

Interview with Ann Hendrickson

By Bobbi Powers

Ann Hendrickson comes from a family whose motto is “Be the labor great or small, do it well or not at all.” Starting **gymnastics** at age 7, with extended training beginning at age 9 in Colorado Springs, she specialized in balance beam. A teenage Ann went to the Mexico City Summer Games in 1968 in gymnastics. While in Mexico City she suffered a career-ending knee injury in practice.

Several knee surgeries later, she switched sports, using **cycling** to rehab her knee. She was good enough to spend summers on the European circuit, was doing well with her qualifying, and really wanted to become the first woman to participate in both winter and summer Games. However, she accepted a Fulbright scholarship instead and attended the games as an observer. Of the massacre that occurred during the 1972 Munich Olympic Games, she said, “My heart ached for the world.”

But Ann really REALLY wanted to participate in the Olympics. She took skating lessons as a child, and at age 10 discovered **speed skating**. (Many speed skaters are also world-class cyclists.) She spent much of her time in Wisconsin, Minnesota, and Scandinavia – the longer and colder the winters the better! She was good, not fast enough to make the team in the sprint races, but still hoping to make the 1980 Winter Olympics team. Her coach had an “Aha” moment and said, “You are a flat-liner. Go for the distance.” She did and made the 1980 Lake Placid Olympic Games team, skating 5,000 meters, the longest distance a female skates. She says, “I skate like I hike, not fast, but I can go all day!” Side note: the leg she stroked with was not the re-structured one.

Ann reflected on her Olympic experiences, saying, “I am amazed at how equipment and technology changed sports. I am also glad I competed before texting, tweeting and the internet. Far easier to write a letter home about your results than having the world pick it apart before you even get your skates unlaced! It was a personal challenge for me, and I’m glad to be an American.”

Ann is still living her life at full speed. She and her husband Bill have finished the CMC South Beyond 6000 Challenge, as well as the Waterfall Challenge, and are working on the Fire Tower Challenge. They may be the first couple to complete three challenges! They are also avid trail maintainers on the Friday Crew. She and Bill will trek the Annapurna circuit in Nepal during the month of October after she spends 10 days in September hiking in the Tetons with a gal pal from 5th grade.

Full speed ahead, Ann!