

Interview Leigh HENNESSY

Leigh is the daughter of Jeff HENNESSY, the inventor of the part method which allowed the trampoline to evolve into what we know today.

1976 DMT World Champion, Leigh took advantage of her acrobatic knowledge for her job. She has doubled many stars in Tv serials (CSI, Cold Case) and movies (in Bad Boys, Green Lantern, etc ...) which let her work under the direction of great filmmakers such as Steven Spielberg, Tim Burton, Michael Bay, Ridley Scott ... (For a complete list, visit her website www.leighhennessy.com).

Leigh is our technical consultant for the WCS broadcasts on Acrobaticsports.TV. She was kind enough to grant us an interview.

Acrobatic Sports: You grew close to acrobatics sports and more specifically to the Trampoline. When you got aged enough, was it natural for you to practice this sport ?

Leigh HENNESSY: Growing up with Jeff Hennessy as my father, I was destined to learn trampoline. But I was also destined to try springboard diving and encouraged to push the limits with any sport or interest. I chose trampoline, therefore I think it was a natural choice.

If I had chosen to pursue diving instead of trampoline, and my whole world would have been different. There were some advantages to trampoline, such as I could train year round (there were no indoor diving facilities in Lafayette). But the main advantage to trampoline for me was that I could perform more than just ONE skill at a time, between getting in and out of a pool and standing in line drenched waiting for another turn. I love that a trampoline routine is TEN skills. But, when not doing a routine, I could flip to my heart's content. That, made me happy.

Of note: Dabbling in many sporting activities, as Dad encouraged, and pushing the limits helped me tremendously in my chosen field. While I always realized that learning to take risks safely, as we do, would help me as an adult in any profession, never in my wildest dreams did I think that my career choice would be so literal. The cliff I dove off of when I was a kid now translates directly into a paycheck.

Acrobatic Sports: The Trampoline has changed a lot in recent years with the advent of athletes from Asian countries, what is your opinion on the evolution of the discipline that your father Jeff HENNESSY and his friend Georges NISSEN have almost invented?

Leigh HENNESSY: As the sport has changed, I never dreamed that trampolinists could perform the incredible difficulty they do today with such apparent ease. As the equipment and rules evolved, I once worried that the difficulty would get so high that the danger would increase too much. But, my fears don't seem to have been realized. While the difficulty has increased, it doesn't seem as though the risk has. The athletes seem to perform their routines with such confidence and grace.

Acrobatic Sports: Are you interested in the results of your countrymen?

Leigh HENNESSY: I love watching the young Americans compete. It's a different world today than when I was competing for the U.S. Today's Americans have much tougher competition, but they handle it very well. I'm proud of them and their successes.

Acrobatic Sports: An athlete like you could certainly become an excellent coach, would you like to transmit your knowledge?

Leigh HENNESSY: While in graduate school at the University of Louisiana in Lafayette, I had a youth trampoline program. My students were very successful. Many competed in World Age-Group competitions and some were on National Teams that represented the

US at World Championships. When I left Louisiana to explore new career directions, I sold my equipment to some of the parents. They started working with Jimmy Yongue as their coach, which was a great choice.

Since then, I'll work with stunt professionals who want to learn a thing or two. It's nice working with athletic adults. They catch on quickly and are thrilled to learn basic skills. In stunts, basics are all that is needed in most cases.

Acrobatic Sports: Too often the medias show the Trampoline as a circus show or simply as a training for other disciplines and not as a real sport. In your opinion, as you stand on the both sides of the "problem": both doing Trampoline and being graduated in communication, what should be changed so that the media have a different view of our disciplines (Trampoline / Tumbling / DMT)?

Leigh HENNESSY: To get the respect the sport of trampoline deserves from the media, the answer lies in promoting international competitions, the athletes and their training programs. The sport need to sell tickets to venues and get coverage. I've met so many people who have seen trampoline on the Olympic broadcasts and just raved about it. It's not a huge leap to see that it has the potential to be a very popular sport.

However, my experience tells me that people in the media are not willing to step outside of their tried and true formula. They would have to carve out time for trampoline, sacrificing something else and then convince advertisers that their money is well spent. Therefore, it's up to trampoline to do the work to convince the media that it's worth the risk. The sport needs to create their own attention, much like what Acrobatic Sports TV is doing. That way they can prove to the media that people will watch trampoline, therefore making it easier to sell advertising, tickets and/or time. There are countless ways of doing it, but without backing projects like Acrobatic Sports TV, it's an incredibly difficult task.

Acrobatic Sports: Are you still practicing the trampoline, just for fun and not in a professional goal?

Leigh HENNESSY: I still jump on trampolines from time to time. Since becoming a stunt performer, I need to be well rounded. I need to slide cars, jump from high places, scuba dive, ride horses, box and so much more. Therefore, my time on a trampoline has been limited over the years. Thankfully, being a trampolinist made learning new skills easy. The kinesthetic awareness I developed is valuable to a stunt person. As a consequence, I'm able to pick up new skills rather quickly. The other benefit is the confidence trampoline has given me. I've discovered that the average stunt person is not as bold as the average competitive trampolinist. To be a good stunt person, you must have confidence to take risks. Therefore, being a trampolinist is priceless.

Acrobatic Sports: You have created your stunt training center and you recently had the visit of Sylvester "Rocky" Stalone. Can you tell us about this meeting, and had you ever met him before in your career?

Leigh HENNESSY: I recently opened a stunt training center in New Orleans. We've literally been open only a couple of weeks. However, our first clients are the stunt team from an upcoming Sylvester Stallone movie called Headshot. They have been renting our space to rehearse fight scenes. "Sly" has been rehearsing, too.

On day two of rehearsal, they forgot to bring a prop gun. Ours was in storage, so I ran out and bought a toy gun for them. The stunt guys chuckled, but Sly didn't skip a beat. He grabbed it and went to work as if nothing was unusual! The toy is now prominently displayed on our wall.

In addition, on that same day, one of the stunt guys bull-dogged Sly into a wall. The drywall busted a hole the size of a grown man! We had it fixed but saved a chunk of drywall for Sly to sign the next time he's in.

Acrobatic Sports: Among all the movie stars or television people you worked with, have you managed to make one jump on a trampoline, and if so, can you tell us some memory of this moment ?

Leigh HENNESSY: Of all the celebrities I've worked with, I've never gotten one on a trampoline. Once I doubled Pamela Anderson jumping on a trampoline, but I could not get her on it. She refused. The closest I got was to help Demi Moore ride in bungie cords. She loved it. She loves sports of all kinds and wants to try EVERYTHING! I taught her how to flip in the harness and fly as high as she could. She grinned from ear to ear.