



## MACCABI WORLD UNION Department of Education

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כ"ג ניסן תשס"ח

### יום השואה והגבורה

### *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*



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*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 2<sup>nd</sup> 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.

Judith's father had decided to emigrate to Palestine before it became to late. The family settled in Haifa, the only city with an Olympic-size swimming pool. She soon became national champion and in 1939 represented the Hebrew University in the International Student Games held in Monaco where she won a silver medal, one day before the outbreak of the Second World War. It is the only medal Judith kept.

It was MWU's own **Rivka Rabinowitz** – Chairperson of the Council of the Movement - who brought *some late justice* to Judith. In 1995, Rivka wrote



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a letter to Othmar Bricks, President of the Austrian Swimming League, explaining the injustice done to this then very young girl. Bricks replied, after reading Rivka's letter, "...*I blushed with shame, humiliation and rage. I am deeply ashamed of the decision they made at the time.*" He invited Judith to Austria to make amends, restore her titles and re-enter her name into the official book of swimming records.

On receiving the formal letter of apology, Deutsch refused to go to Austria in an official capacity, saying "...*they threw me out once. If they want give me back my titles, they can give them to me in Israel.*" And so at an emotional ceremony held at Kfar HaMaccabiah in June 1995, Austria's Ambassador to Israel Dr. Herbert Karol read out an official letter of apology written by Dr. Heinz Fischer, President of the Austrian Parliament, expressing "...*it's deep sorrow for the event. Perhaps we are apologizing too late, but better now than never.*" All sanctions against Deutsch were lifted and all her medals and titles restored.

Judith died in November 20, 2004, in our Homeland, Medinat Israel.

A small story of three 17 years old teenagers - **Judith Deutsch, Ruth Langer** and **Lucie Goldner** – resisting the first steps in the brutality of the Nazis and all their 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.*

**Chazak ve'ematz,**

**Deputy Director-General &**