

# 68OHP Ball Catie Condon SWI

Interviewer: Ingrid Cantola

Narrator: Catie Ball Condon, 1968 Olympic Games, Swimming

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[Speaker 2]

Today is Thursday, March 15, 2012. This is Ingrid Cantola, graduate student at the University of Texas at Austin, and the H.J. Lutcher Stark Center for Physical Culture and Sports. As part of the 1968 U.S. Olympic team oral history project, I am interviewing Catie Ball Condon over the phone about her experiences in the 1968 Olympic Games in Mexico City. Great. So let's just start with your basic biographical background, your birth name, and where you were born and grew up.

[Speaker 1]

Okay. I was born in Jacksonville, Florida, 1951. Grew up there my whole life, and tell me what else.

[Speaker 2]

Did you live, work, or I mean train, and do everything right there in Jacksonville?

[Speaker 1]

Yes, I did. Yep, I trained there. We started training year-round when I was about 12 years old.

There was a group of about eight swimmers that I think our parents realized that we were kind of a lot better than the average swimmers in the area. So our parents got together and hired a coach, and we started training all year round, which is what you have to do in swimming. People didn't do it a whole lot at that point.

So yeah, I lived there and trained there my whole swimming career.

[Speaker 2]

So what age did you first start swimming?

[Speaker 1]

I started swimming when I was six, and I had an older brother and sister that swam on the swimming team at a local swimming club. So I just did it because they did it.

[Speaker 2]

Awesome.

[Speaker 1]

Yeah.

[Speaker 2]

And then what age was it were you when your parents hired that the coach?

[Speaker 1]

I was probably about 12.

[Speaker 2]

That's awesome. Had you participated in any other sports?

[Speaker 1]

No, I never did. I'm not too good on land. I'm not too good at running and jumping.

[Speaker 2]

So besides your older brother and sister, did you have any other major influences to push you towards swimming?

[Speaker 1]

Well, you know, I guess I just kind of fell into it. My father was a swimmer when he was in college. So I guess maybe that's why my brother and sister did it, or it was probably because we could ride our bicycles to the club where we swam.

And they just did it because they can ride their bikes. And, you know, swimming's kind of a natural thing growing up in Florida. So it just kind of evolved that way.

[Speaker 2]

Yeah, that sounds a lot like my experience with sport as well.

[Speaker 1]

Really? What sport did you compete in?

[Speaker 2]

Well, I did swimming as a kid too, but then I moved into track and field in high school.

[Speaker 1]

Oh, okay. Okay.

[Speaker 2]

So what was your training schedule like once you had adopted the year-round coach?

[Speaker 1]

Well, we probably, in the beginning, we swam probably not every day in the winter as well. Now, in the summer, we'd swim twice a day. But in the winter, we probably maybe swam like three days a week during the week because pool availability was a problem.

There aren't a whole lot of indoor pools in Florida. And you kind of need that because in North Florida, it gets cold, kind of like, you know, Austin probably gets cold sometimes too. And probably when I was 14, I would think we started swimming every morning before school.

We'd start swimming at 5 or 5:30, swim for an hour and a half, and then go to school, and then we'd swim in the afternoon. So I guess from the time I was about 14, I was training every day. Usually we didn't swim on Sundays.

[Speaker 2]

And did you also swim for your high school team? Did your high school have a team?

[Speaker 1]

They did. And when I was in high school is when I really was swimming a lot. You know, I went to Europe and swam there.

And so I didn't swim on the team and train with them, but I would swim in the meets.

[Speaker 2]

Okay.

[Speaker 1]

You know, and I couldn't swim in all of them because a lot of times I was gone or I was training for like an indoor championship and I couldn't go. But I think I swam in one state meet for them and I think that's about all. So I just swam some.

[Speaker 2]

Okay. And so when did you start, you know, traveling internationally?

[Speaker 1]

Let's see. I turned 16 in London. So I would say when I was 15 and 16, I swam in South America.

We went like it was more of a cultural exchange. And then they would take small U.S. teams to different meets in Europe. And so I did that.

And I swam in 1966 in what they call the Little Olympics. It was a pre-Olympic thing in Mexico City.

[Speaker 2]

Okay.

[Speaker 1]

And the U.S. had a team and I was on that team. Let's see. And then I swam in the Pan Am Games in 67.

They were in Canada. So I guess that's really all the international traveling I did swimming.

[Speaker 2]

And when was your first like U.S. national level meet?

[Speaker 1]

Let's see. I was I swam at the opening meet and the dedication of the Swimming Hall of Fame that's in Fort Lauderdale. And that was in like December of 60.

I had been 14 or 15 and I can't remember. Okay. If it was December of 65 or 66.

I should be able to figure that out. Anyway.

[Speaker 2]

Sorry. On my bio about you it says it was December of 66.

[Speaker 1]

And that's when it was. And they had people from you know it was an international meet.

[Speaker 2]

Okay.

[Speaker 1]

And that's when I won that. And I think that's probably the first time I swam against anybody. You know there were some Russians.

Oh there were Russians but there were West Germans and Sweden and France. And I can't remember. But it was you know a lot of top swimmers from around the world.

And I think that's my that was my first international competition. But it was here. Yeah.

I think I set a world record. I'm not sure.

[Speaker 2]

Yes. It looks like you did.

[Speaker 1]

Yeah I think I did.

[Speaker 2]

Okay.

[Speaker 1]

And I think that was I guess that was my first one.

[Speaker 2]

That's amazing. Yeah. It would be I think.

[Speaker 1]

Yeah. Terrible. I can't remember.

But it was a long time ago.

[Speaker 2]

No. But that's an incredible accomplishment for you. You were what 15 years old when you.

[Speaker 1]

I think 15.

[Speaker 2]

Yes. Okay.

[Speaker 1]

I think. Yeah that's probably right.

[Speaker 2]

That's fantastic.

And so that was your first meet where you did super well. And then from there you started traveling more. Is that kind of how it went?

[Speaker 1]

Yes. And I started going to. Let's see.

And I probably went to my first U.S. championships when I was 14. And I got second. And I won the 100 yard breaststroke.

And I think I got second in the 200 yard breaststroke. So that would have been like March of maybe 65. Has it been 66.

I can't remember. Maybe you have it written down somewhere. I don't know.

[Speaker 2]

I have your American record for the 100 breast stroke course set in March 1967. Is that a little later. Is that a different one.

[Speaker 1]

That's a different one. Okay. No that might not have been a different one.

That might have been. I can't remember how many short course I couldn't swim in one short course and it may have been 60. No that was 68 because I had mononucleosis and I couldn't swim in that one.

That was 68 because that was the year of the Olympics. So.

[Speaker 2]

Okay.

[Speaker 1]

Maybe it was 67.

[Speaker 2]

And so we're moving closer to the games here. So you are still living in Jacksonville I assume.

[Speaker 1]

Yes.

[Speaker 2]

And so in 67 and 68 leading up to the games. What was your what was your life like? How are you living out?

[Speaker 1]

My life was swimming and that was it.

[Speaker 2]

Yeah.

[Speaker 1]

That's what we trained you know before school after school. And we were now by now this group of eight kids had maybe grown to 15. But we were all most of us were on a national level like one of my.

I had you know the girls one of my good friends who swam butterfly. She was ranked like third in the nation. And then so it really was a small group of really good swimmers.

And I don't know where I was going with that. What was our question. You get my life.

It really was just swimming. There wasn't time to do anything else. And you know we we swam and we always had a short course nationals in the usually around March.

And then the long course championships were usually in August. So you know you're swimming for me. And then we would swim some meet in between.

But but not too many.

[Speaker 2]

OK.

[Speaker 1]

Mostly training for that.

[Speaker 2]

And so you're probably in between your sophomore and junior years of high school. Do you remember.

[Speaker 1]

Sophomore junior. And really. Yeah.

Because when I was in the Olympics was my senior year in high school.

[Speaker 2]

OK. And the question is how is your training and competition supported. And I mean you're 17 so.

[Speaker 1]

Oh well the same thing with our parents were paying a coach. OK. This this small group of kids we employed a coach.

And I was lucky because if you won a national championship which I did in my first short course championship I think I won the 100. I think I did. If you are returning national champion the Amateur Athletic Union paid for your way to the championships which was very helpful because they were in Philadelphia and Lincoln Nebraska and Bartlesville Oklahoma.

They were all over. So that that was very helpful as a returning champion that they paid your way. But if you didn't you had to pay for your own way.

So that that's how it was supported. And things are so different now because so-called amateur athletes can accept money.

[Speaker 2]  
Yeah.

[Speaker 1]  
We couldn't accept anything. I was in 17 Magazine did something on me before the Olympics. They did it about other female athletes too that were going to be in the 68 Olympics.

And 17 wanted to send me a gift and it was a little bracelet. Well they had to send it to New York to the United States Olympic Committee for them to approve whether I could accept this little teeny trinket that maybe cost \$10.

[Speaker 2]  
Yeah.

[Speaker 1]  
So it was so different.

[Speaker 2]  
Yeah.

[Speaker 1]  
You were on your own. You didn't get any help. Like I said unless you won a national team which you know when you're up they paid for everything and anywhere.

Of course the Pan Am Games the Olympic Games everything's paid for. But otherwise you got to pay your own way.

[Speaker 2]  
Yeah. And it's especially challenging when it's you know a parent who has two other kids to support as well.

[Speaker 1]  
Exactly. Yeah. It can get expensive if you're on that level.

[Speaker 2]  
Yeah. So did. How would you say your training affected your schooling and your you know relationships with friends and.

[Speaker 1]  
Well it did.

I had friends but you know I never could do what they were doing. I can't. I don't think I went to one high school football game.

I didn't go to a high school prom. I did get asked one year but I didn't want to go because I liked the guy. But only one time.

You know I was either gone or training and I loved training. I mean I loved doing what I was doing. So I really didn't feel like I was missing out on a lot because you know we had a group of friends.

We were all you know we swam together. So I had friends and we all did the same stuff. But school wise honestly it probably made me more disciplined because I had so little time to do homework that I had a certain time I had to do it.

You know before I swam because when I got back from swimming I was too tired to do anything. So that helped. And then my senior year the Olympics were in October.

So I never started my senior year. I started my senior year of high school in November.

[Speaker 2]  
OK.

[Speaker 1]  
And the school was very nice. They forgave everything. They didn't make me make anything up.

You know because of the circumstances.

[Speaker 2]  
Yeah.

[Speaker 1]  
So they were very flexible and very nice about it.

[Speaker 2]  
Interesting. It's good to you know have that sort of support considering.

[Speaker 1]  
Yeah. And you can't do it without that. I mean they you know very supportive.

If I if I you know was out of the country for a week or 10 days you know maybe they made me do a certain amount. But they really were very understanding. And I think they wanted to see me do well.

So they helped as much as they could.

[Speaker 2]  
Absolutely. So leading into the Olympic Games you had probably the Olympic Trials.

[Speaker 1]  
Yes.

[Speaker 2]



Can you tell me about the process of the Olympic Trials.

[Speaker 1]

Well at the Olympic Trials you have to. There's a minimum standard so you can't even enter them if you don't have a certain time. And that's for any national championship.

Also you can't just enter it. You have to have met a certain standard. And it was just like I guess like a national championship.

It really was because it was the same thing. But it was the Olympic Trials. So for that reason it's a little more nerve wracking.

There's a lot more pressure. So you know we just trained for it like any other big swimming meet. And I was fortunate enough to do real well.

I won 100 and 200 breaststrokes and set world records in both of them. So I had a good Olympic Trials.

[Speaker 2]

Yeah. Sounds like it. Did your family and friends come to the trials to watch or.

[Speaker 1]

No because it was it was my parents had. I had like I said two older siblings. Well they were both in college.

They were paying for college. They couldn't afford to come see me swim.

[Speaker 2]

OK.

[Speaker 1]

The first time they ever saw me swim in international competition other than they did go to Fort Lauderdale for that first meet.

[Speaker 2]

OK.

[Speaker 1]

When I was 15. They went to the Olympics and that was the first time they'd seen me really swim internationally.

[Speaker 2]

Yeah. That's a good time for them to do it. How did your family and friends and your school I mean react when you found out that you were going to make it to the Olympics.

[Speaker 1]

Well quite honestly it would have been a shock if I hadn't made it. OK. I mean you know let's say from the time I was 15 I held both world records in breaststroke and nobody ever beat me.

[Speaker 2]  
OK.

[Speaker 1]  
So I mean I was supposed to make it. You know it's just what it was the next step. That's what it is.

And I made it.

[Speaker 2]  
Yep. What was the reaction to you being so young and so highly successful.

[Speaker 1]  
Well again back then most girls were my age. I mean I was probably the median age on the team on the Olympic team. We had one girl 13.

[Speaker 2]  
Really.

[Speaker 1]  
She she was. Yeah. She was the youngest.

[Speaker 2]  
Wow.

[Speaker 1]  
And probably the oldest 19 maybe because there was a title nine hadn't even been passed. I mean this is 19. When was Title Nine 1972.

I can't remember. But after you graduated from high school unless you had [??] your AAU coach that was you know also coached to college or would let you keep swimming. Girls didn't swim in college.

They didn't have women swimming. Now it started probably right after the Olympics. They started getting major schools started getting women swimming.

But it wasn't available. So the fact that I was 17 I turned 17 and when I was at the Olympics was not a big deal. That was kind of the median age.

[Speaker 2]  
OK. Interesting. Had no idea that there was so many young young athletes at that.

[Speaker 1]  
Yeah. I mean simply because after high school girls quit swimming.

[Speaker 2]  
Well I guess that that makes sense.

[Speaker 1]  
Yeah.

[Speaker 2]

So in preparations for going to Mexico City did you change your training for the altitude that was coming.

[Speaker 1]

Well what happened was once we made the team I think the trials were in August. Everybody went back to their home and then we met in. We all flew to Colorado Springs.

[Speaker 2]

OK.

[Speaker 1]

We lived there for a month and trained there because it's about the same altitude as Mexico City. So we would be used to the altitude and it wouldn't bother us. So we trained for a month you know as a team in Colorado Springs.

[Speaker 2]

And was that the month right before you headed to Mexico City or was it.

[Speaker 1]

Yeah. OK. Yeah.

We went straight from Colorado Springs to Mexico City.

[Speaker 2]

And did you have any other special preparations for heading to a city in Mexico. Was there anything that you guys took into consideration.

[Speaker 1]

No really there wasn't. The only thing we were told is of course not to drink the water. And we were also told that they would kind of like cater food for like the Americans and the British and the Canadians all ate in one cafeteria and they tried to you know cook the food like you know like we were used to cooking food.

And you know the Russians and the Germans and you know they had a cafeteria. So they really did try to make it be make the food be as much like what we were used to.

[Speaker 2]

OK.

[Speaker 1]

Which turned out to be my demise.

[Speaker 2]

OK. I was about to ask you a little bit more about that. So did you experience an illness with the food.

[Speaker 1]

What happened to me was swimming. OK. We flew to Mexico City probably a week before the opening ceremony.

I can't remember exactly. So we. So then we started training in the actual Olympic pool.

Well opening ceremonies came and swimming was at the end.

[Speaker 2]

OK.

[Speaker 1]

It didn't start. It was probably at least 10 days into the games before swimming started. I would go in the cafeteria and I would walk in and immediately my stomach would just smell.

It almost made me gag. I could not. I couldn't eat the food.

I'd go through the line and I'd get the food and I would go sit down. We'd all sit down to eat and I would just sit there and you know somebody be sitting next to me and some guy said do you want this. And I'd pass it to him.

I could not eat the food. It was I just I couldn't. And I was surviving on coke and crackers.

So I think because swimming was at the end. But I was thinking about this the other day in preparation of you calling. I can remember training in the pool at the Olympic pool and we were doing push off.

I mean you know you didn't dive in. You were pushing off on the wall. Yeah.

And I was swimming at the hundred breaststroke almost at my world record. Yeah. Just pushing off.

So there is no doubt I was I was used to the altitude. That didn't bother me. I was in good shape.

I had you know you know start training less and less. The closer it gets to the meet so you have more and more energy. Yeah.

I was in great shape. But what killed me was the fact that I could not I couldn't eat the food. And back then I guess people think it's like it is now.

Back then nobody put us on the scales every day.

[Speaker 2]

Yeah.

[Speaker 1]

We had trainers. We had one trainer that if you had a sore muscle you could you know they they'd rub it for you. That that was their idea of a trainer.

[Speaker 2]

Yeah.

[Speaker 1]

Nobody kept up with us. Nobody. You know it's just what we we weren't monitored like they are now.

I mean now if that had happened they would know within 48 hours that I'd lost weight. Why are you losing weight. And it would have been taken care of.

But it wasn't like that back then.

[Speaker 2]  
Yeah.

[Speaker 1]  
And so what happened to me is when the relay I swam the hundred breast on the medley relay and we won. But I had a horrible split. So I got out of the water and I went over to the coach and I said something is wrong with me.

I feel horrible in the water. I don't know what it is. And so they took me in the back and they weighed me and I'd lost 12 pounds.

[Speaker 2]  
Oh my goodness.

[Speaker 1]  
And I just I had absolutely no strength. I had you know messed up all my electrolytes and all the you know stuff that has to be you know top notch to compete at that level.

[Speaker 2]  
Yeah.

[Speaker 1]  
So they tried to pump me full of fluid. They took me to the hospital and you know they gave me IVs and all this stuff. But the next day I had to swim the prelims of the hundred breast.

And I did terrible. I qualified like fifth. So then you swim the semifinals because at 100 you have to swim it three times.

[Speaker 2]  
Yeah.

[Speaker 1]  
I swim the semifinals and I don't think I did a whole lot better. And then in the finals I was bleeding. I was.

Nobody was even close to me until about 25 20 meters from the end of the pool. Like I felt I told my coach somebody built a brick wall and I ran into it. I absolutely had nothing left.

So four girls went by me and I got fifth. Goodness. So I hadn't been beaten in the hundred breast in two and a half years.

[Speaker 2]

Yeah.

[Speaker 1]

So for me the Olympics were a very bittersweet experience.

[Speaker 2]

Yeah.

[Speaker 1]

So anyway got out of the pool and you know what are you going to do. It was just too. I didn't have the strength or anything.

So I made the decision to withdraw from the 200. I didn't even swim the 200. I knew if I couldn't make 100 there was no way I was going to be able to swim a 200.

Yeah. And I thought it wasn't fair to myself. I'm not going to get in there if I you know if I don't it's not the same level playing field.

I mean I don't mind losing. I lost a lot in my career probably more than I won because I swam from the time I was six. But I just I wasn't going to do it and I didn't do it.

So unfortunately that's how my career ended. And I didn't want to swim four more years. I could have.

I could have gone to Indiana or gone out to California where a lot of the coaches that we knew also coached at college at that time and they would have let me train. But I had not. I just felt like I hadn't had a life you know at that point.

I was going to go to college the next year. So I decided you know not to swim four more years. So unfortunately my career ended on a rather sad note.

But you know when I look back on it not not that many people have an Olympic gold medal. So I'm lucky to have what I have.

[Speaker 2]

Absolutely. Can we. I love that entire you know your story is obviously very powerful and your decision you know as a young young person to pull yourself out of a race must have been incredibly hard.

But can we talk kind of about your experience you know going to the opening ceremonies. And do you remember you know where you were in the formation of walking in and.

[Speaker 1]

Yes. There are some some of my teammates and other people have put on YouTube. You can go to it.

You know you can put in 1968 Olympics. And I can find myself. I was like in the fourth or fifth row from the front because the girls were first and the guys were behind us.

And it's just really like I tell people you know I'd swim against all those people just about all of them before you know in Europe and where I've traveled and swim against them. But the Olympic Games is a whole different story. There is so much more pressure.

There isn't. You know you're an amateur athlete. This is it.

There's nothing else for you. You know you don't have you know the Super Bowl every year. You don't have it.

They didn't have national champions. I mean world championships back then like they do now. But that was it.

You didn't have anything else. So I really think you know there's a lot of pressure on today obviously. But that was all you had.

You had to wait four more years if you wanted to try it again.

[Speaker 2]

Yeah.

[Speaker 1]

It was just. I don't know. It's a lot of pressure.

And like I'm sure it is now. But it's just it's a whole different ball game. Yeah.

The whole feel of it. The whole experience being with you know people from other countries and you're in the you know you're in the lounges and you're playing pool and ping pong and all that kind of stuff and being with people from other cultures and other countries and like especially for us. Because you know there was all the communists the Soviet bloc countries you know that we had learned to be afraid of them and you know they're so different than us.

You kind of grow up feeling that way. But when you're around them they're just people. Yeah.

They're just kids like you are and they like to do the same kind of stuff. So you know in that way you really get certainly a different perspective on people from around the world because you know you realize well they're just like me. They like to do the same kind of things.

And even though you couldn't a lot of times you couldn't communicate you end up being able to communicate. You know you like to do the same kind of stuff. But as I was reading this you know I really hadn't thought too much about the 68 games being really kind of you know all the stuff that was going on in the world at the time.

It really does make them kind of special because I know outside of the dorms where the women stayed they had armed guards all around the building because they had had student riots right before we all got there.

[Speaker 2]

Had you heard about those the Tlaloc local I think is how it's pronounced the massacre in Mexico City. Had you heard about that before you got there.

[Speaker 1]

You know I don't remember hearing about that in particular but I do remember that there were student riots. That's all I remember. I don't remember any particulars of it.

Well it was more like we'll be taken care of. And you know at 17 you really don't worry a whole lot about stuff like that because you think nothing can happen to you.

[Speaker 2]

I guess it was you know another human rights project that was going on. And I think they probably targeted you know maybe people who were older and more involved in that sort of thing. In terms of your interaction with the other national teams you said that you had heard things about the Soviet athletes.

Did you have any stories that stand out in your recollection of interaction with any individuals?

[Speaker 1]

You know not really. My big deal was that an American woman had never held a world record in breaststroke. It was a European sport and moreover it was a Russian stroke.

They were the breaststrokers. So the one time when I went to Europe to swim we swam in Germany and the Russians were there. So that was the first time I had ever swum against her.

So I was so nervous. And you know the Soviets and she was this big girl you know with big shoulders. Kind of the stereotype you would picture Russian women looking like.

So anyway to me that was kind of funny and I was scared to death but I beat her.

[Speaker 2]

Yeah. Do you remember this particular opponent's name? Yeah.

Her name was Galina Prozumenshchikova. I don't know how to spell it. Okay.

One more time then. What was her first name? Galina.

[Speaker 1]

G-A-L-I-N-A. Okay. And then Prozumenshchikova.

And Google her and if you get close you'll probably come up with her. Put in Russian breaststrokers or something like that. Okay.

And you can find out how to spell it.

[Speaker 2]

Yeah. And so what about any interactions with the East German athletes? Because this was the first games in which East Germany had sent an Olympic team.



[Speaker 1]

Yeah. But you know what? I don't even remember an East German swimmer.

Okay. They really did not do all that well. I mean I don't even remember them meddling in anything.

They may have but I remember four years later in 72 they won just about everything. So I don't think they were that much of a force in swimming yet. Okay.

But they certainly were four years later.

[Speaker 2]

And you had kind of dabbled into this in terms of testing for banned and performance enhancing substances. Did you personally receive any or were you aware of the list of banned substances at the Olympics? Yes.

[Speaker 1]

We were aware of the list of substances and you know which really didn't I don't think they told us don't take cold medicine. I don't even remember that. But I do know I was tested and I've never been tested before.

[Speaker 2]

Okay.

[Speaker 1]

In any need.

[Speaker 2]

Yeah.

[Speaker 1]

And one of the highlights of being on the 68 team was I don't know if they still do this but you got a chromosome test that guaranteed you were a female.

[Speaker 2]

Yes.

[Speaker 1]

That was interesting.

[Speaker 2]

Yeah. I feel like that was one of the first times they had ever done that.

[Speaker 1]

It probably was. I thought so. I had a certificate that said I was a female which I appreciate it very much.

[Speaker 2]

I would too. How did you feel about that whole testing process? I mean you say you appreciated getting your verification.

Was it something that made you nervous? No.

[Speaker 1]

No. We kind of laughed. We all laughed when they did the chromosome test like why are they even doing this?

But then four years later you understood why they were. No. I don't think we thought anything of it.

We thought it was just kind of you know weird because we've never had to do it before and who was taking illegal substances? None of us were so.

[Speaker 2]

Do you remember hearing about any other athletes or teams or nations that were you know coming? No. I really don't.

Okay. Were you aware? So you probably weren't aware of the disqualification of the Swedish pentathlete?

No. That was just I guess that happened midway through he got disqualified. Yeah.

I don't even remember that. Yeah. In terms of the U.S. team were you close with your teammates? Was there anybody in particular?

[Speaker 1]

Oh we were very close. Yes. My roommate who I roomed with at the Olympics we've stayed very close friends.

It was Debbie Meyer. Yeah. Yeah.

And we're still good friends.

[Speaker 2]

That's a familiar name to me because I'm from Sacramento and as a swimmer in Sacramento you know who Debbie Meyer is.

[Speaker 1]

Oh yes you do.

[Speaker 2]

And what were your accommodations like?

[Speaker 1]

Uh the accommodations were high-rise apartment buildings that were going to be low-income housing when we left.

[Speaker 2]

Okay.

[Speaker 1]

So not real good.

[Speaker 2]

Yeah. And so you said you had the opening ceremonies and then you had quite a bit of time before your event. Yeah.

Do you have any specific memories of the opening ceremonies kind of going back to this one more time of the opening ceremonies? Like how did you feel walking into the stadium? Oh yeah.

Oh my gosh.

[Speaker 1]

What I mean it's just what a feeling you know here you are representing your nation and the American flag is in front of you and all these people are there yelling and screaming and it's just uh it's it's a fabulous experience.

[Speaker 2]

That's amazing. Um I can't even begin to fathom what it would feel like to be on the floor of the stadium for one of those things.

[Speaker 1]

It's really neat and then you know you're there and you know we're we don't really see the other athletes uh American athletes all that much um you know we because we're training all the time in the village we might run into them but you know you'd be going oh my gosh there's uh so-and-so you know famous people from other sports you know that we had never seen and we're oh my god there's so-and-so so when we were we weren't all together except that one time.

Yeah. So it was kind of neat you know seeing all the other athletes from other sports.

[Speaker 2]

Yeah definitely um I feel like that would probably be the highlight if I was yeah I was there too um so after your event and it you know the you did well for the relay well you know well enough to get the gold and then 100 didn't go as planned and you pulled out for the 200 um did you have any more time left in Mexico City before you um?

[Speaker 1]

I did I um I stayed um until the end I didn't do the closing ceremonies I didn't go to those. Okay. Um I stayed I think I stayed my parents were there I think I stayed with them that night.

Okay. Um so I did not go to those and that was my choice.

[Speaker 2]

Yeah. Did you um travel around Mexico City outside of the Olympic Village while you were there?

[Speaker 1]

Um not really uh we had traveled uh we had uh when I was there in 66 for the Little Olympics.

[Speaker 2]  
Uh-huh.

[Speaker 1]  
They had taken us to a bullfight and done some sightseeing but very little and I don't remember leaving the Olympic Village when I was there.

[Speaker 2]  
Okay. Um and your the swimming pool was right in the middle of it all?

[Speaker 1]  
Uh well it was pretty far from the village because you had to take buses to go there. Okay. Yeah the venues aren't in the village I mean they weren't then.

[Speaker 2]  
Okay. Um so what was that travel like?

[Speaker 1]  
It just put you on a bus and you travel 20 minutes to the pool get off the bus and we never saw anything else. Okay. Come back on the bus they take you back.

[Speaker 2]  
Okay.

[Speaker 1]  
Um. Not too exciting.

[Speaker 2]  
Yeah and it's probably a little different now because it was the days before iPods so you know you didn't.

[Speaker 1]  
And you gotta remember we're 13, 14, 15 we're children. Yeah. You know we're not Dara Torres who's almost 40 who if she wants to use in London she wants to go see the crown jewels she can.

[Speaker 2]  
Yeah.

[Speaker 1]  
It's so different.

[Speaker 2]  
So did you have a lot of supervision from officials or was it your coaches or your parents?

[Speaker 1]

Well we had team chaperones and we had two women who chaperoned all the girls. Okay. Made sure we were where we were supposed to be you know put us on the bus got us home made sure we were all in our room they stayed with us.

[Speaker 2]

Okay. Um and did your parents get to come into the Olympic Village and see you or did you mostly go out to see them?

[Speaker 1]

They did not. No I would go out to see them. I went and I don't think I went to see them at their hotel until after I pulled out of the 200.

Okay.

[Speaker 2]

Um did you in terms of the media attention um did you have a lot of interaction with the media around your events? Um you know that that's um. Okay um that is pretty I mean pretty short you know you did it till you were 17 and then pretty much stopped right?

That's it. Um so looking back on your time as a I mean short but highly highly successful uh swimmer what what would you say was your biggest influence throughout your athletic career?

[Speaker 1]

That influenced me? Yeah. Um you know I I really don't know I mean I maybe maybe there was a person I don't know if there was a person that influenced you you know I just kind of fell into swimming because my older siblings did it and I happen to be real good at it.

[Speaker 2]

Yeah.

[Speaker 1]

They were pretty good too. Uh but you know I can't really I can't really say I don't think there's anything in particular that influenced me it just kind of happened.

[Speaker 2]

Yeah um I mean you could also say that you were creating the influence for you know millions of other young women swimmers in the future so. Yeah. You don't necessarily have to have somebody influence you when you're setting the stage for so many others.

[Speaker 1]

Well yeah and really truthfully I was the first American woman to ever hold a world breaststroke record so maybe I paved the way for all the great American breaststrokers that have come since me.

[Speaker 2]

Oh yeah absolutely I would there's no doubt that you definitely set that standard for American swimmers.

[Speaker 1]

I never thought about it like that so that's a good thing.

[Speaker 2]

Yeah it is it's it's hugely important to the entire you know future of U.S. swimming so. Yeah. Um if you could provide any advice for Olympic hopefuls in the future.

[Speaker 1]

Say that again I didn't hear you.

[Speaker 2]

Uh if you could provide any advice for Olympic hopefuls in the future do you have any you know thing that you would say to uh Olympic hopefuls?

[Speaker 1]

Uh well you know stupid things like work hard. I just really enjoy the experience and take advantage of everything it offers you now because being in sports now especially if you're at the top of your your field or whatever is so different. I mean you can cash in monetarily you get all this kind of uh you know you get a lot of publicity you get you know and not just local you get it nationally and internationally.

[Speaker 2]

Yeah.

[Speaker 1]

It's it's it has changed so much uh you know from when I did it that to me you know I could find myself saying gosh I wish I had all that offered to me so my advice would be take advantage of everything you can.

[Speaker 2]

Yeah. Absolutely. Um and uh would you say that the 68 games had a lasting impact on your life or was it just kind of part of your journey?

[Speaker 1]

Oh no no no no. It to this day has a lasting impact because I didn't achieve what I wanted to achieve and what I should have achieved but you know I think maybe that's helped me get through things in my life that have been hard.

[Speaker 2]

Yeah.

[Speaker 1]

Not pleasant and didn't work out the way I thought they should because you know I've been through it and I see there's a there's another side to just about everything you go through in life.

[Speaker 2]

Yeah. That is a great takeaway definitely from that experience.

[Speaker 1]

Wow.

[Speaker 2]

Um do you would you do you see the effect of the 68 games on the world kind of the whole you know change in political tides around the Olympics with testing and things like that do you?

[Speaker 1]

Well you know it has to be and I never really thought about it you know you don't think about things like that when you're living it.

[Speaker 2]

Yeah.

[Speaker 1]

Yeah I was just doing it um but but you know it had to have and the change that was kind of a change with uh black athletes becoming you know dominant in sports and they hadn't been before and you know I kind of saw that if you if you lived during that time like when I went to the University of Florida we had uh like mini student riot not m-a-n-y but m-i-n-i and we'd be going to class and they'd be throwing tear gas at them and of course you know we're all dressed up because we're the sorority girls and we're just coughing oh I wish they'd quit throwing that tear gas but you know it gets in my eyes and ruins my makeup. Yeah.

And we had we had hippies you know that lived on the um you know the green area in the middle of the school and didn't wear shoes and didn't bathe so you know it was such a diverse time and people were doing so many different things but I think you know you kind of came through that um because we were exposed this is getting off on a whole other tangent to black people in my senior class I had one black boy in my class in a public high school so we were kind of mixed in with all that and we were kind of the you know the first ones that you know we had friends that were black and um you know so it was really but I think the Olympics was a big part of that because you know it mixed the black athletes and you know they did their black power thing and it just it was uh I guess really you know a really unique time because so much was happening but you're living it you really don't realize it.

[Speaker 2]

Yeah.

[Speaker 1]

Especially if you're 17 you don't realize it.

[Speaker 2]

Yeah. Um do you uh so this for this oral history project that we're doing um do you what are your thoughts about it do you find it to be you know uh what does it mean to you to be a part of it?

[Speaker 1]

Well my first reaction when I got the the emails were why in the world do they care about the 68 Olympics you know I a lot who cares about that but then when um Desiree sent me all the stuff on it you know I never really oh I didn't know you were here oh okay okay bye

I'm sorry um okay well oh she put me the you know the um literature on it and I you know when I read about you know how it was the first time people were tested and the black power thing and the ISC and all you know the Soviet countries I really never had thought of it like that because it was just the 68 games and I was in them.

[Speaker 2]

Yeah.

[Speaker 1]

You know I really hadn't thought past that but um you know I think they really were kind of a pivotal game and it's just been a whole different ball game so to speak ever since then.

[Speaker 2]

Yeah um the the whole shape of international competition has just been rapidly rapidly shifted since then I'd say. Yeah yeah. Um I feel like I'm coming to a close with uh my specific questions is there okay are there any other stories or anything that you'd like to share or tell us about?

[Speaker 1]

I can't think of anything I just nothing nothing uh like like sitting next to George Foreman like I said that's my claim to fame my kids think that's great.

[Speaker 2]

That is pretty pretty cool story I'd say um do you have any any questions about this project for me?

[Speaker 1]

I don't I don't I just y'all are so nice to even care about people we appreciate it so much.

[Speaker 2]

No absolutely it's uh I'm very honored to be a part of this project myself and I can't thank you enough for um putting up with me and our little issues with the speaker and um.

[Speaker 1]

Oh well I'm so sorry about how I plugged the phone into the wrong outlet. I'm so sorry. I obviously am not techno wise as you can tell.

[Speaker 2]

Oh yeah that's absolutely no problem for us um there might be a chance that our that Desiree wants to call you and talk about a few more questions that I might have missed when the recorder wasn't working.

[Speaker 1]

Okay.

[Speaker 2]

So uh she'll contact you if that's the case. That's fine. But again thank you so so very much for being generous with your time and with your story and all your memories it's uh been a real pleasure getting to hear from you.



[Speaker 1]

Well thanks for doing it anyway and I appreciate it.

[Speaker 2]

Absolutely have a great day. You too. Bye.

[Speaker 1]

Take care. Bye.