

The past few weeks the weather has turned colder and the leaves have changed color. As we move into November, the month of the Thanksgiving holiday, I have been reflecting on the things in my life that I am grateful for. The list is long with family, friends, and health being at the top. And as I reflect, I realize that I am incredibly thankful that my parents provided me with the opportunity to participate in gymnastics when I was young. I know that my life would be completely different if I wouldn't have had that opportunity.

My mom took me to my first gymnastics class when I was about three years old and I was hooked. I loved everything about the class – it was fun! I moved up through the classes and started practicing more hours each week and before long was asked to join the competitive team. I competed in gymnastics from ages 6-16 and then moved on to coaching the sport I love. I now realize that my parents had to make a lot of sacrifices to allow me to participate in competitive gymnastics. I'm sure there were times that they wondered if the sacrifices were worth it. I can answer, without a doubt, yes! I gained so much from my years training in gymnastics and I know that the children I coach are also reaping these benefits:

- **Mental Toughness:** “Whether you think you can or you think you can't, you're right”  
Gymnasts have to train their minds to be able to block out negative thoughts and emotions, outside distractions, fatigue, muscle aches, and fear in order to accomplish their goals. This mental toughness has helped me get through difficult situations my entire life.
- **Goal Setting:** “A goal without a plan is just a wish”  
Gymnasts are master goal setters. I learned very early how to set goals and then do the work to achieve those goals. A beginner student will learn her forward roll down an incline mat and then set the goal to do it successfully on a smaller incline and then on a flat mat. Gymnasts learn how to break skills down in to smaller achievable goals and then push themselves to move on to the next goal.
- **How to Fail:** “Fall down seven times, get up eight”  
Sounds funny, right? But it is so true! Failure should not be feared, yet in today's society children are often taught to do just that. It makes me so sad to see kids who want to try something, but just can't make themselves do it because they are afraid of failing. One thing is certain in gymnastics: you WILL fail. You will not be able to complete every skill you try. You WILL fall off the balance beam. You WILL mess up in a competition and not get the score you wanted. But guess what? You will come back and try again (and again, and again...)! And you learn that you're not perfect and that's okay!
- **Perseverance:** “Perseverance is the hard work you do when you get tired of the hard work you already did”  
Perseverance is born out of failure. Gymnasts learn to have a “never give up” attitude. When learning a new skill, it can take thousands of tries to successfully learn it. Kids learn to value the effort that it takes to achieve a goal and that failing is part of the process. What a great life lesson!
- **Determination:** “Some people want it to happen, some wish it would happen, others make it happen”  
Why do some kids continually look at a challenge and say, “I can't do it” while others look at the same challenge and say, “I'll try”? It's determination. Gymnasts learn about determination very early in their gymnastics careers. From the first time they step in to a gym, challenges are set

out before them and they never stop coming. You learn a cartwheel? Great! Now do it on the balance beam. Very often in life, the difference between reaching a goal and falling short lies in the person's determination. Gymnastics helps children learn to say, "Yes, I can!"

- Courage: "Decide that you want it more than you are afraid of it"

Life is full of times when you must face your fears. Kids need to learn how to cope with those feelings and gymnastics teaches them how to do that.

These are just a few of the benefits children can reap from participating in gymnastics. I know that gymnastics gave me everything listed above, and also taught me many life lessons. That is why I am so thankful that my parents gave me the opportunity to participate in the sport and why I love being able to coach kids and help them gain these same benefits.