

Sharon Prefontaine

CHSSA HALL OF FAME 2000



As a freshman at Sunnyvale High School in 1961, Sharon competed in speech for the first time. She has little doubt that she was traumatized by the experience of that first tournament. She was a freshman who had never read a newspaper or news magazine, who never watched the “news” on television, who became bored and distracted when the discussion centered on current events, but her first speech coach, the optimistic Natalie Weber (CHSSA Hall of Famer), thought she should try extemp. She tried. She failed. And then she remembers trying speech again.

In spite of that initial trauma with extemp, Sharon grew to love speech. She would qualify for state in oratorical interp, original oratory, and dramatic interp and never try extemp again. Yet she tells us, “It is a constant source of amusement to me that extemp is my favorite event to coach and that I’ve coached students who achieved notable success in both national and foreign extemp.”

Sharon writes, “Because of speech I had more fun in high school, more success in college, and more satisfaction in my teaching career.”

She majored in communication studies at what was then known as San Jose State and was hired as a teacher and forensic coach at her alma mater. She coached at Sunnyvale from 1970 to 1981 with a national qualifier in congress and extemp, but no champions. In 1981 the school closed but she is quick to tell us, “It had nothing to do with me.” She then transferred to Monta Vista High School. As a result of her speech-related knowledge and experience, Sharon was appointed by Delaine Eastin, former Superintendent of Public Instruction, to take part in the creation of curriculum materials for the state standards. In 1997, Monta Vista won the model speech program award from Western States Communication Association. Sharon also taught speech at West Valley Community College and Cal State, San Jose. She continues to coach a large and growing team at Monta Vista.

Sharon feels her “proudest moment” came in 1987 when Monta Vista was third in sweepstakes at State, behind College Prep and Bellarmine, making Monta Vista the number one public school that year.

At various times she served as a league officer for the Coast Forensic League. She became a CHSSA council member and eventually the VP curriculum for four years. As CHSSA celebrates its 50th anniversary she holds the office of CHSSA president!

Sharon concludes by telling us “I suppose that because my first experience in speech didn’t kill me, it made me stronger. Having to give any oral presentation can do that: Competing in speech will assure that.”

