Illinois Wesleyan University
Digital Commons @ IWU

News and Events | University Communications

2011

Spinning Her Way to Success

Courtney Keenan '12
Illinois Wesleyan University

Recommended Citation
Keenan '12, Courtney, "Spinning Her Way to Success" (2011). *News and Events.* Paper 1625.
http://digitalcommons.iwu.edu/news/1625

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the University Communications at Digital Commons @ IWU. It has been accepted for inclusion in News and Events by an authorized administrator of Digital Commons @ IWU. For more information, please contact sdaviska@iwu.edu.
©Copyright is owned by the author of this document.

Spinning Her Way to Success

Oct. 10, 2011

BLOOMINGTON, Ill. – On October 12, Judith Schulz ’71 and 20,000 others across the world will throw their spinning tops, creating the characteristic gravity-defying rotation in honor of International Top Spinning Day.

Judith Schulz, featured top spinning performer at "Tocati," the International Festival of Ancient & Historic Games, Verona Italy, standing in a 15th Century basilica where she was a guest presenter.

International Top Spinning Day is held in celebration of the toy that has endured centuries. While some may have forgotten about these seeming antiques, participants in the upcoming festivities will range from as far as South Africa, France, Switzerland and Romania, reminding Schulz that, “the earth is just like a large spinning top, rotating around a single axis.”

In celebration of the rich history of the top and to educate people on the science behind these toys, Schulz created in 1987 The Spinning Top Museum, which she opened in Burlington, Wis. Over the past 24 years, the museum has evolved into an exhibition with over 2,000 items, hands-on games, experiments and tours. Schulz says that when she arrived at Illinois Wesleyan as an art education major, she never would have guessed how her four years at the University would influence her to one day open such a place with the most extensive collection of spinning tops in the world.

Schulz started her personal top collection by chance when she decided to purchase three from a dime store she frequented as a child. An art teacher in Racine County, Wis., she brought them to school to show her students, who then began to bring her more of the toys to add to her collection. That May, she decided to display her tops at her not-for-profit Teacher Place and Parent Resource Center for the Chocolate Festival in Burlington. The Top Museum became a ‘spin-off’ of the center, as visitors flocked to see the tops and requested that the exhibit remain open just a little longer. The two-day festival became more than two decades, over 7,000 tops, and features on *Ripley’s Believe It or Not* and in the MGM film, *My Summer Story*.

A selection of Judith Schulz's collection of over 6,000 tops.

Spinning tops have been in existence for such a long time, that no one is quite sure exactly where and when they originated. However, tops are referenced in *The Iliad and Aeneid*, dating the use of the cone-shaped toys back to at least 800 BC. They come in all sizes and colors, ranging from customary toys one thinks of to tops weighing 15 pounds. The toy has also evolved into several different types, such as 'twirlers,' which are spun by twisting the center stem, and 'throwing tops,' which are thrown while holding a cord attached to the body of the top.

Schulz credits Illinois Wesleyan for her drive to find new and more inviting ways to learn and inspired her to open such a museum. "It was the willingness of professors to aid in my pursuit to move beyond the classroom and take learning to a 'real life' setting that inspired me," said Schulz. One of her art professors created an on-campus job for her, teaching art studio sessions for education students. Schulz seized the opportunity, experimenting with creative ways to look at teaching and learning. "I never wanted to be confined to the classroom, so I took my art students to fly their hand-made kites on the quad or to build sculptures in the snow," she said. With the support of her professors, Schulz also started a program on campus called Free University. She held sessions at the DugOut in which any student or professor could teach a lesson on something they were passionate about.

To Schulz, learning is about the approach; eventually people all take in the same information, so the process should be unique and enjoyable. She believes that IWU is unique because of organizations like Free University, in which students were able to congregate, not because they were required to, but because they had a desire to learn and grow from each other. Carrying on this ideology, her museum offers educational programs that explain the physics behind spinning tops, and offer hands-on experiments for visitors.

Exemplified through The Top Museum, her philosophy on education is similar to that of cooking an egg: "Everyone learns in their own way; I may prefer my eggs scrambled and you, fried, but either way you're still getting the egg."

For more information about The Top Museum and International Top Spinning Day, visit **www.topmuseum.org**.

*Contact: Courtney Keenan, '12, (309) 556-3181, **univcomm@iwu.edu***