

Gunter Bohrmann's Hall of Fame acceptance speech, June 12, 2005

Since I was a teenager, gymnastics has been a thread weaving itself through my life.

In Germany, where I grew up, sports aren't part of the school curriculum. If you want to participate in sports you have to join a club. When I was about 10 I began hanging out at our local gym club. I loved canoeing, track and field, lifting weights, wrestling and playing soccer and team handball. It wasn't until I was 17 that I discovered gymnastics, and it was love at first sight. Once I decided it was the sport for me, I couldn't get enough of it. I joined the competitive team and started getting serious. Often by the time my teammates arrived at the gym, I had already spent two hours stretching and doing strength workout. I never really had a coach, so I learned from other gymnasts and from any clinics available. I still have all the notes I took at those clinics. I made training plans and kept a training diary. I knew that being organized was the key to being successful, and I carried that philosophy over to my coaching.

After graduating from high school I attended the University of Mainz, where I studied English and PE while continuing gymnastics workouts and competitions through the club. Since I was majoring in English, I was always on the lookout for opportunities to improve my language skills. I hoped to study in England or the United States. After 3-1/2 years of college, gymnastics opened the door for me to study abroad. Through a friend I learned that Dr. Eric Hughes, gymnastics coach at the University of Washington, recruited foreign gymnasts for his team. I contacted him and was offered room and board at a fraternity for two years.

In 1962, at the age of 22, I packed my bags and boarded a ship at Rotterdam bound for New York. From there I traveled by Greyhound to Seattle. I'm not sure a fraternity is the right place to learn proper English, but I soon learned real English! Speaking of English, the first time I saw a John Wayne movie in this country I was shocked that he spoke English! I'd seen all his movies in Germany, and over there he spoke German!

As it turned out, I was able to graduate from the U in one year with a B.A. in English. Now what was I going to do? Once again, gymnastics opened another door. One day Dr. Hughes asked me if I was interested in applying for a coaching position at a local Kent high school. They had just started boys' gymnastics and needed a coach. So I thought, why not? Those were the days when a district would hire someone as a coach, then they'd find him something to teach. Even though I had no teaching certificate and had never been inside an American high school, I was hired to coach gymnastics at Kent-Meridian High School. German, English and P.E were my teaching assignments. I was so clueless about how a school operated! On the first day of school a student came to collect the absentee slip, and I asked, "What's an absentee slip?" In the 38 following years I was able to get the system down pretty well, but the first year was quite a comedy of errors. Before long I discovered that I really enjoyed teaching and coaching. I liked the students and my fellow teachers and coaches, and I came to love the country. In 1968 I became an American citizen.

Through gymnastics I was also able to see much of the world. I had the privilege on three occasions of representing the United States on summer-long goodwill tours sponsored by the State Department. These included the Japan, New Zealand and Australia tour of 1966; the Southeast Asia tour of 1968; and the South America tour of 1970. Besides competing and entertaining, our group taught many clinics to help the native gymnasts.

The most life-changing thing that gymnastics led me to happened in the summer of 1970. For several summers I had been coaching northwest gymnasts at Camp Waskowitz near North Bend. In 1970 an additional group was added to enable teachers to receive graduate credits. It was a course for teachers to learn how to teach gymnastics. In that group was a young woman named Janyce, who ten months later became my wife. For the past 34 years of marriage she has remained my best friend and most faithful supporter.

Over my 40-year coaching career I have had the privilege of introducing gymnastics to thousands of young people. One of my greatest thrills has always been to see a shy, inexperienced sophomore develop in three short years into a poised, confident, skilled gymnast. Many of my gymnasts won State titles, many received college scholarships, and at least five have gone on to start their own gymnastics clubs.

The gymnastics thread weaving through the fabric of my life continues into the lives of those whom I have coached. To know that my life has touched the lives of others who are keeping this beautiful sport alive and growing is very

gratifying. I am deeply honored to receive this award tonight. Thank you, John, Alisa, Lee, and all others who have worked hard to make this a wonderful evening of tribute to our beautiful sport!