



Video Story Transcript

MY FATHER'S RACE AGAINST DISCRIMINATION: ANTI-SEMITISM IN THE 1930s TRACK AND FIELD

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www.storytelling.org/directory

Link to YouTube Video:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7IOzDRC2huw>

Note : The following is a transcription of a spoken story performance and may not reflect textbook perfect English. It will guide you as you listen (or read) along.

Hi, my name is Carol Kaufman-Kerman. It was 1927 when my father was nicknamed Speedy. Speedy Stan. Now he got tagged Speedy for being the slowest runner at Camp Lenox. Camp Lenox is a boys' camp in the Berkshire Mountains in Western Massachusetts. Oh, it could have been worse. He could have been nicknamed "Wizzy" or "Leaky." He peed in his bed every night. I mean, he was five years old. And so, every morning his counselor would wash out his sheets, hang 'em out to dry on the front porch, then drag out that mattress for everybody to see in camp. My father was humiliated. He was humiliated; he wanted to keep this a secret. He just wanted his parents to come, take him back home to Brooklyn. I mean, gosh, eight weeks at summer camp for a five-year old. It's like a sentence.

Now my dad didn't know it at the time that he'd be feeling, later on in his life, these same icky feelings of feeling different. Back in the 1930s and the 1940s, anti-Semitism was on the rise, not just in Europe. It was also on the rise in America as well. Now this was 12 years after my father was nicknamed Speedy for being so slow. He actually had earned a spot on the track team of the University of Pennsylvania. But unlike the other player... unlike the other runners, he was relegated to the bench. He was never put in any meets at all and it wasn't because he was slow. It was actually... he was very, very fast and everybody knew it. His coach knew it, his teammates knew it. He more than proved himself during practice. But it was because he was Jewish. Now his coach knew that he was fast but his coach didn't want this Jewish boy to shine.

His coach was none other than Lawson Robertson. Now Lawson Robertson was the United States Olympic track coach. The one that took the track team to the 1936 Berlin Olympics. It was a very controversial

Olympics. It was where Hitler had grandstanded his, his strong Aryan German athletes. And we had two runners, the American team had two Jewish runners on their track team. There was Marty Glickman and there was Sam Stoller and, uh, they were slated to run in the 400-relay. A day before the race, Coach Lawson Robertson and the other coaches, well, pulled all the kids in.

And he said, "Ah, there's going to be a change. We have to pull out Marty and Sam; they can't run in the 400. We, we ha... we're doing this because we heard reports from the Germans. They said that they are practicing in secret and that they're saving their top, top sprinters for this 400-race so we, we have to pull out Marty and Sam. I mean, the reasoning just... it didn't make sense. I mean, Jesse Owens and Ra... Ralph Metcalfe were put in instead of Sam and Marty. And, granted, we all know that Jesse Owens, I mean, he ordered... already won at that point, the gold for the 100 and the gold for the 200 so he was fast. Nobody could be faster than that. But there was another reason he, he wanted to put in this other player from the team. But this runner clocked consistently slower times than Glickman and Stoller. So, the whole thing didn't make sense.

Now Jesse Owens, at the meeting, he spoke up. He said, "Ah, come on, coaches. Let them run. They've been working at this for over a month. I mean, I've already gotten three golds. I'm tired. Let them have their chance."

And the coach said to him, "You'll do as you're told."

And so, Glickman and Stoller, they didn't run. And, of course, the, uh, the Americans came in first. And, well, Glickman and Stoller, they knew why they weren't running because they were Jews and they knew that Coach Robertson wanted to spare the fear or the embarrassment of having two Jewish boys up on the winning podium. Now if my father hadn't told me about his experience at University of Pennsylvania, I may not even have known about Coach Robertson during the 1936 Olympics or maybe what I would have thought that it was just a one-shot deal and that he had redeemed himself afterwards.

But three years later, my father was on the team and he wasn't allowed to one... run in one meet. It was the day of the Penn Relays, the big, big race and the coach's star runner got injured. Coach looked at my father. He said, "All right, Kaufman, off the bench. You're running today."

My father, he knew what opportunity this was. He knew that this was a, a moment that he could prove himself. And I have to think that he was also running, not just for himself, but he was running for Glickman; he was running for Stoller. He was, he was running for all those Jewish athletes that had qualified for the 1936 Olympics but it had boycotted them. Now none of the students or the community knew who my father was. He was, he was a benchwarmer and they were baffled why the... they would even, eh, let him run. But there he was and he had his chance and he got set on the mark. And when that gun went off, my father shot out of there.

He was fast; he was a sprinter. He was really good. And he took off and he was in the lead and all he wanted to do is win that race. I mean, his fraternity brothers showed up to encourage him... and the ladies from the sorority. But he wasn't thinkin' about them; he wasn't thinkin' about the coach. He was just thinkin' about winning. He was thinking about beating the best time and he was thinking about breaking racial barriers. And so, his biggest contender was another guy from an Ivy League school. And as they were coming into the finish line, they were neck and neck. And then at the finish line, against the Harvard resentment of Coach Robert Lawson (*Lawson Robertson*), my father won. And all the reporters from the Philadelphia papers, they came running up to him and they said, "Who are you? Where did you come from? What's your name?"

And then they went over to coach Lawson Robertson and they said, "How come you never played this Kaufman kid before?"

And he looked at them. He stared at them and then he stammered out a bold-faced lie and he said, "Ah, he's been sick."

His excuses never got any better than the 1936 Olympics. But after that, my father, well, there were articles in the paper. I mean, the coach had to play him. There was too much pressure from the alumni, from the community. They wanted to see my father run. Now the coach never really did mentor him like the other players.

And my father said, "He never acknowledged me."

I'd like to end this story with a quote. It's a quote that my father had taken to memory and he used in his life when he was up against an obstacle or he wanted to encourage us kids. And he's... he said, "Well, I want to tell you, it's a quote by an American abolitionist. His name is William Lloyd Garrison. And my dad would laugh and say, "That guy, he was really a stubborn guy like your old dad."

My father's right. He is stubborn. He's stubborn and determined to take a nickname like Speedy given to him because he was so slow and to turn it around to be called Speedy because he was so fast. And he's stubborn and determined and patient to wait for his opportunity to run against discrimination. The quote, "I am in earnest, I will not equivocate, I will not excuse, I will not retreat a single inch and I will be heard."