

CLARITA HUNSBERGER NEHER
1924 & 1928 OLYMPIC GAMES
DIVING



AN OLYMPIAN'S ORAL HISTORY
INTRODUCTION

Southern California has a long tradition of excellence in sports and leadership in the Olympic Movement. The Amateur Athletic Foundation is itself the legacy of the 1984 Olympic Games. The Foundation is dedicated to expanding the understanding of sport in our communities. As a part of our effort, we have joined with the Southern California Olympians, an organization of over 1,000 women and men who have participated on Olympic teams, to develop an oral history of these distinguished athletes.

Many Olympians who competed in the Games prior to World War II agreed to share their Olympic experiences in their own words. In the pages that follow, you will learn about these athletes, and their experiences in the Games and in life as a result of being a part of the Olympic Family.

The Amateur Athletic Foundation, its Board of Directors, and staff welcome you to use this document to enhance your understanding of sport in our community.

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AN OLYMPIAN'S ORAL HISTORY
METHODOLOGY

Interview subjects include Southern California Olympians who competed prior to World War II. Interviews were conducted between March 1987, and August 1988, and consisted of one to five sessions each. The interviewer conducted the sessions in a conversational style and recorded them on audio cassette, addressing 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.

CLARITA HUNSBERGER-NEHER

1924 OLYMPIC GAMES - PARIS
PLATFORM DIVING

1928 OLYMPIC GAMES - AMSTERDAM
PLATFORM DIVING

INTERVIEWED:

May, 1987
Irvine, California
by Anita L. De Frantz

CLARITA HUNSBERGER NEHER
Interviewer: Anita L. DeFrantz

DeFrantz: We're going to learn a little bit about your history in sport. First, when and where were you born?

Neher: I was born in Michigan on April 6, 1906. I came out when I was maybe three or four years old and have lived all my life in Los Angeles—except for school—and now in Irvine. I came to Irvine in the summer of 1984. I can remember saying to them here where I'm living now in Irvine that I couldn't come until the 1984 Olympic Games were over. (laughter) What's more important?

DeFrantz: Did you have any brothers or sisters?

Neher: No, unfortunately.

DeFrantz: I have three brothers, and I always say I cornered the market.

Neher: Isn't that great. I've always thought that was very important. I remember when I had my first child, a daughter, I thought, "I'll never stop at one. I've got to have two."

Perhaps I should start with some personal data. The beginning is unique in that I was perhaps ten years old . . . I can't be sure, but close to it. My mother, my father and I were at Long Beach staying there during the summer. This day came along when my father and a friend of his were swimming, and they were both caught in the riptide and the other man drowned. My father was rescued by the guards who swam out to him. By then the riptide had carried him way out beyond the end of the pier. It happened to be a very difficult one. At any rate, my father decided at that

point that I should learn how to swim, and learn how to swim well. He was one of those persons who carried those things out. He was determined that I would take lessons and more lessons. Of course, as it turned out eventually, I was swimming laps, and I was getting to the point where I could take part in competition.

DeFrantz: Was your father a swimmer?

Neher: No, he called himself a "dog paddler." But he had a very cool head. Evidently, the other man . . . they thought perhaps he was frightened to death when he found he was in the riptide and couldn't get out. He probably didn't swim well. But my father couldn't swim either, to any extent. So I suppose that made him know that he didn't want me to have that risk.

At any rate, I was swimming one day at Venice pool—and I'm now perhaps 13 or 14 years old—doing laps, and a lady came up to me and said, "You know, you're a very good swimmer. I'd like for you to come down to the Los Angeles Athletic Club on Friday night and try out for our team." I was thrilled to death. I thought that was great. That Friday night my mother and I got on the streetcar where we lived and went downtown to the Los Angeles Athletic Club. Well, I would go every Friday after that; I was a member of the team. And I guess Fred Cady, who was the coach, tried me on every kind of a stroke. Whether he was satisfied or saw no hope I don't know, but finally the day came when he said, "Clarita, I'd like you to try diving." So I was agreeable and we started off at the 3-foot springboard and, of course, from there to the 10-foot board and from there to competition. By the time I was ready to graduate from high school, I had been competing and taking part in meets of all kinds, not winning heavily, but occasionally—maybe a bronze medal or silver or that kind of thing. And so, when I was graduated from high school I applied for Stanford and was accepted. I gave up my part with the Los Angeles Athletic Club and went up there.

DeFrantz: How many other girls and women were competing at the L.A. Athletic Club?

Neher: At that time there was a good size group. I can only guess now, but I would say as a total there would have been 20. Of course there are men too in that group—20 or 25. It's something I haven't thought of in a long time.

Well, then when I got up to Stanford, lo and behold, they had these fabulous coaches, Greta and Ernst Brandsten from Sweden. They had been divers. Mrs. Brandsten had been a high platform diver and they were very interested. Stanford at that time had 500 women and a couple thousand men—that was that era. They had very few women who were interested in diving and, in fact, one of the Brandstens would come out early every morning. I'd go to the women's swimming pool early in the morning. I can remember walking out on that board with frost on the board; it mattered not what time a year it was or what the weather was. And it didn't matter to the Brandstens. They were really gung-ho on having a woman who would be a diver. And so then came the day that Ernst Brandsten said to me, "You know, today we're going to take you up to Searsville Lake." Now Searsville Lake was about nine miles from the Stanford campus. And up there—the lake was actually a dammed lake—they had platforms built on that dam that the Brandstens were responsible for constructing, because there were quite a few men divers who would work out up there. I didn't have a car to get up there. There were times that I walked to Searsville Lake and walked back.

It was ridiculous, but that's the way it was. And usually I could get rides with the men; women didn't have cars, and I think for the most part I didn't know of anybody who did. Well, for some reason I was a better platform diver right from the beginning. I don't know why, whether it was my inability to use a springboard or whether it was something about the platform diving board in itself that appealed to me, but I did like it. And so that was the

beginning of the high platform. I would go up . . . usually one of the Brandstens were there, but if not there was Al White and Dave Fall, both of whom made the Olympic team. I guess there were others. I think of the Kahaleanus and the Kahanamokus.

DeFrantz: Were they all training up there?

Neher: Yes, they would go for training. And, of course, Ernst Brandsten was an outstanding coach. He became the diving coach of the American team for the Olympics, and was that several times. And Fred Cady went into that position too.

I think that to remind you of the era I should tell you about the platforms. They were constructed of wood and, of course, they're over this lake, which sometimes was at one height and sometimes was at another height. Then there was no such thing as a stairway going up to those platforms. Now the platforms are 16 and 32 feet, 5 and 10 meters in height. We had to go up a ladder that went straight up. And I'll never forget that the next rung to the top was missing. (laughter) And if you would do 8 or 10 dives, either from the 16 or 32, or both, and go up that ladder, well, you had quite a workout. And of course you had a nice little swim after you hit the water (laughter), and then to get over to what was supposed to be a ladder to come out of the water. The water would be cold. As I look back on it I wonder why I thought that was a great idea. (laughter) But I guess it was in the blood by then. And I don't even remember during this—it was my freshman year—but I don't remember thinking that the Olympic tryouts were coming. I don't remember that I was working toward that. I was one of those people who was excited about diving. It seems as though that was the way it was. Of course, as time went on I'm sure that that was a part of our thinking. It had to be.

DeFrantz: You were aware of the Games then?

Neher: Well, I had to be. I was at the LAAC in 1920, when Aileen Allen went to the Olympics, and of course she was an LAAC girl. She happens to be the one who spoke to me at the Venice pool and suggested that I try out for the swimming team.

DeFrantz: Oh, she recruited you?

Neher: She didn't see me as a diver, of course. Viola Cady was one of our divers. She was always on the springboard. I don't remember whether she tried out for the team, I have no idea. There is so much that I have forgotten, it was a whale of a long time ago.

Well, at any rate, up on that platform I'd stand at the end of that platform for a minute, and I was well aware that with the wind the platform swayed. And, you know, we talk a lot today about the fact that our swimmers, our divers, our contestants in all fields, are so much better than they were in our era—and it's so, so true. A part of it is a change in the equipment, as well as the fact that we're much more knowledgeable about diving than we ever were then. But I think those of us that made the team at that time wouldn't have gotten to first base at a later year. (laughter) I know we wouldn't.

DeFrantz: I'm not so sure if today's team would have been able to put up with those circumstances. So maybe you would. (laughter)

Neher: Well, that's nice to think about too. I think also, when you think about the era . . . at that time communication was something that was totally different from today. Obviously there was no television. But I'm sure that in those Games in the '20s that radio played no part. You know we had the crystal radios at that time. I came out of high school and I could see the boys with their crystal sets that they'd put together. We just didn't have anything that's comparable to today. Photography was in its infancy; nothing like the split-second timing pictures that they would get today. So, with the Olympic Games, there couldn't be

the worldwide interest that we have now—not even countrywide. Many people had probably never heard of the Olympic Games, I'm pretty sure. Today most people would know what we were talking about.

As for transportation, well, I tried out on the West Coast both in 1924 and 1928. I won the right to go to New York for the final tryouts. But you didn't hop in a plane and fly off. We had to go by train, and I think in both cases it took three nights and two days to get to New York. I recall coming into New York pretty tired.

DeFrantz: Who paid for the trip?

Neher: Well, it was different the two times. The first time they were broke, they felt that they would have money if we made the team. So I know I was stopped cold by that. I questioned asking my parents for it. They were putting what was then a lot of money into education; it was nothing compared to today of course. And I had joined a sorority house at Stanford and these girls offered to put together the money from their treasury and take a chance on me, and they would get it back if I made the team. Of course, they got it back. But they gambled on me.

DeFrantz: What sorority was that?

Neher: Tri Delta. I was a very poor sorority girl. I was never one who thought it was very important. I didn't like what they did, there was a problem there. But that's beside the point. They did something very special for me that might have meant a lot of difference. It could have been a whale of a difference.

So I go to New York, and as far as reaction to the situation there, I was very much alone. And I can't recall now any women that I knew from the West Coast; it was just that bad. And most of the girls were from New York. What did they call it? The New

York Women's

DeFrantz: It wasn't the New York Athletic Club because they don't allow women, even now. (laughter)

Neher: Women's Athletic Association? [New York Women's Swimming Association] Anyway, it was very well known at the time, and they were like a clique. And that was alright, I understood that the competition was keen and the prize was great and it was extremely important. I found it difficult to face it. At any rate, I did make it. Ernst Brandsten was there and afterwards he was the one who came to me and expressed pleasure in my making the team. He was like the only friend I had on the scene. I think that after we made the team there was no problem at all, then I belonged and the certain group belonged. And I remember they took and fitted us in bathing suits and robes and that kind of thing, and I was one of the gang and everything was fine.

DeFrantz: So you were no longer that outlander from Southern California somewhere. Well, that's good. How long between making the team and setting sail?

Neher: I'd say we had a week, maybe ten days. But it was long enough to outfit us and give us a little time to get our breath. And I think those of us who were diving also found time to dive during those days because we knew we were getting on a ship. Today, if you were going to make the team and go to Paris, it would take a few hours to fly across. It took us eight days on that ship. But, you know, there was a lot of pluses. That ship was called the *America* and it evidently had been used in World War I. It was made over; it still was an old ship, but we thought it was beautiful. On each side of that ship in tremendous letters it said American Olympic Team. As we sailed out of New York Harbor all the little boats from all over gathered around and were tooting their horns and the fireboats were out shooting water high into the air. It was a tremendous exit that we had. Of course, it

wouldn't be as it would be today, but it was beautiful.

DeFrantz: We had some motorcycles and a little band when we left Plattsburgh for Montreal. So, I think yours was a much bigger send-off than the one we had. (laughter)

Neher: The ship was leased by the American Olympic Committee. It was devoted to us, the team. We carried the trainers, the coaches, the chaperones and a few members of the Olympic Committee. I don't suppose they carry them today. A few members of the Olympic Committee. It was a marvelous situation. Now there were only 25 women. This is the era when women were swimmers and divers, period. In 1928, you understand, we began to get track and field into it. But there were only 25 women and there were almost 300 men on the ship in 1924. You know, I say it wasn't all bad.

DeFrantz: I can see. Yes, I get the picture, (laughter)

Neher: At any rate, I think one of the wonderful things about it was the days that we had to get acquainted. If you make the team today, you know only the people who are in your field; as a swimmer or diver I would know that group. But here, we got acquainted with everybody: the boxers, the wrestlers, the gymnasts, you name them. And we were with them all day and they were training. Everybody was anxious to be in training. The boxers were working in their ring, the wrestlers had their setup, and the gymnasts theirs. The swimmers had a canvas tank. It was about 10 by 10 feet. It shows you something of what the ship was like. And it was set up so that it hung from a platform above, filled with saltwater each day, fresh saltwater. Two swimmers could get in at a time. We wore a belt around our waist that was attached to the side of the pool by a rope, and the two of us would swim parallel to each other for 15-20 minutes or whatever was prescribed. The divers . . . really there was not anything that we could do that was really meaningful. The high divers used to

get kidded; they would say, "Now look, all you have to do is dive off the side of the ship." (laughter)

Well, they had good planning for the evenings. I recall that they had worked it out so that we would have evenings of games and an evening of entertainment. They got the entertainment right from the Olympic members; those who could sing or dance or whatever, and that was great. The honorary president of the Olympic Committee was General Douglas MacArthur, and he did a very nice thing. He told us—of course, we all ate dinner in the dining room in the evening way down at the bottom of the ship somewhere—but he said that every night he would stay after dinner, and those of us who wanted could gather around and he would answer our questions about his work or his service for the war. Of course, it was quite fresh in his mind at the time. We didn't take long to find out that was fun, and very interesting, and quite an opportunity for us to learn of things that we had no idea about. And then with that, I have to tell you that to this day when I talk to people who were on that team—and there are not many of us—I will say, "Do you remember what MacArthur told us when we left that ship?" They always say yes. I mean it left that much of an impression. It was our last evening on the ship and he said, "I want to tell you something before you leave. You know, it's true you're all Olympians but I want you to remember something: that first and foremost you're Americans." And he said, "Everything you say and everything you do in Paris will reflect on your country."

Well, it kind of hit us. And I thought afterwards it was a good statement to make to a group and, somewhere, somehow, maybe it should be incorporated somewhere because I think it impressed us. And our group seemed to behave itself anyway, as far as I know. I think that that part on the ship was part of the Olympic experience, and it was very important. By the way, there were newspaper men on that ship. And we'd go back to people like Bill Henry, a well-known cartoonist whom I knew at the time. At any

rate, we arrived in Paris.

DeFrantz: How did you get from the shore to Paris?

Neher: They took us by train from Cherbourg into Paris. It was not anything that stands out, it could have been by bus, but there was a train. We were housed at the Chateau de Rocquencourt which was just outside the city of Paris. One incident there . . . we, the Americans, were housed there and electricity had to be run into that area as there was no electricity in the chateau. The women stayed there and the men stayed at housing especially constructed for them. And right along, parallel with that housing, was a one-street French village, and I suppose the electricity came from there. The first night that we were there when we turned on the lights, the lights began flashing in this little village and the people didn't know how to handle it. This one man jumped up and grabbed the wire and died. He was killed by it. It was one of those awful things to start out our experience. I don't normally tell it and we may want to take it from this. We were well aware and we took up an offering that was given to his widow, and we saw the funeral march that went by. We were deeply hurt and concerned about what had happened. I can't remember whether we stayed there the whole time or not, but I think we did.

I can recall that while we were there that Mary Pickford and Douglas Fairbanks drove out there to see the athletes that stayed in the chateau. And I can remember that the chateau itself was delightful. It was so old-fashioned, everything was primitive, and the beds were very, very high off the floor, and they had these tremendously deep feather mattresses. Now if you can think of athletes sleeping on these feather mattresses. And they had these thick quilts that always were on the floor when we woke up the next morning. This is just a tidbit, but it is a part of 1924. Okay, let's go to the pool.

DeFrantz: Did you ever see the housing for the men?

Neher: Yes. It was very plain, just four walls and a little washbowl, and I don't recall the other facilities; but they didn't like it at all. They thought it was terrible. It was just bare—a place to sleep, you know. Ours was better than that in a way, although today if I were to sleep there I'd sleep on the floor. (laughter)

We couldn't wait to get to that swimming pool. You know, the divers in particular had been out of water for a long time, so we needed to get there. That chateau was a whale of a long way from the swimming pool. It was all the way across the city from Paris. Why they had it at the opposite end, I don't know.

DeFrantz: Were there other women's teams there?

Neher: Not that I know of. Just the swimmers and the divers were affected. We got in the bus, and it would take a long time to go through even what was probably very minimal traffic in that time.

DeFrantz: I'm sorry, I meant from other countries.

Neher: Oh no.

DeFrantz: Just the U.S. team?

Neher: That was for us. That little setup was just ours. I don't know where they were. I suppose I did at the time. We had very little contact with the others, other than when we were diving at the pool. They also did not have it set up so that those who spoke English dived at the same time, and those who spoke French dived at the same time. The first time we were ever there and we were diving it was pretty bad, because there was someone below us who was speaking German, someone on the platform above and on the springboard at the side. And we weren't able to communicate, except by pointing. But within a few days I recall that they got

a man who came who could speak the important languages, and he handled it for us.

But I wanted to tell you about that pool. We arrived there and we were thrilled to death. It was almost a brand-new pool. It was beautiful. Not only that, it was up on a hill, and from that hillside you had the most marvelous view out to the city of Paris; and from the top platform it was simply stupendous. So we couldn't wait to get in. We got up onto the low platforms first and finally got up to the upper platform, and at some point there it dawned on us what was wrong: the architects had constructed the diving apparatus so you dived the width of the pool, (laughter) Now every pool you knew, you dived the length. When you were on the top platform particularly—it's bad enough on the low platform—and you were going to do a running dive, you are standing at the back and the platform extends out in front of you so you see no water, absolutely none. And you run the length of that platform and fling yourself out into the cement seats of the spectators on the other side. It was psychological . . . but really, it was not good. It bothered the men even more. Of course, they have more speed and power. I know we, the women, are supposed to be totally equal, but fortunately we didn't get out quite as far as the men did. They would come up right at the side of the pool. Nobody was ever hurt.

I don't think its necessary to go through the Holland thing, because everything is pretty much the same, it's the same era. But when we got to Amsterdam and got to the swimming pool, there was water in it, but the platforms weren't finished. The swimmers could be accommodated, but not the high divers. Again, you realize we had come in by ship, and there was a big pow wow over this, and what did they do to accommodate us? Darling as they were, they sent us by train to Paris; back to that pool where we had to go through that again. (laughter) So the high divers really took a beating on that one. Well, Paris and Amsterdam, whatever you want, you know everybody has all sorts of

experiences, but I think that the experience with the pool itself was the most vital thing that we hit. That was a problem.

The French people were delightful. I can't say enough about them, in that they were so anxious to please us. I can remember talking about this in Spirit Team talks, because I knew it was important that we receive people well. And we were beautifully received, they did provide us as much as possible with buses to take us where we wanted to go—like to museums or to certain restaurants or whatever. They did a nice job, at any rate, and we felt they were friendly. So that stays with me. I think I've always thought that had I won a medal that that would be the most important day of my life there. But, as it turned out that wasn't to be, and it was that Opening Day Ceremony that wiped me out. (laughter). It was something else.

DeFrantz: Me too.

Neher: You have to experience it, don't you? I've heard other people tell about it and I've seen them weep about it when they told it. Of course, I've also noted that they weep when they talk about winning gold medals, which I can understand. But that was quite an experience. You know *Chariots of Fire* is the story, of course, of the 1924 Games. And in *Chariots of Fire*, by the way, there are some pictures that were actually taken in 1924. They are black and white, you can see how poor they are, but one of them is of our team as we march into the stadium. When I saw that in *Chariots of Fire*, it wiped me out. (laughter) And I remembered it well. We were all in what we call our parade costumes. Did you have costumes?

DeFrantz: We did. We called them our marshmallow suits. (laughter)

Neher: We were in white shoes, white suits, and skirts that were way down almost to our ankles, and white hats. Of course, it was the day of hats and gloves. And the men were in white trousers and

navy blue sport coats and straw hats with the rigid, stiff brims. We were all lined up there underneath the stadium ready to come out of the tunnel, and I recall that they passed the word along, "Let's all walk in with our heads high." They also passed the word that we were to come in at the signal that the French announcer gave, which was the United States in French, *les Etats-Unis*. So we were primed and it happened. We stood up so tall. I see people now come in so casual; but not in 1924 or '28. We stood very tall when we marched in. We came out of that darkness, that tunnel, into the light of day. Well, the whole place, I couldn't believe it, it just came alive. I couldn't have anticipated what it was going to be. Coming out into the bright light and having everybody stand up, and people were standing and cheering and shouting and waving flags, and the tears rolled down our faces. I turned and looked behind me, and men had the tears too.

And we marched around that stadium and then finally stood in formation out in the center of the field. And there were 48 countries represented, and when we were all in position they did much of the same kind of thing that we do today. They brought in that Olympic flag with a lot of pomp and ceremony. We did not have the torch. They played the French national anthem. *La Marseillaise*. The President of France came to that microphone and he himself welcomed the athletes and made the official opening of the Games. Then, as here, all of those pigeons, hundreds and hundreds of pigeons were set loose, which is a bit of symbolism that they will carry the message to the world that the Olympic Games are opened. Then we took the oath, and I think it had more meaning there than I sensed that it did in 1984. I don't recall here what it was. I mean I was expecting more. But here I am, one little person in the stands with 90,000 people, and I didn't get the impact that I expected. But when it happened in Paris, I think everybody understood that all of us who speak all different languages were taking an oath. And I hope that it meant something to them as it did to us. We had been told ahead that

we were promising that we'd take part in the Olympic Games in 1924 in the spirit of sportsmanship, for the glory of the sport. So, that kind of thing ended our experience in the '20s, and I think I didn't foresee that, in a sense, I was going to make a third team in 1984. I feel that way about it. I honestly feel as though, although I wasn't competing, it was a fabulous thing to participate as a member of the Spirit Team.

DeFrantz: Can I ask you a couple more questions about the '20s and then we'll get back to the '80s. Were there Closing Ceremonies in either Paris or Amsterdam?

Neher: Yes. I guess it's pretty well gone from my recollection, because since then I have seen Games where they do such different things. I'm afraid that I don't know. Oh, I know we were there for the closing, but I have no idea. I think it was not impressive at all. Of course, in 1984 it was extremely impressive. It was wonderful. Fantastic! They've come a long way, haven't they?

DeFrantz: Yes, they have.

Neher: And again, part of that is our ability today to do what we couldn't possibly do in the 1920s.

DeFrantz: Well, bringing in a spaceship was pretty impressive. (laughter) When you got home from the 1924 Games, how were you received? I'm sure your sorority sisters were happy, but what about the rest of the community, your family?

Neher: Well, my parents and my high school boyfriend, whom I later married, came to meet me at the train station. I went with him in high school. We were "steady" as seniors in high school.

DeFrantz: Venice High?

Neher: I went to Jefferson High in Los Angeles. Then he went to Pomona

College while I went to Stanford, and we were separated for four years. In 1928, when I went down to get on that train, he was there and he had just returned from a year of travel with another young man who had graduated from Pomona. The two of them had taken a year of travel, doing it by bicycle and that kind of thing, in Europe and Northern Africa—a fabulous trip. But he came down and saw me off. And then during both Games I heard from him. You know, we did have Western Union. There was communication, although we did not go together until I had been back for a period of time from the 1928 Games. Then we resumed going together and we've been married 53 years. (laughter)

DeFrantz: So it was for real?

Neher: Yes, it was for real for sure. Let's see, where were we? Oh yes, at the Closing Ceremony and coming home. I don't recall, that didn't seem to have impressed me. There was nothing major. Of course, I didn't come home a victor. I think that would be part of it. If you came home on top of the heap, obviously that would make a big difference.

DeFrantz: Did you keep in touch with some of the team members, or other athletes you'd met?

Neher: Only as I continued diving, but by then it was a new crew of divers in the West. Then, you see, we got Dorothy Poynton and Georgia Coleman and Micky Riley and Bud "Dutch" Smith.

DeFrantz: Why did you decide to go back again? How did you come to that decision? You had finished college—

Neher: I guess I don't know. The second time I was teaching and I had made contact with Fred Spongberg, who was another diver from Sweden and a friend of the Brandstems. Now maybe that was the tie-in. He was the coach at the Ambassador Hotel. So that was my first year of teaching, which was 1927-1928. I was training

anyway. I was not married and I didn't get married until 1929, so I suppose I had the time. At the end of my freshman year at Stanford I had continued diving. Up at Searsville we always had these men who would come and dive and it was lot's of fun. I suppose that's partly it in those intervening years.

DeFrantz: Were you ever injured diving?

Neher: Nothing serious, just a twisted neck where it took time to recover. But I didn't knock teeth out as some divers did, because that was an era when the water was not deep enough. I think of something else to mention, when it comes to high diving and it comes to the era of the '20s, do you realize that everytime I competed there was never a high platform in Los Angeles, except at the Ambassador Hotel, where they had a 16-foot platform. The water was shallow, no more than 12 feet, and that is not deep enough at all. You had to break your dive as you hit the water. We could go to Brookside Park in Pasadena. Brookside had the high platform, the 10-meter—it did not have a 5-meter board. It was three platforms at odd heights and then the 10-meter one. But that's where I had to train between 1927 and making the Games in 1928.

I was teaching at Washington High School. I went there as a new teacher when the school opened. So I was like 21 years old, we'll say. I would drive my father's car—I didn't own a car—and I drove to the Ambassador Hotel . . . well, to the back of it where I entered Eighth Street, picked up Fred Spongberg and drove him to that pool at Brookside Park. It was a long way and there was no freeway. Then I brought him back to the hotel each time. I don't know where he lived, it was somewhere in that area. I went home, and by then my father and mother were home, and began to cook dinner. I had that service.

DeFrantz: They were supportive of you throughout this all? That is wonderful.

Neher: That was rough. I think I could not have very good sense as I look back on it, because I know that Fred Spongberg and I would go even when it was raining. You'd think we could take the day off. I don't know if it was he or whether I was the one who was gung-ho on it. At any rate, we had the tryouts in Los Angeles and if ever I was going to win a medal it was going to be those Games, not 1924. In those tryouts, we did have the girls I mentioned, and I did take first in Los Angeles. We got to New York and I recall that I took second and Georgia had taken first. I don't know where Dorothy was, I think maybe she was third. But of course, I believe they were also doing springboard diving. But I just mention that because when I goofed, so to speak, in Amsterdam I did have a good chance. Afterwards, it was Betty Pinkston who won the high platform. I know it was Betty who came to me and said, "You're the one I was really afraid of." But, I was definitely at my best at that time.

DeFrantz: Was it just a matter of--?

Neher: We never did know what happened to me. It was my first dive there that I blew. Afterwards . . . I guess afterwards it was Cady who was there, or was it Brandsten—maybe they were both there. One of the two men said it was a strange thing that happened. It was a standing swan on a low platform, and he said it looked as though they pulled the platform out from under me. I thought afterwards as I tried to analyze it, because that was something I never did. I'd had enough experience not to be nervous . . . some stress, of course, but not that way. I've always thought that I did not warm up properly, and I've watched recently and I see how carefully they warm up. They have divers today who go and stand on the platform and just fall in. When I first saw that I thought: What in the world is this? You know, if I had done that maybe it would have made all the difference in the world. I don't mean to be excusing myself for it, because a winner is a winner, and either you win or you lose, that's the way it is. Obviously you put a lot of hours into it and you do want to

analyze what happened, That's the only thing I could come up with.

DeFrantz: The second time around were the Opening Ceremonies as impressive for you personally?

Neher: It didn't hit the same. I don't know if there was a difference in the way it was handled, in the audience, in us. I don't know.

DeFrantz: I'll never know, since I didn't get to go to my second Games. But I've wondered if it would have been as impressive.

Neher: I never will understand that—the 1980 boycott.

DeFrantz: I just hope that I can work to make sure that it doesn't happen again. After your Olympic competition did you stay in sports? Do you have any general thoughts about how your experience affected you?

Neher: I was always into swimming. We built a pool in our Los Angeles home. We lived there 31 years. My family and my two children grew up knowing that until they swam in the morning and did their laps that there was no breakfast! And the whole family did it; father, mother and the kids. That was just a part of the routine. Finally, there were grandchildren coming and staying all night and saying, "Do we have to swim before we have breakfast?" And I said, "Oh yes."

My own children are good swimmers but were never strongly interested in competition. But they're excellent swimmers, which is the important thing. Competitive sport is time consuming. You do give an awful lot to this. I was well aware at Stanford that I was giving up much of my social life. In certain instances where I gave up things, I question now that it was wise. Maybe it should have been a little more balanced. But it was important to me.

I guess we'll go to '82 because it was in 1982 that I received a surprise letter from the people who were heading up the Spirit Team, asking former Olympians if they were interested in trying to do something about carrying some of the message of what the Olympic spirit means to people in the Southern California area. The letter indicated that if we were interested we should fill out a form and send it in, which I did. A lot of us did. I just think that was a great experience. I remember our first meeting well, because there was a wonderful turnout. I liked what they were saying and I liked what they wanted to do. They wanted to have the American people educated as to what it's all about. Many people didn't have any idea until Spirit Team members went out. They gave us fabulous training. I thought that was great.

They brought us the man who was in charge of transportation or whatever, so that from the horse's mouth we got the answers to questions that we might need. Then they encouraged us to use our own experiences, which we did. I liked the fact that they gave us training in speech. They gave us training whether we were talking over the radio or on TV. I was thrilled with the whole experience right from the beginning, but it was so much greater than I had anticipated. I don't know if I was particularly lucky or not, but I got to do some talks that will stay with me forever.

DeFrantz: People really appreciated what you had to offer.

Neher: I was impressed with the audience. Of course, it was a privilege to be able to speak to the group.

DeFrantz: I think the honor was theirs to have you as such an eloquent spokesperson for the Games.

Neher: Not really, it was the other way. They inspired us to do the best we could. It was pretty thrilling.

DeFrantz: So that was the first chance you had to get back involved with it? Were you a member of Southern California Olympians?

Neher: I was for a good many years. But I didn't get into being active. Of course, a great part of my life was working. I stopped early; I stopped when I was 55.

DeFrantz: You had been a teacher.

Neher: Yes, I taught starting at Washington High School. Then I became a girls' vice-principal. Today that's gotten into my daughter's blood. She's a principal of a junior high school in Los Angeles. My son teaches at Northern Illinois University, so you see, there's teaching blood. And my husband was a teacher.

DeFrantz: Any advice you'd want to give to kids today who might be interested in aspiring to the Games?

Neher: Well, I would encourage it. If a person is interested at all I think it's a fabulous experience. But I did want to say more about this 1984 experience. I remember that when I was giving speeches I suddenly got this feeling, and I became concerned. I kept finding newspaper articles or headlines that would say something about our "going for the gold." On TV those words were used a great deal, and I thought: Look, the American people are the hosts of this. It's great. Every athlete goes for the gold, I don't need to tell you that. That's what he is supposed to do. That's what the Greeks did. They wanted to find out who the number one person was, and that's what we want to know. The important thing is to find who that is; not that he'd be an American particularly, although that's pretty nice, I suppose, when it happens. And we're proud when it does happen.

But I was so anxious that people receive these guests that we were going to have; receive them with friendship, receive them equally. I was deeply concerned that they were going to not use

good judgment at the meets. Then came the Opening Ceremony and, of course, I found out that I had nothing to worry about. I'll never forget when they had that parade of nations and those athletes from China marched in, it just seemed to me as though 90,000 people must have stood up at one time. I could not believe what happened there. And yet, we knew that they were communists, they knew that we were not, for the most part, and they were there to take part in the sports festival. And I thought: That's it. They do understand and we understand. Our audience understood what the Olympic Games really mean. Then the Romanians came in and we did it again. To think that the Soviet Union had even, as I understand it, requested them not to come and yet they were able to stand on their own two feet to come. It was great. So, that was something I didn't need to worry about.

DeFrantz: Is there anything else you want to add?

Neher: Just that I think at one time, if somebody had said to me, "Do you think that the Olympic Games should definitely go on, continue?" Some years ago, I might have hesitated, and said—which I have always thought—"Well, these are young people and they do have something in common." They come from all over the world and it's a fabulous opportunity for them to find each other. But it seemed to me that in these 1984 Games it really happened: The young people from these various parts of the world got very close together. When we saw them dance together and play together . .

So if anybody asked me today, I'd say, "Absolutely, let's give it a go," whether it's Korea or wherever it is.

DeFrantz: Well, thank you very much. It has been a pleasure visiting with you.