce Spectrum sun gloves (\$25), a Carve Designs lake sunshirt with UPF 50+ sun protection (\$58) and a Sombriole sun hat (\$42). In winter, she layers up and wears windproof Pearl Izumi Escape soft-shell gloves (\$45).

The Playlist

She calls the birds, the sound of the Hudson River and the passing trains her outdoor soundtrack. Indoors, her playlist includes Lord Huron, the Lumineers, Emancipator and Tycho.