have given us reason to overindulge, nutritionists say THURSDAY IN FOOD

REEM., Hoose of the slowish and Bon Jovi make a tour stop in Miam this weekend. PAGE 3D

Palm Beach **County Living** 

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Faith and tenacity keep this Olympic medalist holding to her dream. But the crippling dizziness of vertigo threatens her last chance to go for the gold.

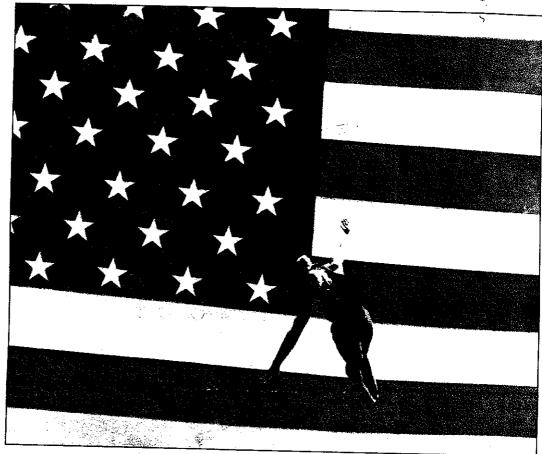


Photo by JULIE BELL

'if I get back in there, I have my work cut out for me,' Olympic medalist Mary Ellen Clark says about her desire to dive again.

By CAROLYN SUSMAN

I want to be

spinning

but I

because I'm

spinning.

Mary Ellen Clark

can't -

Mary Ellen Clark has faith.

Mary Ellen Clark has faith.

It's the strong religious faith that comes from her traditional Catholic upbringing. She grips it with the same tenacity she invoked to contort her body into mind-numbing twists and turns when she plunged from a three-story diving board.

She digs deep into that faith to answer the question, "Why me?"

Why she asks is she an Olympic-class diver

Why, she asks, is she an Olympic-class diver who doesn't dare dive? The irony, she told a sports writer once, hasn't

escaped her.
"I want to be spinning but I can't — because

"I want to be spanning."
I'm spinning."
Clark spins because of vertigo. The crippling dizziness hit the 32-year-old Olympic medalist nearly nine months ago during training at Fort Lauderdale's International Swimming Hall of Fame. The disorientation was familiar; it had happened twice before. But each time it went

happened twice before. But each time it went away.

Now, with the 1996 Olympics in Atlanta approaching, the strange disorder haunts her. She has learned its medical name: benign paroxysmal positional vertigo. But it has nothing to do with a fear of heights, which can cause feelings of dizziness or spinning in some people.

Clark gets dizzy and disoriented when she moves her head the wrong way, maybe too far up or too far down, during a dive. She doesn't know why. She doesn't know how to stop it, although

Please see DIVER/4D



Clark reflects on her future during a visit to the intemational Swimming Hall of Fame.

# Diver desperate to get back on board

#### DIVER

she has tried just about every treatment imaginable since the condition hit her again in Janu-

The first time she felt it, in 1988, she did some exercises recommended by a doctor and "just blocked it out." The dizziness lasted five months and then went away. The second time, in 1990, it lasted three days and "I trained through it.'

This time, she is desperate for answers before her chance at the Olympics evaporates. She's been diving 25 years, 10 of them from the platform, and she has worked hard on that "serious journey," as she calls it, toward the top of her profession.

#### Olympic dream came early

One of seven children in an athletic family in Pennsylvania, Clark started diving when she was 7. By 9, she had qualified for her first national competition.

"She used to come along because we had to have her in the car when her brothers prac-'ticed," remembers her mother, Carolyn. "She used to fall in the pool on purpose so that she could swim, too.

"Then her father saw something in her and I think it was her drive, her persistence. It's not that she has the most natural ability in the family. I think it was because she . . . had that Olympic dream. She developed it very

young.
"She just took to everything mother says. physical," her mother says. "She captained every team she was on: hockey, lacrosse, swimming and basketball. She settled on diving because the scholarship was there."

The scholarship was to Penn State, where Clark received her undergraduate degree. She also has a master's degree in physical education from Ohio State.

- "I don't know that I had talent," Clark says in her self-deprecating way. "I worked hard for something and it came true."

#### Vertigo is a symptom

The culmination of that dream came at the 1992 Olympic games in Barcelona, where she on a bronze medal for platform diving, prompting Sports Illus-trated to dub her the best female diver in the country. Speculation in sports circles is that she was America's best hope at a medal in women's diving at next year's games. But now, the thought of stepping into space from a 33foot platform and hurtling into the water at 35 miles an hour scares her.

"The danger is that (vertigo) is disorienting and she might not land a dive right," says Susan Herdman, a physical therapist at the University of Miami who has treated Clark.

The type of vertigo Clark has, Herdman says, is common and is sometimes a function of

aging.
"We estimate now that in people over 65, half will develop it at one time or another.

Other sports figures have battled this spinning dizziness.

Golfer Lee Trevino experi-enced it on the Senior PGA Tour and it knocked him off his game. Baseball player Nick Esasky was stricken in 1990 and it ended his

There also are different types of vertigo. Meniere's disease, for example, involves repeated attacks of dizziness that result from increased pressure of inner-ear fluids and may vary in duration from 15 minutes to several hours.

But vertigo is a symptom, not a disease.

"The term means that the person has the illusion that the world is moving or they're moving. Most common is the sensation of spinning. It doesn't really refer to a specific disorder; it's that sensation," says Herdman, who has a doctorate in neuroanatomy

It can be caused by inner-ear problems, a head injury, or a virus. Or nothing identifiable. "Probably half of all people just wake up with it," Herdman ex-

Clark doesn't know what happened to her. There are many theories. Maybe it stems from a virus she picked up overseas while she was traveling. Maybe it happened when she hit the water the wrong way, head

#### Treatments were temporary

Now, in fact, she even doubts Herdman's diagnosis, since the treatments she's had haven't stopped the dizziness where it matters most; in a dive.

"A lot of people say inner ear, which is where Susan's coming from. Now," Clark says, "I'm thinking, neck."

Although vertigo can result when the cervical vertabrae in the neck are out of alignment --which can be caused by a dive Herdman says that kind of dizzi-ness usually comes with other neurological problems. Clark has been given a clean bill of health from a neurologist.

"She has responded well to the treatment. The treatment has gotten rid of the symptoms so she's been able to return to all

of her normal, everyday activi-ties, except diving," Herdman says. "A couple times we treated her and she was able to dive for a day or two and then it came back

The treatment consists of moving the patient's head into a series of different positions. That repositions particles of calcium carbonate crystals that have moved into the ear canal from another part of the ear by mistake. The crystals, a naturally occurring substance in the ear that contribute to balance, are thought to confuse the brain, resulting in dizziness and spin-

Clark wasn't allowed to lie down for 48-hours after each treatment, to prevent the floating debris from moving back into the canal.

She tried the treatment six times.

Almost nothing has been too unconventional in her quest to get well.

Clark has taken Chinese herbs - after clearing them with her trainer - and medications prescribed for seizures. She's seen internists and neurologists and undergone acupuncture treatments.

She's even gone to the Upledger Institute in Palm Beach Gardens for cranio-sacral therapy, where Tom Giamatteo, a collegiate swimmer and diver himself, is giving her free treatments. The sessions involve a gentle, hands-on manipulation that has been successful with

other vertigo cases, he says. With Clark, he said, his assessment found her temporal bones - bones in the skull weren't moving properly. "That

area holds the ... system where you have balance."

Clark says, "I'm not saying that what happened with all the doctors hasn't helped in one way or another, like with Susan and stuff. She has been awesome and very supportive and I'm fine on a daily basis. The procedure, I would say, is successful to a point. But it's not enabled me to get back up on the board and do what I want to do.

### 'Path has aiready been set'

"We're all frustrated for her," says her mother. "She's trying very hard to think it's only a temporary thing, but in the back of her mind she knows it could alter her plans for the future."

Her mother credits Clark's

spiritual nature for her strength.
"Probably more than any other member of the family, she has this trust that there is a plan for her and she does her very best to find out what it is, what God wants her to do. I know she does a lot of praying and trusting

in God.
"The only time she called recently (that) you could tell she was upset was when she was back on the board the first time. We all knew to say a prayer on (August) 17th. Her coach was gonna get her back up there. She made it through that day. The next day, she began to get dizzy again."

Despite her disappointment, Clark seems incredibly focused, still, on her Olympic goal.

"I'm on a definite time frame," she says on a recent morning, while consuming a low-calorie breakfast of grape-fruit segments and a bagel at a favorite Fort Lauderdale cafe.

She wants to keep her weight down (5-foot-1, 118 pounds) and her training up to

par so she can be ready.

"She's handling it pretty well right now," her coach, Ron O'Brien, says. "But time is ticking. Olympic trials are nine months away.

Clark adds, "I need to do it yesterday.

But then, with the next breath, she is philosophical, even fatalistic, leaning back into her Catholic faith to hold her up.
"When you try to get the

answer, you have to step back and say, 'Wait a minute. It's not in your hands. The path has already been set. Maintain your composure and get through it.

That's what she did when her father, Gene, underwent quadruple heart-bypass surgery right before the 1992 Olympic games. And that's what she's trying to do now, even though the frustration sometimes dampens her spirits.

"You're as good as your last competition," she says, dismissing the praise she's received in the past. "If I get back in there, I have my work cut out for me.

"In the beginning, I was so bummed," she says, "it was a definitely a lonely time. I was just a sponge to try to learn what (vertigo) was all about. I just feel like it's out of my hands, that I've tried everything possible." Meanwhile, she practices on

a trampoline, lifts weights, runs around selling a line of dietary supplements known as Interior Design Nutritionals. And holds tight to her faith.

"I definitely think things happen for a reason. I may not happen for a reason. I may not have that answer right now, but at some point it will be clear," she says firmly. "If I never get back on a board again, I know I'm gonna be OK."

#### THEATERS TODAY

ALD indicates assisted listening

## CENTRAL PALM BEACH

MC CROSS COUNTY 8, 4356 Okeechobee Blvd., West Palm Béach, 689-1558, ALD

VALUE CINEMAS, 6198 S. Congress Ave., Lantana.

Batman Forever (FG-13), 1, 3:30, 7, 9:30 Congo (FC-13), 1:10, 3:15, 5:20, 7:30, 9:45 Speces (R), 1:10, 3:20, 7:10, 9:20 Smake (R), 3, 7:35 Crimson Tide (R), 3:25, 7:25 Casper (G), 1:5:15, 9:55

A Walk in the Clouds (PG-13), 11 a.m., 1:55, 5:05, 7:35, 9:55 5 tal Kombat (PG-13), 11:15 a.m., 2, 5:20, 7:50, 9:55 of filusions (R), 10:55 a.m., 1:45, 4:50, 7:20, 9:45 perado (R), 11:05 a.m., 2:05, 5:15, 7:40, 10 gerous Minds (R), 11:10 a.m., 1:50, 5:10, 7:55, 0s orio (PG-13), 10:45 a.m., 4:45, 10:10

MISSION BAY PLAZA 8, 10101 Glades Road, Boca Raton, ALD 451-9011.

Mortal Kombat (PG-13), 1:30, 3:40, 5:55, 8, 10:20 Something to Talk About (R), 7:40, 10:05 Magic in the Water (PG), 1, 3:20, 5:30 A Walk in the Clouds (PG-13), 8, 10:15 Dangerous Minds (R), 1, 3:10, 5:30, 8, 10:20