

[BEEP] Speak.

Milton, I'd like to begin by asking you to state your name, your date of birth, where you were born.

Milton Green, and I'm 82 years old. And I was born in Lowell, Massachusetts. But we moved from Lowell, when I was about five years old, to Brookline, Mass.

And we went to Temple-- I went to Temple Israel in Boston since I was about five years old till even now.

How's the sound look? OK. Tell me a little bit about growing up in Brooklyn-- your family, your religious background, all of that.

Yes, I moved to Brookline in 1925. And I have a twin sister and a brother and another sister. And we lived in Brookline, and I went to Temple Israel, which is a reformed temple. And the head of that temple was Rabbi Levi, who was a well-known Rabbi in those days. And it's a reformed temple.

And my parents were quite religious, and I was actually bar mitzvah-ed in a temple and in Brookline. And I also went to Temple Israel. And we observed all the holidays, or most of the holidays.

But specifically, we weren't really terribly religious. We didn't-- we didn't have kosher set up at all, but we always went at different holidays-- Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur. And we still do.

But our religious training was moderate. And I went to school in Brookline. And it was a grammar school called, Edward Devotion School. And that's when I started to be interested in track.

And I was captain of the Grammar School Track Team. And the principal of the school was named Charles Taylor. And he was very interested in my athletic activities, and he really encouraged me, especially in track.

Because in those days, I held a record in the high jump when I was 11 years old, and he was sponsoring me in all activities. And then I went to high school, and I was captain of the track team there, and held quite a few records in the inter-scholastic meets. And that was in 1932.

And then I went to Exeter Academy for one year in preparation to go to Harvard. And while I was at Harvard-- while I was at a summer camp rather, in 1932, I met this Norman Connors, who eventually became my roommate. And he was an outstanding track athlete too.

He was a hammer thrower, and also a 100-yard dash runner. And in 1935, there was a Harvard-Yale track team that competed in London, against Oxford-Cambridge. And Norman Connors was a hammer thrower, mostly at that time.

And they didn't have the hammer thrower in the Oxford-Cambridge meet. So he trained in 100 and 220 and made the team in the 100 and the 220, which was an unusual combination-- a hammer thrower and a 100-yard dash. And I was in three events at the Oxford-Cambridge meet-- that was in 1935-- in the high hurdles, the low hurdles, and the running-broad jump. It was called the broad jump at that time, but it's called the long jump now.

And I won two events at the Oxford-Cambridge meet. And I'd been always thinking and wanting to be in the Olympics. Of course, that was my hope to be in the Olympics.

But 1936, in the Harvard-Yale game, Harvard-Yale track meet, Connors and myself had won six gold medals between us. And there was quite a bit of publicity about it, and about our Olympic plans or whether we were going to the Olympics, or whether we could qualify. And I had qualified for the final tryouts at Randall Island.

And I got a certificate from Avery Brundage. And I think I have submitted, to your group, the certificate from Avery Brundage saying that I had qualified for the final tryouts.

Let me ask you to restate that thought without mentioning the museum.

Oh, OK.

That you had gotten the certificate.

Yes, I received a certificate from the American Olympic Committee-- Avery Brundage. And it stated that I had qualified through all the preliminary tryouts, for the final tryouts, at Randall Island. And about at that time, there was some publicity in the Boston papers about my roommate and me, Norman Connors and myself. There was a picture of us winning six gold medals.

And some of the executives, or the committee members, at Temple Israel and Rabbi Levi, had seen the publicity and knew that we were potential Olympic candidates. And one of the committee members called me and said he had liked-- he had congratulated me for our performance at the Harvard-Yale track meet. And asked if-- said the Rabbi Levi would like to talk to us about the Olympics and the potential there, and could we-- could we meet with them?

And we met with them at Temple Israel. And they explained to us what was happening in Germany at that time, the terrible things that were going on and all the activities against the Jews and people in Germany. And we knew something about the problem of Germany but not in any great details. And we were really quite taken aback with the information that they gave to us.

And at that time it was suggested that-- they suggested that it might be a good idea for us not to go to the Olympics because of all these problems, and to register our objections and boycotting the Olympics. And we were quite taken aback about that thought. And they tried to explain to us that we would never regret if we did take that action to boycott the Olympics.

And they suggested that we talk it over and let them know what our thoughts were, if we wanted any further discussion. And while we-- Norman Connors and I went back and talked it over, and thought we'd discuss it with our parents because we had great respect for their judgment. And after talking it over with our parents, they also called Rabbi Levi to see what his thoughts were again, to get an explanation from him.

And my father told me that he was satisfied and had confidence in Rabbi Levi's judgment, and that we wouldn't regret it if we did boycott the Olympics. Because the problem was-- not the problem, but the question was how imminent our selection on to the Olympic team would be? And I had held the world's record in the high hurdles and also the Harvard-Yale record in the broad jump.

And at that time the Harvard-Yale broad jump event, which I held the record in, was over 24 feet 11 inches. And I had been running in three events at that track meet, and the coach said not to take too many jumps because I have to save myself for the other events. And on the first try on a broad jump, I had fouled the take off, stepped over the mark. And he said to be very careful on the next jump because he didn't want me to take all my full jumps.

So in the next jump I was very careful and took off about a foot behind the take-off board. And I did 24 feet 11. So I would close to 26 feet in the actual jump.

And they thought that I had a good chance of qualifying for the Olympics in the long jump, where I had the potential to go close to 26 feet. And in the high hurdles, which was the other event that I was qualified for, I had been running around 14, 9, 15 seconds in the high hurdles. And the qualifying times were in the 14-second, probably 14, 2, or 3.

But I was improving in the high hurdles, and I practiced at timing event, timing in the high-hurdle practice rounds. And I was getting closer to the 14 5 14 4. And they felt that there was a good chance that I could make the team in maybe two events.

But at any rate, after the discussion with Rabbi Levi and my parents and as this whole situation about boycotting, both

Conners and I decided that we would boycott the Olympics, and we didn't go into the final tryouts.

And although I was disappointed, I felt that, that was the thing to do, and that's what basically happened, as far as boycotting the Olympics is concerned. Because at that time I was a senior at Harvard, and I was interested in getting into business, and whether to go into business right away after graduation, which was in 1936, or to go to graduate school.

And I decided to go to Harvard Business School, and then to go into the real estate business. So I was interested in looking-- I was always interested in athletics. And I knew that I was a pretty good athlete. And as I say, I was captain of all the track teams since I was in grammar school.

But my focus, after getting out of college, was not-- nothing to do really, with athletics. Although I was interested in all athletics and tennis and skiing and all the other activities, but I decided to go to the Harvard Business School and then to go into business, in the real estate business. And that's what happened, and I was interested in finding a nice gal and getting married too.

So that's the basic course that I followed. And after I got out of the business school, I participated in tennis. And I was ranked number six in New England, in the Super Senior category. So I was always interested in athletics, but that's really the basic story about what happened in that situation.

OK, I want to backtrack a little bit now. And that was great by the way. I didn't want to start.

OK.

So we're going to go backwards a little bit. And if you can try not to refer to what you already said. Don't say, as I told you before.

Right.

This is the first time.

OK, then.

What I want to do is get you to elaborate on some of those points.

OK.

OK? So I'm going to go back to your family first. And you came from not a highly religious background, but certainly a Jewish background. You identified as a Jewish boy.

That's right. Absolutely. My mother and father, as I say, were reformed at that time while I moved to Brookline in 1925. But their parents were very religious. Well, my mother's parents, particularly, because my father's parents weren't around at that time.

But my mother's parents, the name was Warper, and they were very religious. And we used to go over to their home, to their apartment, and celebrate all the Jewish holidays. And, as I say, they were very religious.

And my parents were religious, but they were reformed.

What about your friends? Were your friends mixed, or did you really grow up in a more Jewish environment?

I'd say that I grew up, basically, in a mixed environment. After we lived in Brookline in 1929, we moved to Newton. And I went to Newton High School.

And in those days, it was-- it wasn't to integrated. And my friends, I'd say, were 50-50 Jewish and non-Jewish. So our upbringing was mixed, but our social activities were mostly Jewish activities.

Did you experience any anti-Semitism from your classmates or people while you were growing up?

Not particularly. In high school, never noticed any. I know it was around and there were situations.

And in college, at Harvard, we lived-- Connors and I lived in Lowell House. And they had common-room eating, and we mixed with all of the-- everyone there. And we never really noticed any particular anti-Semitism, but we knew it existed. But we were never particularly subjected to it.

Do you think that sports and your early athletic career provided a good opportunity for you to fit into the mainstream and move beyond your Jewish environment?

I never particularly thought of it that way, but was the focus that put us in contact with Ali.

Let me ask you to just start the sentence by saying, sports or athletics was a focus. So that you say the subject in the sentence because my question will be cut out.

Oh, yeah. I see. Yeah, sports and athletics were a focus. Because, as I say, I was captain of the team, so I was-- I did pretty well in all the events.

And while that was a focus, and I enjoyed it, it wasn't a 100% focus. But I trained carefully, and I did all the training that the coaches had suggested. But I would say it was a focus, but not 100% so.

And you mentioned that you had worked toward going to the Olympics. Was that a real serious possibility in your mind?

Yes it was. Going to the Olympics was a very serious focus at that time, and it was a focus on training and doing extra training and exercises to-- and I was watching the performances all over the world, in my particular events, particularly. And yes, it was something that I was always thinking about when I was training. And I had hoped to make the Olympic team.

So this must have been somewhat disappointing when, even though it was your choice, you weren't going to participate?

It was. My boycotting the Olympics through the meetings I had with Rabbi Levy, yes, I was disappointed and felt that, that focus that I had, had all these years was going to materialize. But somehow or other, I felt that it was the right thing to do, and I never had any regrets about it one way or the other.

What gave you that moral grounding?

Well, I don't think the moral grounding, in relation to that, was not really a basic fact. I don't think it had anything to do with moral grounding. It was just a realization that was something that should be done.

And I had great respect for Rabbi Levi. Because prior to meeting with him-- although I had heard about the problems in Germany and what was going on-- I didn't really have a detailed understanding of the problems there. And that meeting was really a shock to both Connors and myself. And it struck home to me that, that was something I wanted to do, after they explained the situation.

How much time do we have on the tape?

Eight minutes.

Eight? OK. You talk about this meeting. Can you go into more detail about what they said to you, and what helped you

make this choice?

Well, the meeting with Rabbi Levi was at the Temple Israel Executive Board Room. And we weren't sure what he was going to tell us about what was happening in Germany. But the several board members of the men's committee, and the Rabbi, went into pretty good detail. But I don't remember all the items that they discussed particularly, but they told us about the terrible things that were going on in Germany and the Nazi regime.

And it was there was a shocker to me and Norman Connors. And it just struck home that it was something that we should do, or consider doing. But I don't remember particularly all the gory details that they went into.

Do you remember any of the details?

Not really. Something about book burning and taking away the rights of all of the Jews, and putting them in ghettos and - I suppose it was-- I don't remember if it was at that time or afterwards, but they mentioned about the killing of Jews. And all those details were pretty repulsive to us.

Were there, at that point, to your knowledge, press statements or public statements about boycotting and about Germany?

Yes, there were. There was publicity about the boycotting and discussions between the Olympic Committee. And there were some other groups that we thought had mentioned in the press about how they should boycott the Olympics. And there were other groups that said that they shouldn't boycott the Olympics. So I was just aware that there was a discussion going on about boycotting, but I wasn't aware of all the details involved.

Were you aware of other athletes who were considering boycotting?

Not particularly. I wasn't aware of any other athletes that I knew of. And I wouldn't be in contact with them other than through publicity in the papers.

But I remember something about Stoler and those track athletes that were questioning about going to the Olympics. But I don't particularly remember the time frame in connection with that. But I do remember the discussion about it.

Did the press, in some of these organizations who were talking about boycotting, influence you?

No, I don't think the press or the publicity influenced me in one way or the other because I wasn't aware at that time, in any great detail, the problems going on in Germany and the Nazis with the Jews. I knew there were problems and they were serious, but I wasn't aware of all the details.

Now when you decided to boycott, was this primarily to take a stand or was there any concern about your safety in going over there?

No, I wasn't worried at all about safety. But the reason I boycotted it was entirely a result of the meeting with Rabbi Levi. That was the essential dominant factor involved.

Did you consider this a substantial sacrifice on your part? I mean, you had been working for this for a long time.

Well, boycotting the Olympics was a sacrifice because I had always wanted to be in the Olympics. But I didn't consider it as-- once we made up our mind and was aware of what was going on there, I didn't look at it particularly as a sacrifice, although it was. But I didn't consider it a terrible blow.

Once you made the decision to boycott, were you asked to, or did you, make any public statements in an effort to influence other people?

No. We never made any public statements or indicated what steps we had taken.

I mean, you were in a pretty high-profile position. You were captain of varsity track at Harvard. I'm surprised that someone didn't come to you and say, will you speak out for this boycott?

Well, after we boycotted the Olympics, no one came to speak to us or ask us if we'd make any statements about it. And I don't think anyone knew particularly that we did boycott it because there was no publicity about it, one way or the other. The only publicity we had was when I spoke to the track coach at Harvard.

His name was Yako Mikola. He was the assistant coach. He was-- in 1936, he was the track coach. And we told him about our intention and he tried to persuade us not to do it.

He said he didn't think we would do much good, and we should try to go to the final tryouts and try to make the team. But we didn't want to do that. And that was the only conversation we really had about it, publicity wise.

I'm going to stop right now because we need to change the tape.