

## Linda's Beijing Journal: Day 13

By Charles F. Gardner

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*Editor's note: Linda McDonald is writing a daily journal for JSOnline, tracking the progress of West Allis gymnast Chellsie Memmel and commenting on the Olympic scene in Beijing. Linda is a nationally rated gymnastics judge, clinician and choreographer and close friend of the Memmel family. Originally from Green Bay, Linda now lives in Aurora, Ill.*

**Beijing** - Today the gymnasts were allowed out of the Olympic Village to spend the day with their families. We let Chellsie choose what she wanted to do.

We met Chellsie and Andy (her dad) at the Beijing Zoo. The first thing we saw were the pandas. They were so adorable. There are eight pandas at the zoo at this time. Seeing panda bears in person was a highlight of the trip.

Next we went to the Xiushui Silk Market so Chellsie could partake in the organized chaos of shopping there. The market is one crazy place. We did our last-minute shopping, and Chellsie and her sister, Mara, shopped to their hearts' content.

This evening USA Gymnastics had a dinner to honor all its athletes. More medals were won in Beijing than Athens, 10 total medals, including silver in the women's team and bronze in the men's team competitions. Meredith Vieira was present and NBC did a short live take with both teams to start the Today Show.

It was a great evening. Many photos were taken, and it was an Olympic farewell for many people. Alicia Sacramone has announced her retirement, and her retirement party is already scheduled for Sept. 6. It is always sad after an Olympics to see who hangs up their grips for good.

Many people saw Chellsie on NBC's coverage of the uneven bars finals. Nastia Liukin asked Chell if she would help her chalk the bars. Nastia competed after one of the Chinese gymnasts, and the Chinese athletes usually strip all the chalk off the bar. The Americans like a lot of chalk. So, Chell was on the floor with Nastia so she could help Nastia's dad, Valeri, chalk the bars. Chell took care of the low bar and Nastia's dad did the high bar (before Liukin's silver-medal winning routine).

We fly home tomorrow, so before I forget, let me tell you about Chinese bathrooms. When you enter a bathroom, there is a toilet paper dispenser, and you take your toilet paper and enter the stall. You dare not forget, because there is no toilet paper in the stall.

There are two types of toilets, the modern ones and one which is a hole in the floor. The Olympic venues had both styles of toilets. Bathrooms were one of our biggest challenges.

We head to the airport in the morning (Beijing time), and everyone is anxious to get home. We have had a great time, but we are all missing the comforts of home.

Chellsie and Andy arrive at General Mitchell Field at 7 p.m. Thursday and WTMJ-4 will be meeting them. Everyone is welcome to go to the airport to welcome your Olympian and silver medalist, Chellsie Memmel, home from Beijing.