



Bravery during the Shoah: Judith Deutsch

Dear Friends,

Last year we suggested that the only possibility of perhaps grasping the immensity of the devastation during the Shoah is to learn the story of *one person* who succumbed at the hands of the murderers, *and then to multiply the story by many millions in our minds*.

In the State of Israel the whole Nation observes *Yom HaShoah vahaG'vurah*, commemorating the Shoah and of the multiple acts of heroism of thousands and thousands of Jews everywhere to resist the Nazi killing machinery.

Maccabi history records many, many cases of bravery and heroism. To give just one example, a whole unit of our Maccabi members in Israel joined the British Army in Palestine to fight the Nazis in Europe - the only Zionist Movement to have such a whole unit.

In his extraordinary documentary film "Watermarks" ("*Hakoach lischot*", in Hebrew), **Yaron Zilberman** brought us back to the heroism of three adolescents who refused to honor the Nazis: **Judith Deutsch, Ruth Langer** and **Lucie Goldner**, all members of the competitive swimming team at the legendary **Hakoah Vienna Club**, the world's most famously successful Jewish sports club. Judith's case is particularly noteworthy, because she'd been winning swim meets and setting Austrian national records at Hakoah Vienna, was chosen as the Outstanding Austrian Female Athlete of 1935 by the Austrian Sports Authority, and was champion in the 100, 220 and 400 meter freestyle events. She broke 12 national records in that one year alone.



The facts are as follows: As a child, Judith Deutsch was barred from joining most athletic clubs in Austria so she began her competitive swimming at Hakoah Vienna. In 1936, she was awarded Austria's *Golden Badge of Honor* as one of the country's Top 3 athletes that year, and selected to represent her country in the 1936 Summer Olympics.

Like many of our Maccabi members and athletes from all over the world today, Judith decided to participate in the 2nd Maccabiah in 1935, representing Maccabi Austria. At that Maccabiah, she learned from her Maccabi Germany counterparts what was happening in Germany at the time: *"It's almost impossible for a Jew to train in any sport. We have been kicked out of schools and sports clubs. The situation is bad."*

Judith Deutsch, Ruth Langer and Lucie Goldner, leading members of the Austrian Olympic team, mature now beyond their age, did the one thing their conscience told them to do: they decided not to be part of "Hitler's Olympics", the 1936 Olympic Games in Berlin. In her letter of resignation to the Austrian Olympic Committee, Judith Deutsch wrote, *"...I protest...as a Jew I cannot participate in the Berlin Olympic Games. My conscience does not allow me. This is a personal decision and is not to be contested. I completely understand that I am giving up my rights to participate as the Austrian contestant in the Olympic Games. I sincerely hope you will understand this decision and not pressure me to change my mind."*

The Austrian Olympic Committee's answer was swift and brutal. Deutsch was at the peak period of her swimming career. They banned her from taking part in all national and international swimming competitions for two years, and excluded her from the Olympic Games. After she left Austria, the sports authorities there stripped her of her titles, and expunged her name from the record books, as if she had never existed.





accomplices. One little example of the different acts of bravery and heroism in a time when all norms and laws were suspended - and replaced by the "laws" of irrationality, hatred, destruction and murder. A Maccabi story with "a happy ending" at a period where there were nearly none.

*May the lives of the Six Million be always remembered, blessed, honored and
perpetuated by our deeds,
for we are their living memorial.*

