

ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW
CHARLOTTE REMENYIK
APRIL 13, 2001

- Q. This is Raimund Goerler on April 13, 2001 and I'm interviewing Charlotte Remenyik for the OSU Archives Oral History Program. And the interview is taking place in the conference room of the Ohio State University Archives. Ms. Remenyik, would you mind stating your day and month and year of birth for the record, please?
- A. Chronologically my age is 66, and I was born September 5, 1934.
- Q. Ms. Remenyik, I'd like to begin by asking you about your early life in Hungary and the factors and people that influenced you in your career in fencing.
- A. I guess I can say about my early life that I was born at the wrong time in the wrong place, considering that the second World War was coming. And in the wrong family. My family background is upper middle class and that would have bad consequences later. I was an only child. My father died when I was five months old. My mother remarried. My stepfather died when I was four. I don't have any memory of either one of them. My cousins, who took the place of siblings I guess, there were seven of us, I was the youngest, and there were five boys and two girls. All the boys went to military high schools and to what would be the equivalent of West Point. For them, fencing was a required subject, a required activity, I shouldn't say subject, whether they like it or not. I think some of them didn't like it. It was very militaristic, lots of drills and it was something which they did just like boot camp, you have to do a lot of things which you don't seem to like, but you have to do them. During school holidays – Easter,

Christmas, summer – we all gathered at my grandmother’s house and sometimes the boys started fencing with each other. And as a typical younger child, I was always getting in the way, and I wanted to pick up their saber and do the same thing. And my older male cousins told me “Get away from here. You are a girl and besides you are too young, so don’t even bother us.” I think that’s what definitely influenced me to want to fence even more.

In 1945, the Russians had occupied Hungary, the second World War ended, and we ended up on the wrong side of the peace treaty. Meaning that Hungary was given to the Russians. That changed life drastically. During the war, we had shortages of food, bombings and air-raids, but life until 1945 was pretty good for me. It started when I was declared the enemy of the state because of my birth, because of my family. And I got it from both sides. We lost all the good things for which the consequence was to be enemy of the state. My uncle lost his land holdings where I always spent my summers during the school holidays. My grandparents died during the siege. But my uncle was taken, he was supposed to be a prisoner of war, but he was too old to actually be in the war, he was just taken and never heard of afterwards. And this went on all around. You would hear of friends who disappeared and people who were kicked out of their apartments and obviously the servants all left in ’44. It was a big change to say the least.

The way I got interested in fencing the second time was that in junior high I had a teacher by the name of Marjorne, who was on the Hungarian selected team for fencing. If you are a woman who achieved any kind of importance, you

usually keep your maiden even if you are married. So do you want me to go with her maiden name?

Q. Yes, if that's the correct name.

A. That's what she used when she was competing. Horvath and her first name was Kato. She taught me geography and history because she was a teacher by profession. Her teacher's salary didn't cover expenses. Her husband was a prisoner of war in Russia somewhere. So she started to teach some of us who were interested after class how to fence, which was theoretically illegal but it was logical and it happened. This went on for several months until somebody reported her to the authorities that she was teaching fencing, which would make her lose her amateur status and was ordered to stop. There are rules and you are not allowed to do that. But by then I was interested enough and I reached a certain level of proficiency, that she found a place for me to continue when she was not allowed to do it anymore. And this is how I got to my coach whose name was Szabo and his first name is Laszlo. He was an excellent coach and he taught in the club for university students. Now the system of sports and teaching skills is entirely different from what you are used to here. Certain sports like fencing are not divided up – this is high school fencing, this is collegiate fencing and this is every other fencing. They merge. Even though the club was originally for university students, at the engineering school, it was all right to join if you were not a student at this university.

Q. Were you a student at the university?

A. I was still in high school. But I was able to join; there was not so much of a separation of different age groups. Actually, I think that's an excellent way to do it because the experienced older fencers are able to work with the younger ones. You have more opponents, different skilled people to fence against, rather than separating it entirely and allowing you to fence only with fellow high school students who don't know any more than you do. So in that sense it's a much better system, I think. I have to say that if I would have lived in a Western European country, which didn't have the Communist system, I would probably not have been quite so determined to do the utmost in fencing. This was one thing which I had to understand much later when I came to the states and I realized that for them, my students, it was not a matter of life and death. It was recreation. During the Communist years, I'm talking about from 1949 until actually 1956, if you were enemy of the state, there were very few things which made you an okay person. Being outstanding in any sport was one of them. If you had the stigma, you were an "undesirable" person, but you were able to jump higher than anybody, you held the world record in swimming or if you were a skilled fencer, then they sort of looked the other way. This was the only "salvation." I suppose if you were an older person and you had, I don't know, an invention in physics or if you were a math professor second to none or somebody like this, then okay. But otherwise ...

Q. Did athletic talent yield some benefits to lifestyle?

A. Oh indeed, Oh definitely. I would compare it to the professional football player versus the average guy. Plus, it was forgiven that your father was a land owner

and your grandfather was a count. This was the reason why in 1948, the very first Olympics which were held after the second World War in London, the Hungarian saber team won the team event and Aladar Gerevich, the individual gold medal. That was almost unheard of because the “old guard,” the team members who were fencing on that team, were in their 40s, as far as fencing is concerned, they were too old. Under normal circumstances, they would have long put their saber in the corner and would have done something else. But they didn’t because of this reason. They were all military officers with all kinds of “nasty” backgrounds like money in the family and influential relatives. So they were competing, and I mean they were working like a dog, well after the time when normally you would stop and concentrate on your job.

Now let me tell you actually this is not new to people to who know sports, after second World War behind the Iron Curtain every athlete was a professional. And I don’t care if you were a weight lifter, a swimmer, a fencer, or a soccer player. You would have been declared a professional if living in the west, because it’s true that theoretically you had a job and you even had an office or you were having a place of work and occasionally you showed up, but that was very secondary. Your job was to train, train and train some more. This is why Laszlo Papp won the weight class he was in. He was an Olympic champion in 1948 in boxing, I forgot which weight class, but he was very old to compete like this. Kovacs Pal, who won the world championship in 1953, was 49 years old, but he didn’t dare stop competing because he didn’t want to be taken during the night to

somewhere in the countryside to work on the fields. He was a military officer before and that was hanging over his head like the proverbial sword.

This is why what they called the old boys' team won in 1948 in London, beating younger, much younger Italian and French fencers. They had the experience and come hell or high water, they had to win. Some of them had been through the war. Some of them have been through prisoner-of-war camps. Some of them had been injured. Takacs Karoly who was the individual Olympic champion in pistol shooting in 1948, was a member of the winning team in 1938 with his right hand, but during the war his right arm was torn and then he became an Olympic champion with his left hand. These were the kind of people we young fencers could look up to and did. So even if your knees were hurting and even if you were tired and you couldn't even stand it anymore, you went and practiced like three, four, five hours a day. Because for an older athlete to take the day off is dangerous, so he didn't dare stop, he knew what happened to fellow officers, to family members, to neighbors. So you hang on to it as long as you could. Ilona Elek won the individual Olympic championship in 1936. In 1940, there were no Olympic games. In 1944, of course there were not. And in 1948, she won again, which is a 12 year span. I mean she competed at home but no international competition.

Q. Who is that individual again? Could you spell it?

A. Ilona Elek. So I started going to this club and I became the pupil of Coach Szabo.

Q. Coach Laszlo Szabo, he was the one who won the Olympics?

A. No, no. He was a coach. I don't think he competed in his younger years. So we were in some ways resembling the Roman gladiators who had two choices, win or being eaten by the lions. I had early successes. I was fencing against the young Polish team, they had the top team and then they were calling it the young up and coming team. I competed against the Czech selected team in 1953. I competed in the world championships for under-20 [years old] fencers in 1955. I competed during those years, every possible competition I could in Hungary. I fenced in the Hungarian championships, and I can't resist telling you that in 1954, the Russian fencing team came to Budapest to train. And Hungarian coaches had orders from above that you are going to teach them how to fence or else. They were not anywhere near what you would call international standards at the time, but they were in training camp for three months, four months, six months, you know, whatever. And they worked like a machine! I have never seen people work like those Russian fencers. Like a machine. They would be there in the morning, in the afternoon. The outstanding coaches had to give them lessons and as I say, it was made very clear that you have to do it honestly or else. And I remember several coaches crying under the mask while giving lessons. These Russians were allowed to fence in the Hungarian championship and in those days the electric scoring system was not in existence yet. So judging was by the human eye, and the possibility for cheating was limitless. It's just like diving. I don't care what the diver does. If I say I'm not giving more than 6.8, then that's that. I had several very good seasons where I was competing and I remember the Russian woman. The way she got into the final and not me, it was shameless. Here are two fencers

and there are four judges. And the two judges are watching this fencer and these two are watching that fencer. And I beat that woman if not five times, at least six times. So clearly that even the Russian judge said yes and the Hungarian said no. I remember a fencer who would take his saber and whack the guy on the head. Then held it there so the stupid judge could see, looked at him. Then hit him again. Then parrying his riposte hit him again. And he still didn't get the point.

Q. So the Hungarian judges were afraid to offend the Russians?

A. Yes, because the Russians had the upper hand. In other words, you had a definite feeling that it doesn't matter what you do. The results have been already decided. If you were the wrong person ... I remember in high school it was very clear to me that I will not be allowed to attend the university, even if I get straight A's I would recite my lessons perfectly and the teacher would say "Well, considering that you are enemy of the state, this is barely passing."

Q. When you say enemy of the state, this was a formal designation and it followed you in what way? You had papers marked or was it just generally accepted that you were on a list of people who were not to be favored?

A. Well, the Communist government was very poor at most things except one. They were excellent in keeping tabs on everybody. They knew from day one who you were, who your parents were, what your father did before and after the war, everything. My maiden name is spelled Ghimessy. And if you are a European and you look at it, you immediately know. She wasn't born in the slums. My cousin's little boy, [my cousin] had to work after the war, even though she was very well-to-do before, so she had to take her son to the nursery, to the day care center over

at the factory where she worked. The poor kid almost starved because personnel knew that he was a son of a former military officer and consistently “forgot” to feed him. This is why I get very upset when people tell me they have been discriminated against. Don’t tell me.

Q. You’ve been there.

A. Yes. This went on until 1956. I have to say my last season in Hungary was very poor. I didn’t get selected to the ’56 Olympic games. I had several injuries and you see it was like, even if you were injured, you had to keep practicing, because you were afraid that the others will get ahead of you. On the other hand, the injury didn’t have time to heal. And it was a vicious circle. In fencing, there is a landing on the floor, very hard on your heel, and I had inflammation of the bone. And the injury itself healed, but you had the psychological block when something hurts you don’t want to do it. And you hold back just a tiny fraction of the second, but that was enough for me to be slowed down and my attacks to be parried. I didn’t have a good year in ’55-56. Then, the Hungarian uprising came in ’56, which was during the Olympic games. The team was already in Melbourne, Australia, and there was fighting going on in the streets of Budapest. In the meantime, my future husband was released from political prison where he spent seven years. And we met and when the fighting broke off in Budapest, there was a certain time for about three or four months when the Iron Curtain, the border closing ... you know Hungary has a border with Austria and it was considered the west. You couldn’t cross the border. There were land mines, barbed wire, guards. I had a classmate whose home was about 15 kilometers from the border and she needed a special

permit to go home, proving that she has a good reason to be that near the border. So the border was absolute. And it was closed, but during the fighting, the central government was very shaken and the border was unguarded. This is how the 200,000 refugees left. Two of us were amongst them. Actually, we left with my future brother-in-law and his wife and his two children. We crossed the border on foot at night. That was October 30, 1956.

Q. So the border was left unguarded because of the uprising?

A. Yes. You could make it. It was hit or miss because there were some people shot. But there were holes in the “curtain,” and if you knew where you were going, then ...

Q. So you left Hungary because of the lack of opportunity for you in the Communist regime?

A. Exactly.

Q. And your family background, which made you enemy of the state. And your fencing career seemed to be quite limited because of the discrimination against the Hungarian fencers in competition with Russians, for example.

A. Well, the Russians, of course they entered international competitions also. And sometimes the Hungarians won it; sometimes the Russians won. But it was a very tough life and you always had this family background hanging over your head. Well, what if I’m no longer going to have the desired level of skills and strength to go on?

Q. So, your fencing career resumes at Northwestern.

A. Actually, there's a big gap. First of all, when we came to the United States in December 1956, I'm sure you can appreciate that we didn't speak any English, we didn't know anybody. We were just two of the refugees. As you know, there is no such thing as subsidizing a professional fencer here. My husband got a job in Chicago in a factory and I also worked in the same factory for a while. Later I advanced to the office because I knew how to add, subtract, multiply and divide. I did payroll. Didn't need to speak a lot of English. I was good at numbers, so I could do that. Chicago was like outer Siberia as far as fencing was concerned. There was minimal, whatever it was and very low quality. I could not afford to travel far to compete in semi-tough competitions. I didn't have a coach. I didn't have the money to travel. I didn't have time to travel. I would say that from '56 to '66, whatever I did fencing-wise, was nothing compared to what I was used to. You see, if you are a long-distance runner, you would possibly find a track field and run and run and run. If you are a fencer, there's no way you can improve your game by yourself. You need very tough opponents whom you would compete against. And there were none in Chicago. I competed in the local competitions. I won the Chicagoland Open six times, but that meant nothing, because it was like fencing three of the janitors back in Hungary. I competed in local competitions, but heavens I remember driving 1 ½ hours to find out that aside from me there were three other girls who want to fence. And I was used to competitions of 60 or more. And obviously I got terribly out of shape. In the meantime, my daughter was born in '63, my son was born in '65. I had two stillborn babies before that

and all kinds of health problems. So I could say honestly that from '56 until late '60 it was a dead period.

The reason I got interested in coaching was because a) I saw the dying need for it and b) by then you can figure out my age, my competing years were numbered. You see, one of the reasons why fencing is not a sport of high caliber in the United States is because if you are a person who by whatever means you got interested in fencing, after your competing years are over and if you decided to become a fencing coach, there is no school where you could go to learn how to become a fencing coach. In Hungary, the University of Physical Education has a department which after two years, specializes to turn out fencing coaches. Before the war, I understand the military had some kind of a school to teach coaching. In the United States none. There are two things against it. Number one, the fencers who were top competitors were usually lawyers, doctors, accountants, people of the upper middle class. They considered fencing a great sport, but they could make a very good living being doctors, lawyers, and accountants. It's not like the football player who, after his competing years are gone, will probably start coaching. That was one big drawback. The other one is that there is no school where you could go to become a fencing coach. And being such a huge country, it's very localized. Up until the '70s, there were fencing centers, if you want to call them that, in New York City and surrounding areas and in California. But in the Midwest there was a big vast emptiness.

Q. Before we get onto the subject of fencing in the United States in more detail, can you give me a sense of the contrast between learning, or is there a contrast between learning fencing in Europe and the United States?

A. Oh yeah, there are traditions in Europe passed on either in the military or in fencing salles, as they were called. Very good coaches would congregate and they would establish a school of fencing. In the U.S. the New York Athletic club would come close to this but one for how big a country? This is the first country I have ever seen where kids would pick up a weapon without any instruction, seeing Zorro on the television, or having some idea and start poking at each other. And then eventually some resemblance of fencing would develop with no coaching. I had fencers coming, both at Northwestern and here at Ohio State, who would proudly walk in and say "I'm Joe Blow. And I was the high school champion in New Jersey." And I would think "Oh my God." Because that kid was obviously a talented athlete who enjoyed and liked fencing very much. He probably had been handed a weapon by the English teacher who was willing to stay over after school ended and supervise the kids so they won't kill each other. And eventually he beat the other kid next to him and became the champion. And now he wants to be on my team. When I had to tell him that "Look you are holding the weapon wrong. Your footwork stinks and why don't you forget everything you have done so far and I will teach you from day one?" the kid either turned around and left or was struggling with me for four years. I wished, I can't tell you how many times I wished, that the kid would have been a stark beginner. There are some places where, if you are lucky, if you happen to live

near the fencing salle and if your father or uncle or somebody got you there on time and you started off with a fencing coach rather than the P.E. instructor who doesn't know anything, then that was lucky. But it doesn't happen too often.

Q. Let's turn back to Northwestern.. How did that opportunity arise at Northwestern?

You're already in Chicago.

A. We lived in Des Plaines, which is a suburb of Chicago, so the proximity was given. And as I say, I did participate in the competitions that were around the Chicago area. There you meet other fencers and you hear about them and so on. There was a French graduate student by the name of Girald Barbottin who was working on either his Masters or Doctorate at Northwestern, I think his Doctorate. Having been a fencer for several years back in France, was he teaching fencing classes under the intramurals and recreation department at Northwestern. When he was ready to graduate, he didn't want to just drop his classes in the middle of nowhere, he was looking for someone who would take over. Now again, I want to stress, this French grad student was teaching beginner classes under recreation and intramurals. It just so happened that I graduated from Northeastern in April 1973. And that was exactly the time that Gerard was ready to go back to France. And being a brand new graduate who doesn't have a job, I took anything I could. And I took these two classes under the physical education department and I got paid \$2,000 for three quarters. It was a part-time job and I was supposed to teach beginner classes. I did and I enjoyed that. But then, from each class I finished, there were a few who were interested in learning more. And those few have joined the fencing club, a student directed and organized fencing club, where I

was just there. They didn't pay me anything for it. But these were my students from the classes. I was happy to give them lessons.

Q. This fencing club. Had this existed before your arrival as instructor?

A. Hard to say. Northwestern had some fencing back in the '40s and '50s. But there was a coach, I heard, from people at Northwestern, who died in 1956 and I'm sorry I don't even know his name. He was the last one and after his death, there was nothing until Gerard Barbottin started to teach these beginner classes. Now, when this so-called club, which was just a group of kids who wanted to learn more fencing, they asked "Where can we go?" I took them to USFA competitions, which were in the Chicago area. In other words, I could pick them up in my car and take them there in 30 minutes or so, and on Saturday they would fence.

Q. So the U.S. Fencing Association?

A. Yes. It had absolutely nothing to do with collegiate fencing. These were individuals doing it on their own.

Q. Okay, so these were sort of private clubs.

A. The U.S. Fencing Association is the governing body of all fencing in the United States, whether you are doing it in high school or in your own basement or in a club, it doesn't matter. And the fencers from Northwestern did it as individuals. Sometimes if I was lucky and if the head of the intramural and physical education department was in a good mood, he gave us \$40 for lunch. And sometimes we used the fencing equipment illegally because we were supposed to use it only for class and sometimes the fencers got their own equipment and we begged, borrowed and used each other's. This is how it started and then after about, let's

see I started the fall of '73. It was in '76 when by sheer accident I got hold of papers announcing that there is a women's team competition hosted by the N.I.W.F.A., which stands for the National Intercollegiate Women's Fencing Association. And this was in Virginia. We wanted to go to that because by then I was fortunate enough to have two girls as freshman at Northwestern who had some fencing in high school. I asked for some funds from the intramural department, and we went to Virginia and begged, borrowed and stole some equipment from here, there and everywhere. And ended up 12th out of 30 teams.

Q. So you actually competed?

A. No, I didn't but the girls ...

Q. The students competed. So they were more than observers. They actually were participants in this event in Virginia.

A. Yes, yes, yes. They entered as the Northwestern University fencing team for women. There were four of them. We had no substitute. And we ended 12th out of 30 teams. The girls were all very happy and proud and we went home and I called the Daily Northwestern, what is equivalent of the The Lantern, and they said "Oh really, that's nice." But then in '76, competing in USFA competitions I learned that Madison, Wisconsin, had a team. And the University of Illinois in Champaign had a team. And there was some fencing at Purdue and they were going to hold something called a Big Ten conference championship. And of course Ohio State is a member of the Big Ten Conference, had both men's and women's teams. So we were going to have a Big Ten [competition] at Madison, Wisconsin. You have to understand I am from Europe and I didn't know anything

about eligibility rules and Big Ten certification and the Registrar being involved in this. It was like somebody walking into the jungle in sandals and a T-shirt. I had no clue. I didn't know. Nobody told me.

I think Tony Gillham, who was the coach at Madison at that time, wanted to have more teams, so he could show that there is really a Big Ten Conference in fencing. And the fact that we were not varsity but a club didn't matter then. I entered with my women and my men. My women's team won it, and the men's team did decent considering how beginners they were. There were all kinds of problems. There was a snow storm and there was no electricity the night before and we didn't know if we can hold the competition on Saturday. And Saturday morning, before we lined up for the opening ceremonies, I am called to the office and there is a phone call for me. And they say "This is the Registrar from Northwestern. What are you doing there?" I said "Excuse me, what do you mean?" He says "Your fencers are not certified to compete." I said "What's that?" There were problems because some of my fencers were in the six-year med program. Northwestern has a six-year med program. Somebody thought that they were graduate students because they were in med school, but they were not. They were in their first and second year. They had not been grad students. Well, we tried to sort of sort this out on the phone ten minutes before the competition. And the bottom line was, Tony Gillham who wanted to show numbers to his athletic director, said "I will let you compete." So we did.

Q. Gillam is spelled.

A. Gillham.

Q. Thank you.

A. We borrowed the warm-up suits from the swim team on a one-on-one basis. In other words, my fencers knew somebody on the swim team and they were already done with their season. “Would you lend us your purple warmup suits?” And they did. So then I kept trying to secure more funds and more possibilities to travel to Big Ten competitions and so on. It was like trying to hit your head against a rock. They said “No, of course not. No.” But I kept bugging them and the fencers went to somebody, the dean of the students, I think and argued for the team. But anyway, John Pont was the football coach and I can’t remember who was the basketball coach. That was a time the Northwestern Athletic Department and probably everybody would like to forget. The football team lost everything. I think they lost their shoes and the ball. They couldn’t fill the stadium in Evanston because they were so bad. I think they were just not doing anything and everybody was hungry for any good news, any win. Then what happened was, there was a basketball game at Northwestern, which of course Northwestern lost. Somebody in the Athletic Department found out that my girls won the Big Ten.

Q. This was at Madison?

A. Yes. I’m sad to say Madison, Wisconsin, no longer has a fencing program. At half time they announced that the Northwestern University women’s fencing team won the Big Ten. The students went wild. They started screaming and throwing stuff on the field and yelled “Hire Remenyik for the football team and punt Pont.” Now you can imagine how that endeared me to the Athletic Department. When we came back they said we really had no business being there and I said “Maybe,

but the women's team is Big Ten champion." That was in '76. Then we struggled around for another year in '77. And you see, my fencers were pretty good individually. I remember a girl, Lee Mikus, who almost made the American team for the under-20 fencers. There were several fencers who, not knowing the field and not knowing the opponent, did excellently. When other coaches asked, "Where did you recruit them?" I said "Are you kidding? These are just students. I got them out of the beginner class." I don't think they believed me.

I had one, Mike Hopkins, how can I forget him? He was a Rhodes Scholar. He had big hair and he was very intelligent and very lazy. What he thought was fencing was fun. And he would come once in a while but didn't come to practice regularly. And you know, in fencing, in collegiate competitions, at least at that time, even in Big Ten, time outs were allowed if you saw that your fencer is just not doing as well as he is supposed to, then you were able to say "Excuse me, time out" and walk on the strip and talk to them. That either helped or it didn't but at least you tried. But this fencer had such a quick mind, I have never had anybody like that. I would tell him what to do, you know having the experience, I could figure out the opponent's game, and I would whisper in his ear like "Mike, do this and do that." And Mike did it. He was such a talent. It's a sin that he didn't, I don't think he's doing any kind of sport. He would beat people who were established fencers in the collegiate circle. And nobody believed me that he doesn't know what he's doing.

Q. He knew how to listen?

- A. Yes. But then he got a Rhodes Scholarship and he went to Europe. I had another fencer who was the runner-up, and he got as a consolation prize a year in Germany. So two of my reasonably good fencers went in the same year.
- Q. You were doing all of this on a part-time basis, right?
- A. Yes. And I also did day-to-day subbing in the Chicago Public Schools in the morning. It was so good to go to Northwestern after this, I can tell you. Yes, I was supposed to be there three times a week from 2:00-4:00.
- Q. I'm sure you put in many more hours than that.
- A. Yes, my first husband was very unhappy about it too.
- Q. But Northwestern was at a low point in their athletics. So there did not appear to be a future at Northwestern?
- A. None. I could have stayed doing the same thing for maybe \$3,000 instead of \$2,000. But in the meantime, we did see at the Big Ten and other competitions, the Ohio State team. My women sort of erased them like 14-2, beat the heck out of them. And my predecessor, Kit Boesch, who was the fencing coach here at Ohio State at that time, went home and always told Ms. [Phyllis] Bailey, who was the Athletic Director for Women, "Sure we lost to Northwestern, but Charlotte Remenyik is there."
- Q. So your team had a reputation for excellence. You have a meet named after you at Northwestern. How and when did that come about?
- A. After I left. That was not at the time. That was their way of saying thank you. After I came to Ohio State, one of the former fencers I coached, Lawrence Schiller, he took over. He's still the coach and it was his idea. So the very first

Remenyik Open, I wasn't even able to attend with the Ohio State team because, before I was hired, the schedule was already put together for that year, and I couldn't change it. But then after that, I took my fencers every year.

Q. Okay.

A. This competition is growing every year, by now it's the biggest in the Midwest.

Q. There was an opening at Ohio State in 1978?

A. Yes. Kit Boesch decided to leave for whatever reason, and she suggested to Ms. Bailey that I should be approached because she knew what I had at Northwestern is not even a job. I had been approached. By that time I was doing three different things concurrently. I was teaching at Northwestern for this ridiculous amount of money. I was teaching beginner classes of fencing at Triton College. That's a junior college in River Grove, Illinois. And I was coaching again on a part-time basis at the University of Chicago Circle. They had some kind of a team where the coach was writing her doctorate and she went to Europe for a year. During that time I took over.

Q. This was where?

A. University of Illinois Chicago Circle. It's an inner-city campus. But after that one year she came back, it was her job, I just did it for that year she was having a sabbatical. I have a degree in physical education. I could teach physical education K through 12. And I had applied for honest to goodness paying jobs around the Chicago area. At that time, there was an oversupply of teachers. This is why I was just subbing in the Chicago Public Schools. Which paid well considering that I got \$2,000 for Northwestern and they paid \$45 a day if you made it there before

10:00, if you were brave enough to go there. I was working almost time and a half and getting paid less than half in all cases. So it was really not...

Q. Losing all this time traveling from job to job.

A. Exactly. I just had to remember what day of the week it was. If it's Monday I have to go to Circle. If it's Tuesday and Thursday I have to go to Northwestern. On the weekends, there were always competitions. And in the mornings I went to sub in the Chicago Schools if they called me. That was obviously too much work and not enough money. So when Kit decided to leave, she recommended me. And she wrote me a letter. OSU paid for my airfare to come here to have an interview. And I came and talked to Ms. Bailey and I was making, with the three jobs, about \$8,000 a year. This was '77-'78. We had the interview and she told me what my duties would be. She said they will pay me \$15,000 a year. I must have made some kind of face because she assured me that obviously every year I'm going to get a raise. I was just stunned.

Q. How was Ohio State's fencing program before you got here? You said your team [at Northwestern] regularly beat them.

A. [The record was] 14, 15 to 1. Ohio State was much better funded and equipped, but they had no clue what's going on. When I came in '78 there was a men's coach and a women's coach, and I replaced the women's coach. The men were an entirely separate team with separate coaching, separate everything. Just like there is a men's swimming team and the women's swimming team.

- Q. What did you find when you arrived in the way of ... I would like to get a sense of the progression or development of equipment, facilities, support basically, for fencing.
- A. Compared to Northwestern this was like paradise. Because when I talked to Ms. Bailey, she actually took me seriously. She didn't say, well they didn't say that at Northwestern either but you could sense, "Why is this woman in here, why is she bothering us?" The facilities were not great, but then again compared to Northwestern, it was better. At Northwestern, we had a small upstairs room, which was hotter than hell as soon as the warm weather started and it was cold during the winter and a few other things. The floor was slippery and there was not enough room. There was literally not enough room for the fencers to work out, which was my fault because why did I develop so many, right? So during the first two years [at Ohio State] I thought I am in paradise because we actually got money for equipment, actually had an office. Even if it was one I had to share with two other coaches, but I had a desk. Those were hectic times because God only knows why they waited to hire me until August 28, even though they knew in April that Kit Boesch was leaving. I don't know. It always happens. My children had started the school year in Des Plaines already. So I was commuting back and forth. My family was in Illinois, I was already here. I lived with the basketball and volleyball coaches who were kind enough to give me a spare bedroom. We were trying to sell our house and I flew home for the weekends. But my children already had their plans, you know being teenagers. So I ended up

going to the fencing competition, seeing the Northwestern fencers who all said “Why don’t you come back?”

Finally by December, we sold the house and then the whole family moved to Columbus. My husband was out a job for several months. By that time the marriage was falling apart anyway. My children had to cope with new schools and new everything. The first year was certainly hectic this way. But as far as fencing, I inherited a team from my predecessor where two of the girls had scholarships. They were actually, I think they were partial scholarships. But you know, after Northwestern this was something unbelievable because I knew that if I can offer somebody a scholarship, I can bring in better talent. And if I keep after them for a year or two, they will certainly do much better. So the first two years I had only the women’s team. I already sensed that this was something entirely different because the men’s coach was unwilling to travel with the team when the team went, even though we went to the same competition, at the same time and the same gym. He was unwilling to let his fencers practice with my girls. As a matter of fact, there was one kid who kind of liked Janet, I think, and he came in after practice to fence with the girls. And when this came to light, he was chewed out terribly. Janet was left-handed and I think they had nobody left-handed on the men’s team. The fencer just wanted to practice.

Q. Janet’s last name?

A. Gearty. So that was not very good but I figured what the heck? And then the coach was trying to tell me what to do and what not to do. I also taught beginning fencing classes. In the afternoon I worked with the team, but in the morning I had

two fencing classes under the Physical Education Department. The men's coach also taught fencing classes. And he wrote me a nasty memo about how the foils are not bent the right way and so on. He was wrong, of course. He didn't know what he was doing. And I wrote him a note, which I don't think he was very happy about. But I said, "Look, fellow, I know more about this than you do and besides, do what you want with your classes, don't tell me what to do with mine." He didn't like that.

So the first few years, the girls were doing better and better every year. But then in 1980, I think [Men's Fencing Coach Charles] Simonian was sort of asked to give up his coaching.

Q. Okay.

A. He didn't get along with the Athletic Department for obvious reasons. His philosophy was, I don't know. Then I was asked to coach the men's team. Ms. Bailey knew that at Northwestern I had men and women together. I think she knew that in most other universities there is the same coach, and [the two teams] practice together, they travel together, and they are considered one team. Well, I guess the results are reported separately, but they are really one team. In Europe you never segregate the men from the women in clubs. The competitions are separate. But it's just like, if you are a tennis player and I am a tennis player, we can certainly practice together. You are going to compete against the guys and I am going to compete against the girls. But that was always, from day one, strange to me this separation by the sexes. It made no sense whatsoever. Ohio State was the only school, not only in the Big Ten, but anywhere, to do that.

Q. Any sense of why that happened? You would think that would be a budgetary issue as well. You're paying two coaches when most institutions only have one.

A. Well, I think it went back to before Title IX. Women's fencing teams started much later than the men. The men had a fencing team of sort, some years better, some years worse, since 1942. The first time the women had a fencing team was in, I want to say the early '70s, Title IX was in 1972, correct?

Q. I think it was later than that. It was in the '70s.

A. So, fencing was part of the women's athletic struggle of becoming something more than just an ornament to the men. And this was not only fencing, I think it was in other sports also. My predecessor, Kit Boesch, was coaching three teams. The fencing team, the track team, and I want to say volleyball but I may be wrong. I know she coached three teams. So obviously she couldn't have been an expert in everything. And it sort of evolved from, I'm not sure how the early years of women's athletics were at Ohio State, but it was step by step, gradually being more and more supported. The girls didn't have to practice in the hallway when the guys had the gym and they were allowed to use the drinking fountains and so on.

Q. So you're teaching men and women was really quite a logical scenario, not revolutionary, but what other institutions had been doing for some time.

A. As far as that goes, it was certainly logical and nothing revolutionary but try to tell that to Simonian. To him that was terrible, but as far as I was concerned ... and I think somebody told me the reason I got the job was two things: Number one, I was already here and I think I knew what I was doing. The number two

reason was that Ms. Bailey, who was in charge of women's athletics, was trying to hire female coaches for female teams. And she had some good candidates and at the last minute they changed their minds and stayed where they were and used Ohio State as "Look either pay me so much or I'm going to go to Ohio State because they offered me so much." And she was left in this position with several teams and had to hire male coaches at the last minute. I know Larry Cox, who was coaching the women's gymnastics team, came like this. The volleyball coach was a man for a long time, I don't know who is coaching now. But I was sort of a balance in Ms. Bailey's mind that, yes, that happened, but look there is a female coach coaching the men's team. That I think was very revolutionary at Ohio State. I don't believe there is any other coach in any other sport, a female coach coaching a men's team. As far as fencing was concerned, I don't think it was very revolutionary. As I say, from day one in Europe, we always fenced together and were not segregated.

Q. The coaches tend to be men.

A. Yes, that is true. That is very true.

Q. You mentioned Title IX. What kind of an impact did Title IX have upon fencing at OSU? Or did it?

A. I'm sure it did. I believe Title IX was enacted before I got here because I remember hearing about it at Northwestern. It was sort of a like a rumor that we were supposed to be getting equal funding and everybody had a good laugh over that. So at Northwestern it took quite a while to get it implemented and I'm sure at Ohio State it was a gradual process also. But Title IX, I think you are right, I

think it was in 1972, and you see I got there in '78. So it was already in place. It was just gradually getting ...

Q. I know it came before 1978.

A. I think that I heard they were allowing the same per diem for all athletes. If the men's basketball team got \$25 a day for food, then after a while the women's basketball team was allowed the same amount for food per day. And they didn't have to put four girls in the same room, they were to have just two girls per room. Trying to flatten the playing field.

Q. Did you get more scholarships?

A. For the women I didn't get more scholarships immediately, but I was able to recruit better quality. The women had three scholarships until women's epee was added. You see, when I got here in '78, the women fenced only foil. The women's team kept being extended during my tenure. In 1995, women's epee was added. In '95, the NCAA held a women's epee championship the first year. As sort of a dry run I think, we had it in '94 and '93 in the dual meets, but their records were kept separate.

B. Originally it was only foil?

A. Yes. I left in '99, and 2000 was the first school year when women's saber was added. By now the women's team is same as the men's. I got an extra scholarship when women's epee was added. I believe, but I'm not sure, that for women's saber there is one also. You see, if you have more fencers, then obviously more scholarships are needed.

Q. So your teams grew because of the opportunities arising with different kinds of

fencing?

A. Different weapons, yes.

Q. So Title IX was then officially providing that incentive for growth.

A. Oh absolutely. I think Title IX was something which had to happen. Otherwise, we would still be in the dark ages. But for a long time women were discouraged from being athletic. It was okay to be a cheerleader, but why do you want to beat the 100-meter swimming record? It's not lady-like. And you have to overcome this. I think the very same thing is that in academics you find very few women still in physics, chemistry or math compared to men. And that doesn't mean they can't do it. It was just from day one it was said "Oh you are a girl, why do you want to take this machine apart? Don't get your hands dirty and what will happen to the bows in your hair?"

Q. That really touches on the subject of recruiting. If it's difficult to find women athletes, how do you recruit or how did you recruit at OSU, especially given the fact that you had less than a handful of scholarships to offer?

A. You sound just like my old fencing colleagues who asked me what I do for a living and I say "I am a fencing coach at Ohio State," and they shake their heads and say "That's impossible." And I said "It's impossible, but I'm already doing it for ten years, fifteen years, whatever, and I have a lot of fun with it." They always said that you can't possibly develop a fencer in four years. This is true. If you are thinking of Olympic-caliber fencers, four years is not enough. Just like I can't teach you trigonometry and advanced math in six months, right? It can't be done. So my old fencing buddies from Hungary always said, "Look, it doesn't matter if

you plant corn on the north pole in rows or in clusters, it's not going to grow." I said "Yes, I know, but ..."

The reason why I was able to recruit better collegiate fencers was because I had that grapevine internationally. The girls on the team came from far, I'm thinking of Coreen Richter who was from Canada, and the Hovanyi sisters, who were from Sweden and Rita Borbely from Hungary. I told everybody I knew, in Hungary and everywhere, I'm looking for girls who are willing to come to Ohio State, get a degree for free, and fence. And Ms. Bailey didn't like that. She said "These girls are all European." I said "Look, they are better students. They are better fencers and somehow I am sorry to say, they are more mature." At least the ones who get here. And it's just easier to live with them day to day. And she said "Yeah, but if this sport is so European that we can't find anybody here, then maybe we shouldn't have fencing." Well, as you know, the hockey team, the ice hockey team and the gymnasts, they all take athletes from abroad. I was the first and when you are first in something they always ask "Why are you doing this?" Even though my recruits were always very good students and obviously very good fencers, and the fact that I had two very good ones on the team, the other three or four benefited from it because they were seeing how it should be done and they were having stronger opponents to fence against. So it was truly beneficial to the whole team. But that was, at one time it was very unusual.

We went to NCAA's with a lot of foreign names, and someone from the business office asked: "Do they have to have a difficult name in fencing?" I said "No, it just happens that way." I had a fencer whose name was Yiamouyiannis,

Zeus, but he was a native-born American. His parents were from Greece, and another named Sabharwal on the same team.

Q. Spell that.

A. Sunil Sabharwal. I wrote it on the score sheets, and the scorekeepers just blinked their eyes.. As I say, at one time it was unusual, but now it's not. They were definitely better fencers. They started younger. They had expert instruction. I think that's the main thing. If somebody comes in and starts to teach you judo, who doesn't know anything about it, but you are very interested in judo and later on you want to learn. And then you go to a true expert, and he says "Where did you learn that?"

Q. So the fencers you recruited were from Europe. They had fencing club, so they had the benefit of more formal instruction that was not available in the United States.

A. Exactly.

Q. And they just generally improved the quality of your team?

A. Very much so, yes.

Q. What do you look for, obviously if somebody comes to you who has had formal fencing training, practically a prize to you already, but what are you looking for with somebody who just has an interest? What I'm getting at is what makes a good fencer?

A. A good fencer has to be intelligent, has to have short reaction time, has to be able to concentrate very intensely for extended periods of time. And you noticed I haven't said anything about being tall or strong or have a lot of body mass.

Obviously, you have to be in good physical shape, but that's secondary. It's a mental sport. You have to be able to outthink your opponent in less time than it takes him or her to figure out what you are up to. And if you can do that, and if you are in reasonably good physical shape, you've got it made.

Q. And is it fair to say that the intelligence of your students, if you are recruiting intelligent students, intelligence is one of the characteristics that makes for a successful fencer? Did this normally relate to classroom work as well?

A. Yes. I remember one year when I went to the scholar-athletes banquet, and it was [Edward] Jennings who was the president then. And of course, he was there too. We finally had our turn and I started out at the microphone, "Ladies and gentlemen, you have to excuse me if it seems like I'm monopolizing this microphone, but my entire team is a scholar athlete." It was true. There was a year when every single girl on the team was a scholar-athlete. And my successor is learning this the hard way: there is no use recruiting someone who is not going to hack it academically. I'm not going to sit there and worry about his math exam, because if he flunks, then I can't use him next quarter. If you are a below average student in high school, what in the name of heaven is going to make you an outstanding student at Ohio State? Tell me.

Q. So they had good study skills already and because of their ability to focus, were able to concentrate their energy in the appropriate places at the appropriate times?

A. Yes. I have to admit that there were several fencers who were big names, but I didn't want them, because I knew that they were going to be more trouble than it was worth. Because fencers are a pretty small, close knit group. And you hear

about so and so. I didn't recruit people who may have had very good athletic skills, but if they were not good students, I figured (a) this kid is always going to be questionable as far as eligibility, and (b) if he thinks that the only way to show that he is macho is to go and get drunk on High Street, I didn't want him. At times that probably hurt the men's team, but I think it was still a good policy.

- Q. Let me ask you another aspect. You coached men and women, and regardless of how mentally strong students are, you're dealing with young men and young women. Was that a problem in your coaching?
- A. It depends on how you look at it. There was a year when it was a problem and I'm sure that there were students who, after hearing that the fencing team has a woman coach and you have to practice with the girls, said "I'm not going to try out for that team." And I never saw that kid, but that's okay. Maybe he was a great fellow. But if that was his attitude, he never even came up and said "I would like to join the fencing team." In the beginning, my girls were stronger fencers, better fencers than the men. I remember one instance when a member of the team saw a kid who came up and wanted to try out for the team. This team member was not stupid. He knew that he was really not a very good fencer and his position on the team is shaky. So this guy comes in and wants to try out for the team. So he says "Well, all right, why don't you fence with the girls and then if you can beat them, we will fence with you." The girls beat the heck out of this beginner, so he didn't come back. I only later learned what this guy was doing. Of course, he was pulled over and strongly discouraged from this. But I think all in all it is a healthy environment because men and women live together in the world. They work

together in different places of employment. Segregation by sex is not a good idea. It's true that men are physically stronger. They have more muscle mass and they usually have longer arms and legs and so on. Yes, the good men fencers can beat the good women fencers. But so what? They are other members of the team.

Q. You had many students in you career here. Any ones you want to particularly single out in this interview?

A. Good, bad or typical?

Q. Well, as outstanding.

A. I had outstanding members of the fencing team, not necessarily as fencers but as human beings. I had a lot of doctors, future doctors on the Northwestern team. I had outstanding fencers because if you are an absolute stark beginner when you show up in your freshman year, and you win the Big Ten in your junior year, that is outstanding. The Big Ten individual championship may not be an Olympic goal, but I think that says a lot about you. I had David Kraushar, who won the Big Ten saber championship when saber was judged by the human eye rather than by the electrical scoring machine. That immediately is much more valuable because the electric scoring machine doesn't care who you are. If you have the correct pressure on that blade, it's going to register. But try to convince an old saber fencer that this young kid indeed cut the "big name" experienced senior, and then you are getting into another story. I had Brett Briley who was an All-American in epee and he didn't know fencing existed before he took my beginner class. Kevin Smith, my future son-in-law, was All-American. He took seventh at the NCAAs in his sophomore year. Jim Clark. He was an All-American. So I had fencers who

were not supposed to be that good, being from the cornfields, but they were. I can't tell you that I had an Olympic champion on the team because again, the good fencers are usually ending up in professional careers and they start working and not compete much after their college years. My son-in-law asked me several times, "Do you want me to support your daughter?" Because I wanted him to keep fencing. He's really a very talented athlete. After he graduated he said "Look, I have to make a living. I have to support your daughter." I couldn't argue with that.

Q. No. If you were challenged to describe your coaching style, what would you say?

A. I coached very differently than I would have in Hungary. And I think the fact that I went to school here in the United States, I finished my college here in the United States, was very helpful to me, not about fencing. I don't think I learned one iota about fencing. As a matter of fact, I was teaching the fencing classes as an undergraduate. But I learned a lot about the college-age American male or female, about his thinking, his experiences, his background and so on. Let me think of an example. There was a year when I had a lot of injuries in the beginning of the year. Everybody was hurting, his knees, his back ... And we had a very good trainer in the training room. She came to me and she said "You know, coach, I see an awful lot of your athletes. A lot of your fencers." And I said "Yes, I know, what is the problem?" She said "They are not warmed up enough. They are not stretched enough." And I said "What do you mean? I have the same routine I did way back from Hungary." And she said "Yes, but these are not athletes." And she was right. These were just students with one or two exceptions. Then I redesigned

the stretching and warm-up series of exercises I did with them and true enough, the injuries went down. You have to fit the shoe to the foot, you know.

Q. Whereas in Europe you would have expected that these were people who had been focused and training in fencing for some time before they got to you?

A. No, it wouldn't necessarily mean that they would be experienced fencers. They are beginners in Europe, too. As a physical education major having taught in schools in Chicago, I'd have to say that the physical education program in European schools is far superior to the American. That kid, at age 6, is required to do gymnastics and track and field, and the kind of exercises they are doing in gym class are much better for a developing a growing child, than I'm sorry to say, in quite a few schools here. If I wanted them to line up and do a relay or anything, they looked at me like "What's wrong with you? The only thing we do is play ball." And even if you are not a fencer at all and you are not sports-minded or sports-oriented or anything, the two hours at the minimum of physical education instruction they get from age 5 to 18 [in Europe] is much better. I'm sure there are good schools in the U.S. but by and large the physical education instruction in the public schools leaves much to be desired. For example, quite often I would show up in the Chicago Public Schools, sent as a sub in physical education, and they said "Forget it, there's no gym today. You are needed in second grade in a mobile classroom." I felt like turning around and going home. But I did not.

Q. You began at Ohio State in 1978?

A. Yes.

Q. And you taught for over 20 years?

A. 21 and a half, yes.

Q. And can you say that your coaching style changed over that time?

A. Absolutely. I had to adjust my coaching style from fencer to fencer. I mean at the same time I had on the team beginners and Elena Kalkina who won the NCAA individual. Now obviously when I gave a lesson to Elena, I did different things than when I gave a lesson to my beginner, who was the number-five girl. So you had to adjust your coaching style from fencer to fencer. Fencing being an individual sport you work one on one. I had to change the warm-up and stretching routine. I tried group blade work drills, which I'm sure in Europe they would look at you like, "what?" But I needed some way to force my fencers, whether they liked it or not, to stop running and punching and do a certain amount of blade work. And being only one coach and having 20 fencers, the best way to do blade drills is to line them up in two rows and tell them exactly what to do and show them. And if it was an odd number, I joined the line too.

In 1973 or 1974 when I started at Northwestern, I'm sure I did things differently than by the time I left here in 1999. Because I learned from experience what the youngsters need today in order to get them to some level of ability to compete.

Q. Now, the Big Ten decided to drop fencing as a competitive sport.

A. As a Conference championship.

Q. Okay. Did that impact your program?

A. Oh yes, indeed. Yes, indeed. That was in '87 when they finally dropped it. If you recall, I don't know, were you at OSU then? Do you remember Rick Bay?

Q. Oh yes.

A. That's a dirty name in sports history. He had the philosophy, if the sport doesn't make money, then we should drop it. And I thought "Is he going to drop the English department because it doesn't make any money either?"

Q. How did this impact your program? The sport continued but the conference championship was dropped.

A. Well, he wanted, if you recall, he wanted to get rid of eight sports. Fencing counted for two – men's and women's – so that made it a good candidate. The others were synchronized swimming, soccer, pistol, rifle, lacrosse, and men's volleyball. He measured the sport by how many people came to watch and did it bring money or did it spend money from the athletics budget? And you know, I'm sorry to say, you run into this philosophy from time to time even after Rick Bay. Needless to say, none of us have any love left for Rick Bay. But quite often you have to ask yourself, "Are we in public entertainment or public education?" In other words, do we absolutely have to win that football game because of how much money it brings in? Or are we trying to have a positive influence on the athlete whose running on that field? And quite often I got into disagreements with administration based on the same principle. Philosophical differences with administration from time to time about just exactly what are we doing here. Because my philosophy is that sports are a tool to an end. They are not an end in themselves. You are trying to throw that basketball into the basket, but there is a hole in it and it's going to fall out anyway. So why kill yourself trying to get that basketball into it? I think the important thing is not to get the ball into the basket.

The important thing is to make positive changes in the ball player. If you look at, especially collegiate sports in that light, that we are working hard to achieve a certain result and in order to do that, we have to do this. There are certain things that athletics will teach you that cannot be taught in the classroom. I very strongly believe that. But there are some people like Rick Bay who say “The bottom line is that the fencing team is costing us money.” So this will come up from time to time.

Q. Did this decision, did this mean a lessening of financial support for fencing?

A. No, it did not. Actually, as you know, Rick Bay has left in 1987, soon after that. He did not want to just reduce the budget. What he wanted to do was eliminate all those sports entirely, which he didn't understand, didn't think it was worth, or whatever. And then use that money for the football program.

Q. So the Big Ten drops the fencing as a conference championship. But that would involve more than Ohio State.

A. Yes. You see the problem with the Big Ten was that Northwestern had a team, Ohio State had a team. When the coach retired at Illinois, they dropped the program. Purdue had always a very weak club program, which was practically non-existent. And when Tony Gillham left and they hired Jersey Ratz after a year, Wisconsin has dropped the program. So the number of schools that supported fencing got less and less and less. And the fact that the Illinois coach was very selfish and didn't train a successor for himself, unfortunately affected all the other Big Ten schools also. Because in a way you can make an argument that it's from

- all the Big Ten schools, only three have fencing, then maybe it's not worth having a conference championship.
- Q. Okay. So that was the context for what was happening and must have encouraged the athletic administration to think about reducing funding.
- A. Exactly.
- Q. But that part didn't happen because Rick Bay was not here for very long.
- A. He put his foot in his mouth too badly. I attended that athletic council meeting when he said that these sports had to be cut, blah, blah, blah. And there were the athletic council members from different disciplines, professors, and one of them, the gentleman with the handle-bar mustache, whatever his name was.
- Q. William Protheroe from astronomy.
- A. Yes. Exactly. I just couldn't remember his name, but I remembered his mustache. He asked Rick Bay if it is his job to decide, is he just asking for their collective wisdom or are they supposed to vote on this? And Rick Bay said "Well, it's an administrative decision." He's was just asking for their collective wisdom. And I could see those gentlemen sort of look at each other, and I knew that was the time when he cut his own throat. I have to say that the former fencers for Ohio State who were fencing long before I came were very nice about coming to the meeting. Dr. Gilbert gave a speech and Dr. Hunt wrote a letter and they were all very supportive.
- Q. This leads us to another major topic, namely OSU athletics administration. Certainly, fencing in terms of dollars brought in, was not a money maker.
- A. No, there is no question about that. Fencing does not make money.

Q. You've talked about Phyllis Bailey as the person who interviewed you and hired you.

A. Yes.

Q. Who were your leading supporters in the athletic administration?

A. You know, I thought the athletic department on the whole was always very supportive of me. God only knows why because I always opened my big mouth and told them things which were unpleasant to hear. I'm thinking of the discrimination suit and several other situations where they were very supportive of me. In a way I can understand their position. For example, I had a girl on the team who didn't want to come to practice or compete, but wanted her scholarship. Of course, I was very upset and I thought this is nonsense. So I went to Archie to complain, and I could feel that he thought "I wish I would have your problems."

Q. Archie Griffin?

A. Yes. He is a very nice guy. I can understand that when he had to deal with the basketball players vandalizing peoples' cars and breaking into them and being arrested for this, fights in bars, etc. I'm sure he dreaded to come in on Monday morning saying "Now what?" Who is being arrested, which OSU athlete is on the front page of the newspaper?" And then a coach shows up to complain about an athlete who doesn't want to come to practice, and to him it seems this small. To me, it didn't. But for him, he obviously had more important fires to put out. So the problem was, you see, that I had a very definite ideal of how a team should be run and how collegiate athletics should be. I think the athletic department, the administration had the same idea, but they had to deal with constant threat of suits

and publicity and people who, you know, and they were sort of trying to not rock the boat. But I didn't think that was a good idea.

Q. The sense I'm getting is that administration preferred to basically concentrate on other things as long as you had athletes and weren't getting into trouble, they were supportive.

A. Yes, I think if you look back on the 23 years professionally I had very little trouble. It's true that we are not a high-publicity sport. In other words, if a fencer does something, hopefully they don't even know he's a fencer. If it's a football player who gets into a fight in a bar, that's going to be all over the newspapers. But it is true that I always tried to stay away from troublemakers even if that meant the team got weaker, because I believed that the rotten apple, if there is one it is going to ruin the others and it doesn't work the other way around. The administration has to do an awful lot of things. I'm sure Andy Geiger had the Schottenstein Center and all these other buildings going up on his mind. It wasn't the main concern, what the fencers are doing or what they are supposed to be doing. So in a way I can understand this, but ...

Q. Your chief administrative point of contact would have been Phyllis Bailey, correct?

A. Yes. But long before Ms. Bailey retired, I was switched to Bill Myles as the associate athletic director to report to. And later on, to Archie Griffin. Remember I am three-quarters men [on the team] and only one-quarter women or something like that.

Q. Okay. We're going to talk about the 1980 lawsuit.

A. Oh yes, the lawsuit.

Q. Before we get to that, what kinds of obstacles do you think you faced within athletic administration? If there weren't any, there weren't any.

A. No, I very seldom had problems with the administration. I tried to do the Mickey Mouse stuff of form here, form there you have to fill out. But I understand why they have to do it. I'm sure there were people who thought I am too opinionated. I'm sure at times I was a pain in the you know where. But I really didn't have trouble with the administration personally, it was a conflict of philosophies. I always felt I am between the two stones. That I had pressure from here and from there, and somehow I had to be in the middle. But you do the best you can with the situation you have.

Q. You want to talk about the 1980 lawsuit?

A. Indeed. That was supposed to be racial discrimination. But I venture to say it was sex discrimination against me. Remember I took over a men's team who had a very male chauvinist coach, who was very unhappy that a woman got his job. And out of the nine guys I "inherited," six of them were seniors, which is a bad combination in any situation. I instituted a lot of changes as soon as I took over, not one of them went well. Some of it I did because I believed in them and in some cases I simply had to. The women practiced from 3:00-6:00 and the guys practiced from 3:00-5:00. After I became the coach, everybody practiced from 3:00-6:00. The men started complaining that they can't do their homework and they are tired and so on. I said, "Excuse me, how come the girls can take it and you can't?" "Well the girls are paid for it." The girls had scholarships, not all of

them, but three had scholarships. I said “What does that have to do with it?” So that didn’t go well.

Then, my philosophy was from the number of fencers I had, I had to put together the strongest team possible and even if three of the starters were freshmen. And if the fourth guy was a senior who already had been here for three years and was going to graduate, that didn’t cut any ice with me. If the freshman was better than he was, the freshman was the starter. And there was a good reason for that. Just when I took over, the NCAA selection process changed. Instead of this coach recommending that coach’s saber fencer so he would recommend your foil fencer – was the way it was. Obviously, that was not the right way to select, so the NCAA made a rule that we are going to look at your dual meet record and that’s going to be the main deciding factor. So let’s say that here is Joe who is the senior and he’s a nice guy but he’s not a very good fencer. My predecessor would always put him in against weak teams: “Let him fence.” And there was Steve who was a freshman, but was a much stronger fencer. But after all, he has time yet. Well I said “Sorry, I’m not going to put in Joe.” And this usually happened against weak teams and they figured they are going to win anyway. So I said “Sorry I’m not going to rob Steve from three easy victories because he needs that to qualify for NCAA.” I even had a meeting and I explained it to them why I am doing this and at the time it seemed like they understood it. Because it’s very logical. If you would be the coach you would do the same thing. You wouldn’t deny a fencer who has a chance to go to NCAA to lose several easy opportunities to win just because this nice guy who is going to graduate anyway would like to

have fencing time. I did that and it gave me a lot of trouble later. But I still say it was the right decision.

When I took over, as I say, there was a lot of bad blood between me and the male fencers. Every fencer or every athlete has a certain amount of loyalty to their old coach. That's always a problem when somebody new comes in. But this was heightened by the fact that before, they were absolutely forbidden to work with the girls and now they had to work with the girls. Until now, they only had two hours practice. Now they have three hours of practice. Then here is this woman who tells them that they have to do drills, which made their legs sore and it's tough. And they said "Oh well, we did that when we were freshmen." I said "I don't care if you are a grandfather. You are going to do it." And a few other things, like I told them to do certain things differently and they said "Well that's not the way we used to do it." After a certain time when they started this "how they used to do it," I started to see red. Because I'm sorry, Simonian didn't know his elbow from the bathtub. He taught certain things which were dead wrong. And while I'm trying to break the bad habits, they said "Well we didn't used to do it that way." There was more and more like this. And they always went back to him and said "Guess what she wanted us to do? Today we have to do drills!" And here was the argument.

When I was competing back in Hungary and here, women fenced only with foil. When I took over as the coach for the men's team, I had to coach saber and the epee because the men had fenced all three weapons. But when I got the job, during the summer I went to a coach in Cleveland and I took extra lessons

from him, in saber and epee, and even my background, even though it's just like you are a musician and are used to play one instrument you have to play another, that obviously is a change, but it's not impossible. They always said that I can't possibly know how to fence saber or epee and consequently how to coach saber and epee because I didn't compete in that. That's not a valid argument, certainly not on this level here. Now if I would have been named the Olympic coach for the American select team, that would probably hold some water. But in a collegiate setting, especially after Simonian who didn't understand even foil, that just made me so mad I could have strangled them. Of course, they started sabotaging things like they didn't show up on time. Then they would sit down as soon as I turned my back and a few other things. And one day I had probably had a bad day. I was going through a divorce and they started these antics again and I said "You and you, out." The only problem was those students were black. But I don't care if they are purple with red polka dots, they were doing these things for too long and they got on my nerves. I think there was also sort of like, well, she can't do it to us. After all we are black. But she did.

Q. And they filed charges?

A. Discrimination suit, yes. And the of course the NC, what do you call it, the Advancement for Colored People.

Q. NAACP.

A. That's what I was trying to say, thank you. They got into it and Hugh Hindman who was the athletic director at that time, probably got a lot of flack. But he also knew what was going on. Do you know that this coach was low enough that

before we were ready to go to a competition, he still had the key for the equipment room and he got one of the fencers to take out the points from the weapons, so we left without any working weapons? The fencers had to stay up until 2:00 a.m. before a meet to correct it.

Q. This coach who had previously coached the men's team, you had said that he was either dismissed or asked to leave. He stayed in the area?

A. He was one of the few with the so-called dual appointment. Part of his salary came from physical education; part of it was athletic department. There is no such thing anymore. But he had been at Ohio State for so long, that that was still the case. If you recall when Woody Hayes got fired, they fired him as the football coach but they couldn't fire him as the professor of physical education because he was tenured.

Q. Correct, yes.

A. This was the same thing.

Q. So the outcome of the lawsuit? Was it a lawsuit?

A. It was a lawsuit. It was thrown out of court. We had to go to Big Ten. At that time it was still a Big Ten. And on the day we were supposed to take off, we had to go to court in downtown Columbus. Because this was presented as a case of discrimination. And the judge looked at those students and said "The coach decides who is on the team and who is not on the team and I am not going to get into this. Case dismissed."

Q. That quickly?

A. At the time it did not seem quick to me. We missed our flight, which we had had the reservation on and we had to be flown by Ohio State's small planes so we would get there on time. From Don Scott. And obviously there were a lot of reporters and people asking questions and people showing up. They just sort of stuck their head into the fencing room like "Let's see this monster. What does she look like?" I was afraid that my fencers, because of all these goings on, back and forth, "Are you going to fence at Big Ten, is she going to be fired? Are we going to be completely dropped as a sport?" I was afraid that they are going to fence below their abilities because after all they are just students and they get nervous in a competition. No. Everybody outdid himself or herself without exception. We had a better record then than before and after.

Q. What happened to the two athletes who, did they just drop out of athletics entirely?

A. They were both seniors, so they were graduating that year. And they were certainly not on the fencing team. They obviously wouldn't join any other athletics.

Q. So that's how it ended?

A. Yes. Hugh Hindman was very nice to me. He supported me. He held the reporters and all those other people at bay. And they graduated and I stayed, even though they demanded that I should be fired. I think they got scholarships for grad school, but they would have gotten them anyway, being from low-income families. But both of them were seniors and they both graduated. So that was it.

Q. And that ended the matter then?

A. Well, I heard it from time to time. It had its effects but at the time I said, "I know I didn't dismiss them because they are black. I don't hold any grudges against people from any other race. 'Here I am and I can do no other.'" You can't have people disrupt the morale of the team and constantly complain and gripe because that affects the whole group. And I don't care if they are red with polka dots, this is not going to be done on my team. It's also true that out of the nine fencers I inherited from Simonian, the following year none of them came back. It was a blessing. Six of them graduated because they were seniors and the other three just disappeared. And I didn't cry a tear.

Q. I also wanted to turn some attention to your involvement with the NCAA. You were on the committee on fencing?

A. Yes.

Q. Can you talk a little bit about that?

A. Certainly. The NCAA was not hosting a championship for women until 1982. That was the first year when they were sponsoring women's sports. Not only fencing but other women's sports. This again, I think, is part of that Title IX decision back in the '70s which finally got to that point by 1982. The people in the NCAA committee were in sports administration, but I think none of them knew the first thing about fencing. At the time we had two athletic directors, two sport administration people from the NCAA and two coaches on the committee. I have been on the committee for six years because that's one of the by-laws that you can only serve two terms, three years each. The very first committee that was formed, I was one of the members. [We handled matters like] "If you have to host

a championship in a gym at a certain time, what is the best way to run a competition like this? How do you ask for the judges? What time should you start? How many strips are needed?" In other words, technical advice particular to the sport to people who didn't know. Those athletic director ladies, they didn't know. The host school's administrators didn't know either. Well, at least they had enough sense to ask from the people who do know. So that was simply technical advice to run the championship. There was a time when the women ... you know, this whole NCAA championship has gone through such development and change, that if you have someone who looked at it 20 years ago, they won't even recognize it. I am trying my best to recollect this, but I wouldn't be surprised if I missed something. First, only the men's was sponsored by the NCAA and the women had another organization sponsoring their national championship.

Q. NCAA began in the 1940s. 1942.

A. Exactly. In 1941, the first national collegiate fencing championship was hosted at Ohio State. In 1982 this was the first year when the NCAA sponsored women, but it was at a different site at a different time. And the results are counted separately. Then, they had started to host the men and women at the same site at the same time, but the results counted separately. Then, they started reducing the men's numbers and the women and men were counted together but they didn't have team or individual separate. They just had an individual competition and they gave points for the team championship. Whichever way you can figure results, I think they have tried it. So it has changed a great deal. And then of course womens epee was added and now women's saber is added and they had one

fencer per school. Then they went to individual and team separate and you have to qualify as a team and as an individual. Then they dropped the team competition because there were too many bodies and they started to come up with team ranking based on individual results. If Penn State is supposed to be the champion, that doesn't mean the Penn State team beat all the other teams. It simply means that the Penn State fencers accumulated more points through the individual competition.

Q. Oh, okay.

A. As I say, I would really be hard put to figure out a system which they haven't tried yet. The committee met once a year for three days somewhere where we had meetings and went over how this can be done. After six years my time was up. The NCAA committee was interesting, but I'm not good at sitting at meetings. Especially for a full day.

Q. Where were the meetings held?

A. Different places.

Q. Okay. We've covered a lot of ground and I'd like to get an overview, if you will, of thinking about your career in fencing, not just at Ohio State. If someone were to ask you, like I'm asking you now, what were your greatest accomplishments and your greatest disappointments, what would you say?

A. Well, my greatest disappointment was obviously that because of historical and other reasons I could not complete as long as I would have been able to otherwise. In other words, as a young girl I never dreamed to be a coach, I wanted to be a world champion. But because of all those different reasons, that was not possible.

- Q. Anything else in the negative column?
- A. Any competitor will tell you that at such and such a competition, they should have done better, they lost only by one touch, the judge did not see it, etc..
- Q. Oh okay. On the positive side, your accomplishments – there were certainly many.
- A. I think Ohio State's fencing program is a better one when I left than when I came. There is no question. The numbers will bear that out. I broke ice by being a coach for men. One thing that is very encouraging, is that my successor, Vladimir Nazlymov, is former Olympic saber champion. There is no question that he was an outstanding competitor. When they hired him I wasn't terribly happy because (a) I don't like Russians for obvious reasons: I have nothing against him personally, but you know how that goes. I still have great doubts about his administrative ability, of doing the paperwork and doing all the administrative part of running a team which each year is getting bigger and bigger. But I understand that he has a vision of making Columbus into a fencing center. He already hired two outstanding assistant coaches. You probably heard me joking that I had been replaced by two men. Well I just learned that it's not two, it's three. Two are Russians, so I guess you have to reduce 40 percent, but it's still pretty good. If that indeed is happening, then there is no question in my mind that in spite of difficulties and paperwork, if those three guys are going to stay in Columbus and start coaching, this is going to be one of the fencing centers. There is always a very real danger that, when a coach retires, that program is going to suffer. I made sure that this is not going to happen in this case. Unfortunately,

there are examples to this. Illinois is an example. Michigan State is another example. I can quote you others. But you can't be so selfish as to say "I was the greatest and nothing can come after me." That's not true.

Q. Did you have any role to play in the selection of your successor?

A. Yes. They had 25 applicants and they showed me the folder with all those applications. It's true that Vladimir was not my favorite. I wanted my coach's son who is also a fencing coach, to succeed me. But the problem is, he was still in Hungary, he still is in Hungary and I understand there are all kinds of administrative hoops you have to jump over in order to hire someone from abroad. I guess administration didn't want to do that. In a way I can understand it. So, I told Archie and Susan Henderson that if we can't have my coach's son, then Nazlymov has the best qualifications. There's no question he understands the sport. Now what kind of an administrator he is, I don't know. But that will probably sort itself out.

Q. Okay. Anything else you want to add?

A. No. I think we certainly ... I took up a lot of your time.

Q. That's what I'm here for.

A. But remember this is just a good example for me to follow when I'm doing the interviews.

Q. Well, I hope it's that. But you certainly have made a contribution to Ohio State and to fencing nationally and internationally. So this is hopefully a good documentation of that as well.

A. Well we hope so. I still have papers at home, about this much, Ohio State papers, and I haven't done much with it in the last couple of weeks. But I will and then I will give you more stuff. That's probably going to be mostly my files. And historic things like this.

Q. Well, let me then terminate the interview by thanking you for your cooperation. And we will have this transcribed and of course you will be having to sign the agreement. So let's end the tape for right now. Thank you very much.

A. You're quite welcome.