

OK. You were starting to tell me that, when you came back from England, your were able to go to some school?

When I came back from England, I went to Stuttgart a couple of times during the month, because there, the Jewish Club had a stadium. And they had invited me to come and use that stadium. So I happened to learn about a school-- not a Jewish school, it was Gentile-owned school-- for physical education. So it was a private school, not a university. And I thought, well, I'll apply and see. If they take me, fine. If they don't take me, fine, too.

And they did take me because they might have got-- they had to get permission from the government that they could accept a Jew. And I suppose that was all in view of my being an Olympic candidate. And had they not let me go into that school, it might have come out into the other countries, and there might have been more problems for the Olympics for Germany. So they accepted me, and I had a good time there. We were all very friendly. The girls were all friendly there.

And it was a big town, and I could go in the afternoon, after we were finished practicing, we would go into this cafe and make pigs out of ourselves eating whipped cream cake and everything. And we had a terrific time there. And we were very friendly, and it was nice. The only thing that would prevent me, the curriculum had in it German gymnastics. And they wouldn't let me take part in the German gymnastics. Now, why, I don't know, because the Jew and the German gymnastics, maybe that was too much of a paradox. I don't know. But the other girls, we just laughed about it. We thought it was funny. And by then, I was so used to being excluded that it wasn't such a big deal.

But here you were going to the cafe and hanging out.

Yes, it was good. It was good. It was a big time in a big town, you could do more things. You could go to the movies. And we did do a foolish thing one time with these girls. We were having a lot of good times, and laughing and carrying on. And there was about six of us. And there was a table full of uniformed SS men at the next table. And they kept looking at us and looking at us.

Finally, they came over and they tried to make dates with us. And there's this big German blond guy trying to make a date with me. And I said no, and I said no. And the more he tried to make a date with me, the more the other girls laughed. And we got hysterical. And it was funny and it was stupid at the same time, because had I been found out, I don't know what would have happened to me. But we were young, and you didn't really think of any consequences that much.

I've heard that, prior to the Olympics, Germany really tried to sanitize its anti-Semitism, the signs, the way people were treated. Was that apparent to you at all in Germany?

I didn't really see these anti-Semitic signs. I mean, I knew I was excluded from all public places, but I don't think I saw ever any signs because I just didn't pay any attention to it, I suppose. I only noticed those in 1937. But I know that Brundage, the head of the American Olympic Committee, went over to Germany to see what was going on because there was so much resistance in America against taking part in the Olympics. So he went over there.

And I read later on, doing some research, that Berlin was manicured terrifically. Everything was clean. All the offending signs, dogs and Jews not allowed, et cetera, et cetera, they were all gone. And Mr. Brundage who was not a champion for Jewish causes, as I have heard, never spoke to any Jewish people. He just left himself being lulled into some false security by these Nazis saying everything is fine, we are doing everything we said we would do. And he came back to the United States and said everything is fabulous over there, and we'll be going.

So you were aware of efforts in other countries to boycott the Olympics?

Not at that time.

[INTERPOSING VOICES]

Yes, I was not aware of it at all.

So prior to the Olympics, was there some qualifying meet in Stuttgart?

Yes. After the--

Oh actually-- I'm sorry to interrupt you, I want to ask you, this school that you went to in Stuttgart, this non-Jewish school, did it afford you an opportunity to really get ready for the Olympics?

The school was very nice because I was able to do as much as I wanted to in sports. My body was reacting. The first few weeks, I was a complete wreck because my body wasn't used to this kind of-- being used so much. But after a while, my muscles got supple again, and it was great to be back into every day being into sports.

We had gymnastics, we had track and field, we played team sports. It was very nice. And the first day I was scared stiff because I didn't know how the girls would react to me, and they greeted me, what's your name? My name is Bergman. OK, you're Bergie from now on. And we were all the best of friends. It was really very nice.

Were these facilities comparable to what the German athletes were practicing on?

No. I mean, the track and field that they used was not bad, but it wasn't in very good shape, either. And the male teacher there, if he could beat me in high jumping, which was really my specialty, he was so proud of himself. And I mean, as a man, he should have been doing much better than I did, but if he just beat me by an inch, he was very happy.

OK, so I had started and then interrupt you about this meet in Stuttgart.

There must have been quite some protests again in the United States. I know that a senator or congressman Celler, he was pleading in the Congress not to send a team over. There were protest meets in Madison Square Garden, where 20,000 people showed up. There was a lot of resistance. And this must have been the reason why they invited me to come to Stuttgart-- and that was in 1936-- to compete at a meet there. And it was really rough. When you're the only Jew, if the spectators knew that I was Jewish, they didn't wish me well. I knew that much. And the officials were hostile. I think I mentioned that before. And it was very hard to compete against myself.

But I was so mad that I equaled the German record. The German record then was five foot three. And I equaled that. I must have cleared it by 15 inches at the time. I was so angry. And usually, you have three tries for each height. You started four, six, let's say. And you do it the first time fine. But you have to go over it by the third try, otherwise you were eliminated. Well, all the other girls were out by-- they did about four, eight, and they were all out. And I kept going, and going, and going. And every height I jumped over the first time. So I did the five, three. And I think the officials most likely would have liked to poison me but they didn't.

And I was just so elated. I thought this is the best thing that ever happened to me, you know, those lousy Nazis. And after that I went home, I think, and wanted to share this with my family. And I think that was the last time that I stayed in Stuttgart. I went home then and I said-- now, well, this is four weeks before the Olympics start. I better go home and see what happens.

So I went home, and my parents were happy, my brothers were happy that I did this. And I looked for the mail every day and what's going to happen, you know. What excuse are they going to use? There was only one other German girl who was capable of doing this height. And if they don't want me in there, how are they going to get rid of me?

And I was really scared. Are they going to break my leg? What are they going to do to eliminate me? But it was very simple one day a letter came and it said in view of the fact that you have been doing very poorly lately, we did not select you for the Olympic team. Heil Hitler. And that was the end of it.

I remember me sitting outside on the stoop and I got this letter. And I must have used every profanity I knew. And I knew a lot of them. And at the same time, I had such an incredible feeling of relief. It's all over now. Now, I know

what's going to happen to me. I know.

It was just like the biggest load was lifted off my shoulders. You know, that was such a paradox. That I was angry, very, very angry at the same time. So relieved. And I don't remember a thing about the Olympics.

Just stop you a minute. Why were you so relieved?

Well, all this time, I was worried how, first of all, am I going to compete? Am I not going to compete? How are they going to eliminate me? Or what am I going to do if I do compete, and I do win a medal?

And I know the German way to acknowledge a victory, you stand up on the podium and you Heil Hitler? And I didn't see that happening for me too easily. That would be-- I mean, how can you expect a German girl to stand there and raise her arm in the Hitler salute?

You mean a Jewish girl.

A Jewish girl. This was on my mind for two years. And all of a sudden, I didn't have to worry about it anymore. And that was a terrific relief.

Did you also think about the crowd reaction or the government reaction to a win on your part?

Had I won the Olympics or had I been allowed to compete in the Olympics, I would have been a loser either way. Because had I won, there would have been such an insult against the German psyche. How can a Jew be good enough to win the Olympics? That I would have had to be afraid for my life, I'm sure.

And had I lost, I would have been made as a joke. See, we knew the Jew couldn't do this. And that was on my mind all these years.

So you got this letter.

Excuse me.

You got this letter that said, sorry, you're not good enough, even though you had just competed and had tied the German record. Didn't make much sense.

I think that was the first time I really realized that my candidacy as an Olympic athlete was really all a sham. It was just something that the Germans did to fool the whole world. Maybe that's when I realized it.

I really don't even know. I think I have complete amnesia what happened to me after this. I cannot remember whether I watched the Olympics. I mean watch-- you couldn't watch it, there was no television.

Whether I listened to the Olympics, whether I followed the Olympics in the newspaper, I have no idea. I can not. I have complete amnesia about it.

You don't know where you were?

I knew where I was except I did not want to think about the Olympics. As a matter of fact, you know, people were, oh, maybe it's for the best. And my parents looked at me feeling sorry for me, and my brothers looked at me feeling sorry for me, and is she going to freak out, or what's going to happen to her?

I said, I'll have to get away from me here. And I went to a spa, under an assumed name, of course. I couldn't afford to. Nobody would take me if they knew I was Jewish. And I sat there for two weeks not talking to anybody. I did not want to be bothered with anybody. And I was just thinking about all this and what was going to happen, and what did happen.

And that's when I realized I have to get out of Germany. And I just made up my mind. I'm going to have to leave.

So you weren't-- at least you don't remember being very aware of the Olympics? That you tuned that out.

I had complete-- I to this day, I can't remember what I did. But I knew who did what. Or I know this one person that I knew that later on that she came in third. Girl I was very friendly with. She came in third in the high jump, a German girl. But whether I realized it at the time, I do not know. I cannot remember.

What point do you think you came to? And realized that the Olympics have taken place and you weren't there, of course.

Yes. I think that I only realized what was really going on once I came over to the States. Friends of ours had saved all the newspaper articles where my name appeared, you know, with all the ups and downs of whether-- what the Germans said, and what the Americans said, and what was going on, and all their promises, and all their excuses, the German excuses. And I think that's the first time I really realized how I was used as a political football.

Did the winners in your events-- were the winners German? Would your record have been competitive in the high jump?

The high jump in the Olympics was won with a height of 5 foot 3. The height I had reached four weeks earlier-- and I had the best chance to win a medal. I could have had the gold medal. Because as I said, when I got mad, I did better. So I would have been mighty mad seeing all those people out there with the uniforms on, all the swastikas flying. I would have been really mad. And I know I had a very good chance to win a medal.

Now, was it hard for you to come over to the United States? When did you come over here?

Well, when I came back from that spa, I told my parents, I'm leaving. I cannot stay over here anymore. This has no future for me. My brother had left already. He came to the States in January, I believe. No, no, no, no, that was later. I said, I'm leaving.

And my father had a very good friend who came from this town and who emigrated to the United States, became very rich here. And when he visited in our town, I was the big shot, you know, the Olympic candidate. And he said to me, oh, any time you want to come to the United States, just let me know and I'll give you all the papers.

So we wrote him a letter and said that we were now ready to accept his offer. And very quick a letter came back saying, well, times are very bad in the United States and you might not be able to find a job. And maybe things will get better in Germany, and maybe you should rethink your future. Maybe you should stay and see what happens.

And my father wrote him a very strong letter back, and he finally did give me the papers and I was able to come to the United States.

When was that?

I came to the United States in May of 1937.

When you came over here, did you decide to pursue your athletic career? Or had you been completely soured?

When I came over here, the first thing I had to do was make some money. Because the Germans allowed each immigrant to take along \$4 and a camera, which everybody sold and lived on until they found a job. And I had the same thing. And the first thing I had to do was find a job.

But somehow, an article appeared in the long-defunct Royal Telegram, a newspaper, a New York newspaper, about me arriving. I don't know. I think my brother must have been managing to get this in there. And talking about what had happened to me.

And one day, a coach showed up at my house and said, listen, I have a track and field team and would you like to compete for me. And I said, you bet. And that was it. And he wasn't a very good coach. He was an undertaker. And I kept teasing him that I thought the bodies that he prepared for wherever these bodies were going, were in better shape than the bodies he prepared to compete at the track meet.

But he tried hard. And I competed here several events. And I did OK.

You weren't turned off by sports?

No.

I mean, you weren't sick of the whole thing?

No, I really wanted to get back into it. And I was right away very successful. So that kept me going, I suppose. The first year I was here, I won the American Championship in high jumping. I won the American Championship in shot put, weighing all of 112 pounds, beating out my competition who must have been twice my size and twice my weight. And that really gave me a good feeling.

Do you feel somewhat vindicated in a way? That finally you had an opportunity to show your stuff?

It felt very good because I knew that somehow, word had to get back to Germany that I did win. And that made me feel very good. But I knew it wouldn't be in any newspapers, it would be like word of mouth, you know. And I know that people who wished me well-- and there were some Germans. I mean, not every German was a Nazi. They would be happy for me.

I think we're close to the end of my questions. Well, how many?

Stop.

OK. What about your family? Were they able to get out of Germany?

We were very worried about my family. My brother came here a few months before I did. And we were very worried about my family. And finally, somehow, my father was able to get out even though it was a miracle. They took all the people who they wanted, the Germans, whom they wanted to keep in Germany. They just took their passports away. So there was no way for them to get out.

And my father had a work permit for England, which was pretty hard to get. But he had done business with England quite a bit. And he got that work permit. And that was about to expire. So he went to the authorities and said, listen, can I have my passport back? I need to have my work permit renewed. And somebody gave him this passport. And my father said, we are leaving.

So they packed the little suitcase, little clean underwear, and they all took off. My brother, my mother. Then left the house, left everything back, and went to the next town, went to the next town, went to the next town. Finally ended up in Cologne, where they took a plane and flew to England.

Were you able to communicate with them once you left Germany?

Oh, yes. We wrote to each other all the time. But you had to be extremely careful what you wrote. For instance, there was the Crystal Night, and they took all the men from, I think, the age of 18 to maybe 60, and took them to concentration camps. And we had no idea, was my father taken or wasn't he? And my mother wrote a letter that dad was quite ill and had to go away. So we knew that he was gone.

And we tried everything. You know, Congressmen, and tried to get him back. And he finally did come back after four weeks, weighing 80 pounds, and signing himself into the hospital in Laupheim. And the next day, the nuns who ran the

hospital came to him, said, you have to leave. The authorities told me we can't keep Jews here. So they threw him out, weighing 80 pounds. And he had to recuperate another way.

And I still blame them, apart from his smoking cigarettes, that he died of a very sudden death, of a heart attack.

Where was he sent?

Dachau. That's near Munich. And they took all their clothing away, dressed them in these clothes, you know, like you see in the old movies with the stripes, the cotton, the cotton suits. And they had to stand outside from 5 o'clock in the morning-- and it was November. Until 11 o'clock at night. No, no warm underwear. No nothing. And I mean, this is what they did.

This is in '38/'39?

I think it was in '39. I don't know, the Crystal Night.

It was November--

I can't remember--

--of '38.

--was it?

It was '38

I think it was '38.

November.

Yeah.

When you got this letter saying your father had to go away, what was going through your mind?

Well, we just tried to get him out of there, you know. We wrote to everybody that we could think of to try to get him out. And whether it was that we were successful or whether they were just saying, well, let's just get those old guys out of here, you know, after four weeks or five weeks he came home.

And my husband's brother and future brother-in-law, they were also in Dachau. And the Germans told them, if you can go someplace, leave Germany today, you can leave. So China was the only country that would take you without any red tape, so they bought steamship tickets to China and went to China.

Was he taken-- did they give him a reason why they were taking him, your father?

No that was just-- you know, was a fun thing to do, I suppose, for the Nazis.

I think we're going to change the tape. I don't have much else to ask you. But I did want to check with Tom in the other room and Steve, just make sure that we--