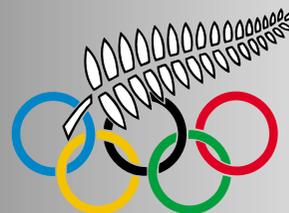


FIONA STEVENS [JOHNSON]



OLYMPIC MUSEUM
New Zealand Olympic Committee



"I was born in the High Country in the South Island - in Canterbury on a farm called Mt. Torlesse. We lived at the end of a gravel road which was six kilometres from

the front gate. My early childhood really centered around my family. We didn't have a lot of interaction with other people because of our isolation, though when we went to school, that was sort of an adventure in itself. We had to drive through a river and sometimes, the car would get stuck and bogged down, and so then we'd have to walk and find my father to pull it out with machinery. But it was in the days when much of the farming was done on horse back. I spent a lot of time on horse back as a child. *Life was horses, open spaces ...*

We'd ride hell for leather, and we were always daring each other; like to jump wire fences and things. We hunted alot, and I loved that. *That was galloping fast, it was speed, and it was dangerous!*

During the winter we tobogganed and then we skied down a little slope, and there was a pond at the bottom. I remember being very indignant and probably shrieking and crying, having skied down and then lost it at the end, and ended up in the pond."

The Balanced Development of Body, Will and Mind

"One of my Role Models came from within the family. Maurice Brownlie, my grandfather, was Captain of the All Blacks in 1926 and 1928 - none of us got to meet him as he died before I was born. My mother talked about him a lot - in fact as Role Models, my mother and my father were probably the strongest influences I had at that time.

It was because of my aunt Annette Acton-Adams (Johnson) - who was a member of the first New Zealand Olympic Winter Games Team in 1952 - that I got into ski racing. I was about 10 or 11 years old and we skied at a club race and I did quite well.

In 1972, when I was 12 I skied well, and I won a scholarship which then led me on to have this coach from Switzerland, called Leo Baccaglio. There were a couple of people but he probably did the most with my skiing in the shortest possible time. I went from being absolutely nobody to being the best female skier in New Zealand, and that was all done in a few months, just like that! So it just shows you what you can do, and he was tough, very, very tough and that was my sort of first taste of the European skiing approach.



"This is my mountain, Mt Torlesse. Photo taken from the lower flats on the farm"
Photo: Private Collection

I had this belief that I could be one of the best in the world, and I think Leo believed that - he transmitted that to me, *that I had all this potential*. I had other coaches later on who had that same belief in me, and that's very important for any athlete to have outside confirmation that what you're doing and where you're headed is actually correct.

I was selected for the 1976 New Zealand Olympic Winter Games Team, but it was decided that I was too young - I was deemed too young. I left it to my parents to fight those battles for me.

Jan Tischhauser was another very key person in my skiing career, and again very tough but very talented Swiss coach. He organised all the races that we would go to, where we would go, how we would go, and that was fantastic. We had a base, we had transport and we had some support mechanisms. Jan then moved on to coach the Australian Olympic Winter Games Team prior to the 1980 Olympic Winter Games. That was very negative thing to have had happen to an athlete, I lost everything with him going. I lost my coach, I lost the structure, basically I was there on my own.

My goal was to be the best in the world and unless you have that goal then you really couldn't handle what you had to go through.

That was my goal and at stages I came very close to achieving that!

XIII OLYMPIC WINTER GAMES LAKE PLACID, USA, 1980

VILLAGE LIFE

The new prison was being used as accommodation for athletes. You were given a tag that allowed you entry in and out of the village and for your meals inside this complex. You got allocated either Block A, B or C - it was a slightly claustrophobic atmosphere, and they had a kind of communal area outside the rooms, or the cells, and you could sit and talk with other athletes, and it was in a circular shape, so all the rooms, (cells), were off this area, and they had television and things there. That was great as long as you weren't trying to compete, as it was so noisy.

OPENING CEREMONY

A lot of Olympic tradition instills huge pride, and so there you are behind your flag and there's lots of ceremony about it. And it was great! I felt huge pride to be there, that I was good enough to be representing my country.

PARTICIPATION / COMPETITION

The Joy Found in Effort

In many ways it was really just another race. I mean, all the people that were there were people I'd raced against and come up against before, and had been exposed to at other races. I suppose there's always a possibility that you might ski out of your skin and do something amazing, but my form at that point, it had plateaued, and so I didn't really have a big expectation on myself other than to try and ski the best I could.

I was tracking upwards, upwards all the time prior to the Olympics, and then various things happened with the loss of a coach and no proper buildup programme, and I actually was having a lot of injury problems with my back. I was disappointed in my result, because it wasn't a personal best. Also I was disappointed not to finish the slalom because I was well positioned after the first run (15th).

Incompleteness is a really good way to describe it.

I felt like in a funny kind of way that I let other people down, people had really worked hard to help you get there and support you. I felt those responsibilities; I have to say that it was a family effort too, actually. Me being there was a family thing.

CLOSING CEREMONY

It was a great sort of party atmosphere. It was fun actually. Everyone ran in and I just remember a whole medley of people, different races, colours, sporting codes, all mixing together, with a big party atmosphere - and it was fun. It was probably one of the most fun parts of the Olympics.

MESSAGE TO YOUTH

I would say that everything that you need to achieve in life is within you and that it's really a case of what you decide you want to do. It's a decision you make - I believe that everything you need to achieve *is inside you*. It's just a case of accessing it, believing it and implementing it.

The other thing that I would say to motivate aspiring athletes, or just anybody if it's not working, change it! Have the confidence to say, look, I've tried that and I've gone in that direction several different times. I've approached it and that has not worked. Okay, discard it. Do not hang on to stuff that hasn't been effective, and I suppose that's the other thing, is learning how to be effective."

Fiona Stevens - Olympian

XIII Olympic Winter Games, Lake Placid, USA 13 - 24 February 1980
Alpine Skiing; Ladies Slalom, dnf; Giant Slalom, 30 / 35

dnf Did not finish



Fiona (photo taken approximately 1962)
Photo: Private Collection



"Me on my pony 'Say Fair' competing in a Canterbury Show." (photo taken 1965)
Photo: Private Collection

"Me with my family, 1996 at the family farm." (L-R) James, Fiona, Richard and William
Photo: Private Collection



Stuart Blakely (left) and Fiona Johnson, winners of Air New Zealand Alpine Cup(s), Mount Hutt 1978
Photo: Private Collection



XIII Olympic Winter Games, Lake Placid, 1980
"Outside the Olympic Village which was built to be a prison"
Back row: (L-R) Scott Kendall, (Wally), Stuart Blakely, Mark Vryenhoek, Murray Laird
Front row: (L-R) Andreas Hefti, Fiona Johnson, Anna Archibald, Richard Johnson
Photo: Private Collection



XIII Olympic Winter Games, Lake Placid, 1980
"In my New Zealand Olympic uniform and equipment."
Photo: Private Collection

