If there were a list of the world’s toughest occupations, it would undoubtedly include the following: mother, orthopedic surgeon, award-winning equestrienne, and author. Roll these four jobs into one woman, and you have someone who has almost reached the status of superhero.

“It’s something in my heart, mind or soul,” says Barbara Bergin, M.D., a married mother of two who is also an orthopedic surgeon at a busy Austin, Texas, practice. “I am driven to keep reinventing myself and I like a challenge.”
As if her life weren’t full enough, when Bergin turned 39, she decided she wanted to learn to work cattle.

“I wanted to connect to my heritage, I guess,” she says. “I had friends as a child who had a place with horses, and I loved that country experience.”

She hired a trainer, bought horses and began competing. At six-feet tall, she stands out in a crowd, but she also stands out in the saddle. She began traveling to equestrian competitions and it wasn’t long before she was winning. Eventually, she placed third and fifth in the world championship Working Cow Horse competition. She owns five American Quarter Horses.

She is an accomplished horsewoman, but learning to ride as an adult was not without its complications.

“I hadn’t been riding six months when I was thrown from my horse and broke my wrist,” she says. “I set my own wrist right then and there, but I still had to have surgery and wasn’t able to work for six weeks.”

She has also torn her ACL while riding, but neither injury stopped her competitive spirit. She has two horses with which she competes and several others she says she “put out to pasture” to live out their days at her 200-acre Palo Blanco Ranch in Smithville, Texas.

Although Bergin considers herself a dyed-in-the-wool Texan, she was born in the Bronx, N.Y. Her father, a Korean War veteran, moved the family from New York to Houston so he could pursue a college degree under the G.I. Bill. After finishing college, he went to work for Alcoa, Inc., a company that produces aluminum. The family moved frequently, and Bergin ultimately graduated from high school in Houston.

“I came to Tech because of my boyfriend, whose whole family had gone to Tech,” says Bergin. “Believe it or not, I hadn’t seen the campus until the day my parents drove me to Lubbock.”

Bergin loved Tech from her first moments on campus, and still does. She believes there is something magical about West Texas.

“When I fly into Lubbock, I love the way it looks, even from the air,” she says.

Bergin met her husband, Paul Nader, M.D., a nephrologist, at Texas Tech, too. He graduated from Southern Methodist University in Dallas, but attended Texas Tech for one year as an undergraduate. The couple met in a biology class and was part of the same study group. She admits that she did not like him initially, but he left Tech and returned to SMU.

“We ended up together again in med school (at Texas Tech University Health Sciences Center) and I said, ’Oh no!’ But, I changed my mind about him!” she says, laughing.

They married in 1980 and have two grown children, Wallis and Matt, who are both undergraduates at University of Texas-Austin. Bergin notes that marrying a fellow doctor was a boon. They experienced the rigors of medical school and residencies together, which forged a powerful bond.

Bergin says becoming a surgeon wasn’t a lifelong ambition. Neither of her parents was in the medical field. Her father was an electrical engineer. Her mother was deputy superintendent of the Houston Independent School District and finished her career as the Deputy Commissioner of Education for Texas. Bergin was drawn to medicine in her teens.

“I decided to be a doctor when I was in high school,” she says. “I always wanted to take care of people and initially thought about physical therapy. I liked talking to people and when I was in med school I thought about specializing in psychiatry.”

But, during her rotations she realized orthopedic surgery was the best fit. She completed residencies at the University of Missouri-Columbia and at TTUHSC.

Because her parents were in Austin, Bergin opened an orthopedic surgery practice there in 1986 with two men who completed their orthopedic surgery residencies at the same time. Texas Orthopedics, Sports and Rehabilitation Associates, is now Austin’s largest orthopedic group, boasting 14 doctors. Bergin is proud to note that eight of the partners either attended school at Texas Tech or completed rotations there.

Once she made her decision, Bergin never questioned that she was meant to be a physician. It came in handy the time she broke her wrist, and another time when her son, Matt, broke his ankle in the eighth grade playing football. She set his ankle right on the football field and, later, was able to observe one of her partners perform surgery on him.
Bergin notes that only about three percent of orthopedic doctors in the United States are female.
More important than setting broken bones, there was one Friday night when being physicians allowed Bergin and her husband, Nader, to save a life together—their son’s. Matt was a star offensive tackle at Westlake High School in 2006. Only a junior, he weighed in at 310 pounds and had already been named All-District and All-State. He had a full-ride to play football at University of Texas-Austin.

On Sept. 15, 2006, Matt went into cardiac arrest during a football game in College Station. After completing a play and returning to the sidelines, he collapsed. Bergin and Nader rushed from the stands to their son’s side.

“I tried to speak to him but he didn’t respond,” Bergin says. “I pinched his pale cheeks. His skin was clammy, dusky. His curly hair was soaking wet. He was breathing, but I recognized it as agonal breathing when I heard Paul say he couldn’t feel a pulse. I felt for a carotid pulse and found none. At that instant Matt took his last breath, a weak gasp at best. My husband and I started CPR. We started CPR on our own baby! A patient of mine later wrote to me, saying that my husband and I went through all that medical training so that we could be there, at that moment, to give life to our son.

“There were some other doctors in the bleachers; a couple of anesthesiologists and a cardiologist. They took over for us, but it was hard for me to leave Matt’s side. Four years ago someone donated an AED (automated external defibrillator) to our football team. It had never been used. It was charged, someone knew exactly where it was so when it was called for, it was there. Matt’s shoulder pads and jersey were cut off and the sticky defibrillator pads put on his chest. When I heard the prompt say he was ready, I knew there was a serious problem, because the automatic defibrillator will not deliver a charge unless the person is in asystole or ventricular fibrillation. We stood back. I saw Matt’s tremendous body convulse.”

Amazingly, Matt began breathing on his own. When he regained consciousness in the emergency room, the first thing he asked his mother was, “Will I be able to keep playing football?” The answer was no, but Bergin couldn’t bear to tell her son at that moment.

In the ensuing days, every known test was performed on Matt. They were all normal.

“The strip from the AED proved Matt had been in ventricular fibrillation,” says Bergin. “Matt had died. Early CPR and defibrillation had saved his life.”

Matt had an internal defibrillator installed because doctors said he could suffer another episode. While he can never participate in contact sports again, his football scholarship to U.T. was honored, and he was told he could assist the offensive line coach, which he does.

“He continues to speak for the placement of AEDs in schools and promotes the learning of CPR,” comments Bergin. “In 2007 Senate Bill 7 passed, which will fund the placement of AEDs in all the schools of Texas as well as provide funding for CPR instruction of teachers and students.”
Bergin has been fortunate to find love many times and in many ways. She is in love with being a wife, a mother, a surgeon and an equestrienne. It was while sitting in the stands awaiting her turn at a reined cowhorse competition that she fell in love again—with the idea of being an author.

While traveling between Pilot Point, Texas, and Denton, to meet her trainer to travel to a competition, she came up fast behind a pick-up truck hauling a horse trailer. Barely avoiding an accident, the idea for the beginning of her book was sparked. From there she spent every spare moment writing her novel, "Endings."

"It took about eight months to get it done," she says. "My Mom helped me edit numerous manuscripts."

She took her laptop to riding competitions and used the down time to write, write, write. She began shopping for a publisher. For every query letter she sent, a rejection letter was received. On the advice of a literary publicist, Bergin began telling everyone she knew about her novel. While visiting with an old friend from TTUHSC, Jim Bob Jones, former assistant dean for student affairs, she struck pay dirt.

"I was on my way to Amarillo and decided to call Jim Bob, who is retired now and lives in Friona (Texas)," she says. "While we were visiting I told him about my book. He said his wife was an author."

Jim Bob's wife, Teddy Jones, is the founding and former dean of nursing and professor emeritus at the health sciences center. She has authored three books that were published by Sunstone Press in Santa Fe, N.M.

"When Barbara told me she had written a book and was looking for a publisher, I handed the phone to Teddy," says Jim Bob, who says he got to know Barbara during her time as a medical student and resident.

"It was hard not to get to know medical students; when Barbara was at Tech, there were only about 40 students in medical school." Jim Bob expressed no surprise that Barbara had authored a book.

"She has a lot of different interests and enjoys trying and doing a lot of things," he says, recalling she was in a rock-and-roll group when she was a medical student. "You never want to put her in a single category."

The connection to her old friends paid off and by the fall of 2007, Bergin’s book was published.

"Endings" combines all of Bergin’s loves: marriage, motherhood, medicine and horses. The book’s main character, Leslie Cohen, M.D., lost her husband and two children, twins Victor and Vivi, in a car accident. As an orthopedic surgeon, Cohen chooses a nomadic life as a temporary surgeon, or locum tenens. She fills in for orthopedic surgeons while they’re vacationing or recovering from illness, never staying longer than two weeks.

She reveals little while working her short stints, only that she’s lost her husband, never hinting at the unbearable truth about her children.

Her life changes when she accepts a one-month assignment in Abilene for a lovable older surgeon, "Doc" Hawley. En route to Abilene, she is involved in an accident with a truck pulling a horse trailer. The truck’s driver, a contractor building a new stadium for a local high school, is Regan Wakeman. Wakeman is also a local rancher and competitive team roper. While they are uninjured, the chance meeting ultimately changes Cohen’s life, again.

Bergin reveals bits and pieces of Cohen’s previous life with heart wrenching memories of her husband and young children. Her attention to detail will bring tears to any parent’s eyes, and is often bittersweet.

As a first-time author, Bergin peppered her novel with stories from her life, people she’s known and places she’s been. There’s a cafe in the book based on an old Lubbock cafe Bergin frequented: J & J’s. Another portion of the book mentions a Methodist minister and his son, which refers to Bergin’s husband and father-in-law, a minister. The book also mentions Lubbock numerous times.

Much of the book captures with shocking perfection exactly what any mother would feel if she found herself in Cohen’s place. The book ends with a twist, or what Bergin calls a special effect, leaving the reader with hope and a few questions.

Bergin has been bitten by the writing bug. She is almost one-third of the way through a new book, "The Wish," much of which takes place in Lubbock.

Bergin seems to choose challenges that seem impossible to many: becoming a surgeon, competing in world-class equine competitions and having a book published. Her insatiable appetite for learning has ensured that she is, on many fronts, unforgettable.

For more information about Barbara Bergin, visit her Web site at <www.barbaraberginink.com>.
They found a marble. A single tiger eye marble. It was beautiful. They went outside to dig up the crusted snow and ice. They had to get a gardening shovel which Leslie found in a box in the garage. They went inside to get it. They waddled. The moisture collected around their nostrils and froze there. Little crystal webs. They could suck the air through their noses and make their nostrils stick together. She did it too, but she had to squeeze hers together with her fingers. As they got older, and the cartilage in their noses got firm, they had to use their fingers to push them together too, but like the matching snow suits, it didn’t interest them so much anymore.

Leslie loved cold weather. Winter was her favorite time of year. She didn’t want to think of their favorite winter. But she did.

They had just moved into the new house. Winter was an inconvenient time to move but that’s when her favorite house in New Paltz had unexpectedly gone up for sale. She had always wanted that house. It was old. Large enough. Red brick, white trim, black shutters. Snow covered the house. The inside was bright with reflected sunlight through the curtainless windows. Sounds were amplified and echoed off the bare wooden floors. Vivi and Vic ran around the house looking for all its secrets. And there were plenty. There were a couple of attics. Some old sealed boxes were left behind. They had to find where the doors were and had to access them through closets. A basement with sealed boxes were left behind. They had to find where the doors were and had to access them through closets. A basement with sealed boxes were left behind. They had to find where the doors were and had to access them through closets. A basement with sealed boxes were left behind. They had to find where the doors were and had to access them through closets. A basement with sealed boxes were left behind. They had to find where the doors were and had to access them through closets. A basement with sealed boxes were left behind. They had to find where the doors were and had to access them through closets. A basement with sealed boxes were left behind. They had to find where the doors were and had to access them through closets. A basement with sealed boxes were left behind. They had to find where the doors were and had to access them through closets.

The marbles were spread throughout the yard, not in one place. Even a dumbwaiter! There was an old servant’s staircase, steep, dark and narrow. It was a magical place and they loved it. In the backyard there was a short hill. They found an old round toboggan, buried in the snow on its side so that just the edge was peeping through. The kids spent the rest of the winter climbing up and down that hill taking turns on the toboggan. She could watch them through the kitchen window when she was home. Chris and their nanny got to watch them the most. Chris could do quite a bit of work out of the house, when he wasn’t traveling.

In any place where the winter is severe and long, there comes a day, a sunny day, when the snow starts to melt. It’s not going to snow again. Things that have been stuck in the ice and snow can be gradually pried loose. Water drips from icicles on the roof and erodes little caves in the snow and ice on the ground under them. It was just such a day when Vivi saw a dot of bright color six inches down in one of those little water caves. She ran in to get a gardening shovel which Leslie found in a box in the garage. They went outside to dig up the crusted snow and ice. They found a marble. A single tiger eye marble. It was beautiful. Leslie had not seen marbles in years. Of course she hadn’t been trying to see marbles but they simply didn’t have the appeal now that they did when she was a kid. This was a find. The kids started digging up the ice under the dripping icicles trying to find more. They found a red marble and a clear one. They found a marble painted to look like the Earth. They found a large bubble gum sized multi-colored one. And then no more.

The rest of the snow in the back yard was still way too deep to excavate. They had to wait. As the weeks went by the edges of the snow began to recede, and more little dots of color were exposed. Sometimes they could scout the bright ones through several inches of snow and they would dig them up. By the time the snow melted they had found close to one hundred marbles. Some were very old ones. Some newer ones. Some looked like they had been cracked by pouring boiling water on top of frozen marbles like she had done as a child to make jewelry. It was a treasure. The kids were mesmerized by them and the nature of their discovery.

The one tiger eye was the coveted prize and they decided to draw straws to see who picked first when they divided them up. Leslie provided each with one of her green felt draw string show bags. She took two toothpicks and broke one short. They picked, and Vivian picked the short one, instantly throwing herself backward on the bed in agony. She knew Vic would pick the tiger eye. But he didn’t. He took the big multi-colored one, leaving the tiger eye for Vivian. Then they took turns picking marbles one after another and putting them in their bags. They lay in front of the fireplace all day looking at those marbles. Looking deep in their little internal structures.

“How do they make marbles, Mommy?” She didn’t know the answer. She promised someday she would look it up.

The stranger question was how did they get there? The people who owned the house before did not have any young children. The marbles were spread throughout the yard, not in one place as if they had been accidentally dropped there. She could have found out the history of the marbles easily enough by calling the previous owner, but chose not to. The magic surrounding them was a beautiful thing, not to be spoiled by reality.

After the accident she had an estate sale and then sold the house in late November. The family who bought the house wasn’t moving in until after the first of the year. A cold front came through in mid-December. That night she gathered the two felt bags from under Vic and Vivi’s beds. She stood on their back porch for the last time. The night sky was clear, sharply cold. The moon reflected off the gathering frontal clouds which would dump over a foot and a half of snow on upstate New York. Leslie untied the little knots and opened the bags. She searched for the tiger eye but couldn’t find it. Then, she flung the contents of the bags out over their yard.

The next morning the only thing that interrupted the blanket of white was the top edge of the toboggan leaning against the garage.