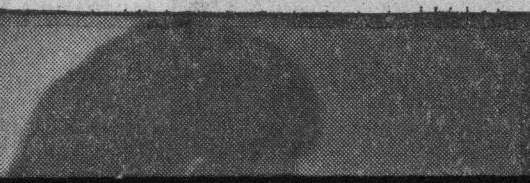
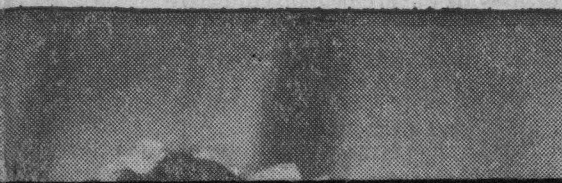
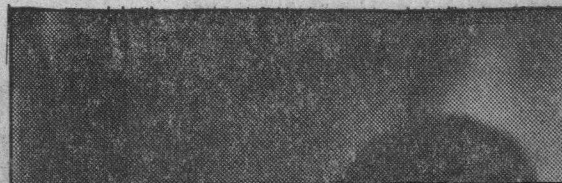
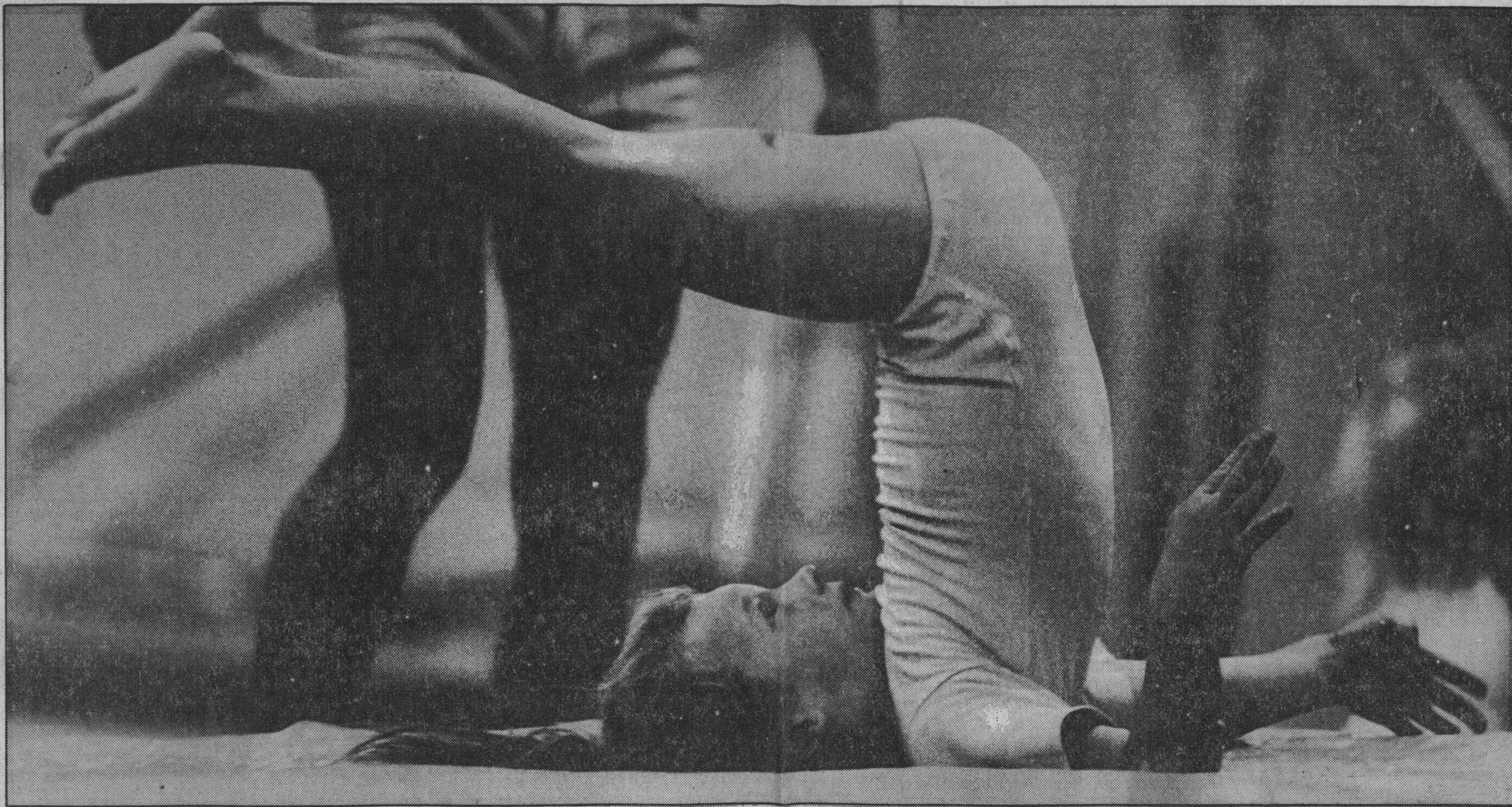
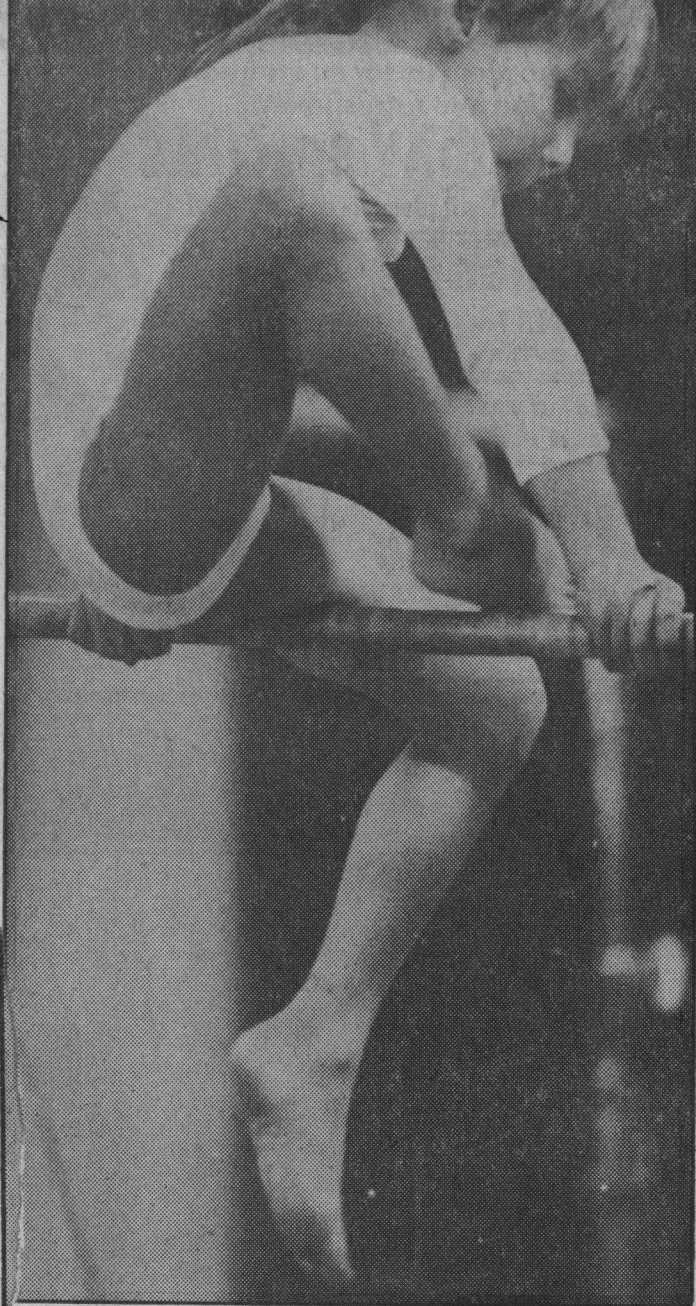


## They're growing up with gymnastics







**G**ET SSEEETTTT — GO!" At this command from their gymnastics coach, a dozen lithe little bodies flip over into handstands like so many springy rubber dolls.

Kids learn young — as young as three years old — how their bodies can stretch when they attend classes at Santa Cruz Gymnastics Club.

There is a no-nonsense air about the vast gym off Soquel Avenue. The floor is of ethafoam over steel springs, there are huge American and State of California flags gracing one wall and over all there wafts the old and familiar sweaty gymnasium smell.

Watching the small gymnasts, it appears they are as at home on their hands as on their feet.

Doug Tozier, who, with Tom Haller, has owned and operated the club since 1973, points out that fear is probably 99 percent of what stops people from doing gymnastics.

"You have to deal with fear right away," Doug says. "The biggest thing about all this is getting

somebody to be successful in gymnastics with good training from the beginning, with good coaching, bringing them along, making it fun and enjoyable.

"After four or five years, kids begin to develop real skills."

There are classes for all ages, including teenagers and adults. In fact, during the interview, a new mother, clad in leotards, took a break from her exercises and came in the office to nurse her baby.

Doug and Tom have developed championship gymnasts, but insist that is only a small part of their emphasis.

"We have teams that compete within Northern California and more advanced teams that compete on the national level," Doug says, "but winning competitions is the glory part of it.

"There's a lot more to it than that."

The club's Class 1 team won the state championship two years ago, Dachele Newton of Santa

Cruz, one of their students, is Western national champion on bars and Kala Loughrey, another student, won the balance beam competition at the same national meet.

Their three-fold program of pre-school, instructional and competition, provides a place for anyone interested in the sport.

The two coaches have a lot of years of experience behind them. Doug, a former elementary school teacher, competed in gymnastics in high school. Tom was a collegiate gymnast at Indiana State University, where he was named an All-American Gymnast.

Meanwhile, out on the floor, those little gymnasts are going through their paces, all arms and legs and looking somewhat like baby giraffes or baby deer.

Starting so young, they won't have to fight the fear of flipping over backward or balancing on the beam.

BARBARA BURKLO

Photos by Bill Lovejoy