



# unapologetically *Shawn*

## A Revealing Conversation with the Olympic Gold Medalist

**By: Lacey Johnson, Executive Beauty Editor**

She's an Olympic Gold Medalist, an eating disorder survivor, a fitness enthusiast and a YouTube all-star. She stole millions of American hearts with her sassy freestyle on "Dancing With the Stars" — not once, but twice. Standing at 4'11", Shawn Johnson East is proof that powerhouses often come in tiny blonde packages.

Compassionate, fiery and resilient, the 26 year-old is equal parts an independent dream warrior and a doting wife to NFL player Andrew East. In the revealing interview ahead, she dishes her heartfelt perspectives on valuable life lessons learned from gymnastics, the art of self-discipline, the most frustrating misconceptions about marriage and the importance of living in a spirit of bravery.

### On Life Lessons From Her Beloved Sport

**LJ:** You were once quoted as saying the Olympics taught you invaluable life lessons you will carry with you always — including the importance of discipline and responsibility. In what specific and surprising ways (beyond the obvious) did the Olympics help to mold you into a woman of strong character and tenacious ambition?

**SJE:** Gymnastics is a very humbling sport. You literally have to fall on your face hundreds of times before you ever have a chance of succeeding. It's just a reality you learn early on. Now, combine that with the pressure of being on the world's largest stage, with the world's toughest critics, and that is an equation for the greatest life lesson of all.

Just like at the Olympics, people in life will always judge you, critique you, try to tell you that you aren't capable, or tell you you're second-best [to someone else]. They will tell you not to go for your dreams or they will try to persuade you that it's impossible, but I can tell you from experience that they are all wrong. The greatest life lesson I ever learned was to tune out the world, live out my passion and respect everyone else's passions around me.

### On Staying Strong in the Face of Injustice & Scandal

**LJ:** I applaud the vulnerability demonstrated in your recent YouTube video response to the reports about Larry Nassar. Now that you have had some more time to digest it further, how have your emotions about it evolved? Do you feel led to take action?

**SJE:** I haven't commented on this publicly, outside of my video, so I want to keep this brief. Choosing the right words on this topic is very hard but, with that, I will say that these past couple of months have been trying for everyone involved in the sport. To see the one thing that has given you such joy your whole life be torn down is an emotional thing to go through. It makes you question everything about your childhood. To see some of your closest friends be emotionally stripped in front of the world fills you with enough anger to last a lifetime. Do I feel led to take action? Absolutely.

I still feel gymnastics is the greatest sport in the world but, before the world will trust our sport enough to encourage children to be part of it again, we have to change so much. I think this movement has been led by some of the strongest voices our sport and our world has ever seen, and will have an everlasting impact. But I also think this is only the beginning and we all need to pray for every single soul affected.

### On Her "Dancing With the Stars" Days

**LJ:** You're an Olympic athlete, so I'm curious about your perspective on what most would consider to be a physically challenging job — learning those routines, rehearsing, performing, etc. What were the challenges, highlights and takeaways of your "Dancing With the Stars" experience?

**SJE:** DWTS was truly one of the hardest things I have ever done! Was it harder than the Olympics? Probably not, [laughter] but still. The humility involved with dressing up in a skimpy (but stunning) outfit and doing a salsa on national television [was] daunting, however it was the greatest experience ever and taught me so much about myself. I showed myself that no matter how terrified I am of something, if I just go for it and put myself out there, there is nothing to lose.

**LJ:** Which performance is dearest to your heart?

**SJE:** Definitely the Titanic dance with Derek Hough. I am not good at acting and taking on a character so that one really challenged me. But seeing how proud Derek was when we finished that dance — that made it all worth it.

### On Love, Marriage & the Sweet Comforts of Life at Home in Nashville

**LJ:** What makes you feel most beautiful?

**SJE:** My husband makes me feel beautiful. I could be looking like a disastrous mess with no makeup on, sick in bed with the flu and wearing sweats, and he would still tell me I'm beautiful to him. There is no greater feeling.

**LJ:** What is the most valuable lesson marriage has taught you about yourself?

**SJE:** That perfection is impossible and you have to fight through the mistakes and imperfections life throws at you to make your marriage last! Marriage isn't easy and I feel like the world paints this fairytale expectation that if it's not perfect 100 percent of the time, then it's not the right relationship or that person isn't "the one." I believe that is completely wrong. Marriage has taught me to fight for what I love and not let anything or anyone stand in my way.

**LJ:** You clearly love to travel, but you also loving being home. Do you have a favorite room or corner of your house — like a special place where you relax and recharge?

**SJE:** Oh, by far my back porch. I absolutely love being outside. So, sitting on my back porch with a cup of coffee and my dog is the most relaxing and perfect place I could be.

**LJ:** When you return home after a day, week or entire season of intense work, what are the most indulgent ways you treat yourself? Any guilty pleasures you care to share?

**SJE:** After a hard day, I grab a glass of wine, throw on some very unattractive sweats, and turn on a Netflix marathon. If it's been a long season of work, it's probably still the same answer!

## On Being Phenomenally & Unapologetically Shawn

**LJ:** I commend you for opening up about your fertility struggles and miscarriage. Why do you feel these types of uncomfortable subject matters are important for people of influence to speak candidly about?

**SJE:** For me, it wasn't just about sharing our story for others to hear and relate to but I also needed help healing and didn't know where to find it. When I am candid about struggles of any kind and share them with the world, [I have hopes] that someone can help guide me through the pain and I can do the same for them. Influencers have an incredibly powerful platform to connect to millions of people and, when they can connect people who are looking for support or a community of people to love them, that's the reason I share what I do.

**LJ:** You shared openly about your battle with an eating disorder. What do you wish the rest of the world understood about those who struggle with such defeating and painful types of behaviors?

**SJE:** I wish the world understood that it's not just something you/we can "fix." There is something so humbling about behaviors like these because they consume who you are as a person. Trying to explain (to someone who is unaffected) that you can't just turn it off is a polarizing and defeating task. It took a lot of time and healing for me to finally get to a place where I felt like I was in control again, and I pray for everyone out there that is currently fighting for the same freedom.

**LJ:** You make so many of us fall in love with you just by being unapologetically yourself. Who inspires you and what about them do you find to be most beautiful?

**SJE:** [Laughing] Well, first off, thank you! I always say I got so tired of living in the world of sports where I was told every single day what I had to wear, what I could say, how I was supposed to act. People always chose to edit me however they wanted. Now, I get to do all of that and show the world how weird and "unapologetically me" I actually am.

As for people who inspire me, where do I start? For me, it's more of the people closest to me that inspire me. My parents are my biggest role models. They've been through their fair share of ups and downs but, through it all, love each other and believe in each other more than anyone else in the world. But [in general] I find confidence in others to be the most beautiful. There is a certain glow that comes with confidence, and no one can ever take that away.

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## Still I Rise // By Maya Angelou

You may write me down in history	You may cut me with your eyes,
With your bitter, twisted lies,	You may kill me with your hatefulness,
You may tread me in the very dirt	But still, like air, I'll rise.
But still, like dust, I'll rise.	Does my sexiness upset you?
Does my sassiness upset you?	Does it come as a surprise
Why are you beset with gloom?	That I dance like I've got diamonds
'Cause I walk like I've got oil wells	At the meeting of my thighs?
Pumping in my living room.	Out of the huts of history's shame
Just like moons and like suns,	I rise
With the certainty of tides,	Up from a past that's rooted in pain
Just like hopes springing high,	I rise
Still I'll rise.	I'm a black ocean, leaping and wide,
Did you want to see me broken?	Welling and swelling I bear in the tide.
Bowed head and lowered eyes?	Leaving behind nights of terror and fear
Shoulders falling down like	I rise
teardrops,	Into a daybreak that's wondrously clear
Weakened by my soulful cries?	I rise
Does my haughtiness offend you?	Bringing the gifts that my ancestors gave,
Don't you take it awful hard	I am the dream and the hope of the
'Cause I laugh like I've got gold	slave.
mines	I rise
Diggin' in my own backyard.	I rise
You may shoot me with your words,	I rise.

