

# Thinking Outside *the* Ring

Mandy Bujold has more than boxing to keep her busy these days

BY LYNN HADDRALL

**T**hey jab playfully with words, Olympian Mandy Bujold and firefighter husband Reid McIver, talking about the life they share.

The same playfulness leaps from their wedding and engagement photographs. McIver lifts his bride over his shoulder with a classic firefighter move. Bujold, the boxer, pretends to launch McIver into the sky with a powerful punch.

It's a refreshing vibe at odds with the intensity of their lives, one a world-class athlete, the other a full-time lifesaver. Perhaps it's no surprise they met at a CrossFit gym in Kitchener while working out.

McIver knew of the female boxer who had achieved great things but didn't realize who Bujold was when they first chatted. He invited her to go indoor climbing. "She came along and it blossomed from there."

Bujold joins the conversation, adding an important detail.

"He invited me to go rock climbing and then disappeared for six weeks," she says, laughing. "I was like 'Oh, you are still alive?'"

McIver laughs too. "Oh yeah, that's right. I got injured, my shoulder or something. I just took some time off from working out to heal."

When they next met he apologized for not getting her phone number. "The rest is history,"

Bujold says.

The boxer married the firefighter last summer after five years together. They are expecting their first baby in the fall.

McIver, 34, grew up in the Bruce Peninsula and loves to hike, boat and fish.

He has been a firefighter for 10 years and works out of the Strasburg and Ottawa station in Kitchener.

Bujold, 30, was born in Port Hope and lived in Moncton, N.B., before moving with her family to Kitchener. Her amateur boxing career took her to about 40 countries, racking up national and international wins.

Life has brought major changes for Bujold, better known for jabs and hooks than the foodie sensibility she shares with her husband. They renovated their kitchen to accommodate their cooking hobby.

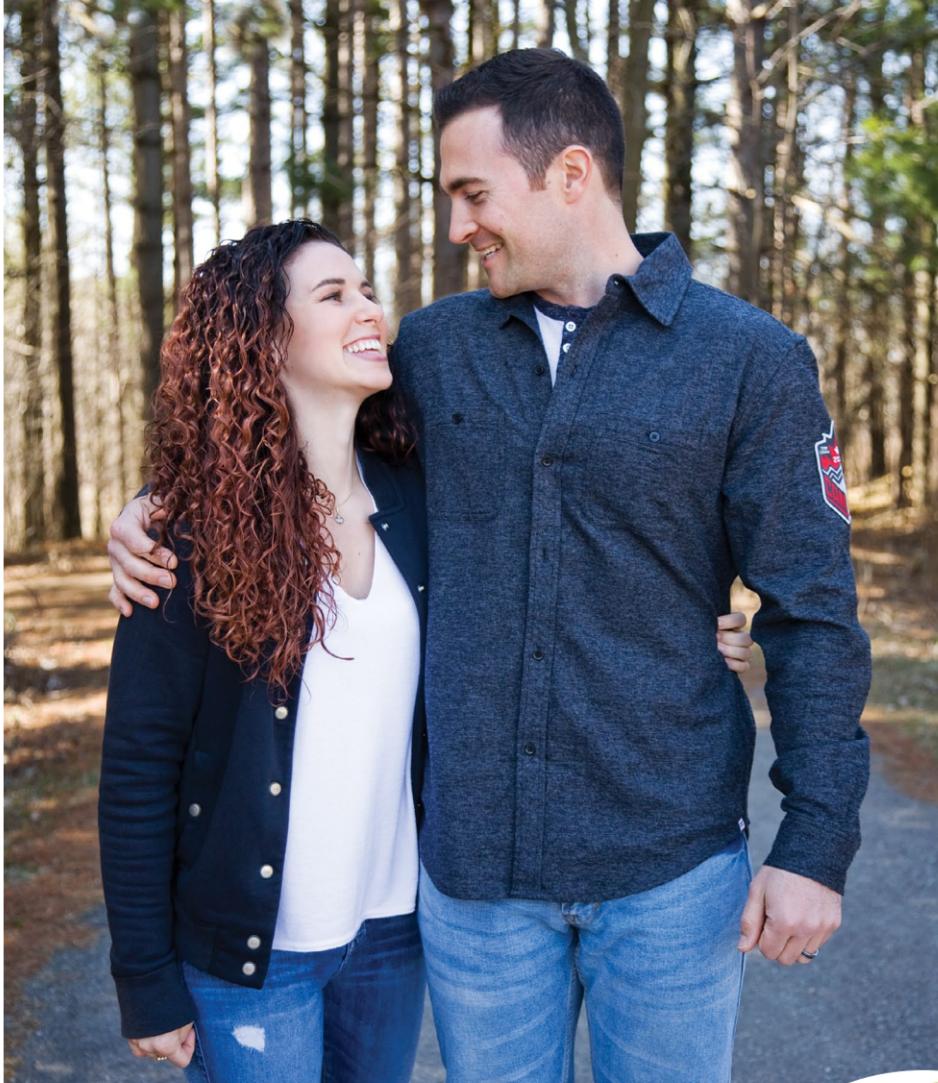
"I love to try new things," McIver says, listing yummy recipes. "Yesterday was lemon chicken with coconut curried quinoa and then some roasted cauliflower, just something new and healthy."

McIver follows a recipe better than Bujold but both like to experiment. "We both love food," she says. "That's part of the reason why we re-did our kitchen. We spent so much time in the kitchen that we might as well have a kitchen that we love."

Mandy Bujold and her husband, Reid McIver, enjoy spending time together cooking in their Kitchener home. "That's part of the reason why we re-did our kitchen," she says. "We spent so much time in the kitchen that we might as well have a kitchen that we love."

PHOTO BY ALISHA TOWNSEND





Whether getting carried away last August on their wedding day or pretending to land a body blow in an engagement photo, it's clear boxing champ Mandy Bujold has met her match in firefighter Reid McIver.

MAIN PHOTO BY ALISHA TOWNSEND  
WEDDING AND ENGAGEMENT PHOTOS BY BEN KANE

to be that girl.”

Donna Mancuso was one of those boxers. She's an inspector today with the Waterloo Regional Police. She remembers Bujold as a talented young woman who worked the hardest in the gym.

“She always had that spark, like you knew that she had that determination. She was driven, very driven. You just knew that she was somebody, if she set her mind to something, you could tell that she was going to do it.”

Mancuso was a police officer when she boxed. When she left the sport, she was at the highest level a female boxer could achieve. She had represented Canada internationally and her resumé included a bronze medal from the inaugural women's world championships in 2001.

“It can be difficult (to move on) because you work so hard and it defines you to some extent,” says Mancuso.

“It wasn't so abrupt for me because I had already had a career of full-time employment so that probably made my transition a lot easier. . . .

not considering herself particularly athletic. She had never played a team sport but had dabbled in twirling a baton and in artistic gymnastics.

“It wasn't until I found boxing that I realized there was something about how hard you had to work and just constantly try to improve; it's like you could never really perfect it. I wanted to perfect it, but I couldn't, and I think that's what drove me.”

A handful of female boxers in the gym inspired Bujold.

“There were two or three girls then, and they were at a really high level. I remember looking and thinking: I want



**B**ujold has stepped back from her intense training but still works out at TNT Boxing and Fitness Academy in Guelph. She works full-time at Communitech and is giving herself until the end of the year to decide if she will train to compete at the 2020 Olympics in Tokyo.

The 11-time national flyweight champion has much to celebrate in a boxing career that started when she was a girl wanting to box like her brother. Very few women were training in her early days at Waterloo Regional Boxing Academy.

“I asked a girl at school to come with me because I was a little nervous; there weren't that many women in the boxing gym. Once I walked in there, I was OK and comfortable with it. Walking up those old creaky stairs and going into this male-dominated world was a little intimidating for me at 16.”

Bujold fell in love with the sport despite

You miss the competition and you miss the people.”

Bujold knows the transition is coming and she is preparing. She graduated from a business program at Conestoga College and has been studying part time at the University of Waterloo to attain a bachelor's degree.

In her job as a business development specialist at Communitech, she uses her marketing and branding skills to help plan events such as the True North technology conference held in May.

“I think it's a great place for me to make a transition because they have that flexible work environment and flexible schedule. My job is exactly what I did for myself as an athlete. I was really successful in getting a lot of sponsorships and a lot of support over the years. I think part of that was because I actually knew how to build those relationships. I thought: I already do this for myself, now I'm just basically doing it for Communitech.”

Bujold is a featured public speaker. She launched a YouTube channel with training tips. And she runs a high-performance mentorship camp on the last weekend in July. It's open to all athletes and includes sessions with a sports psychologist, nutritionist and Olympian Alex Genest, a runner and steeplechase competitor.

**A**s her boxing career advanced, Bujold moved from being inspired by other women to helping the next generation. Kitchener boxer Danielle Ten Eyck credits Bujold with building her confidence by taking the time to reach out with words of encouragement.

Bujold did not aspire to be a role model, but she is conscious of how she carries herself inside and outside the ring.

“When you're a cute girl in a male-dominated sport, they want you to basically show it as a sex symbol. I've always been very against that because I know all these young girls are looking up to me and I want them to look up to me for the right reasons. I'm trying to show them that I'm being

respected for my sport and not for anything else.”

A life lesson she imparts to young boxers is the need to work through adversity. There's no better example than how Bujold handled herself at the 2016 Olympics in Rio de Janeiro, where her medal bid ended in disappointment.

Bujold contracted a stomach bug the night before her quarter-final bout against China's Ren Cancan. After years of training, she ended up hooked to an intravenous tube in a hospital bed just hours before the fight.

She compares it to a horror movie. Doctors rushed to settle her stomach without giving her any medications that would make her drowsy or contravene Olympic drug rules. She lost several pounds in just a few hours.

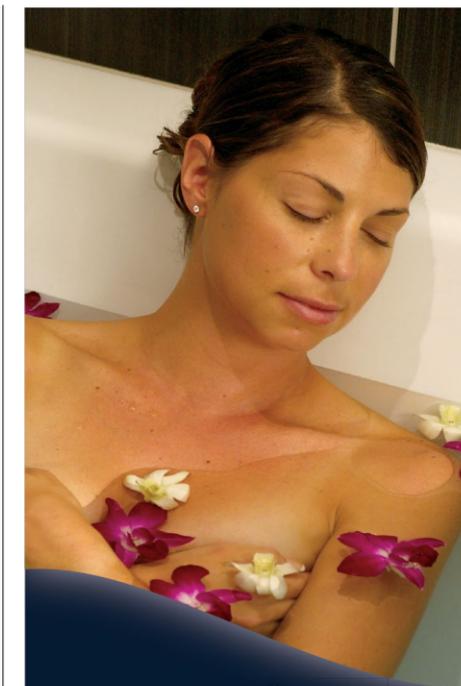
“You focus so much and you plan so much for that moment. I kept thinking of something my old psychologist used to tell me – it's not about what happens to you that counts; it's about how you react to what happens to you that counts. I kept thinking, I could be really pissed off right now, or I can focus my energy and keep it for when it's going to count, when I'm actually going to step into the ring.”

Bujold appreciates that qualifying for the Olympics is a big achievement. She missed that opportunity in 2012 – the year women's boxing was added as a sport – when she was not chosen for the Canadian team. Getting to Brazil was a win in itself. But she went there to compete; missing the bout wasn't an option.

“There was nothing that was going to stop me from getting in there. I didn't care, cut my arm off, I was still getting in there.”

Watching from the audience, McIver could see something was wrong when Bujold entered the venue. He knew she had been ill but had not talked to her. She had texted her mother – “I'm sick, pray for me.”

“When she actually walked out of the tunnel I was just like: Oh my God, you don't look good,” recalls McIver. “She was just green and usually she comes bopping out like a bouncy ball. She just kind of



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walked out, looked like she was just trying not to puke. I was a little bit scared because it's boxing; it's not like she's in the triple jump where it's her and sand. There is someone trying to hit her."

Bujold lost. She got big support from family, friends and fans, but an Olympian competes to win a medal and this was a letdown for her.

"Everyone is saying it's still very inspiring, but it's not the way I wanted to inspire people. I wanted to have a medal around my neck. You imagine it a certain way," she says. "I had thought about that moment every day of my life for the last 13 years."

Another challenge was the loss of her long-time coach, Adrian Teodorescu. He couldn't be with her in Rio and died in November 2016. He had kept his lymphoma treatments a secret.

"That was definitely difficult because he was one of the best coaches in the world," Bujold says. "I was lucky to spend the last four or five years of his life, literally with him every single day. That also was tough for me to go from having that really strong positive coach-athlete relationship to the Olympics being over. I don't have this coach anymore who was kind of convincing me to stick it out or maybe we'll go for 2020 in a different way."

McIver smiles and mimics a Romanian accent to quote Teodorescu: "We'll get it in 2020, Mandy."

That big Olympic decision will come later this year, after the couple learns how the demands of parenthood will impact their busy schedules.

"I don't know what that's going to look like because it's obviously a whole new thing for us," says the mother-to-be. "We are super excited and it's going to be a whole new adventure. This is obviously going to be factored into that decision."

Then she adds: "Ideally, I think that coming back after this would give me motivation to get back in shape."

Time will tell. But for now, Bujold and McIver have a robust life to explore outside the ring.

### Speed-round questions with Mandy Bujold

• **Best boxing movie?** "Girlfight," with Michelle Rodriguez. "I actually haven't watched it in about 10 years, but that was one of the movies I watched at the very beginning. At the very end, she beats up the guy and I liked it."

• **Best song for training?** Although she prefers to train without music, she does like Rihanna, featuring Drake – "Work, work, work, work . . ."

• **Favourite part of training?** "Probably sparring, because you would do something on hand pads and work on it with your coach in the morning and then you would actually do it. When it would work, it was really rewarding."

• **Least favourite part of training?** "Probably warming up, especially when you get to that second or third workout in one day and you have to do this long workout, it's just like ugh."

• **Boxer she admires?** Katie Taylor. "She is an Irish boxer who basically has won everything you could ever imagine. She was just the best boxer in the world for years and years and still is. Now she is a pro and she's basically winning world titles. In the boxing circuit everybody knows her. She's a really nice girl. She was this fierce female in the ring, but outside of the ring she was so down to earth and humble. Never really had attitude."

• **Words to box by?** "I usually have signs all over the house when I'm preparing for a fight, but they'll always be more focused on what I'm working on. 'Control the controllable' is one that I really like."

• **Coffee or tea?** "Reid's tea; I'm more coffee. I'm more like a latte type of thing. I wouldn't drink just a regular cup of coffee."

• **Morning person or night person?** "I absolutely hate getting up in the morning. Reid's a morning person and I'm a night person. He could easily get up at 6 a.m. every morning and just have a tea and watch the news and I'm like: Why would you do that?"

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