

Linda's Beijing Journal: Day Four

By Charles F. Gardner

Monday, Aug 11 2008, 12:30 PM

Editor's note: Linda McDonald will write 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 we ventured out to the Silk & Pearl Market. Seven floors of indoor shopping, the market is a bargain hunter's dream.

Each floor has something different - designer clothes, handbags, shoes, watches, sunglasses, souvenirs, silk.

The market was so much fun. You do not ask for a price quote unless you are seriously thinking of making a purchase. If the sales person says, '100 yuan' (Chinese currency equaling about \$15), you offer around \$20. The rule of thumb is never to pay more than half of the initial offer. There will be banter back and forth until the two of you agree on a price. Usually you need to walk away at least once. The salesperson then will holler, "Lady, lady, OK." They cave to your price, and the item is yours!

The silk stores have bolts of beautiful silk. They can make anything you want. Pick your material, get measured, explain what you want, and in a few days pick up your tailored items. U.S. men's team member and all-around qualifier Jonathan Horton had a suit and five shirts made for \$150 (U.S. currency).

The pearls and the jade were both very reasonable. Almost everyone bought one or the other, or both.

We shopped about five hours and had enough. It is an exhausting experience. As you pass each store, every salesperson tries to lure you in. They are very pushy. Some will actually try to grab your arm and drag you into the store. It does get tiring after a while, but we will definitely be going back for another day of shopping. Today was just a warmup.

As we walk the streets, the Chinese are intrigued by Chellsie's sisters, Mara (age 18) and Skyler (age 11). They will ask to have their pictures taken with the girls, not because they are the sisters of an Olympian, but because they look so different. As we watch the Chinese people, they are truly fascinated by all the foreigners.

Tomorrow (Tuesday in China but tonight in Milwaukee) is the men's gymnastics team final. We will be cheering for the men. Go USA!