

An Olympian's Oral History

VICKI DRAVES

1948 Olympic Games – London

- Springboard Diving -

Gold Medal

- Platform Diving -

Gold Medal



Interviewed by:
Dr. Margaret Costa

Edited by:
Carmen E. Rivera



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VICKI DRAVES

Today is Tuesday, April 19th, 1991. This is Dr. Margaret Costa interviewing Mrs. Vicki Draves, Olympian in diving in the 1948 Summer Olympic Games.

Q: Tell me about your childhood, Vicki.

A: I was born on December 31, 1924, in San Francisco, California. I lived in San Francisco until Lyle and I were married in 1946. My mother came over to the United States from England, she was English, and my father came to the United State from the Philippines, he was Filipino. Of course, intermarriage was frowned upon in those days. It really was not an easy situation for the family. I had two sisters. One is a nonidentical twin sister who lives in Plantation, Florida. My older sister, Frances, who we call Frankie, lived in Columbus, Ohio, until she died of cancer. Little Sonny, who was born before my twin sister and I, died when he was just a year old. Growing up we had no exposure to relatives per se. We did not really have grandparents, aunts and uncles. We had a small family unit. I always loved anything to do with acrobatics. I wanted to be a ballet dancer. We were just a very poor family, and there was no opportunity to extend on those desires.

Q: Tell me about the physical activities at Franklin Grammar School.

A: I don't think they had any programmed physical activities.

Q: Did you use your arms for hanging so you developed strength in the upper body?

A: I would just kind of play around with handstands and cartwheels. I didn't learn to swim until I was nine or 10. I was really kind of afraid of the water. We learned to swim going to what they called the nickel baths in the Mission District.

Q: Tell me about the nickel baths.

A: You paid five cents admission and we would go there each summer. We would go there first thing in the morning, and then the Red Cross gave some lessons, and we would participate in that.

Q: Did you practice diving, at that time, off the side?

A: I tried some dives off the diving board and off the side. I had a close girlfriend, Diana Radovich, who thought I was very brave. I would try straight dives and a back dive. I did not really know what I was doing. I did not know anything about diving programs or diving competitions, or the Olympics. I did not start diving until I was 16, anyway.

Q: Would you take your lunch to the pool park?

A: We would pack our lunch and eat it during the break. On the way home we would pass by a bread factory. The smell of that fresh baking bread used to just kill you. We would get so hungry that we would speed up the trip home.

Q: Did your parents encourage you?

A: If we were doing anything, they would encourage us. Neither my father nor my mother swim. I think my mother was close to her early '30s when she came over to America. She followed her younger sister who had already married into the Filipino race. My parents came from meager backgrounds and did not talk about it much.

Q: Were you always with your twin sister?

A: We were together most of the time.

Q: What junior high experiences did you have?

A: I wasn't what you call a real terrific student. School scared me and I was very shy. I think I probably had an inferiority complex and so it was hard for me to get up in front of a class to talk.

Q: Was your twin the same way?

A: No, I skipped a half a grade in grammar school and so we weren't together in our classes.

Q: What sports were you introduced to in junior high?

A: I loved badminton and played basketball. I was a cheerleader when I was in junior high school. I played in intramural competition. In physical education they used to have exercises and posture contests.

Q: Was there swimming in junior high?

A: There was no swimming in high school either. In high school I took a modern dance class after school. I continued with badminton and we had softball games before school.

Q: Being partly Filipino, did the other children tease you?

A: No, not that I remember. In San Francisco, in the schools that I attended, there were many different races. It was a melting pot.

Q: If there was no swimming in high school, where did you learn to swim and dive?

A: Our summer vacations were spent out at Flieshacker Pool. It was a very famous pool. It was one of the largest pools in the world. Being by the ocean, and it was filled with salt water; shaped in a rectangle, followed by a bowl, and another rectangle. It was 1,000 feet long. The shallow area was at one end. At the deep section there was a low board, a high board, and a platform. They had a grass area where you could bring your lunch and picnic. The zoo was not far away and you could walk out to the ocean to swim, as well. They had what they called the Far Western Championships for swimming and diving at Flieshacker Pool. The pool drew a lot of good swimmers. My older sister started swimming before I did, and she tried competitive swimming and one of her trials was there at the Far Western Championships.

Q: Who trained her?

A: Eddie Ukini, one of the Hawaiian lifeguards. We actually met a group of divers and swimmers who used to practice there. They were with other clubs and would practice there in the summer time. Mr. Ukini, the lifeguard, would help them and he would help my sister. My sister started learning to dive and was associated with the Fairmont Hotel Swimming and Diving Club in San Francisco. I used to love to watch her dive and I would ask her to dive for me when she was out there. When they had some sort of a run in with the coach, Phil Patterson, the divers went over to the Olympic Club in San Francisco, which was, at that time, strictly a men's club. I met one of the young divers, Jack Lavery and had a crush on him. In those days, adagio dancing, where they lift the girl up and swan dives and swing her around, was very popular. I guess it was like Muscle Beach. Weightlifters and bodybuilders would be out there picnicking and getting together. They would do a lot of their own tricks. I found it fascinating. The young man I had a crush on suggested that I might be a good diver after I tried one of the tricks. He even said, "Would you like to learn how to dive?" I had stars in my eyes. He started to teach me some of the basics in diving. He said that he would take me to the Fairmont Hotel to introduce me to Phil Patterson, the coach over there.

Q: What was the first dive you learned?

A: Because of my racial background, he could not bring me as a member of the Fairmont Hotel Swimming and Diving Club. Instead, he set up a special club called the Patterson School of Swimming and Diving, and that's who I represented.

Q: How did you feel about that?

A: I didn't feel great about it because there was this distinction again. I thought that if that was the only way I could start, I would have to accept it. He even asked my mother if I could use her maiden name instead of my Filipino name, which was Manalo.

Q: What was your mother's maiden name?

A: Taylor. She said yes. Which surprised me. I don't know how my dad ever felt because he never said anything.

Q: Did you dive with your mother's maiden name?

A: I started to dive. I remember the first time I was interviewed for anything, they asked my name and I replied, "Victoria Manalo." I received a chewing out from Phil Patterson. The kids on the team were really good to me. They did not care what my race was, and they were just really, really nice to me.

Q: Tell me about learning your first dive.

A: I guess I really learned my first dive when Jack Lavery started to help me. I learned my list of dives under Phil Patterson when during workout one evening he told me to follow another diver. That is really how I learned to dive.

Q: Was there anyone in that group who you wanted to emulate?

A: Oh yes, the champion was Helen Crlenkovich at that time. She was the reigning national champion. In fact, she and Marge Gestring, who was the '36 Olympic springboard champion, were rivals at that time. We had Leota Woodmansee, another little gal from Oklahoma, who had made the trip out to dive under Phil's tutelage. My friend Patsy Kelly was also one of the divers. I first learned the swan dive or the jackknife, and then the back dive. Later I learned the half-gainer, which is a reverse dive layout. We also knew them as the swan dive, back dive, half-gainer, cut away jackknife, which is called an inward dive pike now, and a half twist, forward dive with a half twist.

Q: When did you know that you could perform well?

A: I don't think that I even knew that I was good. I just knew that I picked it up very quickly. Phil did not have a lot of time to spend with all the divers. Most of his concentration was with Helen because she was the gal who was going to win the championship.

Q: How often would you practice?

A: I was finishing high school when I first started. I went to San Francisco Junior College for less than a semester and then I went to work. I practiced after school or on weekends. It was a nice association with the other divers.

Q: Did you continue with the same trainer?

A: When the war came along the club was disbanded because Mr. Patterson went into the service. There was about a year, when I did not do any diving because the Fairmont Hotel swimming pool was closed. Another coach, Van Hooten, took over the Fairmont, after Patterson, in the tail end of the war years, '44 into '45. After being kind of dormant there for about a year, I saw a picture of one of the girls that was attending Berkeley, Joanne Crinkle, in the paper. I decided that I wanted to start diving again. I checked at what used to be the Crystal Plunge in San Francisco. The coach was Charlie Sava, a very famous swimming coach, and he had the champion Ann Curtis. Do you know where she is now, by the way? He had the national teams then, national championship teams there for several years, Ann Curtis and Brenda Helser. He has some fine swimming champions. He was not a diving coach. I went over to him and talked to him and told him I really wanted to start diving again. He said he would love to have me and that he would check into getting some help. Jimmy Hughes was not coaching anyone else but he had produced some good divers.

Q: Did he give you any instruction?

A: He changed my approach. He did as much as he could for me, but he couldn't keep it up. I think he coached me for a year, and I went to my first national championship while I was there. There were your local meets such as the SPAA, Southern Pacific Association meets. There were two divisions: senior and a junior division. You could dive in junior until you won a gold medal and then you had to move up to senior. At that time, California was divided into four associations - the AAU, Pacific Association, Central Association, and the Southwest Association, which was San Diego.

Q: What did it feel like up on the board at your first meet?

A: I was really, very, very nervous and tried not to let all these other outside thoughts bother me.

Q: Would you realize when you entered the water that it was a good dive?

A: You actually know when you are taking off from the board whether it is going to be a good dive or not. When it is a good dive, just feel it go in the way you know it should, and you are really happy underwater.

Q: When you started competitive diving, were you almost immediately successful?

A: I was up in the first three places. If a diver keeps practicing, improvement will follow. I had this vision of being able to dive like Helen.

Q: Would you watch her?

A: I would watch her practice. She was such a lovely champion, so pretty, so graceful. I really, really admired her.

Q: How old were you when you went to your first national championship?

A: I was 19. In those days, there were not as many divers and anyone could compete at the national level. If there were 30 divers, the competition would be divided into flights. Each diver would perform her list of dives and then the divers with highest scores would compete in the finals. There were usually 12 divers in the finals.

Q: When you went to the nationals, did you represent Crystal Plunge?

A: Yes. I represented Crystal Plunge at the first nationals, which were at Shakamack State Park in Indiana. It was a beautiful facility. It was a man-made lake, and they set up a 50-meter course and a high platform for diving. It was ideal.

Q: What was your mode of transport?

A: We traveled by train for three days and it was a lot of fun. All of Charlie's swimmers and I went. There were probably between 10 and 14 of us, and it was fun.

Q: Who paid your way to the national competitions?

A: In those days, clubs sponsored the divers. I was not charged membership fees for the clubs I represented. For my first national, the club paid part of my expenses, and one of the families, who had swimmers in the program at Crystal Plunge, also donated money and helped me get there.

Q: Were you excited?

A: I had never traveled before. The only places I had traveled were in San Francisco where you go by streetcar or you could walk.

Q: Tell me about the competition site.

A: I thought it was beautiful. It was a lake with the swimming course roped off. A wooden platform, which was like a bulkhead, was set on long stakes or pipes planted in the bottom of the lake and bolted to planks at the turning end of the swimming area. Cocoa matting was placed on the planks to prevent swimmers and divers from slipping. On the other end of the swimming area was a regular platform. The entire lake was deep.

Q: Who traveled with the team?

A: There was the coach, Charlie Sava, who went with the team. The mother of Ann Curtis, who was a well known swim champion, as well as some other parents, traveled with the team. Helen Rose, who was the one to beat, also had her coach, Buddy Carson. Madeleine Carson also took me under her wing. One of the first things she said to me was, “Vicki, stand up and hold your head up.” I was more or less by myself, even though I was with the swimmers. The swimmers worked out at different times and were somewhat separated from me. I came in third behind Helen Rose and Zoe Ann Olsen on the 3-meter board. I did not start platform competition until Lyle became my coach.

Q: How did you become acquainted with Lyle?

A: Lyle had brought Zoe Ann Olsen out from Iowa to the Athens Athletic Club to train with him in the fall of ‘43. Her parents would bring her back and forth from Iowa. She would come out and train for big meets. Jimmy Hughes was my coach for the next national, which were held at the Athens Athletic Club in Oakland. That is where I first saw Lyle. He was coaching Zoe Ann, who was an extremely good contender. She could look like a dish rag in practice and then, when the competition came around, she would perform beautifully. Competition was her forte. When I had to really fight to keep myself going for the competition, because I would get so nervous. Mine seemed to work the wrong way. After the indoors in Oakland, in ‘44, Jimmy Hughes had to renege. It was after the indoors in ‘44 that Jimmy had to renege on the coaching. I talked to Charlie Sava, who suggested that I approach Lyle Draves, who was over at the Athens Athletic Club, in Oakland, about coaching. It was the fall of ‘44. I was not sure that he would be interested in coaching me, as he had this protégé Zoe Ann Olsen. Charlie encouraged me to talk to him anyway.

Q: Do you remember how your meeting came about?

A: Charlie called Lyle and told him that I wanted to continue my diving, and was wondering if it would be possible for me to dive with him at the Athens Athletic Club. He had to consult with the athletic committee because taking me would increase their financial responsibility. Lyle explained his method of coaching. I was absolutely amazed because he had a reason for doing everything. I went home with stars in my eyes, thinking about what was ahead of me and how I was really going to learn how to dive. I was excited about learning the proper mechanics, which are so essential. To this day I wish I had such training from the beginning of my diving career. I would have been a much more confident diver. Before this time, my diving relied on my talent and coordination more than knowledge of technique. I was always glad that my head was first into the water.

Q: Do you remember your first lesson from Lyle?

A: I had to learn how to walk on the board first. Lyle was very precise on the fundamentals of board work. I also had to learn what to do with my arms. We finally decided that he would teach me as if

I had never dived before. I went through the first workout doing nothing but board-work and -jumps in the water, straight dives in the water, bouncing the board, walking on the board and practicing the approaches. It was hard, especially after having performed all of the dives in national competition. Here I am being treated like a novice.

Q: What did you realize in that first lesson? Anything new?

A: I realized how much I didn't know and why I was doing what I was doing. I was amazed to learn about the arm movements, walking on the board, bringing up your knee for hurdles and back dives.

Q: Do you remember going home that first day after that first lesson?

A: It was like buying a new hat or buying a new dress. I just kind of sailed home. I had to take the train over from San Francisco, across the Bay Bridge.

Q: Did you compete that fall?

A: No. Lyle did not feel that I was ready. He had a goal in mind as to when I would be ready to handle his new coaching. As a result, he didn't let me compete that fall. I was not aware that he had entered me in some competitions, but I was not able to dive because of racial prejudice. My first real meet after Lyle became my coach was the internationals in '45, held in the Medina Athletic Club on Michigan Avenue, Chicago. Then it changed to the Tower's Club and the pool was up on the 19th or the 23rd floor and we all stayed there. I came in second on the 1- and 3-meter boards to Zoe Ann.

Q: Was Sammy Lee diving at the same time?

A: I was working at the port surgeon's office, and Sammy also worked there. Although he usually competed and trained at the Olympic Club, he occasionally worked out at the Fairmont Hotel. He always encouraged me. We had a lot of fun in those days. After working out, we would go home, have dinner, and then meet again at Sutrobaz at night.

Q: What was Sutrobaz?

A: They were big indoor pools in San Francisco, out by the marina, between the bridge and Flieshacker Park. All of those pools have been torn down. We would have so much fun just swimming and playing in the water. Sutrobaz had many little pools. They had one big pool and then they had all these little pools that were different temperatures. There was an ice cold pool, and a hot pool, and one that had sulfur. I think we'd just have so much fun in the bigger pool, which was pretty shallow enough to stand up in.

Q: After the Chicago meet, the first one under Lyle's tutelage, how did you progress?

A: Lyle: I had entered her in the Fairmont Hotel meet and she didn't dive. The athletic committee told me that I could enter Olsen and Gloria, but not Vicki. They would not give me a reason. I entered her, but she didn't dive anyway. I told her that it should be my prerogative because we had the nationals coming up and it would be a good meet to warm up in. They nailed me anyway. I was asked why I had entered Manalo (Vicki) in the swim meet? I told them I was exercising my prerogative. When the

athletic committee told me that they would tell me who to enter, I quit.

Lyle : I was working for a Navy contractor, the Alameda Air Base, at the time. I then was transferred back to Los Alameda. However, Vicki was left without a coach and the outdoor nationals were going to be in Los Santos that summer. Vicki asked me if I would coach her if she joined me in Los Angeles. I was working swing shift for the Navy as an electrician and I agreed. She took a leave from her job and came down to Los Angeles. We obtained a room for her near where my mother lived, and I worked with her every morning before I went to work the swing shift. We were getting her ready for the outdoor nationals, which were to be at the Coliseum pool.

A: Vicki: I started to learn platform diving. I picked it up quite nicely, even though it scared me to death. I remember the first time I was trying to get one dive off the lower platform, which is 16 feet. I think I stood up there for about a half of an hour before I got off. I liked platform diving, and it was really an asset to my springboard diving. I think it strengthens you. In platform diving, you really have the feeling of going through the air, like you're flying, especially if you do a dive like a swan dive. You hit the platform and set your dive, and you're out there for what seems like a long time. It's scary, and you hit the water with a great deal more force, of course, then you do when you are going off the springboard.

Q: Who else was training at Exposition Park?

A: It was preparation for a national championship, so all the local divers were there from the Los Angeles Athletic Club, Pasadena Athletic Club practicing. Sammy had taken a leave of absence, and I think he was training for the outdoor nationals that year in which, I think, he won on platform and on this. He went to Kilgore, Texas. The men and women had their meets in separate places.

Q: What was the result of the competition?

A: That was the year that Helen Crlenkovich made a comeback and she beat me by nine hundredths of a point on the platform. Zoe Ann and Helen beat me on the springboard. Then my father died and I went back to San Francisco. It was not long before Lyle and I started to make plans to get married. I moved back down and went to work for Canada Dry. We were married in July of 1946 and almost immediately took off for Indiana and the nationals. I came in second on the springboard to Zoe Ann and won the junior national platform one day and the senior national platform the next.

Q: Was it tough having Lyle coaching you after you married him?

A: It really wasn't because we had a goal in mind, and I guess your diving came first. I respected his teaching so much and I wanted to be a top diver, which I knew I could if I stayed with Lyle. I was opening with difficult dives such as forward 2 1/2 pikes and twisting 1 1/2s, back 1 1/2s, which were considered impossible to win with. After we were married, we moved to Pasadena and trained at the Pasadena Athletic Club for the rest of '46, '47. The Olympic Games were coming up in '48, and the Los Angeles Athletic Club wanted us to dive for them, as Pasadena Athletic Club were short on financial resources.

Q: Where were the Olympic trials held?

A: In 1948 they were held in Detroit, Michigan. The trials were exciting. There was a separate diving

pool. It was a nice set up because they put the 3-meter event on four different springboards. It was a good facility. The run on the platform was much longer than we had been used to. Lyle changed my run on the platform for my forward running dives. It was different and a little nerve racking. It was something new that I had to learn just before competition time.

Q: What was the result of the competition?

A: I won the platform and came in second on springboard. Patty Elsener was third and Zoe Ann Olsen was first on the 3-meter board. I was second and Patty Elsener was third. Because I had made the team, we had to get ready to go to the Games. The diving coach was the manager Elsie Vedes Jennings. She chewed Lyle out for helping the women with their diving. We went to London on the S.S. America, the women traveling first class.

Q: Lyle, give me your background.

A: I came out of the Iowa farm country. My father would buy a farm, live on it for two or three years, bring it up to par, and then share crop it out. He would then buy another and do the same thing. He retired in 1927. In the mean time, my brothers and I grew up around creeks and rivers. I learned to swim when I was seven. In 1927, when my father retired, I moved to a little town called Iowa Falls where a dam had been built on the Iowa River. We had a swimming beach on the Iowa River, which had a diving board and ropes to swing on. A young fellow by the name of Bud Cavanaugh was the lifeguard, who ran different programs, such as junior life guards, in the summer months. I passed junior lifesaving and a test called flying fishes, which was a mile and a half swim, in addition to different tricks in the water, which included diving. After watching Bud do different dives off that springboard for awhile, I soon learned to do a swan dive and a jackknife. In addition, he helped me buy what was called a 10,000-lakes swimsuit. It was a full suit made of wool with a skirt. I was so proud of my suit and the patches I earned. We soon moved to Waterloo, Iowa, where my father bought a sewing machine franchise. During the winter months I joined the YMCA, and in the summer months I was out on the river beach teaching myself some more dives. Every time a newsreel, which contained diving, came to town, I would keep going to see it, learning the dives until they changed the newsreel. In 1932 I became so proficient that some of the city fathers took me to the Midwestern tryouts in Council Bluffs, Nebraska, where I took third place. That qualified me to go out for tryouts in Chicago for the '32 Olympic Games. Unfortunately, I did not have enough money for the trip. Such a possibility piqued my interest, though, and I kept plugging away. In 1933 the Iowa Association had a big meet at the Cap Dodge Pool in Des Moines. The outdoor nationals that year were held in Chicago at the world's fair, and all of the West Coast clubs were there. They called them allied clubs. Five of them pooled their swimmers to win the national championships. Those clubs were: the Los Angeles Athletic Club, the Doville Club, the Del Mar Club, the Cottonwood Athletic Club, and the Pacific Coast Club of Long Beach. The coaches that year for diving and swimming were Clyde Swensen and old Fred Cady, the great coach at USC. The Iowa Association invited these club swimmers to an invitational meet at Cap Dodge pool. I had entered the meet along with Marshal Wayne, Frank Kurtz and other big amateur names who were top winners in diving at the Chicago nationals. I placed third in that meet in a group of 12. I felt pretty good. After the meet was over, old Clyde Swensen came up to me first, and then Cady, and asked who my coach was. I told them that I did not have one. They informed me that there was a possibility that one of the city fathers would sponsor me, and if I ever came to California, they would be glad to help me. Almost immediately I hitchhiked to California and never went home again. I immediately started training with Swensen, and eventually Cady, when he got the programs worked out at USC. We worked out at

the Ambassador Hotel, also. Margie Gestring, Margaret Rheinhold and some little women divers from Florida were diving then. Fred had the three of us there. By the fall of 1935 I had improved sufficiently to return to Iowa to defend my title. I defended four titles and won four new ones. Back in California I was offered a job at the Ambassador Hotel, taking care of the pool, cleaning and painting. I was able to train hard as well, because I wanted to make the Olympic team for the 1936 Olympic Games. The hotel manager offered me the concessions at the pool, a job which would make me a professional and ineligible for the Olympic Games. After much thought I accepted. Immediately I went into movie work with stars such as Janet Gaynor and Charlie Farrell.

Q: How did you connect with the movies so quickly?

A: In those days the Ambassador Hotel was a mecca for the movie stars. The Coconut Grove had the big bands. I met all the big band leaders and a lot of the players. Adjoining the pool was a feminine conditioning place called the Lido Club. It was a feminine conditioning place where women would go in and steam bath and massage. I would start teaching swimming and diving at 6 o'clock in the morning and go 'till 6 o'clock at night. Little by little, through these connections, I was able to get involved in movies.

Q: What did you call your show?

A: It was the Ambassador Hotel Swimming Club Show. We procured a trailer and a couple of cars and we were out on the road five months. We were all over the Midwest, never east of the Mississippi.

Q: Where did you work next?

A: The Downtown Y wanted to get an aquatic program going. I went in and started a program that was competitive swimming and diving. In the spring of '40, I was offered a job at Indian Springs, which I accepted.

Q: Where does your coaching of Zoe Ann Olsen fit in?

A: In '36, '37, '38 and '39 we were back in Iowa with her in the summer. I would work out routines for her, and her parents would follow through during the winter. In 1940 I was given a job at the Racquet Club in Palm Springs, where my wife was working. A big water show was in production at the El Mirador Hotel and I became one of its featured divers and performers. During the war I obtained a job as an electrician in charge of the swing shift for a firm which had a contract with the Navy. I was transferred up north to Los Alameda Air Base in San Francisco, which led to the coaching job at the Athens Club. When Zoe Ann came back out again, why I'd take her to the Pasadena Athletic Club and work with her. You know the story with Vicki.

Q: Vicki, did you provide your own swim suit for the competition in 1948?

A: I had to have the old Mavs suit, which was the popular one. Mavs was the manufacturer.

Q: How were you able to go to London, Lyle?

A: Ira Olsen, Zoe Ann's father, and I were teamed up together and paid our own way. The swimming

board informed us that it was not advisable for friends and relatives to travel with the athletes. In London, we stayed at the Southland College in Wimbledon.

Q: Vicki, what were the accommodations like at Southland?

A: They were like a boarding school. I shared my room with Juno Stover. There were swimmers and divers from all of the countries there. Each of the sports had their women's teams housed at one of the little women's colleges. Women drivers, from the Second World War, transported us to and from Wembley Stadium for practices. They would send us off with box lunches.

Q: Tell me about Opening Day ceremonies.

A: I really didn't have a clue about the Olympic Games. I can remember all the teams as we arrived at the stadium. You just feel like this one little tiny member of a huge gathering of all these wonderful athletes from all over the world. It is one of the few times that a woman was able to have a real patriotic feeling. It is such a different experience. It is just magnificent. Something you just hold in your heart and you just never forget, no matter how long ago it was.

Q: After the Opening Ceremonies, did you practice everyday?

A: Yes, yes. We had scheduled workouts. Sometimes you'd practice early in the morning, sometimes it would be afternoon, and sometimes it would be afternoons toward evening. There was just one pool for everyone. It was so different because it was an indoor pool, and the platform was indoors. I had never dived off platforms indoors. It was all such a different feeling. We did not go in like we did in the nationals, with a flight of dives to qualify. We just went in with all this number of divers, and the competition would be held over a period of two or three days. It was difficult to keep this edge up.

Q: How did it feel to finally be at the Olympic Games?

A: It is a little unbelievable. You hear all these names of divers from foreign countries such as France, Italy, Australia. Our Olympic rules in those days held down the degree of difficulty for dives, as well as the number of dives. We were used to 10 dives in our nationals, five compulsory and five optional. Out of the five groups of dives, we had the forward, backward, reverse, inward and twist. They broke us down to just eight dives. We couldn't do our forward 2 1/2s. We couldn't do our gainer 1 1/2s. We couldn't do our twisting 1 1/2s. They broke it down so that there were a lot of fine divers who had good similar dives.

Q: Walk me through the competition.

A: I was very nervous and very excited and because I had all this time between dives to watch all the other competition. I was doing pretty well in the first four dives off the springboard. I remember when we arrived back at the college after the competition, the other athletes were congratulating me and the other swimmers and the divers. I was ahead at the time. Zoe Ann came in and ... what did she say? She said something about ... and reminded me that the results were for the first day and that I should wait until the next day to see who really won. It was a very close competition up until the last dive.

Q: What did you think about that night, knowing that it was going to be very close?

A: I prayed a lot.

Q: Did you walk yourself through the dives?

A: We do that in our minds all the time, and I was having a lot of problems with my back 1 1/2 layout, which was my last dive. I just wasn't hitting it. I was missing it.

Lyle A: She was leaning with her head into the dive before she'd try to receive the impulse of the board. Instead of standing up and riding up on it, she'd be playing dibble dabble, but she learned how to choke down and she really nailed it on the Games last dive. Zoe Ann was ahead of Vicki on the seventh dive.

Vicki A: They didn't call out the tally on every round of dives. The judges scores were announced and then recorded.

Q: What were you thinking when you came to the last dive?

A: It was my back 1 1/2. I was thinking, "Please, God, help me." I remember sitting by Sammy, and I was so nervous that I would shake between each dive, as though I was cold. I remember saying to Sammy, "I can't do this Sammy. I am not going to make it." He said, "You came all this distance and you are going to give up? Get up there and do what you are supposed to do." I got up there for that back 1 1/2, and I tell you it was like somebody else did that dive for me. I sort of sailed through it, and I knew I hit it when I was under water and I thought, "Oh boy, thank you, God." It was sort of euphoric, I guess. I didn't know where it came from. I didn't perform that well in practice. It was just a beautiful feeling.

Q: When did you find out that you had won?

A: When I came up out of the water, and I knew it would be close.

Q: Had Zoe Ann already done her full eight dives? Had she performed as perfectly as you had?

A: I don't really remember. I knew what kind of competitor she was. I also knew that Patty Elsener could get in there, because she was a good competitor. As well, little Maddy Moreau, the little French diver, was very good. It wasn't what you'd call a walk away, but it was enough.

Q: When were you awarded the medal for the first event?

A: As soon as the event was finished. It is overwhelming when you hear your national anthem, and of course, it was three Americans on the podium. You see the Stars and Stripes go up. They started talking about the possibility that I would win both events. I had the opportunity to be the first woman in history to win both the 3-meter and platform. The closer the platform event came, I became more nervous. I think I was more nervous than I was for the 3-meter. I felt like I did not dive to my best in the platform. I really didn't. I missed both of my forward dives, which I had done really well beforehand.

Lyle A: There are six dives from the platform. You start from 5-meter. Your first is a forward running 1 1/2 pike. Then the next is a back layout somersault from 5 meters. Then you went to the platform, 10

meters - standing swan dive, and then a running swan dive, and then the two optional were a reverse dive layout and a flying forward 1 1/2, and then the reverse dive.

Vicki: I think I did well on the first two dives on the 5 meters. It was the forward 1 1/2 pike and open pike and the back somersault layout. When I moved up to the top platform, I had the standing swan dive and the running swan dive, and I was not pleased with my performance. Next, I had my forward flying 1 1/2 pike, which was fine. I then had my running half gainer, and I was so nervous that I forgot about stepping on it. I was hop, skipping and jumping up there, and I thought, "I'm going to miss this dive." Somehow or other I hit.

Lyle: There were 6 or 7,000 people at Wembley Stadium, and before her head come up above water, the whole audience was applauding. They knew she'd hit it. When she went in that water, it was like a knife. It was beautiful, but she didn't know that.

Vicki: I just knew I hit the dive, then realized that I had actually won it. My score was very low by today's standards, because of the degree of difficulty.

Q: How did you feel about winning again?

A: I couldn't believe it. It was just the most thrilling thing in all the world.

Q: Did you realize the historical significance of your performance?

A: Later, I certainly did.

Q: Did you have a lot of press interviews because of this?

A: Yes, they interviewed on radio. There was just some local television that was not broadcasting to the United States. Apparently, in the states, there were headlines on the front page of the newspapers. It was followed by the newsreels, which they used to have in the movie theaters in those years. It was very exciting. "Vicki Draves, Zoe Ann Olsen and Patricia Elsener; USA, USA, USA; 108.74, 108.23 and 101.30; women's springboard diving." Next, the women's highboard diving: "Vicki Draves, 68.87, USA; Patricia Elsener, 66.28, USA; and Bertie Christopherson, 66.0, Denmark."

Q: Did you go out and celebrate?

A: It was a very quiet celebration. Because my mother was from England, I was able to meet her family while we were there in '48. We went to dinner at the Continental Hotel with my aunt and uncle. I was so hungry that I ate all of the food in front of me without even asking what it was. It was horse meat, because steak was so hard to get as the whole country was on rations. It tasted fine to me.

Q: What did you do for the rest of the Games?

A: We watched some of the track events. Some of the swimmers and divers went on a tour to Holland, but Lyle did not want me to go. In addition, we had been discussing a show at Soldier's Field, with Larry Crosby, called "Rhapsody in Swim Time." I needed to get ready for my professional debut. We came home by ship on the Queen Elizabeth. It was a lovely voyage, yes. There were quite a number of other

Olympians on board, and we were treated royally. On the same ship with us was Asa Bushnell, the U.S. financial secretary for the Olympic Games. He told us that when the American team left for London, there was not enough money to cover the expenses. However, Avery Brundage had given him a blank check to pick up the charges, which were not covered by the money that had been raised. Later, he told us that he did not have to use Brundage's check.

Q: Tell me about Vicki's professional debut.

Lyle A: The idea was for Vicki to dive in his water show at Soldier's Field, at the Poke County Fair. We had not decided to accept the offer. We did do the show in Chicago called "Rhapsody in Swim Time." It was a stage and water swimming show with the ballets and the diving tank. I helped design the tank before we left. It was quite a nice water show.

Q: What did Vicki do exactly?

Lyle A: Vicki was one of the featured divers. She used the 3-meter springboard and she did her 2 1/2s again. The dives were announced by the movie actress Nan Grace. We also had Russ Saunders, Charlie Deal, and Jim Strong, who dived with Vicki from the tower. Next, we went to Canada to do a water show for General Motors. We had the option of being paid with a new car, or half a new car and half in salary and money toward a new car. We decided to get a salary, as well as a big down payment on a car with a life time guarantee of any General Motors product at a dealers cost. We picked up our new car in Detroit and then drove back to the coast.

Vicki: After we arrived back, we realized that we had missed an Olympic parade. Sammy Lee saved the blanket and other mementos for me. After we arrived home the phone calls began to come in. Warner Buck, for the Sportsmans Show, wanted us for the Cow Palace. A call came in from the Philippines, so off we went in January. When we returned, we did a show in the Cow Palace for three days only, as we were booked with Buster Crabbe, who was opening in Cincinnati. We toured with Buster, from April through September, when we finished in San Diego. We both went back to work, even though we had many movie offers. Fox was interested in me, but they did not have the scripts ready. They wanted to cast me as a native girl, Sabu. I was not interested. All they wanted to do was make money on a current name. We were tied up with Buster. We did his show and the Minneapolis Aqua Stadium in '49. We came home and went to work and did little things in the fall months, and then in January, then Buster booked Hawaii. We went over there for eight or 10 weeks.

Lyle: I got back into coaching in 1951. I took the Ambassador Hotel concession back for the summer months, because the money was good teaching. That fall I met a couple of guys from Technicolor who knew I had camera background and experience. I was able to get a job at Technicolor. However, two or three weeks after I went to work out there, the Los Angeles Athletic Club called up and wanted me to take a coaching job. Because my friend was the athletic director, I took the job.

Q: When did you start coaching Paula Jean Myers?

Lyle A: I had Pat McCormick, Paula Jean Myers, Theyer Esparian, Gary Tobian, Willie Farrell. All except Theyer became Olympians. P.J. made three Olympic teams.

Q: Tell me about the rivalry between Pat McCormick and Paula Jean.

Lyle A: There was a little jealousy because I improved P.J. to the point that she beat Pat on the 3-meter board.

Q: When was Pat at her peak? When did she first win a national championship?

Lyle A: Zoe Ann quit in '49 and then Pat moved in and grand slammed in '50. Pat held the crown in '50, '51, '52, '53 and '54. I came in during the fall of '51 with Pat. She had another coach by the name of Rusty Schmidt, who was the athletic director and coach. He was fired. Wes Hanna moved up to athletic director, and that's when I was offered the coaching job. When I began coaching Pat I started her from scratch. I taught her how to twist a bit and then she moved up fast. When Zoe Ann moved out, there was really no competition, really. She grand slammed the indoors, grand slammed the outdoors. P.J. was right behind her, trailing all the way. She improved and finally caught Pat on the 3-meter board in 1953 in Ft. Lauderdale. Vicki and I received offers for a series of shows in Vegas, Minneapolis and Seattle. I made in two months what I made in 2 1/2 or three years at LAAC. The one in Vegas was at the Desert Inn, with Johnny Weissmuller, the swim star. Vicki was the diving star.

Q: Did you take P.J. with you at all?

Lyle A: P.J. traveled with us that year. I had quit the club. Glenn McCormick was a student at SC at the time, so he came in with Pat one night, and I told him the job was available. Glenn caught on quick. Glenn was a wrestling man and didn't know other than what his wife could do. P.J. traveled with Vicki and me because we were touring. We had her in Vegas and Minneapolis with us. We were training P.J. as we did these shows. In '54 we came back and I took over Indian Springs, '54. She came with me in '54-'55, and in '55 she went back to Ohio State. She was at SC, she had a scholarship at SC. She went back to Ohio State and then came back again, and I picked her up in '56 and '57.

Q: Tell me why Glenn was selected as the coach in 1956.

Lyle A: It was a political appointment because Clarence Pinkston, who had been the Olympic coach, suggested that a younger coach be hired. It was unfair to Paula Jean. It was unfair to Juno. It was Pat's political pull. If I were Glenn, I wouldn't have turned it down either. I should have had it in '52 when Pat doubled in Helsinki. I should have had it in '60 again, but I turned it down because I had to pay my own way and I couldn't really afford it. In addition, I had too many programs for which I was responsible.

Q: Were you still P.J.'s coach in 1956?

Lyle A: I sent P.J. back to Topeka all by herself and she won everything, 1-meter, 3-meter. She won the grand slam all by herself. I couldn't go because we had the swim school that year.

Q: How long did you stay with coaching and diving?

Lyle A: I coached and dived at Indian Springs for four years, then in 1958, I sold out to my partner. Vicki and I moved to Encino where we had the Encino Swim School. We also did water shows for such groups as the Optimist Club. We trained Sue Gossick from 1958 through 1961 there and through 1968 at the Westlake Club. Sue was a member of the team in 1964 and won the springboard event in 1968 when she beat Micki King.

Q: What do you think of the kind of dives that are being performed now?

Lyle A: Diving is so acrobatic now. It has lost its 3-dimensional phase. Divers today are rolling the dives or are cutting them. Greg Louganis was the last of the great ones. Now I go to a diving meet now, and sit there and become very disgusted. I can't stand to watch. They have the finest equipment in the world now. When divers get 14 or 15 feet of height, it becomes very acrobatic because they are doing multiple somersaults and twists now. The Chinese are the greatest now, but if they ever look to learn how to sight and spot that water, they'll be unbeatable.

Q: What do you think about Greg Louganis and his ability? Why is he so different?

Lyle A: He had everything. He had ability, brains, body, the strength, the aesthetic value, sense of rhythm and dance. On the board he used a five-step approach, man, and that more or less sets a rhythm for the hurdle. The short step, two-, three-step divers, are jerky. They are a power type or what they call a jar diver. There is no refinement.

Q: Vicki, for young women who want to go into diving or want to be an outstanding athlete, or think they have talent, what advice would you give?

A: If they have the desire they should follow their goals. You never know what a wonderful experience it is to concentrate on something, to set your goals and to work hard for them and then to eventually attain the ultimate. There is so much that happens to you along the way that is so wonderful. The discipline that you learn for yourself, believing in yourself, and meeting other fine people who are involved in whatever activity it is that you are trying to attain. Above all you need to find a good coach. Diving is not a sport that you can do entirely on your own. You need guidance.

METHODOLOGY

Dr. Margaret Costa, of California State University, Long Beach, conducted this interview. The interview was recorded on audiocassette and then transcribed. The interview addresses the following major areas:

Family History

Date/place of birth; occupation of father/mother; siblings; family residence;

Education

Primary and secondary schools attended; college and post-collegiate education;

Sport-specific Biographical Data

Subject's introduction to sport—age, event and setting of first formal competition; coaches/trainers/ others who influenced athletic development; chronology of sports achievements; Olympic competition; post-Olympic involvement in sports;

General Biographical Data

Employment history; marital history; children; communities of residence; retirement;

General Observations

Reactions and reflections on Olympic experience; modernization of sport; attitudes on and involvement with the Olympic Movement; advice to youth and aspiring athletes.

Interview transcripts were edited and may include additional material based on subsequent conversations and/or subject's own editing.

The opinions and recollections expressed in this oral history are exclusively those of the Olympian interviewed. They do not necessarily reflect the positions, interpretations or policies of the Amateur Athletic Foundation of Los Angeles.