

# NEWSLETTER

Winter 2019

Editor: Jim Bertz  
[www.worldacro.com](http://www.worldacro.com)

## A Word From Our President...

Dear members and friends of the World Acrobatics Society,

I wish everyone a Happy New Year and hope yours will be filled with happiness, success and prosperity!

Last year's WAS Congress & Awards Banquet was a weekend of renewed friendships, camaraderie and the opportunity to induct 16 outstanding individuals into the WAS Gallery of Legends – Hall of Fame.

Over the past few months, our Board of Directors and their committees have been busy with new ideas for this year's grand event; which will be held September 13-15, 2019, in Las Vegas. Their plans include the fine-tuning of our gala awards banquet and the addition of several special activities for attendees (more to be announced in future newsletters).

Nominations for the 2019 slate of Legend inductees are now being accepted and we need YOU - - our members to participate in this important process. Though our hearts will always feel saddened with the loss of Pat Henderson; longtime WAS member and our Gallery of Legend Chairperson for the past five years, we welcome Stacie Hansen, who has stepped in to take over this position. Stacie had worked closely with Pat on this committee, so we know we are in good hands.

Also working behind the scenes and deserving of a big thank you is WAS Board member, Rich Kinney. He took on the task of giving our WAS Constitution & Bylaws a needed makeover. The new and improved document is much more user-friendly, easier to read and understandable! Thank you Rich, for a job well done!

A new committee has been formed and is being led by our newest board member, Lieve Olivera. She is the Chairperson of the WAS Endowment and Benevolence Foundation, which will be rolled out shortly. Lieve will be assisted by Whitey Anson, along with several of our highly qualified WAS Board of Directors. Briefly, the Foundation will focus on how WAS can better support athletes and Legends attending our events. We will have more information on this in future newsletters.

In this January issue, we welcome a guest writer, Sue Challis (2018 WAS Legend in Trampoline) and her article, "Some Girls Have all the Luck." Sue takes us through a thought provoking comparison of her experiences as a young trampoline competitor in the UK, to those of her son Mike, a competitive swimmer in USA Swimming. This issue also has our favorite Bobby Dickson's Comedy Corner, along with a profile of long-time WAS member Paul Swafford.

Finally, please encourage your friends and family to join our acrobatic community with a membership in the World Acrobatics Society. All WAS memberships run on a calendar basis, so now is the time to join or renew for 2019. Details are in this newsletter, on our website at [www.worldacro.com](http://www.worldacro.com) or on our World Acrobatics Society Facebook group page.

I wish everyone a fabulous New Year and thank you once again for your continued support of our fine organization.

Respectfully,

David Jacobs, President



## Some Girls Have All the Luck!



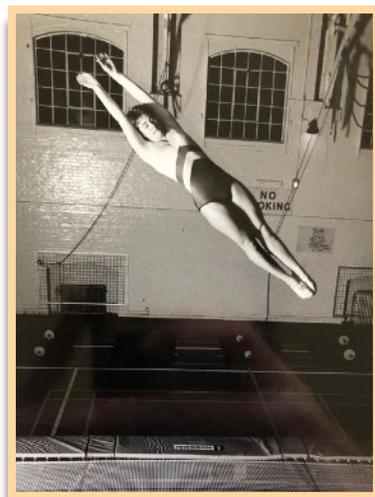
"The harder I train, the luckier I get" is a familiar phrase. But what does it take to train hard? And what else do you need to succeed? I did train hard, because I was lucky enough to be able to. I was lucky enough to fall into the perfect environment for nurturing my passion to be the best trampolinist I could be.

Let's start with being British. By the time I first climbed onto a Nissen 77a in 1974, everything was in place. There were trampolines to be found in school gymnasiums across the country, trained coaches, a structured system for competition, from grass roots to World Championships, and fellow Brit, Paul Luxon; who was the best trampolinist in the world. These things were all vital to my future success. They did not happen by chance, but were the result of the hard work and insight of a bunch of individuals over a number of years. There was George Nissen, of course, but in Britain we had Ted Blake. His passion, business acumen and effort, facilitated the spread of trampolines around the country and Europe. Ted also had the foresight to reach out to Rob Walker and Bert Scales to form the British Trampoline Association (by the time I joined it was the British Trampoline Federation), giving them separation from British Gymnastics. The combined skill set of this group rapidly established a well-considered system of coach education as well as a functional hierarchical competition structure. So there were trampolines, trampolinists, coaches, and competitions. There was a route to representing Britain in international events. What's more, the minimal annual membership fees associated with joining the national governing body, and token entry fees for

## Some Girls Have All the Luck! (continued)

competing in the organized events, provided a decent pot of money to fund the best athletes (including me) to travel to national squad training and international events. This worked because lots of people had the opportunity to be involved at the grass roots level. The general public was especially excited to try the sport, as we already had people like Dave Curtis winning medals on the world stage.

That's only the start of my luck. My Dad was in the Royal Navy, and soon after I was born my parents decided to move to the historic naval city of Portsmouth. It turns out that that was where Bert Scales had landed too. My dad noticed that I had a penchant for acrobatics, and gave me a small, wrap-around cable, Lodge brand backyard trampoline for my eighth birthday. I was clearly more creative and coordinated on it than my friends, and when we happened to come across Bert at a regional training day at the Navy gymnasium, we asked if there was a club I could join. It just so happened that the Portsmouth Trampoline Club was considering starting a group for under 10 year olds, and a few weeks later they invited me to go for a six week trial. It was a completely amateur club; using local facilities for free, and buying equipment through local grants and fundraisers. Fees were less than twenty pounds a year – everything (except leotards and trampoline shoes), included – travel to competitions in Britain, entry fees, coaching (late in my career this was up to 30 hours a week!). The club had support from the local council, free access to school facilities after school hours and free access to the Royal Naval Physical Training Instructor facilities. The coaches took nothing for their work. It actually probably cost them quite a lot. They did it because they loved it. Because the club was not a business, they did not need to make money, and they could have whoever they chose in the club. At the culmination of the six week-long trials you were either invited to join the club or you weren't. Once in the club, the quality of the coaching was astonishing. Bert was way ahead of his time as a coach and educator. His focus on perfect technique and building robust skill through variety and build ups, combined with his sense of humor, gentle



nature, and concern for the well-being of his athletes, made him the ultimate coach... at least for me! Bert was not an authoritarian coach, and after a couple of years it became very much a team effort, with me being allowed to guide my own training more and more. And that's not all. Bert's wife Biz, also coached, frequently I would have a trampoline to myself and two coaches giving me all their attention!

I could go on about how from the age of 14 onward I received a grant from the Sports Aid Foundation, and how I was able to train alongside Stewart Matthews and Carl Furrer, how I always had strong competition with other female trampolinists in Britain, etc. But

instead I am going to switch tracks a bit, and compare my experiences with those of my son, Mike, who is now 18, and is a swimmer.

He started swimming because we lived close to the local council run pool in State College, Pennsylvania, and we saw summer league meets going on. They were festive and full of lively young people. It was \$65 for 8 weeks of training every morning with meets held about once a week. He was eight, he did OK, but was certainly not deemed a great talent. But he loved it – the friends, the exercise, the college aged coaches, the team spirit and competition. Summer league swimming like this happens all across the US. After two years of summer league, Mike

decided he needed to swim year round, or he would not be able to keep up with the kids that were there next summer. Swimming is an expensive business, and annual costs have

been several hundred times more than Portsmouth Trampoline Club, but during my eight years of involvement with USA Swimming, I have been struck by the similarities with my experiences in British Trampolining.

The Washington DC area has an estimated 50,000 young people involved in summer league swimming each year – fun training and meets that occur in the weeks after school ends, and incur minimal costs. One club in the area, that sent eight swimmers to the last Olympic trials, estimates that

95% of club members started in summer league and that there are 12,000 to 13,000 year round swimmers within a 40 mile

## Some Girls Have All the Luck! (continued)

radius. Swimming requires access to specialized facilities. In 2017, according to the Association of Pool & Spa Professionals, the ratio was about 1 public pool per thousand people. Depending on the size of the pool (from 6 lanes 25 yards, to 10 lanes 50 meters), you can get 36 to 150 swimmers practicing simultaneously in one pool. Compare that with trampolining, where you can only have one participant on a trampoline at a time. How many competitive standard trampolines are there in the USA? I do not know the answer, but in State College, PA, there are none. Nor are there any within at least a 50 mile radius, other than at Woodward Camp, which is only open for the summer, and is only an option for the affluent.

As summer ends and school rolls around again each August, summer leaguers who are hooked on swimming have two options: the YMCA swimming system or USA swimming. My kids went into USA swimming and I have been nothing but impressed by this organization. They nurture swimming enthusiasts at all levels. There is a proficiency scheme of time standards for each event and age group (where applicable) from beginner to Olympic Trials qualifying. They have an amazing network of USA Swimming sanctioned events that provide competition for all ages and levels, and a huge volunteer network of parents and other interested parties that they train and mentor to fulfill crucial roles in organizing and running these meets. At the lower levels, swimmers travel relatively short distances and pay meet entry fees of a few dollars an event. These meets are run by local clubs, and generate profits for the club to use for daily functioning, and future development. A few percent of the meet entry fees are transferred to USA swimming. This revenue, along with annual USA Swimming membership fees is used to support drowning prevention programs, as well as the upper echelons of swimmers, who need to travel further, and maybe train full-time. The USA does not financially support Olympic athletes, but from 2013 to 2016, the USA Swimming Foundation provided more than \$2,000,000 to the National Team for direct athlete support, coaching incentives, and National Junior Team travel. Regional levels of USA swimming start issuing



small travel grants once athletes attend championship meets such as Futures Championships or Junior Nationals. Are you jealous yet?

USA swimmers are dominant on the world stage. Certainly other countries have swimmers that can and do challenge them, individual versus individual, but there is no question that the strength in depth of US swimmers is unrivalled. In trampolining, there are isolated pockets of excellence, organized by passionate individuals who have devoted their lives to learning about and developing the sport, such as Ruth Keller and her coach/father in Switzerland way back in the early 80's, and currently Dave Ross in Toronto. It is perfectly possible to build Olympic Champions in this way, but a comprehensive hierarchical system that supports and encourages participation from the grass roots up, with facilities, education, competitions, and financial easements, takes a little of the roulette out of it.

On reflection, there is a "Robin Hood feel" to both of these systems. Robin Hood led a bunch of like-minded individuals, in a not-for-profit effort, in order to redistribute wealth and provide fairly and freely for all that needed it. I benefitted from landing in the "sport for all" socialist policies and mind-set of Britain in the '70s and 80's. Maybe some young Americans are on the brink of long and remarkable careers in the burgeoning landscape of trampoline training centers and support, associated with the re-acceptance of trampolining as it is now well established as an Olympic sport. With continued efforts to develop the social and environmental infrastructure of the trampoline community, it is possible that the next generations of American athletes could be as dominant and famous as Michael Phelps and his female counterpart, Katie Ledecky!

WAS



## Bobby Dickson's Comedy Corner

Our humorous story this issue comes from Dagmar Nissen-Munn and gives us yet another peek into the mind-set of one of the greatest icons in acrobatics history. Dagmar shares:

*My father, George Nissen, was certainly well-known for his signature handstand. Even well into his 80s, he continued to press-up into handstands on banquet tables, award stands, sidewalks ... really just about anywhere! But few knew how hard he worked to stay in shape in order to perform this special skill.*

*Almost every day he would be down on the living room floor, stretching and practicing his special rock and press-up sequence. He'd end each session by reaching up and hooking his hands over the top of the guest bathroom door for a few minutes of hanging.*

*Much to my mother's chagrin, every home they lived in had a guest bathroom door that regularly needed repairs to realign it with the door frame. Whenever she voiced her complaint he would simply smile, shrug his shoulders and say, "Well, you never know when you're going to need your act."*

### Performance Stress:

Regarding rituals, habits or good luck traditions for performances or competitions, we will go the world of circus and variety shows.

A very famous juggler (who shall remain anonymous here) would always have a chair placed just behind the curtain. If he dropped anything, at the end of his act he would storm out swearing and throwing things. But if his act went well and he did not drop anything, he would collapse into the chair, shaking his head and sobbing with relief from the stress.

Talk about taking your job too seriously!!!

### Excuses to miss practice:

Gymnast: "Coach, I can't workout today. I've got a weak back."

Coach: "When did you get it?"

Gymnast: "Oh...about a week back."

### Your Stories:

Lately you readers have been a little lax in sending in your funny stories, quips, one-liners, superstitions, and memories to [dixoncomedy@gmail.com](mailto:dixoncomedy@gmail.com). I know there are literally thousands of great stories out there, so stop procrastinating and start getting more of them to me.

### A Happy Sad Note:

I am very pleased that Paul Tickenoff had the chance to read his 'Guess Who' story in the spring Comedy Corner. He told me how much he enjoyed that and how it made him laugh.

Paul definitely understood that: "A person with no sense of humor has no real understanding of life." R.I.P. my friend.

WAS

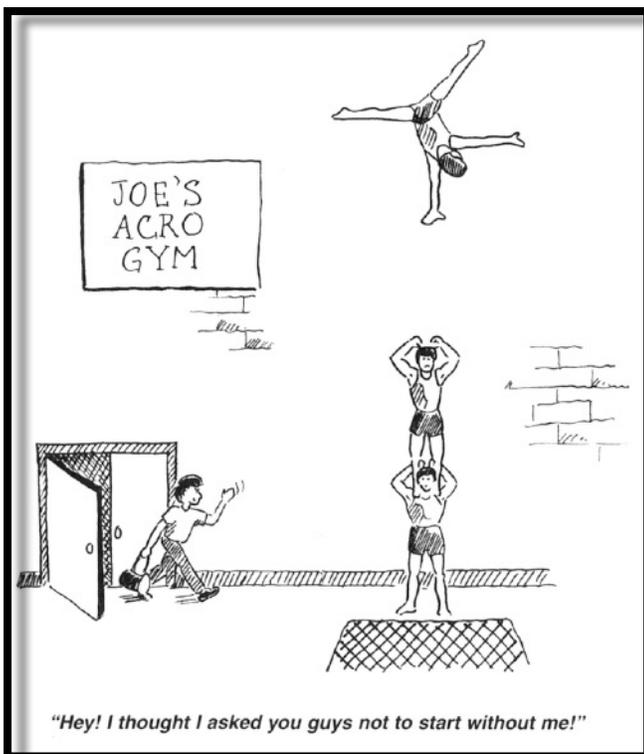
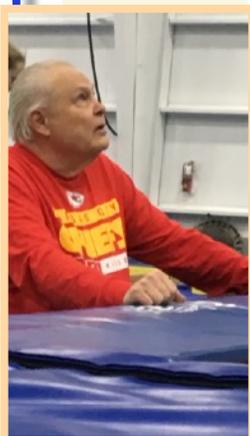


Image courtesy of Dwight Normile

## Want to Keep Receiving the WAS Newsletter?

Then JOIN or RENEW your membership in the World Acrobatics Society today! Our membership year runs from January 1st to December 31st, so this reminder is right on time! Important: Current paid members receive the WAS newsletter prior to it being shared with the public. Don't miss out on future event announcements and all the news about your World Acrobatics Society friends. To JOIN or RENEW your membership online just go to [worldacro.com](http://worldacro.com) and follow the online instructions.

## **An Interview with Paul Swafford (2013 WAS Legend)**



Paul Swafford began his acrobatic life in high school when he started diving and playing around on trampoline at jump centers. He would go on to dedicate his life in many different acrobatic sports as an athlete, coach and a judge. He would coach many international athletes throughout his career.

**How did you get started in the acrobatic sport(s)?**

*Jump Centers of 60's, HS/College Swimming & Diving*

**Were you active in one or many acrobatic sports (which ones)?**

*Athlete & Coach in Trampoline, Tumbling, Diving PE Teacher Artistic Gymnastics*

**In what facet were you active in acrobatic sorts (coach, athlete, support)?**

*Athlete, Coach, Administrator, Judge*

**What was your most positive experience you had while participating in acrobatic sport(s)?**

*I received 10's on 401B (Inward dive pike)*

**Was there any person you looked up to when you were involved in acrobatics?**

*George Nissen Larry Griswald, Tom Hariabedian, Jeff Hennessy.*

**Was there a most memorable trip you took that was involved in your acrobatics?**

*World Games 1982. My athlete Karl Heger won a World Championship.*

**What is your most fond memory during your acrobatic career?**

*Being inducted into the USA Gymnastics Hall of Fame and induction into the World Acrobatics Society Gallery of Legends - Hall of Fame.*

**Is there anyone in your life you would like to thank for the success you had in your acrobatic career?**

*My wife Mary, George Nissen, Jeff Hennessy, Frances Kauffman, my athletes, and COUNTLESS OTHERS.*

**WAS**

## **In Memory of Pat Henderson (Legend 2018)**



Sad news to share -- Patricia Louise "Pat" Henderson, 2018 WAS Charlie Pond Service Award recipient, passed away on October 19, 2018 at the age of 70, after a long battle with cancer.

Pat began her gymnastics career in 1968, while attending South Dakota State University. She opened her first gymnastics facility in 1974 in Tulsa, Oklahoma. That same year she received her Trampoline and Tumbling coaching certification and

since then represented the USA

in approximately 30 countries as a coach, judge and teacher.

In 1978, Pat moved her team north and became the Minnesota Twisters and through 2018, had an athlete qualify for nationals every year, many were members of the national team and earned individual titles. She produced international competitors – world age-group medalists, world team members, one world team bronze medalist, two world team gold medalists, and the 2004 Olympic Team alternate.

Through the years, Pat received numerous accolades and awards including: Coach of the Year award for tumbling in 1977, the USATT Master of Sport award in 1997 and the FIG Silver Recognition Award in 2005 for her dedication and service. She is a three-time recipient of the Outstanding Coach of the Year Award and the Women in Sport Award. In 2009 she was inducted into the USA Gymnastics Hall of Fame for the Lifetime Achievement Award. And in 2018 Pat received the Charlie Pond Service Award from the World Acrobatics Society.

Pat has been a member of the World Acrobatics Society since 1996. Her unique background in acrobatics gave her insight into guiding the Gallery of Legends Committee; which she chaired for five years.

Pat traveled the globe to share her lifelong passion for acrobatic sports; easily traversing different disciplines from trampoline and tumbling to snow sports, gymnastics to performance artists and anyone in between.

Pat is survived by her sons, Jesse and Nathan, her daughter-in-law Heather, and her grandson Nathan II. She also leaves behind her sister Lynn, brother Roger, other beloved family members plus many, many close friends in the acrobatic community. She will be missed by all.

View Pat's WAS Charlie Pond Service Award video:  
<https://youtu.be/KO5LmSirP0g>

## It's Nomination Time!

Nominations for the World Acrobatics Society 2019 *Gallery of Legends - Hall of Fame* are now being accepted!

This is the first and the most important step in the process leading up to the grand induction banquet that will be held in Las Vegas in September. We count on YOU - - the members of the World Acrobatics Society to participate and nominate the outstanding individuals of our acrobatic community for this fine honor.

### A quick look at the nomination categories:

**Lifetime Achievement** -A Nominee for Lifetime Achievement must be well established and have accomplishments in any one or a combination of the following:

- Coaching/Teaching: Has spent many years in their acrobatic discipline. Developed national/international performers and /or other successful coaches.
- Writing/Authoring: Has published work that has had a profound influence on an acrobatic discipline recognized by WAS.
- Inventing/Manufacturing: Has been involved in the introduction of new equipment or apparatus that has resulted in a profound performance improvement to any of the WAS acrobatic disciplines.

**Golden Achievement Award** - This award celebrates extraordinarily high level of accomplishment achieved by an individual who participated in one of the WAS disciplines outside of their acrobatic accomplishments.

Criteria includes participation at any level in at least one of the WAS disciplines. Plus nominee must have achieved very high level accomplishments and/or profound improvements in any one or a combination of the following over a lengthy number of years: *Politics, Administration, Medicine, Inventor, Manufacturer, Write, Author, Choreographer, Coaching or Teaching*

**Charlie Pond Service Award** - This is an award honoring the nominee's service to the World Acrobatic Society. Criteria is based solely on contributions to, within and for the Society as a member.

**Gallery of Legends Award** - Category: *Acrobatic Gymnastics/Cheerleading, Artistic Gymnastics, Diving, Extreme Sports, Professional Acrobatics or Tumbling/Trampoline*. This award honors an individual who displayed excellence in one particular category. Criteria focuses on the nominee's work, competition or performance in acrobatics (Acrobatics is defined by WAS as an activity featuring aerial rotation and balancing of the body).

### What's new this year?

We welcome Stacie Hansen as this year's Chairperson of the *Gallery of Legends – Hall of Fame*. She has kindly stepped up to fill the mighty shoes of Pat Henderson, who lost her battle with cancer late last year. Stacie worked closely with Pat during her tenure as Chair, so we are in good hands moving forward.

Stacie's committee is honing the selection process and plans to provide support to both the nominator and inductee, "from initial selection to final induction."

If you will be submitting a nomination, here are a few important points to remember:

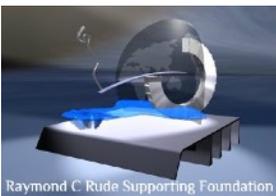
- Go to [www.worldacro.com](http://www.worldacro.com) for full instructions and the online nomination form.
- Nominations will close February 28<sup>th</sup>, 2019.
- For questions or help with your nomination, contact: [stacie@gymssupply.com](mailto:stacie@gymssupply.com)

We look forward to seeing you at the 2019 World Acrobatics Society Congress & Banquet - - so save the date: September 13-15, 2019 at the Tuscany Suites & Casino, in Las Vegas. And we look forward to receiving your nominations!

WAS



## World Acrobatics Society Sponsors



### WAS Mission

*The mission of the World Acrobatics Society is to advance the education, communication and cooperation among all individuals and organizations interested in fostering the growth, development and safety of the various acrobatic disciplines along with preserving their histories.*

*The World Acrobatics Society is a not for profit private foundation. Corporate and individual donations to WAS, are 501 (c) (3) deductible.*