

Joanne Aschenbrenner

Personal Life

I was born in 1942. I'm a fourth generation Coloradoan with great grandparents who were homesteaders. I am married to my high school sweetheart, Duke Aschenbrenner and have been married for 63 years. We have been living in in the same place for 55 years in Longmont, Colorado. I was a physical education teacher for 36 years. I have one son, Vance, who was also a physical education teacher for 33 years. I have a Bachelor's and a Master's from the University of Northern Colorado and was an Assistant Principal for a short period of time. I worked on my Administrative Doctorate at CU, but did not finish my thesis because I knew I couldn't be an administrator and a judge. I chose judging. I have one granddaughter, Emily who is 23; she was a level 10 gymnast and went to Nationals meeting all my judging friends there. My husband was a principal of Longmont High School. Because he made a little more money, I was able to take off and go judge, having my salary constantly docked. We could still pay our house payment, so that's kind of how I was able to do the judging.



We both retired in 2000 and we have been on over 100 cruises. We have literally cruised the world; that's our hobby we do together. At 83 years old, I play a lot of tennis and pickleball. My husband at 83, still is a team roper. This is a rodeo event. We are in the sports world and the cowboy world. We've always had his horses with us.

Background in Gymnastics

In the '50s, there just wasn't gymnastics in Colorado. It was on the East Coast and on the West Coast, but not in Colorado. We had acrobatics and tumbling, which I loved, but as a kid I was a ballet dancer. Through that I developed a good sense of kinetic awareness. The High School PE teachers literally started women's gymnastics in Colorado. In 1967, I was a teacher at Adams City High School and decided to start a gymnastics team. In the beginning, there were about ten schools in Colorado that started these programs. We would judge each other's teams, because there were no judges. We were the judges, we were the coaches, we mopped the mats, we did everything. Rod and Debbie Hill moved to Colorado from Utah. He was a coach, and she was an elite gymnast. I knew that he knew a lot more than I did. I lived in a very poor area and a lot of my kids were underprivileged. Gymnastics was something for them to cling to. I would load up my Adam City kids for \$1 each, and take them to Rod Hill's on Wednesday nights in Denver. He would teach me how to spot the harder stuff. I was lucky to be strong enough to do it. He taught me a great deal. It was sort of a hostage situation because he said, "I'll do this for you, but you have to judge for me." He was bringing in Romanian teams and he wanted me to judge for him. So, I did! Somewhere along the line, I got connected up with Jackie Fie. I got called to do a Collegiate Nationals in '72, and then they needed a judge for an elite meet in '73. For that meet Jackie Fie called and said, "You are our last resort, and you need to be in Seattle tomorrow morning." Of course, I'm teaching and coaching, and I went into school and asked my principal,

can I go to Seattle tomorrow?" And he was the most wonderful, supportive man... and away I went! In all, I coached gymnastics for 18 years and judged gymnastics for 25 years. I started judging the Elite level in 1973 and earned my Brevet rating in 1981.

Judging Experiences

I was the first elected secretary of NAWGJ in 1974 and then the National Director, or President, in 1980-1984. In the mid 70's, we knew we needed a code of ethics. As secretary, they said, "Oh, Joanne, you can take care of that." I had had a neck injury and my lawyer, Morton Davis, helped me pay my medical bills. Since I knew this lawyer, I said, "Will you write a code of ethics?" He said, "Well, I can write it based on the lawyer's code of ethics, and I can fill it in with gymnastics." That is how we created our Code of Ethics.

I knew I was eligible to judge the Olympics, but I didn't think I'd ever be chosen. And I got a telegram on my birthday, June 22, saying, "Congratulations, you are going to Soeul Korea" (for the 1988 Olympics). Audrey Schwyer was actually the assigned judge, but she and her husband decided it was too dangerous because the threat of terrorism was horrendous. I thought to be able to put "Olympic judge" beside my credentials, when I teach, and when I give inspirational speeches, that it would give gravitas to my words. I would be able to help NAWGJ. We just wanted our members to be treated fairly and every good thing I got to do made my voice a little stronger.

Judging Opportunities & Awards

- Collegiate and National Championships throughout judging career
- National Elite Championships
- World Championships and Olympic Team Trials
- 1979 World University Games (the coolest thing ever!)
- 1981 received my Brevet rating (at the time only 18 Brevets in the United States)
- 1984 Olympics, Los Angeles California -Scoring coordinator
- 1985 Australian Games in Melbourne
- 1986 World Cup in Beijing, China
- 1986 World Championships in Montreal, Canada
- 1988 Olympics, Seoul Korea
- 1989 and 1991 Elite Judge of the Year (biggest honor)
- 1991 World Championships in Indianapolis, Indiana
- 1997 Colorado USA Gymnastics Hall of Fame Award
- 2010 NAWGJ Lifetime Award
- 2016 Colorado NAWGJ Hall of Fame Award

Judging and Travel

There were two parts to travel with judging. One was that you studied all the way there, on the plane. I judged every age group in Colorado. I judged compulsories, optionals, regionals, nationals, collegiate, and elite levels. They were all different rules. I studied all the time. And so, to me, judging involved two words, competency and fun. Competency on the floor and when you weren't on the floor, fun. In those days we would judge three or four hours, or maybe we'd fly in and judge Friday night, and then we'd have Saturday off till Saturday night. So, we played all day Saturday, or Sunday. I had so much fun with my judging friends! No matter where we were, we conjured up shopping trips and a lot of us that brought our tennis rackets along. We played tennis wherever we were. Delene Darst and I played tennis against two, Korean men when we were in Seoul, Korea. They were the two guys we played were ball hogs, and they obviously thought we two women couldn't handle our own. Well, we could. Delene and I were often partners, and we even had matching tennis outfits. When I went to the World Cup in 1986 in Beijing, China, Audrey Schweyer and I got to tour the Great Wall. That was a memory beyond any kind of belief. We did anything we could to break the stress of the meets, especially international ones, and anything that we could do to have pure joy. We had so many good friendships. We were magnets for a good time. Oh yes, and when we were close to snow, we were skiing.

Mainly during those years, the thing that really gave me a lot of energy was doing a lot of inspirational speeches at symposiums, conferences and congresses. It was all about empowering judges. My goal was to be a fair, and excellent judge, and then, once we had our



2025 Duke and Joanne on latest transatlantic cruise

judging association, to work for fair pay, assigning procedures and ethical standards. I judged for 25 years (1967-1992). I had an unbelievably magical judging career. I never expected to judge a world championship or a World Cup, or to judge the Olympics. All those things, it just felt to me, like God gave me those things, so I did have more power to advocate for the judging association.

*Transcribed from a conversation with Joanne in January 2026 by Gina Fuller, NAWGJ Historian

Joanne Aschenbrenner Photos

All-Around	Comp.	Vault	Beam	Bars	Floor	Total
1. Joan Moore Rice	37.10	9.45	9.15	9.15	9.50	74.35
2. Roxanne Pierce	37.15	9.50	8.85	9.40	9.35	74.25
3. Nancy Fies	36.30	9.20	9.40	9.20	9.40	73.50
4. Janette Anderson	36.65	9.10	9.05	9.20	9.15	73.15
5. Debbie Fike	36.30	9.25	9.15	9.20	9.00	72.90
6. Kim Chase	35.95	9.50	8.55	9.40	9.30	72.70
7. Diane Dunbar	36.10	9.20	9.00	9.05	9.30	72.45
8. Pam Simone	35.20	9.25	9.20	9.00	9.05	71.75
9. Claudia Fiehl	34.95	9.05	9.15	9.20	9.05	71.40
10. Kathy Howard	35.75	9.35	8.90	8.75	8.25	70.90

Recognize any of these judges from the 1973 Elite Championships?
(For the record, no hairstyles were altered.)

1973 Elite Championships: J Aschenbrenner, D Darst, G Treiber, K Patoile, S Valley, D Kephart, G Davis, J Pasquale, J Fie



1979 Mexico City World University Games



1979 Mexico City World University Games Sharon Valley, Joanne Aschenbrenner



1980s Caesars Palace Meet Romanian Group



1980s Caesars Palace: Sue Ammerman, Jenny Sparing, Cheryl Grace, Joanne, and Dale Brown wearing cone heads from waitresses



1980s Judges Tennis group



1984 Olympics LA: Joanne Aschenbrenner ID tag



1980s Judges Skiing Together



1984 Olympics LA, CA Betty Srouffe and Joanne



1984 Olympics LA CA: Carole Ide, Cheryl Hamilton, Joanne Aschenbrenner, Elaine Thomposn, Betty Srouffe



1984 Olympics LA: Sharon Valley, Joanne Aschenbrenner, Audrey Schweyer



1988 Olympics Seoul Korea
Contribution Recognition Joanne
Aschenbrenner



1988 Seoul Korea
Olympics, Joanne
Aschenbrenner and
Brandy Johnson



1988 Seoul Korea
Olympics, Larissa
Latyninia 1st Russian
super star gymnast,
Joanne Aschenbrenner



1988 Seoul Korea Olympics, Nellie Kim, Joanne
Aschenbrenner, Ludmilla Tourischeva, Delene Darst



1991 World Championships



1988 Seoul Korea USA Olympic Team



1991 USECA Elite Judge
of the Year, Joanne
Aschenbrenner



1991 World Championships
Indianapolis IN, Kim Zmeskal,
Joanne Aschenbrenner, Betty Okino



1991 World Championships
Olga Korbet and Joanne



1991 World Gymnastics Championships
Contribution Award Joanne Aschenbrenner



2010 Jul 18 Itasca IL NAWGJ Symposium,
Joanne Aschenbrenner receiving Lifetime
Award from Carole Ide



2016 Colorado NAWGJ Hall of
Fame Joanne Aschenbrenner