

Letter to the Editor: 'Indonesia's Ban on Israeli Gymnasts: A Painful Reminder of the 1936 Summer Olympics'

By - - November 4, 2025

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I was overcome with nostalgia when reading the Oct. 31 op-ed about Indonesia's ban on Israeli gymnasts and the 1936 Summer Olympics. First, because of its historical significance. Second, because I knew Shirley Friedberg Neustein, the counselor at Camp Raleigh in 1937 who helped Gretel Bergmann when she fled the hostile Nazi regime that had excluded her from the 1936 Summer Olympics.

Shirley was affectionately known to me, and to many other abused (by spouses, relatives and/or courts) mothers, as "Grandma Shirley." As a Brooklyn rabbi's wife, Shirley assisted her husband in running a "safehouse" of sorts, where battered mothers who were going through nightmarish family court proceedings could bring their court papers and openly discuss the dangers they were facing in the American judicial system. I can envision the warm and caring Shirley counseling Gretel, just as she would later counsel countless Jewish mothers, and those of different religions, who were downtrodden and demoralized by the biased family courts. Kudos to Shirley for helping this young gymnast fleeing the perils of Nazi Germany.

-Michelle Etlin, Pikesville