

Where Are They Now? An Update on Husky Alum Bo Bennett

by Coach Hughes

Usually I request info from the gymnast being honored and then write the article myself. In the case of Bo, I found his material so interesting I decided to submit it to the editor as received except for reducing it slightly in length. After all, he is already a published author. Bo Bennett was born in L.A. but moved to Washington early in life and attended high school in Tacoma. From here on the article is in his words:

In September this year I turn 65, and I am now planning the last dismount from my current job. Indeed, most who know me don't think I ever had a job. They claim I had way too much fun to call it work. I knew I had fun before, but didn't know how much could be had if you looked hard enough. In 1969, I spent six weeks in Alaska running a statewide gymnastics camp. I had a great time and flew in a small floatplane for the first time. That trip gave me the full-blown hunt, fish, and play disease from which I never recovered.

When Coach asked me to prepare some notes about my life for the newsletter, I was flattered but knew there were many better gymnasts he could interview. I thought about my response for a long time. What was it like to be around the Huskies in what I call the golden age of our sport?

Both my parents were professional skaters and my father spent a lot of time at Muscle Beach, in Santa Monica, when it was a gymnastics hang-out. Because I was little for my age he took me to tumbling class. I continued those classes until I was in junior high. My tumbling teacher entered me in a meet at Hec-Ed. That was my first look at real tumbling, trampolines, and the gauntlet of apparatus. I saw Brent Rule and Carl Alexander doing tricks I knew I could do. Soon I joined them in Coach Hughes' extension program where I had coaches like Lew Landers and Bob Schwarzkopf. My favorite Husky gymnast was Bill Crow. I was at every session of the national meet in Seattle in 1962. Then my favorite gymnast became Armando Vega. I started to go to the Seattle YMCA where I met my long-time friend John Anthony and got to know George Lewis. There was no gymnastic team at my high school so I got special permission to compete in the state meet as a sophomore in 1964. I won floor-ex and did well in the all-around. In 1965 I placed second

in vaulting in state and later did well-enough in the all-around at the Frank Hailand Memorial (a former Husky assistant coach) in San Francisco to receive more than 30 scholarship offers. During the time I was deciding what school to attend, my father was killed in a car crash. I decided to stay close to my mother and go to the University of Washington.

I joined a family of gymnasts, not just a team. My memories are alive with great people and fun. I remember weekly card parties with the likes of Bob Baumann, John Anthony and Rick Fonseca. I remember having a drink or more with Gary Finne and Mike Flansaaas at the Library Tavern; fishing trips with Jack Heavner, Bruce Brinton, and Gary Fox stand out. As a competitor, I always accepted the notion that you don't have to win, but your presence must be felt. Throughout the years I won my share of awards, including the Northwest Ring Championship, and will cherish them forever. I also remember the team being locked in the locker room during a riot by protestors at a home meet with BYU where Coach got doused in the face with ammonia. In an era laced with criticism of Coach Hughes for importing gymnasts like Shoichi Fukushima, Yoshi Hayasaki,

Hide Umeshita, and Mauno Nissinen, I earned my place on the team and was happy to be there.

In those days we did lots of half-time shows at UW and Sonics games. I never did like basketball anyway, but on our State Department tour in the summer of 1966 to Japan, Australia, and New Zealand, basketball was such a novelty as a new sport in New Zealand that they had a basketball demonstration game during the intermission of our gymnastics show!

I graduated from the UW in 1970 with a teaching degree and taught English in B.C. for \$5,500 a year. While in Canada I joined former Husky Ron Hunter and UBC coach, Arno Lascari, on the BC team to the Canadian nationals in 1971. I made the finals on floor and rings. At that time there were no school teams so I coached at the gymnastics club where I met future Husky Rod Minaker.

My mother developed terminal cancer so I left Canada to be closer to her. I taught English and coached gymnastics at Springfield High School in Oregon. My mother turned worse so I left Eugene for Seattle and a

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Can you pick out Bo from the '66-'67 Freshman lineup?

Where Are They Now: Bo Bennett

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job at Adventures Unlimited, a private hunting and fishing club. I took some flying lessons and got a commercial license and was on my way to Alaska to buy the first of several airplanes I have owned. When I got back, the club was bankrupt and I had no job.



The next several years I was back in Canada as an elementary principal in Northern B.C. Luck was on my side as my superintendent loved to hunt and fish as much or more than I. I was in the fast lane to become a superintendent and would have, too, but fate changed my course. A guy walked up to me and my airplane and asked if I had a Canadian and an American commercial license. He had seen my airplane on several small gravel bars he thought were too small for landing. Then he told me his best pilot was in a car wreck and he had passengers at the dock waiting to go. Once the weather cleared I left the educational world in a cloud of dust and started flying commercially for 10 cents a mile and 15 cents a pound for every pound I could cram into the plane. Trust me but don't tell the authorities, I learned to fly a really heavy airplane.

In my world one job leads to another. No less than six companies filed bankruptcy but I always landed on my feet. I guess you could say I've had more ups and downs than a new bride's pajamas!

I finally started flying for the big Alaska fishing lodges. I also flew the only float-equipped airplane in South America for a fishing lodge in Southern Chile. Then I took an offer to go to Africa and fly for a safari company. Wow, that was great right up to the time I got shot at on a flight over Angola. A couple days later I was back in Alaska and in the gym where I met and coached future Husky Dane Boysen.

In 1989 I took a job with Alaska aviation pioneer Ray Petersen as director of flight operations at Katmai Air and manager at Kulik Lodge, the most prestigious

fishing lodge in North America. That job prompted me to write my first book about the history of Alaska fishing lodges. Obviously the flying gods were pleased with my progress because after ten years with Kulik lodge, a big-time client made me an offer I could not refuse. I left Alaska and flew to California where I became the personal pilot for one of the richest men in the world. I flew corporate jets and fancy helicopters and knew that I finally made it to the aviation big league. I managed assets worth over \$55 million and had an operating budget that was out of sight. I always said I wanted to marry a woman who owned a string of liquor stores – I didn't – but my employer is in the alcohol business and has extensive racehorse interests. I had a front-seat tour of the world of the rich and famous. Since the recent death of my employer, Jess Jackson, my duties with his family have changed. I don't fly anymore but do some construction management projects. Because they have extensive real estate holdings around the world, I'm never quite sure where this job will take me next.

I'm proud to say I have hunted on five continents and fished on six. Speaking of six, I'm currently on wife number six. This one is a certified chef with more books (cookbooks) in print than I. She is an endurance horse riding champion and likes to shoot and fish.

A couple years ago I bought a great little hunting dog and together we hunt upland birds. I also shoot in competitive shotgun sports. So far my health is good but am starting to have "old gymnast shoulders" with a hint of arthritis – but that is okay because I can still double-haul a fly rod with either arm. I hope my first novel will be out soon, a



werewolf story that will scare everyone!

Gymnastics gave me a foundation upon which to build my life. Great men like George Lewis and Eric Hughes taught me to keep my head up no matter what. I am proud to have been exposed to not only their expertise in the gym, but their total commitment to developing and maintaining a positive attitude. For this I thank them both.

Would you like to nominate one of your old teammates (or yourself) for an upcoming "Where Are They Now" article? Let Coach Hughes know at gymcankay@hotmail.com