

## Where Are They Now? What Ever Happened to Charlie Denny

by Charlie Denny

Charlie's major accomplishment in gymnastics was winning the national AAU championship on the flying rings. He omits this accomplishment in his write-up below. The Amateur Athletic Union's (AAU) national meet was THE most prestigious meet in the US at the time, while the AAU was the national governing body for gymnastics in the 1960's. Charlie also doesn't mention that he was the Pacific Northwest college trampoline and flying ring champion in 1959. When I started coaching gymnastics in 1950 there were 10 events in all college meets – the six events we have now plus trampoline, tumbling, rope climb and flying rings. In the flying (or swinging) rings, the competitor was supposed to maintain an arc of 45 degrees. Charlie was a "big swinger" and always maintained an arc greater than the other competitors and therefore his dismounts were higher, more spectacular, and scarier. Charlie was the first national champion in gymnastics for the UW, and since flying rings were dropped as a gymnastic event after his win in 1962, he will always be champion and can never be dethroned. Coach Hughes

I was born in Yakima, Washington and grew up in Kennewick. At Kennewick High School I had my first experiences with gymnastics as a member of the school team, which included half-time performances at basketball games. I spent my first college year at Columbia Basin College and transferred to the UW in 1956, and began working out as a member of the UW gymnastics team.

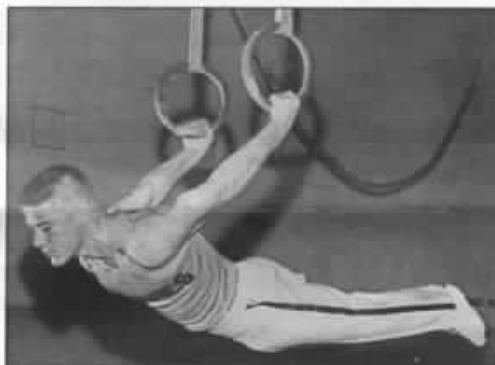
Like Charlie Peters (who was featured in the last newsletter), I reached back in time for inspiration and nostalgic moments that I think are unique to our time there and not experienced by current team members.

For example, I would arrive daily at Hec Edmundson around 3 pm and open the storeroom where the apparatus and mats were stored. Next it had to be organized in our end of the gym since the other 2/3 of the gym was reserved for the basketball team's workout. Stray balls and players constantly showed up in our end and I occasionally torpedoed a few while swinging on the rings. Saturday mornings I spent time in the gym teaching tumbling and trampoline to budding young gymnasts including Brian Sternberg, John Anthony and Jimmy David who went on to become

Husky greats.

Our team was NW Collegiate champions for most of the years of 1956-60. At away meets our method of transportation was the UW's ski bus, which ran downhill quite well. We played Hearts in the bus on our journeys to away competitions, and Coach Hughes became quite adept at the game.

My competition ended in 1962 when I competed at the National AAU Championships, which were held in the ice arena on the grounds of the Seattle World's fair in Seattle. Because the ceiling was too high to hang the rings (just think about that arc of movement), a scaffolding was built so the rings could be hung at the proper height of 23 feet. It certainly added to the drama of the performance as it swayed noisily throughout the routine. Luckily I was able to hang on to win the gold medal in that event.



Charlie back in Hec-Ed

A highlight of those years was "working out" with the Greater Seattle Gymnastics Club and George Lewis. As Charlie Peters stated, it was a big family and we were having some fun. Bill Crow, Coach Hughes and I developed some pretty cool clown routines for the trampoline and gave

performances all over the area along with performances on swinging rings. One of those clown routines is part of the archives at the Seattle Center and appeared during the program honoring the 50-years celebration in 2012. An outstanding memory for me is when during a flying ring routine at an exhibition at Kent-Meridian H.S., Coach Hughes announced that I had become a father that morning to enthusiastic applause from the audience.

After finishing at the UW, I took a teacher-coaching job at Issaquah H.S. I was lucky enough to be the faculty advisor to the Foreign Exchange Club, which hosted three Japanese student-gymnasts: Yoshi Hayasaki, Hideaki Umeshita, and Tomi Ozora, who went on to the UW after graduating from Issaquah. It was a privilege to get to know these outstanding young men and the families of my gymnasts who hosted them while they spent their year at Issaquah H.S. The experience also encouraged my wife and me to become "parents" to several other young men over the years. We had six

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more Japanese students, a Saudi student, and one from Thailand join our family for periods of a few weeks to a year, although none were gymnasts. After ten years at Issaquah, a new school opened up in Kent and I helped to open Kentridge H. S. as teacher and coach.

In 1970, I transferred to teach at the Kent Continuation High school, where students who had dropped out, failed or been turned off by the regular system could find both academic and personal support. After 16 years there, I retired. I highly recommend retirement. An avid reader, I am known to mosey off to the library nearly once a day in search of the latest good book.

My wife Linda and I are actively involved with our four sons and our five grandchildren who all live close, except the youngest in Arizona. Those living here grace us with their presence for dinner nearly every Friday night to enjoy their Opa's good cooking. They provide

us with unlimited entertainment and good vibes. Our youngest grandson, Quinn, joins us for breakfast each school day morning, with Linda then walking him to school, until recently, when Charlie has taken over the delivery service.

A more recent highlight for us was the celebration of 50 years of marriage in 2012 with a 17-day cruise through the Panama Canal, which was a dream come true for me. We also celebrated at home with a garden party for family and friends at the beautiful Soos Creek Botanical Garden where Linda volunteers each Thursday morning.