

UFA 3

Interviewee: Nicole Haislett

Interviewer: Julian Pleasants

Date: December 16, 1996

P: Nicole, give us your full name, where you were born, and when you were born.

H: My full name is Nicole Lee Haislett. I was born in St. Petersburg, Florida, today--December 16, 1972. Today is my birthday.

P: Happy birthday. We picked a good day. Where did you go to high school?

H: Lakewood High School.

P: When did you graduate?

H: 1990.

P: I understand you swam or trained with the St. Pete Aquatics Club.

H: Yes.

P: When did you start your swim training?

H: I started competitive swimming at the age of five on the summer swim league. I am not sure if that is the proper name. A bunch of the city pools had a big summer league program and I started there. After the second summer, I believe I was six, I started swimming year round with St. Pete Aquatics.

P: Why did you start so soon?

H: I have always lived in Florida. Since there is so much water surrounding this state and [there are] so many pools, my parents wanted me to be comfortable around water and not have to worry about me. So when I was very young--just a few months old--my mom got me in the pool and used to water and I liked it. I just took to it. When I was about eighteen months old, my mom said I could swim the length of the pool--a backyard pool, not a racing pool--underwater on my own. So I guess I was kind of a natural. At about four, I think I learned the four strokes. I went to this summer

team, tried out, and made the team. They found out I was four and you had to be five. They sent me home and said come back in a year. It was a fun thing. All of my friends did it. It was hot in the summer, so it was natural to want to be in the pool. It just took off from there.

P: One summer, you trained at the Canadian Swim Club, this is much later, at Etobicoke. I did an interview with Elfi Schlegel [Olympic gymnast, University of Florida]. Do you know Elfi?

H: Yes.

P: That is where she is originally from. Is that how you got there?

H: No. I went there in the summer of 1989. The summer before, at the Olympic trials, I met Mitch Ivey [University of Florida, Head Swimming Coach, 1990-1993], who was my coach here. He was coaching a team in California at the time called Concord Pleasant Hill, but was going to be leaving them right after the Olympic trials to go coach at Etobicoke. My coach at the time, her name was Dawn Hewitt, was good friends with him. She introduced me to him and he was really taken by my swimming. I was only sixteen at the time. He became very interested in me. Right after that meet, my coach was fired and she decided to go up to Canada and coach with him. I was disgruntled by her being gone, because we had a great relationship and I liked her as a coach. I did not like the new coach who came in for me. I kind of butted heads with him. So I decided that next summer I would go up there and train with them [Dawn and Mitch].

P: Dawn Hewitt was the coach for the St. Pete Aquatics Club?

H: Yes.

P: Did you swim in high school at all or did you just swim with this club?

H: Yes, I did. I swam in high school, but only in the meets. I trained with the St. Pete Aquatics Club and swam the state dual meets with my high school team. We had quite a few people on my high school team who did that, because the level of training at my high school was not what we needed.

P: You went to Canada in 1989 and then you came back to St. Pete.

H: Yes.

P: How did you decide on the University of Florida and when did you decide to come here?

H: My senior year I only took two recruiting trips. I had a couple others scheduled, but I canceled them. I took one here and one to Texas. There is an early signing period in November and a late one, I think, in April. I waited until late into the spring to take my trips. This is kind of funny. That was when Randy Reese [Randolph Reese, University of Florida, Head Swimming Coach, 1967-1990], who was the coach here at the time, was on his way out and Mitch, my coach in Canada, was being considered for the women's position. I do not think that he and Dawn were married yet, but maybe they were.

P: This is Dawn Hewitt and Mitch Ivey?

H: Yes. They were a couple and, obviously, she would be coming with him. That played a big part in my decision. My dad went to school here, my sister went to school here, [and] her husband went to school here. Ever since I was nine or ten years old, I have been coming to a meet here every December. I always wanted to be a Gator. I always wanted to swim on the team. I just thought it would be the coolest thing. There is such a great tradition and I would be close to home. There were a lot of factors. I think the thing that solidified [my decision to come here] was swimming for Mitch. I thought he was a great coach and I swam really well with him that summer.

P: Had he been hired by the time that you signed?

H: I think that he had. When I was thinking what I was going to do, it was not a done deal but I knew that [he was going to be signed].

P: Would you have liked to swim for Randy Reese?

H: I do not know. He was a great coach. A lot of my friends who swam here for him just loved him to death. He was one of those coaches who tried everything and did everything--who was kind of crazy. I always heard through the swimmers who swam for him that he would work your butt off, but then you had to rest yourself because he did not like to rest people much. I think I would have swam well for him. He had lots of sprinters

who did very well.

P: Would you have wanted to go to his brother at Texas? Was that one reason you were thinking about that school?

H: Actually, no, because Eddie is the men's coach there.

P: Oh, he is the men's coach. When you got here, one of the problems that we have discussed earlier is that you would have to swim a certain number of hours everyday. How did you balance your swimming, your academics, and, presumably, have time for a social life? How did you work all that out?

H: I had practice in high school because I swam morning workouts. I had to get up at 4:50 a.m. and I swam from 5:15 to 6:15 or 6:30. It was not real long, but that is because school was so much earlier.

P: This is high school?

H: Yes. In the afternoon, I was at the pool for another three hours swimming and doing weights. I had to deal with kind of the same thing then. Obviously, the intensity level increases when you come to [the University of] Florida. The classes are harder, there is more training involved, it is more intense, [and] there are more meets. It is something that you learn to deal with. You figure out what your priorities are, what is important to you, and you make sacrifices. It is not always easy, but, fortunately, the athletes here have a lot of support and a lot of help as far as tutors, counselors, and all kinds of things. Sometimes your social life suffers a little bit, but you love the sport and that is why you learn to deal with it.

P: I know for a fact that you are an outstanding student and that you made All-Academic SEC, I think, several times. It is one thing to do the work; it is another thing to excel at both levels. I mean, [to win] gold medals and [to maintain] a high academic standard is very, very difficult. How do you explain that level of accomplishment?

H: I think it all stems back to what I learned through swimming. Starting at such an early age, I learned a lot about myself and about the sport. It is not just swimming; it is any sport. It teaches you about goals, hard work, giving things up, and those are all things that can be carried over into any aspect of your life [including] academics. It is rare that you find someone

who is really good at one thing and then does not care or does not try at anything else. It was just natural for me to want to do well in school or whatever it is that I was doing.

P: I guess part of it is just discipline.

H: Yes. Nothing is easy. You have to work hard for everything, so it carries over.

P: Let us talk a little bit about your degree and when you got it. What was your degree in?

H: Telecommunications production. I graduated this past spring after a few semesters off here and there.

P: What was your final grade point average?

H: It was right around 3.0 or 3.1.

P: How much did your scholarship pay?

H: It was a full scholarship.

P: How did they treat you in terms of the commitment they made to you and then following through on those commitments?

H: I was actually in my last semester of classes in January of 1995. I had gone through about a week of class and decided at that point to move to Colorado to train, so I withdrew [from school]. Everyone said, you only have one semester left and you are going to come back and do it. The University Athletic Association said, let us know when it is and we will give you your scholarship and we will help you get into classes. They were very eager and helpful to do anything, because they wanted everyone to graduate. When athletes are on their fifth year, if you are not still training, they require that you work for the Athletic Association doing something. They usually try to do it [so that your work is] related to your major or what you are interested in. For me, there really was not anything that worked with my major, so I assisted baseball and women's volleyball. I worked with their secretary and did little odds and ends for the coaches. It was just about eight or ten hours a week. It was a full scholarship. It is now

twenty hours a week, so I got off easy.

P: If you look back, this is the twenty-fifth year of women's athletics at the University of Florida, things have changed rather dramatically. I think we would see in the last four or five years that women's sports have become much more equal to men's sports. Did you find that, for example, on the swim team?

H: Yes. While I was here, I never felt that the men's swim team had anymore than we did or had more privileges. I never saw that anywhere, except for football. They have more scholarships because they have more players. They get bigger prizes if they win the SEC and so on. [But] it was not like it was an unfair thing, because they are the ones who are bringing in all of the money for us. I never had any problems with that kind of thing. I think it is pretty impressive that they have added the two women's sports--softball and soccer--and have not gone the way that many other schools have [of] dropping men's programs. I think that is a really big statement. I always felt that I was treated fairly and equally here.

P: What about the facilities, in terms of the pool, for instance? Did you stay in the dorm?

H: I lived in the dorms for one year. They built new dorms now which are really nice. I stayed in Sledd Hall which was OK, but kind of old. Our facilities are great. We have the outdoor pool and the indoor pool. The indoor pool is perfect for dual meets; it is not a real great pool for hosting Southeastern Conference Championships or anything like that, [but] it definitely gets the job done. The fact that we can swim outside or inside on a long course or short course is great. Our offices and locker rooms are not on the great side, but they are building us a new building. They are going to start after the first of the year. That will be a million dollar building with brand new offices, locker rooms, a team room, coaches' locker rooms, and a small training room. It is about time; it is going to be great.

P: But you see a real commitment on the part of the University Athletic Association toward women's sports?

H: Definitely.

P: More so than most universities?

H: It is hard to say. Guessing, I would say, yes. Just from [talking to] friends I have had over the years who have gone to different schools and from stuff that I have read in the paper, it seems like Florida has a good handle on what they are doing.

P: What benefits have you derived from your four years at the University of Florida?

H: Basically, life experience. I think college is such a crucial part of your growing up. You are not really out in the real world. It is about as close as you are going to get [to the real world] until you really are [to be there]. You learn so much about yourself and about other people. It is a lot different from high school. You have a lot more responsibility. You are on your own; you do not have your parents there to tell you to study or to tell you to go to bed, you are a lot more self-reliant. As far as the sports, I made a lot of friendships and learned even more about swimming. I was a real good swimmer when I came here, but did not realize how much further I could go or how much more there was to know. In my four years competing here, [my knowledge of the sport] almost tripled what I knew before. I notice things now more than ever because now I am not a student here, I am still around the university and see all the students, and I work with the swimmers. It is really funny for me to watch the different stages that they go through and to think back and remember what it was like for me. It is pretty interesting.

P: Speaking of the real world, how did you decide to come back and coach?

H: I always said I will never coach. It was not because I did not want to; I just did not think I could do it. I did not think I would have an opportunity like this. I am the kind of person who wants to work with top athletes. I love kids to death, but it is not very interesting for me to coach them because I want to see people swim real fast. When I came back to finish my degree, I was still talking to the coaches periodically. Kevin Thornton [University of Florida, Assistant Women's Coach, 1995-1996; Head Women's Swimming Coach, 1996-present], who is our head coach for the women's team, was the assistant at the time. [He] was trying to get the women's position. We had talked about it a little bit. He brought up the idea about me assisting. I thought that it was a crazy [idea], there is no way. Then he started talking about it more. I talked to some people about it, and said,

what do you think. The more I thought about it, [I realized] there was no way that I could turn it down. It was a perfect opportunity for me to figure out whether I liked coaching, and whether I was any good at it. It is the top level. It is at this university which I know and they know me. It is one of the best sports programs in the country. I would have been a fool to say no.

P: Do you think it is going to be a career? Do you like it?

H: Sometimes yes; and sometimes no. I think coaching is probably one of the most frustrating things just as teaching is when you have to deal with youngsters, not that I am old. Some days I love it, I am having the best time, and other days I want to kill them. I have so much to learn. There is so much more to coaching than you realize as a swimmer. Everyday I learn something new. I am going to give myself at least two years here just to learn the ropes. I do not want to leave this place; I love it here. I take it day by day. I have a lot of other interests.

P: It is really interesting to be on the other side. When you are on the other side, it makes you appreciate some of the problems that you had with coaches.

H: Definitely. It is amazing.

P: What are your responsibilities primarily as a coach?

H: As far as administrative stuff, Kevin does a lot of work. He is not one of those head coaches who pushes everything off on his assistant. I sometimes have to ask for stuff to do because I do not have enough. I make a lot of recruiting calls, [take care] of a lot of the paper work. I do all the financial forms and paper work anytime we have recruits in on visits. I do the weekly monitoring forms for the NCAA. I help him with travel [arrangements]. I am there everyday as far as coaching. I am there at every practice. During practice everyone might warm-up together, but then we split into different groups to do different stuff. I will go with one group. I do not have a specific group of people to myself. Kevin makes up most of the workouts. Sometimes he will tell me, make up today's [workout] or I want to follow these guidelines make up a set for this. He is out of town this entire week, so he just had a few sets for me to follow. The rest I am making up on my own. I do a lot of hands on coaching; I

make all kinds of corrections. We are both there paying attention to everybody.

P: So you work with the stroke, the kick, and turns?

H: Yes, everything.

P: Does it help that you are a three-time gold medal winner? Do they tend to listen to you more than they might otherwise?

H: I think so. I was nervous coming into the job about how they would respond. A lot of swimmers have a hard time with female coaches. I did not know how they would react to me since I am not much older than they are. I think there is instant respect because of my career. They know that I am not just talking. I know what I am talking about [because] I have come from where they are. They have been great. They never really back talk me. Actually, some of them are afraid of me. I am not mean to them, but I guess I can be intimidating. When I say something, for the most part, they believe that I know what I am talking about.

P: As a coach, how do you motivate them?

H: That has been one of the hardest things--trying to figure that out. This team is real young; we have no seniors and we only have four or five juniors. The rest are freshmen and sophomores. They just have not gotten it yet--the fact that this is the college level, this is one of the best teams in the country, it is not easy. You have to stand up and race every single time, that is frustrating. They have to want to do it. You cannot make them want to do it. You have to somehow figure out a way to get them fired up. When people ask me about coaching, one thing I always say is how do you get them [motivated]? What do you do? I am still learning that. I do not think that you ever figure that out 100 percent.

P: Because the bottom line is really self-motivation, is it not?

H: Right. I think that is what you have to recruit when you look at swimmers. Do they really want to be good? Do they want to work hard?

P: Why are there so few female women's swim coaches?

H: I do not know. When I was talking about my coach earlier--Dawn

Hewitt--she came in right after another coach I had, I had lots of coaches when I was growing up, his name was Dave. When he left, I was just beside myself. Then Dawn came in and I did not want anything to do with her. She was in her mid-twenties; I had actually swum on the team with her when I was a lot younger. She was a woman. I think it was the authority part of it; I do not know why. It seems silly to me now. I really gave her a hard time. I actually left one summer when she was there. I went to train in Jacksonville. Then after I realized [that] I am in this position and I have no choice, I made it work and it turned out great. This is one theory I have--coaching is such a time consuming job and you cannot be normal as a coach. You are constantly thinking of your athletes. You are living the life of an athlete, but only worse because you have to be there longer and you have to plan. I can only imagine what it would be like to try to balance a family with that. I think maybe that is one reason a lot of women do not get into it.

P: Do female swimmers prefer a male coach?

H: If I said, yes, I think that would be a wrong answer. I would probably say that most of them do, but there are a lot of women who would rather swim for a [female coach]. At the college level at Division I, there are not very many female head coaches. I know a lot of the swimmers who swim for female coaches, swim there for that reason.

P: There are not a lot of world class swimmers who have been trained by women, are there?

H: No. I am just trying to think of all the international meets I have been to over the years and I cannot think of any head coaches who I have ever seen from any country who are female.

P: Maybe you are about to change that.

H: Maybe. The head coaches for the Olympic team are chosen and their head assistant is chosen, and there has never been a female coach for the U.S. team. I think that there has been a female coach who has made it based on their swimmer's performance, but that is not the same. So it would be pretty cool to be the first appointed Olympic coach.

P: Yes. Maybe that will change. Are there more women who would be

interested in coaching?

H: I do not know. It seems like more men after swimming competitively, go in that direction. I do not know why. Maybe it is because women realize that there are not many female coaches out there. They [wonder whether] they will get the respect they deserve, so they just do not even bother. I do not know.

P: Let's talk about your career at Florida. Let me get some general background. What was your best event?

H: The 200 freestyle.

P: Why?

H: I think for various reasons. I had a real good stroke for it. I was a sprinter, but I could also swim middle distance. I had a lot of easy-speed, which is important for that race. I loved it. I had a lot of respect for the event. I think that is one thing that helps.

P: It is also your favorite event.

H: Yes. It is a very challenging event because it combines speed with endurance and you have to have strategy. To me that was a big challenge. My goal was to conquer the event--figure out how to be the best at swimming it.

P: Talk a little bit about strategy.

H: What about it?

P: How would you plan a race? Let's just say that at one point you were the American record holder in the 200 freestyle.

H: I still have that record.

P: How did you set that record? What kind of strategy did you use for that particular race?

H: For the most part, I tried to swim my own race every time. I did not worry

about what other people beside me were doing. I had my way of swimming it and I would pretty much always stick to that. Of course, there would be times when it would change. For example, that race I have the record in both meters and yards. I broke it in meters at the Olympics [Barcelona, Spain, 1992 Summer Olympics]. The girl who I was swimming next [that morning swam] better than my best time. I knew it was going to be a big race. She had a lot of speed. I knew she would be very fast for the first 100. My strategy was to go out with her, but let her do the work and stay right with her but not let her get too far ahead. I would say the biggest part of the race was flipping at the halfway point. I worked that turn especially hard, I wasted a little bit of energy, but she had terrible turns and I had real good turns. When I came off the wall with her, I went in behind and came out even with her and she looked over at me and panicked. She scrambled a little bit for the third fifty. I stayed relaxed and did what I did, and had another great turn. Then we raced head to head on the last fifty. My coach and I had talked about that before the race, and it happened just as we said. For the most part, when I was racing if I was even with someone on the last lap or the last fifty, very rarely did I lose. So I had a lot of confidence from that point.

P: Is that just sheer determination or training?

H: I think [it is] both. I knew at that point in the race that was my last shot for an Olympic gold medal individually. There was no way in hell that I was not going to win. It was not even an option; I had to win. It was basically going to come down to the touch, which I knew approaching the wall. I had practiced perfect finishes for so long, and I had so many of them in practices that I knew that I could do it.

P: So it is the old story--stay focused, you know what you can do [and] you have to do it; but, of course, under the circumstances emotion plays a factor.

H: Definitely.

P: You can be frightened, nervous, or panic.

H: I never got scared before races. I always got nervous, and I wanted to be nervous, but I never got scared. That was probably one of the first times that I was ever scared, because she had swam so fast in the morning and

this was so many years of training and this one 200 [race] meant everything. I was nervous. I got up on the blocks and a calm came over me. I had been the best in the world for awhile and I knew that I could do it. I just let my mind and my training carry me through.

P: You were the world champion in the 100 freestyle, the 400 freestyle, and the 400 medley. These are different kinds of races. How did you do in the 100 because that is a pretty short, intense race?

H: Right. I won the 100 Freestyle in the World Championships in January of 1991. I was a freshmen; I had just turned eighteen. At that point in my career, my 200 was not very good. I did not have a lot of experience swimming it. I would have a good swim, and then I would have a terrible swim. There was not a lot of confidence there. My 100 was much better. I had a lot more speed. I was training more for the 100. My time from that race never really improved. I went a 55.17 in that World Championships. Then the fastest I ever went after that was 55.14. So I was always right in that area. As I got better at the 200, I started training more for the 200 and I think that took a little bit away from my 100. At the Olympics, I was the second American who qualified [in the 100 meters] to swim in Barcelona. I qualified fourth in the preliminaries and got fourth at finals--I just missed a medal. I was pretty heartbroken about that.

P: You did expect to win a medal, but not necessarily a gold [medal]?

H: Yes. I knew that winning a gold medal I would have to have a real, real good swim, which I was ready for because I had been at that same time for so long. I sort of lost confidence in that race--it all had gone to the 200. I had focused my training so much on the 200. But I expected a medal; I wanted a medal. I got fourth. It was a pretty big disappointment, but the next day was the 200, so I had to get over it.

P: Was the 100 your first [1992 Olympic] race?

H: Yes, my very first race.

P: What about the 400 free and the 400 medley?

H: Actually those are the relays--the 400 free relay and the 400 medley relay. In those races each swimmer swims one 100. In the World Championships, I anchored both of those.

P: Freestyle?

H: Yes.

P: You always anchor with freestyle?

H: Yes.

P: You were a twenty-eight time All-American, which is the maximum you can get. How do you qualify to be an All-American?

H: To be an All-American you have to place in the top eight at the NCAAs.

P: What about age in swimming? We see a lot of swimmers like Janet Evans who do extremely well at age fourteen. Sometimes when they get to be eighteen and nineteen they may be too old, but you did your best times when you were eighteen or nineteen.

H: Right. I think that it is different for every person. It used to be back in the 1970s and 1980s that male swimmers always went a little bit longer, but the best female swimmers were in their mid-teens. You saw twelve year olds even. Over time that has changed. I think a lot of it is because now there are more opportunities to train as you are older, post-graduate stuff. There is more money. A lot of people had to drop out of the sport because they just could not afford to keep training. They had to work; they were not on scholarship anymore. They could not do it. Now, with the changes in swimming, the possibilities are greater. People are a lot more knowledgeable about training and about bodies and everything. That is why people are swimming fast at an older age. [For instance], you do see a lot of breast stroke swimmers who are doing very well like Amanda Beard [U.S. Gold Medalist, 1996 Olympics] who swam in Atlanta and won two silver medals and a gold medal. She is fourteen years old and she is a stick. She is awesome. It is going to be real interesting to see what happens to her in a few years. Her body is going to change, and with that her stroke is going to change, that is what happens to a lot of the breast stroke swimmers. I do not know why it is that stroke specifically, but it is a really complicated stroke. I have seen so many people go [in] that direction. The biggest thing you see with the swimmers who do real well young and fall off is either body changes or [it is] mental. They either get burned out or they go through changes. They do not do well for a couple of years, and they

never can turn it back around.

P: I think once you stop, it is awfully hard to get the edge back. What about this fourteen year old business? That is an awful lot of pressure, time, and training. Is it too much? We heard in the Olympics particularly about the gymnasts--they were too young and fragile, and this was too much pressure. Is that the case?

H: I think it depends on the sport. [For] fourteen year old pro tennis players and gymnasts, [there] is a lot of pressure. I think that gymnastics is a really difficult sport mentally and physically. I think that most swimmers swim because they want to and because they love it. It is real hard to say to a fourteen year old who is at an Olympic level, sorry, you are too young; let's hold back for a couple years and see what you can do. If that is the way their career goes, then that is the way it goes. I would rather win some Olympic medals at fourteen, and then never [swim] again, than not [win any] at all.

P: Should there be an age limit for the Olympics?

H: Yes, I think so. I think it is fourteen. I think that is probably a good idea.

P: One other thing about some of your awards. You won the Honda Broderick Award for swimming. What was your reaction to winning something like that because that is a national award? How did you feel when you were given that award?

H: I had been nominated for it a couple times before and had not won it. The swimmers who won it prior to me were good friends of mine and people who I really respected. So when I won it, I felt great to finally have won it, but I think I did not realize the magnitude of it until I actually went to San Diego for the awards ceremony. [When I] got there, [I] was with all the other athletes from the other sports and was just in awe that I had been chosen among these people. One of them was Lisa Leslie [U.S. Gold Medalist, 1996 Olympics], the center on the women's basketball team. [Another was] Mia Hamm [Mariel Mia Hamm, U.S. Gold Medalist, 1996 Olympics], the soccer player, and also Lisa Fernandez [U.S. Gold Medalist, 1996 Olympics], a softball player on the Olympic team. I felt so little there. I came from Florida when I was a bit of a star, and then I got there and I was very humbled by everyone around me. It was pretty neat. It was one

of those things that does not always stand at the top of your list. When you think back on your career you always think about the records and the medals and stuff, but those [national awards] are things that are really important because it is more than just the swimming.

P: That is the key to that. I think we see that a little bit with Danny Wuerffel [University of Florida, quarterback 1996 National Champion football team and 1996 Heisman Trophy winner]. I think one reason he won [the Heisman Trophy] is because he was a good scholar-athlete. Primarily, that is the award. I would think it would give you a lot of satisfaction.

H: Yes.

P: Let's talk about swimming for the University of Florida. How much different is it to swim for a team, rather than swimming individually? How does [that affect your participation] in meets?

H: College is the only place where you actually score points as a team, so that changes things a little bit. My outlook on it, when I was swimming at Florida, was that it is still an individual sport. As long as you swim well individually, then you are doing good for the team. Now that I look back on it, there was more to it. It was being a leader and working together as a team. I was not a real outspoken person, but I led by example. People had a lot of respect for me because I worked hard and got the job done. I did not really think about it that much while I was actually competing, but now that I look back on it and see the team here [I realize the importance of that leadership presence]. There is not really a strong leader on our team now, so [now that I see the importance of it] and I value more what I had.

P: How would you feel if you swam very well and the team lost?

H: Not too great. I would obviously be very happy with my individual performances, but [due to] the fact that we were a team, it would have been a big let down. There was such a great pride and tradition at the University of Florida with our team and teams from the past. We never won the NAAs, but we were always in the top three. We won the SEC every year and we were pretty dominant on relays and stuff, so those were big factors to me.

P: So those were big goals--for you to win the SEC?

H: Yes, definitely. In the history of women's swimming, we have only lost it one time, so that is a big thing to our team.

P: How many events would you swim in a normal meet?

H: In a dual meet, three events.

P: In the SECs would you swim more?

H: In the SECs you can swim three individual events and up to four relays.

P: How many would you do?

H: All of them, seven.

P: Over how many days?

H: Three.

P: Is that not a little taxing?

H: Yes, it is. It is a long meet and there is a lot of racing. You have to swim morning and night, so it is really actually fourteen swims.

P: Because you do the prelims first?

H: Right.

P: In swimming, have you done anything other than freestyle?

H: Yes.

P: You do the individual medleys?

H: I swam individual medley. I was actually on the Olympic team in that event. I won it one year in the NCAAs.

P: Did you like that?

H: I liked it. Freestyle was my better thing, but the individual medley was a

lot of fun for me because it was less pressure and it was all four strokes. It was a fun event to swim. It was always fun to move to a different event and do real well at it because people are always kind of surprised.

P: [There is] one other area I wanted to ask you about. You were SEC Swimmer of the Year four times and no male or female swimmer has ever done that. How do you feel about that kind of award? This is more of an SEC, rather than just individual, award.

H: I have always had a strong feeling for the SEC. It is one of the best conferences in the country. It is a very good swimming conference, very competitive. I am kind of protective of it because that is our conference. To have been chosen, among all the great swimmers who were in the conference, the swimmer of the year four times, to me, was a pretty big accomplishment. It was exciting stuff.

P: How would you compare your career to Tracy Caulkins [University of Florida Swimmer, U.S. Gold Medalist, 1984 Olympics]?

H: I would not even compare it. She is probably the most amazing swimmer ever in the history of swimming. There are people like Janet Evans [U.S. Gold Medalist, 1988 and 1992 Olympics] who have dominated distance swimming--she is the best distance swimmer ever. You can say the same thing about Mary T. Meagher [U.S. Gold Medalist, 1984 Olympics] in the fly, but Tracy Caulkins could swim anything and everything and she did. She is the only person to have ever qualified for senior nationals in every stroke. She has had, I think, sixty-three individual national titles and forty-eight American records, or something like that, in every stroke. That is just out of control. I think she was on the team that was boycotted. If she had been able to swim in those Olympics, [who knows what she would have won]. She is amazing.

P: She never got SEC Swimmer of the Year four times, so you got her there.

H: That is only because she did not swim her last year, I think.

P: Let's talk a little bit about your experiences in a certain number of events. Let's talk about the 1994 World Championships in Rome. How do you do in a World Championship after you have done an Olympics? Is it less competitive, less interesting; [is there] less desire?

H: No. It is definitely not less competitive. Besides the Olympics, the World Championships is the biggest meet in swimming. For me, at that time, swimming was not going real well. I was struggling with a lot of different things. My strokes had changed and I was not swimming very well. My confidence had gone and that was one of the reasons I always swam so fast is because I had so much confidence. I knew when I stood up on the blocks that I had done everything possible in order to win. At that point in my career, I did not have that same belief that I had done everything and that I was as committed. I think part of it came from having won the gold medals. After the Olympics, nothing was ever really the same. I think that was because you say, well, what is next? It is not that you do not think the World Championships is important. It is really hard to explain. I wanted to swim fast and I wanted to keep swimming. It meant just as much to me. It was just that I was not doing what I needed to be doing. Having already done that and already knowing what it took, that was a big disadvantage.

P: You were not burned out?

H: No. I do not think I was burned out, but for some reason I just could not get myself motivated enough.

P: You lost the mental edge and, of course, in World Championships we are talking about tenths of a second. That edge is the difference between a great swim and a good swim.

H: Right.

P: Your times in the [World Championships] were less than your Olympic times.

H: Definitely.

P: I also noticed in looking through your records that some of your best times were in the SECs and the NCAAs. In fact, I think you once set the U.S. record. How do you explain that? These are events that are obviously less important than the Olympics or the World Championships, yet you swam some of your best times.

H: College swimming is short-course and Worlds and Olympics are long-course, so they are totally different. Of course, the Olympics and World Championships roll around every four years, really every two because they are split, so every other year there was something huge. Having been on the college team, the NCAAs was probably the most important meet of the year, unless it was an Olympic year. So you fully taper, rest, and shave for those meets and try to swim real fast. Short-course swimming in America is a big deal. As I said, we had a lot of pride as far as SECs, so we always rested for that and I had to try to swim real fast there. I had a lot of pride swimming in the SEC and I was undefeated in my individual events.

P: You never lost?

H: Never lost. I think we lost one relay, but I won everything else, even all the relays.

P: Obviously, you were highly motivated?

H: Even if I had not shaved for it and I was not as rested as I would be for the NCAAs because it was only three weeks later, I wanted to swim real well there, so I got myself pretty pumped up for those things.

P: Are some pools actually faster than other pools?

H: Yes.

P: Why?

H: The depth, for one, is a big thing. The deeper it is the faster it is. If you are swimming in a real shallow pool, the currents are going to bounce off the bottom. It can also depend on the gutter systems. With the real old-style gutters, the water just goes into them and comes right back out. But if you have the overflow gutters, where the water just runs over the side and just drops off into the things, then all the turbulence goes away from the pool. The lane ropes also make a difference with turbulence. The way it looks, the way it feels--the atmosphere makes a big difference. If you walk into a real crummy-looking pool, that does not mean you cannot swim fast in it, but a lot of times you are not as excited about it.

P: Now you were the 1991 World Champion and I do not know in what event.

H: That was the 100 freestyle, the 400 free relay, and the 400 medley relay.

P: That was where?

H: Perth, Australia.

P: How did you enjoy Australia?

H: I loved it. I had been in Australia, exactly a year before. We went for a World Cup meet. They chose a group of people who they thought would probably make the World Championship team the following year. It was kind of like a scouting thing. We went over there and got used to the time change, and saw what it was like. We stayed in the same hotel, and swam in a meet and had a lot of fun. I was so excited to go back. I just loved it. It was great. I love Australia.

P: I lived there for a year, years ago.

H: Where?

P: I lived in Brisbane. I feel the same way about it. I just loved it. As you know, Tracy lives there. There are a lot of Americans [there].

H: Kevin, our head coach, left yesterday to go [there].

P: See, there we are. Let's talk specifically about the Olympics. When did you start training for the 1992 Olympics?

H: At the age of five. It is not like you all of a sudden one day you go, oh, now I am training for the Olympics. Every day, every practice, every year, every season is to get better and better. It carries over. It is not like we just swim for a few months out of the year. We swim all year long. When I was about ten, the dream of going to the Olympics started. When I was about eleven or twelve, I realized that it was actually a possibility [to go to the Olympics], if I worked real hard. There were obviously a lot of other things I would have to do and achieve before I would even make Olympic trials, but I never forgot about it. It was always kind of stored in the back of my mind. I was just taking each little step to get a little bit closer.

P: Talk about your training schedule [for] an average day in 1991 or 1992. What time would you start, how many hours would you swim, what kind of swimming?

H: It changes depending on where you are in the season. The hardest part of the season would be approximately nine to eleven practices a week, morning and afternoon [every week day], and then Saturday morning. I think at that point I was swimming at either 5:30 or 6:00 in the morning. I would swim anywhere from an hour and a half to two hours. Then, in the afternoon, we came back and swam for another two hours, sometimes two and a half [hours], and lifted weights after that. We would do aerobics, running, or stadiums [running up and down the stadium steps at Ben Hill Griffin Field] on the days that we did not lift weights. We did a lot of medicine ball throws. We would do elastic bands which simulate your stroke--you do that on land. [We did] a lot of different dry-land things. The training changes with the time of the season also. A lot of it was race-specific stuff--working on speed but also doing sets to increase your aerobic capacity, strength-type stuff. We used to pull these baskets that were on a pulley system. You had a cord that attached to your waist. You swam out with elastic cords around your waist, the basket went up, and you put weights in it. You would swim to the other side of the pool, turn around, and they pull you back real fast. We did vertical kicking with weights, which is like treading water but you are kicking and you had weights in your hands. Then [we did] the basic type of training like swimming, pulling, kicking, and stuff like that.

P: [Did you do] a lot of work on turns and strategy as well?

H: Yes. [We did] a lot of stuff on turns, starts, and relay takeoffs--working on specific sets where you would do pace-type things. You would try to simulate 50s from your events, like the middle 50s of your 200, stuff like that.

P: Are you always timed?

H: No. You are always on the clock because everything is always on an interval and you always look to see where you are going. Not everything was on a watch with your coach, only certain sets.

- P: On the start--I noticed that at the 1996 Olympics [in Atlanta], males were diving into the water and staying under water longer. I wonder, does that help you? It seemed to me at least in one event the person who did that was ahead of his competitors.
- H: Right. It is mainly a fly thing now. In backstroke you used to be able to kick under water for as far as you wanted, but they have changed the rules. Now you have to come up within fifteen meters. They will probably make the rule in fly, also. It is an advantage for some people, but not for others. [For instance], in the streamline position [your arms are tight and your hands are clasped over your head]. You are the most efficient. You have the least drag then. If you can kick really fast in the streamline position, then you can be ahead of someone who is swimming. But, obviously, you go into oxygen debt. So to some people who do a lot of that type of training, and who it does not affect at the end of the race, it is definitely an advantage. But some people either do not have a strong enough lung capacity or they are not good enough kickers.
- P: So for freestyle, aerobics is absolutely critical.
- H: Yes, depending on the event. The 50 freestyle is really anaerobic, you hardly even breathe in it. [To swim] anything from the 100 up, you have to have some aerobic capacity. Obviously, in the longer distances you have to have a lot more.
- P: How do you breathe? Do you breathe on a stroke?
- H: Yes.
- P: You always breathe exactly the same way exactly the same side?
- H: No. Most people breathe both sides. Some people have breathing patterns that they follow--they breathe every three strokes, or every four, or every two, and then three and then two and then three.
- P: What did you do?
- H: I never really followed an exact breathing pattern. I probably did. If you put all of my races together and looked to see when I breathed and counted by strokes, they were probably about the same just because it was

built into me. I knew, [but] I just did it and did not think about it. In practices, a lot of times Mitch would make me do two-two breathing, which is two breaths on the right and then two on the left, back and forth like that.

P: What would be the advantage of that?

H: Just to keep my stroke balanced out, to keep everything even.

P: It is more important than you think it is, is it not?

H: Yes. Swimming is so complicated, there are so many little things that you are constantly thinking about.

P: Plus, when you are dealing with tenths and hundredths of a second, any little thing [matters], even the suit. The swimsuits, I understand, now are different. What are they made of now?

H: I do not know. Speedo has come out with this new suit, I am not sure what the fabric is, but it has little ridges--little lines that go along the length of your body. They are supposed to channel the water. It is some concept that they got from airplanes or NASA. They also have these suits with things that look like an arrow without the straight part that are on the butt of the suit. Those are supposed to decrease the turbulence or the air right behind you. Speedo has come out with suits that have legs. They go just above your knee. That is supposed to do something. I do not know. My personal opinion is that there are so many little things you can get wrapped up in and worry about that you forget to swim. It becomes a psychological thing. You cannot get away from hard work and you cannot get away from mental preparation. I think those are the things you should worry about the most.

P: How do you motivate yourself to compete against time because, although you are not always timed, you know you want to get the best time. You know basically what it would take to win the Olympics, right? You need to get down to that time. How do you motivate yourself, particularly over a long period of time, to work toward that?

H: You give yourself goals in practice. There are some sets that you repeat over time and you want to have better sets each time or the best times in

practice. [For instance, you might think], oh, I have never swam a 100 in practice that fast before, stuff like that. Maybe Mitch would say, we are going to do a set of 100s and I want you to try to hold this time, which would be a big accomplishment. Stuff like that keeps you going. Touching the wall first is what everybody wants to do, but sometimes, if you are always touching the wall first, you have to start racing yourself. Everybody wants to swim really fast and you just want to keep going faster and faster, so you do not really have to motivate yourself. It is a natural thing.

P: But in a sense, you really are racing yourself. You are really racing against time.

H: Definitely. The clock is the telltale. There are a lot of swimmers out there who are never going to be Olympic champions or who are never even going to win an event. That is when it is even more important, because to them it is just doing their best and having the best times. It is almost like they do not even look at the place, they look at [their time and ask themselves], did I go faster?

P: What about shaving? Is it physical or is it psychological?

H: Both. They have done tests and I think they say when you shave you take off .07 seconds for each lap. But more than anything it is psychological. It is a feel. You have a better feel for the water, you ride higher in the water, and it just feels really great.

P: Also, you said you only shave for important meets. It also has a fairly significant psychological impact?

H: Definitely.

P: When you are swimming for the Olympics, let's say before you swam the 200, what did you do the day or two before? How did you get ready for that meet? How long had you rested?

H: I probably rested for up to six weeks before [the race]. It is a gradual rest. You do not all of a sudden go from 8,000 meters per practice to 2 [meters]. It comes down a little each day and there are certain days where you maybe will go up a little bit. It is really a complicated taper. Tapering

is never the same for any one person; it is different for everyone. You never get it exactly right. [There are] always swimmers who say, I am not doing enough, I am doing too much, or I just do not feel good yet. It is a very psychological thing. I think two days out from the meet it is kind of like, those next two days do not mean anything. You have either put in the work and gotten the rest or you have not. It is just a matter of staying focused, getting rest, staying off your legs, and getting yourself ready.

P: So you do not swim at all?

H: Oh no, you swim. I swim all the way up until the day before. You have to stay in the water; you have to keep a feel for the water. You do not do anything very hard, nothing for time.

P: Just like warm up?

H: Yes. [You do] mostly warm ups, drills, maybe a couple starts.

P: You do not swim at all the day before?

H: I do. I swim, probably just once, to get in and loosen up.

P: The day before the meet, what do you do about food and sleep and that sort of thing?

H: Usually, the day before I would shave. That would be one thing. I usually would not be real hungry [because] I would be nervous, so most of the stuff I would eat would be pretty light like sandwiches, salad, or fruit, stuff like that. I would not eat any big, heavy meals. I would definitely take a nap during the day and pretty much stay off my legs to keep my legs rested.

P: You would not have any starches or anything like that?

H: Yes. I am more conscious of protein and carbohydrates now than I was when I was swimming. Yes. I would have bread--I ate a lot of bread when I swam. Maybe I would have had a salad for dinner, but I would have a couple rolls or a couple pieces of bread with it. I drank lots of water.

P: Did you try to get eight hours of sleep, if you could?

H: Yes. I would pretty much always take a nap every day, or try to anyway. I probably would not sleep all that great that night. I would be in bed at 10:00 or 11:00, hopefully. I had to get up fairly early the next morning, so it probably would not be eight hours.

P: How would you swim differently in the prelims and in the final race in the Olympics?

H: In the prelims, my main goal was to qualify in the top three so that I was in the center of the pool and I had myself in a place where the race was going to go on. I did not want to kill myself, I did not want to use up everything I had, but I wanted to have a fairly decent swim so that I felt good about the night. Whether your body is more warmed up and ready to go or if it is psychological because that is when it really counts, you almost always swim faster at night.

P: The center of the pool is faster?

H: The way they qualify is the top qualifier from the morning is in lane four, the second person is in five, the third in three, and then six, two, seven, one, eight.

P: So it does help to be in the center. When you swim prelims, you are still swimming for a time, right? You are not looking at opponents?

H: There are several heats. The top eight from all those heats qualify. Most of the time, you would want to win your heat because if you are third or fourth in your heat then you have all these other people who could knock you out.

P: You have finished the prelims, now you are going for the 200 free, and this is after you have finished fourth in the 100, so you are a little disappointed. Did that affect how you looked at the 200?

H: I do not think so. If anything it made me want to win it even more. That was the event for me. I knew it was my best shot and I knew that I had trained specifically for that event. I had to push the 100 aside and say, it is over with, I cannot do anything about it now, and focus on the 200.

P: Right before you swim, what do you do? What do you do in the ready room, for example?

H: If I remembered, I would tell you. Everything is such a blur. I really do not remember things very well. I remember warming up real quickly before I went to the ready room and I was in the warm-up pool and the men's 100 fly was right before my event. Pablo Morales [U.S. Gold Medalist, 1996 Olympics] was in it and you know that was a big story. My coach at the Olympics came running in with this huge smile on his face and I was like, did he win? I could tell [that he did]. I was really pumped up about that, so I had some big adrenaline going. I warmed up, got my stuff on, and went down to the ready room. All I can remember is being so nervous. I do not even remember where I sat, I do not even remember who I looked at, or what I was thinking. They put you in a line according to your lanes and you march out. As I was marching out--here would be the blocks and the pool going this way and then there were some stands right behind the blocks--I just remember hearing these people yelling, "Go Nicole, go Nicole!" For a second I thought, wow, that really sounds like my family. I lost all concentration and I looked up and [saw that] it was [them]. They were just behind my lane. I almost stopped the line-up because I was staring at them wondering how on earth they got those tickets. So everything I had been focusing on was gone. That was about thirty seconds and I got back into my frame of mind.

P: Did that help, the fact that they were there?

H: Probably. One of the fondest memories that I have from the Olympics is finishing the race and being able to see them right away. The first thing I did was look at the clock and then I looked at them. That was a big thing for me. I do believe that I thought about it once or twice during my race, that they were right there.

P: Some people in the ready room stare down opponents. Do you get into these mind games at all?

H: No. I was real quiet; I did not talk a lot. I just did my own thing. If it was intimidating, then it was, but I did not do anything purposely. I did not spit on anybody or make faces or anything like that.

P: Some people have headphones and things and sort of listen to music.

H: I do not think I had any headphones on.

P: This is a question we have sort of talked about and I want to get a little fuller answer. You said before this race you were really scared, whereas usually you were not scared, you were just nervous and nervous was good because it gives you energy. How do you deal with being scared, because that is a little bit different, and how do you deal with being nervous?

H: With being nervous it is just that you have the butterflies in your stomach. I think one of the reasons I liked being nervous to race was because then I knew that I cared and it was obviously something that was important to me. [It meant] that I was ready to go--I felt excited and I had a little bit of the jitters, but that was a good thing. It gave me, like you said, a little bit of energy. But being scared was almost like a fear. I guess there was always a fear before I raced, a fear of the unknown, which, like I said, I had the confidence and I was a little bit cocky, but you could never be so cocky that you did not fear losing.

P: That is what it is, a fear of losing.

H: Yes. It is a fear of losing, a fear of not doing well. The being scared part was really weird. She [her opponent in the 200] had swam so fast in the morning, it took me by surprise. Then to realize, OK, I am going to have to swim that fast tonight, if not faster because she might go faster. Also, I did not know much about this girl. She was only fourteen, she was brand new to the scene, and I had never raced her before. It was just a whole brand-new experience [for me]. It was the Olympics, this was everything I had ever worked for. This is my event. It was just kind of like, wow.

P: When did you know you won? Do you know when you hit the wall?

H: I did not know. I think I felt pretty good about it, but I did not know. I touched the wall and I looked back and it seemed like an eternity before the places went down by the lanes. Then I saw the one.

P: You were swimming next to this girl.

H: Yes. I was right next to her.

P: And you did not see who touched first?

H: I breath hold the finish, so I do not breathe from five, six, seven meters out. You cannot see the side of you and you are concentrating on your finish, so you cannot really tell. You know if you are ahead of somebody, but I was not ahead of her. We were even.

P: It was that close?

H: [The difference] was .1 seconds exactly. I did not know until I saw it.

P: In that race, the turn probably won it for you.

H: All of the turns really. Like I said, her [turns] were terrible and I just swam. Most people say to me that race was probably the closest to a perfect race that anyone has ever seen. I did everything right--I took advantage of all of her weaknesses and did stuff with the things I was good at.

P: Talk about your other races in the Olympics. You won a gold in that one, then you won the 400 free relay. Talk about that race.

H: I was the lead-off leg. There were three people behind me. The Chinese were our biggest competition. We felt pretty strongly that we could break the world record, which was held by the Germans for God knows how long. I led off and the Chinese led off [with] their girl who had won the 100 and had just missed the world record.

P: This is the one who had finished first when you finished fourth?

H: Yes. We raced and she beat me. She missed the world record by .03 of a second. Franziska Van Almsick, who is the German I beat in the 200 and who got third in the 100, was Germany's lead off. She beat me again. So we were, I guess, third after my leg. Our second and third leg [swimmers] were pretty strong swimmers. They had great splits. Since China and Germany had used their best swimmers, they kind of had their middle people in there, so [our middle legs] got it back to a race to where we were beating Germany and were real close to China. Our anchor leg was Jenny Thompson [U.S. Gold Medalist, 1996 Olympics], and she was the world record holder who got the silver in the 100. She had the fastest

relay split ever. She was moving and she won it [for us].

P: What was her stroke? All freestyle?

H: Yes.

P: Now the other race is the 400 medley relay. Talk about that.

H: That one I swam in the morning. What they do is there are two people who qualify in each individual event. The 400 medley relay is 100 back, 100 breast, 100 fly, 100 free. I was the second-best 100 freestyler, so I swam in the morning. All the second-best people in those events swam in the morning, qualified their relay for finals, and then the top people swam at night. Now if I had beaten Jenny individually in the 100, then I would have been on the night relay. But we still get medals because we qualified them.

P: You were in one other race in the Olympics, is that right?

H: Yes. The 200 individual medley. That was a real disappointment for me. The 200 IM was the same day as the 400 medley relay. I was ranked in the top four in the world in that event. I swam it in the morning. By this time, my body was feeling fatigued and my mind was pretty much fatigued also. I had a so-so swim in the morning, I went like a 2.17 and got second in my heat and ended up getting ninth, so I did not make the final eight. So I made the consolation final, but you cannot win a medal. That was pretty disappointing, so I decided to scratch it. I did not swim it in the consolation heat, which I wish that I had, but I just wanted to be done. I was not going to win a medal. It was kind of the wrong attitude to take, but [that is what I] did. My best time was a 2.14.4 and the bronze medalist went a 2.14.0 and I really think that if I had qualified for finals and had swum it, I probably could have raced her for that bronze, which would have been pretty neat.

P: But that was too many races too close?

H: Yes. That is not an excuse because lots of people swim lots of events and do well in all of them. It was not that I did poorly, I just did not have a great morning swim and I just did not swim fast enough to get in. I think I would have swum fast that night, but that is the way it goes.

P: Did the Olympics meet your expectations? When you went in did you hope to get three gold medals and two bronze medals? What did you have in mind?

H: I really do not know. Like I said, all my focus was pretty much on the 200, but I felt that I could be very competitive in the other two events. Obviously, [I felt that we could win] the relays. So the 100 was a disappointment, but fourth place in the Olympics is not all that bad.

P: Most certainly not.

H: The 200 was an American record, a gold medal. I could not ask for more. The IM was a disappointment, but to come away with three gold medals, I guess I had not really thought about it that much. It is a very unusual meet because there is so much pressure and you try to take the attitude that it is just another meet, but you really cannot. You have no idea what to expect until you actually get there. It does not matter how many people you talk to or how much you try to prepare yourself, it is just unlike anything you have ever been through.

P: How did you feel when you got up on the stand to get your first gold medal?

H: To me it was like deja vu because I had visualized it and pictured it happening so many times that it felt like I had already done it. It is funny for me because I watched the 1988 Olympics the closest because I had been to the Olympic trials and had more interest in it then I had in 1984, [since in 1984] I was pretty young. After 1988 and before 1992, every time I pictured the Olympics and pictured being on the award stands, I always thought of Seoul [capital of South Korea, location of the 1988 Summer Olympics] and so getting to Barcelona, wow, it was totally different. This is nothing like it was like in Seoul, it did not look like this, and I had to say, Nicole, you are in a different place, this is a different Olympics. It was pretty neat. It was funny because you watch it at home and you watch them on the award stands, you watch them raising the flag, and [you hear] the national anthem. So as I was standing there I was thinking, wow, people at home are watching me right now getting my medal.

P: I would think it would be one of the great thrills of your life to have won individually, but also [to have] won for your country in the best competition in the world. It must be an extraordinary experience. Did it change with the relay medals when you got those? Did your reaction change because it was a team medal not an individual medal?

H: Yes, I think so. It was like a bonus to be able to be on the relay and to have contributed. Like I said, my split was not one of the best splits, so I felt like, yes, I contributed, but these other people did amazing things. It was kind of cool. It really felt like a team; people had done what they had to do for us to win.

P: But you had to do as well as you did or they would have lost.

H: Right. The 400 free relay win was just fun. It was the coolest, we broke the world record. That was a big bonus to me.

P: Talk about your experiences in Barcelona. Where did you stay? How did you feel about the whole event, rather than just swimming? I mean being with people from other countries.

H: It was pretty exciting. Swimming is the first event, so we started day one. I did not get to go to opening ceremonies because I had to race the next day and that would have just knocked me out. We stayed in the Olympic Village with all the other athletes. The way they did it in Barcelona was each country had some buildings, so all the Americans were in these four or five buildings together. Then the Germans were over here, and so and so over here. But you ate with all the rest of the countries and all the other sports and were basically with everyone else all the time, except when you were in your dorms or apartments, whatever you want to call them. The first week was swimming, I was very isolated; I did not really do anything. I just went to the pool, came back, got something to eat, and stayed in bed or went to the training room or whatever. I did not really see much, but after the swimming was over was when I had a lot more fun. I went out into Barcelona and did sightseeing, went out with the other athletes at night, and got to see some of the other sports. That was really cool. That was kind of what it was all about--to intermingle with the different athletes. Not just in swimming. To meet people, that was pretty cool.

P: Did you exchange pins and do all that?

H: Yes. We did pins and traded shirts and warm ups and stuff like that.

P: Did you go down to Ramblas [main commercial street in Barcelona]?

H: Yes. I went down there with my parents.

P: Did you see the Church of the Sacred Family?

H: You know what, I did not go there. Is that not ridiculous? There are a couple things that I did not do, and I could not believe that I never got around to doing them, but I was having too much fun.

P: Part of the experience is really being in the Olympic Village and seeing other people and enjoying a different environment. Once you finished your races, you were free to really enjoy that and spend all your time [doing that].

H: Yes. That is what the Olympics is about--taking those two and a half weeks where everyone in the world comes together and watches and enjoys and celebrates sport and peace, and everyone getting along. So that is pretty cool.

P: You won more gold medals than any other U.S. competitor, and I think one other female won three gold medals. How did you feel about that in terms of your team's accomplishment?

H: Pretty good. The women's and men's swimming teams did very well. When they said that to me it was like, well, yes, but two of them were in relays and one of them was in a relay that was in the morning. It sounds great and it is great, I am definitely not down on myself about it, but to me that is not as great as some of the other things.

P: Here is the question everybody gets. Where are your gold medals?

H: In a safe deposit box in St. Petersburg.

P: When you got them did you give them to your parents, show them to your parents, have you shown them to other people?

H: Oh, yes. I have taken them to schools and I have worn them to a couple

places that I have gone to for appearances. After the 200 freestyle, I met my family outside the pool because that was the only way I could get outside the gates and go on the buses. I had a brief thing with them and gave my medal to my dad right then. [I said], keep it in your pocket and keep your hand on it.

P: Do not lose it.

H: Right, especially with all the pick pockets and stuff that goes on. I gave them the medals right away.

P: Let me ask you a little bit different question now. We see in 1996 that the Olympics are extraordinarily commercial. Was that the case with the 1992 Olympics, did you feel that?

H: I think that they are commercial and I think they were in Barcelona, but I do not think it was anything compared to Atlanta. I could not believe it. In Barcelona, it was not so present that it was distracting or that you were that aware of it. Atlanta was just ridiculous. You could not look anywhere without seeing a huge billboard or some sort of sign or commercial. It was bad.

P: How should the Olympics be paid for?

H: I do not think it can be paid for unless there are sponsors as there are [now]. I think maybe the sponsors, who are big enough as it is--like Coca Cola, you are not going to tell me that they are not doing well--should have a little more taste. Obviously, they are going to advertise and they are going to have their name where it can be seen, but I think it can be done a lot more tastefully and there could be a lot less of it.

P: Should athletes be paid, and who should pay for their training?

H: It is different for every sport and it is different for every country. I think that there really are no more amateur athletics. The only thing that keeps athletics amateur in the United States is the NCAA. That is really the last grasp of amateurism. I think that the Olympics is supposed to be the world's largest amateur sporting event and it is not anymore. It is totally professional. You have people finishing races and saying, I am going to Disney World! It is bad. This year either the USOC [the U.S. Olympic

Committee] or U.S. Swimming, it might have been U.S. Swimming, paid \$50,000 to everybody who won a gold medal.

P: This year?

H: Yes.

P: Not 1992?

H: In 1992 there was money, but I really cannot tell you how much it was because I did not take it. I still had two years [of college eligibility left] and I did not want to give them up.

P: So you did not financially profit at all by three gold medals?

H: After NCAA swimming, yes. But I could have probably done very well right afterwards, but two years later it is kind of over with. I have a Speedo endorsement and contract plus appearances and stuff like that. I have an agent. But I have not profited like I probably could have if I would have done it right away. I do not think anybody should be paid. I think that if the money is there and you are [in] a federation or [on] an Olympic committee or whoever wants to endorse you wants to pay you, then great. But I do not think that it should be a given. I do not think that every athlete who wins a gold medal should receive X amount of dollars. That is not what it is all about. Sometimes I look back on it and I think, wow, I missed out on the opportunity to make pretty decent money, but it does not bother me because that is not why I did it. It was never the goal. That was like a bonus for me, to be able to make a little bit of money.

P: Would it not be true probably that most athletes would do it because they loved the sport and wanted to excel, or do you see some of them who are just out to become famous?

H: I would hope that most athletes had that opinion [that they loved the sport and wanted to excel], but I think that in the past couple of years and now as we go on that it is getting worse. People do not really care all that much. They want to be big stars and celebrities. They want to make lots of money. I think a lot of people stay in the sport longer than they should or longer than they want to for those reasons. I think it is wrong.

- P: What about the gymnasts? They have had parts in television programs, they have been on a world tour, they have literally made money from all sorts of endorsements--[on the] Wheaties box and that sort of thing. What is your reaction to that?
- H: Great. Like I said, if it is there, if you have the opportunity, then take it, run with it. There is nothing wrong with making money, there is nothing wrong with having your face being recognized.
- P: It would be foolish not to.
- H: Right. Just do not let it take precedence over the real reason behind competing and training and all those things. Money can definitely cloud people's minds.
- P: After you finished the 1992 Olympics, did you plan to swim in the 1996 Olympics?
- H: Yes. I planned on it and I swam all the way up until July 1995, so it was just about a year out that I retired. I probably could have kept swimming and I probably would have made the Olympic Team. I do not know whether I would have made it individually, but I probably would have made it on a relay. I would have gone and probably won a medal based on a relay. It would not have been the same; it would have been mediocre and I have never trained for that. That is what I was training for--mediocrity, and I was not as committed as I was in 1992. My confidence was gone and it was not fun. Swimming had always been fun and all of a sudden it was becoming something that I had to do. Deciding to retire was probably the hardest decision I have ever made. It took a long time--it was not a week, it was months. I do not have any regrets now. I look back and I say, well, maybe if you had done this, things would have been different. I did not do it, so I cannot live in the past. One of things that [helped me decide that it was time to retire] was that the memories that I was starting to have were not all good, some of them were bad. I did not want to end my career with bad things. I wanted to always remember the good and positive things.
- P: When you say mediocre, you just mean that you were not up to your world standard?

H: Right. I do not mean mediocre to the average person, but to me, yes.

P: Was it physical as well as mental?

H: A little bit. I was struggling with my weight a little bit, which was a big thing. My stroke had changed a little bit. The training that I was doing was not what I had been doing when I was so successful, it was different stuff.

P: Was it coaching?

H: It was a different coach, yes. The coach that I had was really good, it was just a totally different philosophy. I had so much confidence and belief in Mitch and the type of training that we did. It worked so well for me and then all of a sudden you change it. You are not doing real well and you are constantly comparing them. Well, I did this, I did this. So I think that hurt a little bit.

P: You went out to Colorado Springs to train?

H: Yes.

P: How long were you out there?

H: About ten months.

P: What did you do out there on a given day?

H: Swam, weights.

P: This was ten months total commitment?

H: Yes. We trained at altitude, which is pretty hard on your body. We did a lot of our aerobic stuff and conditioning at altitude and then we would travel down to sea level anywhere from four to six weeks and do lots of quality intense training because that beats up your body enough. Then to do it at altitude, that just really digs you in a hole.

P: That was the U.S. Training Center out in Colorado Springs?

H: The Olympic Training Center.

P: Who paid your salary?

H: I was on a plan where I earned \$1,200 a month from United States Swimming. It is called the resident team. The resident team paid for all of our travel expenses and our meals. I lived off this training center because it is worse than dorms. I lived in a house, which I paid for, but I was getting the money from U.S. Swimming, so that helped. If you lived on the grounds, then everything was taken care of.

P: Are you glad you did that?

H: Yes. It was pretty cool. I became better friends with a lot of people who I already knew. It was a great team experience. Jonty Skinner was the coach there. I learned a lot about swimming from him. He is a real big technician. He does a lot of testing. He is very [much] into stroke mechanics and does a lot of filming and analysis, so I learned a lot of things through him.

P: So that helps you in your coaching now?

H: Yes.

P: But you still regretted not competing in 1996, even though you still were not quite at your standard?

H: I do not know if I would say regretted it. It would have been nice, obviously, to have been there and swimming. But I would not have wanted to be there swimming if it were just swimming. The only way I would have wanted to be there is if I was on top, swimming fast, winning stuff.

P: I want to go back to the 1988 Olympics. You did swim in the 1988 Olympics?

H: No, the Olympic Trials.

P: Trials. You did not make the team in 1988?

H: No. I got sixteenth in the 100 freestyle and I think twenty-fifth in the 50. I

did not even swim the 200 yet.

P: So your performance changes dramatically in four years. Why is that?

H: Just getting older, getting stronger, getting better, training harder, learning more. You just keep getting better and better. I had such strong goals, hopes, and aspirations and just constantly kept working and working.

P: That was a good experience for you though--to go to the trials and see what it was like?

H: Oh, yes. To go to the trials and see what it was like and just to be in awe.

P: You are over that. Then you have enough big meets, world championships, and all of that before you get to 1992. Then in 1992 you were a very seasoned, experienced swimmer. Obviously, that makes a difference.

H: Definitely.

P: That fourteen year old opponent, had she been a little better on her turns, might have done better. The question I have is, is there any limit to swim times? They keep coming down. I read that in Atlanta, there were 267 national records, twelve Olympic records, and four world records. No swimming mark set before 1980 has survived. Do you see four years from now that the times are going to be even lower, even faster?

H: I think some of them will. There is going to be a point where you just cannot get any faster. There are times that are just impossible. But they are going to drop, they are going to keep coming down in little bits at a time. Maybe some of them will have bigger drops, like in the distance events. I think unless there is some major breakthrough or some weird scientific stuff goes on, there will be a point when the times will plateau. But the swimmers are up and down. Maybe one year people are swimming right on the best times ever and then maybe the next year the winning time is not that fast.

P: But you see, as we talked about earlier, [there is] a lot of new technology in swim suits and [then there is] pool design, better nutrition, and different training methods. Obviously, we look at athletes now who have just 2

percent body fat and things like that. Clearly, that is going to give these athletes an edge.

H: The thing is that it is not going to give them that much of an edge. Nutrition is only going to help you so much and swimsuits can only help you so much. You are talking about swimsuits that make tenths of a difference, not a big deal.

P: So you do not see them coming down significantly?

H: I do not know. I do not know what the limit will be, whether it is going to be four seconds in the 100. In the women's 100 free right now, I do not know how much faster anybody can swim. The world record was set by a Chinese woman who, I will pretty much say on my own, is on steroids. That time right there is even almost untouchable. I think one day somebody clean [without steroids] will probably go faster, but it is going to be a while.

P: How do steroids help?

H: [They] make you stronger for one. A lot of the steroids that they take allow you to recover faster so that you can train at a higher level. You can train harder and more intensely. Everyone has their limits and you can only work so hard before you kind of crash or you have to recover. With some of the steroids, you can just keep going and going, and keep training.

P: Should they be legalized?

H: No.

P: Why not?

H: It is not fair, for one, because there will be some people who do them and some people who do not. They are bad for your body. Regardless of whether you have that gold medal or that world record, maybe you have a deformed child or maybe you develop cancer. Who wants that? How much does that gold medal mean to you then?

P: A lot of people, like Ben Johnson [a Canadian sprinter who won the gold medal, but it was found later that he had used steroids], have done that.

They see that as such a tremendous reward, they are willing to take that chance. The Chinese women did not do as well this year, did they?

H: No.

P: Their times before had apparently improved dramatically. That would be the difference. There could be something similar to steroids that would not be harmful that might improve people's capacity to swim or lung capacity. You know science is so extraordinary, you never can rule out those kinds of activities.

H: I guess I just come from the old school where [the philosophy is to] put a suit, cap, and goggles on and make them work hard, find them a pool, and let them race. I think so much of the science stuff takes away from the main thing.

P: You have traveled, literally, all over the world and come in contact with different cultures and different people, and you started at a fairly young age. How has that impacted your life?

H: It has made it richer, I think. I have seen what different cultures are like and [I have] made friends from all over the world who I keep in touch with. I think it has made me more tolerant to people in general. It is a great experience. In my eighteen years of swimming, I have traveled to more places than most people will do in a lifetime. I feel very privileged. I think that is one of the exciting things. Swimming has given me so much more than just records, times, and medals. It has let me make friends, meet different people, and learn about myself-- things that are irreplaceable.

P: So some of your fonder memories are as much about the travel and the friends as the sport?

H: Yes, and the fun.

P: Let me ask you a couple of questions about coaching at Florida. Talk to me about the firing of Mitch Ivey. What was the circumstance here?

H: Basically, prior to coaching at Florida, way back, he married one of his old swimmers. I guess people did not like that. Here, he was accused of sexually harassing swimmers. Really what happened was ESPN decided to do a story called "Outside the Lines" and they decided to do it on Mitch

and some other guy. They started dredging up this stuff from his past, which the University of Florida already knew about. It had been made clear when he was hired and it was OK. Then ESPN decides to do this story and they just make it look awful. They talked to these people who would not even show their face on camera. This woman who he married was very vindictive and just out to get him. She said a lot of terrible things.

Then there was another swimmer who swam for him here my freshman year who was kicked off the team and she said that she vowed to get him. She was on there and made lots of bad comments about him on the show. Basically, I think the university screwed up in not, from the second it started, standing up and saying we support Mitch, we know about these things already, he is doing a wonderful job, that is the end of it. They did not do that. [They said], no comment, blah, blah, blah. They brought in lawyers and had them question every single one of us. I felt that the questioning was very one sided. If I said anything that was negative like, yes, he has cussed, or, yes, he has said a dirty joke, they would be writing furiously. All the wonderful things I said, they never once wrote down.

P: Was there sexual harassment?

H: Not anything that I am aware of. Nothing ever happened to me. It was very unusual that the sixteen girls on the team, all sixteen of them, wanted him to stay and did not want him to be fired.

P: Why do you think they fired him?

H: I do not know, I really do not know. It is such a huge story and there are so many little things that I could get into, but it is really not important. I think there was a lot of little scheming going on by certain people in the background.

P: Certainly, he had been a successful coach.

H: Yes.

P: That was not an issue. Maybe it was public pressure and the times because that was a national issue and people were concerned about it, as they should be. Maybe they just decided they did not want to take the heat. It might be that simple. At one point, you all were thinking about boycotting the swimming?

H: We had our very first swim meet of the season right after he was officially fired. I think we had talked about not going to the meet or something. But we decided that that would be stupid, so we swam in it. We had a very unhappy group of ladies.

P: That was what year?

H: That was the fall of 1993.

P: That did not affect your swimming from then on?

H: I think it did.

P: In terms of your commitment?

H: Yes. Mitch and I were super close. I was kind of like his swimmer. I believed so much in everything he did and everything he said. He knew me so well. He knew exactly how to train me, exactly what to say to me to get me to do something. It is very rare that you can find that with somebody else. The coach that took over was completely opposite. It was pretty hard for me.

P: Had he stayed on, might you have competed in the 1996 Olympics?

H: Well, you cannot really say. I think that things would have been different. I know I never would have gone to Colorado, for one. I probably would have had better meets after 1992. When he got fired, things were starting to really get rolling again with me. I was doing real well in practice and I was on the right track with my weight. Then everything came crumbling down.

P: So psychologically that was a really hard blow to you?

H: Yes.

P: What made him a good coach?

H: The question you asked about how do you motivate people--he had it down to a science. He knew exactly what to say to you to get you to do anything. Everything he said to me, like, I believe you can do this, or if

you go out in this time, your final time will be this. There were three or four times that I can think of that he told me exactly what to split and exactly what my time would be and to the tenth. I was there, so I believed in what he said 100 percent.

P: [He was a] strong reinforcement.

H: Yes. I had such respect for him, everybody did. There was a little bit of fear, but it was such a strong respect.

P: For his skill, his knowledge, or as a person?

H: Both I think. Practices were serious. He was very good at bringing swimmers who really did not have that much promise and really were not that great to do great things. When you got to practice, you knew it was serious. You did what you were supposed to be doing. When he said something is fast, everybody went fast. Not like I see today where you tell them to go fast, and they decide whether they want to or not. I wish that I had the opportunity to coach with him a little bit. I wish that I had been able to swim for him longer just to have learned more from him.

P: As a coach you try to emulate some of the qualities he had?

H: Definitely.

P: The key to his success is really motivation rather than technique or training?

H: After the training is over with you can only do so much, then it is totally mental, it is totally up to you. He was so good at that. I think that was a huge part of his success. He had a lot of crazy training philosophies and we did a lot of really unusual stuff, a lot of really hard stuff. There was a reason for everything. There was a reason behind every set. As a swimmer you knew that, so it gave you a lot of confidence.

P: You cannot just go and swim set after set, pushing the ball and doing some other aerobics, you have to change things around. It helps your conditioning, you would get bored swimming lap after lap after lap. What do you do to get rid of the boredom?

H: I was a cerebral swimmer. I was always thinking about something when I swimming, whether it was my stroke, or where my head was when I was breathing, or my kick, or rotating. I always tried to do that. Of course, some days I would be singing the last song I heard on the radio or counting down--oh, we only have two more laps. I tried to use my time to my advantage because it is silly to waste all that time because you are putting a lot of time into it. Not everybody does that. It definitely gets boring sometimes, just as anything does.

P: The NCAA has reduced training times, is that right?

H: Yes. You can only be held responsible for twenty hours a week of mandatory hours of training, which is not enough, so the rest of the training is voluntary. . They volunteer a lot [smile].

P: You can still be there as a coach to help them, it is just that they cannot be required [to be there]? So in effect it is meaningless?

H: Right.

P: How many hours [a week] do you work them now, literally?

H: I would say thirty hours.

P: That is almost a full-time job. That is about what you trained, about thirty hours per week?

H: Yes, with Mitch, sometimes more. We had some pretty long sessions. When I was in Colorado, it was about of six hours a day training, so that is thirty hours and then Saturday. It would be thirty-three, thirty-four [hours].

P: That is a fascinating process because you see in almost every sport people who have been training, particularly individual sports like ice skating or gymnastics. Elfi [Schlegel] started at five and did six to eight hours every day and had no regrets. She had some frustrations, but basically loved it. It is hard sometimes to look back and see how much time and effort that you put into one race that takes two minutes.

H: I know. It is amazing.

P: It is amazing to me.

H: It is like, why can you not just do it for a year or a month? It is kind of crazy when you think about it.

P: But the commitment is significant. Most people cannot commit to anything with that kind of hard work and real goal setting. Why is it that some people can do that and some cannot? Why could you do that?

H: I think you are born with some of it. I think you are born with a competitive nature. That is probably one of the biggest things that you have to have. I do not think you can really become a competitive person. It is just that you either have it or you do not. A lot of it, I think, you learn in your upbringing--how your parents raise you. Do they teach you hard work or is that just something you have or you never have it? I do not know. Obviously, talent plays a role, but a lot of talented people do not do anything with it. Then a lot of people who are not so talented work super hard. What I accomplished, I lived it day in and day out. It was a dream, and everybody has dreams, but I lived the dream. It was not like I could just hope that one day I would go to the Olympics. It takes a lot more than that and you have to realize that. You maybe make Junior Nationals and then all of a sudden you make Senior Nationals and you get there and it is like a whole new world. Junior Nationals is a joke, Senior Nationals is wow. Making Senior Nationals to actually making a national team where you travel and compete internationally, that is night and day also. With every step I took, my eyes were getting wider and wider just realizing how much I had ahead of me and how hard it is. That is one of the things with the freshmen on the team. I want to tell them, do you not realize, OK, maybe you are winning this dual meet or maybe you are second in this event, but this is nothing compared to when you walk into SECs or NCAAs. [The freshmen swimmers at UF] are going to be in for a shock.

P: But is it not hard as you are training seven hours a day at age fourteen to see the end?

H: Yes.

P: But you get individual awards as you go--the Junior and then the Senior--so you see you are making progress so that reinforces your drive.

H: Are you talking about the end being the Olympic gold medal?

P: Yes.

H: That is one of the things that keeps you going is knowing that is what you are trying to do. Sometimes it may get frustrating because it seems so far away or you have so much more to do, but that is the fun of it.

P: Do you have any regrets?

H: I do not have any regrets. I wish that the end of my career had been a little bit better. Some days I will think about it a lot and I will kind of get depressed about it. Then I always have to check myself because how many people end their career on a good note? If you are on a good note, then you want to keep it there. I guess most people retire from a sport when things are not going well. I guess I have to look at it that way. If I were still winning medals and still swimming best times, then I would not have retired. So I do not have any regrets. There will be days where I will remember something that I did that I just completely forgot about and I will say, wow, you should be really proud of yourself, or, that is pretty amazing. When I was competing, I used to be so nonchalant about everything, like, oh, well, thanks. [I think it] was good because you do not want to be too high and mighty and you have to keep yourself in reality. Now I think it is all right for me to be proud of what I have done and to actually pat myself on the back for it. Now that it is over with and I can reflect on it. I do that more often, not really vocally to anybody, but just to myself, which is what matters anyway.

P: Exactly. And you talk about being a perfectionist, and when you look back on your career, while you did not do everything you wanted to do, nobody does, you must have a lot of satisfaction in what you did accomplish. Your record is really amazing. When you think about all the swimmers who compete in all these meets, and most of them never get to even the bottom level of finishing third in the SECs, that is an accomplishment. When you add that to the national and the international--the Olympics--it demonstrates that you used your talent and I think people must have some sense of satisfaction for that because all of us have seen wasted talent.

H: That is the worst thing in the world.

P: You now see what I see. I see students who will not work who are bright, who are capable, who could be lawyers and doctors, who could do wonderful things. They do not want to work, they are lazy. It is frustrating. Now you get to see a little bit of that.

H: Yes, we have people on our team now who are good swimmers but they could be so much better and they just do not want to do it. That is my question--how do you make them do it?

P: Sometimes you cannot. Nicole, thank you very much.

H: Thank you.