

## **UC Berkeley**

### **Section I: Chronicles - Undergraduate student life, campus experience, organizations, and political movements**

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# 150 Years of Women at Berkeley

## Valerie McClain

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INTERVIEW BY JEAN STRAUSS

*Where were you raised? When were you born?*

A long time ago in a galaxy far, far away. Born and raised in Berkeley. I went to school in Oakland, California and Berkeley, California.

*And how old were you when you first were taken down to a boathouse? When did rowing even enter your consciousness?*

Grammar school, when my sister, who was older than me by five years, started rowing in high school at Holy Names on Lake Merritt.

*And were you interested right from the get go? I mean, so you would have been a little kid. You would have about ten?*

Yep. So. I wasn't really interested. My sister and I weren't close, so it was pretty much anything she did, I didn't want to do. But as the family kept going on trips and and sponsoring the crew team and fundraising for the crew team and, you know, I watched those girls have so much fun, then I thought, well, maybe, you know, maybe when I get to high school, maybe I might want to do it.

*And so what year was the first time? Do you remember the first time you ever stepped into a boat, and did you do it as a rower or a coxswain?*

As a coxswain, And yes, I do remember. It was in the summer of 1969. So just before I started high school, they were training for the Nationals. So at that time it was still the NWRA. So they were training for the Nationals and the coxswain got mononucleosis. And they were just looking for somebody little to steer the boat for workouts while she recovered because their intent was that she was going to cox at Nationals, but she just had to rest because she had mono. So that's what I remember. And I remember that the stroke was Sally McClellan, and she was really, really nice because I had absolutely no idea what I was doing. And I'm surprised they would have sent somebody like me out there, in the middle of Lake Merritt. Didn't know how to steer, didn't know what to say, didn't know how to call anything. But I didn't break anything. I got the boat back in one piece, so I guess that was my big hurrah.



*Valerie McClain, Varsity 1978*

*So you were 13?*

Yeah, 13.

*Wow. And did you then end up coxing for them at Nationals?*

I went to Nationals because my sister went to Nationals and I was on call in case that coxswain couldn't race. But I did not race that summer. And I believe I can't remember where it was. It might have been Old Lyme, Connecticut or. I can't remember where it was, but I know that we all got on a plane and traveled somewhere.

***Old Lyme would have been 1970. And so did you start racing then at that point? Did you start going down to the boathouse a lot?***

Yes. So then the fall after that summer, that fall, when I was a freshman in high school, I started coxing. The coach for the high school team. Holy Names High school team was Pat Lickess. So that was Ed Lickess's son and started going to workouts in the fall and fall through the spring and then started racing.

***Wow. And so where did you go to high school? Did you go to the same place?***

Holy Names. And so by the time I was a sophomore in high school, I was a national champion. So the high school teams, there were boys and girls, high school teams, boys and girls college teams, and boys and girls club at Lake, all at Lake Merritt. So what would happen is you would do your racing in your entity. So for us, it was Holy Names. And then Ed would determine how to mold all those groups together and put the best boats together for the Nationals as Lake Merritt. So it would be Holy Names High School, uh Mills College and any other woman that was down there rowing. And then they would put those boats together.

***So I guess there was this little group from Cal that you might have overlapped with slightly that Carol Simpson was in because 69 was - well, she graduated in 69. It sounds like you started the fall of 69. So you're rowing in in high school. Were you recruited to come to Cal?***

Technically, yes, I guess so. I took a couple of gap years after high school, because I wanted I thought I wanted to be a doctor. And both my aunt and uncle were doctors at Stanford, and my aunt gave me some really good advice. She says being a doctor for a woman is hard and you're going to have to give up a lot. And you need to really decide if you're that's what you want to pursue. So she suggested I get into the medical industry in some form or fashion and just determined if whether that was something I wanted. So in the gap years, I got my respiratory therapy license and my EMT license and I worked and I rowed at Lake Merritt, coxed at Lake Merritt and coached at Lake Merritt and just kind of hung out for a couple of years to determine whether or not I wanted to go to college and become a medical doctor. And I had met Steve Gladstone in 1973 when he came to Coach Cal and our family and his family had become good friends and he was down at Lake Merritt looking at the guys because there were high school guys and college guys, both rowing out of Lake Merritt and he used to come and watch races and he we used to go to Cal and watch races and he let us go in the launch and it was a very open, nice relationship between Steve and the rowing community at Lake Merritt. So, when they announced that there was going to be an Olympic women's rowing team in '76, I asked him what it would take to get an invite. And as you know, while Lake Merritt was a premier rowing center for the West Coast, the coaches were all from the East Coast. Most of the recruiting was from the East Coast and it was hard to even get noticed. And so his advice to me was get into a college program because you're not going to get noticed as a club sport, just it's not going to happen. So he he said, go into a college program. So I wanted to go to the East Coast, but my parents said no. So it was Cal.

**Wow. Okay, so what year did you start at Cal?**

Fall of '77.

**Fall of 77. Did you go out for crew then? Because I have no. I mean, I didn't join.**

Yes, I did.

**Yeah, that was our first year together. Okay. So fall of 77, I came out for crew. Did all the workouts in the fall and then was not selected to be in the varsity boat. What did you study while you were at Cal, by the way?**

I was pre-med for three years until I determined that was a lot of work and maybe not something I wasn't probably going to be willing to give up enough to become a doctor. So I ended up writing my own major, which was sports physiology. Um, Cal did not have that as a major, but you could write your own major. So technically my degree is in physical education because that's how you had to get your independent degree. But it was I did everything that UC Irvine was doing for exercise physiology. Just at Cal.

**Did you watch the Olympics in 1976? The rowing?**

I did watch the Olympics in '76. In fact, I wanted to go there. But, you know, it's kind of young, I guess, to to just go off to Montreal by myself. But yeah, I did watch it.

**So you were aware of rowing at a time where there were some pretty important people from Joan Lind to Carie Graves in your backyard. In 1974, I believe, was Carie Graves very first nationals on Lake Merritt. And did you watch the races there and did you race there in 1974?**

I did race in 1974, and I did meet Carie and I met the whole Wisconsin team because I think it was one of the mothers on the Lake Merritt team hosted a couple of breakfasts for those guys since money was so tight. So I do remember meeting Carie. I do remember wanting to meet Joan Lind and having her pointed out to me. But she was kept pretty isolated in terms of, you know, nobody just walked up. I think we were all just scared of her. Right. Nobody just walked up to her.

**It's funny. She's such a nice person.**

I know. I know. For some reason, I wasn't scared of Carie, but.

**Was Title IX something that you were kind of aware of or excited about, or because you were already competing did Title IX seem sort of like this thing out there that was happening? In other words, were you aware of it? Were you aware of Peter Lippett?**

Yeah. Well, yeah, absolutely, because Peter Lippett was highly involved in Lake Merritt. So, yeah, everybody knew Peter. I guess because I came from a club sport where you just raise your own money and you suffered in silence because there was no funding. It was your parents or it was the car washes or the bake sales that you did. I guess Title IX didn't - I wasn't really aware of Title IX when I went to Cal. I was aware that they had a women's crew team and I was aware that they had a men's crew team. But I didn't realize until I actually got there how segregated it was and how it wasn't - I

mean, I've been in the men's boathouse at Cal a million times. Right? I didn't realize that there wasn't a damn bathroom at the women's boathouse. There wasn't any water. I don't even believe there was electricity. Was there electricity there?

***At the Briones boathouse?***

Yeah.

***No.***

Yeah, because it was like I remember bringing a flashlight.

***Or we had, like, a little outhouse.***

Yeah, and I never used it. Yes.

***Yeah, well, you know, it was - we used to chase cows out of it. Because it was segregated and here you were coming and you already knew Gladstone and stuff, did you traverse both sides? Were you chummy with Steve and chummy with Daig?***

I was always chummy with Steve. From a young age, I think I kind of connected with him because I respected him. I respected his style of coaching, I respected his knowledge of coaching, and he was so amazingly open to all of us that would ever ask him a question. And we were in awe. I think of Steve because of his background and what he brought to Cal, and Cal really started winning when he got there. And, you know, again, I could ask him any question and he would answer it and he loved that somebody might want to understand rowing - rather than just watch it. So he was very open to discussing things and answering questions.

***I always felt that you were a student of rowing and as much of a coach in a boat as well as a coxswain in a boat. So when you came to Cal and you had all this experience, did Daig know what he was getting when you walked in the door?***

Yeah. And I think - Daig didn't want anybody to assume that they had a seat. That you had to actually earn your seat. And I hoped I didn't come in with a chip on my shoulders, but maybe I did.

***Pretty confident.***

I certainly didn't think that I shouldn't have to earn it. But, you know, it was a blow to my ego when the varsity boat was announced and I wasn't in it. But it just, you know, those kind of things make you more determined to try and figure out what it is you have to do. And certainly that was one of the first disappointments of many to come in my career.

***Let's talk about that 1978 season. Tell me about your very first race rowing for Cal as the coxswain of the JV team. Tell me what that day was like, what that race was like and what it was like going on the water and coming off the water that day.***

So we got so we went down there not knowing exactly, I don't think, what race we were going to be in. It was early on in the Crew Classic and sometimes you just had to wait till boats showed up. So we were allowed to race in the varsity race. But there were already six boats in the varsity race, so we got lane seven. Joy and I had become good friends, and there were a couple of other people in the JV boat

that I had raced with at Lake Merritt. Janie Koch was one of them. And, you know, we rowed against the varsity boat on a number of occasions and I don't believe we'd ever actually won against the varsity boat. There may have been times we were pretty close. So we went out. Decided to do the best we could. Joy was real good in her knowledge about that race course and said, "Guys, it's going to be really, really rough out there and just hang on. Just don't catch a crab." So I think the plan was - just don't catch a crab. And it was kind of a wild, wild West out there. I remember water just coming into the boat and bouncing up and down.

***The person who was coxing our boat was watching Washington.***

Well, the Cal varsity boat competition there was to one side.

***Yes.***

And the rest of us were not competition. And therefore, I think what happened, I wasn't in that boat. But I think what happened is that the coxswain stayed centered on what they believed was their competition.

***WASHINGTON Yes.***

And. Nobody, nobody saw us. So we just kind of stealthily came up and won.

***Is that like, your best moment at Cal?***

It was one of the best. Yeah, I think because. One. It was one of the times where I believed that I didn't go into the race thinking that we probably were going to win, but there was a point in the race of which I knew we were going to win.

***Really? How did you know that?***

Because. Something happened to that boat, something in the middle of the race when I said - uhhhh, we're ahead. Just want to let you know we're ahead. And I think you could probably stay ahead if you can just hang on. And something switched in the boat and all of a sudden it just kind of picked up and moved. And it was a confidence builder I think for those women who thought that they were just a second, second thought, second boat. Go there. Have a good time. Help the rest of the varsity. Put the boat back on the rack and go drink some margaritas.

***What has that race meant to you over the years?***

So I don't personally believe that anyone can be motivated unless they want to be motivated. I don't think that having a cheerleader in the coxswain seat is naturally, naturally going to win you a medal. Right? But I think that race taught me that if you can connect with the people in your boat, you might be able to impact their ability to believe in themselves and their ability to do things that they never thought they could do.

***And so how do you do that connection? Because shortly after that race, you became the coxswain of my boat. And I remember literally specific things that were said during certain races that will always stay with me, that were confidence builders for me. Do you think that that race changed you as a coxswain? It sounds like it might have.***

Yep.

***How did you find the way to connect to people?***

So, yes, I do think it changed me as a coxswain. First of all, it was my first collegiate experience, right? It wasn't a club race. Being in a collegiate race was big time.

***Yeah.***

I know that I did have coaches that said, just shut up and steer. And that's not what I was going to do. Right? And especially since I had coached before I came to Cal, I really couldn't just shut up and steer. I had to give some type of input. I had to establish what my value would be as a coxswain. And I think what I learned from that race is my value was making sure that the people in the boat had every opportunity to do better than even they thought they could do. And if it was me getting to know you and know your hot buttons and know when to push those buttons or know that you are sensitive about something and maybe you couldn't get yelled at because remember, in those days it was still megaphones. So I literally was yelling. And then once it became electronic, right? You had a voice box. It became more soothing and calming and I didn't yell. It was all about staying calm and staying in charge. And I learned that from my experiences in an emergency room. The more hysterical you get, the more people around you get hysterical. But the calmer that you get, the more people can do the right thing and act in the appropriate manner. So that's how I tried to change, especially when the Cox boxes became the big deal. Is it's not about yelling anymore. It's about talking. So let me just talk to Jeannie. Tell her where we are in the race. Tell her what she has to do in order for us to be a little bit faster. Let her know that everybody understands that it hurts and it's going to continue to hurt. But probably you're still going to be alive by the end of the race. So if you just crank it up a little bit more, you know, maybe we could go faster.

***I think the one that stood out for me was when we were behind in the Cut at Washington. And you told us we were six seats down. We had them right where we wanted them. And you weren't talking to us, you were talking to them. I'll never forget that. So you were the only athlete, actually, who was undefeated in that varsity boat before we went to Nationals. All of us had lost a race before. We could spend a lot of time talking about 1978. But I want to move on because there's a lot of ground to cover here. Did you try out for the national team in 1978?***

No. So we went to Vancouver. We went to Burnaby after. And I was not extended an invitation. So. I was pretty bummed about that. And I went back to Steve that summer and I said, What did I do wrong? You told me to do this. I did exactly that, and I didn't get an invitation.

***Who was the coxswain that was chosen that year?***

I think Holly Hatton.

***Yeah.***

Steven, I remember sitting on his deck at his house having this conversation, and I'm like, What do I have to do to even be considered to even be given an opportunity? And he said, You're going to have to take it up a notch. And, you know, he said while Cal is a good team, you know, they aren't Wisco. So, you know, you're going to have to do something to stand out because coaches aren't naturally



looking to invite coxswains. They don't necessarily know what it is you can offer. So you're going to have to stand out. And that's when we started discussing whether or not I should come to the men's team.

***And so what year did you move over to the men's team?***

Fall of '78 into race season of '79. So I did one year with the women and then I moved over to the men's.

***Okay. Wow.***

Yeah, so Steve, you know, Steve said. I can't guarantee you'll make the team. There's never been a woman at Cal as a coxswain that's ever made a varsity team - in the history of Cal. But what I can tell you is the experiences that you will take away from being on the men's team will enhance your ability on a women's team.

***And so what was it like for you to be at five foot four? How tall are you.***

Two.

***Five foot two to talking to these big guys?***

So it's funny because I knew some of the guys already on the team because they'd rowed in high school with me at Lake Merritt. But, I was not welcomed with open arms. There were a lot of men that did not want me down there. Did not want me on the team. Didn't, you know, didn't think I was serious. Didn't think it was a good idea. And you got to remember that it was the men's boathouse. It wasn't a coed boathouse. And the way the boathouse was designed is you walked in the front door and straight into the changing room. So I was never allowed to walk in the front door of the men's boathouse. Ever. So I had to enter the boathouse down the side of the building, pitch black, dark, over bushes, and enter in through the back bay. And that's what I did for the entire time I rowed there. There was no bathroom, so much like Briones. There was no bathroom for girls. There was no changing room for girls. There wasn't anything there. But, I didn't actually see that as a bad thing. It was the men's boathouse. I wasn't you know, I didn't become militant about it. It was. It just was, you know, just what it was. The nice thing about going into the boathouse that way is I would go and sit on the workbench and wait for the guys to finish dressing and come out of the boathouse and get ready. And the boathouse roster was always posted just outside the door of the changing room. So I always got to see the roster first. But I also became fast friends with Matt Franich who was the rigger. Most of the guys didn't pay any attention to Matt, but he was a plethora of information. And I would sit there and talk to him and we would talk about rigging and we would talk about boats and we would talk about oars. And he knew a lot about the currents and the tides in the estuary. So he taught me how to read the tide table, and he taught me how to watch the water and what the tide did to the water so that you knew where the currents and the eddies were, and when you got into them, how to control the boats through the currents and the eddies, where the slip streams were. And we raced every Friday night down at the estuary for the entire fall. So they'd put boats together. And by the time it was race time, it was pitch black. I mean, it was scary - one of the scariest things I think I've done is to race in the pitch black. And it was 2000 meters of racing and you had to get through three bridges and not hit anything. And if two people were coming at the same time, somebody had to figure out who

was going to go through that bridge first because you couldn't get two boats through the bridge at the same time. So. I would I would talk a lot to Matt, and Matt taught me where the slip streams were. And so just before every race, I go back to his tide book and I'd look and see what lane I was in and whether or not I could hit a slipstream. And I started to win in the lanes that I was in because I found the slipstreams. And that's when the guys started paying attention that - hmm - she might know what she's doing and she might be helpful. But they were pretty mean. I mean, there were guys who refused to get in a boat with me.

***You're kidding. Really?***

No.

***Wow.***

There were guys that would just yell at me, you know? And I think that's probably one of the first places that, you know, when somebody starts swearing at you, it's like, yeah, whatever. You know. So when I wasn't a little wallflower and I didn't start crying - because that's one thing I told myself I would never do. No matter how mean they were to me, I would not cry. And when they realized that it wasn't having much effect, that's when they kind of stopped.

***So how many other coxswains were you competing with that year when you were rowing for the men?***

I think there were six or seven that came out in the fall. I think there were still six at race season, seat race season.

***Were you were you named the varsity Coxswain?***

Yeah. We had just finished double days. So what's that? Easter vacation, I guess. I can't remember. And I remember it was the first time I'd ever been in the dressing room. So, we finished the workout and we all knew it was going to get announced, right? And Steve brought everybody into the dressing room. Normally everybody met in what was called the Blue Room, which was the front room in the boat house. But we were in the dressing room. And I remember sitting on a bench and I think I was next to Miles Raphael because he had rowed at Lake Merritt and we knew each other, when they announced the boats. So it started with three V. Then two V. And I wasn't announced in either of them. And I thought, well, I'm not going to race, I'm not even going to race. So. And then when they announced it, they announced the coxswains last. So. Yeah. I think I might have fallen off the bench. Maybe.

***What kind of reception did you get from the men on the team?***

So it's interesting and I didn't know this until later. Steve had asked all 24 guys, so first, second and third varsity. Asked them all, "If you could choose your coxswain, who would it be and why? And in what order?" And all the guys in that varsity boat had actually ranked me as their first choice. So those guys were really, really accepting right off the bat. I remember the first time we went out and we did a workout as that team. It was just an immediate connection. It was the boat that was going to win. We just decided that that that was the way it was. Some JV guys were not so nice. And the JV and 3V

coxswains just made sure that I was miserable the entire season. They were really, really mean and doing everything they could, including trying to get people rallied to go tell Steve to take me out of the boat. So.

***What did you guys do? Did you win?***

We won everything. Beat Washington on the Montlake Cut, decidedly, after, I think, a 14 year dry season for Cal. And it was one of the most pivotal learning experiences for me. Coxing men is different than coxing women. I don't exactly know how to explain it, but it's different. Knowing what the guys want is really important. There again this may have really reinforced my belief that you can't be motivated unless you want to be. They don't want somebody telling them anything but the truth. Their feelings are less exposed, I think, than women. But you know, I think the thing that that helped me with coxing them is that Steve really was open to discussing the goals of what he wanted for that boat. And that's when I started to really work with a coach. So whatever Steve saw from the launch, I wanted to understand what that looked like from my seat. So that I could coach that, so that I could get to it before he had to pick up his megaphone and say something. So if he was saying, Brad, you're dropping your shoulder at the catch. So I would look at what is Brad doing? Why can't I see that? What is it that he's doing so that I can make sure Brad doesn't drop his shoulder as a catch?

***Could you see that then?***

Yep. It took me a while, and it took hours of post-workouts talking to Steve about - what is it that we're missing? What is it that he wants to see? How we're going to make this boat go faster? So it really was a partnership with Steve and myself about how do I make a fast boat go faster from my seat? What do I do? And it was a game changer, I think, in terms of my abilities.

***How did you guys do with the IRAs that year?***

We didn't go to the IRAs. We went to Henley.

***Tell me about that. Were you the first woman to ever race at Henley?***

I was the first woman to race in the Grand Challenge Cup at Henley. The year before, a woman whose last name is Brown but I can't remember her first name was in a much - not a Grand Challenge cup. She was in a much different race. Less prestigious race. So we went. Again, they didn't have any place to go to the bathroom. They didn't have any place for women to change. They had to put up a tent just for me so that I could get into my race gear. There was a lot of nasty comments from a lot of men coming up to the race because we raced in a couple of different spots, we went to Nottingham, went to Marlow, and there was a lot of nasty comments from guys. But by this time, who cares? Right. I didn't care. The guys cared. They got really pissed off, but I didn't care.

***How'd you guys do?***

The British National Team beat us. And we got thoroughly trounced. But again, it was the British national team. So.

***So how do you come off of that year? Because then you came back and raced for the women again, right?***

Right. After beating Washington on the Cut, Bob Ernst came up to me. And he was the coach for the Women's Sculling Team, National Sculling Team. And he invited me right there and then to the camp. So I left Henley and arrived at Princeton, New Jersey, in the pouring rain, and I was late to camp because of Henley. And I'd never been treated so disrespectfully in my entire life. Not even the men treated me as nasty as the sculling women treated me.

***So it was the sculling women?***

Yeah. We were being housed at Princeton in their dorms, in. And I ended up getting housed with and Anne Warner and Chris Ernst. And actually they were pretty nice to me because I was their roomie, but I didn't always get in their boats. So a lot of the women were not very one excited that a new coxswain came in. Right. They'd already started camp. Why was I late? Nobody bothered to explain to them why I was late. I had not really coxed scullers before. I don't know what I was thinking when I accepted the invitation because I had just come from an environment where the guys were dependent on me. They had certain things they expected of me, and scullers are very independent and somebody on more than one occasion told me, "Just shut up. We don't want to hear from you. We don't need to hear from you. Just shut up and steer." I mean, I was miserable at that camp. Miserable.

***How important is a coach's support? Or lack of support for your success.***

Yeah. It's very important. It's a matter of respect. And it's hard to quantify what a good coxswain is. Right? It's easy to quantify a rower or sculler. You win seat races, you have a higher erg score. You can pump weights, You can run and do great times. You can do stadiums. But it's hard to quantify what a coxswain adds and what a good coxswain is. And for coaches that don't understand the value add of a coxswain, and if all they want you to do is shut up and steer, there's no reason for you to try to grow or develop. What good is it going to do? Why would you want to help?

***Did you return to the women's team then in 1980?***

Yes. Steve and I had a conversation. I said, I didn't get a chance in 76. I need a chance in 1980. And he said, Go back to the women and go and tough it out with the women, but bring back all the skills that you learned and make the women better. So I did. I went back and it was Sweeney, I believe. So...

***And that was the first national championship for Cal, was it not?***

Yeah, I redshirted that year, so I didn't compete. I left. So I did get an invitation to go to the sweep camp this time, from Korzeniowski and I left school in January of 1980 to go on the East Coast, to sit in a tank. So. Yeah.

***And tell me about 1980. What that meant to you.***

I found that sweep rowers were probably a better fit for me. And it was grueling. And it was hard. And there were folks that had a shoe in, right? You kind of knew who those folks were. But Korzeniowski was kind of open to seeing, and I think I was probably given a fair shot. Holly, in the end became the eight, which was picked first and I became the four which was picked second, and that was the boycott year. We got to race in Europe. It was really disappointing. It was exciting to make the team

and disappointing because we all did really well at Lucerne and Amsterdam. And probably the eight for sure would have done really, really well. And I think the four would have done really, really well. So.

***And so then you go back and you row for Cal. Let's finish up your Cal experience.***

So after 1980, I went back to Cal and rowed for Sweeney 81 and 82. And graduated in 82. Sweeney was good because he was a coxswain. He'd been to two Olympics. But it was a building year really for Sweeney. And I think there was a lot of frustration for Sweeney in 81 and 82 because those were building years, and he had to try to get the crew back up to speed. So, it was fun. I loved every minute of being on those two teams. Had some great memories being on those two teams, but we didn't do a lot of winning.

***And so did you go on to national teams?***

I was on the 80 and 84 Olympic teams and I was on 81, 82 and 83 national teams.

***And what boats did you cox in 81, 82, 83.***

81 was the eight.

***You guys took silver.***

We took silver. 82. The four was the first boat picked. I was in the four and we took silver. 83. I was in the eight again, first boat picked and we got a silver. In May 84 was the four and we got 4th.

***By how much? Like this much?***

Yeah. I don't even know that it was measurable, but - photo finish to me looked like it was dead even. But they made a decision and it wasn't so.

***Let's talk about what it was like to be an Olympian. No matter what you do, particularly marching into that stadium. This was a dream you'd had since you were a kid. Tell me about what the dream is like when it's fulfilled.***

So I don't want to sound unthankful. But I know there are a lot of people, whether you're an Olympian or you're not Olympian, that say, making the team should be just as important. For me, making the team was the first step. Winning a gold medal was the most important, and I didn't get to achieve that. So that part of my experience was pretty disappointing. But being on the team and walking into the stadium, especially in LA where your family could be there was amazing. I remember sitting in the holding area and then lining up for the United States and walking past all these big, tall basketball players. And because I was short, I got to be in the front. And I stood when I stood next to Mary Lou Retton. And I'm like, "Hi, you're Mary Lou Retton. I'm Valerie McClain." And she goes, "Well, who are you?" "I'm a coxswain." And she's like, "What's a coxswain?" But by the end of, you know, lining up and waiting, we were actually pretty good friends. And I kind of knew she was going to be on in all the pictures. So I made sure that I stood next to her so I could get in all the pictures. So but honestly, Mary Lou was really nice. So walking in there and listening to the roar of everybody screaming when we walked in and I get pretty emotional about the flag. I'm also. You know, it was fun.

***I understand what you're saying about wanting to win the medal and that it was a first step. But I also think that there are goals that are almost unachievable by most people. And you made a team, made two teams, two Olympic teams, and, you know, achieved great success nationally. I think you comported yourself well and there's some things that are totally out of your control, i.e. how you get into a boat beyond and then what happens within that boat. And when you lose in a photo finish race. I was there. I watched that race live and I thought you'd gotten the bronze. What's your most memorable moment as a coxswain? Is there one?***

You know, I think there's so many moments, right? You have such great connections with the people in your boat. And maybe some of them aren't even racing moments. Right? Running back and forth in that van from Cal. I laughed so hard that I'm pretty sure I might have peed my pants in that van on multiple occasions since I wouldn't use that outhouse. And then, you know, just some of the adventures that we would have. I don't think I ate all the time I was going to Cal I don't think I ate any food other than lettuce. So, you know, just some of those things are funny. I remember getting Peete's coffee and living on Peete's coffee at Cal and this was before they had those really cool lids like they have now. I could literally get a cup of Peete's coffee and run to my first class and never spill a drop. So - one of the achievements of a public education.

***What would your college experience have been without rowing?***

So if I had. Really made the decision to be a doctor. I would have had no extracurricular activities. My entire life would have been going to school and studying, period, end of story. I just wasn't as smart as the rest of those kids. And I had to really, really work hard. I don't know that I would have had that many friends because medical school is pretty competitive and nobody's going to give you an edge. It would have been a lonely existence. Cal was so big. I came from a small Catholic school that had 92 kids in my graduating class. And so when I walked on to that campus and - I was born and raised in Berkeley, it wasn't like I didn't know where the campus was - but when I walked in there for my first class, which was Chem 1A, and there were 5000 people enrolled in that class. I never saw a professor. You were nobody at Cal. Right? So you were somebody on the crew team.

***You said, rowing is a team event, but success is made by the individual contributions each person brings to the boat. What do you feel was your greatest contribution at Cal?***

I think that my ability to coach, and my ability to see things from my seat that may make a boat faster, and to talk individually to the people in the boat and get them to recognize they were better than they even knew they were. I think that might be what I hope is my contribution.

***Of course, you do know that some of the best lines that you ever said in a boat were not to our boat, but were to other coxswains.***

Well, there is value in distracting the other team. Yes there is

***Of all your attributes and qualities, what attribute would you say was developed directly because of your time on your Cal teams?***

Generally, I would say leadership skills. I would say, getting to know a group enough that they would follow you out of a burning building. So I would hope that my team would have trusted me enough. And I think I honed those skills that they would follow me out of a burning building. If I said, "You have

to do X to get Y." Okay. What else do I have to do Val? If you if I say you're doing this, great. I need you to do it some more. Okay. What else do you need me to do Val? And I've taken that all the way through my years of management. How do you get a team to believe in you, to want to work with you, to want to go farther than they think they can go, to follow you out of a burning building?

***What one life lesson did you learn while you were rowing at Cal?***

You're not always a winner. And that's okay. What do you take from that? What do you learn from not being a winner all the time? I had great success at Cal and I had great disappointment at Cal. But through it, you learn that you don't always get to win. Now I will say that I am the world's worst loser. So I did not learn to lose well at Cal. I just learned that you pick yourself up and you keep moving and you go on to the next thing.

***Did rowing have an impact on your life in terms of where you are now?***

I get to speak to a lot of girls and women and one thing I tell them is that if you can get into sports as a young girl or a young woman - and if you can get into competitive sports - that the takeaways from competitive sports will change your life. The things that I look for when I'm looking for an employee, are the things you learned in sport because you can't help it. It is what sport is all about. So being a good teammate. Time management. Listening. Observing. Giving good constructive feedback. Developing others. These are all skills that you learn no matter what sport you're in. You learn these in sport. And you see really, really good female leaders in corporate America today. And a lot of them participated in sport and they bring that engagement to the workplace. I think there's a statistic from Ernst and Young that 94% of C-suite women. So women CEOs, CFOs, 94% of them were in competitive sport. So why is that? What is it about sport that gets you that leading edge? And I think it is it is all the things that sport will teach you.

***What did it mean to be named to the Hall of Fame?***

Well, you know, deep down, I so wanted to be in the Hall of Fame, and I just didn't think it was going to happen. I redshirted in 1980, so I didn't get that opportunity to be in the boat. And I didn't think that any of the other years were going to get me into the Hall of Fame, even the '79 men's team? If you look at the Hall of Fame, it's all about Olympic achievement a lot of times. So, you know, deep down, I so wanted to be in the Hall of Fame and I was so happy when Pat got in there and Connie Carpenter got in there, and the 1980 boat got in there. But I'd pretty much given up that I was going to get in there. And then to be nominated as a coxswain - not as a member of a boat. What? I literally couldn't believe it. And it means the world to me to be in the company of those athletes that are also in the Hall of Fame. And there's more women that should be in there, especially more rowing women that should be in there. And I hope to see my sisters come into the Hall of Fame pretty soon.

***I've always been sort of fascinated by you as an athlete, just the breadth of your experience, because I think it's a it's actually a difficult position to be in because you need to steer the boat straight. You need to handle your emotions when you're out there. And then you need to be thinking about 20 other things, particularly about each individual in the boat. And what do you do if something you say doesn't motivate the boat and keep rebooting it? And so I think that there's a lot of very interesting gifts you bring to the table. If I have any regret from this interview, which were pretty much done with is that your sense of humor, that's a huge part of who you are. And, you know, your brazenness doesn't***

*necessarily come through from this. That's something that would come through from interviewing a lot of other people about their fond memories of rowing in a boat with you would often be things that you said on the water and off the water. If I could, I because I wasn't there, I'd have you sing the menopause song. But I think that, you know, most of us that have had the privilege of being in one of your boats would suggest that, you know, we're always surprised that you wanted to be a doctor because you could have been a standup comic. So the last question I have for you is just is there anything that I haven't asked you that you'd like to comment on for those who actually come in our footsteps, for people maybe 50 years from now? How fun would it have been to be able to see our parents generation or grandparents generation being able to reflect, I think, on significant achievement and experience in their life?*

I think women are going to continue to struggle for a long time for recognition. While we have made great strides and inroads and I won't I won't take that away, I won't take Title IX away, and I won't take a lot of the things away that have happened. But I would hope that 50 years from now, I wouldn't have to say to women go out for sport because you're not going to be allowed to develop the things that you need to be a leader without sport. But if it's still like that in 50 years, I think my advice would be don't let any sporting opportunity go wasted. Take every advantage to get on a team. To learn everything you can from being on that team. To watch other successful women and what it is that they do that make them successful. And then when you become successful, don't turn your back on other women. Give them the same opportunities that you got or give them more opportunities than you got. I'm still witnessing really successful women turn their back and not give a helping hand to a woman. And I don't know if that's because it's perceived as not fair or it's perceived as I'm with the boys now. So, you know, you figure it out for yourself. But I would hope in 50 years we don't have to continue to have this conversation. I'm not that hopeful. But those that know me know I'm more a pessimist than an optimist. I guess if anybody listens to this in 50 years, I would hope that they'll go, oh, Val was wrong. That's not how it worked out. And then, you know, great on Val for being wrong.

*Very last thing I would want to comment on. I have known you since 1977. That's a long time.*

40 plus years.

*And we still know each other. We've done a lot of things together, and I think that we haven't touched on the fact that there is, how does how does rowing impact your life? But for me, it's created a family that's been there forever. I know that this family means a lot to you.*

None of us were anything but "all in" in the years that we rowed. I don't think you go through that kind of bonding and emotional roller coaster that is racing in competition without forming bonds. And those bonds will always be there. Distance doesn't matter. They'll always be there. I just recently went to Carie Graves funeral and just seeing some of those people that I haven't seen, I don't think, since 84, some of them. And it was like you flipped the switch and it was yesterday, right? None of us thought we were any older because we aren't. We just picked up where we left off. So.

*Oh, one last question. What would you want the world to know about Bettina Bence, a teammate of yours from 1978. She raced in your boat for Nationals. She was a very, very sweet person. And any recollections you might have on Bettina.*



So. Really one of the straight from her heart nicest individuals you would ever meet. Right? She was always thinking about other people. She was thinking about other people's feelings. Always had nice things to say about people - unlike me. But hidden under that fluff of woman was one of the fiercest competitors that you'd ever want to meet. And I used to say to her, you know, I wouldn't want to meet you in a dark alley if I wasn't on your team. Because she'd go to the mat for that boat she would give, but she would throw up her insides for that boat. But you wouldn't know it by that very sweet facade that she had, always patting somebody on the back and always wanting to make sure that after a race, if you were disappointed, she would be trying to comfort you after a race. But a fierce, fierce competitor. Taken way too soon.

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