

An Olympian's Oral History

SAMMY LEE

1948 Olympic Games – London

- *Platform Diving -
Gold Medal*
- *Springboard Diving -
Bronze Medal*

1952 Olympic Games – Helsinki

- *Platform Diving -
Gold Medal*



Interviewed by:
Dr. Margaret Costa

Edited by:
Carmen E. Rivera



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This is Dr. Margaret Costa. Today is October 19, 1990. I'm interviewing Dr. Sammy Lee, Olympic gold medalist in diving in the 1948 and 1952 Summer Olympic Games.

Q: What I want you to tell me about is your heritage, your Korean-American parentage.

A: My father first immigrated to the United States in 1905. In fact, he landed in Hawaii and was there for several years; and then came here in 1907. He was sponsored by the American Railroad Workers who were helping build railroads there in Korea. He became bilingual. He was quite good in languages, which I'm not. My father told me about the time when he was working as an interpreter for railroad workers in Korea and learning how to speak English, along with Syngman Rhee, who later became president of Korea. When my father left Korea, he had two sons. He left my mother, came to the United States, and then went to Occidental Academy, after he left Hawaii. Since they didn't make American shoes in his size, he had to buy girls shoes because his feet were so small. He used to mix flour and water just to be able to eat something, or sometimes he got some rice. He became a Christian at Occidental College, which is a Presbyterian school. Samuel Augustus Pritchard converted him to Christianity, which was fortunate for me because he decided to get rid of his concubine. He came here with his concubine. All this I didn't know until after he passed away. My mother told me when I was grieving for my father, "I want you to know what kind of a man your father really was." She told me the real story of my dad having a concubine. He was going up to the School of Engineering at Cal. However, he decided that he had to work to bring his wife over from Korea. She arrived here in 1911 or 1912. He worked very hard, and it was very difficult for him to make a living. My mother cooked for the workers in the Central Valley there in Fresno. My parents had two daughters. Dolly, who has a master's degree from USC in English literature, after attending Occidental College for her bachelor's degree. My sister, Mary, got her master's at University of Southern California as well. They always wanted a boy as their two boys had died in Korea. My mother and father used to see little boys around the park and get tears in their eyes. They wished for a son to carry on the family name. I was born in 1920 in Fresno, California. They said that I had a large head, as you can tell. If I had a body to fit my head, I'd been a basketball player.

We were not doing well up in Fresno. In fact, my father had made a fortune, (\$50,000 worth of fresh vegetables and fruits to be shipped to the East Coast) prior to World War I. When the armistice was signed, they celebrated for a week and he totally lost his produce because there wasn't any refrigeration. He had to start over in Los Angeles, near the Music Center near Bunker Hill, where they had a little Korean church. We lived upstairs from the Korean church, and we all contracted the measles and scarlet fever. From there, my dad decided to open a grocery store on Temple Street. My father took me to a celebration. On March 1st, in 1919, 20,000 Korean students were slaughtered by the Japanese when they wanted independence, because they didn't want to be annexed by Japan. My father took me to a demonstration. That really shook me up. I said to my dad, "What's going on?" He said, "Well, that is what the Japanese did to the Koreans." That made such an impression on me that very early the next morning, on Temple Street, I went over to our neighbor Mrs. Watanabi with a butcher knife. I knocked on the door and she came to the door, and I said, "I saw what you Japs did to the Koreans, I'm gonna kill you." And boy, she headed out the door and she got a hold of my dad, and my dad said, "You stupid kid. Mrs. Watanabi had nothing to do with that." It made such an impression on me that whenever I did term

papers, and I'd get all this material together about the massacre of 1919 and have it in my notebook. We lived in Highland Park, which I was too small to remember. However, my sisters tell me that when my father tried to move to Sunset Boulevard, we stayed only about a week. The people did not want Asians living on Sunset Boulevard. We lived in the back and had the grocery store in the front, and I wondered, "Well, gee, we're moving again," and we moved to Highland Park. But the irony of ironies, in 1984 they were putting in plaques of famous Olympic athletes, and here, almost diagonally across the way from where we were asked to leave, is my star. My sister reminded me that there were pickets, "No Chinks, no Japs," in Highland Park on York Boulevard. We lived at 5711 York Boulevard. I remember it so well. It had a Korean quality market, and there were pickets. There was this man who stepped out and said, "Syngman Rhee and Soon Kee Rhee have every right to be here." He said, "I too am an immigrant, but I'm white, so you didn't object to me. I came from Germany, and I'm a doctor, and I'm going to give Soon Kee Rhee and his family the same rights and privileges that I've had." So, we were the only Oriental family there in Highland Park for years.

About the fifth grade, a kid comes in by the name of Isao Kikuchi who was introduced to us at school. I was really shook up. Isao Kikuchi, that's Japanese. I walked up in front of the class, and I said, "You're a Jap, aren't you?" and he says, "Yes." I belted him. I said, "I'm a Korean." Boy, the teacher was so shocked she sent me down to the principal and the principal reprimanded me, said I had to clean the lunch tables for a month. When I went to kindergarten, they said I was not mentally gifted and I had to repeat kindergarten. I went the first day and left. It took them six months to get me back in, and then, finally, I got to first grade and second grade. I hated school so much, that when my dad dropped me off at school, I'd walk through the hallways, come back out, and sit outside. In fact, not being too bright, I'd sit right out in front of the principal's office. He could see me from the office, sitting out on the curb. And when a number of hours passed, I'd go back home. I had to repeat second grade. Well, that was an advantage to me because being small I was one of the oldest and strongest kids. Anytime anyone would call me a "Jap" or "Chink," I'd beat the hell out of them. The principal finally said to my father, "I think Sammy has to have more sleep. What time does he go to bed?" He said, "Oh, he probably goes to bed at 10 o'clock at night or so." He says, "He's got to go to sleep before then." My dad said, "We own a grocery store and we stay open until 10, sometimes 11 o'clock." They finally figured out that this kid needed responsibility. Because I had this Big Ben pocket watch, she said, "You're going to ring the bell for school and recess." That gave me responsibility. I also had to show up to school to ring that bell. She also figured that that wasn't enough to keep me busy. I also had to hand out the athletic equipment. All of a sudden I began to like school and compete with Isao Kikuchi. Everything that poor Isao did, I would do him one better. I became president of Yorkdale Grammar School, and it was there I met my first love. She had a broken arm, and her name was Betty Green. We were 11 and 12 at the time. I even took care of her mother-in-law as a doctor years later. I always admired the best runner and the best baseball player, and I just craved sports. Studies were secondary to me, but my parents would always say, "Now, you have to have a profession, and the most honorable profession is to be a doctor of medicine, because you will always be needed and you'll never starve." At Luther Burbank Jr. High School a man by the name of Mr. Walter Koerper heard that there was a Korean boy, Oriental boy, coming to the school. Now Walter Koerper was German. He was a strict teacher, and his favorite student was a Japanese-American named George Nikato, who was a straight-A student and the Boy's League president. When I went to Luther Burbank Jr. High, I was supposed to go to another homeroom, but he finagled me into his homeroom. He was always bragging about George Nikato, and that really upset me. So, I just made up my mind to make straight A's and also be student body president. I was told promptly that boys and girls had to vote for me. I knew that it would make me one better than George Nikato. My first year at Luther Burbank was very traumatic. Nobody asked me to sign the

yearbook. Who the hell is going to pay attention to a little Oriental guy? But deep in my heart, I say to myself that someday they will.

Q: Let us go back to your sporting experience in elementary school.

A: At Yorkdale Grammar School, in my last year, 1932, they had the Olympic Games in Los Angeles. I didn't know what all this hullabaloo was, but I used to drive with my father in his Model T truck down to San Pedro Street, to the markets at four or five in the morning to get vegetables. This one particular morning he was really late. It was about seven or eight, and in those days Broadway went through a tunnel, and you could see all of the flags there. It was a beautiful sight, and I asked, "Gee, what are all those flags?" He said, "They are having the Olympic Games. That is where the greatest athletes in the world are crowned every four years." Boy, I'll never forget the chill that just went up and down my spine. I said, "Gee, papa, someday I'm gonna be an Olympic champ." He chuckled and said, "What in?" I said, "I don't know Papa, but I'll find it."

Q: Did you hear anything about the Olympic Games while they were going on?

A: No, not until one summer at the Los Angeles Recreation Department in Arroyo Seco, when we were playing follow-the-leader. I noticed that I would do things that my classmates wouldn't try. All day long I'd do a front flip and a back flip. I didn't know how to do anything else. There was a black kid standing there by the name of Hart Crum, who was an all-around everything. He was a basketball player, football player, and he could do anything. He came up to me said, "Hey Sammy, why do you just do one somersault?" In those days, they had very thick plank diving boards and it was very hard for a kid about 60 pounds to bounce. He said, "I'll tell you what, you go up and bounce the board, and I'll bounce it behind you and when I yell, you'll do 1 1/2 somersault." That was the biggest thrill of my life, doing that 1 1/2 somersault. I ran home and I said, "Papa, I found the sport that I'm going to be champion in." He said, "What?" I said, "Diving." He said, "I don't know what that is." I told him that he would have to come out and see. Hart coached me and I won the Junior City Championship and things like that. Hart used to always say, "You know, Sam, I can only take you so far, you need a big-time coach." I won all the city championships. By the time I went to Luther Burbank Junior High School, Mr. Koerper knew from my other friends that I was a pretty good diver. He had always wanted to have a swimming meet, a Luther Burbank Junior High School Swimming Meet, so I could excel in it. We didn't have a pool, as pools weren't available at that time. So, at Luther Burbank Junior High School I played baseball and football, and all these things, with the biggest kids. Now, I'm a year or two older, and I could keep up with these kids, although they were bigger. I was strong, see? All summer I'd be diving because the recreation department pool would open up on Memorial Day and close on Labor Day.

Q: Was this Brookside Pool?

A: No, this wasn't Brookside Pool. Brookside had a 1-meter board and 3-meter board, and diving tower. Hart Crum told me about this place. But he said you could only go in one day a week. I thought it was Monday, but later on I found out it was Wednesday. Hart and I went over there on a Wednesday and we got in. I saw a couple of black kids, and very few people there, but they wouldn't let me on the 3-meter board, which was getting really high for me. They would let me on the tower. Finally, I was permitted to go on it. I thought that damned thing was 100 feet high. It was actually 28 feet. I told my dad I went up the 100-foot diving tower. I was very disappointed when I found out it was only 28 feet. But that was only one day a week. The Los Angeles Swim Stadium became the recreation departments, and the

restriction was lifted. I could go on a streetcar, which took me about an hour, to Exposition Park. They held all of the All-City Championships there. I first won the Los Angeles City Championship, junior division. Then later, as I got better, I won the senior division, but I was always hunting for that coach. In the summertime, I obtained a job around the pool as a locker boy. I wasn't a good enough swimmer to be a lifeguard. Besides, I was told that if I became a lifeguard I would be classified as a professional. I was getting ready for the Olympic Games. I'm training and diving away, and 1936 comes. Now I know all about the Olympics. I had studied about all the great divers and listened to the victories of Jessie Owens. I just kind of projected myself when they were talking about Jessie Owens on the victory stand. My father becomes very excited when they said, "A Korean won the Olympic Games in America." I said, "What do you mean Korean?" and he said, "Well, he goes by the name Kitei, but he is actually Korean, his real name is Sohn Kee-Chung." Sohn Kee-Chung is his Korean name. He said, "Not only that, on the victory stand he tore off the Japanese emblem and underneath there was the Korean flag." Later on he was put under house arrest. He is a hero in Korea and Syngman Rhee gave him a whole piece of property in Seoul. I talked to him about three or four years ago and I said, "You must be a multi-millionaire now with land." He said, "No, Sam, I had tunnel vision only in sports, and I was tricked out of that land." I followed the 1936 Olympic Games closely. I needed a diving coach and I also needed a job at 30 cents an hour. So, I applied to the city council's office. One of the county supervisors, whose name I forget, called me in and said, "I hear you want this job," and "How many votes can your father swing out of Chinatown?" I said, "Well, I'm not Chinese, and my father's not a citizen and he's not allowed to become one." Boy, (pop) the interview was over like that. I had friends in the municipal department who spoke on my behalf, and I got a job over at Evergreen Swimming Pool, which was integrated with Russians, blacks and Japanese. I was attending Franklin High School at the time, which was not an integrated area. So I got this 30-cents-an-hour job and I had a couple of days off, Friday and Saturday. I heard about what they used to call the L.A. International Invitation Swim Meet. The night before I had gone to the L.A. Athletic Club to watch the Pacific Coast Diving Championships and met Johnny Riley and Dick Smith from USC. I'd been trying to get in to the L.A. Athletic Club as a boxer. I went over there and boxed a couple of times hoping that when there was a lull I could come up to the diving board and do one hell of a dive and the diving coach would say, "You shouldn't be a boxer. You should be a diver." But that never happened. I went there for about a month and a half. Besides the boxing, one man wanted me to become a jockey. My dad said, "No, no, no, no, no." So, I stopped going to the boxing because it made my dad so unhappy. That was the winter of '38. But the summer of '38 at the Evergreen Swimming Pool, I went to the L.A. Swim stadium and there is a lull, so I get up and do a little diving. Hart Crum was with me. There was a green hulk like the Jolly Green Giant standing on the deck. I could see this huge man in a green suit and chain smoking. He comes down and he's waiting for Duke Kahanamoku to come over. He comes up and says "Hey kid, you like to dive?" I said, "I'm crazy about it." He said, "Let's see you do a swan dive." I thought it was great, I'd swan dive, come out of the water expecting to hear praise. "Who taught you that dive?" I said, "That kid over there. Hart Crum!" "Go kick that son of a bitch in the ass. That's the worst goddamn ..." I had never heard language like that. He said, "Go up and do it this way." Now Dick Smith is there. He is also coaching Dick Smith. I could hear him talking to Duke Kahanamoku, and he's got a very loud voice. He says, "See that little Jap over there, I'm gonna make him the world's greatest diver or kill him." So I walked up to him and I said, "Hey, I'm not a Jap, and I'm not a Chink, I'm a Korean." So he spins around and he kicks me right in the butt. I said to Dick Smith, "See that big guy down there, after this next dive I'm gonna get out of the water, I'm gonna jump up and hit that son of a bitch right in the mouth, and I'm gonna get out of here." Dick Smith said, "Sam, this man is the answer to your prayers. I want you to keep your mouth shut and listen to him." I swallowed, I bit my tongue, and all I heard was just four-letter words. In those days, I didn't swear. Someone asked who that man was. The reply was that he was Jim Ryan, a diving coach,

but he hadn't been around since the '32 Olympics. He said he'd be back at noon the next day. I still have that day off. So, I'm there about six minutes to noon, and at six o'clock he shows up. He says, "Well, I guess you're really interested." Then he says, "I'm gonna buy a diving board for my backyard, and I'm going to build a sand board." That is dry land diving used to do port-a-pits and belts, etc. In 1938 I took my first trip away from home overnight to San Francisco to the Far Western meet. He told me that I was going to be Chinese. My dad was upset, but Dick Smith and I drive up to San Francisco.

Q. Did you go by car?

A: He had a beautiful black Cadillac.

Q. And he was a diver?

A: He was a diver. The Chinese press came and asked what part of China were my parents from. Hell, I didn't know, I said, "Why, I really don't know." I'm not sure, but I was probably last on the major springboard, and fourth or fifth on the tower. I didn't make too great an impression. It was the first time I got to stay in a hotel and do all these things that I'd never done before.

Q: What did you get to do?

A: Well, I got to go to a nightclub, and I saw this woman up there belly dancing. I was really embarrassed because I'd never seen anything like that. This didn't bother Dick Smith at all.

Q: Now getting back to the sandpit, who dug the hole?

A: Dick Smith and I dug it. Boy, we dug that thing. He bought all the stuff.

Q: Whose yard was it in?

A: Jim Ryan's, near UCLA, on Switzer Drive in West L.A. We dug the sandpit and we mixed the cement. He bought the diving board and got a couple of tons of sand. Then we started training.

Q: How high was the pit?

A: The pit was probably about 9 feet long and about 6 feet wide. You had to pile the sand up into a pyramid because when you landed it had to be soft. We used to constantly shovel that stuff up. That's how we got very big in the shoulders.

Q: What does it look like?

A: O.K., one's like the 1-meter board, a low board, with the sand piled about a foot above the springboard. So you somersaulted over and landed in the sand.

Q: Did you put the stand in the cement yourself?

A: We did it ourselves. It was fixed fulcrum. We had this 16-foot regulation wooden diving board with

cocoa matting, and a shovel and a pitchfork. Jim Ryan said, "Now we're going to do all of our dives here, front somersaults and double somersaults." We said, "Are you gonna catch us?" He said, "If you're dumb enough to break your goddamn neck, you deserve to die." We'd be all bug-eyed, but we became very strong. We did that for a couple of months. Even when it was raining, I would show up from Franklin High School. At this time I'm a senior at Franklin, 1939, and I wanted to be student body president. I had already been president at Luther Burbank Junior High School. I was yell leader, vice president and president at Luther Burbank. I beat George Nikato in all those things.

Q: How many males were cheerleaders at that time? Were you cheerleaders with the women?

A: No, oh, no. Not in those days. There were only men cheerleaders. There were three; they had the head cheerleader and two assistants. When I went to Franklin High School, I played lightweight football.

Q: Lightweight means what?

A 150 pounds and under, and I weighed 114. I was quarterback and I could punt the football 50, 55 yards with very strong legs. Then, in my junior year, 11th grade, I was captain of the football team. On defense, I was a linebacker, especially if there were Japanese-Americans on the other side. In fact, at Roosevelt High School, a primarily all-Japanese-American school, they used to talk in Japanese and give signals. I'd be on one side saying, "Come on, let's get those damn Japs, let's get the Japanese." They'd get down and say, "Let's get that damn Korean." But anyway, my senior year, Jim Ryan is coaching me and it's 1939. Because the Olympics were in 1940, he says that he doesn't want me playing football. My god, quite a few people felt we'd win the championship with me playing. So, when I announced to the football coach that I wouldn't play anymore, he was naturally very upset. Then, when I ran for student body president, the vice principal called me in and said, "You know, we've never had a Korean president. Don't run for president."

Q: You had never had a non-white president?

A: When I got elected he was really upset, and I told him that my classmates looked at me as an American.

Q: What did you say in your acceptance speech when you were elected?

A: There were seven guys running against me for student body president, and I won. I thanked everybody and said that they were the members of the jury and I was asking them to judge me by what I had done as a student and athlete. I told them I had led them at Franklin and at Luther Burbank Junior High School. I never mentioned being Oriental. So, I won it, which upset Mr. Axe, the vice principal, very much. When I was training, I remember Jim Ryan always browbeating me. I remember January 1st, 1939, when USC beat Duke University in the Rose Bowl 7 to 3. I remember that I was listening to the game, doing back double somersaults, and fell forward on my head and cracked it. I split my eyebrow, and it was bleeding, so I had to close it off. Well, Ryan is standing there smoking a cigarette and said, "Ah, you Chinks got red blood, haven't you?" Boy, I could have belted him one. He said, "Just get back up there." So I kept diving. Everyday, when I was going to high school, raining or not, I would train. The sand would be wet and I'd have to shovel that sand up. Sand got in my trunks, in my face, and I was being browbeaten by this guy who'd be sitting in a chair under an umbrella and

was drinking hot coffee. He did make me tough to racial slurs. In fact, there were incidents in several competitions in the indoor pool at the L.A. Athletic Club. When I was walking across the board, I'd hear someone say, "Hey, watch this Chink, or this Jap, dive." I'd stop in the middle of the dive and say, "Hey, you know I'm not a Chink or a Jap, I'm a Korean, and I'm American." At this one meet, I introduced a back 2 1/2 reverse. It had never been seen before in competition, and I won the Pacific Coast Championship. So, Saturday I went to UCLA, Jim Ryan wanted me to go to UCLA because it was only a few miles from his home.

Q: 1939?

A: This was spring of '39. The Olympic Games were coming in 1940 at UCLA. At the UCLA scholarship interview, there were about eight or nine of us, and I was the only non-white there. I remember during the interviews I was feeling pretty good because I had just won the indoor Pacific Coast Championship. They looked at my grades and asked what I wanted to be. I said, "I'd like to be an Olympic diving champion, and also doctor of medicine." They looked at each other and said, "Well, do you have any alternative plans?" I said, "No. I have no alternative plans." I did not get the scholarship.

Q: What happened with USC?

A: Fred Cady said that he had half a scholarship. I needed a full scholarship. Occidental College came by because I graduated from Franklin High School. My graduation ceremony was held at the Greek Bowl at Occidental College. It was announced that the outstanding athlete of the class of 1939 was Sammy Lee. The valedictorian was Sammy Lee with eight others. The outstanding student body president and et cetera, Sammy Lee. My parents were bursting with pride. Also present was Ted Broadhead, who was the alumni director of Occidental College, as well as Roy Dennis, the swimming, diving, basketball, baseball, and for a small college, everything coach. Occidental offered to pay for all of my education and offered me a job, as well, for \$30.00 a month. They also promised to send me to the national championships.

Q: Tell us about your prom night.

A: My friends and I had dinner, which was prepared by my mother, and then we went to Venice. The dance was at the Pasadena Civic Auditorium, which was restricted. Anyone of color was not allowed at the Pasadena Civic, which cost 25 cents. They had big name bands that go there. I never told the kids I couldn't get in, so I always had some excuse. In my junior year at Occidental, my premed advisor, Dr. Sully, had called me in and said that I really should forget about being a doctor because he knew from all these tests that he had been giving, that I would most likely flunk out of medical school, so he would never recommend me.

Q: What did you major in at Occidental?

A: Premed.

Q: What was your favorite subject?

A: Athletics was my favorite subject. I used to dream about being a coach. All the guys were in P.E.

When my grades dropped down to C, I was on the carpet for that.

Q: What was your schedule like at Occidental?

A: I stayed at home and had a little lunch ticket that they gave me. My father passed away January 17th, 1943. The premed advisor called me in and he said, out of respect for my father, but against his better judgment, he would recommend me for medical school. But in the mean time, my father had hounded me about applying to medical school. I applied to Duke, Oregon, USC and Stanford. I got rejections from everybody but USC. They called me for an interview. But, when I stepped into the door, I could see the secretary was the sister of the man who used to let me in at the Occidental College swimming pool. He used to sneak me in. Besides, I could walk to school. I was lucky because my classes were small. I'd leave my chemistry experiments requesting that my classmates take them off in 55 minutes because I was going down to the pool to train. At the big universities, you can't do that because they're so interested in getting their grades that they might contaminate experiments during your final examination. I was fortunate. When I went to the championships back East, unbeknownst to me, in my mailbox would be carbon-copied notes of every class I missed. To this day I don't know who did that. I was the only person from Occidental to go to the national championship at Michigan State University at East Lansing. I will never forget that. The divers said, "Here comes the Oriental from Occidental." I remember meeting kids from Princeton, Yale and Harvard, all these big name schools. My first years at USC were traumatic. The kids at Occidental College were bright but USC students, UCLA students, are used to that tremendous competition. But they are all fraternity boys. When there is going to be an examination, the fraternity guys all study together and have copies of old exams. I was lost; I didn't know how to study. So, I remember my first grades at USC School of Medicine were biochemistry, nine units, F; Anatomy, 12 units, F; Histology, D--which was a five unit course. And so the medical assistant dean, Dr. Walter Scott, called me in and he said, "Sammy, I know that you aren't really interested in being a doctor, the war is bothering you." It was bothering me, and I wanted to be a fighter pilot with Miller Anderson, who I was on the Olympic team with in 1948 and '52. When Pearl Harbor happened, Miller and I were together, and we said, "You know, if we survive this war, let's both come back and become Olympic champions, OK?" And we shook hands. I said, "Wait a minute, Miller, you're gonna be springboard champion and I'm gonna be tower champion." In 1945 Miller Anderson was shot down on his 113th mission over Italy, and he wrote me a letter from the hospital and said, "Sam, remember our promise? When I get out of the damned hospital, they are resetting my leg. I got a six inch plate in my left leg. But remember our promise, we're gonna meet at the Olympic Games." And so we did. We both made the team, but poor Miller, a dive he never missed, he got second, and when he came out of the water he looked at me and said, "Jeez, Sam, I didn't live up to my agreement." I said, "Hell, it wasn't your fault!"

Q: Let us return to medical school and your conversation about your progress with the assistant dean.

A: He suggested that I go in the service, because if I flunk out of school, no other A-class medical school would accept me. By the time I came home, I could re-enter medical school this way. He gave me 24 hours to think it over. He suggested that I go in the service, come back, and go at a more leisurely pace. Because of the war, all those who were drafted into the Army and the Navy by the specialized training programs had their program cut to two years and nine months. There are no vacations and the lectures had to be speeded up, and professors were not ready so they would say, "Well O.K., we're gonna give nine lectures on a particular subject. You're gonna have to study on the other six because we can't

cover it.” So, as I’ve said, I’m not bright, so I had a hell of a time! When I came home my mother was crying. In my class now, for the first time, there is Chinese, Bob Huey; myself, Korean; and Jimmy Rhee, Korean. My mom had heard that I was flunking out of medical school. So the next day I go back and see Dr. Scott, and I said, “Dr. Scott, I have never quit in my life. If you can flunk me in the next 10 weeks, you flunk me.” But boy, I am telling you, I studied 24 hours a day. The fraternity guys, who knew me, gave me all the examination papers. They told me how to study. Fraternities were restricted, so I couldn’t belong. In fact, 30 years later, or so, they called me up and wanted me to join the fraternity. I refused.

Q: So you studied with the fraternity members?

A: With the fraternity boys.

Q: What happened at the 1948 Olympic tryouts? Did you qualify?

A: In the mean time Walter Scott is now dean of the medical School at Wayne University Medical School in Detroit. Detroit is where the Olympic tryouts are. So, I’m up there, and I had the best day of my life! Johnny McCormack and I are in the locker room when we hear them calling diving scores out. They had moved up the time for the diving competition. So Johnny got up and yelled down, “We were told that we could take a warm-up dive.” Johnny said, “Sam, should I take a warm-up dive?” I didn’t know the microphone was on. I said, “Hell no, hit the goddamn dive!” He goes out and hits an 8.5, 8.5, 9. He did a great swan dive. But I’m all psyched up, too. So, I had the hottest day of my life. I didn’t score anything under nine. I got quite a few 10s; it was the best contest I ever had. I think I averaged 9.3. Now I am on the Olympic team: Bruce Harlan, Miller Anderson and I on the springboard.

Q: Miller Anderson was the one from Michigan?

A: Ohio State University. Bruce Harlan from Ohio State and I’m from USC at the time.

Q: Had you graduated? What year did you graduate?

A: In 1947, and finished my internship. I’m also a lieutenant in the Army medical corps.

Q: How did you get into the Army then?

A: Because when the war came along they had this Army Specialized Training Program. All those who qualified passed the physical for Army or Navy, or were in medical school, were drafted and paid by the government. The minute you finished, you went into the service. When the war ended, they didn’t need us right off. But we still had to pay back the government for the years when we were in medical school, so I went back into the service in ‘47, now as a first lieutenant. Now, they don’t have the national championship in 1942 on the 10-meter tower, and Mike Peppe said that wasn’t fair for Sammy Lee who has trained all this time. He decided to host the national championship in Columbus, Ohio, for Sammy Lee to win. But now they are hunting for tower divers. There aren’t enough, so I beg Miller Anderson, who hasn’t done tower for a couple of months, to get in the contest. So I feel so great, I go out there and I do my back 2 1/2, reverse 2 1/2, front 2 1/2 and the audience have never seen this. This is warm-up. They blow the whistle, the contest starts. I can hit my hat, I hear 9, 9.5, 9. I looked. It’s Miller Anderson! This guy I talked into entering the contest. All of a sudden, he falls down on

his arm stand and he misses the whole dive. So, I won my national championship. It was so funny. Miller and I make the team.

Q: Who is paying your way to all these places?

A: I am in the Army. They paid my way.

Q: Tell us about the 1948 Olympic experience.

A: The first national championship your nervous, but the Olympic Games, you are competing for your country. I hear these recent winners in the Olympic Games say, "I did it for myself." Well, in my day, sure it was for yourself, but it was for your country, your family, as well. The Olympic Games are something different because it's you and our system against the world. It's also a rebellion against the bigots in my own country who said I couldn't do it. I used to wear ear plugs in my ear because I had ear problems and I'd pour alcohol in them and always have lamb's wool so I couldn't hear everything going on. But during the Olympics, I took them out so I could hear all the music, the foreign language, everybody talking to one another. Nowadays they're so big they don't do that, they are so worried about that gold medal that they have lost some of the fraternity that used to exist. Your mouth is dry and the night before, I must have slept about an hour. And then I think, what if I had an appendicitis attack. You're up early in the morning, you are still healthy, there are no excuses now. Always, during your first dive, you feel so weak and, like, you just can't move until after the refreshment of hitting of the water. Then you're ready for the competition. You think everybody in the audience can hear your heart beating. But I remember the nervousness of my last dive, which was my favorite dive, the forward 3 1/2 somersault. I'd be leading all the way. You could see Bruce Harlan and Joaquin Capilla of Mexico looking at me, and I'm looking at them. I know exactly what they were thinking, "I hope you land flat on your ass!" And I'm thinking, "I'm not gonna land flat on my ass!" You walk up to that diving tower, and in those days they had the cocoa matting, with the skylight brighter than the water. I think, "Oh my god, a year ago in Texas I did that front 3 1/2 and I opened up for the sky, instead of the water, and I had to duck and barely got in head first. They always tell the athlete, to make the image of the perfect dive. But I kept thinking about that damned skylight. Then you hear your name, "S. Lee of the United State of America," then, "S. Lee, forward three somersault." And they say it in French. The whistle blows and there is dead silence and all you can hear is the trickle of the water from the 10-meter tower. Drip ... drip. It sounds like a gong. And that time is just like when you think you're gonna die, your whole life goes by. Wow, I've waited 16 years for this moment, and now it's here. Here is my baby, the forward 3 1/2 somersault that I put in the books in 1940, eight years before, and I'm gonna do this dive. And I can't move. I said, "Get moving, get moving." So, I finally move and I hit the water. I said, "What the hell did I do? Did I do a 3 1/2? Did I do a 4 1/2 or did I do any dive?" I came out of the water and I see 10, 9, 9.5 and a 7.5. As I tell everyone that's the second time in history man walked on water. And Vicki Draves comes up and she hugs me, and she's so happy. Everybody is crying, I'm crying.

Q: You didn't remember when you were doing it, you didn't remember?

A: I didn't remember any of it. The only thing I do remember was the thump of the tower and that's all. From that time, it was numbness and tingling. I'm not a real religious person, but you do get religious in a moment like this. Like I'd say, "Dear God, let me do the best that I can. I want to win the gold medal." Now, I don't know the reason why I deserve to win this damned gold medal, but I do, I give a silent prayer. Then I'm arguing with the Lord. I say, "Look. Hey, I'm such a hell of a nice guy, I never

cheated anybody, and I'm fine morally and religiously, so I should win!"

Q: Tell us about being awarded the medal?

A: They awarded the medal in swimming within a half hour. I remember when I got up on that victory stand, that number one stand, and I heard my name being announced and the cheering and all. I thought, "Jesus, am I by that radio in 1936 when I was listening to the victories and tears in my eyes? I must be by that radio!" and, "Oops, I've got to go, it's not the radio ... its me and I'm actually up there, I won the gold medal." When they raised the flag, the red, white and blue was never so bright. I've never been on LSD, but they say that color and everything is magnified. So, I must have been on a trip! And the "Star Spangled Banner," boy, I'm telling you, it never sounded so beautiful. It was a symphony to me and I said, "Well, thank God." My mother said that she was wakened early in the morning by friends from all over the country congratulating her. And of course, got a wire from Syngman Rhee, president of Korea. And Korea was just in ecstasy. Koreans would say, "We knew you would win because you are Korean."

Q. Do you remember who presented you with the medal?

A: No. No, I don't. It might have been Avery Brundage. He might have been there to present the medals. One of the poignant moments was when the Egyptians came up to me. They gave me a big hug and said you have vindicated Farid Simaika.

Q: What did you do after the games?

A: After I finished competing in London, I was on a plane flying over London, on the way to Holland, to give a diving exhibition with Bruce Harlan. Miller had hurt himself on the 10-meter tower and didn't go on this part. I'm with the swimming team going there to give the exhibition. When we got to Amsterdam, we had that great Dutch cooking. God, did we eat. We ate like hell. They weren't under as much rationing as the English were. In fact, in England, they didn't even have rice in the Chinese restaurant. Vicki Draves didn't go.

Q: Didn't women go on the trip?

A: Yeah, Zoe Ann Olsen went along, Patty Elsener and Ann Curtis. We gave exhibitions in Holland and we went to Apledoorn, which is where the royal palace and the summer palace were. It rained, and it was cold, but there must have been 3,000 people there. Queen Wilhelmina and Princess Juliana, they were there, and the whole town of Apledoorn. She sat through the whole thing. Everyone sat through it and when she got up and left, they all left. We had to sleep two to a room. So I had to sleep with Bruce Harlan, which was a real let down, but we got to be good friends. Bruce said to me, "Sam, I know you don't like me, and you are very upset that I beat your buddy Miller Anderson, and I know the vow you two guys made. But, you can't blame me." I said, "No, I don't blame you." And he said, "I really trained hard, and I respect you and I want you to be my friend." I said, "Bruce, you'll always be my friend."

Q: Do you remember much about Germany?

A: So when the Army said, "Report to Paris. You're going to leave the U.S. Olympic team, you're on

temporary duty and you'll be going on to Germany." So, I'm in Paris a couple of days, and the special service officer says, "I want you to have dinner with a friend of mine. He's quite a character, his name is Gaylord Houser. He wrote the first book on nutrition and how fat women could stay thin and healthy." So, we had dinner with him at a French restaurant, his favorite French restaurant.

Q: That wasn't part of his nutrition?

A: He ate everything that wasn't in this book. I was then picked up by the Army.

Q: When you came home, who was here to meet you?

A: Well, they had the *Times* dinner, and they had just promoted me to captain.

Q: Captain for diving?

A: From lieutenant.

Q: You were promoted for being a diver?

A: No, I was promoted because there was a rotation.

Q: What did your mother have to say when you arrived back? And your sisters, Dolly and Mary?

A: They were just so happy, and, of course, the Korean community was overwhelmingly happy. My mother said, "Well, son, its about time to get married. You know."

Q: As soon as you arrived back?

A: She knows I'm living high on the hog.

Q: So when you came back in '48, what did you do? Where did you go? Back to Pasadena?

A: I'm retired. In my spare time, I'm coaching Johnny McCormack. We get invited to New Zealand. Captain Lee was invited to go to New Zealand, but the A.A.U. says he must have a chaperon. New Zealand wired and said, "Why would a captain, a doctor of medicine, need a chaperon to come to New Zealand? We will not pay for a chaperon, but we will pay for another diver. He can be the chaperon." I invite Johnny McCormack. We arrive in New Zealand, in March of '49, and it is getting cold. We had one hell of a great time. We were the first American athletes since World War II to go to New Zealand. At the Olympics I had decided on a residency in ear, nose and throat, because I'm thinking of Howard House, that nice kid. So I wanted a residency at L.A. County Hospital. The L.A. County Hospital residency pays 100 to 105 dollars a month. Out of that, they take out your laundry money, which is \$25. My mother now is about close to 70 years old. She can't work any more. She would run the little chop suey store. When my father passed away, we still had to eat. She'd be making her little restaurant chop suey and be crying while she's making it. My sister Mary would have to go on the street car, down to Chinatown, because she didn't know how to drive a car, and pick up all the stuff, get back on the street car, and come home. She was also studying at USC, and she was on the Mortar Board. She was a good

student. USC stripped the requirements for foreign students. Although she wasn't a foreign student, they gave her a foreign student scholarship because she came from foreign parents. They stretched it a little, but that's how she got through four years at USC. My mother would be busy, cooking and crying. So, when I went into medical school, since I was going to be a private first-class, which gave me a hundred and something dollars, I gave her all my money. Well, she could live on that, and we had this house that my sister bought when the down payment was about \$7,000 or something, right on the SC campus. I could, in fact, roll out of bed, walk over to the little parking lot where all of us started at the march, and have a drill for half hour. We would all walk to class. I had this car that my father bought from the Japanese who were in or were going to internment camp, which was a 1937 four-door Chrysler, for a \$150. It was an exorbitant little amount. When we had to drive to L.A. County, the guys chipped in for gas, and we were able to drive to class. I was told that if I took a residency I would be paid \$400. Oh, hell, that's four times more than I could get as a civilian residency. I was invited to Yale to give a diving exhibition. On my way back, I stopped by the Pentagon. This is funny. So I went to the Pentagon and I met the guys there, and they said, "Oh, congratulations for winning the Olympic Games, Captain Lee. When your letter first came across that desk two years ago," he said, "we were going to send you to Korea." At that time, that was the worst assignment you could possibly get. Korea. The surgeon general had walked by and said, "What are you guys discussing, anyway?" And they said, "Well, there's some guy here named Sammy Lee who says he could possibly make the Olympic team and also work as a doctor of medicine." He says, "Station him wherever he wants to be stationed." I would have liked to have been one of the first Asian-Americans, or Orientals, to become an officer in the regular Army. But I didn't want to fill out all these crazy forms, such as how to change a tire, and what side do you get on, when you really don't want a Chinaman in the regular Army. I went to Letterman Hospital in San Francisco for my residency. In the meantime, before I go to Letterman, I go to New Zealand. My mother used to say to me, "Son, you're not much of a man." This is in '49. "What do you mean, Momma?" She said, "It's not nice for you to wait for somebody to die to marry her." She was referring to Vicki Draves, because her husband Lyle had angina. She said, "You should start thinking about somebody and the only girl I see that you should marry is Rozlyn Wong, the girl you brought over here from San Diego. She's the only one who loves you enough to forgive you for your faults, your bad temper, and your bad thoughts." I said, "Momma, forget it." So, I go to New Zealand. Nine months later I was engaged to Roz, and on her birthday, June 1, 1950, we were married.

Q: Tell us about the phone call regarding the '52 Olympics.

A: I got a call from Mike Peppe, who was at Ohio State, and was going to be the official Olympic diving coach. He told me that if I did not compete, Joaquin Capilla of Mexico would win. He suggested that I think about talking to my commanding officers. My commanding officer was General Leonard Heaton, who eventually became surgeon general of the U.S. Army and also became the personal physician of President Eisenhower. And I said, "General Heaton, I have mixed emotions about even asking you whether it is morally right to compete in the Olympic Games when so many of my fellow officers are in action and some of them have already been killed during this Korean War." Without hesitation he said, "Hey Sam, we have many physicians who can repair and treat the wounded, but we've only got one guy who can win the Olympic gold medal. So, how long do you have to take off?" I said, "Well, starting January '52, I would have to be transferred down to Ft. MacArthur in Los Angeles. So, from there I could do my duty during the day, and in the evenings I could practice diving up at the Pasadena Athletic Club, and also when the Olympic Pool opens up at the L.A. Swim Stadium, I'll be able to do my tower diving then." He said, "No problem." So, he cuts orders on me. And Roz stayed up in Letterman Army Hospital working in the Patients Fund, and I go down to Los Angeles and live with my mother, who's

right on the USC campus. My sister is there, also, while I am training. Roz comes down maybe once a month from San Francisco. Before the Olympic trials, I wrote to the surgeon general and said, "Dear sir, I'm four years older than I was in 1948 and you gave me one month off, relieved of all medical duties, so I could concentrate on working out seven days a week. How about two months off since I'm four years older." So I got new orders, temporary duty assigned to the Los Angeles Swim Stadium. The trials were in New York.

Q: At the Astoria Pool?

A: Yes, Astoria Pool in Flushing Meadows, New York. Just prior to that I got a telephone call from the ambassador assigned to Korea. He said he had just received a call from President Syngman Rhee of South Korea asking me to represent South Korea. I wrote Syngman Rhee a letter saying it was certainly an honor to represent my ancestral heritage, Korea, but since I was an American first, I will take my chances and try to make the American team and do justice both to my ancestral background and to my Americanism. So, when I competed in 1952 at the Olympic tryouts, Roz had already made preliminary reservations to go on the maiden voyage of the S.S. United States to Helsinki. It was leaving New York City the day of the Olympic tryouts on the 10-meter tower. I had missed the 3-meter springboard. I got fourth, the first person was Skippy Browning, second was Miller Anderson, third was Bobby Clotworthy, and I was fourth. Next is the tower that I was favored on the year I was coaching a young boy by the name of Jerry Harrison who dropped out of Ohio State University. I am coaching my best man, our best man, John McCormack. We were all in the finals of tower diving. In the New York paper, it says, "Major Sammy Lee's wife departing for Helsinki, Finland, hoping her husband makes the team after that." Boy, I was really upset about that. So I made sure that morning I went around and apologized to all the young kids there. I was really worried, but fortunately, I made the team and Roz is already out to sea on the S.S. United States. So the announcement is that first is Sammy Lee, second is Jack Calhoun, and third is Jerry Harrison, and Johnny McCormack fourth. I was really upset, and Johnny comes up with tears in his eyes and he looks at me and he says, "Sam, how could you?" It just broke my heart. Jerry Harrison is upset because he wanted to make the Olympic team but did not want to eliminate Johnny McCormack. I told him that if I knew he would have been so upset I would not have coached him. A half-hour later they say, "Correction, correction, there's been an error, there's been an error. Johnny McCormack is third and Jerry Harrison is fourth." They forgot to transfer some 10 or 15 points to Johnny McCormack's score from the preliminaries. Johnny McCormack is on the subway. The clerk congratulated him for making the Olympic team and he told them they had the wrong guy. When he realized he had made it, he cried. One of the superstitions, of all the divers I've coached, and even myself, is to have a Chinese meal the night before the Olympic tryouts. I even had to find a Chinese restaurant in Detroit. I got a call from Dr. Bob Schwartz, who's with me at Letterman Army Hospital as a dentist. And he said, "Hey, Roz just called from ship to shore, and you guys weren't in the hotel room and I told her you made the Olympic team." She was 15 hours out to sea and she was so happy. We all flew over to Helsinki where it would just be dark for about an hour and then the sun came out. The athletes were nailing their blankets up against the windows so they could go to bed. You'd be out at night until 11 o'clock, 12 o'clock, and it would be like a sunset.

Q: How did you feel about competing against the Soviets?

A: Well, of course it raised a lot of nationalism in me. I'm going to show them what democracy can do. One of the Russians came up and said, "You are Sammy Lee? I watched the movies of you in 1948 and you did win the contest fairly and squarely. We predict that you will win again." The next day, when we

were at the workout, I saw the Russians and got hold of the interpreter. He said, "By the way, can we ask you some personal questions? How much in dollars a month do you make?" I said, "Well, as a major, I make \$685 a month." I told them that many of my colleagues made five times that amount.

Q: What was it like having so many nations competing and practicing at the same time?

A: Some of us had to practice at six in the morning because, again, the water polo team had to practice in the pool. There were more countries.

Q: The water polo team was practicing in the diving pool?

A: In the diving pool. Because the swimming pool wasn't deep enough. We had to regulate a time with the Finns, and they brought a big sauna that we could all jump in to get warmed up. But it was the first time that ever happened, for us to jump into a sauna like that. The other thing that was funny was that when we were in the locker room, the ladies would be washing the locker rooms while we would be standing there stark naked. They'd be brushing, and you'd spread your legs and they'd brush the floor between your legs and all. It didn't bother the Europeans at all, but the American kids are all covering up. You put your clothes in a bag and the girl grabbed the thing. We had to do dives very early in the morning. And we had to get our workouts in. In 1948 I had peaked for the Olympic tryouts. I felt so good. I was diving just beautifully. We had about 10 days before the competition. But this time, what I thought I'd do was not train as hard after I made the team, but I'd train very hard when I got to Helsinki. Because of the time thing, working out at six in the morning, I didn't get as many dives in as I wanted. I didn't feel I was at my peak. The other consideration which I had was that the Korean War was going on.

Allow me to tell you about the Japanese. The star diver was a boy named Kichu Ichimori, who has now immigrated to the United States. I met him and I wanted to do my best, again against the Japanese. They knew all about me. In 1948 we'd just finished the war against the Japanese. Now, the war's going on with the Koreans. So, I had to do missionary work, and tell the judges that even though I was of Korean ancestry, my father's boyhood chum was Syngman Rhee, and I was South Korean. I often say, I won my second gold medal by confusing the judges. Half of them judged me as a North Korean, and the other half judged me as a South Korean. So, the guys didn't have a chance, competing against me. But in '48, I was angry because this guy said, "I hope you don't fear for that Korean." I think it was Larry Johnson who was then the president of USA Swimming. Kiyoe Nakagawa was swimming for Ohio State University and this idiot, Larry Johnson, says, "Hey, are you an American citizen?" Mike Peppe is so mad, he almost tore old Larry Johnson apart. "This kid is an American. He was born in Hawaii." I stayed with Roz at the apartment the night before the contest, and then went on a cute little streetcar to the Olympic Village, about 10 minutes away, to the competition. There's a picture of me in the newspaper under the shower and it is all in Finnish. I can see my name, Major Sammy Lee, and I can see Joaquin Capilla, but I can't read the stuff in between. I asked my host Birger Kivelä what it said. "Oh, no, no. I will tell you after the competition. If you read it now it will just upset you." I said, "No, no, you tell me now." "Well, it says, Major Sammy Lee, gold medalist, 1948, will most likely lose his title to Joaquin Capilla of Mexico." I say, "Boy, that really upset me. No way." So, when I showed up at the pool for the contest, I see Joaquin Capilla, chain smoking one cigarette after another. He is even more nervous than I am. On the day of the competition, I don't get wet.

Q: Did you have your Chinese food in Helsinki?

A: Yes, because at the Olympic village, they had Chinese and Korean food in there. I had it the night before. I ate Korean food because they had Asian, Indian, and European food at the villages. They'd recognize you by your sweat outfit. If you were USA, they would ask you to go to the other line. But I borrowed one of the Korean sweat shirts to get into the Korean line. They had my soul food. So I'd get in there, go through the line, and get my soul food. I'm standing there, and everybody's warming up for the diving, and a *Life* magazine photographer comes by and says, "Oh, Major Lee, would you mind jumping in the water and get wet and we'll get a shot of you." He wants to get a shot of me climbing out of the water and I said, "You know, I have a superstition, I don't get wet the day of competition." He said, "Don't you want your picture in *Life* magazine?" I said, "I want to win the gold medal." Joaquin Capilla's first dive was an arm stand, and he goes up in his arm stand and he can't hold it. He just goes right off, so he scores low. I had the jump on him. We're going on in the competition and I'm doing real well, leading all the way. The last dive was an inward 2 1/2, usually my best dive. I figure that at a score of eight to 10, in my own heart, I could do it. So, just as I am ready to take off, I raised my arms. They have a new camera out, 128 frames a second. I hear it go, "Woooooowoooo". So, I'm not going to let it bother me. I take off and I get 3 1/2 and 4s. I go way over, I spun so fast, and then I went over. I could have jumped out of the way and told them that the camera bothered me and ask to repeat it. I thought, I'm not going to go down in history as being a big crybaby, so I just kept my mouth shut. My last dive again was 4s, 3 1/2 somersault. That's August 1, 1952, my 32nd birthday. When I went up to do my 3 1/2, it wasn't as good as the one in '48, but I figured it was good enough, because I went in and hit the bottom real hard. I said to myself, "Happy birthday you son of a bitch, you did it again." So, I come out of the water happy and everybody is congratulating me. A surprise in the competition was the West German diver named Gunther Haase. He was really good, and did not miss too many dives. I thought he was an excellent diver. Now what got to me was Joaquin Capilla did the dive that was a reverse dive with a half twist and somersault. In the book, it says you are supposed to do the reverse somersault with your feet getting up as high as the ceiling and then you do the half twist and your somersault. Well he just kicked off and turned around in a half twist. So I thought, I had him. That was worth 3 1/2 points just alone. So, I see the Mexican judge throwing up an 8 1/2. He received a much better score than I thought. I know him, his name is Meriscal and he is a real nice guy. He's president of one of the banks in Mexico and a very wealthy guy. He is looking at me and I see the score. I mouthed to him, "You son of a bitch." His face turned red, as he knew he did a real high score. I get on the rail when I am going to do my last dive, the forward 3 1/2. I lean over the rail and I look right at Meriscal, Antonio Meriscal. I look right at him when I am doing my 3 1/2. I come out of the water, look at him and he throws up an 8 1/2. I psyched him out. He chickened out. When we are up on the victory stand Joaquin turns to me and said, "See, Sammy, I said in Buenos Aires that it was an accident that I beat you, you are the greatest diver." I said, "Thank you, Joaquin." And Gunther Haase turned around and said, "Yes, but you see I have the best position, the cameras see me first." He asked me to come to his village in Germany. I said, "We'll be there in March. Pat McCormick will come, too." The U.S. Army again asked us to make the same tour and to take Pat McCormick to the various bases. I was able to get my wife and Pat's husband invited, too. So, that's how we got to tour Europe. In the women's contest they were allowed to repeat their dives. It got to be a farce and women's springboard was a disaster. In the women's tower contest we got first, second and third. First was Pat McCormick; second, Paula Jean Pope, Paula Jean Myers at that time; and third, Juno Irwin. Juno Irwin, in 1952, was about 2 1/2 or three months pregnant, but she didn't show. I signed her medical certificate because she needed an exam. I didn't examine her. I said, "You're in good health and are you pregnant? Ha!" I put down "no" on the certificate. When we arrived over there she said, "Sam, you know, I think I'm a couple of months along." I said, "Oh, I signed your medical certificate." We both laughed about it. She was not phased a bit. The girl from Ecuador looked like she was going to deliver by the time of the Opening Ceremonies. In fact, she couldn't walk

with the flag, she was so big. She was a diver and about 7 1/2 months along.

Q: Were there any rules or regulations about pregnant women competing?

A: I don't know. In those days they were even pretty upset when the women even had menstrual periods. The whole ball game has changed now. I want to tell you about Miller Anderson. Skippy Browning is fantastic, but Miller Anderson, he is one of the great competitors. Boy, he's got the pressure on Skippy. Skippy does 9s; Miller Anderson does 9, 9 1/2, 9. So, Skippy is really mad now because there is so much pressure on him because of Miller Anderson. When Skippy comes out of the water, I'm standing there and Skippy looks at me and says, "Why don't you old bastards stay retired?" He said, "Oh, I'm sorry Sam, I didn't mean it." So, Miller, on a dive he never misses, misses this one dive. He comes out of the water, his face is red, and he figures he missed the dive, and he knew he missed the chance at the gold medal. He'd get second again. He comes to me and he says, "How old are you, Sam?" I said, "I'm 32." He said, "Let's see, I'll be 33 by 1956. Oh, we'll talk about that later." After the tower diving, Roz had a little birthday party for me. I got that thing the kids all carved their names on. Skippy and Johnny, and all the divers, carved their names on this little wood block thing. Roz and I, we went from there with Pat McCormick, toured Germany, went to Vienna and had a great time. I don't remember if I told you when I was in Vienna with Skip and Miller Anderson, and not winning the gold medal again. And we went off to Europe to give the exhibition. I want to tell you about a funny incident involving Johnny McCormick. He was always a meticulous dresser. The best dressed Olympian ever. Everything was just right, and I'm marching in the Opening Ceremonies and it rained like hell. In fact, the first time Birger Kivelä came to Los Angeles, I met him, it also rained like hell, and I said, "This is very unusual weather for Los Angeles." So in Finland he told me, "Sammy, this is like Hollywood, California, isn't it?" and we were laughing about that. The Opening Ceremonies were four hours long. Before the competition started I said, "Hey, Johnny, you gonna go out?" He said, "I can't." Skippy and he are just sitting there. He said, "We got arrested last night because we wanted to steal one of the Olympic flags. We got up there when it was dark and lowered down, grabbed the flag, and heard a gun shot." We ran like hell but the police dog caught us. One of the guards or aids had to go down to bail them out of jail and they're under confinement in the village for about six days. The Australians said, "You should have done what we did." Their water polo teams got in uniform and marched at midday with a lot of crowds around, and the Finnish guards, as part of the ceremony. They walked in and ceremoniously stole the flags, rolled them up, and marched right out. As soon as they got out of sight they just took off and disappeared. They said, "That's the way you should do it, you bloody blokes." Poor Johnny. I was his best man in 1964 when he got married and, unfortunately, I also gave his eulogy when he died a couple of years ago. His widow had him cremated, and she said she knew it was against the law, but she took his ashes and threw it all over the golf course where he loved to play. She has a good sense of humor. She said, "If the cops catch me, I'll say it's a good friend and you will have to pick him up." After the tour of Europe, we had a little celebration. They gave me a life membership at the Pasadena Athletic Club. I went back to finish my residency in ontology at Letterman Army Hospital, but in '53 I got my orders cut to go to Korea. The war was still going on.

Q: What were your duties?

A: I was now an official ear, nose and throat man. I was going to be a major in the U.S. Army Medical Corps. We all go to Camp Zama in Japan, and then we get distributed to various areas, either in Japan or in Korea or wherever military installations were. I had a couple weeks off. So, we went up to Alaska to give some diving exhibitions. Johnny McCormack and I also went to North Dakota to play golf with

Bing Crosby and another guy. John and I wanted to take a picture of Bing Crosby, but we didn't want to bother him. He's is just a tremendous golfer and shoots straight. When he is going down the fairway, he sings. So my friend would turn to me and in a loud voice and said, "You know, a guy with a lousy voice like that should keep his mouth shut and not bother our morning with that lousy voice." I must have shot maybe in the 200s or something, but Bing Crosby shot around 70. He'd hit a drive 250 yards and he'd say, "Oops, a little girlish, a little girlish." When we finished, he said, "Let's take a picture." He reaches and gets his camera and takes the picture and later sends it to us. In parting he said, "Hey, doctor, a word of advice." I said, "What's that?" He said, "You'd better stick to diving." I said, "Yeah, I plan to sing, I plan to." Wasn't that cute? Years later, I saw Bing Crosby again at the 1972 Munich Games. President Nixon sent me to Munich as one of his personal representatives and head of the delegation of Mal Whitfield, Pat McCormick, Bob Richards and Bob Mathias. I saw this good-looking woman walking around and I did not notice the man next to her. Soon someone taps me on the shoulder, I turn around, and she says, "Do you remember me? I'm Kathy Crosby and this is my husband Bing." I said, "Oh, my goodness, I remember you when your little daughter Mary Francis was getting her life saving certificate at the age of four." It was at a basketball game where USA lost to Russia and we were all upset. So I said to Bing, "How you getting back?" He said, "Oh, I'm going to go out and flag a taxi." I said, "Why don't you let me use some of your tax money. I have the state department car." The driver, a very proper and strict German, was waiting out there. I said, "Hans, we have a couple of guests with us." He said, "Oh, my god, Himmle the Bingo." He was so excited, he got his driver's license and had Bing Crosby sign right on his driver's license, and he almost got lost taking us back.

Q: What happened in 1953?

A: Oh, then in '53 I went to Korea. First stop was Tokyo. The Japanese heard I was there and wanted me to come and watch them dive, and I did some diving. They told me that because I had a pretty plush Army life, they were sending me to Korea as close to the DMZ as possible. The war had just stopped and I told them that my uncle would not be too happy about that. "Who is your uncle?" I said, "Syngman Rhee." I got stationed in Seoul. So on the first day I land in Korea, it's a real emotional experience. Here we're all medical officers, and some characters have got their golf bags and some of them can hardly see because they were 4F during World War II, and now in the Korean War they're on active duty. And I said, "How in the hell did you guys get over here, as you can't see, and some of you guys are kind of crippled up." They said, "Well, the standard question was, 'Are you making a living in private practice?'" If the answer was "yes," they were sent to Korea. I couldn't help but laugh when we were going through this Korean town, as one of the guys said, "Hey, what town are we going through?" And the driver says, "Yöngdüngp'o." Two weeks before that I was at a show where I saw Jack on television.

Q: Jack Benny?

A: Jack Benny, and Sammy Davis Jr. were on the program up in San Francisco. My sister got tickets for Roz and I. He said, "Well, I've been all around the world. I've been to Berlin, Cucamonga, and Yong Dong Fong." And everybody just roared when they heard Yong. And here I am in Yöngdüngp'o with kimchee, I don't know if you've ever smelled kimchee or not.

Q: No, what is it?

A: Kimchee is a national dish of Korea. It's like fermented sauerkraut, only you throw in a ton of chili

pepper and a ton of garlic. Even Italians back off when Koreans come in the elevator. It is hot and spicy and, well, have you ever been in a chem lab where they're burning hydrogen sulfide? It smells like that. In fact, when my little boy was in diapers, I'd sometimes look in his diapers to see if he did anything and I'd say, "Hey Roz, did you open up the jar of kimchee?" And she says, "Yeah." The jar of kimchee reminded me of my son's diapers. The guys would say, "Sheeeesus, what is that odor?" And I'm thinking to myself, "Oh boy, kimchee, I can hardly wait to get at it."

So, we go to the repo depo where the doctors are being assigned to the various areas. I'm assigned to 121 Evac Hospital, but I want to see my uncle. My mother cuts out a thing with his address, all in Korean. On the first day, I see a girl standing there at the repo depo speaking English. I say, "Do you speak English?" "Oh, yes, I speak English." I said, "Can you read this?" She said, "Yes, who's this?" I said, "That's my uncle and I want to find him." I said, "Na Hangucharum Korean." I said, "I'm Sammy Lee." She said, "Sammy Lee! Olympic champion." She tells all the Koreans there, "This is Sammy Lee that won Olympic Games in 1948 and '52." She knows all about me. She gets hold of a ROK officer. Because 90% of Seoul is destroyed and there aren't any landmarks. So, he knows where this area is, and he's bilingual. I say, "His name is Lu Roo, Lieutenant Roo. I want to be sure. I have never seen my uncle, nor have I seen a picture of him. I want to give him money, what I can, while I'm here in Korea. I want to give it to the right person." So, he goes along through all these ruined areas and there's still a home standing. He's in the back, in a little place about the size of a bathroom. They knock on the door, he comes out, and he says, "What?" "What?" They said, "Is your name, Chung Don?" "Yes." "Do you have any relatives?" I can understand this. "I have an older sister in America." "Does she have any children?" "Yes. Two daughter...Two daughters." "Anybody else?" He said in English, "Ah, Major Sammy Lee." "Oh, my nephew, my nephew, he's *chaka, chaka*." He comes up and he gives me a big hug, and the little wife comes out. She comes out and she tries to grab me, and he pushes the wife and says, "My nephew, not your nephew." Then he goes into his little cubbyhole there, and he starts digging. And about a foot underneath there's a thing that he digs out and he brings out a picture of me in my Olympic uniform. My mother had sent it to him. I asked through the interpreter. "Why did you bury my picture?" He said, "Because the North Koreans might see your picture and murder you when you come here. They would see your picture and shoot you." I told him, "I'm going to give you 35 American dollars. I'm going to buy you all these cigarettes and you can black-market them. But please, save the money. When I leave, I won't be able to do it because I'm also supporting my mother. She still gets half my salary. Roz and I can't do too much, so you must save your money." "Oh, O.K., O.K." I come and visit him every week because he got a carton of cigarettes for a dollar. I come in with 30 cartons of cigarettes, and \$35 in MPC, that he could barter, black market it all off. What happened is funny. My mother would send him 100 pounds of rice from America when she could. He would take that 100 pounds of rice and trade it in on 50 pounds of Korean rice, because the American rice is not as tasty.

One Thursday I got a call that Syngman Rhee got an ear infection. They need an ear, nose and throat specialist up there. I've been telling everybody. So I go up to the Korean White House, and Madame Rhee comes in and looks at me and she says, "Who you?" "I'm Sammy Lee." "Oh my god. Oh, President's going to be so happy to see you." Now he hadn't seen me in years. When he walks in, he's very anti-Japanese, he thought I was Japanese, and he comes up and he said, "Who you?" I said, in my broken Korean, "*Na ee su yu si a gu*." Which means, I'm the son of Soon Kee Rhee. He steps back, chokes up, and says, "You're the son of one of my greatest friends who died for me." My father died at a political meeting defending the right of Syngman Rhee to become president of Korea when the war was over. So he gives me a big hug and he said, "Where's your brother the world's diving champion?"

I said, "I don't have a brother. I'm the champion." So he gives me a big hug and he says, "Call the cameras." Boy they came running in and they're taking all kinds of pictures. He says, "Where have you been? I have been asking for you. When Korea became independent, I asked for you in 1946, '47. I asked you to dive for me in '52." He says, "You must put on a diving exhibition for me because they bombed everything but the Olympic diving pool. I think that all the bombardiers must have been sportsmen. They left the facilities alone." So I have a diving exhibition with Syngman Rhee, and that place was loaded. I tell Syngman Rhee, "Mr. President, you know my mother's uncle is sitting somewhere in the audience there." He says, "What?" So, over the loudspeaker they say such and such a name, Chung, come on down with his wife. So, here they're dressed in their finery. They come down and sit next to the president. Oh, they are just on cloud nine, and I give the diving exhibition.

Q: This is the old man who you found in the little village who was very poor?

A Yes, very poor. And he's sitting next to the president, taking all kinds of pictures. Syngman Rhee gets up and says that this is really a proud moment for him. It's too bad my father was not here. Many people said my father would have been an ambassador if he were living, because Syngman Rhee was crazy about my dad and vice versa. In fact, I remember when he met and married Madame Rhee, my father was crying in 1933, '34, and I asked my mother, "What's he crying about?" I asked my dad, "So, why are you crying?" He said, "Syngman Rhee just married a white woman, Austrian, Francesca Rhee, and he has just lost half of his power." This is 1933, because Koreans will not accept her because she's white. At Christmas time I go to see my uncle. My god, he's got a block party, everybody's there, all eating and drinking. He's feeding the neighborhood. I said to my interpreter, Shelly Kim, who lives down here in Los Angeles. "Why is he spending all this money, because I'm going to be leaving pretty soon, and what's he doing?" So she talked to him and he said that he could die tomorrow and be happy. He said for the first time in his life people bow to him, because I am his nephew. He has stature, faith and no matter where he goes in Seoul, people bow to him. How can I get angry at him? He has cataracts in his eyes, and I talk to the eye men and we get it all fixed for him to be operated on. He doesn't show up. I haven't seen him for three days. I'm looking around for him with the interpreter again. "Where the hell were you?" So, he said to her, "I have pride, and not want to embarrass my nephew. He is Major Sammy Lee and I'm just a peasant." I tell him that in America we don't care what the hell you are. "No, I will not do it because I'm a peasant." He was half blind in his last years. At Thanksgiving, I get a chance to take him to the Army telephone company to talk to my mother. They haven't spoken to each other in 40 years. Through the interpreter he says, "I couldn't understand a word my sister said. She was so excited, she was speaking to me like she speaks to my nephew, half-English, half-Korean." It was real tearful. Then I got the Sullivan Award. I read in the *Stars and Stripes* a letter of complaint to the AAU that I am listed as a candidate for the Sullivan Award. Some guy writes a letter and says, "To show you the stupidity of the Amateur Athletic Union, naming, selecting one of the candidates, Major Sammy Lee, who did not win one national championship in 1953." So I am writing them a letter saying, "I don't know what the hell you're crying about. The reason I didn't win one national championship in 1953 is that I didn't even have my pants off. I've been stationed over in Korea. I retired in '52. Besides, I don't have a Chinaman's chance of getting the award, so quit your crying." I dropped this letter in the mailbox. About three days later, New Years Day, they announce the Sullivan Award winner. I am at the military hospital where I get a telephone call. "Major Sammy Lee?" "Yes." "This is the AP calling. Congratulations, you just won the Sullivan Award." I said, "What! Are you kidding?" I said, "You gotta be shittin' me." I'm shocked! I think to myself, "That letter is on it's way to New York!" So, Syngman Rhee is so happy about it that I get a call to come to the White House. Syngman Rhee gets up and says, "It shows all my people of Korea that the Americans have their heart in the right place to honor one of

us. A young man who's the son of my great friend, Soon Kee Rhee. It shows America has the right heart to give him such a prestigious award." It's on the radio all over and they have the newsreel cameras. I say, "It just goes to show you that only in America could an American born Korean, by the name of Dr. Sammy Lee, win the award given by an Irishman Sammy O. Lee. In the meantime, Syngman Rhee goes to Taiwan to see Chiang Kai-Shek. I get a call one Sunday morning from Bob Pierpoint, who became my daughter's godfather and also the White House correspondent for five presidents. Bob Pierpoint, CBS. He calls and says, "Sam, Syngman Rhee just died on his way back from Taiwan." He says, "Can you verify that for me? Can you get into the White House?" I call Madame Rhee. "I'm leaving for New York, I want to thank the president." She said, "O.K." So I told Bob that I'm gonna be there at 11 o'clock. "Now wait a minute, when you come to the press billet, come up the side door because I don't want NBC or ABC to see you. I don't want any of those guys to see you. They'll know something is up. Because it's all stirring around, Syngman Rhee's dead. So, here's the plan. If I don't hear from you by three o'clock, I'm going to call the Marines to rescue you." I said, "Is it that big a deal?" He said, "Sure, it will be total pandemonium in Korea. There may be rioting going on. Madame Rhee will not want you out of the White House to let the news go. So if you are not out by three o'clock, Marines!" I'm getting a little nervous now. So then I get in the Jeep, they see me, they snoop me, they let me through to the White House. They open the White House door and they are packing! My heart drops right down to my shoe. So Madame Rhee comes to the veranda and she says, "Oh, Sammy, come on upstairs." I go upstairs, she opens the door, and there is Syngman Rhee with mustard plaster on his neck and his foot in hot water. He's got a hell of a cold! He said, "Oh, Sammy, how are you? Why did you want to come and see me?" I said, "I gotta tell you the truth." I said, "The *Myenichi* newspaper said that you just died, imagine that." He says, "You know those Japs, they want to see me dead. I'm not gonna die until I show them what a good war really is! Why don't you stay and have dinner with me?" I said, "First I've got to make a telephone call. I would love to have dinner with you after I make my telephone call." So, I get on the phone. I say, "Bob Pierpoint? I'm gonna have dinner with them." He says, "Oh, shit!" and he hangs up. So I had dinner with Syngman Rhee and we chit chatted. My relationship with the president was a problem as well. I remember this one foreign trader came up to me and said, "How would you like to have a million dollars in the bank of Switzerland? I give you Swiss account, it will be a million dollars in gold." "What do I have to do?" He says, "You see Syngman Rhee almost every day because of his ear. Have him sign this note for me to ship two ship loads of brass from Korea to Japan." I wonder how many guys did take that payola?

We got the Sullivan award, New York, New York. So in the meantime, I write to the A.A.U. and requested that I receive my award in Pasadena or any other club other than New York Athletic Club. I told them about that incident where I was thrown out because they knew me as a Chinaman. In the meantime, I try to get the letter back. I called back to Korea, and my friend, Captain Jude Howell, who's six feet four; plastic surgeon; ear, nose and throat man. I said, "Jude, can you get that letter out?" He said, "It's a federal offense, but I'll try." So, the postmaster there says, "We'll trick the law, so he keeps my letter." I never did send it. I'm sorry I did it now. I got a watch and I gave it to Syngman Rhee when I came back from Tokyo. At the Sullivan Award my mother really stole the show. She said, "Little did I realize that when I came to America that my son would be able to become an Olympic champion, God bless America." I have the distinction of being the first non-white to have gotten the Sullivan award. The oldest, and the shortest to date, the only Asian-American to have gotten the Sullivan award. I was the first diver, the second was Pat McCormack, and third was Greg Louganis, who had been up for it seven times before he got the award. He broke the world's record a number of times. When we went on the *Ed Sullivan* show, we introduced her from the audience. My mother was in a little corny costume. A fellow named Harold Howlen from the state department decided that it would be a great idea to send

Sammy Lee as a sports ambassador all over South East Asia. So, I went back to Japan and went to Ceylon, India, Pakistan. When I was in Pakistan, I got up to Istanbul, Turkey, the Philippines, Hong Kong, Burma and Vietnam. In fact, I went to Saigon and I was there when Dien Bien Phu had fallen about a month before. I give diving exhibitions and then I'd have a little session to talk about Americanism, prejudice, bigotry, and I always, in order to top them, say that the majority of the American people didn't practice what they preach. I could not be here as a two-time Olympian, doctor of medicine, major in the U.S. Army and winner of the James E. Sullivan award otherwise. That was my punch line. Nobody could top that. It was a very educational tour for me. When I decided to get out of the Army, I went to see General Heaton, just prior to the time he became surgeon general. I said, "General Heaton, I hope you are not too upset with me, but I am planning to resign my regular Army commission." He got up and he closed the door. He was the chief of Walter Reed Army Hospital. He said, "Sam, I don't blame you. The medical corps is all screwed up right now." A year later, he was selected surgeon general. I could have eventually ended up the shortest general in the U.S. Army, the way things worked out. Housing discrimination was a fact in 1955. I was invited to the White House, and they said I couldn't buy a home in Garden Grove. Again, Bob Pierpoint enters the picture. I write him a letter and said, "Things have really improved, they don't slam the door in my face like they did to my father, no chimps, no Chinks, no Japs. But I can't buy a home, but I can get an office." So, Bob says, "Sam, you are in a position, because of your swimming background, to really make a fight against discrimination, especially in California." So, I call my sister Dolly, who works for Scott Newhall, the editor of the *San Francisco Chronicle*. I said, "It's so embarrassing, I just finished less than a year, a \$100,000 tour of Southeast Asia, talking about America. There will now be this publicity: I can't buy a home." He said, "Ask Scott Newhall his opinion." Scott Newhall said, "Let's attack the disease." Bob Pierpoint, in the meantime, contacted Edward R. Morrow. Edward R. Morrow was so incensed about it that he gets all the key radio stations. If I give the approval they will get a lot of letters. So I said, "Well, go for it." I only got a few hate letters. You know, "Slant eye, go back home." Most of them are all very favorable. In fact, an offer in one of the old letters of 5 1/2 acres overlooking the Hollywood Hills for less than a million dollars. Can you imagine what that is worth today? Ed Sullivan offered, "You can buy the house right next door to me." In 1955 some kid comes by and says he has a buddy who wants to be an Olympic diving champion. This is November and the pool is still open. I watch him dive and I said, "Kid, you know you could be an Olympic champion in 1960, four years from now." He said, "Are you kidding me?" I said, "No, if you really want it, then I'll coach you." He said, "I want it." In 1960 Bob Webster won his gold medal and repeated it again in 1964.

Q: Where did you coach him?

A: At Santa Ana, at the municipal pool there. Los Coyotes Country Club is where I trained him off the 10-meter tower. I didn't have to go all the way to the L.A. Swim Stadium.

Q: Tell us the story of your meeting Greg Louganis.

A: I'm on the President's Council of Physical Fitness and Sports for 1970. I'm asked to represent the Council of Physical Fitness and Sports during the Junior Olympics at the Air Force Academy. I go there and take my son. We see this half-Samoan kid diving. I turned to my son and I said, "Son, there is potentially the greatest diver in history."

Q: Why?

A: Because of the way this little boy could take a hurdle, and the hurdle was almost the same every time, and the tremendous amount of life he had off the board, and the way he hit the water. He just lined up beautifully and every motion was very aesthetic. It was poetry in motion. The tremendous amount of power that he had was so, any fool could have seen the potential in him. So about a week there my son says to me, "Who would you rather have as a son? That kid out there or me?" I looked at him and I said, "Son, you know you're going to be ugly like your old man. I'd rather have you as a son." He said, "Jeez, thanks dad." As he was walking out the door he turned around and said, "Dad, I wish you wouldn't look so pissed off." He closes the door and walks off, and I totally cracked up. So I'm coaching a kid named Billy Day from Missouri who moved out here.

Q: Where are you coaching, still at Los Coyotes?

A: Los Coyotes and in my back yard pool. I have a one-meter board and a one-meter tower. Ray Rude, who invented the Duroflex diving board, gave it to me, and so I had a diving pool in my back yard. I was coaching, and on the weekends, when we had time, we get out to Los Coyotes, which was about 20 miles from us. I'm coaching Billy Day, and he beat Greg Louganis at the Jack Kramer diving meet.

Q: What year was this?

A: This was 1973. I think Mr. Louganis comes up to Billy and said, "Boy, you have really improved, who has been coaching you?" He said, "Dr. Sammy Lee." He said, "Well, I didn't know he was still coaching. Do you think he will coach Greg?" So, I get a call from Pete Louganis. "You met my son in Colorado Springs. Would you be willing to coach him and what do you charge?" I said, "Yes, I would be willing to coach your son and what I charge is nothing. But no smoking, no drinking, no drugs and he has to clean the pool before he works out with the other divers. You can't smoke either." He said, "I'll buy that." So, the next week they show up. They drive up on a Friday from San Diego. I'm coaching Billy Day and three or four other little kids. "Greg, do you do a forward 2 1/2 somersault tuck." He always did a pike. "I don't do them tucked." I said, "Greg, you've got 15 seconds to do it tucked or you get your ass out of here, I don't need you." His face just dropped, no one had ever talked to him like that. He did the tuck. So, that night Mr. Louganis called me up and he is chuckling. He said, "Greg is asleep now, but I've got to tell you, Greg said to me when we were going home, he said, 'Dad I need a coach like that.'" That is when we started, and Greg just worked and worked. These other kids would be working on dives for years, like back 2 1/2s. The first back 2 1/2 somersault Greg ever did, he did better than these kids who had been working on it for years. Greg is very cautious and he has enough chicken in him to move quickly when he has to. I mean, when a guy is foolish he doesn't move quickly. Greg has a lot of self-preservation, but Billy Day had guts. So, when Greg would learn he'd go (whoosh) 8, 8 1/2 right off the bat. It's sickening for the kids, but very inspirational for me as a coach. In January of '76, I talked to Greg. I said, "Greg, do you want to be the youngest male diver to make the American Olympic team on both springboard and tower and to win the Olympic Games?" He said, "Yes." I said, "Then you have to move in with me starting January and go to high school with my son at Santa Ana High School." He said, "I want it enough to do it." I said, "OK, now ask your dad, its up to him." His dad said that it was perfectly agreeable to him if only Greg wanted to do it. Greg wanted to do it. Its funny, Greg would have to drive my son on dates to the prom. Greg didn't mind and he kind of laughed it off. They would double-date and Greg would drive. At the Olympic tryouts, I remember he was so shy and I'd just tell him, "You know you got to really do this." I coached Greg differently than I did the other kids. I browbeat the kids, you know. It's a hang over from Jim Ryan. "You might make the Special Olympics, but it will be real touch and go. But the regular Olympics? Forget it! If anyone asks

you who coaches you, please don't use my name. I got a reputation." I never did that to Greg. I never gave him negative stuff, but sometimes in the competition I'd say to him, "Did you see what that number three judge gave you? What you do is get angry the next time you go up, you just stick it to that judge." He said, "Oh, Dr. Lee, if I got angry I would totally destroy myself." He is an artist, he performs like most of us compete. We're not gifted, we compete hoping the other guy is going to land flat on his ass so we can win. But Greg's performance is so impeccable. These last few years he's learned how to compete because of the pressure he has had on him. I think my contribution to him was that I gave him some positive influence about competing, being tough. If someone hurts you, you get tougher. I know Greg had a lot of racial slurs because of his color. I remember in 1976 when we went off to Montreal after he made the Olympic trials. On the springboard he cried. We all cried, and he did win the tower. I said, "You know Greg, I'm just surprised your father or mother has not tried to contact you." I remember the letter he once wrote to his mother and she's crying while she let me read it. He said, "I want to thank God for being born of Samoan and half-white parents, and also that you adopted me as your son." It was very touching. When we were driving to the workouts, I used to tell him stories about Farid Simaika being beheaded, and the story of how you do not use ethnic minority as an excuse. I would tell him stories about the hurts I got and I'd be watching out of the corner of my eyes, he'd be crying, you know. I made some impression on him because he is a very emotional person. He is very sensitive, he's just a wonderful person, and we're very close. He has gained a real close friend and buddy in Ronald O'Brien. Ronald O'Brien is one of the brightest young men I'd ever seen. In fact, I watched O'Brien when he was coaching at the Pan American Games in 1975 and I thought to myself, if Greg goes to school, I'd like him to go to Ohio State because I watched how strict Ron was and how he knew diving. In 1976, after the Olympic Games, Greg was still in high school and we got invited to go to Japan. They all ooo'd and awww'd and said he was such a great dancer that they sneaked him into a nightclub. These girls were all hustling him because he was such a great dancer. "Oh, he could get king medal in dancing." That's a gold medal.

Q: How did you feel about the boycott? How did Greg feel about it in 1980?

A: Oh, that totally destroyed Ron O'Brien because he was ready. He was undoubtedly the undisputed world champion in 1979-1980. He won the world championship in '78 on the tower and springboard. He was untouchable in 1980. When that idiot boycotted, the Mission Viejo Company, who has a lot of government contracts, put the clamps on Greg, Ron O'Brien and on Schubert. They said, "We don't care how you feel personally, but do not say anything against the boycott. Say that you are in favor of the boycott or it's our financial neck." They called me and they said, "You can say what you want, but be low-key because it will reflect on us and on the diving program as a whole." I personally rationalized it to the point that if the boycott made Russia pull out of Afghanistan then I would be for it. The kids who had their last shot at the Olympics cried. Greg thought it was his last shot, too, because he was 20 years old then, and he wanted to go on with his career, performing arts. I felt sorry for them, but the carrot they gave them, they said, "Well, you've been invited to China since China has not boycotted. All the members of the Olympic team can go to China." It was interesting for them because they all wanted to see Greg Louganis. I think I told you that story, didn't I? Going to China in 1979 where they wanted to know the secret of Greg Louganis? Well, they saw the secret of, it was his diving, over there. In fact, in the first competition, we had judges that were so bad, the only one they scored correctly was Greg. They scored the rest down and scored the Chinese divers so high that the Chinese divers came by and gave the medals to the Americans. They changed the whole judging panel the next day. They were so embarrassed by the judging, that the officials came by and apologized. Greg was one of the few members of the team who did not drink or smoke. The Chinese officials came to me and said, "We did

not realize that American divers were smoking and drinking as much as that, except Greg.” They were shocked. If I were coach, I’d have sent some of them back home.

Q: Do you think you had an influence, or that Greg had a tremendous influence, on the Chinese divers?

A: Oh, yes, they knew what they had to do to try and beat him. He’s always the standard of diving and they knew what to shoot for and almost did it in ‘88. This young Chinese boy, Yung Nee, is now being challenged by another 14-year-old boy who beat him at the Asian Games. They have so much talent there and with nothing else to do.

Q: Lets go just quickly to the ‘88 Games. I remember seeing the video of you sitting on the side next to Glenn McCormick. How did you feel when Greg hit the board?

A: Well, when he took off, I thought, “He looks awfully close,” and he hit the board. When I saw him bounce and jump out of the water, I was momentarily panic-stricken. I could see the gold medal and everything gone. But when he bounced out of the water, I knew he was going to be all right. So, when he came out, he hadn’t started bleeding yet. Everyone’s saying, “How do you feel, Greg?” He says, “Oh, am I pissed, am I pissed!” The team doctor looked at it and he said, “It’s going to need a few stitches. I can inject you with Novocain to make you numb, but the Novocain’s going to make you hurt.” Greg said, “Go ahead and do it, but can I lie down first?” He started getting a little pale. So, he lay on his stomach, and I held the flashlight while the doctor did the sewing. So, everybody’s all in turmoil because it took about 45 minutes between dives. So, Ron says, “Well, I’d like to talk to Greg alone.” So he took him down, gave him a lot of positive thoughts. You’ll have to have Ron O’Brien tell you what he said to him. So, when Greg got up to do the reverse 1 1/2 with 3 1/2 twist, his feet missed the board, if you look at that film, by just less than two inches. He could have hit the board a second time, but only with his feet. But the average diver would not have been that high to hit his head. He would probably have hit the tips of his fingers because he would have been practically under the board, finishing the dive. But he was six feet or so above the board when he finished the dive. He was just bending back to reach for the water when he hit. The average diver would have probably been hurt more because he would have been pressing out of the dive to make the 2 1/2 somersault reverse pike. He was all finished, just floating out of it, and that’s why he wasn’t hurt as seriously. If that would have been the 10-meter tower, as Hobie Billingsley said, “That would have ended the sport of diving.” If the greatest legend in diving would have killed himself, that would have destroyed diving all over the world. It just proved to the other divers that you cannot make that cardinal mistake. When you press the board your head, your shoulders, your hips, and the balls of your feet have to be perpendicular to the board. When he pressed the board, his hip line was a few inches back of where his feet hit. So, when he pressed the board and straightened up he was pushing in reverse instead of straightforward. He made the cardinal error, and that’s why he said he was pissed. Ron had kept telling him, “Greg, you’re coming close, you’ve got to get your hips up over and push them forward.” He wasn’t pushing his hips forward. Now the question is, what is he going to do in 1992? Ron O’Brien and I have discussed it and he said he’d still be competitive on the 1-meter and 3-meter springboard, because he’s got such natural rhythm. Everything looks smooth. The tower would be tough on him because he was 32, but the competition wasn’t that rigid as it is now. These kids and the weightlifting they do.

Q: Is he still in training?

A: He's got three Great Danes and he walks them, so I'm sure he's running around the hills with his dogs. But he does a lot of dry land exercises like cycling. His weight is maybe two or three pounds over and he tells me that he is staying in shape.

Q: Let's go back. You became a diving judge in '64?

A: Right, I did in 1964 and '68.

Q: And a member of the president's council in '70?

A: Well, '70 was when I went to the Junior Olympics. In '72 was when President Nixon appointed me as his personal representative. Just as in '56 with President Eisenhower, when I went with Bob Mathias, Jesse Owens, Dan Ferris, who was also one of the representatives and myself. Dan Ferris committed so many years of his life to the AAU. That's when I became a Republican, because up at that time I hadn't made up my mind whether I wanted to be a Democrat or Republican. When Eisenhower picked me, I told Roz, "I'm a Republican." The first time that I was on the Olympic poster. I said, "Now the Olympic poster can have an Asian on there." But now, you know, on our Olympic poster, we have the Hispanics, the Indians, the whole bit. But in my speech, I said that was the reason I became a Republican. I was getting my hair cut in Garden Grove when they said, "There's a telephone call for you." "This is the White House calling. Would you like to be one of the representatives of President Eisenhower to the 1956 Olympic Games in Melbourne?" I said, "Who is this? Is this Miller?" I said, "Who in the hell's kidding me, anyway?" All of a sudden the operator cut in, "This is the White House calling." Bob Mathias and I went to Singapore, Kuala Lumpur. Jesse did not go.

Q: Why?

A: Oh. Oh, well, he had other things to do. Now I go down to coach the kids who are not Olympic caliber.

Q: And you're still coaching?

A: Still coaching.

Q: Who is the Korean you're coaching?

A: Jung Kim, J-u-n-g, Kim, K-i-m. But in 1984 they had a dinner for me in my honor called, "Who the Heck is Sammy Lee?" And they raised \$25,000 at the dinner. We put it in the bank, and every once in awhile, when I did speaking engagements, I'd put it into this trust fund. Out of that money I give \$1,000 a year to a diver who doesn't smoke, drink or is on drugs, and who has finished college, because you can't give it to an NCAA guy. I also give it to the coach who doesn't smoke, drink or do drugs. I've been doing that since '85.

Q: This young Korean, does he have a lot of ability?

A: If he has as much ability as he has guts, he would almost be another Greg Louganis. He is one of the most fearless young kids, and what I like about him is he doesn't have to do it. He does not have to work a day in his life. His mother bought him a \$300,000 condominium overlooking the Queen Mary

over there on Ocean Street. He doesn't have to do it. She's always sending us presents and stuff like that. In the future, I hope to get him good enough to make the Korean team. I hope to take him to the world championship. Now, he just came back from Korea where we went to try out for the Asian Games and he did poorly. He didn't make it. But he went back to a competition between Americans living in America, Koreans living in America, and Koreans living in Korea. He was winning until he missed one dive and he got third place. The Koreans are thinking of sending me to the world championship in Perth, Australia. Jung Kim said for me to think it over very seriously because of my reputation, "You are a coach of champions and they feel that I will embarrass you too much because I am not of your standard caliber." So I told him this, "You are my standard as far as desire and guts go. The ability is not there, but I coach you because I like you and that you have the attitude of a champion and that's enough for me." I'm going to meet him tomorrow. We're starting on the routine, coaching him again.

Q: Do you have a message now for the future generations who will go to the Amateur Athletic Foundation and listen to these tapes?

A: I'd say for those who wish to be good divers. Be good divers, be a champion. Champion about being a champion. You have to have certain fundamentals, and be willing to pay the price. The agony of defeat, for the few joys of victory you have. I just wrote to a little boy, whose father wrote to me and said he's an autistic child. I said, "When you train, you have moments when you get so discouraged. But never be discouraged. Be disgusted with yourself, but never be discouraged with yourself. You have to have more desire. If you have the desire to overcome your fear of failure, then you'll be a success. Especially in diving, when you're going to do a dive, you've never done before. If you really don't have that much desire to do that dive then you really don't want to be a champion. Don't kid yourself. Don't kid your coach. You've got to have a healthy body, as well as a mind. Take care of your body, as well as your mind. Like my father said, "I don't care how many hours you practice, but you've got to exercise your mind."

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.