

Written by Dwight Normile
Tuesday, 13 July 2010 09:28



IG has received some wonderful personal stories through the years. An upcoming issue, for example, will include "A Girl and Her Knee: One gymnast's candid account of what really happens after you tear an ACL" by **Diana Gallagher**. Two summers ago, **Kathy Nimmer** submitted "What Matters Most," her inspiring account of learning gymnastics while losing her eyesight.

Betsy Cooper

wrote "Gymnastics from the Other Side: How television and the Internet have changed the fan experience."

Everyone has a personal story, whether it's funny, sad, embarrassing or inspiring. And IG would like to share your stories with its readers. So if you are a gymnast, coach, judge, parent or diehard fan, send us your story. (See below on how to submit your story.)

As an example, following is an edited version of a story that first appeared in the May 1993 IG.

My First Front Flip(s)

By Dwight Normile

My name is Dwight, and I'm a gymnasticaholic. I'm addicted to gymnastics and have been for a long time. I think there are a lot of us out there, some more seriously affected than others.

It all began in elementary school. My older sister was on the high school gymnastics team, and I got dragged to her meets. At first, I was one bored fourth-grader, but I soon fell under gymnastics' magic spell. I was amazed that these seemingly normal high school students could perform complete flips — on a basketball floor! — under their own power. It just didn't seem natural, or possible. Hence, the lure of the sport for me. I wanted to learn how to flip, and the sooner the better.

Unfortunately, I had nowhere to practice, no one to teach me. At age 10 I wanted to do gymnastics, but it was frustrating to know I had to wait until high school to join the team. You can only do so much off the diving board in summer, or at home. I managed a back flip to my

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knees on my bed once, cautiously aware of an eight-foot ceiling. But when I tried to show a friend my new skill, I leaned back too far on the takeoff, landed off the bed, and crashed my neck hard against the wall. I quickly learned how humbling and humiliating gymnastics could be. Not to mention painful.

Not satisfied with flips aided by diving boards or bedsprings, I devised a plan to execute one on my own. My first solo front flip took place in the fall of 1966. I was 11.

After raking leaves in the back yard one day, I was struck with a brilliant idea. If I piled the leaves at the base of our hill, I could create an above-ground pit. The angle of the slope was just enough to help me complete a flip. It was perfect.

Realizing my attempts might be limited, I summoned my sister to record the historic moment. "Bring your Polaroid Swinger," I ordered.

I wanted my sister to snap a picture precisely when I was upside-down, so my friends would believe in awe that I had actually done a flip. She agreed to try. I paced off my approach at the top of the hill, knowing how crucial the takeoff point would be. I was ready. My Jack Purcells felt light and springy, my V-neck sweater loose yet soft to help absorb a rough landing.

My plan was to jump off the top of the bank, flip hard, land on my feet and plow into the leaves with a shoulder roll. After all, I would be landing halfway down a hill. If I didn't roll, my momentum would surely slam me into the side of the house.

Like all gymnasts, I faced the moment of truth as I contemplated the next few seconds. No backing out now; the camera crew was poised and ready. My biggest fear was landing on my butt, which would mean a painful defeat, physically and psychologically.

I had done front flips on trampolines and off diving boards, but now I would try one without the aid of springs—or mats. To me, this was what gymnastics was all about. A success here would elevate my status among peers. "He can do a flip," they would say.

OK, no more stalling. "Ready?" I asked my sister. She nodded. Feeling a bit like Evel Knievel, I ran, jumped, tucked and experienced my self-created thrill to its fullest. Everything went to plan. It was all so easy.

"Did you get it?" I asked, brushing leafy debris off my sweater. We waited for the instant photo to develop before our eyes. In fear of missing the shot, my sister had snapped the shutter immediately after takeoff. (A Polaroid Swinger is slightly slower than a Nikon D3.) I was still upright, barely off the ground. I had no proof. Better try again.

My second attempt was also a success, the photo perfect this time. I now had visual evidence that, at age 11, I was a little nuts. And for that I blame gymnastics.

How to Submit Your Story

International Gymnast Magazine Online - Stretching Out: Here's My Story; What's Yours?

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Email story to: ig@intlgyrnast.com

Subject Line: My Story

Copy and paste the text of your story (between 750-1,500 words) into the body of your email.

Attach JPEG head shot and other photo(s) relevant to your story. Images should be at least 300 K in size (or straight from your digital camera).