

Spring 2012



# Member Highlight

**MOJCA HERMAN, MA, OTR/L CHT**

*This edition's member highlight features Mojca Herman, MA, OTR/L, CHT. "Mo," as she is better known, came to the States from Toronto, Canada, on a full swim scholarship to attend the University of Southern California. Before following the path of degrees and certifications we all know, Mo had the extraordinary opportunity to represent Canada in the 1988 Summer Olympics, held in Seoul, Korea. If you check out YouTube, you can marvel at her world-class performances in the 200M butterfly. Mo now takes her skills honed as an elite swimmer and parlays them into her career as a Certified Hand Therapist, business owner, swim instructor at her own swim school, mother of three sons and all-around inspiration.*

*Lynn Festa ASHT Times Editor*

## What led you to become a hand therapist?

When I was an occupational therapy student, I had tremendous respect for the complexity of the hand; however, at the time I had no desire to be a hand therapist. I pursued a career in rehab and developed into a senior therapist for spinal cord injury when I sustained a back injury of my own. I herniated three discs in my lower back while assisting in the transfer of a patient with paraplegia. It was almost a year before I was ready to work again and had to consider other areas of occupational therapy. I volunteered in many specialties of OT to discover my future as a therapist. When I observed in a hand clinic, despite my reservation when I was in school, I realized it was a natural transition for me. The more I learned about the upper extremity population, the more passionate I became about the specialty. I knew I wanted to pursue becoming a CHT and become an expert in the field.

## Where do you currently practice, and what is a typical caseload?

I am in my ninth year of private practice in Torrance, Calif. We treat a variety of post-operative upper extremity diagnoses referred from orthopedic/hand surgeons in the Los Angeles area. Our clinic is a fast-paced setting that is challenging, rewarding and rich with learning opportunities.

Our distinct reputation in the local community has allowed us to attract professional athletes; most notably we are the designated clinic for hand and wrist injuries for the Los Angeles Clippers.

We have a strong affiliation with the local universities that have occupational therapy graduate programs. We accommodate fieldwork student interns year-round and promote "hands-on" education.

## Do you have any special projects that you enjoy outside of the clinic?

I am a graduate of University of Southern California, and I return to the school every year to guest lecture in the USC Graduate Occupational Therapy Program.

I am in my 12<sup>th</sup> year of running a swim school for kids in Redondo Beach, Calif. We teach young children technique so they can become more efficient in the water for the four swimming strokes, as well as prepare them for junior lifeguards.

## What are your treatment "philosophies?"

There are several treatment philosophies that I instill in both my patients and staff:

Patients are real people: Invest time in learning their stories and their individual personalities; these become excellent tools for motivating the patients during recovery.

Therapy is a full time commitment: Educate the patient on active responsibility for both goal-setting and participation in exercises at home. The more time dedicated to the therapeutic journey, the better the final outcome.

Every session is purposeful: Every session should have a treatment plan in place where the patients are skillfully progressed toward their final goal. We aspire to create an environment where the patients look forward to coming to therapy!

Feedback is important: Having some form of objective feedback for the patient reinforces and validates the importance of formal therapy and the benefits of home exercise programs. It also teaches the patient that we care about how they are doing.

Discharge from therapy is celebrated: On the last day of therapy, our clinic ritual is to trace the patients' hand on colorful paper and placing it on our graduating wall of hands. It is amazing how excited people get about the prospect of graduating therapy.

## How does your past experience as an Olympian influence you in your professional life?

Swimming taught me life skills that have allowed me to succeed in all aspects of life. Some of the attributes and characteristics that enabled me to compete at an elite level include dedication, hard work ethic, teamwork, attention to detail and being goal oriented. These very same attributes influence my patient care and clinical decision-making.

## What do you find most rewarding personally? Professionally?

I receive a tremendous amount of pleasure when I know I have helped someone do something they couldn't do before; whether it is helping my children learn a new skill, teaching a child how to swim or enabling a patient to be independent again. It is extremely satisfying and rewarding to know that I have made a difference in someone's life.

## What is your involvement with ASHT?

Over the years, I have volunteered on various projects and conference needs for ASHT.

My most recent involvement has been as a member of the ASHT Education Division. Currently, I am co-leading the effort on updating the second edition of the CHT Exam Prep textbook.

I was the recipient of the 2011 ASHT award for Outstanding Committee Member for the ASHT Education Division.

## What advice would you give to a new hand therapist looking to get more involved in the profession?

If an occupational therapy student approaches me for advice on hand therapy, I encourage them to volunteer in several hand therapy clinics to observe the variety of opportunities that exist in the specialty of hands. Most importantly, I advise all new hand therapists to surround themselves in opportunities for learning, and, furthermore, to seek settings that provide mentoring. A skilled and knowledgeable therapist that is willing to teach is invaluable!

## Any words of wisdom on how to balance life while pursuing goals and dreams?

The most important thing for me is being surrounded by supportive people. I would not be able to succeed in my life endeavors if I didn't have the endless support of my spouse and family, as well as the support of my staff at work. Being part of a team both at work and at home, as well as taking some time out to swim, is instrumental in helping me keep my life in balance!

## ASHT Chapter Contacts

### Alabama Chapter

Cindy Powell, OTR, CHT  
fairhopegct@aol.com

### California Chapter

Saba Kamal, OTR, CHT  
saba@hocinc.net

### Hawaii Chapter

Wendy Howard, OTR/L, CHT  
howardtherapy@yahoo.com

### Louisiana Chapter

Brian L. Leingang, OTR/L, CEES, CHT  
leine@msn.com

### Michigan Chapter

Rasa Poorman, OTR, CHT  
rpoorman@twmi.rr.com

### Missouri Chapter

Barbara Sopp, MS, OTR/L, CHT  
bjsopp@hotmail.com

### New Jersey Chapter

David Skolnik, OTR/L, CHT  
skolnik2@optonline.com

### Pennsylvania Chapter

Terry Taylor, OTR/L, CHT  
taylor@msx.upmc.edu

### South Carolina Chapter

Beth Peters, OTR/L, CHT  
beth.peters@tenethealth.com

### Texas Chapter

Valerie Willette, OTR, CHT  
vwillette@hotmail.com

### Wisconsin Chapter

Ann Porretto-Loehrke, PT, DPT, CHT, COMT  
aporretto@newhands.net

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### MEMBER SPOTLIGHT

## Mojca Herman: Moments of Greatness

By Ann Porretto-Loehrke, PT, OPT, CHT, COMT

ASHT is proud to feature ASHT's own Olympian, Mojca Herman. Read about her accomplishments as a hand therapist and as an Olympic swimmer.

Do you know an ASHT Member who should be recognized for an outstanding accomplishment? Send an e-mail to [info@asht.org](mailto:info@asht.org).



**E**xperiencing moments of greatness gives life meaning and excitement. Sometimes these moments occur when a complicated patient responds favorably to a treatment technique; sometimes they occur when we achieve an impossible dream. As hand therapists, we have the opportunity to experience simple moments of greatness as part of our



professional careers. For one therapist, Mojca "Mo" Herman, moments of greatness have occurred throughout her life, both in her career as an accomplished hand therapist and as well as an Olympic swimmer.

Mo began swimming at the tender age of two, growing up in a small town of Concord, Ontario, located north of Toronto. At 9 years old, she began swimming competitively. Mo demonstrated a natural talent for the sport which blossomed into eventually becoming a member of the Canadian Swim Team. From 1986 until 1992, Mo represented Canada in the 1988 Olympic Games, 1990 Commonwealth Games, and Pan Pacific Championships in 1987, 1989, and 1991. She also participated in the World Cup Circuit from 1988 to 1989, World University Games in 1991, and the Italy International Swimming Cup in 1990. By the time Mo had officially "retired" from her swimming career, she had achieved an impressive amount of awards: 29 national medals (16 gold, 7 silver, and 6 bronze) and 24 international medals (6 gold, 10 silver, and 8 bronze).

Not only is Mo an outstanding swimmer, but she is also an accomplished hand therapist. Mo moved from Canada to southern California to attend college,

where she obtained a full swimming scholarship to University of Southern California (USC). She received a Bachelor of Science degree in Occupational Therapy from USC in 1994, and later a Master of Arts in 1996. In 2001, she became a Certified Hand Therapist. In addition to owning her own private hand therapy practice since 2003, Mo is very involved in the many hand therapy-related activities. She serves as an item writer for the Hand Therapy Certification Commission, as well as a surveyor for the National Board of Accreditation for Orthotic Suppliers. Mo is also a part-time lecturer at the USC Graduate Occupational Therapy Program where she teaches neurology. Recently she has co-authored several chapters on hand therapy topics appearing in *Upper Extremity Nerve Repair – Tips and Techniques: A Master Skills Publication and Distal Radius Fractures and Carpal Injury: The Cutting Edge*, scheduled to be published in September of this year. She also co-authored a chapter in *Principles and Practice of Wrist Surgery*, scheduled for publication in July of 2009. In addition, Mo also presents continuing education courses on distal radius fracture management across the country.

Busy in both her professional life and personal life, Mo is a wife as well as a mother of three young boys. In her "spare time," she also runs her own swim business called "SWIM WITH MO" which involves working with young children to refine their technique with the four swimming strokes which also prepares them to become junior lifeguards. In September of this year, Mo will be inducted into the Canadian Swimming Hall of Fame in Ontario. She has been a great asset to the Canadian Swim team, as well as to the hand therapy profession. When asked how she balances her career and home life, she responds "It is crazy but I wouldn't want it any other way!" ■