

CELEBRATING HIS MEMORY



ERIC LESTER HUGHES

FATHER OF WASHINGTON MEN'S GYMNASTICS

SEPTEMBER 1, 1923—MARCH 14, 2016

WASHINGTON GYMNASTICS REMEMBERS DR. HUGHES

My first introduction to Dr. Hughes happened innocently enough as I attended a Saturday morning gym class at the UW when I was in junior high. My friend and I had taken a bus from Mercer Island and were enrolled in one of his beginning classes. Dr. Hughes was teaching one of the rotations on floor. To our group, he taught us log rolls – a twisting and rolling drill where three boys are trying to avoid each other jumping and rolling sideways. It was a relatively easy and fun exercise that he enjoyed teaching to us. Of course, little did I know who this elderly man was and how important he was to Washington gymnastics – or how much he would influence my life.

Later, as an adult I got to know Dr. Hughes and his deep commitment to gymnastics, physical health and the University of Washington. It was then that I came to feel fortunate, honored, and even lucky to know him and have him so involved in the growth and direction of the men's team.

As you read and see the pictures throughout the following tribute letter to him, please relate to us your stories of Dr. Hughes as we are constructing a section on our website that all will be able to access that tells the story of this great man. Through these memories, his life will have even greater meaning to the present and future gymnasts and fans of Washington gymnastics!

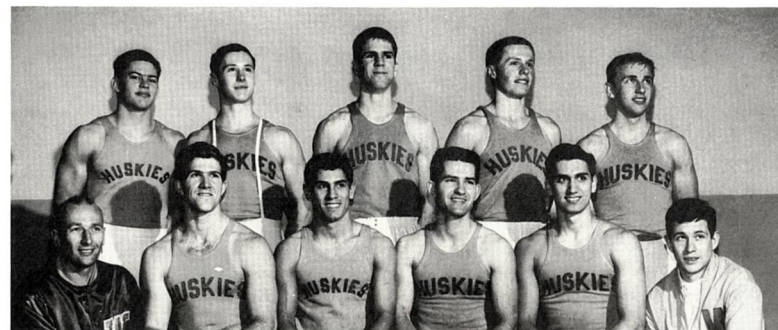
- Coach Mark Russo



At U of Illinois



WEST FINALIST - UNIVERSITY OF WASHINGTON



1965 University of Washington Gymnastics Team. Top row, from left: Gary Finney, Mike Lovell, Mark Buckingham, Steve Lovell, Eigel Flaathen, Front row: Coach Eric Hughes, Bob Hall, Rick Fonceca, Gene Jensen, Jim David, Manager Steve Wimbush.



DR. ERIC LESTER HUGHES

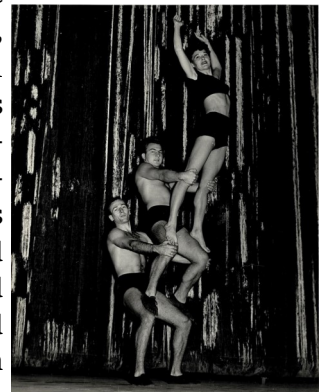
By Rick Chapman, WMGF Co-President

Our longtime Men's Gymnastics Coach, Mentor and Good Friend, Dr. Eric Hughes passed away on March 14, 2016. We all said our goodbyes at his Celebration of Life held at UW's Founder's Club at Hec Edmundson Pavilion on March 26.

Eric Lester Hughes was born on September 1, 1923, in Victoria, British Columbia. He grew up there and competed in high school gymnastics in 1936, winning a silver medal in the all-around in the British Columbia Province Championships. Eric went on to college at the University of Illinois where he was coached by the great Hartley D. Price, competing on the U. of Illinois NCAA Champions Gymnastic Team. In 1941



when College was interrupted by WWII, he enlisted as a Royal Canadian Air Force pilot. After the war, he returned to Illinois where he participated in cross country and track as well as gymnastics. During these years Eric also traveled with a touring acrobatic group called the Aristocrats of Balance. Upon graduation, he worked as a teaching assistant at the University for a year and a half as he finished his Master's Degree. Eric then taught at Bemidji State Teachers College in Bemidji, MN from 1948-1950. He was hired to coach hockey! (He is Canadian after all!) He started the gymnastics program there, and also was an assistant coach of the Football Team.



He went to UW in 1950 for their doctorate program and started a children's gymnastics program. Eric was the Head Coach of the University of Washington Gymnastics Club Team, (1950-1954), and continued as Head Coach when the Huskies gained Division I NCAA status in 1955 and the team was officially recognized as a major sport at the university in 1956. Dr. Hughes coached three Pac-10 Team champions and 33 Pac-10 individual event champions. His team won the NAAU team title in 1968 and 1969 and placed 2nd in the NCAA Championships of 1965. In the process of coaching winning teams, he also produced six NCAA individual event champions plus three all-around champions. In 1969, he hosted the NCAA National Championships at UW. Some of the more accomplished UW men whom Dr. Hughes influenced were Charlie Denny, Mauno Nissinen, Yoshi Hayasaki, Sho Fukushima, Mel Cooley, and Steve Wejmar.

He served as President of the National Association of College Gymnastics Coaches and was selected Western Coach of the Year in 1963 and 1965. He was Pacific Northwest AAU Gymnastics Chairman from 1954 to 1963. In 1961 he was the coach of the US team that toured Czechoslovakia, Poland, and the USSR. In 1966 he took the Husky Club on a tour of Japan, Australia, and New Zealand. In 1968 he took them to many countries in Southeast Asia, and in 1970 to five countries in South America. He was manager of the 1972 Olympic Men's Gymnastics Team in Munich.



Eric was one of the founders of Gym Kamp at Camp Waskowitz and he held coaches clinics and invitational gymnastic competitions. Two books, *Gymnastics for Men* and *Gymnastics for Girls*, plus numerous articles were written by Dr. Hughes.

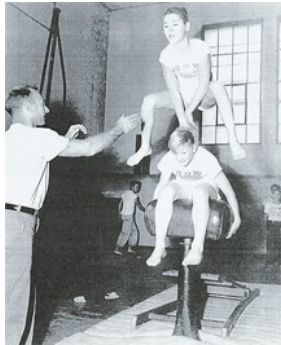
In 1973, he was inducted into the national Helms Gymnastics Hall of Fame. Eric is a Husky Hall of Fame inductee as well, and he was inducted into the first USAG Washington Hall of Fame in 2002.

After the 1980 season Men's Gymnastics was dropped as a varsity sport at UW. Dr. Hughes went on to teach PE and also paddling at Green Lake. When the Washington Men's Gymnastics Foundation was formed he became an original Board Member and established a Scholarship Fund for gymnasts. The WMGF works as the financial backer for the Husky Men's Gymnastics Team. It promotes the program and raises funds for the team. The Foundation is a goal-oriented, thriving, and stable organization consisting of former gymnasts, friends of gymnastics, and parents. Dr. Hughes was a key member and remained on the WMGF Board until his passing.

Eric paddled canoes since the age of four and was active with the Seattle Canoe and Kayak Club since its formation in 1969, teaching both canoeing and kayaking on Green Lake. He continued to paddle up to his 91st birthday, enjoying canoe camping trips throughout the San Juan Islands and Vancouver Island.

Eric was a man that loved life and lived it to the fullest. He maintained a strict regimen of fitness which kept him in great health his entire life. Eric could be seen in his gold Huskies sport coat at most UW Men's Gymnastics Meets and several age-level meets talking to former and current gymnasts, encouraging the new gymnasts, and meeting parents. He passed on his passion for gymnastics to all he coached, and all you have to do is attend any UW or age-level Men's Gymnastics Meet and there will be several of his former team members in attendance. His love of athletics also extended to the Canoe Club where he taught anyone that wanted to learn about paddling.

Dr. Eric Hughes will be missed by many but his memory will stay alive in us all. Farewell Eric!



The gymnastic world owes so much to Eric Hughes! He promoted the sport through many venues - the age-level program at the University of Washington, the competitive program through the UW, promoting gymnastics through the Greater Seattle Gymnastics Club, Goodwill State Department Tours to Japan, Australia & New Zealand in 1966; to the Far East (Japan, Thailand, Singapore, the Philippines, Taiwan and then Hawaii) in 1968; and finally to South America (Venezuela, Colombia, Bolivia, Peru, and Argentina - and some continued to Ecuador before returning home) in 1970. After the men's competitive program was dropped at the UW, Eric was instrumental in forming the University of Washington Men's Gymnastic Foundation to keep men's competitive gymnastics alive and well here in the state of Washington! He was active in this endeavor through the age of 92!

I guess you could say that Eric is responsible for my family today! If I hadn't been a participant in the 1970 Tour to South America, I never would have met and married Sergio. Forty-six years later we have 6 children and 6 grandchildren! Eric kept me involved with the age-level gymnastics program at

the UW from 1974 until it was dropped to make way for other private gymnastics schools in 1989. Sergio joined the program in 1975. Because of our involvement, we were able to participate in yet another State Department Tour to Chile in 1989 teaching/coaching gymnastics! I was also fortunate to be on the Washington Men's Gymnastics Foundation Board with Eric for several years. Eric always had a quiet way of making you want to give back to the gymnastic world by volunteering to support the sport!



Dancing in Argentina, South American Tour

Thank you for everything, Eric! You were definitely a great influence on the Lunas! You will be missed and kept alive in our hearts by all the wonderful memories!

-Linda (Rodella) Luna, Seattle Gymnastics Club 1960s

I met Eric when I was in junior high. As luck would have it, the trampoline center he owned on Roosevelt and about 68th, was on my path home from junior high. I remember walking by the center a few times before I ventured in, but it didn't take long until I became a regular. In addition to meeting Eric, that's where I also met Jim David, Bill Crow and Harold Lyons. After getting hooked on trampolining, Eric also encouraged me to enroll in a few of his classes at the U of W. Since my high school (Roosevelt) didn't have a gymnastics program, he also encouraged me to work out down at the Y as well as with the Husky gymnasts after hours.



Truth be told I suspect I was a bit of a thorn in Eric's side during my collegiate years ('65-'70) as I was pretty active in the Vietnam War protests. That and the long hair I was sporting at the time. I always appreciated and respected Eric's passion and commitment to gymnastics. Some pretty good life lessons in all of that.

I stayed active in gymnastics for a few years after I graduated from the U of W, not in men's gymnastics, but working with George Lewis and the program he ran out of Seattle Pacific Univ.

-John Anthony, UW 1960s

To Kim and Kip,

I am just one of the hundreds whose life was enhanced by your father. I first met Dr. Hughes at a tumbling and trampoline meet in 1961. I think I was just 12 or 13 at the time. I was pretty proud of myself when he approached and asked if I'd like to join his extension classes and become a real gymnast. Over the next 10 years he directed and focused my gymnastics career until I graduated and left Seattle for the work world in 1970.



While it is completely possible to quantify his accomplishments and long list of accolades in the sport of gymnastics, I find it difficult at best to fully comprehend the significance of the sphere of influence he cast on gymnasts, coaches, the University, and indeed Seattle itself. A wise man once told me to judge a man not

only by his deeds but by the company he keeps. During the years he tutored me, Eric surrounded himself with the best of the best, great people like George Lewis, Bob Tanac and many others who shared not only his dedication to gymnastics but also his personal commitment to make each of us not only better gymnasts but better people. Your dad also greatly enhanced the entire gymnastics community by encouraging and assisting many foreign gymnasts to come to Seattle and join his extended family. From my earliest days at the extension classes to my last year as captain of the varsity team, I met many fantastic people who all shared one common thread; Eric Hughes.

I think more than anything else Dr. Hughes made sure we all understood what it took to create and execute the perfect gymnastics routine. "Know the rules, focus on your strengths and try to conceal any weakness. Have a back-up plan if something goes awry, and finish with look of confidence!" Now I'm 68 and can see what a great foundation for life he presented. Fortunately I was smart enough to incorporate his routine building philosophy into my own endeavors, especially bush flying around the world. More times than I'd like to admit I heard his voice asking what are you going to do when the engine quits or the weather worsens.

A few years ago I had the opportunity to share an afternoon and lunch with your father and a few of the old gang in Seattle. I'm glad I had that time with him. There is no way I can ever put into words what he meant to me. He was a "one of a kind" man and mentor. For many of us Dr. Hughes pushed us towards greatness letting each of us know in his own way it was there waiting and all we had to do was seize the opportunity. His optimistic ways were an inspiration for me that will never end.

I'm sorry that I will not be able to join your family and the entire gymnastics community for the Celebration of Life on Saturday. Please understand that my thoughts and condolences are with each of you. Please trust me when I say your father's final dismount may have been the end of his days on earth, but his legacy will never end.

-Bo Bennett, UW 1966-1970



He will be missed. Thanks Dr. Hughes for all you did to promote gymnastics and create a big gymnastics family in the greater Seattle area. Rest in peace.

-Lonna Woodard Kantas, Seattle Gymnastics Club 1968-1970

Eric was an inspiration to so many of us as gymnastic "pioneers" in the 1960's, and beyond. As a member of George Lewis's Seattle "Y" team, I participated with Eric's UW men's team in some unforgettable gym shows, gym meets, and much practice time at Hec Ed Pavillion. And what great memories at Camp Waskowitz! He was a big part of making these events happen.

Eric inspired me to transfer from Everett Jr. College to the UW to become a member of the women's team. To this day, many of us "pioneers" still keep in touch.

-Louise (Grant) Sussman, UW 1960s

And thus passes another great man with a mission; a mission that touched so many for so long. Eric will rest in peace.

-Pat Ruckert, UW 1966-1967



I was fortunate to have known Dr. Eric Hughes, during my years at the UW with the women's gymnastics team (1971-73). Eric was instrumental in helping the women's team move their equipment into the men's practice gym in the Hec Ed Pavilion and gave us practice time. The current UW women's team continues to use that practice gym.

Eric was very supportive of our efforts and a great cheerleader for the program. During that time Eric produced a Second Edition of his Book: *Gymnastics for Girls: a Competitive Approach for Teacher and Coach* (copyright 1971) and used photos of our team in the vaulting section.

We will miss his joyful spirit.

-Priscilla (Taylor) Hickey, UW 1971-1972



With Lee Bjella and Priscilla Hickey



From my first year as a Husky gymnast, I remember Dr. Hughes. As the years went by I got to know him and respect him for all he did for the sport. He was truly a huge influence on gymnastics here in Washington.

-Michele Garcia Havard, UW 1982-1985

Dr. Hughes leaves a legacy that has positively impacted many, many lives and will continue to endure.

He led an inspirational life and was always a joy to be around. He will be missed!

-Mike Williams, UW 1989-1993

Dr Hughes you truly were a great influence on our sport. For many years prior to joining the Washington Men's Gymnastics team you and I had conversations about school and the sport we both love so much. Speaking with you truly helped me as a young man.

-Lance Bowie, UW 1999-2003



From a Saturday morning recreational gymnastics class to becoming the Head Coach of this great tradition, I can only say how grateful I am that Dr. Hughes started this gymnastics program back in 1950. How rich my life has become making this team, the whole supporting family we all collectively are, and the team that Dr. Hughes was the father of, are the focal point of my life. From his belief in physical fitness to his founding of the gymnastics program here at Washington to his involvement in charting this team's future beyond his own life, we are all very lucky to be products of his great ideas. It is now our responsibility to take this program to the places Eric would be proud of, the highest levels of competitive gymnastics with people and gymnasts of the highest standards.

-Coach Mark Russo

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