

Where Are They Now? An Update on Husky Alum Mark Peterson

by Mark Peterson

My gymnastics pinings began in the early 60's when I stumbled across a Saturday television program being broadcast from the University of Washington. On the program Coach Eric Hughes was teaching gymnastics maneuvers on the different apparatus, and I watched intently, even trying some of the moves. I had started out my athletics career in junior high as a springboard diver, later adding swimming when I attended Stadium High School in Tacoma. Stadium didn't have a gymnastics team, but my swim coach taught me a back handspring, which I also used as a member of the cheerleading squad.

I was so enamored of gymnastics, and specifically the gym program at Washington because of the TV show, that I decided to turn out for the sport when I got to the UW in the fall of 1965. I figured one just had to go talk to the coach to get on the team. It might have been my first day on campus when I went to ask Coach Hughes if I could turn out. The gist of his response was, "I know every gymnast in the state, and you're not one of them." I was floored!! I had put all my eggs in this basket, and here I was out in the cold! Well, not exactly in the cold... Coach recommended that I join his gymnastics class, which I did. I must have shown some promise because a few weeks later he invited me to join the team workouts.

I was eager to learn, and that year an assistant coach named Bob Schwarzkopf was on board and taught me much. My favorite event was tumbling, but the coaches expanded my repertoire to include parallel bars, vaulting, rings, and trampoline, which at that time was still a competitive event. I was so fortunate to be on a team with some great and inspiring upperclassmen: Mike Flansaas, Steve and Mike Lovell, Eigil Flaathen, Mark Buckingham, Bo Bennett to name a few. I competed that first year, but my point total at the end of the year was a few shy of the requirements, so I didn't earn a letter award. I did, however, nab the Most Promising Freshman award.

The following years brought a host of outstanding international gymnasts to the team: Yoshi Hayasaki, Sho Fukushima, Hide Umeshita, Mauno Nissinen. A funny story about Mauno, a Finnish import... on one trip to Los Angeles, we passed a body shop while driving to a meet. We had to explain to Mauno that that business dealt with automobile bodies, not human ones!

As I mentioned, tumbling was my favorite thing, and I was fortunate enough to get some pretty buff (IMHO!) moves under my belt: in my junior year I opened with a double-twisting back somersault, and one pass included a one-and-a-half twisting dive roll, which I had brought in from my diving days. Remember that at the time there was no spring floor, so we were launching – and landing – these moves without the springs and padding that current tumblers enjoy. On several occasions we competed floor exercise on a bare – that is, wooden – floor. At the University of British Columbia they had a horsehair basketball floor, which had hot and cold spots... if you landed on a cold spot, you ended up on your can, which I did!

I was able to compete on floor, p-bars, rings, and vault through my career at UW. Unfortunately, in the workouts leading up to my senior year of competition I got a bone bruise on one of my heels, and was unable to compete floor exercise all season.

At the UW I earned a degree in Biology Education, and after graduation taught Biology (and math, and gym) at Newport High School in Bellevue for ten years. By that time my interests had turned to electronics, so I switched careers and started out making test fixtures, then later learned programming microprocessors, which

I continue to do these days. The code I write gets squirted into manufactured products, so they call it Embedded Systems Programming. Fun stuff!!

In 1976 I married my wonderful wife, Cam. A year later we moved into our current house in Wallingford, just a stone's throw from the UW campus. In a few years we had two boys, Ryan and Chris. Ryan has since married Amy, and they have given us two wonderful grandsons, Cody (4) and Mac (2). Ryan and the family live nearby, so we get to see them and the grandkids often. Chris moved to LA to pursue his acting career, and is doing what all aspiring actors do... he waits tables!

I keep busy working (still!), playing guitar in a rock 'n' roll band (www.N2Oseattle.com), and recently I launched a wild and crazy project... building a Teardrop Trailer from scratch (<http://nwwoody.N2Oseattle.com>).



Mark at Hec Ed