

1968 U.S. Olympic Team Oral History Project: Transcript of Interview

Interviewer: Thomas M. Hunt

Narrator: Micki King, 1968 U.S. Olympic Team, Diving

Interview Date: April 28, 2011

Transcription: Completed by Desiree Harguess, August 21, 2012; edited version (edits by Micki King) completed January 27, 2014 by Desiree Harguess.

Begin recording

[Thomas M. Hunt:] How did you get into swimming? I've read some of your biographical material, but I think it would be certainly of interest to the public to state how you did it.

[Micki King:] There is a big difference between swimming and diving.

[Thomas M. Hunt:] Sure.

[Micki King:] So, when divers get called swimmers, they will always correct you.

[Thomas M. Hunt:] Sure, I'm sorry about making that mistake.

[Micki King:] No, I'm teasing, I'm really teasing, but just for the record, internationally, swimming, diving, water polo, and synchronized swimming are governed by the same body, in other words, that's an umbrella organization. In this country, we're autonomous; swimming is its own boss, diving its own boss, etcetera. We are connected by water so it's easy to put us all in the same boat—but trust me, these are four W-A-Y different boats.

[Thomas M. Hunt:] Sure.

[Micki King:] I found swimming in lakes growing up in Michigan, the “Land of Lakes,” if you will, all summer was a blast. We had all sorts of games in the lake; we sunk an old rowboat one year, and pretended there was hidden treasure in it, and did free diving to go get the treasure. We chased fish amongst the seaweed, and hid stuff on different parts of the bottom of the lake from our buddies and told them to find it. You know? Lakes were a blast. I must have driven my folks crazy in the winter months until they discovered this indoor pool at the YMCA that had girls’ night two times a week. I’ll never forget the first time I had a chance to go to an indoor pool. I was so excited. I thought it was just over the top unbelievable that I could be swimming in the winter, you know? And I remember having to take a shower before I went into the water and I remember very vividly as I opened the door from the shower room to the pool that I was almost knocked over by the chlorine aroma of the indoor pool. All these kind of awkward things were happening to me before I could enjoy this wonderful thing called “swimming in the winter.” When the door opened all the way, I saw this pool that was so antiseptic, so perfectly clean. There wasn’t a seaweed growing in the pool, there wasn’t sand to sink your feet in, there wasn’t a fish to be seen, you could see to the bottom of the pool, and it was just boring with a capital B. The only fun part of an indoor pool was the diving board. That’s exactly how I began to dive. The diving board was the magnet. So, pools were boring, and at age ten I discovered the diving board, and at age fifteen I entered my first diving meet. You can’t enter your first diving meet at age fifteen anymore and become a great diver. Today, kids start in the eight and under age group. So anyway, from age 10 to 15 I’m playing at diving. It was just fun until a high school diver,

who was a lifeguard during the open swim, saw us kids playing around the board, doing flips. He started giving us pointers. “Hey, do this more, do that more.” He told us the old “jack knife” we were doing, is really a “front dive, pike position.” I remember going home and telling my folks, “I did the front dive pike today!” Now I’m talking the real diving language, you know? So, this was like right-place-right time that this high school kid showed up, took us little kids under his wing, and started teaching us. For me, it grew from there. My first competition was the YMCA meet when I was fifteen, and my last competition was the Olympic Games when I was twenty-eight. That’s the long and short of Micki start to finish.

[Thomas M. Hunt:] Sure. Sure. Well, then as you, I guess grew older—

[Micki King:] Uh huh—

[Thomas M. Hunt:] I know you went to The University of Michigan, and dove there. How did that come about?

[Micki King:] Well, that’s another story because; again, we are talking in the sixties now, the early sixties. I graduated high school in ‘62, and all my friends were going to Michigan State. That was the party school, that was the fun school, that was the school of choice. The only people that went to Michigan were the eggheads, you know, the real smart ones. But Michigan was the school that had the diving coach. Michigan State had a great pool but they didn’t have a renowned coach, and my folks said you know “if you’re into this diving thing, you can’t go to State just because they have a cool pool, that’s not good enough.” And so, they actually talked

me into going to The University of Michigan. My heart was more than a little serious about getting good at diving, and their guidance aimed me that direction.

[Thomas M. Hunt:] Sure, um, well tell me then how the training for '68 began. How did you end up being selected, why did you chose to complete, were you in the Air Force at the time? So there is a bunch to get us to '68.

[Micki King:] Yes, there is a bunch starting n 1960, when I was sixteen. I had been playing with diving and going to my first meets at age fifteen. So at sixteen, the 1960 Olympic trials were at Brenen Pools in Detroit Michigan, less than an hour from where I lived. There were no qualification rules for trying out for the Olympics back then so I literally tried out for the 1960 Olympic Games simply because the trials close to my home town. The family joke is that Micki didn't get last in the '60 trials. I was 29th out of 30. But I got fired up because I was meeting divers who were the real deal. I was finally seeing real divers and I said, "I can do this, I can do that." This is where I got a lead on coaches, where I heard about the University of Michigan coach. That was '60, and then in '64 I'm a junior at Michigan, and I try out again, and that time the trials were in New York, and I ended up 5th in those trials, and three qualified for the Olympic Team. So, I missed my chance then, but again I wasn't ready in '60 and I really wasn't ready in '64 either. But now I'm graduating in 1966 and that's two years before the next Olympics. I think it's important to note here that I was a pre Title Niner. I was one of the reasons we needed Title IX. I was the product of making the "big dance" without help from any other source but my parents, whereas my male counterparts were getting scholarships. So my folks said, "Hey, when you graduate in '66, you're off the payroll." My sister is four years younger

and the money that sent me to college would now send her to college. So I had to suddenly take care of myself, be independent from my parents, two years before the Olympic Games. This is what motivated me to go Air Force. I, by total accident, got a lead on the Air Force idea, and looked into it. They told me they could give me a meaningful, challenging career, and at the same time continue my diving ambitions. And by the way, in that day, the U.S. military was one of the few occupations in the world that a woman could get equal pay for equal work. Young women today are floored when I tell them this.

[Thomas M. Hunt:] Hard to believe.

[Micki King:] So, I went into the Air Force, and the Air Force stationed me in the ROTC attachment at the University of Michigan. I had my job; I worked for the Air Force ROTC, normal work hours, spent my lunch hours training at the pool, then after work did my second workout right there on campus with my college coach. That's how the Air Force came into my life. So, in 1968, I'm a lieutenant, and I try out for the 1968 team. Now I've tried in '60, '64, and '68, and make it in '68. Only two divers per event made the '68 team.

[Thomas M. Hunt:] Got ya. And were you concerned about any of the altitude conditions? Was your training different from what you had been doing before?

[Micki King:] I would have to say altitude was a zero factor for my sport. Only if we let it, you know, between our ears. We're not an endurance sport; we're a quick twitch sport. Swimmers, gymnasts, anybody with stamina—even fencers, who need the stamina for eight minute bouts

before they get a rest—were affected by the altitude, but we were not. We did train at altitude with the swim team. Training with the swimmers was fun because the divers were boring. I knew all the divers already, but the swimmers were interesting and fun, had varied backgrounds, and had stories to tell. The altitude training we did was in Colorado Springs, and by the way, that was at the Air Force Academy, and my being a lieutenant meant I was right in my own environment. So altitude training was a non-issue, except that at the Air Force Academy, at the time, was the most up to date, the best Olympic caliber pool in the U.S. We would have trained there whether it was at altitude or not because of the facility.

[Thomas M. Hunt:] Gotcha, gotcha. And what were your accommodations like in Mexico City? Were they nice, were they different, were you worried about food?

[Micki King:] I don't ever remember worrying about food. I'll tell you what was most interesting in Mexico is all of us roomed together. We had an apartment, and all six women divers lived in the same apartment, which was way awkward because we were all trying to beat each other.

[Thomas M. Hunt:] Sure.

[Micki King:] —and hanging around together was hard. We weren't bosom buddies. Every one of us came from a different team with coaches who were very competitive among themselves. One coached at Indiana University, and the other coach was from a diving club in Arizona. So, we came from different teams and, in short, we just weren't buddies. And here we are in an apartment situation. You want to go to bed at nine and they want to go to bed at eleven. You

wanted to go eat at six; they wanted to go eat at eight. So, they're getting up to leave when you're trying to rest. It was awkward.

[Thomas M. Hunt:] Sure. Was there anybody there that you became particularly close to that wasn't maybe among the group in your apartment?

[Micki King:] Um, not on my team. My hobby was photography, and I wanted to see every venue, I wanted to have pictures of every Olympic event.

[Thomas M. Hunt:] Sure

[Micki King:] So, I made it a point to go out and meet every possible Olympian. I have to say I know a lot of Olympians, but I don't know that I was close to anybody.

[Thomas M. Hunt:] Right.

[Micki King:] Certainly not my diving teammates. I mean there were three springboard divers on the team that year, okay. And there are three medals, right? We were all so good, there was no doubt the three American girls were going to get first, second, and third. The only doubt was which one of us was going to be first, second, and third. That is where the competition was. I wanted to beat those girls. And I didn't want them to know if I was having a bad night or day. I didn't want to be around them. So yeah, I didn't get close to anybody that way.

[Thomas M. Hunt:] Gotcha. What was the most meaningful part then, of the Games for you? Did you go through the opening ceremonies? I know it couldn't have been the broken arm that you had, but was there anything that struck you as particularly wonderful about the Games?

[Micki King:] Oh, oh, you know what? Anybody that isn't bowled-over and totally snowed by their first Olympic Games hasn't got a heart, their blood's not pumping. I had a really tragic accident that stole the medal away from me, from my own stupidity. I came back in '72 and actually won the medal that I didn't in '68. Yet, of the two Olympics, Mexico is the one that stands out most vividly and most special. The reason is the adventure, the color, the sharing; the experience of the first Olympics is irreplaceable. I have never really asked anybody who participated in multiple Olympics, "Hey, was your third Olympics as cool as your first?" I'm venturing to say that the first Olympics is the one you remember most, that makes the most impression on you. 1968 is my favorite Olympics in a lot of ways. One reason is by the time I got to my second Olympics, I'm in a whole new frame of mind. I didn't go to Mexico thinking I'd ever go to another Olympics. I'm twenty-four years old, I am a lieutenant, I've graduated, I've got my life to get on with. And, in those days, we were training on our own. We did not have an Olympic training center that could take care of us. So, we had to get on with our life. Sports was a temporary thing, we weren't pro. It never occurred to me to do two Olympics, and so this was it, I was going to absorb it all, and the color, the pageantry was just over the top and special. After the bad experience in my event, I took thirty days leave and went back to my hometown in Michigan and moped around, kicked the cat, and was basically depressed. One day, my father pulled me aside and said, "It breaks my heart to see you so sad, and to have your Olympic experience be so horrible," and he said "I just wish you had some fun while you were

there so you could fall back on that.” I said, “Well, dad I had fun, I mean gosh, the Olympic opening ceremony was stunning, and the camaraderie and the village was all just fun as could be and they had all sorts of international games and places you could go. Yeah dad, I had fun at the Olympics.” And he said “Oh, really!” He said “Well then I guess it would have been nice if you had met some interesting people to make your experience a positive one.” I said “Come on dad of course I met interesting people, I mean gosh I met people from Japan, I mean have you ever met anybody from Japan, dad? And I met people from Russia, and they are the bad guys, but these people I met from Russia, they weren’t bad.” Then I realized where he was headed. I said, “What are you getting at, dad?” He said, “Mick! Five thousand of the world’s greatest athletes were in Mexico City, and you were one of them.” He said, “Maybe that’s what you were supposed to take away from the 1968 Olympic Games. The fact that you didn’t get a medal is a side story. The important story is you made the team and you were one of the best athletes in the world those two weeks. That’s what I think you should be embracing and you should stop kicking Fido and start appreciating the good part of your experience.” No one likes to admit their dad’s right, but he made the point that actually helped me take a deep breath and say, wow, And I did appreciate the Games and I did have fun and I met some fabulous people from all over. So, that is what I remember about the ’68 Games. Today these memories over come missing out on the medal.

[Thomas M. Hunt:] Gotcha. Gotcha. You know there is something particularly, well, all of it I thought was very meaningful, but particularly for me— I do research in the Cold War, and of course ’68 is the height of the Cold War.

[Micki King:] Right.

[Thomas M. Hunt:] And you mentioned you met some people from the Soviet Block. What was your more specific memory of that experience? You mentioned that they didn't come across as Darth Vader.

[Micki King:] Right.

[Thomas M. Hunt:] Could you talk a little bit more?

[Micki King:] Well, here is a very cool story, very special. We're sharing the workout with the divers from Russia. We have to take turns. You go, we go, you go, we go. One of the boy divers on the US team, while he was waiting his turn, thought he'd have some fun and went up to one of the male Russian divers and in English with a smile on his face and an upbeat tone in his voice, kind of like being a buddy. He said, "Hey man, I hear your mother wears combat boots." And we're all horrified that he said it. But then we realized well, the Russian guy doesn't know what he's saying. The other guys on the team laughed and began playing along with him. Later our guys were talking about those Russian dudes, how they're not so tough. Basically, our guys were kind of ugly. They were taking advantage of the fact that we were in an environment where everyone was equal. So, and I didn't say anything. I'm older than most of our team at twenty-four, and I said to myself, "Ah, what do I do? I guess it's harmless." Then one day back at the village, I realize I forgot something—shampoo or something—at the pool. I went back to my pool locker to get it and there is a female Russian diver who had stayed late to work out

extra. As I went to my locker, I gave her a "Hi" and a nod or whatever. As I was reaching for my missing item, she said in perfect English, "The boys on your team are being a little bit mean." Imagine my surprise! Perfect English—with a British accent, actually. I turned around, real slow, I looked at her and I said, "I am so sorry." I said, "I am so embarrassed for them. Can you forgive them and me for—? I don't know what else to say." And then laughed and she said, "I thought it was kind of funny." She said, "Especially, it was funny for me because they had no idea that I knew what they were saying. So, I actually had it over them, you know?" And from that time on, she and I became buddies. And I said, "Well, what time do you workout tomorrow? I'll see you then." She said, "You know, we have people on the team watching us and we're not permitted to talk with anybody outside our own Soviet bloc." And I said, "KGB?" And she said, "Yes." She said, "There is an officer with every team and I must be careful because they're watching us at all times." And I said, "Oh, then I promise." So, we made an agreement to meet at the pool every night at the same time when she said there're all eating. "If I don't choose to eat then that's okay. They don't watch me eat, so I can meet you down here." So, we would meet evenings and just talk about our lives and our countries and what we liked and what we didn't like and whatever, whatever. And so I made a friend a Russian friend, and that gal ended up getting second on the ten-meter tower, I think. And she was a way long shot. She suddenly became a national hero over there. I think part of the reason she got a medal was because our diver, who won our trials, ended up blowing a dive for twos and dropped out of the top. She was a shoo-in for the top three. When she dropped out, then it gave space for others to come up. So whatever the reason, this Russian gal now is All-World in her country. I met her after the event, gave her a hug, and congratulated her. She said, "You know, this will help my family back home. I will get extra rations. This is so important for me." And I remember thinking, God! The medal

is life to her—literally a better standard of life and that made an impression on me. When the Games were winding up and we met for the last time, she gave me a bottle of Russian vodka to take home as a gift. You know—serious vodka. And I didn't have a gift for her. I mean, it was—whoa! It threw me back. She said, "No, this is not to be reciprocated. I just want you to know how special it is that I found you and that I had someone I could share and be honest and open with because I cannot be this way in my home country." And I said, "Well, we will make a pact to meet in 1972." I had my accident by this time and I had no intention of going to '72. I was still walking around with a cast and I had no idea what my life would be. But anyway, that's how she and I parted. I discovered she's a normal person, that she's persecuted back home, that the athletes are treated like soldiers until they make the grade and get rewarded. And then they get their status upped and all that. Each team had a policeman watching the team so they didn't get chummy. All of that was very interesting, I thought.

[Thomas M. Hunt:] Oh, very interesting. That's a wonderful story. In terms of the other larger issues going on at the time, the '68 Games were unique for a variety of perspectives. And I thought we might go through these. They were the first to have controls for doping, the black power salute of course, the first Games in Latin America. Were you aware of these—any in particular? And to what degree did they affect your experience in Mexico City?

[Micki King:] I was aware of the doping and we were tested, too, even though divers don't have the same doping issues as swimmers. Swimmers were the ones that were screwed big time by the eastern block teams, especially by East Germany. You'll find swimmers didn't mind being tested, because then they knew that their medals were clean. I don't remember being tested in 1968 but I have a very poignant story about my drug testing in '72, which is not your topic.

[Thomas M. Hunt:] Oh, well we're happy to hear it. This is a particularly—I literally wrote a book on doping in the Olympics. And so anyway, it'd be wonderful to hear.

[Micki King:] Okay, but to finish up the doping part, from what I remember in most cases it was a burden. It was inconvenient, but I think in the end, we were glad for it—at least the people I hung around with and had conversations with about it. The black power demonstration really struck me hard. I had no idea the track team actually had segregated workouts. And for all my admiration of the track athletes, secretly I had a crush on Bob Seagren, the pole-vaulter.

[Thomas M. Hunt:] I want to say '68 or was it '72?

[Micki King:] I had this crush on him, I remember. And the track athletes were so in shape and so prominent. They were the gods along with the swimmers. The swimmers for me were people I knew. The track people, I didn't know. So, they were more of interest and I really wanted to know them. But to think that those guys I was admiring—those track folks, I thought I admired—literally shunned the black athletes—didn't even train with them in training camp! That was abhorrent to me and really took my respect for those athletes and those coaches to the lowest depth. I couldn't believe how naïve I was. And I felt cheated not knowing. I would've said, "What the hell?" I would've been vocal. I remember feeling I was naïvely dancing around thinking things were hunky-dory; the U.S. team is cool, when it wasn't.

I studied Spanish in high school, little bit in college. And I was excited to go down there and try out my “como esta.” And I was aware of how important it was. So it made making that ‘68 team even a little more dramatic, you know, a little more unique that we're in a place that's brand-new to the Olympics and I couldn't wait to try out my feeble attempt at the language. I was proud to be part of something that was history making.

[Thomas M. Hunt:] Gotcha. Gotcha. Well, if it's not too painful to talk about—and please feel free to decline. Can you tell me about what happened on, was it the ninth dive?

[Micki King:] Yes, I hit the board on the ninth of ten dives and missed medal because of it. Maybe if I had not won the medal in '72, hitting the board would still haunt me. But, my story has a happy ending. People say you could have had two medals if you hadn't hit the board in '68. But I'm not convinced I would've tried out again. I'm not convinced I would've tried out in '72. I will never know.

Anyway, back to 1968. So, we had to do seven dives in the pre-lims. The first five were called required dives. They're the jack-knife, the swan dive, the back dive, etc., and they had a degree of difficulty of 1.6, 1.7. And the optional dives had a degree of difficulty of 2.2, 2.3. So, we start with the easy dives that everybody can do. And after these first dives I was comfortably in first place, I was having fun in Mexico, I was enjoying taking those photos. I was getting out of that apartment using my camera, doing other things making a point not to "hang around" after practices were over. And so after the pre-lims, I'm in first going into the finals and I'm in control. I put my two easy optionals in the pre-lims so I had three pretty tricky, if you will, but comfortable dives left to do.

Going into the finals, I had three dives remaining that I'd won many meets with. I was comfortable. I was in the lead. So, I'm nervous but a positive nervous. I did my first dive and it was a little short of vertical but it was still comfortable, and I'm still leading and feeling great. Now I have two dives left. The second to last dive—the reverse one and a half layout—is a high degree of difficulty dive because in the "layout" position you rotate slower. Of the three dives I have left, it was my riskiest dive. So here we are in the big dance doin' it. To do a reverse dive,

you walk forward, but rotate back toward the board when you're in the air. So, the takeoff is facing forward, but the action of the somersault is back towards the board. So I am rotating back toward the board in layout position—no bend at the knee, no bend at the waist. As you can see, it is a tricky dive. Lots can go wrong. And it did. For starters, I wasn't aggressive in my hurdle. I think, to tell you the truth, I was afraid of leaning forward. If you are leaning forward at the end of the board, you must recover from the forward lean to execute the reverse action. I was afraid of leaning forward and so I over corrected and landed on the end of the board leaning back too far and that put me close. I just didn't know how close I was. I have to say I was surprised when I hit. I didn't think I was in that much trouble when I left the board. Of the seven judges, only a couple realized I hit. They couldn't hear the hit on the board and that dive did not rate bad scores. I'm still in the hunt and I have my best dive left. I have my highest degree of difficulty dive and the dive that is my trademark dive. I'm the only one doing this dive in the meet. I get out of the water and realized that even though I hit the board it didn't affect my ranking. So, Coach Kimball pulled me aside and said, "Hey, we can do this." He gave me a pep talk. "This is the Olympic Games. You suck it up." I had a gash in my arm, and they wanted to bandage it. I said, "Wait, wait, wait, wait. No way am I going to put a bandage on and let people see that I was hurt." Nobody realized I hit the board. I put a bandage on my arm, I'm telegraphing that I'm hurt. If I'm the other divers, and I see the big leader hurt, then I'm thinking, "Hey, I have a chance!" And I didn't want anybody to have that edge on me. So I said, "No way! I'm not putting a bandage on my arm." And I had about five or six, maybe seven minutes—ten minutes max in between dives before it was my turn again and coach said all the right things. But the last dive I was doing was also a reverse action dive. It was a reverse one and a half somersault with one and a half twists. So, I was doing the same walk out forward, and the action back toward the board

that I just hit on. Coach Kimball kept telling me to be sure I landed without leaning. Don't lean, he kept telling me. I didn't know my arm was broken, by the way. I was not thinking about my hurt arm. I was not thinking about hitting. Instead, he had me thinking about the dive I was doing. And that was the right thing. I just wish he said to me, "When you go to wrap for the twist your arm is going to hurt like hell. Be prepared for that arm to hurt when you twist." Then I would've been ready for it. But instead, I was thinking about landing the hurdle correctly. I was thinking about leaving the board without leaning. I was thinking about other important things, but when I wrapped for the twist, suddenly out of nowhere, it was like a strike of lightning hit me that I wasn't prepared for. I just hurt my arm and I was not prepared for it to hurt again when I put it back into action on my last dive. When I did the last dive the pain hit me, and I suddenly fell apart in mid air. I did a "spaghetti dive." That's when the judges scored me low on the last dive. That's the dive that knocked me out. I moved from first to fourth, and of course, there are only three medals.

[Thomas M. Hunt:] Hmm. Oh, that's tough. That's tough to just hear about.

[Micki King:] Yeah.

[Thomas M. Hunt:] I guess how did you—. Did it immediately destroy the Games for you? I know that talking about your father and sitting—finally finding some peace with it. But what happened after that?

[Micki King:] In some Olympic events (like track, I think) you come back the next night to the medal ceremony. In Mexico City, the medals were awarded that same night within twenty minutes of the event being over. I remember it all happening so fast. My event was over. The Meet was over. They announced the winners. I remember it all being over in a snap. Before I knew it, I'm watching someone else get my medal. And remember it was supposed to be 1-2-3, USA, USA, USA. And suddenly it's USA first, and we were split by that German girl, so USA finished first and third and I'm fourth, watching this parade of winners. It was then that it hit me, what just happened? Like a bad joke—okay, wake up now. And of course, everybody came over to comfort me and all of that. My arm hurt, it throbbed but it wasn't until the next day that I saw the doctor and found out my arm was fractured. They put a cast on and suddenly I became a celebrity. I became a celebrity. Everybody is, "Ooh, ooh! Can I sign your cast?" People were making it a fun novelty, which took the sting out of it while I was at the rest of the Games. Now I'm free to be a spectator. I'm free to take all those pictures and go to other events because my event's over. And, oh, by the way when I show up everyone's, "Oh, there's Micki. She's the one that got hurt. Hey, let's sign her cast." It's a very famous cast. By the way, I donated the cast to the International Swimming Hall of Fame with all the famous signatures on it. It wasn't until I got home, with the cast on my arm, that it hit me, the woe is me, how bad am I—kind of state. The rest of the Olympic Games, I was running around like the Queen of Sheba, because people were sympathetic and sought me out to hug me. People were being upbeat. But when I got home, it was like the bad news. So the rest of the Olympics—I mean the '68 Games, was way, way, way memorable and way excitingly positive for me.

[Thomas M. Hunt:] Gotcha. Well, after you got home, when did you decide that you were going to try again or when did you find out that you were going to have the chance in '72? I guess what I mean is, what did you end up doing in the Air Force and how did you get the chance to come back?

[Micki King:] I spent three weeks at home after the '68 Games. And near the end, I drove to Ann Arbor to see Coach Kimball. I hadn't really talked to him since I'd been back. He was brokenhearted for me too. He knew what I meant and he also knew, when everybody else was hugging me and saying, hey it's too bad, he knew it was going to be four years before I could try again. It's not like the World Series—we'll get the next year—if you lose. It's a four-year wait. And the difference between twenty-four and twenty-eight years old is big. So, Kimball knew what I was really up against. I was able to say to him, "I just can't believe it." I was pitiful, pitying myself and he finally said, "Hey, get off that." He said, "Let's start thinking about the next go around." And I said, "Coach, gosh, I'm in the Air Force they're not going to keep me here in Ann Arbor anymore. They're going to put me in another assignment. I won't be able to train with you." Plus, I was really afraid of coming back and getting beat by the kids that I was beating. I was the matriarch. I was the queen bee. And the idea of coming back and maybe getting beat, because I'm old now, and I'm not training like I should, scared me. I did not want to be a "has-been." Coach Kimball said let's just try one nationals at a time. If you can be "in-the-hunt" in a nationals, then you know you're on top of your game, and everybody will know you're back. There will be no questioning that Micki King is still as good as she always was. That was his pep talk while I was still in my cast. But, at that time, I had no intention of ever diving again. In my mind, my diving career was over. My plan was to get involved in my

Air Force career. I had two more years of my four-year commitment, and was told I would soon be reassigned to a new Air Force job. And, guess what. Coach Kimball intervened, without me knowing, and got the Air Force to station me in a place where I could train once I was out of my cast, if I chose to. And he felt he could talk me into it. So, I suddenly get this assignment in California, which is across the country from Michigan. And I thought, hey this is a good assignment. This isn't bad. And right down the freeway was Long Beach, where they had a big pool and a great diving facility and a couple good coaches that I could train with. I never thought about that part at the time but turned out the nationals, the Winter nationals of 1969 were in Long Beach California at this wonderful pool. So, I go down to watch. All my buddies are there, all the diving community's there. I'm sitting in the bleachers watching this nationals, and the old feeling comes back. I'm watching them dive and I'm thinking, I can do that. I'm doing all this mental diving with them and it was after that nationals when I went back to coach and said, "Should I or shouldn't I make a come back?" That's when he said, "If you come back, I'll get you ready." Then he said, "Oh, by the way, I arranged for the coaches in Long Beach to coach you. Then you take leave and train with me the final two weeks before the nationals." So, we set the 1969 Summer nationals as my trial. If I could hold my own in that nationals, I would know whether to keep trying for '72. So, I trained in California with these new coaches. When I get to the meet, Kimball coaches me and I end up winning two events and getting second in the third at that nationals. Kimball and I never had a conversation about should I or shouldn't I ever again. It was just assumed that I'd train for the '72 Games. So, I was stationed out in California between '68 and '72. I took leave to train with him before each nationals for ten days to get the final polish. I won a couple more nationals and tried out for the '72 team and made it living and training in California.

[Thomas M. Hunt:] Gotcha. Gotcha. Well, I think we're getting close to wrapping up, but if you could give a piece of advice to one of today's Olympic hopefuls, given all of your experiences and what you had to go through, what would it be?

[Micki King:] Okay. Thomas, the reason that's a hard question is, then and now. I mean, what the kids do now and what the training's like now is difficult to relate to my day. You can go to the Olympic training Center and they'll pay you to train. You can pick any coach in the country, and they'll pay your way to meets and pay your way to training sessions. It's way better now. Way better. But what's happening is the kids are taking it all for granted. They're not hungry. They don't have to scrap for what they have. You know what I mean? I'd have to think about that question. Now women are diving in college. We never have that outlet before Title IX became law in 1972. That's a big help. They have a national training center now. I don't know if I would've left my coach and gone to the training center. I don't know. I guess in the end, you have to take a deep breath, and concentrate on your goal. You can't have ten balls in the air and make an Olympic team. You have to have one ball in the air, and that's your training ball to get ready. It's hard to have a social life. It's hard to have an employment life. It's hard to have another thing going on besides your training, and that's hard for today's kids because there's so much to distract them. I guess I'd have to think about this question. That's the one question you've surprised me with that I couldn't answer.

[Thomas M. Hunt:] Sure. And we can always talk again or you can send me an e-mail or you can do an update to—. We're using software that allows updates. And so there's all sorts of stuff we can do.

[Micki King:] Okay.

[Thomas M. Hunt:] Is there anything else you can think that is important or would like to tell us or—?

[Micki King:] Let me tell you the other part of the drug-testing story in '72.

[Thomas M. Hunt:] Perfect.

[Micki King:] When I make my come back in '72, nobody says, oh, poor Micki. She had that accident in '68, what a bummer. Let's let her win in '72. Let's help her out so she doesn't get screwed again. No. They're hungry. Every diver at the Games in '72 wants to beat me. They all know my story and they could care less. I'm now twenty-eight and had my four years in the Air Force and extended. I went in for four years and retired twenty-six years later. The Air Force turned out to be the meaningful, challenging career they promised. So I'm now a captain, have my Air Force job, which took time away from my diving practice. But, I had a good blueprint. I had a good foundation. So, I make that '72 team, and this team was a whole different set of personalities and a new set of dramas. I went into the '72 Games knowing this is my last hurrah. There ain't no '76 Games. I gotta make this work. I can't screw this up. So, I was all business. I

mean, I went around and did pictures and I got to know people, but that was after my event. When I talked about the glamour, the pageantry, and the adventure of the '68 Games? Unh-uh! I could care less about pageantry in Munich. I had business to do. I was in a whole different mindset in '72. I'm now twenty-eight. The divers called me Momma-Max. Micki is short for Maxine. They called me Momma-Max, and I'm the old fart on the team. I was no-nonsense in '72. They can go out after practice and do the town, but I'm going to bed. In 1972 I use the same diving order I did in '68 except I took that reverse one and a half layout out, which has a high degree of difficulty, and put in a reverse one and a half tuck, which was a low difficulty, but was easier to get high scores on. I never did the dive again that I hit my arm on in '68. But I do that last twister for eights this time and won the medal I didn't get in Mexico. There are some stories about my victory ceremony and I'll tell you that over a beer sometime.

[Thomas M. Hunt:] We're happy to hear it here. We don't have to be limited to '68.

[Micki King:] Oh, okay. Well the '72 story is way funny and way cute. Coach Kimball gives me the pre-meet speech before the first dive. He says, "By the way," he said, "You're ready. You couldn't be more ready." And he says, "I'm really excited for what's ahead, but I want you to know if you're not ahead by fifteen points going into the finals, it's okay. It's gonna be okay if you're behind by two or three points." And I was floored to hear that from him. I mean, he was giving me permission to be behind, and he had never done that. It shook me up a little bit. And I must say I thought, why would he tell me that? Sure enough after the seven dives, I'm in third place by three points. That means first, second, and third place divers are real close. I looked up at the scoreboard, and I'm thinking S-H-I-T. You know? Just what Kimball told me came true.

And I came over to him, kind of like my hands on my hips and saying, you know, what the hell? And before I could open my mouth, he grabbed me by the shoulders and pointed to the two girls that were in first and second in front of me. They happened to be two Swedish girls that I knew very well. They actually trained with Kimball and me in the summers. So I knew these two girls, and coach had actually made them better divers, and here they were beating me. But anyway, there they were, both of them, with TV cameras on them and a microphone and interviewing for TV. Well, '72 was the first Olympics that had serious TV during those two weekends at each end of the Games. Remember Jim McKay? He had six or seven, eight hours of TV time covering Munich. That was the first time you saw this much on TV. Kimball said, "See those two? That's where you'd be right now, explaining and talking about Mexico and talking in front of a camera about what you're going to do for the finals. You don't need that." He said, "You need to get back to your room and rest and eat and be thinking about your final dives. I'm not unhappy at all that you're where you are. We know you can come back from three points." I looked over and saw them and I thought, "Wow, he's brilliant." You know? He was right. I did not need the TV distraction. So, I took off and they were still talking into the microphone. I'm in third place, but I have my three best dives left. And of course, the Swedes had trained with us, so they knew I had my best dives left. I knew they knew, and they knew I knew they knew. That was my ace in the hole—that I had them right where I wanted them psychologically and physically and dive wise. So, I'm back in my room and I'm going through my dives in my head. As I was packing to go back to the pool, I did my routine. By the way, any athlete that tells you they are not superstitious is lying to you, okay. I have my favorite suit, and my favorite towel, and I packed my favorite hairbrush. It was my routine for the finals. I went to reach for my U.S. warm-ups. You're required to wear team warm-ups on the victory stand. They were not the kind of sweats

you wore just around the pool because they weren't made for water. When you're wet, they didn't absorb water. So, we had pool sweats and we had the issued warm up uniform that you had to wear on the victory stand. So I reached for those sweats and as I was putting them in the bag, I said to myself, "If I bring these warm up sweats to the pool, I may not need them, meaning I may not make it to the podium. So I better leave them here because I want to need them for the medal ceremony tonight." That was my exact thought pattern. I'm a college graduate. I'm a smart person, but I talked myself into leaving my warm ups in my room because I wanted to need them at the pool. And I didn't think twice about leaving them. So, I head off to the pool and I nail all my dives in the finals. The last dive I did in Munich to win the Games was the same dive I did in Mexico that lost the Games for me—the dive I did with a broken arm. That's kind of a cool tie between those two dives. Within minutes of winning, they're gathering me up to go get my medal. So I go to reach for my warm up suit, right? I needed it. Well, where was it? It was in my room! And now I'm required to wear it on the victory stand, so my theory worked. I needed to need it. So it was a good thing I left it. But now I'm in trouble because they're calling me to get in the medal presentation parade. So, I see one of the Olympic teammates—one of the USA boxers that got on the pool deck somehow to watch the event. And he's wearing his warm up, his USA warm up as a jacket. I said, "Bubba, Bubba! Hey man! I need your jacket. I'm going on the victory stand and I don't have my own." And he goes, "My sweat suit's going to be on the Olympic medal stand? Sure, here, it's yours." So, I'm wearing Bubba's USA jacket as my Olympic parade outfit. But I also needed the pants. My teammate, Janet Ely, had just slipped her sweatpants on and I said, "Janet, I need your sweatpants, please." She wasn't in my event—she's a platform diver. She said, "Oh yeah, here they are." So, I put on her sweat pants, and Bubba's sweat top and I march out in the parade, and as I'm marching, I'm taking a deep breath, Gosh. I

just won the Olympics. Oh man, this is all my hopes. The whole universe is spinning. What just happened? All the excitement. And as I'm trying to gather what all is going on, I put my hand in Bubba's pocket. He has a candy bar in that pocket that is melted because the pool is warm, and my fingernails break through the paper. I have chocolate in my fingernails while I'm walking out to the award ceremony. I'm horrified at this and I'm thinking how I'm gonna get the chocolate off. And thinking, guess I'll rub this off on Janet's sweatpants. As I start to rub the chocolate on her sweatpants, I looked down. Janet is easily 5 inches shorter than me and I realize it looks like I have high water peddle pushers on for sweatpants. So here I am in the medal presentation ceremony wearing Bubba's sweatshirt, and Janet's high water sweatpants with fingernails full of chocolate! When people ask me what I was thinking as I marched out to get my medal—I'm thinking how goofy I look and how stupid I was to leave my USA warm up uniform in my room, because I wanted to need it. And, yes, I do get Janet's sweatpants full of chocolate to get my fingernails clean as they present me with my medal. I was flooded with emotions. It's an incredible moment you can't put it in words. When people say how did it feel, you can't put how it feels into words. At that moment, how it feels is in your heart and in your body. It's not even in your head, and so I'm overwhelmed with all this, the anthem and everything. Then the minute the ceremony is over, the first thing they want to get is the urine sample. All three of us went to the doping room where we had to give a sample, 50 mL of urine. And of course, we're anxious to get this over with and go celebrate. My buddies who were waiting for me finally came back and they said, "Hey Micki, you're taking too long so we're heading to the hofbräuhaus. We'll meet you there. We'll get started. We'll save a seat for ya." Okay, okay, okay. I'll be there. Well, one by one, the other two girls gave their sample, and I was the last one drinking hot tea and everything. Literally a couple hours later, I was able to pee out the required amount. And they released me,

and it's midnight now. I walk out of the natatorium and the cool air of the evening hits me. I remember the moon being stunning, and I remember the cold air hitting me and I remember being alone, out there, with the moon and my medal. As I started walking, I realize they're all waiting for me at the hofbräuhaus. And there's no way I felt in the mood to go there. Suddenly, the excitement of right after, in the pool, everybody tugging at me, and everybody congratulating me, and hugging me. Suddenly it's hours later, and the whole thing just hit me. I'm in the Olympic village at midnight in the quiet. Every once in a while you'll hear some shouting or somethin' from the dorms and laughing, but I'm by myself with nature. And that's when it really struck me— what I just did and I realize what this means, and now what's ahead for me? How will this change my life? How did I do it? Wow. What a ride, what a journey. And as I'm walking toward my room with all these emotions, and I realized, hey it's midnight and I'm hungry. I'm going to the dining hall and grab something to eat. So, I go into the Olympic dining hall that's flat empty. It's just me, and one of the cooks. It's open twenty-four. They had the make-your-own-ice-cream-sundae deal, and I thought, what better way to celebrate my gold medal than an ice cream sundae that I make myself? So I scoop the chocolate and I scoop the vanilla, and I make this outrageous sundae with whipped cream up to the ceiling, and I'm just enjoying the fun of this and laughing at myself that this is the way I'm celebrating. I was so in a zone of comfort and joy. Being by myself was like, perfect. And so I sit down at this table in the middle of the dining hall all alone and I plunk this big old grossly, obscene ice cream thing on the table. Then I sit down, and I kinda rub my hands together, like here I go. At about the time I take my first bite, the door to the dining hall opens, and these two big guys come walking in, all rowdy. And they're kinda leaning on each other and laughing and high-fiving and speaking English with an accent. They don't see me, until they get up close to me, and they stop. And they

say, “Oh! We've got company mate, can we join you, do you mind? We just finished our event today, we're done and we're just gonna celebrate. Can we join you?” Damn! I was so happy to be alone. I so wanted to be alone and enjoy my sundae. But these were two cute guys, and I said okay. Yes. Sure, come on, join me, sit down. They grabbed some food, came back with plates piled high. They were laughin' and having a ball. We're weightlifters, what do you do? And I said, well I'm a diver! Oh, diver! That's crazy! You're crazy. All we do is lift these heavy weights. And we started talking and laughing about our sports. Then one of them said, “By the way, my buddy here, he got fifth today. He kicked some real butt. Then one turned around and asked me, “Hey, how did you do today?” As he was saying it, they looked over and their eyes caught the box, the box that had the medals in it. Everybody knows “the” box. And they suddenly stopped and got quiet, because they realized they were talkin' to someone with a box. They turned real sober. I mean they weren't drunk. But they quieted down from their giddiness. They pointed to the box and said, “Yours?” I, kind of sheepish, said, “Yeah.” One of them said, “Do you mind?” And I said, “No.” One of them picked it up and slowly opened it. They didn't know what color it was until they saw it was gold. And wow. They stopped, and looked at me. They didn't even know my name. They didn't know anything except they saw my USA sweat suit. And these two guys I never met, didn't know their name, only knew their country 'cause of their warm ups. They stood up and saluted me and my medal, and gave me a hug. And then, one of them smiled and made a face and said ah-ha! And he fumbled around and out of his workout bag, he pulled this huge bottle of wine—wine or champagne or something that they were supposed to celebrate with when they won their medal. But they didn't win one, I did! And then suddenly, I realized I wasn't alone, and that I shouldn't be alone. I was with two guys that didn't know me, but they knew what I'd done without knowing me. And celebrating my medal

this way was way way way special. Had I gone to the hofbräuhaus instead, by the time I got there, my friends would've never remembered that I'd even showed up. I spent that night, in the dining hall of the Olympic Village with two Australian weightlifters celebrating my gold medal. And that is as memorable as it gets in my book.

[Thomas M. Hunt:] Hmm. That is very special. Wow. Well, is there anything else that you can think of that you'd like to share? That's a pretty high note to trump, but anything else?

[Micki King:] Well I guess that '72 story ties in with the '68 story. So, it's a losing and winning thing. I think our 1968 training session in Colorado Springs was special because we were sharing it with the swimmers. I don't know if anybody's told you in their discussions that while we were at the Air Force Academy, 1968 Olympic women's swimming and diving team were the first women to ever eat in the dining hall of the Air Force Academy. We were invited to eat with the cadets and that was real special. It was only a male institution, no women on the grounds ever, and we were special enough that they allow the women Olympians to eat there. This is not a big known fact, and I think it's of interest.

[Thomas M. Hunt:] Sure. Absolutely.

[Micki King:] The women on the '68 team were the first women to swim in the pool, too.

[Thomas M. Hunt:] Right.

[Micki King:] So Tom I'd have to think about that question. Now, who else have you interviewed from the swimming and diving team? Anybody else?

[Thomas M. Hunt:] We have interviewed just one swimmer, Doug Russell?

[Micki King:] Oh okay.

[Thomas M. Hunt:] And I believe he's the only swimmer or diver that is among the, gosh, we're approaching twenty now. But I think the only swimmer or diver.

[Micki King:] Oh okay. And I don't remember Doug specifically or any specific things. So I'd have to think about. That question of what I think's been forgotten of memory. I do remember that the pool was not quite finished yet when we arrived. The Mexicans had some political unrest going on.

[Thomas M. Hunt:] Absolutely.

[Micki King:] Yeah, right? So that distracted some of their abilities to get construction done, so they were still working on the locker rooms and final touches on the pool when we came to practice. By the time the Games came, they were finished, but there were workers on the pool deck when we were training, early on. But that's another thing about me. I'm from Pontiac, Michigan. My dad was a factory worker at General Motors Truck and Coach. There's not an elite

bone in my body. But I'm in Mexico City at the Olympics. I wasn't about to criticize anything there. It was all ready for the opening ceremony. That was all that was important.

[Thomas M. Hunt:] Sure.

[Micki King] Like I said, two Olympics, and the first Olympics is gonna trump every Olympics after that. I can't imagine how that wouldn't be the case.

[Thomas M. Hunt:] Yeah. Well, I very much appreciate you talking to me. And the next step will be, we'll, and it may take a month or two because we've got a variety of recordings stacked up, but the next step will be for us to transcribe this, and then we'll send you a copy for you to look over, and you'll be able to add things, if you'd like to add things, so there'll be more chances as you have time to reflect for us to talk more.

[Micki King:] And maybe reading it in a different location city and in quiet and all that, something will come to me that didn't before.

[Thomas M. Hunt:] Absolutely. Exactly. That's sort of our thought for how this'll work.

[Micki King:] Yeah. Yeah. We'll, good! Well I'm really excited about what you're doing and it was a special team and, do you have Dick Fosbury on your list to talk to?

[Thomas M. Hunt:] That is our list to talk to. Yup. We have everybody actually on our list to talk to but whether or not everybody's willing is the question.

[Micki King:] I guess what I mean is if you've been, is he on your ready to schedule kinda thing?

[Thomas M. Hunt:] No. He's not. We have—we're sitting at about thirty that are on our immediate list and we came to the decision that contacting more people or adding more people to the list right now—. We wanna get what we've got on our current small list done before we can move on. And part of that is driven by the semester system. My graduate students will be phasing out and I'll have a new set of graduate students next semester.

[Micki King:] Well, you need to feel like you've moved forward. You have to cross 'x' out before you start 'y' and I can see that once you get that through you'll say, wow! We did thirty, now we're at our next set. I think I see your wisdom there.

[Thomas M. Hunt:] Exactly. Exactly. Well you have a wonderful evening and we'll be in touch very shortly with the next step! Ok?

[Micki King:] Yeah. That's cool. You're the leader here, there's no hurry at my end. In other words were not judging anything by how quick stuff's happening. We just, really respect and appreciate what you're doing.

[Thomas M. Hunt:] Well, we very much appreciate that. And thank you. Thank you for the patience and I do think in the end, this is gonna be a wonderful thing.

[Micki King:] Yeah. I think we're gonna actually be the envy of a lot of people because we're—. Tom Lough being— you need a point guard in this process and he's been the guy. And I haven't seen one that's quite as passionate. So I think all that will evolve as it's supposed to I guess.

[Thomas M. Hunt:] Absolutely. Absolutely.

[Micki King:] Well thanks again. Well enjoy those little cuties of yours and—

[Thomas M. Hunt:] I will! I will! Thank you!

[Micki King:] Well I'll sign off and we'll just stay in touch as needed.

[Thomas M. Hunt:] Ok. Thanks so much, Micki.

[Micki King:] You bet. Bye now.

[Thomas M. Hunt:] Bye.

End of interview, end recording

This transcript of Micki King's interview for the 1968 U.S. Olympic Team Oral History Project provided by:

The Institute for Olympic Studies

The H.J. Lucher Stark Center for Physical Culture and Sports

University of Texas at Austin

403 East 23rd St., NEZ 5.700

Austin TX 78712

512-471-4890

www.starkcenter.org

info@starkcenter.org