

## **Linda's Beijing Journal: Day Eight**

**By Charles F. Gardner**

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*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** - The judges got it right! Nastia Liukin first, Shawn Johnson second and Yang Yilin third.

I could not be happier for Nastia. She had the meet of her life. It was a great day for USA Gymnastics, to finish 1-2 in the all-around at the Olympic Games. Nastia hit everything. Shawn had a minor mistake on beam and was short on her twist on vault. China's Yang had a good meet but not enough to outscore Nastia and Shawn.

After the competition, we went to the Olympic Village. Every athlete was given a few guest passes, and we were on Chellsie's pass list. After going through several security checkpoints, passport control and credentialing, we were able to enter the village.

The village was beautiful, a complex built specifically for the Olympic Games. The girls are staying together in what will be turned into apartments after the Olympics are over. There are three bedrooms in the apartment, two bathrooms and a common room. Chellsie shares a room with Bridget Sloan, and also in the apartment are Samantha Peszek, Alicia Sacramone, Shawn and Nastia. Kathy Kelly (vice president of USA Gymnastics and delegation leader) and Martha Karolyi (women's national team coordinator) are across the hall.

The dorms are so impressive. Each country flies its flag outside the windows. It's almost like the United Nations as you pass the line of buildings.

There are displays of life-size Olympic mascots, beautiful Chinese gardens, a bank, a store, a restaurant, exercise facilities, a pin-trading station and a concert stage, all in the village.

Buses run a schedule to transport everyone where they need to be.

Chellsie was issued a bike after she broke her right ankle in training on Aug. 2. Every day she rides her bike around the village. It is an old-fashioned white bike with a basket. I sang the "Wizard of Oz" song to her when I saw the bike. It's a far cry from a 10-speed or a mountain bike.

This evening we went to the USA House where there was a reception for athletes' families and friends. The USA House supports all American athletes. We had drinks and dinner. The U.S. girls all were honored, and the coaches and Martha were given special awards.

Bela Karolyi and Mary Lou Retton (1984 Olympic all-around gold medalist) were in attendance. There were also athletes from other sports.

Later as I shopped for some Olympic souvenirs, it was fun to listen to the other shoppers on their cell phones. The buzz was that the U.S. gymnastics team was in the house!

The USA House has a store with the best Olympic gear and clothing. I probably spent too much money, but I am pretty sure I have my Christmas shopping finished!

All the families and friends settled outside on the patio for drinks when the event was finished. We were told to stay as long as we liked. The patio was on the river and overlooked Workers Stadium. It was a perfect night. We may not have won the gold in team finals, but going first and second in the all-around stifled the Chinese.