

**Aileen Riggin Soule:
A Wonderful Life In her own words**

The youngest U.S. Olympic champion, the tiniest anywhere Olympic champion and the first women's Olympic springboard diving champion was Aileen Riggin. All these honors were won in the 1920 Olympics by Miss Riggin when she had just passed her 14th birthday.

If no woman started earlier as an amateur champion, certainly no woman pro stayed on the top longer. Aileen Riggin never waited for opportunities to come her way. In 1924 at Paris, she became the only girl in Olympic history to win medals in both diving and swimming in the same Olympic Games (silver in 3 meter springboard and bronze in 100 meter backstroke). She turned pro in 1926, played the Hippodrome and toured with Gertrude Ederle's Act for 6 months after her famous Channel swim. She made appearances at new pool openings and helped launch "learn to swim programs" around the world. She gave diving exhibitions, taught swimming, lectured and wrote articles on fashion, sports, fitness and health for the New York Post and many of the leading magazines of her day. She also danced in the movie "Roman Scandals" starring Eddie Cantor and skated in Sonja Henie's film "One in a Million." She helped organize and coach Billy Rose's first Aquacade in which she also starred, at the 1937 Cleveland Exposition. She was truly a girl who did it all. When in 1996, while attending the Olympic Games in Atlanta as America's oldest Olympic Gold medalist, she was asked if she still had any goals left in life, she said: "Yes. I'd like to continue - life in general, that is." And she did, setting F.I.N.A. Masters World Records into her 90's.

Aileen Riggin Soule passed away in 2002 in a retirement home in Honolulu at the age of ninety-six years. At her request, Aileen's relatives sent her scrapbooks, articles she had written and other memorabilia on to the International Swimming Hall of Fame where it is being catalogued, preserved and put on display.

The photos from Aileen's scrapbooks capture, perhaps better than any other in ISHOF's collection, the era when women swimmers were trend-setting celebrities, household names and the most photographed female athletes in the world.

In her own words

I was born in Newport, R.I., and learned to swim at age 6 in the Philippines, where my father, a Navy officer, was stationed. Quite small and very thin, I caught a bad case of Spanish Influenza and doctors advised my parents that if I didn't return to the States, I would surely die. Once home, doctors at the Brooklyn Navy Hospital prescribed less dancing (Aileen had chosen to become a dancer) and more outdoor exercise to build me up. He particularly recommended I take up swimming. I had learned to swim in the Philippines, but soon she found out that was only play swimming.

My new sport brought me to take lessons at Manhattan Beach where I met girls from the New York Women's Swimming Association. They encouraged me to join them the next

winter. I still did not give up my dreams of becoming a dancer but added to it – by becoming a swimming and diver.

As a healthy eleven year old I became one of New York's top junior fashion models for pre-teen clothing ads in the newspapers and the catalogues. I found it boring. You had to sit still all the time and smile whether it was funny or not. The only fun thing was, you sometimes got to keep the clothes you modeled.

By 12 I started putting aside my toe dancing slippers, ice skates and modeling for advanced swimming lessons at the Women's Swimming Association. We were all just kids, and we had lots of fun together and had a remarkable swimming coach. Louis de B. Haneley's name is now enshrined in the International Swimming Hall of Fame. He was an amateur coach and this was a hobby with him, but he developed some of the greatest swimmers of that era, swimmers such as Gertrude Ederle, Eleanor Holm and many others. Mr. Handley was very handsome and elegant in his spats and waistcoat. His heritage was French, and he spoke several languages fluently. He was a former Olympic track man, water polo player, swimmer and rower. He wrote articles for the papers, too. Mr. Handley was a great inspiration to us.

His specialty as a coach was the crawl. In those days everybody did the Australian crawl, which is one scissors kick to three kicks on the other side. Mr. Handley improved the stroke by changing the kick. He originated the American crawl stroke and we were his favorite pupils as he tried out this four beat, six beat, six beat, eight beat and even ten beat kicks with our crawl arm strokes. He liked to start us young so he wouldn't have to make us unlearn the trudgeon or double over arm we would have previously learned. Learning a new stroke right the first time is best. It's easier to teach a new swimmer than one who had already learned the old way. We soon had the fun of going all over the place showing off Mr. Handley's new stroke which some people still called the Australian crawl, which it wasn't. It was so far superior that every time we entered the water we were breaking records. No one could understand how us little kids could beat all the women who had been champions before us. 'All the better,' said Mr. Handley. 'If little kids can beat the old champions, it will show how much better anyone can swim using the new American Crawl.'

Besides Mr. Handley, we had Charlotte Epstein as our chaperone and club manager, and they taught us "Sportsmanship comes above winning." That was our WSA motto, and they also taught us table manners and how to be young ladies in the pool and out. We even learned how to walk and dress and we were always very polite, even to the strangers we were going to beat in the pool. We were polite, but not coy. They would razz anybody who was coy. And we did win most of the time, and soon we expected to win, and we did win for years and years.

The first WSA girls were all from the metropolitan area. Claire Galligan, Charlotte Boyle, Ethelda Bleibtrey, Gertrude Ederle, the Helens – Wainwright and Meany, the O'Mara's, everybody. It wasn't until later that the whole world wanted to

come and swim for our club. People like Martha Norelius from White Sulfur Springs and Adelaide Lambert from the Panama Canal came.

Even the stars were teenagers. Role models like Claire Galligan, Charlotte Boyle and the “Champ” Ethelda Bleibtrey were still teenagers. I was one of the youngest at 13 with my pal Helen Wainright. I liked the backstroke best because I could swim it and still look around. We all swam the crawl, and it was almost as if we took turns being the national high point swimmer for the year.

First it was Ethelda. She was marvelous, the best in our world and as it turned out, the whole world, in everything. Helen came along with marvelous strokes and she was the best my age. Ethelda, Charlotte Boyle and Claire Galligan were about five years older. We were all very good. Helen Meany was a year older, and Gertrude Ederle was about our age, too. We all swam and some of us, like Alice Lord, the first of our divers, began to dive a couple of nights a week and then a lot in the summers at Manhattan Beach and other places where we could get to a tower and a high board.

Well, we were winning almost everything. Only the Philadelphia teams were giving us competition with their good sprinters including the first U.S. women’s world record holder Olga Dorfner, Gertrude Artelet and Betty Becker. Betty was about as good as any of us as a diver and of course she was also one of their swimming stars. We were all swimmers first who then took up diving, but none of us really stopped swimming either.

The thing that was so great about Mr. Handley’s new stroke was that we won all the time as a team. Claire Galligan had been our first star, our first AAU national champion before she moved to California, and Ethelda took over with us. The WSA was the first swim club just for women and maybe the first just for swimming (men and/or women) as opposed to the Turners and the NYAC who did all sports. We kept winning as a team, winning 27 national in a row before we finished our streak. We beat our competitors, to, except for a few great exceptions like Sybil Bauer and Ethel Lacke of Chicago, Margaret Woodbridge from Detroit and, of course, the Philadelphia girls I mentioned before. Oh, there were one or two others, but by and large, they were all from New York and our club in New York. We got used to being winners and learned how to handle competition so well because we swam against the best every day in practice the same way George Haines did it years later with his Santa Clara girls.

And the papers and reporters of course just loved us – they wrote of cute little local girls setting world records. There was a story almost every day and a picture, and we were pestered by our jealous friends as being some kind of freaks. We were in a way because we were doing it with a new stroke, Mr. Handley’s American Crawl, which he developed with us and eventually took it to everyone else or else everybody came to us.

Of course, my parents saw to it that I didn’t get a big head. Certainly Charlotte Epstein, our manager did as well. We were just kids, pretty good kids, and the press, too, got a kick out of our being the youngest champions. We did a lot toward getting women’s sports accepted in America – we didn’t even know this was what we were doing.

Although Charlotte always reminded us that we were ladies and expected to act like ladies (but of course we were kids, too, and we giggled a lot).”

I was a member of the first American Olympic women’s swimming and diving team. There had been some women from northern European countries and Australia in the 1912 Games in Stockholm, but 1920 was the first time that American women participated in regular Olympic events. Our participation was limited in those days to swimming. Track and field events came later for women, as well as gymnastics, fencing, and various other sports that women compete in today.

We learned that American women might participate in the Games in the spring of 1920. The American Olympic Committee and the various affiliated groups were not in favor of sending women at all. In those days women did not compete in strenuous athletics. No one swam very far. It was not considered healthy for girls to overexert themselves or to swim as far as a mile. People thought it was a great mistake, that we were ruining our health, that we would never have children, and that we would be sorry for it later on. There was a great deal of publicity against women competing in athletics at all. We had to combat this feeling at every turn. Many of the coaches on the Olympic team for men decided that they did not wish to be “hampered” by having women athletes on the team, and many of the officials felt the same way. It took a great deal of persuasion by the American women to convince them to let us participate in the Olympics at all. There were some diehards who never really got used to the idea.

In those days in New York, there was no indoor pool for women that had a 3-meter or 10-foot springboard. They was one indoor pool in New Jersey, but that meant a three-hour commute for us after school. We did practice there about once a week before the outdoor season opened. However, the water was only six feet deep under the board. This was exceedingly dangerous, and all we could think of as we dove was not about our diving and our form, but about quickly putting out our hands and cutting short our dives so we would not hit the bottom with too much force. Of course we hit bottom every dive, but the trick was to have your hands ahead and break with your elbows to protect your head. It is hard to concentrate on your diving form when all you can think of is trying to avoid getting injured or killed.

When the weather permitted we practiced in an outdoor lagoon at Manhattan Beach on Long Island. It was about an hour’s commuting time, and we had to go there for diving when the tide was high, whether it was six o’clock in the morning or six o’clock at night. And the board we used was most unsatisfactory. It was just a plank and didn’t give one inch when we bounced on it. The present-day boards are laminated, and you can control them by moving the fulcrum to make the board more or less resilient according to your weight, height, ability and needs. But diving boards in the early ‘20s were just boards; they couldn’t be adjusted.

In 1920, diving was a very new sport. There were few competitors, and the best ones for some reason seemed to be concentrated in New York, with one or two in Philadelphia. Between us we had it all to ourselves. The California girls came along about eight years

later. Helen Wainwright, Helen Meany, and I were from New York, and Elizabeth Becker, who came to all of our contests, was from Philadelphia. We were all about equal, and the contests were very keen. The competition between us was so close that we never knew whether we would be first or fourth when we started out on our first dive.

Helen Wainwright and I were 14 years old. We were also very small for our age. I was 4 feet, 7 inches tall and weighed 65 pounds while Helen was a little taller and weighed 75 pounds. Helen was dark, and I was blonde so we were foils for each other. Helen Meany was slightly older, and her specialty was platform diving. She had access to a platform near her home in Greenwich, Connecticut, and everything we learned from a low springboard she learned from a 30-foot tower. She was absolutely fearless.

The girls from our New York team did very, very well at the trials. Helen Wainwright won the springboard, Helen Meany the platform, and I placed second and third. We were the three youngest competitors, and this seemed to cause a great commotion with Olympic officials. They said there was absolutely no way they were going to take children to the Olympics. They had several meetings and then informed us that they would take the next-highest-rated women in our place. Our manager and several other women went to the committee and lodged a complaint. They had a bitter session, but finally we won. In the interim, we had packed and unpacked our trunks several times. We were so depressed and disappointed because we felt that we had won fairly – and we had – and that we should represent our country. We also wanted that trip to Europe. Eventually it was ironed out, and we got our passports and were measured for our uniforms at Spaulding's which donated the outfits that year.

We had navy blue suits and white flannel suits with our USA emblem on the front pocket. Helen Wainwright and I were allowed to have short skirts because we were still considered children. Helen Meany was just enough older to wear the long skirts that were the fashion in those days. We all had white shoes, and we wore ridiculous straw hats that were the same as the men's. They were the English schoolboy style that was then popular.

I think I should mention our bathing suits. In those days we wore one-piece suits for racing, with a little skirt across the front. The actual racing suit was made of silk. We usually showed ourselves only at the start. We would then take off our robes, go to the starting block, and start, because those suits were rather revealing. We did not like to expose ourselves too much. For diving we wore woolen suits. They were warmer, and we felt more comfortable in them. They also had skirts. Once in a while the skirt would fly out and spoil the line of the dive. The older girls who were in high school wore long bathing suits, also made of wool and very flattering. They gave clear straight lines, no bulges or bumps and were very attractive. The girls looked something like seals when they entered the water with those pretty suits. Because we were considered children, we were allowed to wear the short suits that were something like the ones worn today.

Before the Games, we were issued new bathing suits, which caused a great deal of laughter and we absolutely refused to wear them. They were made of cotton material that

clung very much like silk when wet. These suits had legs to the knee and sleeves to the elbow. They were one piece, and they were cut rather low in front. They were full-fashioned, and we weren't – at least Helen Wainright and I weren't – so we were allowed to wear our own suits because we simply couldn't fit into these. They were enormous, and we looked ridiculous in them. I don't think any of the American girls wore these suits. I saved mine for years just as a joke to take out and look at once in a while. People couldn't believe that we had been expected to wear those things.

Our send-off to Antwerp was from the Manhattan Opera House in New York, on 34th Street near Penn Station. We marched from there to the ferry, and then we got on the Princess Matoika, in Hoboken, New Jersey. The Princess Matoika was a transport ship that had been in service during the war and was now carrying supplies to our forces in Europe. Our hearts sank when we saw the old tub. It was a bad wreck of a ship, but it proudly displayed "American Olympic Team" across the side in large letters, and we really didn't care about how poor the ship looked because we were so excited to be going.

The morning after our departure, we went upon deck and were absolutely amazed by what we saw. The entire ship had been transformed into one large gymnasium. It was unbelievable. The decks had been covered with cork to make a track on which the athletes could run. There was a boxing ring and a fencing strip, and there was a place for calisthenics. The pistol team had their target equipment. The javelin throwers had a rope attached to their javelins and threw them out to sea. It probably didn't help them a great deal, but it kept their arms in shape. Then, when we walked off, we saw what was to be our swimming pool for 13 days. On deck there was a framework of boards, and inside of this was a canvas tank suspended from the edges. It was filled with sea water from the Gulf Stream, so it was nice and warm, and we couldn't wait to get into it. We would swim against the cork in a stationary position with a belt around our waists.

There was a great deal to do on the ship. In the evenings before curfew we would go up on the top decks and gather around and listen to our Hawaiian team members sing and play their ukuleles and guitars. There were about 11 of them, and they were all swimmers. The most prominent was Duke Kahanamoku, who won the 100 meter freestyle in Stockholm in 1912 and was to repeat his victory in Antwerp in 1920. They were very accomplished musicians, and every one seemed to have a beautiful, sweet voice. We were entranced listening to them and sitting under the full moon, sailing across the Atlantic. Even though we were supposed to be children, it was a most romantic experience.

We were all glad to arrive in Antwerp. We girls went directly to our quarters, which were in the old American Hostess House which had been used during World War I for visiting Red Cross women and any other women who had official business in Belgium. It was about a four-or-five story building, and we were on the top in a dormitory-type accommodation with about six or eight beds in each room. It was comfortable, and we didn't mind running up those flights of stairs at our age.

The men were in a schoolhouse, and they were not happy. I understand that it was very uncomfortable, and they complained bitterly about their accommodations. This was, of course, in the days before Olympic villages.

On our second day in Antwerp an Army truck came to drive us to the stadium where we were to swim. World fail me in describing our first view of this place. I had never seen anything like it. It was just a ditch. I believe they had had rowing races there at one time. There were boardwalks around the pool – I have to call it a pool – to mark the ends. In the center were the diving board and the diving platform. On one side there was a hill, and on this were placed bleachers where some 10,000 persons could sit. This was, of course, all outdoors, and we heard later that this had been the city moat. It was a ditch that had been dug with an embankment on one side to be a protection in case of war.

The water was entirely black. It was dark, dark black. The weather was quite chilly. But we decided to quickly get into our suits and test this “pool” where we were going to practice for the next several weeks. We came running down, and the first girl who dived in let out the most dreadful shriek. The water was the coldest we had encountered. It was simply freezing. And the day was overcast, as most of the days were, and this seemed to make it even colder. The swimmers bravely tried to do their laps, but some of the girls were eventually carried out almost unconscious. Others were unable to climb up the stairs to get out, it was so frigid. Diving was not quite as bad, but each time we dived all we could think of was the cold water that we were going to hit. We learned to bring towels and bathrobes and woolen stockings and socks and mufflers and anything we could find to keep them warm. Many of the girls helped each other by giving rubdowns between dives. We were so cold that our lips were blue and our teeth were chattering. To make things more miserable, there were no hot showers in the dressing room. It was probably even worse for the men because it is said that women can withstand cold better than men.

The water polo players had it even worse. They finally shortened the length of the water polo periods to half the usual time. They were in the water for 7 _ minutes for each period, but even this was too much. Some of the men had to be rescued as they were losing consciousness from the cold.

Because the water was so cold and dark when we dived in, we would sometimes become disoriented. We didn't know which way was up. When we were going off the tower and diving as deep as possible to make a clean entry, often 15 feet or more, it was particularly difficult to determine which way to come up. This was very frightening to me. Several times I was running out of air, and sometimes I had a feeling that I was not going to make it to the surface.

Once in a while we would have a sunny day, and then everyone would turn out from all the countries, and we would socialize and talk to various people. There was a Swedish boy who was even younger than we were. His name was Niklas Skoglund, and he was to get second place in the diving. We had lots of fun with him as we were all the same age and were doing the same sport. He spoke very good English. Later on we saw him again

at the Paris Games in 1924, and by that time spoke four or five languages. We all traded pins, which as the custom.

When we were not training, we went on several trips around Antwerp in our truck, and one was to the battlefields. The mud was so deep that we could not walk, so we stopped along the line and bought some wooden shoes and learned how to walk in them. They were not too comfortable, but they did protect our feet from the mud. I do not know how we happened to be allowed on the battlefields, because they had not been cleared. In places they were still the way they were in 1918, when the Armistice was declared. We even picked up shells and such things and brought them home as souvenirs. There were trenches and pill boxes and things like that scattered about the fields, and we looked into some of them, and they were deep in water. There were German helmets lying of the field, and we brought some home with us. I picked up a boot and dropped it very hurriedly when I saw that it still had the remains of a human foot inside. It was a weird experience and we were glad to leave. It must have taken them another year to clear off the battlefields from the way we saw them. They were in shambles.

After about two weeks of practice, the Games officially opened. We all gathered on the opening day to march into the stadium. We wore our uniforms, of course, and as we hadn't had any practice in marching, we just walked in. But we did try to keep straight lines. We walked around the stadium, and there were the King and Queen of Belgium in the royal box. We took the Olympic oath, the king welcomed us, and thousands of pigeons were let loose.

There were only 26 participating countries in those days. There were no Russians because they were just getting over their revolution. And there were no Germans because it was right after the war. They were a defeated nation, and they would not have been very welcome in Belgium at that time. Most of the athletes came from Europe, although there were also sizable teams from Australia, South Africa, India and Canada.

The swimming and diving events were held the second week. Our girls did very well in swimming. We got first, second and third in the two freestyle events, and we won the relay. We had our amazing American Crawl, and our girls were dominant although no flip turns and no starting blocks such as they use now, and the paralyzing cold water slowed everyone down. But our girls won everything and we were the new champions.

In the diving competition, I was the only girl who was entered in two events. Helen Wainright decided to concentrate on the springboard and Helen Meany on the high tower. It was a strain to do two events.

The foreign girls were very, very good at platform diving. They had a great deal of speed and force in their dives and were able to get good height from the tower and had beautiful entries. They were excellent, but at that time the contest included only swan dives. Our Helen Meany could have won so easily if they had had fancy high diving. As it was, I was the top American with a fifth place finish. However, we did gain a great deal of experience in the high dive and did much better in 1924.

The springboard diving was held on the next-to-last day. Before the event the required two unknown dives were drawn from a hat, and we found that we were to do one forward somersault running on the layout position. This does not sound like a difficult dive, but it is if you do it slowly. It requires a lot of restraint because one is supposed to run and get height on the dive and enter the water perpendicularly. The other dive, as I remember, was some kind of gainer.

Helen Wainwright and I were fairly even until this last dive. I was fortunate that day to be diving last. This is not always considered the best position because the judges compare you with all the divers who have gone before. This time it was fortunate for me because I watched everyone else go over on this forward running layout somersault, and I made up my mind that I would not go over – that I would go almost as if I was in slow motion. It worked, and I entered the water up and down as I should – feet first.

We did not immediately find out who had won. The judging was very complicated. They did not hold up their marks right after the dive as they do today. In 1920 each judge kept an individual score, which he turned in at the end of the contest. There was an enormous master chart that had to be filled out; it took several hours to get the results. We dressed and went back to the hostess house for lunch. When we came back they finally announced the results, and I had won. Unlike today's Olympians, the winner did not parade around and receive the medal and listen to his or her national anthem or receive any award at that time. We all received our medals and trophies on the last day of the games.

At the closing ceremonies in the track and field stadium, we lined up alphabetically in front of the stands. The king of Belgium was on a raised platform, and he had his sons on each side of him. As the names were called, we walked up to receive our prizes, and the king awarded the first-place medal and also a statuette. The princes gave out the medals for second and third place. We spoke to the king for one minute, and he asked how old we were. We answered and said, "Thank you," and went back to our places. Then all of the athletes bid farewell and dispersed. It was very touching. We had been there so long that we had made many friends from all of the countries as well as many among our teammates.

After the final ceremonies, the teams broke up. We American girls had been invited to Paris to give a demonstration. They had erected some kind of tower along the Seine River for us to dive from. It was on a derrick, and it was almost impossible to dive off it. Our high divers managed to climb up there and do a few tricks, but there was no place to stand for takeoff. I don't know how they ever managed to dive at all. I went off an improvised springboard. I had to do something because I was the Olympic diving champion. We also did a little water ballet, which was new then and had not been seen before.

From Paris we took the boat train to Cherbourg, where we got on another American transport. We had to wait several days in port while they were loading it, and one of the

saddest sights I can remember was seeing the coffins of the American servicemen being loaded into the hold. They were treated very respectfully and gently and covered with the American flag. But it was a sorrowful sight, and we felt so sad that it had happened.

After a stop in Southampton, we sailed on for home. In New York we were greeted with a great celebration. There was much excitement in the press, and there was a parade down Fifth Avenue. We started in Central Park and walked down Fifth Avenue to City Hall, Mayor Highland gave each of us a commemorative medal from the City of New York. Later there was a banquet at the old Waldorf-Astoria Hotel at 24th Street and Fifth Avenue. The banquet hall was enormous, and it was a very elaborate dinner.

Except for some archers who gave an exhibition in 1904, we were the first American women Olympians, and there was considerable talk about whether our athletic activities would affect our health later on. Some critics thought we would develop heart trouble, and there were doubts about whether we could ever have children. There was so much discussion about the pros and cons of women in competition that my parents became alarmed and thought that I should not compete until I got older and stronger. I was still very small. So I was carted off to boarding school for a year in Greenwich, Connecticut. It was a school that did not have a swimming pool, so I didn't compete for a whole year. Of course, we know now that it was very silly to keep me away from my sports, but in those days it was the way people thought, and they had to be educated differently over the years.

When I returned to competition the following summer, I had been playing tennis and other sports, but I had not been swimming. And when I entered the national championships I took only third place. This was very hard for me to accept after having won the Olympics.

After that I kept competing until it was time for the 1924 Games, which were to be held in Paris. Of course, we all looked forward greatly to spending a summer in Paris, and we tried very hard to make the team. The tryouts were held at Briarcliff on the Hudson. I was lucky and won the springboard tryouts.

I was also competing in the backstroke. This event had not been held before. There was a girl from Chicago named Sybil Bauer who was to win the Olympics in Paris. I got second place in the tryouts, which I was very accustomed to doing behind Sybil. I did not concentrate on backstroke because I felt my best effort would be in diving, and because I was the defending champion I had something to uphold.

Things were much better on this Olympic trip. We sailed on the America, which was very comfortable, although we still did have the funny little pool on the deck. We had very nice uniforms. They were white flannel, and we had navy blue suits as well, for every day. We wore hats and white shoes.

In Paris we were very happy in our new quarters, which were in a beautiful chateau just outside of Versailles. It was called Rocquencourt. The girls were given the gatehouse. It was all very pleasant and comfortable. The boys had quarters of their own up at the top

of the hill. The grounds were beautiful, with big old trees everywhere. We had one central hall at the top of the hill where we all had our meals. We had French chefs, and the food was simple but excellent. We had no complaints.

It was about an hour's drive to our pool in Paris, and this time everything was much better. The pool had been built for the Olympic. It was up near Sacre Coeur somewhere, and I believe that it is still there. We had a big bus that would pick us up every morning and take us to the pool to practice. It was a 50 meter pool, and the diving board and the diving tower were in the center. This was a nuisance. We were always afraid of diving on top of somebody below, and we had to have a lookout all the time tell us when it was safe to go. The water was much warmer than it had been in Antwerp.

I almost never had a chance to swim because I gave practically every minute I had to the diving. I would get in and swim two laps, which would cover the distance I was to race. Of course, I should have been doing a mile at least to prepare myself for the 100 meter backstroke, but I just couldn't fit it in.

In swimming we had a little more competition than in 1920, but our girls remained supreme. Perhaps the swimmer who was to become the best known was Gertrude Ederle, who two years later would become the first woman to swim the English Channel.

The backstroke came in the middle of the week, and I competed and fully expected to be second because I had been second to Sybil Bauer for so long, but a British girl named Phyllis Harding got in there ahead of me, and I was third. It was too bad not to have a clean sweep for American, but I did the best I could considering so much of my training time was spent diving.

We had an excellent girl diver in Carolyn Smith, who won the high diving and took it away from the Europeans for the first time. She received several standing ovations for her perfect -10 dives and was a beautiful sight to behold in the air.

The ridiculous rules they had in 1920 for the springboard had been changed. Instead of doing 12 dives, we now did 10. There were 4 compulsory and 6 optional. However the optional divers were chosen from any category, and this was not good because a diver could choose 6 dives from a single category. One girl actually did do 5 gainers and one other dive for her optionals. Today one has to choose from different categories, and this makes for a more rounded contest.

The competition was very, very keen in the springboard diving. When we finished, I thought I had won because people were congratulating me. I went down to dress, but when I came back up, I found that Elizabeth Becker had won and I had come in second. If I had to lose my title, I was very glad it went to such a fine person as Betty and to an American and a friend who had missed out on the 1920 Olympic team by the narrowest of margins.

This time after the Games I did not go away to boarding school or to any school. I just took a rest. I had been in training for swimming and diving for about six years, and I was

getting just a little tired of it. It is a strain, and when a girl reaches 18 she thinks more of going out to parties and such things, and it is an ordeal to remain in training. However, I wanted to win the nationals and go out as a champion, which I did the following summer. I won the three-meter springboard in 1925, and then I decided to turn professional.

There were not many opportunities then. There were no college scholarships for women. There were no women coaches. There were no professional jobs. There was a stigma attached to being a professional. People were not yet ready for this. People did not think of money in those days. It was more the love of your sport. However, amateur athletics can become terribly expensive. The traveling was paid to championships and exhibitions, and we were usually entertained beautifully when we would open up a new club or hotel, but we received no salary for this.

I decided to leave the amateur ranks. I accepted a job in Florida at the Deauville Casino. At that time it's a very different setup than it is now, although it is still there. It was a club on the outside of Miami. It was a beautiful casino with dancing and all sorts of things like that. It had excellent dining and a very large pool. I was in charge of the pool. I took three girl friends with me, and we spent that first professional winter in Miami.

There was much more to follow: a world cruise, exhibitions all over Europe, although mostly in England, where I spent a year teaching and writing articles and books about swimming.

As I look back now and see how the sport has progressed, perhaps it was just as well that we did not have many moving pictures of us swimming and diving at the time because the girls who are competing now are so far superior that there is no comparison. However, we were the first ones. There was no one to copy. We had to do things on our own initiative. We invented dives as we went along. We had no coach. And because of what we went through in our first Olympiad in 1920 there have been great improvements. The water now has to be heated to a certain temperature, the diving boards have to be just o, as well as the tower. There is a separate pool for the divers so they don't collide with the swimmers. There is a little elevator to take divers up to the 30-foot tower, which saves on climbing three flights of stairs for each dive. Now one can concentrate on just the dive and not on catching one's breath.

The bathing suits are more practical. There are new training methods. We had no such things as trampolines and harnesses to get us through the feeling of the dive the first time. The only protection we had was to put on a thick sweatshirt so when one landed flat, it would somehow lessen the sting of landing in the water.