

Joyce Tanac Schroeder Memories of Seattle YMCA (Sept. 2012)

My very first introduction to the Seattle Downtown YMCA Gym was in 1960. Watching my first competition, I was hooked! My "dancing school" friend and future Seattle Y gymnast, Louise Grant, was with me as we tried to figure out what gymnastics was! I was kind of in the "2nd wave" of gymnasts that George Lewis began coaching. Included in the "1st wave" were Dale McClements, Jean Mallon, Jan Crosby, Patsy Walkup, and Marilyn Miller. I think Barbara Cook, Carol Camp, Carol Elsner and Linda Rodella came to the Y about the same time as Louise and I. For the next 10 years, I learned gymnastics, found wonderful friends and made life-long memories.

George Lewis, our coach, was a tireless human being and not just in the gym! He owned The Time Shop, a watch repair and jewelry business, in downtown Seattle. After working all day, he'd come to the Y and coach for 3-4 hours, plus Saturdays. During fishing season, he would often fish off Fauntleroy before coming to work.

In our gym, it wasn't just for men's and women's gymnastics. We were joined by basketball players, runners using the 25 laps - mile track above the basketball floor, weight lifters, hand balancers, boxers (with a very annoying punching bag) and wrestlers. I remember doing a layout and watching a basketball roll across the mat as I'm upside down in the air. Each workout, we had to haul all the equipment out of a small storage area and put it all back at the end. Tumbling mats were rolled up and pushed against the wall. We would arrange the mats for our tumbling passes or just use the floor-no Floor-Ex mat in those days. Our first balance beam was an I-Beam. When George heard balance beam, that was the only type of beam that came to mind! For vaulting, Dale first used a "take-off" board, with NO spring at all, then we graduated to a Reuter board, still with no springs, but an S-curved board between the top and bottom pieces, which provided the spring. The bars at that time, were wood, egg shaped, wider at the top than bottom and they BROKE if we hit them wrong. The width between the bars was 16-18 inches at the most.

We competed all over the Northwest. George believed the more competition, the better. It was so wonderful to have Dale as a role-model, as she was so focused and such a hard worker, who paved the way to the national and international levels for the rest of us. There were many road-trips to Tri-Cities, Spokane, Eugene, OR. and Victoria, Vancouver and Kelowna in British Columbia, with parents driving and keeping track of all of us. As our program grew and progressed, I remember trips to the Canadian Nationals in Saskatoon, Saskatchewan and many times to California. Then, onto the National meets all over the United States.

I always felt we had so much fun in the gym, while working hard to get better as gymnasts. After talking with former gymnasts from other clubs over the years, I learned this was not always the case. George made this possible, by being a very calm and encouraging coach, not a "yelling coach." We knew if we heard his favorite expression, "Folgers Coffee!" we had gotten it right. He not only cared about us as his gymnasts, but as his friends. I believe, with hardly any exceptions, all of his gymnasts kept in touch

with him until he passed away in 1989.

We sometimes had gymnasts from other clubs train with us during summers. One of these was Sandy Hartley, from Vancouver, BC, who trained with us and attended the University of Washington for the year leading up to the 1968 Olympics. She was a 1968 Canadian Olympian. This shows the great respect that the gymnastic community had for our Seattle Y program.

I must mention some of the other coaches who were part of our Y program: Dale Shirley, Dale McClements (Flansaas) Kephart after she retired from competition and Tommy Thorson, whose specialty was coaching good bar basics to the new gymnasts on the single bar which was lowered down from the ceiling. Cy Hart wasn't a coach, but was a runner and lifted weights before it was popular. He was such a supporter of our program.

Under George Lewis, the Y program flourished. It was such a special and unique situation. Speaking for myself, I did not realize what a great gym and atmosphere we had until later in life and appreciated everything even more. Our gymnastics years have a continuing impact on us as we live our lives.

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