

--and Jewish sports [INAUDIBLE] the potato field. Margaret, I wanted to backtrack a minute. Before you went to England and you were kicked out of all of the German sporting clubs, were there alternative outlets for you?

We made our own alternative outlets. We tried. Of course, I was being torn into the direction of sports, as I said before. We played music, and we tried to entertain ourselves as well as we could. But sports for me, of course, was the thing I wanted the most.

So a farmer let us have an old potato field. And we tried to make it smooth. You know, it's a very rough field, big clumps on there. And we try to smooth it out. And we started our own Jewish handball team on there.

Handball is a game like soccer except that you don't kick the ball. You dribble it like a basketball, and you pass it, throwing it. And it's a great game. And I coached all the fellows on the team. And I was the only girl on the team. And I shot the only goal on the first time when we lost 7 to 1.

And we also tried to straighten out-- next to the Jewish school there was a yard. And we tried to straighten that out to do calisthenics on it because that soccer field was a little bit-- that handball field was a little bit out of the way. So we tried to straighten that out.

But we had to fight the teachers' chickens. And they used that same place for their activities. And it was not very appetizing, so we gave up on that pretty fast.

I want to ask you-- my sense is that you're looking a little bit toward the camera rather than just on me. If you could try to keep your eyes on--

OK. OK.

Were there Jewish sporting clubs? Or did they exist before? Did you form them when you couldn't join the German the ones?

There were Jewish sporting clubs. Maccabi, they called it. But that was a Zionistic outfit. And that was like the National League and the American League in baseball. They didn't get along with the other Jewish athletes, so--

They called them the-- RJF was people who fought in the First World War, the veterans. They started this club for athletics. And they were able, in some towns, to rent or even buy-- I don't know-- stadiums where Jews could practice on. But the facilities were pretty poor, pretty terrible.

But as I said, we tried to do as much as we could to entertain ourselves. And there was no coach capable of-- anybody who was a little bit more advanced like I was, to tell me how to do it and what to do. And it was just a very, very bad time.

These Jewish clubs, were they already in operation? Or they were formed in reaction?

I think they were mostly formed after-- as I said, the Maccabi, they were formed before already. But the Veterans of Foreign Wars, I think they called themselves, that came afterwards. In all the towns, almost, especially in the bigger towns, they started a movement so Jews would have a place to go to and do sports.

What kind of facilities were they?

Poor, mostly pretty poor. I think they only let you-- the Germans would not give you anything very good. They let you have the garbage places that nobody else wanted. Most likely, that's what they gave the Jewish people.

So this made it difficult for the Jewish athletes to really improve or be competitive?

Oh, yes. Oh, yes. It was very bad to really achieve something spectacular because it was just in such-- it was a poor condition. And no coaching, that was bad too.

Now we can jump forward to England, where you had been running in, I guess, British National Championships.

The day I won the British Championship, as I said, that was a fabulous day for me.

Let me ask you to do that again but don't say, as I said before.

OK.

Thank you.

The day I won the British Championship was a fabulous day for me because I felt such pride in myself that I was able to do that because the Germans had told me I'm inferior. I'm no good. And all of a sudden, here I am, the British Champion.

And I was hoping that, somehow, word would go back to Germany so they would find out that I did this. And my father had come over to watch me, I thought. I thought that was the reason for his trip, to watch me compete.

But on the way back from the stadium, we found out differently. He didn't tell me right away. He waited until we got back to his hotel. But on the way back there, there were newspapers being hawked in the street. And everything seemed like to be big excitement.

We asked the taxi driver, what's going on? And he said, it has something to do with the Nazis killing each other off. So we stopped the taxi, and we got out, got the newspaper. And it told a story about Hitler having killed off his best friend plus about 1,000 of his Nazi people because they complained about something. And he wanted to show that you just didn't do that. You did as you were told.

And when we thought that this might have been the beginning of the end for Hitler, we couldn't have been more wrong. Because Hitler, by killing off these people, let everybody know, if you want to stay alive, don't be a hero.

So we got to the hotel-- excuse me. And there my father finally told me that I had to go back to Germany. And the reason he could not write to me or tell me on the telephone was because there was this strict censorship of everything coming into Germany or going out of Germany.

And he couldn't have dared to tell me that unless I came back, the family was being threatened. You tell her to come back, or else. So, of course, I decided immediately to go home, especially in view of what happened to Hitler's pals. If he can kill off his own people, what is he going to do to a Jew who says no?

And I went back. I think, within a week, I was back in Germany, which was very, very hard to accept. I was supposed to be a member of the German Olympic team. And that was something I couldn't understand and didn't understand for a very long time. I think I didn't understand it until I came over here and saw all the newspaper articles that had been written about my involvement with this time.

The only reason I was supposed to be on that Olympic team was because the Americans, and the English, and the French, and a lot of the other nations threatened not to come to the 1936 Olympics due to discrimination of the Jews. And Hitler wanted to make this the best Olympics ever, use it as a propaganda vehicle. And he wanted, of course, the United States and all the big nations to be there.

And this was the ruse that they used. I was the pigeon to help him get the 1936 Olympics settled in Berlin. They were already making a building and making a stadium and everything. But they were really afraid that it would not be a good Olympics for them because the big nations weren't going to show up. And that would take away from the Games, of course.

So that's how I got on the German Olympic team. And it was tough.

How did your father get this information that they wanted you to come back?

It was very peculiar. My father told me at the time, the way he had to come to England to tell me in person, somebody showed up at our house in Laupheim to tell him that-- he also could not write to my father-- that the family would be in danger if I didn't come back.

So this man traveled to Laupheim, told my father. My father traveled to England, told me. That was like a relay race, avoiding danger.

You, as a Jewish athlete, we're going to-- when you tell me that you were aware of-- you later, at least, learned about the kind of international aspect of this. At the time, did you know that you were going to fill some symbolic role?

No. But I knew that I would be the only Jew because there was nobody else. It sounds kind of conceited. But there really wasn't another 100% Jewish athlete who could have competed in the Olympics and having a chance to win a medal. They just weren't good enough. That's the way it was.

In Germany.

In Germany. And I didn't know that I was going to-- at first, that I was going to be the only one. And in Germany, nobody knew anything about this. This was strictly-- nothing was in the papers about this, that the Olympics were in such good shape. No, they only heard, the Olympics is going to be the best thing you ever experienced in Germany and all this stuff.

And there was nothing in the papers that there was a danger that it wouldn't be-- that it would be a flop.

Do you remember the reaction of the German community to your coming back?

I think that the Jewish community, they were very proud of me. After a while, word spread around that there's this Jewish girl who might be competing in the Olympics. And, of course, I was like the Great Jewish Hope. We had the Great White Hope, this boxer, whoever he was. I was the Great Jewish Hope.

And people were proud of me. And they wished me the best. And it was a terrible time for me because I would be asked all these ridiculous questions. Are you going to be competing in the Olympics? And what are you going to do, and how are you going to conduct yourself? I said, I don't know. How do I know what's going to happen? I just have to play it by ear. And that's exactly what I did.

So did you think that you would actually go forward and participate in the Olympics at this stage?

Maybe I was hoping for it in a way. And maybe I was hoping for it--

I need you to say-- my question is--

Oh, yeah. I'm sorry. Yeah.

In a way, I was hoping I would be in the Olympics because to compete in the Olympic Games is a thrill of a lifetime. And it doesn't happen to everybody. You have to be good enough to do it.

On the other hand, I was so afraid. Supposing I am allowed to compete, supposing I win-- and I was convinced that I would win a medal and possibly the gold-- supposing I do this, what do I do? I'm going to stand on that podium and say heil Hitler like all the others?

That was the accepted way to say, well, I won. You had to stand up there and say, heil Hitler. And this to do for a Jewish girl would never do. I was scared stiff. And this was going around in my head, day and night, day and night, day and night.

Oh, wow. What's going to happen? Am I going to compete? Am I not going to compete? How do I conduct myself if I do compete? It was a terrible time.

So you were very conflicted about this.

Oh, yes. I was so torn apart about it. I didn't know what to do. And it was not only that, but when I met with the other girls, non-Jewish competition, I was always afraid. How are they going to react to me?

And at the Olympic training courses that I was ordered to attend, they couldn't have been any nicer. All the girls accepted me fully, no antisemitism, nothing. I was just an athlete like all the other athletes.

And I wrote many, many years later-- after 1980, I wrote to one of them. I said, I can't understand why you were so nice to me. Did you really know I was Jewish? And she wrote back to me, sure. I knew you were Jewish. But you were a good athlete like we were good athletes.

And that was all that counted to us. And politics didn't mean anything to us, she said in the letter. But I'm sure that she, as well as many of the other girls, were members of the Nazi Party. There is this conflict again. They're Nazis. And still, they accept me, the Jewish girl-- doesn't make any sense. It didn't make any sense.

Why don't you get a drink of water? Your voice is getting a little-- sounding a little scratchy.

Well, I just said--

5 seconds and 14 minutes left.

Oh, OK. Cool. So you came back to Germany a little bit confused but championed. What kind of training and preparation at this point were you able to participate in to get ready for the Olympics?

I got back to Germany. I was hoping I would at least have a place where I could train. But the fact that I was a member of the German Olympic team did not allow me to use any of the stadiums. I was still a Jew who was not allowed to use any of this.

So I had to use those poor facilities of the Jewish clubs and compete there for them. And that was absolutely terrible because first of all, there was no competition whatsoever. If you don't have any competition, you have to only fight yourself.

And that's much harder than somebody who-- if there's stiff competition, you try to outdo each other. But when there's no competition, it's very hard. So I always had to fight myself. And it was really very, very tough.

And then, of course, all those stupid questions I had to answer-- everybody asked me, are you going to be in the Olympics? What are you going to do? I was a nervous wreck, I think, day and night. Things were on my mind. It was really horrible.

And my parents and I, we didn't discuss it, because I knew they were worried about it. And they knew I was worried about it. So we didn't talk about it, because we didn't want to hurt each other's feelings, I suppose. So it was very hard.

How does one train for the Olympics if you're not on the same playing field? You know what I mean? It doesn't sound like you had what you needed to get ready.

I was ordered four times in those two years to go to an Olympic training course. And that's the only solid training I had

for the Olympics. And as I said before-- I think I said it before-- I was a natural athlete.

And if I hadn't been a natural athlete, I don't think I would have achieved what I did because there just wasn't any opportunity for me to get better or to advance or to know what I was doing. It just happened naturally.

And, I think, also then what I've got to assume from this is that even if there had been good Jewish athletes, maybe not in your caliber but good Jewish athletes, clearly, they wouldn't have had an opportunity to progress and be competitive with the German athletes. Is that true?

There were very few Jewish athletes who really were capable to compete on a national level. There were the best Jewish athletes, let's say. But they weren't the best German athletes. And they really couldn't compare. They were very, very few.

And there were some-- for instance, in the Olympics, there was a fencer, Helene Mayer. She was half-Jewish. They let her compete. I guess half-Jewish was only half as offensive as being all Jewish.

And there were some half-Jewish athletes that competed, one in ice hockey. So he melted into the team. So he wouldn't stick out like I would have stuck out. But I don't think there were any Jewish athletes, really, that were capable of competing on a national level.

They certainly didn't get the backing to get better.

No. The Germans did another number of days-- every time there were some newspaper articles written that they're not holding up their end about-- they finally signed a commitment that they would not discriminate against Jewish athletes. They wrote it down.

But there were always newspaper articles that they were not living up to their commitment. They wouldn't let me compete in the German National Championship. And they said, well, she was not entitled to compete in that, because she was not a member of the German Track and Field Association. And why wasn't I remember? Because I was Jewish. So it was like a dog chasing its tail.

And so they had all kinds of ways to talk themselves out of it. In 1935, for instance, they got a little scared again. So they called all the best Jewish athletes for a training course, an Olympic training course. I said in an article once, I think Snow White and the seven dwarves would have done just as well as those athletes because they weren't any good.

I happened to meet my husband there. That was the best part about this training course, really. But they really weren't good enough. But it was just a sham by the Germans to show, well, we're trying to find new talent for the Olympics in the Jewish community. But that was all baloney.

Did you learn anything there? Did it give you an opportunity to get better?

There was a very good coach there. But I think what he told me I knew already. By then, this is 1935 already. And the Olympics were the following year. And I did very well all along. In the training courses I always outdid the other-- not in the Jewish one but in the other one, I always did better than the German girls.

And whenever I competed-- it only happened three times, I think, in the two years-- I always beat them. Even though only once did I have good competition with girls that were also going into the Olympics. The other times, I think I jumped about 15 inches higher than the next best.

And there was no-- I had no competition in that respect and in the Jewish competitions also. But the Germans always kept an eye out. Whenever I was competing someplace, there was always somebody watching out for the Nazis to make sure if I did poorly, they would have kicked me off the team immediately, I'm sure.

You had mentioned that the other athletes treated you the same as anyone else. Did you feel that same equanimity from the officials and from the coaches?

The coaches treated me very well. They saw-- and listen, not everybody was a Nazi. And they treated me well. And they like me, it seems. But the officials, whenever I had to compete at the-- they were hostile. I think they were hostile towards me.

One time I saw this fellow who was a member of my former club. I knew him as well as I knew myself. He looked through me like I didn't exist. He didn't say hello. He didn't-- I was just non-existent.

And at that competition, they tried-- the officials are supposed to be neutral-- they tried to teach the other girls how they could beat me. They didn't do that, of course. They couldn't, because they weren't good enough.

This must have been hurtful.

Yes. But it made me better because I was so full of rage. The madder I got, the better I jumped. And the Germans didn't know that, of course. Otherwise, they might have treated me a little better. But I was so absolutely enraged about everything, the whole thing, these whole two years, that the madder I got, the better I did. And that was wonderful.

So rage was your motivator.

Rage was my fuel, fueled my energies-- and my motivator. It was really weird.

Took you on to new heights, huh?

Uh-huh.

5 minutes.

So you're training, and you're taking sham courses. And you're continuing to work as if you are going to be in the Olympics. Was there a qualifying process?

For instance, the German Track and Field Championships, they were supposed to be one of the events that would show who was going to be taken into consideration to compete for the Olympics. But they wouldn't let me compete, because I was not a member of the German Track and Field Association. So I couldn't compete.

One time I had to compete in Munich, which was the scariest thing because Munich was the hotbed of Nazism. Hitler lived there. And I was scared stiff to go there. And I didn't do that well.

And it was noted, duly noted by the Nazis that I only jumped a meter 53 instead of better. But still, I beat the competition by about 15 inches. But I didn't do as well, because I think I was mentally a wreck at the time.

Were there other qualifying matches? Assuming that you were going to go forward and be in the Olympics at this point, were there other qualifying meets or anything like that? Or it was just-- how does one then get in the Olympics and on the team?

The gentile girls who were supposed to go into the Olympics, they had their own meets to which I was not admitted. And I think the whole deal was just if I did fairly well, they would not throw me out because they were still afraid that the boycott would happen.

So, I think, no matter what I did, I was pretty safe at that point, even in Munich when I did not do too well. They couldn't afford to throw me out at that point, because they were still afraid the Americans wouldn't show up.

So you just assumed you were going to be on the Olympic team.

Yes, I think so. I think that I was going to be safe then until further notice. And I didn't know, was it going to be? Wasn't

I going to be? What was I going to do? It was a terrible time.

Tape change.

Tape change.

Thank you.