



## **Testimonial - Emily Gruen, Showtime Team**

The impact Sally has had, and continues to have in my life is immense (to put it lightly).

When I first started gymnastics at the Westport YMCA, I was an extremely shy yet energetic five-year-old. I had the nickname "velcro child" and was attached at the hip to my mom, so when it came time for my first TNT hotshots practice, I distinctly remember my mom finding another young gymnast, introducing me, and running for the door before I could cling back on to her.

I spoke once during the entire first class. I was put into the most beginner line for cartwheels, and upset with this, I told a coach "I have a back walkover." I was moved up to the most advanced line, invited to join pre-showtime, and rewarded a laffy taffy from my mom for speaking up. While I definitely did not appreciate the "ripping of the velcro" at the time, I can now say that putting me in gymnastics with Sally is one of the greatest gifts my mom has ever given me.

Sally took me in, as she does every gymnast, and taught me how to shake my hips, perform for the judges, and above all, be a good teammate in a sport most would consider to be very individual. This is what Sally does- she makes gymnastics much more than just a sport, she makes it about family. The Y was always my home away from home, a safe haven where I could go be my truest self-knowing that I was surrounded by teammates and coaches who loved and supported me. Sally created a gym that I never wanted to leave at night, and would wake up excited to go to at 8:30 am on Saturdays...even as a teenager. To be honest, I was usually there by 8 so I could sit and chat with Sally about life, new stunts, and really anything on my mind. Sally somehow always knew when I needed to be cheered up, and her stories never failed to make me laugh.

It is times like this, gossiping in her office at 8 am on a Saturday, that exemplify just how special Sally is. She always goes the extra mile, and her passion for gymnastics and her gymnasts is contagious. Sally instilled in us that every performance we did was important, not because of medals and awards, but because we were doing them to spread joy to others, whether it be a crowd filled with thousands of people at Gymnaestrada, or a small group of elderly people at a retirement home. In Fact, the small shows are truly what Showtime is all about. Sally instilled in us that every performance we did was important, not because of medals and awards, but because we were doing them to bring joy to others. Performing for people of all ages and seeing their smiles and gratitude not only gave me great fulfillment, it also allowed me to reflect on my privilege, and how I can use something like gymnastics to spread it.

Speaking of exhibition trips, I had the privilege of traveling with Sally to Switzerland and Finland for Gymnaestrada, Washington DC for the 4th of July parade, and Ohio for Nationals where we took home gold. These trips are some of my greatest memories, and my teammates and I still talk and reminisce about our experiences from years ago.

Sally helped shape me into the person I am today, and I credit her with so much of the reason why I am going into social work, to become a child therapist, a job where I can actively help create a more kind and thoughtful next generation. Sally is everything that I hope to be, a strong and empathetic leader who commits her life's work to helping others. I truly feel so lucky to have Sally as a coach, mentor, and as family.