

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

Interviewer: Desiree Harguess

Narrator: Donnan Plumb Sharp, 1968 Olympic Games, Equestrian

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Interviewer: This is Desiree Hargus [sp], graduate student at the University of Texas at Austin, Institute for Olympic Studies in the H.J. Lutcher Starke Center for Physical Culture and Sports. Today is Sunday, May 15, 2011. I'm interviewing Donnan Sharpe, who was on the equestrian team in the 1968 Olympic Games. This interview is taking place over the phone and is part of the 1968 US Olympic Team Oral History Project.

Donnan, do you mind if we begin with a few biographical questions such as where, when you were born, and where you grew up?

Donnan Plumb: That's fine. I was born in 1938, which seems like a long time ago, in Philadelphia. My family lived outside of Wilmington, Delaware. And I lived there really all my life in Centerville, Delaware till I went away to school.

Interviewer: And where did you go away to school?

Donnan Plumb: I went to West Silver School. It's a girl's boarding school in Middlebury, Connecticut.

Interviewer: OK. Tell me about your earlier equestrian experiences.

Donnan Plumb: My grandmother was quite a horse lady in her day and was a sidesaddle rider, as ladies did then. I guess I must have inherited her love of horses. My family all rode, but nothing terribly serious. I had a pony when I was little. And then I got my very own pony when I was probably 12. I had a friend that I rode with after school and just grew up loving horses.

Interviewer: About how old were you when you had the pony the first time?

Donnan Plumb: I think I was 11 or 12. I got her for my birthday. I'm guessing it was 12.

Interviewer: OK. When did you start doing competing or start riding a full-size horse? And what was your first full-size horse?

Donnan Plumb: Well, my interest led on to fox hunting, learning how to jump and fox hunting. And my uncle would take me hunting, riding more seriously, jumping bigger fences, and just learning how to be a better rider. I had never had any lessons or anything at that point. And then this very good friend of mine, Lana DuPont Wright, who went away to boarding school about the same time I did, got into the three-day eventing, which was very, very new in this country then. That would have been in the late '50s, early '60s. the sport was really very new in this part of the country. She said, "This is really fun. Why don't we take our hunters and try to do this competition?"

So we did. And we got more and more into it and went up to Sunny Field Farm in New York to get dressage lessons. We knew how to run and jump. We thought that was easy, but this dressage was another part of the three-day event that we didn't know anything about. So we had to learn about the dressage.

We studied with him a couple of winters. Then we were invited to come train with the team in Gladstone, New Jersey. In those days, girls weren't even allowed on the three-day team. It was a military sport and it had come down through The Army. But civilian men were doing it and we were occasionally beating them.

So gradually, they were going to have to let girls into the sport. But before that happened, the coach there with the team said, "Well, you do with the dressage phase of the three-day eventing. Why don't you branch out and do just that?" Which would mean a much higher level of dressage.

So I thought, "That sounds like fun." [laughs] "I'll try that." So that's what led me into serious dressage, was coming up through fox hunting and through three-day eventing, and then into the pure dressage.

Interviewer: What were you doing or where were you living, or studying, or training in the year prior to the games in 1967?

Donnan Plumb: Well, the friend that I spoke about, Lana and I, moved up to Gladstone, New Jersey where the three-day team was training. They invited us to come train up there, even though girls weren't allowed on the team. So we did. And we had a little cottage there in Gladstone and lived there for a couple of years and trained with the team.

Interviewer: Were you training fulltime with the US Olympic team at that time?

Donnan Plumb: Yeah. We were. We were riding every day. And during that period I got my pilot's license, and somebody, actually Lena's brother, leant me an airplane. So we'd fly home, fly from Gladstone, New Jersey, back to Maryland, because that's where Lana was from. So that was kind of an adventure in itself.

Interviewer: Yeah! That's really neat!

Donnan Plumb: [laughs] I mean we were young and crazy and having fun and loving every minute of it.

Interviewer: It sounds like it. What a life! Very adventuresome.

Donnan Plumb: And doing a lot of competing. And she stuck with the three-day eventing because she had a good horse. And she was the first female to ever ride in the Olympic three-day event. She rode in Tokyo. I had switched from the three-day to the dressage and tried out for the '64 Olympic team. But I didn't have a very good horse at the time, and I didn't really know what I was doing anyway. So I didn't make that team.

But I pushed on and worked on a horse to get him up to try out for the Pan-American Games in '67, which were in Winnipeg in Canada. So I competed there. That spurred me on to try for The Olympic team the next year.

Interviewer: OK. Tell me a little bit about those tryouts and what that was like. How did you go about making the team? Or how was it decided? And were there any challenges or problems?

Donnan Plumb: Well, the tryouts for the Pan-American Games obviously came the year before the Olympic games. It was pretty much cut and dry. You competed in a tryout at Gladstone and they took the top three people. so, we went to Winnipeg and I didn't do very well, but we got the silver medal. There weren't a lot of countries competing; I think Mexico, and Chile, and Canada, and maybe Argentina. I can't even remember; just North and South American teams.

And then the next year, I competed throughout the year and then went to the Olympic tryouts, which were also in Gladstone. I think they also maybe had one in California, because one of our teammates that year was from California. And I don't think she came east. I think they tried her in California.

Then there was the big hush, hush period after that of a week or so where all the big higher ups decided who was going to go.

Interviewer: And how did they decide that? Was it very political?

Donnan Plumb: No. It was really basically the outcome of the tryouts. My horse was probably at his peak during the tryout. He wasn't an international horse by any means. We hadn't been to Europe like all the teams do now. But I think he was at his peak for the tryout. Horses reach a peak in his career. And because we were going to go to The Olympics Games, we had to keep pushing on him. and I think by the time we got to Mexico he was beyond his peak, beyond his fitness, beyond his ability.

So it was tough. I mean in those days we were in over our heads with all of Europe. They had had dressage teams from way back. We were pretty knew at the sport. But we surged on. [laughs] We did our best.

Interviewer: Every sport needs the path breakers.

Donnan Plumb: Yes! It needed a beginning. There were teams prior to us, but we were a pretty new, green team when we went to Mexico. None of us had done any Olympic stuff before.

Interviewer: Do you remember how you found out or where you were when you made the team and what your reaction was?

Donnan Plumb: I had done well in the tryouts. As I said, my horse was really pretty good at that point. I think we won the tryout or maybe were second. And there weren't a lot of people. there were maybe 10 or 12 people that even had a horse high enough to get to the tryouts.

So by the time you got to the tryouts, if you horse went as well as he could, I felt we hopefully will make it. But you are never sure till they call you up. And General Tupper Cole, who was an old, I think, Army officer, and a very good rider, and a wonderful person, called me and said, "You made it!" And he was a pretty good friend by then, too. I mean obviously very much a senior of ours, but a real gentleman of the sport.

Interviewer: And how did you feel when you found out you made the team?

Donnan Plumb: I was obviously thrilled, because I had worked very hard. It was time consuming. Like other Olympic athletes, you don't do anything else in your life. You focus and concentrate totally on your daily routine.

Interviewer: How did your family and friends react to your making the team?

Donnan Plumb: I don't really know, because they seldom came to competitions. They didn't know about this new world I was in. they weren't close to the sport. They didn't really know about it. I don't know. I wasn't doing what ladies probably were meant to be doing in those days [laughs], which was getting a secretarial job.

This was early '60s when I think you were pretty individual and you went off doing this kind of a sport.

Interviewer: Around that same time period in 1968, in the news a lot during that time were stories about the second wave of the women's liberation movement. Do you remember reading any stories or hearing anything about women's liberation and if that had any effect on you and how you viewed your sport?

Donnan Plumb: No. I thought this women's lib stuff was just women being frustrated that they couldn't do what men could do. I remember thinking, "Well just go out and do it anyway and see what happens!" We were trying for the three-day team where we knew women weren't allowed to run. But we thought, "Oh well. We can still compete nationally and try to beat the opposite sex," and we did!

I think I thought they were just sort of whiners. [laughs] Maybe that's not a fair thing to say, because I was lucky to be able to do what I was doing, looking back on it now, how fortunate I was. But I didn't think much about it then. I just did it.

Interviewer: That makes sense. do you remember hearing anything about The Olympic Project for Human Rights or a rumor about any possible boycotts or protests that might be held at the games?

Donnan Plumb: No. The equestrian sports were pretty isolated from the track and field and the...I mean we were in our own little world. We didn't get to associate really very much with other athletes. They did their thing. We did our thing. We'd meet in the Olympic village. But we were still so busy concentrating on our own thing that...

You know, looking back on it now, the world just sort of went on by. We were just doing our thing. I don't know if that makes any sense.

Interviewer: Oh, no. it makes perfect sense. that's actually what a lot of the athletes we've interviewed have said, that they were so focused on their sport and on the games themselves, which makes perfect sense, that they weren't too focused on outside concerns or tangential concerns.

Did you ever remember receiving a letter from the Harvard Crew Team about sympathy or support for the black athletes?

Donnan Plumb: No.

Interviewer: Some people...

Donnan Plumb: I don't know that I ever got such a thing.

Interviewer: You may not have. I don't think that they were able to send that letter to every single person on the team. But they sent out some letters. What are some of the most memorable experiences that you had leading right up to the games in Mexico City?

Donnan Plumb: Oh, dear. I guess just knowing that we were going to the old adage about representing your country. I was very proud of the fact that I was one of the best and I was privileged to go do this.

Interviewer: How did you get your horse to Mexico City?

Donnan Plumb: God. They couldn't have done on a truck. They must have flown down. I remember they left quite a bit ahead of us. But they had to have flown. That's a great question, because I really don't remember. We fly them so easily now. But in those days flying horses was a big deal.

Interviewer: It sounds like it would be a big deal even today.

Donnan Plumb: Oh, no. they fly all over the world with, I mean, a dozen horses at a time, planes all fitted just for horses. But in those days they sort of flew with cargo. And the planes weren't very spacious at all.

Interviewer: Gosh! What was the name of your horse?

Donnan Plumb: Attaché.

Interviewer: Oh yeah! That's right. I remember seeing that and it didn't click with me just now that that was your horse's name. What were some of the training methods that you used to prepare for the altitude of Mexico City, or was it a concern at all, the altitude at all?

Donnan Plumb: I think it wasn't so much for us because we weren't an endurance sport. The horses were there probably two weeks before the competition. When you head for a competition that big, you try not to blow their tires going into it. So your training pretty much has been done. You just have to keep tuning them a little bit.

So the work wasn't terribly strenuous. Again, you try to just peak your horse for the day of the competition, as I guess most athletes try to do with their own bodies.

Interviewer: Did you march in the 1968 opening ceremony?

Donnan Plumb: [laughs] Yes we did.

Interviewer: Do you remember where you were positioned? What are some of your reflections or experiences from that opening ceremony?

Donnan Plumb: Well, I'm quite tall. I'm about 5'9" and a little bit. So I was one of the taller females. So I was in the back of the line with...I don't even know who were the other tall girls that were back there. Anyway, I've been tall all my life, so I'm always at the end of the line. [laughs]

And it was a thrill. Walked in representing the country. And we had sort of red, white, and blue uniforms that weren't at all attractive. But they were very red, white, and blue! So it was fun!

Interviewer: What were your accommodations like in Mexico City? Where were you in the Olympic village building? Do you remember the floor?

Donnan Plumb: I don't. but we weren't on the first floor. I think we were 2nd floor...these were, as I remember, sort of cement block buildings, all very new and Spartan. I think there were two people to a room. I roomed with one of my teammates. I mean they were very sparse. You had a bed and a dresser. But it was very clean. Kind of like going away to boarding school again. And you had kind of a communal shower. I mean it was fine. Very adequate, very clean. I'm a cleanly person, so I remember appreciating that.

Interviewer: What was the food like?

Donnan Plumb: I can't remember. [laughs] I'm sure we ate well. I really don't remember....I think there was a big dining hall where you could just go in and help yourself. But that part wasn't very important to me.

Interviewer: Did you get sick at all while you were there?

Donnan Plumb: Nope. We were lucky. but, you know, we ate and drank in the village. I don't remember that we were even told not to drink outside the village. But I don't think it was a problem to any of us.

Interviewer: Did you become particularly close to anyone on the team?

Donnan Plumb: Well, I knew them all ahead of time anyway. My roommate I had known forever. Not forever, but we had shared a house in Gladstone, the training quarters in New Jersey. So I knew her very well.

Interviewer: And this was Lana Wright?

Donnan Plumb: No. This was Edith Masters. Lana had done the three-day event in '64, so she did not go to the '68 games. She came to watch me, but she didn't compete.

Interviewer: OK. What are your memories of the athletes from the Soviet block? Did you encounter any Soviet athletes while you were there?

Donnan Plumb: I don't really remember that. there was a lot of pin exchanging going on, and that was a very important part of the day, to get all the right pins for the collection. I still have a big bag of those. And that was fun. And that was a way to introduce yourself to some of the foreign teams. Not everybody spoke English, but they did know that you wanted their pins, [laughs] and vice versa.

Interviewer: The Mexico City games were marked by several historic first and moments and controversies. During your competition, did you notice the effects of high altitude? Or were there any noticeable effects on you or your horse you think?

Donnan Plumb: No. I don't think so. I mean we were both pretty fit. And as I said, it wasn't really an endurance, which I think would get to your fitness first. But I don't remember that being a problem at all.

Interviewer: What about the testing athletes for performance enhancing drugs? Apparently this may have been the first games to deliberately test athletes for performance enhancing drugs. Do you know anyone that had to be tested?

Donnan Plumb: No. And I don't remember being tested. I mean you could tell me that we were being tested, but I don't remember having to give my little bottle or blood or anything.

Interviewer: I don't think they tested everybody. I'm fairly certain they did not test everybody.

Donnan Plumb: Well, I knew absolutely zero about drugs in those days. I still only know from reading the paper or whatever. I don't understand...and I don't think performance enhancing drugs would help a rider, or I can't imagine what drug that could possibly be, because you want to be so in tune with your body. If anything feels different or strange it certainly wouldn't help me.

So I was very naïve and still am about drugs. Why anybody would want to change their...I can see how they'd want to be able to be better, but we had worked hard in making ourselves the best we could. Maybe I could make my horse be better with drugs, [laughs] but I don't think I would have thought about it.

Interviewer: During these games there was the first ever disqualification for using performance enhancing drugs. It was a pentathlete on one of the European teams. Do you remember hearing about this at the time that he was sent home or disqualified because of performance enhancing drugs?

Donnan Plumb: I don't. but I'm sure I would have said serves him right.

Interviewer: This was also the first games held in South America, or Latin America, or Central America, south of the US essentially. What did you think about that? What did you think about Mexico or the Mexican people, the host city?

Donnan Plumb: Everyone that we dealt with wen out of their way to make us feel important and welcome. We didn't get to see much in Mexico City. I think we went to one bullfight, which I wasn't crazy about anyway. But we just didn't have time to be sightseeing or I guess think it was important at the time.

So I don't think we went outside of the village or the stabling area at all. I don't remember it, except to go to the bullfight.

Interviewer: Do you remember hearing anything about a massacre or student protests that had taken place near Mexico City where some students were killed?

Donnan Plumb: Nope. We probably heard all about it after we got home. But we were pretty isolated.

Interviewer: What was the security like there in Mexico City surrounding the Olympic village and the different event arenas?

Donnan Plumb: It was so unlike what I think is going on today, because you didn't have security in the airports...I think we had a badge around our necks that we were meant to wear all the time, and we did. And no one ever checked us. I mean you had a tag around you and that was it. But it was certainly not like security is now, which is scary.

Interviewer: Did you get to go to any of the other events?

Donnan Plumb: Only the other equestrian events where we knew people. I was married to a three-day event rider then. So our worlds were all right there.

Interviewer: Who was your husband?

Donnan Plumb: It was Michael Plumb, who was on the three-day team for many Olympics.

Interviewer: Is that like '60 through '92?

Donnan Plumb: Yeah. You know! That's him! You've done your homework! [laughs]

Interviewer: While you were watching the other equestrian events, did you witness anything that stands out particularly as being remarkable?

Donnan Plumb: Well, they had the terrible floods at the three-day event where it started to run and flooded the course. The tradition of the three-day event being that it came from the Army was you keep going no matter what. And it rained, and rained, and flooded the streams, and the course crisscrossed these streams. And it was The Mississippi by the end of the day. It was pretty terrible. Some horses drown. I mean the team members were standing downstream just to catch anybody that happened to get washed downstream. It was hideous. That wouldn't happen in this day and age. I don't know if you've talked to anyone from that year.

Interviewer: No. I haven't. you are the first equestrian that we've talked to. I talked to some pentathletes who have a horse background component where they borrow horses from the host country. But you are the first equestrian team member I've talked to.

Donnan Plumb: Well, the three-day was just a terrible thing. And in this day and age they would have had to have cancelled it because it was off the charts. But nothing terribly went wrong in the dressage or in the show jumping, which are the other two equestrian disciplines at the time.

Interviewer: Describe your event and how your competition went.

Donnan Plumb: Well, we're all assigned a time that we know we're on deck. And we know how long it takes to warm our horse up. So we plan backwards of when you get on, when you start putting your horse to work. you have so much time before you have to be ready. I had to ride right after the German who ultimately won the gold medal. He was the favorite going into the games. He did win the gold medal. So his tests that went right ahead of me was a real crowd pleaser. And the crowd went wild. And so did my horse.

Interviewer: Oh no!

Donnan Plumb: They were stamping on the bleachers. I mean the place was cheering and whistling. My poor old horse just thought it was the end of the world and he had to perform next. So it was a very nervous moment to try to calm him down before we had to be next.

Interviewer: Oh my goodness! How did the competition go? Once you got started, was your horse still very nervous the entire time or did he calm down eventually?

Donnan Plumb: He calmed down, but he had lost his focus. I mean the Grand Prix dressage is a very focused horse/rider combination sport where you have to be really tuned in as one. And he lost it before we went into the ring. His warmup had been good and we were ready. And this outburst of racket rally set him off. By the time we got in the ring and got going, he just wasn't...It was a bad time.

I felt horrible for him, but I felt even worse that we were letting the team down, because he wasn't performing as well as I know he could have. It's such a concentrated focused moment of the 10, 12 minutes that you are on stage. And you better have your act together. I think we had come a little bit unglued.

Interviewer: What was the composition of your team? How many people were on your team?

Donnan Plumb: It was three women; three lady team.

Interviewer: Were you competing against other female teams or were the teams mixed?

Donnan Plumb: Men and women compete against each other on equal terms.

Interviewer: Oh, wow. That's quite unusual, especially for that time.

Donnan Plumb: Well, the equestrian sport is...I think women are better riders. They are not as strong as men, but I think they put more finesse and less muscle into it, which, in my female opinion, helps a horse. You can never take total command of an animal that big, so you have to work with them, never against them. and I think that's what makes females, usually, not always, but usually better riders. [laughs] Wait till a male hears this.

Interviewer: [laughs] I think there are more than a few that would probably agree with you. In the tryouts, there were men and women competing for spots on the same team?

Donnan Plumb: Yep.

Interviewer: And all the spots were taken by women?

Donnan Plumb: Right.

Interviewer: Oh, wow. How did the men feel about that?

Donnan Plumb: They got beaten! [laughs] But the men pretty much...No, I can't even say what I'm thinking. I was thinking pretty much in those days were doing the eventing or the show jumping, not the dressage. But I mean there were plenty of men from plenty of countries competing and beating us, because they were better, had more experience, and had better horses at the time. I think The United States has certainly caught up and surpassed a lot of those countries.

Interviewer: Did you notice if any of...Did any of the men treat you differently or make any remarks to you about winning/competing in what had been at one time more male-dominated?

Donnan Plumb: No. No. The equestrian sport is, I think, beyond all that. they are probably older athletes than...I don't know what the average age is of an Olympic athlete. But I think the equestrian athlete rank among the oldest.

Interviewer: Is that because they are able to do the sport longer? Is it more like a life-long sport?

Donnan Plumb: I think because it takes so long to be good at it. I think the gymnastics you are good when you are young and flexible. I don't know what the age is. I don't really know what I'm talking about, but I think there's a point with that sport that your body has gone beyond its peak. But I think with the equestrian you probably don't reach your peak till much later.

Interviewer: Donnan, did you march in the closing ceremony or do you remember watching the closing ceremony?

Donnan Plumb: I think we did. I think we were still there, because the equestrian sports were spread out in the calendar. So someone of our buddies would have been competing that we would have wanted to watch. I don't remember the closing ceremony. I have much more vivid memory of the opening ceremony.

Interviewer: Where was the equestrian event center? Or where were the equestrian events held in relation to some of the other events or in relation to The Olympic village?

Donnan Plumb: Well, the horse part is most always outside of town in most Olympics, just because there isn't room in the city to accommodate the horse. So we were a little bit, I think, on the outskirts of Mexico, not in the Olympic complex of stadiums.

Interviewer: You described some problems with the course earlier from the rain. But overall, what was the condition there of the equestrian course events?

Donnan Plumb: Well, the dressage and the show jumping were in a different area. The three-day eventing was up in the mountains of Andro [sp], which is way outside the city. It was on a golf course a couple hours outside of the city. So that almost had nothing to do with The Olympic Games because it was so far away.

Interviewer: Was that your feeling, that you were kind of disconnected from...?

Donnan Plumb: Well, when I went out to watch the three-day event, because my husband at the time was competing in it. We had to take the train out to it.

Interviewer: How long was that train ride?

Donnan Plumb: Now, wait. I'm confusing Japan and Mexico. We didn't have a train ride in Mexico. Sorry.

Interviewer: That's OK! You've been to multiple Olympics...

Donnan Plumb: They sometimes become a big blur. But the dressage and the show jumping were in perfectly nice stadiums where only that was held. I mean we weren't in a track and field arena, at least I don't think the dressage was.

Interviewer: What happened immediately after the games? What did you do immediately following? Did you have any downtime or did you go back to training or take up any kind of employment?

Donnan Plumb: No. We all just went home. It's not something that you get out of your blood right away. You have other horses to bring on to further competitions. I never rode that horse again, though. I retired him after that. but I continued with the sport and never pushed it to that level again, just because I had other things, other commitments.

Interviewer: Have you helped train any gold medalists or do you have family members now that are competing in the sport?

Donnan Plumb: My oldest son is doing the three-day at an international level. He hasn't had a horse for The Olympics yet. But it's a much different world now, much tougher competition all around, tougher courses, tougher...the competition itself is tougher.

But he loves it. It's in his blood. He's done well with it.

Interviewer: I was asking if you've trained anybody or helped anybody.

Donnan Plumb: Oh, right. Yes. My coach in the days when I was competing always harped on me, because he was from the Spanish riding school. He was quite a famous man. And he always [laughs] beat on us, saying, "Now you better pass this knowledge along."

So I have. I've helped mostly three-day event people with their dressage, because I had done both. I had done the high level dressage and the dressage of the three-day. So I could appreciate what the three-day horses were dealing with. They weren't just dressage horses. They had to run, jump besides. And I understood that whole factor of their training. So I've helped quite a few event people with their dressage. And that's very rewarding.

Interviewer: What was the name of the coach or the trainer you had that was of the Spanish school of riding?

Donnan Plumb: Richard Watjen.

Interviewer: Was he part of the training staff in New Jersey?

Donnan Plumb: Well, we trained with him early on when I was talking about going up to Mt. Kisco, New York. He was training people there for the dressage. And then when my friend Lana and I went to Gladstone with the team, the team said, "Any chance you can talk Mr. Watjen into coming with you?" So we did. [laughs]

So he helped some of the event people also with their dressage, although he was a Grand Prix dressage coach. Two different worlds?

Interviewer: How so?

Donnan Plumb: Well, the Grand Prix dressage is a much higher level. And those horses don't have to run and jump. The dressage in the three-day event is about half the level. But they have to do a serious cross-country and a pretty serious stadium jumping course also. So they are very rounded athletes, those horses, where the dressage horses just have to concentrate on pure high level dressage.

Interviewer: Donnan, how did your experience in the '68 games change you? Did it have any impact on your life? If so, what was the impact? Were their positive benefits or any negative effects?

Donnan Plumb: Well, it gave me the confidence to teach and to go out and help others. I heard the voice in my head from Mr. Watjen saying, "You pass this knowledge on," because the classical dressage, which is the Grand Prix dressage, gets pretty complicated and pretty difficult, which is not required in the three-day dressage. But you can add the classical touch to the three-day dressage if you know it and understand it. I don't know if I'm making myself clear.

Interviewer: Yes. You are making yourself clear.

Donnan Plumb: So I had that advantage of having classical dressage training which I could then pass along to a lower level of dressage people, because my heart was still with the three-day event, the jumpers and the whole rest of what those horses have to train for.

Interviewer: Did you have a birthday during those games or shortly after?

Donnan Plumb: Did I? No. My birthday is in August. I can't remember when we were there.

Interviewer: October, like mid to late October.

Donnan Plumb: Oh. OK.

Interviewer: Tom Lowe told me that he thought maybe you had a story about a birthday during The Olympics or before or after. But he may be thinking of something else.

Donnan Plumb: I don't think it was me. I don't remember birthdays [laughs], especially that long ago.

Interviewer: I just thought of this question. Who took care of the horses in the stable before the event and before they were taken back home?

Donnan Plumb: Well, we had grooms. Each horse had a groom of their own that did the complete care. We didn't have to do anything but show up and ride. But we know our horses pretty well, so we were always in on the daily routine of the care. But we had a groom that traveled with the horses and was always there with them. they had their room and board out their near the stabling.

Interviewer: This person was from the same region of The United States as you were? Were they part of the US staff?

Donnan Plumb: Yes. Well, you know, each person, as you came to the team, you had your own groom. That person got pretty much to stay and travel with the horses. I think now the teams have grooms that are just designated to travel with the Olympic horses. But we each had our own. They stuck right with them.

Interviewer: OK. So if you made the Olympic team, then your horse's groom would become staff...

Donnan Plumb: Yep, for that period. And then you went home and business as usual.

Interviewer: For you, what was the most meaningful part of participating in The Olympic Games? Oh, I already asked you that question!

Donnan Plumb: I think just being there and having achieved that level. Although we didn't do very well, we were the best that the country could come up with at the time.

Interviewer: It's definitely something to be very proud of.

Donnan Plumb: Well, I think we were proud. I'm still proud of it. I'd love to go back and do better. [laughs] But I had my turn.

Interviewer: What one piece of advice would you give to today's Olympic hopeful?

Donnan Plumb: If you really...you have to be passionate about your sport. You can't go into aiming for The Olympics without being totally consumed and passionate about it and loving every day, getting up just to go try to make yourself better. So the daily routine was seriously important and was all part of it.

For anybody that has those aspirations, that's how they have to live their life. If they don't have that passion, they better get out of it, because it takes a lot of work and a lot of dedication. You give up...like all the athletes, you give up a lot to get there.

Interviewer: Do you feel like there is something you gave up that maybe you regret at all or are there no regrets?

Donnan Plumb: There's no regrets, because if I hadn't done it the way I did it, I wouldn't have made it. So it's kind of an all or nothing. I mean you have to be that passionate about it. And be glad afterwards that you did it even if you didn't do very well.

Interviewer: Donnan, is there anything else you can think of that you'd like to share with us about your Olympic experience?

Donnan Plumb: I think you've pretty well covered it. [laughs] You've made me think about it all, which is kinda fun to go back and try to remember.

Interviewer: Well I've sure enjoyed speaking with you today. Thank you so much for sharing a little bit of your history and your stories with me.

[end recording]

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