Sammy Lee: Olympic Diver

As a child, Sammy Lee loved to swim at a community pool in California. However, although Sammy wanted to swim every day, he could not. Because he was Korean American, Sammy was only allowed to use the pool one day a week.

Then Sammy saw a boy dive into the water. He wondered how the boy could dive without making a splash. Sammy needed a place to practice diving, so his coach dug a pit that he filled with sand. Sammy practiced diving by jumping into the pit. Finally, Sammy found a pool where he could practice, and he began to experiment with diving techniques, such as doing flips in the air.

Sammy's father insisted that his son become a doctor. He wanted Sammy to have a career that would earn him both respect and money. For as long as he could, Sammy continued to train to be a diver and study to be a doctor. However, Sammy finally had to stop diving because his studies took up all of his time.

After he graduated from college, Sammy joined the army as a doctor. There was no time for diving during the Korean War, but Sammy began to practice again after his service ended. He began winning awards again, too, and soon he qualified for the Olympic diving team. He won a gold and a bronze medal in two diving events in the 1948 US Olympics. Sammy was the first Korean American to win a medal at the Olympics. Four years later, in the 1952 Olympics, Sammy became the first man in the world to win two gold medals in an Olympic diving event.

After Sammy stopped diving in competitions, he coached other divers. Some of Sammy's students also became Olympic athletes and won gold medals in diving. Sammy never gave up his passion for diving or medicine, and he worked hard to include that passion in whatever he did.