

# **WORLD ACROBATICS SOCIETY**

## **HOLIDAY NEWSLETTER**

**DECEMBER 2000**



### **FEATURED ATTRACTION OF NEXT YEAR'S WORLD ACROBATICS SOCIETY REUNION**

The WORLD ACROBATICS SOCIETY is pleased to announce that on April 24-25-26 of the year 2001, it will celebrate the 5th ANNIVERSARY at its ANNUAL REUNION in Las Vegas, Nevada! Las Vegas has been chosen as an excellent site for our ANNUAL REUNION for a variety of positive reasons. Paramount among these reasons is the fact that Las Vegas is considered as the "ENTERTAINMENT CAPITAL of the WORLD" with a wide variety of entertainment attractions for the entire family.

The featured attraction of this year's Annual Reunion will be the honoring of 42 major figures in Acrobatic History whose various contributions to Acrobatics world wide have lead to the exhalted position that such activities as Gymnastics, Sports Acrobatics, Tumbling, Trampoline, Competitive Diving and Professional Acrobatics enjoys today.

These "GALLERY of HONOR" Awards are consistent with the main purpose of our Organization which seeks (1) To preserve the history of Acrobatics world wide and (2) To provide an opportunity for old friends and associates to get together for a meaningful and pleasurable reunion.

### **AWARDS CEREMONIES SCHEDULE**

Two days will be allowed for the honoring of FORTY TWO "Gallery of Honor" recipients. Each recipient present will receive a beautiful Plaque and have their personal profile and photograph included in a book entitled "ACROBATIC LEGENDS" (Profiles in Greatness). These awards will be scheduled for the 25th and 26th of April, 2001.

**SEE THE FOLLOWING PAGE FOR A COMPLETE LIST OF  
THOSE CHOSEN TO BE HONORED AT OUR ANNUAL  
REUNION**

# **THE WORLD ACROBATICS SOCIETY "GALLERY OF HONOR" AWARDS FOR 2001**

## **"Gallery of Honor" Recipients**

The following nominees have been approved by the World Acrobatics Society Selection Committee to receive the "Gallery of Honor" Award for the year 2001.

### **GYMNASTICS**

FRANK CUMISKEY  
JACKIE FIE  
JOE GIALLOMBARDO  
ABIE GROSSFELD  
NEWT LOKEN  
GEORGE NISSEN  
ERNESTINE RUSSELL  
ART SHURLOCK  
GEORGE SZYPULA  
GENE WHETSTONE

### **TRAMPOLINE & TUMBLING**

JEFF AUSTIN  
ERVIN BEDARD  
GAYLORD HUGHES  
FRANK LaDUE  
PAUL LUXON  
JO ANN MATHEWS  
DAN MILLMAN  
WAYNE MILLER  
RON MUNN  
ALEXANDRA NICHOLSON  
BARBRA GALLEHER TONRY

### **COMPETITIVE DIVING**

HOBIE BILLINGSLEY  
KLAUS DIBIASI  
DICK KIMBALL  
SAMMY LEE  
GREG LOUGANIS  
PAT McCORMICK  
RON O'BRIEN  
CYNTHIA POTTER  
DICK SMITH

### **SPORTS ACROBATICS**

IGOR ASHINASKI  
JAN BRANCH  
SONNY BROWN

### **PROFESSIONAL ACROBATICS**

MARCO CANNESTRELLI  
TITO GAONA  
GEORGE PAUL  
RUSS SAUNDERS

### **POSTHUMOUS AWARDS**

SKIPPY BROWNING    ERVING (BUD) BEYER    LARRY GRISWOLD  
TOM MALONEY    HARTLEY PRICE

### **LAST YEAR'S "GALLERY OF HONOR" RECIPIENTS**

JUDY WILLS CLINE    GLENN SUNDBY  
ROWLAND WOLFE    TOM GOMPF



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## LETTER FROM THE PRESIDENT

*Dear Member of the World Acrobatic Society:*

*We would like to apologize for the sporadic manner in which the NEWSLETTER has been prepared and sent out this year. We realize that the quarterly Newsletter is the life blood of our organization and serves as our primary communications vehicle. Roger Council, who produced the last Newsletter did an excellent job but due to health considerations is unable to continue in that post.*

*As a consequence, Bob Bollinger agreed to temporarily produce our Newsletter until such time as we can designate a permanent editor and get our Newsletter back on a proper quarterly schedule. It is our belief that you will find this issue one of the best we've produced as it not only names our 42 recipients of the "GALLERY of HONOR" Award for the year 2001, but also contains 8 excellent articles from 8 of our most prominent members. Lastly, we hope that ALL of you will consider attending our 5<sup>th</sup> ANNIVERSARY REUNION in Las Vegas scheduled for April 24-25-26 of the year 2001. This should be a great gathering for ALL to enjoy! In concluding, let me wish all of you a Happy and Joyous Holiday Season.*

*Yours in Acrobatics*

*Don Leas*  
Don Leas  
President:

# PRESERVING THE HISTORY OF ACROBATICS

by

A.B. Frederick, PhD.

W.A.S. Archivist and Historian

An integral part of the mission statement of the World Acrobatics Society (WAS) is to preserve the history of acrobatic sports worldwide. The Society has identified a number of acrobatic disciplines all of which have elements of somersaulting, twisting and balancing as a part of their makeup. Acrobatics are practiced by both amateur and professional athletes and most have an international governing body with affiliates in many countries. Established acrobatic sports include, in order of their historic appearance, tumbling, circus arts, gymnastics (known today as artistic gymnastics), diving, trampoline and sports acrobatics. More recent examples are inclusive of the extreme sports of free style skiing, skateboarding, modern stand alone cheerleading and others.

We have been attempting to develop the historical record for each of the acrobatic disciplines and have been somewhat surprised at the paucity of information available. These investigations have also revealed that very often little is known about the important personalities in each of the disciplines. For example, the founder of the modern trampoline, WAS member George Nissen, is fairly well known due to the recent addition of Olympic trampoline events, but who was it that introduced diving to the world? We're not very sure. Thousands of questions remain to be answered.

The establishment of the "Acrobatic Legends" program is useful to identify those individuals we recognize as prime movers, innovators and outstanding champions, coaches and trainers in each of the established acrobatic disciplines. Encouraged by the program last year where four of our top people were recognized, the Board of Directors has



approved honoring forty-two new "Legends" in 2001 at the annual meeting in Las Vegas scheduled for April 23-25. Bob Bollinger has been the initial force behind the effort accumulating lists submitted by those interested in the program. Eventually, the profiles assembled by Bollinger and his coworkers will be the basis for a publication with the suggested title, Acrobatic Legends. The Gymnastic Association of Texas, under the leadership of Brian Schenk, has a similar program to honor its outstanding members. Such a publication will have to undergo periodic updates. As the writer can testify and as Frank Cumiskey before him might relate, the accumulation and vetting of profiles is an ambitious and time consuming undertaking. Such a project is one of many ways we can preserve our history, however. Accordingly, we invite you to make suggestions about potential honorees and submit profiles of those who have made an impact in your life. We look forward to seeing you and the "Legends" in Las Vegas.

ABF

12/3/00



# WHAT IS AN "ACROBATIC LEGEND?"

By  
Bil Copp

A remarkable gathering took place in Las Vegas on February 7, 1994. It was the occasion of the 80<sup>th</sup> birthday of George Nissen, former diver, gymnast, acrobat, gymnastic and table tennis equipment manufacturer and the universally recognized "Father of the Modern Trampoline." Present were many luminaries of gymnastics and acrobatics, many of them legends in their own right. At my table alone sat World Tumbling Champion Steve Elliott, Circus star Marco Cannestrelli, Canadian Olympic Coach (to be), Dave Ross and trampoline innovator Dr. Bill Harris. At other tables were Pro Trampoline Champ George Hery, twisting belt inventor Charlie Pond, former National Tumbling Champ Joe Giallombardo, former acrobat and university Vice President Joe Schabacker and first World Trampoline Champion turned successful author Dan Millman.

Also present were three times NCAA Trampoline Champ Edsel Buchanan and Olympic Diving coach Hobie Billingsley. Five times World Trampoline Champion Judi Wills along with numerous others from the world of acrobatics, diving and table tennis also attended. So did trampoline legend Ron Munn and George's former acrobatic partner Xavier Leonard. It was a unique event unlikely to be repeated anytime soon. Presiding over the event was Bob Bollinger (Voltaire of the Trampoline World), inventor of the Double Mini-Tramp and Axial Rotation System for evaluating difficulty in trampoline and diving and one of the most successful coaches in trampoline history. One by one, for almost two hours each paid tribute to George with anecdotes and remembrances.

I remembered my youth in the high school library where an almanac listed athletic achievements and champions. Munn, Wills, Pond and Giallombardo were in the book



along with many others in the room. Later I read in 'Modern Gymnast' that a young hot shot named Dan Millman was winning everything in sight during the jump center days. It was no surprise to me when he subsequently won the First World Trampoline championships in 1964. Modern Gymnast's publisher Glenn Sundby was even there himself. Though I'd never met or seen them, each was a hero to me and a living legend. Now many of them were in the same room at the same time. I looked around and thought of a few legends that were not there; Larry Griswold, Paul Luxon, Newt Loken, Jeff Hennessey and Abie Grossfeld.

Later that same year at the Florida Workout, we recognized Elliott, Harris, Luxon and Aerial Ski Champ Frank Bare Jr. as "Living Legends". Charlie Pond and Glenn Sundby were recognized as "Pioneers of the Sport" along with the "Father of Soviet Trapolining" Mikhail Smirnov. Another time it was Millman, AAU Tumbling Champ Dick Browning and two time World Trampoline Champion Wayne Miller. I had seen Browning in a newsreel at a theater in the 50s but never expected to actually meet him.

# WHAT IS AN "ACROBATIC LEGEND?"

## (Continued)

Champions abound but legends are relatively few. I wondered what transformed a normal human being into a living legend. Was it achievement, influence or spin that does it? We all have our own views of living legends, usually influenced by what has personally influenced us throughout the years. Some time ago a Hollywood publicist defined "true fame" as needing no further introduction other than their name; no title or preface such as 'the eminent' or 'the famous' need be used. The world knows who we mean when we simply say "Columbus", "Beethoven", "Shakespeare" or even "Elvis" but who outside of a particular sphere would recognize "Oerter", "Moskelenko", "Zukerman" or "Skakun?"

The World Acrobatic Society has made an effort to keep alive the memory of outstanding performers and contributors in acrobatic related activity by periodically recognizing them. Still, this effort is limited to the collective memories of the individuals given the task of selection. One truly admirable achievement in this area was the recognition last year of Roland Wolfe, the World's only gold medalist in Olympic Tumbling competition. It is unfortunate that this unique achievement is basically unknown to all but a few acrobatic history buffs, mostly near contemporaries.

How well are you versed on Acrobatic Legends (or potential legends)? As a test of Acrobatic History I present the following quiz. See how many correct answers you can get.

1. Who is the present 2-time Men's World Tumbling Champion?
2. What Olympic gymnast has won the most gold medals?
3. Name one Olympic Trampoline Champion.
4. What acrobat perfected the one finger

5. What gymnast achieved the first 10.0 score in Olympic competition?
6. What gymnast did the first Full-Twisting Double Somersault in Floor Exercise?
7. Who uniquely competed in 11 World Trampoline Championships in 20 years?
8. What tumbler achieved the first Triple Somersault in competition?
9. What female trampolinist performed the first "Triffis" in World Competition?
10. What aerialist achieved the first caught quadruple somersault in public?

## ANSWERS

1. LEVON PETROSIAN - RUSSIA
2. LARISSA LATYNIA - USSR
3. ALEXANDER MOSKALENKO & IRINA KARAVAEVA - RUSSIA
4. THE "GREAT UNUS"
5. NADIA COMENECI - ROMANIA
6. JOHN CROSBY - USA
7. CARL HEGER - USA
8. VADIM BINDLER - USSR, 1974
9. ALEXANDRA NICHOLSON - USA
10. MIQUEL VASQUEZ in 1974

10 POINTS = ACRO EXPERT  
8-9 POINTS = WELL INFORMED  
6-7 POINTS = BETTER THAN AVERAGE  
5 POINTS = SOMEWHAT KNOWLEDGABLE  
4 POINTS = NEEDS MORE TUTORING!  
LESS THAN 4 RATHER QUESTIONABLE

# THE OLDER I GET.....THE BETTER I WAS!

REVISITING THE 1956 "ED SULLIVAN" SHOW

By  
BOB BOLLINGER

"The Older I get.....the better I was!" is a claim that many of us old retired acrobats can make with some degree of legitimacy. At age 71, I look back upon a lifetime of involvement in Tumbling, Trampoline and Springboard Diving. I first became inspired by acrobatics at age 8 in 1937 at the British Embassy in Shanghai, China while bombs were raining down on the city from Japanese bombers overhead. I witnessed several members of the Chinese Second Route Army 'Big Sword Corps perform acrobatic stunts while twirling their massive two-handed swords.

Returning to the United States in early 1938, I began practicing tumbling in my own backyard. I distinctly remember teaching myself a standing back off the rear seat of an old Model-A Ford. By 1942 I had taught myself a Roundoff-Flip-Flop-Back and by 1948, one of my tumbling passes consisted of a Roundoff-Flip Flop- 3 Bounding Full-Twisting Backs to a Flip-Flop-Full Twisting Back-Punch Front. Many years of professional acrobatics followed, mostly with Trampoline, Tumbling and Diving. Not long ago, I asked myself the question...."I can tell, but how can I prove to my 14 grand-children (many who are now involved in gymnastics) that their Grandpa once performed such skills?" I had no film or video cassetts to prove anything.

Then, just a few weeks ago, my old Army buddy and partner, Tony Napier sent me video cassette of the 1956 Ed Sullivan Show in New York City. That was almost 45 years ago and I was thrilled to review the show to see what we were like way back then. After presenting many other talented performers, Ed Sullivan said...."And now, Ladies and Gentlemen, from 6<sup>th</sup> Army at Fort Ord, California, performing on two of the world's smallest trampolines (circular mini-tramps) are the "Tyro-Jets" featuring Bob Bollinger



**BOB BOLLINGER**  
As he appeared on the  
"Ed Sullivan" Show in 1956

and Tony Napier!" Our act took a full 2-1/2 minutes and featured such stunts as Handstand on a table, snap down to Double Fulls, Rudolphins, and a Double Back, a jump down to a Back Somersault through a flaming hoop and a jump down blindfolded to a Forward Double somersault over a 6' high flaming high-jump standard. It was estimated that over 52 million T.V. viewers watched that show and in the live audience were such dignitaries as the Secretary of the Army, Walter Cronkite and my old friend and coach Burt Lancaster.

It was almost 14 years to the day when in the summer of 1970, I made my second appearance on the Ed Sullivan Show filmed at the Mid-South State Fair in Memphis, Tennessee. This performance was also a two person act featuring one of my students Judi Ford who had won the 1969 "Miss America" contest with her stellar trampoline performance. I recently assured Joe Schabacker that I would make the original video tape available for the next W.A.S. Reunion. There is a lot of truth in the statement...."THE OLDER I GET.....THE BETTER I WAS!" At least I now have something tangible to show my grand-children!



# MEMORIES OF THE "GOOD OLD DAYS"

By  
H. EDSSEL BUCHANNAN Ed.D.

In looking back over a lifetime of memories, we often recall the "Good Old Days". In looking at the present, we can therein review the many changes which have taken place in our lifetime. I have concluded that after a life which has spanned some 72 years plus, there is a guiding truism for me; namely, that it people that generate change and the memories produced by these changes. A corollary to my belief, "it is people who generate change" is the belief that "friends" are the best possessions which we acquire over time. Yes, I remember many events which have remained forever in my memory and the key component for each has been an individual, a person....a fellow human being.

In the "Good Old Days" of the 1940's there were many memorable events which emanated from the Amarillo, Texas Maverick Boys Club. It was there at the Boys Club where my trampolining experiences were born. Ralph Dykeman was the director of the Boys Club and he was an accomplished tumbler. His friend, Nard Cazell gave a new trampoline (6x12 Nissen Model with serial numbr 146) to the Boys Club. Soon after, Nard Cazell became the trampoline coach at the club and later started his own school in Amarillo. Over the years, Nard developed many trampoline champions who won AAU NCAA and world titles. These included Edsel Buchanan, John Hamilton, Joe Tim Way, Ronnie Munn, Dave Jacobs, Bob Elliott and his son, Steve Elliott who all won trampoline and tumbling championships.

I first met Newt Loken, Michigan's famous gymnastics coach while I was training at the Maverick Club. In January of 1948, I enrolled at the University of Michigan in Ann Arbor. At Michigan, Coach Loken honed my skills with the result that I was able to win several trampoline championships including the Midwest AAU, National AAU, Big Ten and three consecutive NCAA titles (1949-1950-1951). The only regrets I have about that time is



that Trampoline was 50 years away from becoming an Olympic event.

Reflecting upon those "good old days" of early trampoline competition (solid double canvas, 6 x 12 beds, steel springs, horse hair pads), competitive rules changed annually. Early rules permitted almost whatever the competitor wanted to configure and there were no time limits. Later rules called for routines to consist of 3 segments; then came 2 segments of 10 skills per segment and then routines of swing-time skills with a limit on time (2 minutes maximum). The better performers all had double somersaults and full and double twists in their routines. The truly exceptional performers also had Back Triple Fulls and Forward sommies with 2-1/2 Twists (Randolphs). Very few performers had the Barani-out Fliffis. Including the Fliffis, the Triple and 2-1/2 Twisting Fronts within a routine was accomplished by very few performers in those days.

The very best trampoline performers were those who utilized skills which they could do in practice and "hit" those skills 10 times out of 10 attempts! Hitting the routine and staying in control on the trampoline as the trademark of the very best! The rules of the Olympic Trampoline competition in Sydney this year placed a premium on safety and control by defining the bed's "center space" as a major component of the scoring. The modern day trampoline with its special web type 7 x14 bed, special chrome springs,



# REMEMBERING THE "GOOD OLD DAYS!"

(Continued)

foam padding and safety-end platforms is a tribute to George Nissen and his development of the modern trampoline. One thrill of my many years in trampolining was the experience (via TV) of seeing George Nissen interviewed by NBC at the 2000 Olympics in Sydney!

For me the "Good Old Days" focus first on people (family, colleagues, friends, teammates, coaches, students, classmates and then places. My memories will always include places like Amarillo, Texas, Ann Arbor, Cedar Rapids, Omaha as well as a host of other cities. There are, of course, many other cities but I don't want to focus on places as much as I do on people. At each of the above cities sited there were individuals who were exceptional. Many were and still are legends in their own right! My comrades with whom I associated with and enjoyed great times were numerous. My Michigan teammates and fellow students were exceptional. One teammate and roommate, Gordy Levenson, was (and still is) a super great comrade. A famous person, Will Rogers, once said that he never met a person he didn't like. I never met a coach or competitor that I didn't like but I must admit, I liked some better than others.

In my senior year at Michigan, I married Anita Mixon of Amarillo. She was my ever present loyal "fan" for 50 years! Anita, my children and family and extended family made the "Good Old Days" exceptional and on-going. During my formative years, my family and my friends are the integral substance of the "Good Old Days." My perceptions of the "Good Old Days" remain highlighted by people, namely, Anita, our children (Steve, Stan, Stella and their families), Ralph Dykeman, Nard Cazell, Gordy Levenson and Newt Loken. My friends have also made the "Good Old Days" cumulative over time. Those who are 'trampolining specific' are Gordy, Jack, Clifford, Don, Jackie, Bil, Bill, Steve, Robert, Joe Tim, David, Bob, Frank, Dan, Wayne, Frank, Ron, George, Glenn, Bill and Judy.

I've only "touchrd" what one person's perception happens to be regarding the "Good Old Days." I hope all of those who may read this can still, indeed, remember and revere their personal "Good Old Days" My wife, Anita died of Alzheimer's disease recently. She could not remember anything regarding her "Good Old Days," I believe that memories sustain us throughout life. I pray that my family and friends as well as you readers will always have the capacity to remember.

Being a "people oriented person," I aspire to be like those individuals who possess an excellent recall of names, places and events. If my memory is deficient, please do not feel left out. I ask that you forgive my "defective memory" and that you include yourself as a valued person and friend. I am grateful to my old friend of 50+ years, Bob Bollinger for providing me with the opportunity to share with you how I perceive my "Good Old Days!"

## CONGRATULATIONS! to ART SHURLOCK



The W.A.S. Organization was most gratified to learn that your recent heart surgery in Pennsylvania was a complete success! One could expect no more! After all, Art..... You've always had a lot of "heart!"

# CLIMBING THE ACROBATIC LADDER

By  
ROB BOLLINGER

ARTISTIC DIRECTOR OF THE "O" SHOW AT BELLAGIO



Since first assuming my new position as Artistic Coordinator of Cirque du Soleil's "O" show at Bellagio, I have received a number of questions from friends and past associates in the various acrobatic disciplines. One of the most common has been... "How did you get to be the Artistic Coordinator and what steps did you take to acquire this new position? Of course, there is no easy answer to this question, but in this article, I will attempt to provide some answers in what could be called "Climbing the Acrobatic Ladder."

I was fortunate to have been born into a family 40 years ago that had a long history of acrobatic involvement dating back to the beginning of the century. My paternal grandfather (born in 1902) was a self-taught amateur diver who performed a 1½ somersault from a 60' wooden diving tower in Aurora, Illinois. To my understanding, this feat was performed in 1916 when he was 14 years old. He was the inspiration that would spawn two generations of divers, tumblers, and trampolinists.

My own father was first introduced to the acrobatic disciplines when he was a young boy visiting Shanghai, China in 1937 during the outbreak of the Chino-Japanese war. While there, he witnessed members of the Chinese 2nd Army Big Sword Corps perform tumbling and acrobatic feats with their swords at the British Embassy. Returning to the U.S. in early 1938, he was influenced by watching the Great Bombao perform on the bounding rope at the Cole Bros. Circus in Chicago. Encouraged by his own father, my dad began practicing backyard tumbling at home in Oak Park, Illinois. These influences set in motion a life pattern of involvement for my dad that lasts to this day.



Although I do not distinctly remember, my dad has shown me old photographs of the annual Christmas trip the Trampoline Town USA club used to take to Sarasota, Florida when I was around age 3. Apparently I began my acrobatic career very early at a time I can hardly remember. What I do remember are the years following and a childhood in which trampoline and springboard diving were an integral and important part of my growing up.

In 1963, my dad accepted a school teaching job in Rockford, Illinois and subsequently moved Trampoline Town USA to the local YWCA in that community. My mother, who had been a dance instructor in Canada, was in charge of the dance program there, and her encouragement along with my dad's daily coaching enabled me to attain a certain degree of competence in both trampoline and diving by the time I was eight years old. I remember my first diving competition in the City meet that year. The Rockford newspaper published a photo of me executing a Back Dive. My form was horrendous and the caption beneath the picture read: "SIDEWAYS ANGLE" Although Robbie's style was unique, Robbie failed to qualify!"



## CLIMBING THE ACROBATIC LADDER

(continued)



The years that followed that competition are chronologically quite vivid in my memory. They involve a series of competitions in both trampoline and diving that during the next 20 years involved several trips to Europe, Africa, the Mideast, Asia and South America. Another boy my age, from Rockford, Illinois, Ron Merriott became my closest rival and best friend. Early in my career, I met George Nissen of Cedar Rapids, Iowa who not only became my Patron Saint but also served as a second father. George and Ron Munn, International Sales Manager of the Nissen Corporation, not only took me to many foreign countries to perform and compete, but also provided me with positive role models to emulate.

With regard to role models, I was most fortunate in having been coached by three of America's top diving mentors. During two summers in the late 1970s, I attended the summer diving camps of Ron O'Brien, Dick Kimball and Hobie Billingsley. In 1978 I was fortunate to win the Illinois State High School Diving Championship and subsequently accepted a diving scholarship at Indiana University under the direction of Doc Councilman and Hobie Billingsley. This experience coupled with winning two Big Ten and two N.C.A.A. springboard titles and earning my Bachelor's Degree in Business Administration, reinforced my self-confidence and helped to prepare me for a professional career.

Shortly after graduating from Indiana University in 1982, I began a professional diving career that included contracts with Sea World Theme Parks along with my teammate and friend Ron Merriott. At about this time, I met a beautiful Canadian gymnast and trampolinist by the name of Nathalie Bechard, who eight years later would become my wife and mother of my two boys, Nicolas and Andrew.

After two years of performing with Sea World in Cleveland, Ohio and San Diego, California, Nathalie and I accepted positions as actors and performers at Universal

Studios in Orlando, Florida. While in Orlando, Nathalie and I became involved in the motion picture industry as stunt performers. We were both very fortunate to work with one of Hollywood's premier movie directors, Steven Spielberg on his productions of "Hook", "Jurassic Park" and "The Lost World."

In February 1993, Nathalie and I were offered contracts with the Cirque du Soleil headquartered in Montreal, Quebec, Nathalie's hometown. After a year of training, we came to Las Vegas as part of the original cast of "Mystere" at the Treasure Island Hotel and Casino.

While with "Mystere" and then later at "O", part of my duties were to coach other performers and to help develop and choreograph certain acrobatic numbers such as Bungee at "Mystere" and Russian Swing at "O". In December of 1999 I was offered a new contract to serve as Artistic Coordinator of the "O" Show at Bellagio. This position I have found not only extremely pleasurable but also uniquely challenging. Since the show is an ever evolving artistic entity, my major responsibility is to preserve the artistic integrity set forth by the director and creator of the show.

The past eight years with Cirque have been filled with unforgettable experiences and provided us both with some valuable insights as to what "artisticall" comprises what many consider as the world's most elite acrobatic entertainment. The team is made up of a multi-cultural cast, which creates a unique and very challenging work environment. That coupled with year around great weather is the major reason why Nathalie and I have decided to consider Las Vegas as our permanent home.

In summary, what I have termed "The Climb up the Acrobatic Ladder", I would attribute whatever success I have achieved to a variety of positive factors: (1) Having been blessed with great parents, coaches and friends. (2) Hard work, patience and dedication. (3) And last, but not least, a wonderful, talented and supportive wife!



# REFLECTIONS ON A DECADE OF GOLDEN YEARS

(UNIVERSITY of ILLINOIS, NAVY PIER 1947-1957)

By  
DR. HAROLD FREY, HEAD COACH

In 1946, the University of Illinois established a new branch of its campus at Navy Pier in Chicago. A large gymnasium constructed by the Navy during World War II was made available to the Physical Education and Athletic Departments. I had graduated from Penn State University in 1946 and was hired to teach physical education and later coach Men's Gymnastics at that new institution.

The 1947-48 season began with the enrollment of Bill Rotzheim and Erv Bedard. We had a small group of gymnasts (mostly from Chicago area High Schools) and Chicago gymnastics clubs that comprised our first team. Among these were quality gymnasts such as Bob Mateo, Al Jurus, Frank Bilmayer and Jack Oda. That year's program included competitions with the U. of Chicago, U. of Nebraska, and Michigan State. We hosted the Big Ten Championship Invitational to initiate competition in the Big Ten and were fortunate to win it. This was a big boost to our small institution and also to the Athletic Department. The season was capped when Bill Rotzheim made the 1948 Olympic Team as a freshman. In that same competition Erv Bedard won the NAAU Tumbling title for the second time. Our team was also undefeated that year in dual meet competition.

The 1948-49 season had a larger schedule of competition and the team hosted the Midwest Open Championship and again placed first in the tournament. The squad had grown in size and was probably twice as large as the previous season. Notable additions were Andrew Stayart, Allen Riggle, Bob Ulseth, Tom Mosiej, Homer Hoving and also Bill Bukovsan. The team was again undefeated in dual meet competition and then participated in the NAAU Championships which we hosted at



the Navy Pier gymnasium. At this competition Bill Rotzheim became the first collegiate gymnast to win the USA Championship All-Around title. Erv Bedard again won the Tumbling title and their combined efforts enabled the team to win First Place in the Team competition. Our little school simply went wild in celebration. Imagine a two year school accomplishing so much in such a brief period of time. For a young coach in his first assignment I was a bit bewildered and overwhelmed at times!

The 1949-50 and 1950-51 seasons were not as spectacular but during the 1951-53 seasons, we had strong teams and annually posted good records. In the 1953 season particularly, we had a much stronger squad with the addition of Lawrence Bestmann, Joe Takehara and Bob Bollinger. The team went undefeated that year and also won the Central AAU team championship.

The 1954-1957 seasons were a time when we continued to rebuild our program in spite of the fact that we were plagued by injuries to key members and since we were a two year institution, our gymnasts could only represent us for that time period. We were, however, successful in winning the Midwest Open Championship again edging out Illinois which went on to win the NCAA Team title that season, Art Shurlock

## REFLECTIONS ON A DECADE OF GOLDEN YEARS (continued)

competed in the NAAU Championships and placed 3<sup>rd</sup> on the Pommel Horse. Sandy Horn won 1<sup>st</sup> Place in the Midwest Open on Still Rings and Dick Danner won 1<sup>st</sup> Place on Flying Rings. This team was probably the strongest we had with more depth than all our prior teams. The 1949 team had the highest quality but it lacked the depth of the 1956-1957 squad.

The team members were recruited from Chicago area high schools, recreation park programs, the Turners and the Sokols. The most prominent example was Al Barasch who competed several years on the team and then transferred to Illinois-Champagne where he won the NCAA Tumbling event. Other gymnasts that enrolled at Navy Pier came from high-schools such as Lindblom H.S. coached by Henry Smidl, Senn H.S. coached by Al Bergmann, and New Trier H.S. coached by that great gymnast, Joe Giallombardo. All three of these great coaches were inducted into the USAG Hall of Fame. I was fortunate to have these fine programs in the Chicagoland area.

The U of I Navy Pier gymnasts were not eligible to compete in the NCAA Championship because we were a two year institution. Many of the gymnasts from the decade of 1947-1957 were also instrumental in affecting programs at other institutions at the NCAA level of competition. Gymnasts that transferred to Florida State were crucial team members at two NCAA Championships. Illinois-Champagne won four NCAA team championships in this decade that included Navy Pier transfers. Michigan State University won its only NCAA team title with a strong all-around gymnast from Navy Pier. University of California at Berkeley became a major power in gymnastics with the transfer of Art Shurlock to its program. The NCAA was inconsistent with their rulings on the transfer of gymnasts to four year schools and it seemed that each conference had different transfer rules. Nationally the Junior College rules were being formed to handle the transfer of student athletes.

Some of the outstanding athletes during this decade were:

**Bill Rotzheim** was probably the most productive and outstanding. He won every title in All-Around that he was eligible for and he earned a birth on the 1948 and 1952 Olympic squads. He was the leader of the Florida State teams that won two NCAA titles after his transfer there. He was NCAA All-American in many events. He had a most distinguished career as a competitor.

**Art Shurlock** was a strong member of the 1956-1957 team but sustained a back injury which kept him from having a perfect career at Navy Pier. He still earned a 3<sup>rd</sup> place finish and a 1<sup>st</sup> place finish on Pommel Horse in the NAAU Championships. He had a wonderful career at the U of California Berkeley winning the NCAA on Pommel Horse and All-American recognition in many events. He was the first Champion of the U.S.A. at the first USGF Championships and won many USGF titles. He was also National Champion of Canada. He also coached many NCAA Championship teams at UCLA and ½ of the 1984 Gold Medal team members were from his team at UCLA.

**Ted Muzyeko** competed on the 1956-1957 teams and transferred to Michigan State where he led the team to an NCAA Team title. He placed 2<sup>nd</sup> in All-Around and won the Parallel Bar title. He has had a distinguished career in judging and has officiated at the Pan Am Games, the World Games and two Olympic Games.

**Al Barasch** started in Benny Montcalm's tumbling class and moved from that class to the varsity program. He competed on later teams and eventually transferred to Illinois-Champaign where he competed in NCAA and won the Tumbling event.

**Ronald Amster** competed on the 1951-1952 teams and then transferred to Florida State where he won the NCAA Horizontal Bar title. He coached at Anaheim H.S. in



## REFLECTIONS ON A DECADE OF GOLDEN YEARS (continued)

California, and coached Sid Freudenstein who transferred to U.C. Berkeley and won the N.C.A.A. title in Floor X and competed in the Mexico Olympic Games.

**Bob Bollinger** competed on the 1952-1953 team that went undefeated. His strongest events were Trampoline and Tumbling. He won the Central A.A.U. title on Trampoline and performed some strong Tumbling passes that included consecutive bounding Backs with Full Twists. He coached World Champions on Trampoline and Double Mini-Tramp. His son Rob, won 2 Big Ten and 2 NCAA Diving titles at Indiana University. Bob also competed on the Diving team at Navy Pier. Two of his most significant accomplishments were the development of the Double Mini-Tramp event and the Axial-Rotation system of difficulty which is used internationally to score both Trampoline and competitive Diving.

**Don Ohannes** competed on the 1956-1957 team and transferred to San Jose State University in California. They had their finest season ever with Don on the team with a 10 win 2 loss record. He also led the team to their first Championship in the California State College Championships. Don serves on the USAG Foundation Board of Directors.

I would like to mention all the names of all the wonderful gymnasts but that is not possible within the scope of this article. Tom Mosiej who was almost two decades ahead of his time on Pommel Horse had a lot of originality in his work. Ed Clark and Bob Ulseth were wonderful on the Trampoline and those early trampolines were not easy to work on. Sandy Horn won the Midwest Open on the Still Rings and was a fine All-Around performer. Dick Danner won the Midwest Open on Still Rings and had a flawless style in his work. Alan Zimmerman was a Still Rings specialist and his strength was legendary. Joe Takehara worked the Parallel Bars and did top routines in that event. There were so many others that Trained and competed and left me with a host of great memories!

Many of the gymnasts went on to successful coaching positions and I would like to mention them here:

**Bill Rotzeim, Art Shurlock, Bob Danner, Erv Bedard, Andy Kostick, Tom Walthouse, Frank Walsh, Don Karamitsos, Anthony Canino, Bill Simms, Hal Frey, Bob Bollinger and Dr. John Osterello.**

This era at Navy Pier had individuals involved whose contributions and achievements were recognized as noteworthy by their induction into the USAG Gymnastics Hall of Fame. These individuals are Bill Rotzeim, Ted Muzyeko, Erv Bedard, Art Shurlock Dr, Harold Frey and Anthony Canino.

One additional and interesting happening came from this decade of gymnastics at Navy Pier. Several prominent members of the Midwest Gymnastic Association including Charlie Pond, Paul Fina, Hal Frey, Jan Roberts, Bill Haase and Erna Wachtel united and challenged the NAAU to reform. They were openly rebuffed and this group then moved on to form a new Federation. This group was successful in securing the support of the NCAA and College Coaches Association and in 1962, formed a new organization called USAG. This struggle is well documented.

In closing let me state that several of the Navy Pier alumni are making arrangements for a Gymnastic Alumni Reunion in Chicago this spring. The exact site and date has not as yet been finalized but will probably take place during the early part of May.



# "OLYMPIC" IMPRESSIONS FROM SYDNEY



By  
DIAN NISSEN RAMIREZ



Our trip to Sydney, Australia for the 2000 Olympics was a fabulous experience! Shortly after returning home I interviewed my dad (George Nissen) to get his actual impressions of this experience. Our interview was as follows:

**"Dad, What was the high point of the Olympics for you?"**

**George:**

"I'm sure the climax for me was seeing the trampoline winners on the podium receiving their first Olympic medals for Trampoline...after hearing in the 40's and 50's that I should forget about the idea of getting Trampoline into the Olympics. "Maybe it could be," they said, "but not until the year 2000. Not thinking that any of us would still be around by that time. The doomsayers proved to be correct and it was the year 2000...only I got to be there to experience it! After 50 years of our efforts, working, thinking, teaching and dreaming of the Olympic goal. The Olympic dream was just that...a dream...well now it was a dream come true."

"Another memorable moment came when NBC made arrangements for me to enter the Olympic arena just prior to the Men's Trampoline competition. I was able to say hello and mingle with the competitors, coaches and officials right down on the floor. They even let me get up on one of the trampolines and take a couple of bounces. It was marvelous to see many old friends from the sport. It was a very special moment for all of us I believe. We took pictures and all the while NBC was following me around with their cameras! I have to say that they (NBC) were quite gracious and I have them to thank for making that whole thing happen."

**"DAD....How do you feel the Trampoline competition was received by the spectators?"**

**GEORGE:**

"The thunderous applause from the packed stadium during the Trampoline events was additional proof that the sport of Trampolining has great spectator and television appeal...equal to gymnastics, figure skating and diving. We heard that the attendance for the Trampoline finals were some of the highest for all of the gymnastic events."

"The trampoline competition was especially exciting and spectacular because Australian competitor, Ji Wallace, was in contention for the gold medal right up to the last competitor's routines in the Men's Trampoline finals. He was performing in front of his home town crowd and they loved the excitement and drama of it all. He ended up with the silver medal, claiming the first Olympic medal ever for Australia in gymnastics."

"It's ironic that no Americans even made the finals in the Men's and Women's competitions. After we started the sport, we dominated it for 20 to 30 years. I think we have room to improve in all areas. Our goal should be to once again compete at the top level of the sport with more than just a few athletes. On the flipside, I think it is great that the sport has experienced wide acceptance around the world as evidenced by the fact that the men and women medalists were from three countries, Russia, Australia and Canada."

**Continued on the following page:**

# OLYMPIC IMPRESSIONS FROM SYDNEY (continued)

"DAD....How did the 2,000 Olympics in Sydney compare to others you have witnessed?"

**GEORGE:**

"I have been to quite a few Olympics including Tokyo, Rome and Montreal. In all of these I was involved in supplying gymnastic equipment. But, by far, in my opinion, Sydney was the best organized and best run Olympics, including the gymnastics events. Probably the most impressive thing was the way that the Olympic Organizing Committee was able to handle, control and assist the unbelievable amount of crowds. This was all accomplished by mass transit on trains and buses. No pushing or shoving took place. No tickets were collected and all rode for free into and out of the Olympic park where most of the competitions took place."

"Another impressive thing was the Australian people themselves! All that we met were so generous, courteous and helpful. With no more hotels available, many Australian just opened up their homes to Olympic visitors and took them in as family. My daughter Dian and myself were fortunate to experience the the hospitality and kindness of the Australian people first hand as guests of the Sammut family. This made our visit even more special!"



Judy Wills Cline feeds a small Kangaroo in one of Sydney's many wild life zoos!



George (at age 87) performs his legendary "Handstand" for a group of young Gymnasts!



Left to Right: Dian Ramirez, George and Nicole Sammut.



Left to Right: Tracie Sammut, Tammy Biggs and Former World Trampoline Champion, Judy Wills Cline.

# A PLEA TO UNIVERSITY ATHLETIC DIRECTORS AND PRESIDENTS

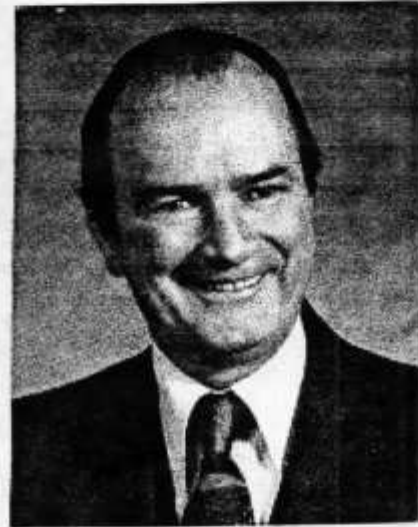
By  
JOSEPH C. SCHABACKER Ph.D.

As a former university administrator (42 years at Temple, U.C.L.A., Wisconsin and Arizona State University), I find it difficult to understand the many university decisions to drop men's gymnastics! The alleged reasons given to me for those reductions in a part of collegiate sports programs continue to be financial. We have been told that in order to comply with Federal law under Title IX (gender equality) some minor men's sports must be dropped..

Several university top administrators tried to explain the financial quandry they face by blaming athletic scholarships as an economic burden in the gymnastic program. I pointed out that the costs of tuition scholarships to the university are absolutely nil. Fixed costs for faculty, buildings, administrators, insurance etc. will remain a sunk cost for the institution no matter which "minor" sports are offered.

I have been told that minor sports such as men's gymnastics do not help raise funds for the university. Therefore, they need to be dropped. To that answer I offer this argument to the university presidents. "Would you drop English and Music from your curriculums because they do not bring in big bucks to the institution's budget?" The answer has to be "obviously not" since English and Music are what a university is all about. Why not also a sport like men's gymnastics? Does it not round out a total athletic mission for the university?

In past years, men's gymnastic teams which have represented the United States internationally have traditionally come from collegiate gymnasts. I do not see men's gymnastic clubs across the nation replacing the colleges and universities in the recruitment and training role. Consider the fact that men in gymnastics reach their highest physical potential during the age period from 18 to 25. This coincides with



the normal years to complete a degree. Private gymnastic clubs that do well to prepare our women from 14 to 18 years of age cannot be a viable training ground for men. Men mature as gymnasts during their college years.

Student athletes who perform in college as gymnasts invariably bring great honor to their alma mater as successful professionals. Consider the many college gymnasts who have graduated into highly respected and often famous careers. Countless numbers of doctors, lawyers, professors, writers and other professionals that the discipline and experience they learned in collegiate gymnastics preparation and competition argued well for them in their professional life.

Men's collegiate gymnastics should continue as a part of the athletic program in colleges and universities throughout the U.S.A. Let me be among many who agree with this point of view, and in so doing, we trust that Athletic Directors and University Presidents will follow suit and and reinstate collegiate gymnastics for men as a viable part of a well rounded and inclusive athletic program at their respective institutions.



# PHOTO GEMS OF THE 2000 W.A.S. CONGRESS



International Diving authority, Tom Gompf provides some words of wisdom at the 2000 W.A.S. Reunion.



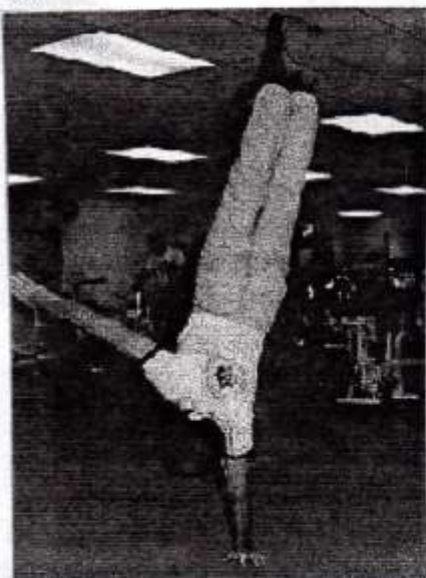
Charlie Pond, Mrs. Schabacker and 1932 Olympic Tumbling Champion, Rowland Wolfe have a chat.



W.A.S. President Don Leas and Judy Wills Cline share a few moments of reflection at the Reunion.



Paula Boelsems, WAS 2<sup>nd</sup> Vice President introduces Internationally know publisher Glenn Sundby.



George Nissen still performs a Handstand at age 87! Not to be outdone, Joe Schabacker performs a One Hander at age 69! Not bad, Joel

# CIRQUE du SOLEIL

## auditions calendar

Date	City	Country
2001		
February 11-12	Las Vegas (NV)	United States
February 17-18	Cincinnati (OH)	United States
March 10-11	Vancouver (BC)	Canada
March 10-11	London	England
March 17-18	Los Angeles (CA)	United States
March 24-25	city to be determined	France
March 31-April 01	Oklahoma (OK)	United States
April 3-4	Orlando (FL)	United States
April	cities to be determined	Russia
April	cities to be determined	Ukraine
May	Montreal	Canada
August	cities to be determined	Japan

Photo: Michel Desjardins / Cirque du Soleil

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