

Abel Kiviat Interview

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A member of the National Track and Field Hall Of Fame, Abel Kiviat merits inclusion in a history of America's great runners. During the years just prior to World War I he established numerous records with his distinctive bow-legged gait. No other athlete has ever simultaneously held the world indoor records in the 600-yard, 1,000-yard, and one-mile runs. He lowered the world outdoor record in the 1500 meter run on three successive occasions in 1912. At the 1911, 1912, and 1914 Outdoor Nationals Kiviat won the one-mile title and was the United States cross country champion in 1913. An Olympic medalist in 1912, Kiviat, despite his years, retains a pungent personality.

"I forgot to mention one thing when we were talking yesterday. At all interviews, I have to be fed, others all do. Pick me up, feed me and bring me home. I hope you agree or otherwise, forget your interview." Those instructions, written in a clear and bold hand, arrived in the first letter I received from Abel R. Kiviat. I would find the man much like his directive-direct, humorous, somewhat contentious, detailed, warm, and incredibly energetic for a man in his 90's.

On November 2, 1985, I drove to the Cedar Glen West Retirement community in Lakehurst, New Jersey. Since the death of his second wife in 1981, Abel Kiviat lives alone. He is a small man, constantly in motion, a curious mixture of discretion and strong opinion, and generally upbeat. His major complaint is spending too much time by himself. A social individual, he's not used to living alone. Yet Kiviat is not isolated. Daily contact with friends at a local nutrition center where he eats his lunch, visits from family, and renewed attention from the media brighten his life.

It is evident that Abel Kiviat has enjoyed his long life. Talking with him was an experience I genuinely enjoyed. This small mustachioed man is so very human. I spent seven and a half hours with him, and during that time he offered me cough drops, a pen, a Jewish calendar, and a place to sleep for the night. The interview itself was very physical. Kiviat used his hands to emphasize points. He got up several times to show and explain some of the articles and trophies that dominate his living room. At one point he even ran in place with the Olympic torch he had used the year before. And we finished the day with a delightful dinner at a restaurant he picked out. He does not go to restaurants as frequently as he would like anymore. Kiviat wore an Olympic sports jacket to the restaurant, drank a scotch, and ate prodigiously. During dinner he asked to

see a photograph of my family. He remarked that my son obviously took after my wife rather than me since he was a good looking boy. He complimented me for taking his humor so well. Abel Kiviat had a dish of ice cream for dessert.

Abel Kiviat was born in 1892, four years before the revival of the modern Olympics. The early Olympics were subordinate to international expositions. At last in 1912 the Stockholm Olympics were not an adjunct to a World's Fair. This was the first Olympics where several athletes other than Americans set new records. And in this Olympics the American Indian Jim Thorpe won the decathlon and pentathlon, only to have his medals later taken away by the apostles of amateurism. This was also the Olympics in which Abel Kiviat won a silver medal in the 1500 meter run.

Abel Kiviat was twenty years old when he competed in the Stockholm Olympics. Although he was born in New York City, he was raised in a country-like atmosphere on Staten Island. Not all New York children of immigrant Jews grew up on the crowded streets of the Lower East Side. Abel Kiviat's account of his boyhood reminds us that at one time on Staten Island a boy could live both in New York City and in a semi-rural environment. Kiviat was a star basketball player in high school but did not take up track until his senior year. He quickly became an outstanding runner. In his prime he ran for the Irish-American Athletic Club. Ironically two other Jewish Olympians, Myer Prinstein and Alvah T. Meyer, also affiliated with the Irish-American Athletic Club. Unlike contemporary world class athletes, Kiviat's life was not dominated by training. He trained only once or at most twice a week.

Married twice, Kiviat saw service during World War I. For many years after he ceased competition he served as a track official. And for forty-one years he was deputy clerk for the Southern District of the Federal Court in Manhattan.

For decades Abel Kiviat lived in relative obscurity. He was rediscovered by the media on his ninetieth birthday. As America's oldest living medalist, he attracted much attention as the nation prepared for the 1984 Olympics in Los Angeles. Abel Kiviat enjoys his new status as a celebrity.

Simons: When were you born?

Kiviat: June 23, 1892 on the corner of Allen Street and Grand Street, the famous Grand Street intersection on the Lower East Side of Manhattan. When I was six months old, we moved to a little Italy on Staten Island. I spent the rest of my childhood on Staten Island.

Simons: why did your family move from the Jewish neighborhood on the Lower East Side to an Italian neighborhood on Staten Island?

Kiviat: My father found out that he didn't want to be a peddler with a pack on his back. He had too much education for that. He had studied to be a rabbi. With a little more time, he would have been a rabbi. My mother, God bless her, also knew a lot. She had gone to night school. Someone tipped my parents off about a nice little town on Staten



Fig. 1 Abel Kiviat, 1912.



Fig. 2 Abel Kiviat, 1984 © Nancy Coplon.

Island called Rosebank. We would be the only Jews there, but there was a lot of room for business. So my father moved us to Staten Island, opened up a general store, and was a success.

Simons: Do you know why your mother and father came to the United States?

Kiviat: Indeed I do. I emphasized that. Pogroms against Jews. They came to escape the killing of Jews. My parents got out of Russia, and my mother's four or five sisters followed suit.

Simons: Where in Russia did your parents come from?

Kiviat: From Bialystok, called the Paterson of Europe. It was a famous industrial center.

Simons: Why didn't your father finish his rabbinical studies?

Kiviat: My father had a short period to go in Russia. But a buddy of his, in the Russian army, warned him to get out, told him they were coming for him at the end of the week. So he grabbed his wife to be and headed for Hamburg to Liverpool to New York.

Simons: How many children did your parents have?

Kiviat: There were seven of us, one right after another. We were born between 11 and 12 months apart.

Simons: What was your childhood like?

Kiviat: Picture a Jewish boy playing with Italians and Irish, all Catholics. There was a big church at the front of my street, the famous St. Mary's Church and the St. Mary's parochial school right around the corner. We got along wonderful. I never got hurt. I never got in a fight because the other kids took care of me.

Simons: In what sort of economic circumstances did your family live?

Kiviat: My father was fairly successful in business. He had a general store. Generally business would come in. My father treated the people well. He would get anything they wanted-suit, clothes, children's things, all kinds of clothing from head to foot.

Simons: Did you and your siblings work in the store after school?

Kiviat: Most of us helped out in the store. But my father insisted upon us staying in school. Education first before full-time work.

Simons: Of the seven siblings, who was the eldest?

Kiviat: I am the oldest. The youngest born was ten to twelve years later.

Simons: Did all the siblings have their own bedroom?

Kiviat: In Rosebank we didn't have enough room. We only had a small apartment above the store. But later we moved to Stapleton, also on Staten Island. In Stapleton we had a big apartment over the store. Eventually we got a whole house with the store in the front and a garden in the back. Then we had a place for a horse, a cow, and about 300 chickens.

Simons: Did your mother work in the store also?

Kiviat: Yes. My father was on the road a lot with his horse and wagon. The wagon had a lot of shelves inside where you hang all kinds of material, even a suit. The wagon had a place for hats, a place for shoes and other things. My mother with the older children ran the store when my father was on the road.

Simons: Did your family ever take in boarders?

Kiviat: Only once. In Stapleton. The boarder was a suitor to my mother's sister Sarah. We got to know him well, and he worked across the street in the famous R & H Beer Brewery. He was with us a very short period, about five or six months. Then he broke off with my mother's sister and left. We never heard another word about him.

Simons: What type of leisure time activities, if any, did your parents pursue? Did they have time for games and sports?

Kiviat: No. My father was a great one in the yard. He'd raise a few vegetables. What we didn't eat right away he'd put in barrels. He'd pickled things. I remember him trimming the green mold. He made sauerkraut and pickles. He'd pack fruit and vegetables. He was a very handy man. Friday night the Rabbi would come around 4 o'clock just before sunset when we slaughtered the chickens. For the Sabbath my mother made seven or eight chickens because we were all big eaters. We had our own cow and had fourteen quarts of milk a day. Mother was a good baker and cook. She'd make various things with milk—cheesecakes, cream cakes, pies, challah. Anything you can think of she would bake.

Simons: When did you first develop an interest in athletics?

Kiviat: In some ways I was a country boy on Staten Island. In back of the house there were lots of woods and empty lots. We played children's games. We played what you call "hare and hounds", but in our day we called it "lost track." The gang would stay in one place, like a room where they couldn't be seen. Then the goat would go out and run some distance and hide. The idea was to find the goat.

We also played "cat," one or two "cat," using the manhole cover in the middle of the street. We hit with a broken broomstick and ran. Then eventually when we were big enough the boys and some of the girls would go out in the fields by ourselves. There were more tomboys among the girls in those days. We'd play baseball out there all day. We'd use a rock for first base, sometimes we'd use a bag of dirt for a base. We'd buy a catcher's glove for 25 cents, and that was the only glove the baseball players had. Only the catcher had a glove so I tried catching and look what happened.

Simons: What?

Kiviat: I broke my nose. There was no mask for the catcher. Later when I was older I had a glove of my own. I played a lot of baseball. I had a couple of other accidents, collisions with outfielders running into each other.

Simons: What was your favorite sport as a boy?

Kiviat: Mostly baseball and an imitation soccer we played. We bought a black rubber ball for 10 cents. You blew it up with your mouth. There was a little bit of an opening, a valve, and you'd turn it and blow it up with your mouth. We'd play between the trolley tracks. For this imitation soccer we were kind of fresh but ambitious kids, playing on the streets.

Simons: When did you first compete in track?

Kiviat: As a kid I was able to beat most of the youngsters. In baseball I didn't know how to slide, but I used to steal bases. In grammar school we had a baseball team that won the Staten Island PSAL (Public School Athletic League) championship of the grammar schools. The school, PS 14, was three blocks from the house where we lived in Stapleton.

When I entered Curtis High School, I went out for football, but I was too darn light. I weighed a little under 100 pounds and was about five foot. The high school had no coach. The captain of the previous graduating class would help out the present football team. Last year's captain would come down and give you a little advice. We made the best we could with each other. All we had was a pair of pants, a jersey, and a pair of socks. The rest we supplied ourselves.

If last year's captain had a good job he wouldn't come down. Someone else would come down to help out. We were a sort of country town. We were the only high school in Staten Island, and we played the big high schools in New York City. They'd come down and beat the "H" out of us. Thirty, forty, fifty to nothing.

Simons: What position did you play in football?

Kiviat: I was an end. Around 1907 or so the forward pass became famous. I was the wide end although we didn't use that term then. I caught some good passes. But when I got hit, I was knocked into the grandstands. I was too small. When I got a busted nose my mother said in her broken English, "for this I send you to school to get an education." Then I broke my collarbone and shoulder blade. I was laid up seven weeks for that. We had no pads.

Simons: Did your parents then make you quit football?

Kiviat: Yes. I had to quit it in my second year. But I played a lot of baseball in high school which I loved. We got a uniform. I had already played a lot of baseball before high school on what we called clubs, which were just groups of ten or twelve kids who were friends.

I played shortstop. I read so much about Honus Wagner. Honus and I were both bowlegged and long-armed so I was christened the Jewish Honus Wagner. I walked around with a photo of Honus Wagner, walking like a gorilla with his hands way down. I was a fairly good hitter. I led the school in hitting, stole the most bases, and had a strong arm. I made the All-Interscholastic baseball team in 1909.

One day standing there in my baseball uniform, a buddy of mine, who was captain of the track team, said to me and some of the other baseball players: you guys are pretty fast stealing bases so how about coming to a half-mile race the track team is having. The track was right next to Curtis High School, but it wasn't only used by us. From Manhattan Dewitt Clinton High School and Stuyvesant High School, and a high school from Brooklyn were allowed to come down one day a week to use the field next to Curtis High School. On those days Curtis High School wasn't allowed on the fields.

So this fellow, the captain of the Curtis High track team, said come on, let's see how good you baseball players are. So I went down to the track in my baseball uniform, wearing leather shoes with homemade spikes. The shoemaker would put the spikes on for 9 cents, you know. The track captain gave the baseball players a fifty yard handicap. The winner was going to get a bronze medal. Everybody donated a nickel to pay for the medal, which cost a \$1.25. I won the race by almost the fifty yards I got as a handicap. The track captain's eyes almost popped out of his head. He was the high school champion, half-miler, quarter miler. From that day on, I began participating a little in track. The two captains, baseball and track, then got together with the managers and made a deal. The track meets and baseball games would be scheduled so that Abel could participate in both. It would be baseball in the morning and track in the afternoon against the same opponent. Next Saturday, it would be the reverse, track in the morning and baseball in the afternoon. We'd go someplace like to Bryant High School in College Point, Long Island. We'd compete against them in both track and baseball. We'd get beat in baseball and beat in track, but I'd have a good day.

At my first track meets I didn't do better than third or fourth. One day on the last Saturday in June of 1909 a lot of big AAU and Olympic officials were going to act as officials at a big schoolboy meet. I ran the mile and won it, setting a record, 4:40 and a fraction. There were fifths in those days, no tenths.

Simons: Was that a schoolboy record at the time?

Kiviat: Yes. A PSAL record for Greater New York. I won the race and beat the champion from Brooklyn Boys High School who won it the year before. I ran without knowing what to do, no rub, no sweat clothes. We had nothing to put on. You wore an old sweater, a jersey, or a heavy flannel shirt. That same day I also ran the half mile. That was a tight race to the finish. I just won by the skin of my teeth. I set a new schoolboy record. Lawson Robertson, who later became an Olympic track coach, was at the meet and said to me how would you like to compete in the Amateur Athletic Union, you're eligible.

I said I'll take it up with my parents because I have to help work at the store, and I deliver papers. My parents said yes. Because of my two schoolboy records the *New York Evening World* gave me two pages in the Saturday edition. I was only a kid, and there was my picture in the newspaper. I was also selected All-Interscholastic shortstop and leading batter. So it was a wonderful day for me, two PSAL championships in track and making the All-Interscholastic baseball team of Greater New York. It was late June 1909.

Simons: When did you first participate in AAU meets?

Kiviat: Soon. In the summer of 1909. Within a week or two I ran for the Irish-American Athletic Club, a poor man's club with very few college men. The Irish-American Athletic Club was made up of guys out of grammar school or from high school or kids who worked. If you could run or jump, you could try out. I ran in the Metropolitan Junior AAU championships for the Irish-American Athletic Club and won the half mile, the first time ever it was broken in less than two minutes. I did 1:59, a record. From then on I ran regularly every Saturday and Sunday for the Irish-American Athletic Club. Our training grounds were Celtic Park in Long Island, outside of Long Island City, near the famous Calvary Cemetery.

Simons: So the summer of 1909 was very important?

Kiviat: Yes. It was my first AAU championship competition. I won three big races: the junior half-mile, the senior mile, and the Metropolitan championship. I also competed in Montreal that summer. Also track friends helped me get a job earning some money. Eventually they got me a job in Wanamaker's where I got paid every two weeks. That's a long wait for money, and it was a long trip from Staten Island to Manhattan. I had to be at work at 8:30 in the morning. It meant getting up at six o'clock, catching the trolley car, the South Ferry boat, then I subways to Eighth Street where John Wanamaker's is. I worked there couple of summers, and I ran for John Wanamaker's in a league the stores had.

Simons: Was the Irish-American Athletic Club still your main sponsor?

Kiviat: Yes. I ran AAU competition with the Irish-American Athletic Club. Wanamaker's was in a league outside the AAU where Macy's and the other stores would get together teams. I ran for two organizations at the same time.

Simons: Did your father encourage your interest in sports?

Kiviat: He did as long as it didn't cost him any money and I enjoyed it, and it didn't interfere with the things I had to do-then it was all right.

Simons: You mentioned before, however, that your mother opposed football because of your injuries.

Kiviat: My parents didn't like body contact sports. As long as sports weren't contact sports, and I didn't get serious injuries, they were all right. Baseball and track were all right.

Simons: Did your parents have any specific career goals for you when you were a teenager?

Kiviat: No. But among the Jews of my generation, the oldest boy is accustomed, my parents told me, to work as soon as he can. When the child is young, education first, but the eldest boy gets part of his education and then goes to work to help, which I did. But I worked part-time until after high school. I worked in the afternoons selling papers, running errands for a drugstore, getting 50 cents, 75 cents a day. I did what I could. But work didn't interfere with my studies in high school at all.

Simons: Did your parents ever come to a track meet or to a baseball game?

Kiviat: Yes. At the County Fair in Staten Island. The Richmond County Fair was run by the sheriff. At the fair there were some schoolboy events planned. I ran a fifty or sixty yard race. I asked the sheriff for a couple of tickets for my parents because 50 cents was a lot of money to pay in those days for admission. The fair was about five miles from the house; we used the trolley car to go there. I was still a slow starter. Nobody had showed me how to start yet; that's before I joined the Irish-American Athletic Club. So everybody got off the mark better than me and were ahead of me. But I won the race even with the poor start. My parents were there, God bless them, although my father didn't see me cross the finish line because he turned around to talk to a neighbor he recognized. And my mother put her hand over her eyes. But it was a kick to win with them there.

Another time I took my parents to Brooklyn to my regiment, the 13th National Guard where I ran in military athletic league games. I joined the National Guard when I was 19. A few years in a row I won the mile and half-mile championships in military athletic league games sponsored by the National Guard. I also ran in the relays. My parents saw me win in the military athletic league games.

I didn't have to do much training. I ran for Wanamaker's now and then. I ran in the military athletic league now and then, and I ran regularly for the Irish Club. You don't have to do much training when you compete that often. Just come out to compete mainly and get a good European Massage. A European Massage starts at the top of the head, wiggles a little bit, gets down to your hands, goes all the way down the body, takes twenty to thirty minutes for the massage. After a good hard shower, I'd get a good rub. With one workout a week I could run two or three races on Saturday and Sunday.

Simons: Were you a good student at Curtis High School?

Kiviat: I managed to do well enough to graduate.

Simons: Did you have any favorite subjects?

Kiviat: No. Anything but mathematics, which was a great weakness. I even took up Latin.

Simons: Was your father built like you?

Kiviat: No. He was a little taller and much heavier. He went up around 200 pounds. Oh he had hands. If he ever hit you, you knew it. He had huge fists. He was a great swimmer. He swam from Staten Island to Bay Ridge and back for exercise.

Simons: In your prime, what was your height and weight?

Kiviat: About 5' 3", around 120 pounds. I reached my full size after high school when we got big training tables with big hunks of rare roast beef, and each of us got a small pitcher of milk. When you ran out of milk, they'd give you another pitcher. It was real good. All you could drink, three or four quarts of milk. And we got plenty of green vegetables on the table, big platters full of them. And lots of meat. At breakfast you could have as many eggs as you wanted with all the toast you could eat and plenty of buttermilk. Nothing fried and no coffee except in the morning for the older guys.

Simons: What sort of Jewish education did you receive?

Kiviat: I made my Bar Mitzvah as was the custom. After my Bar Mitzvah I was more on my own. After your Bar Mitzvah you're supposed to be a "mensch." I started eating a little bit outside, having non-kosher foods.

Simons: Before your Bar Mitzvah how frequently did you go to Hebrew school?

Kiviat: Nearly every day but only for half an hour because the boys were anxious and wanted to get outside to play.

Simons: As an adult when you went to Temple, did you still remember the Hebrew?

Kiviat: After my marriage I went pretty regular for Friday night services and Saturday services. My wife and I would go. My wife could read Hebrew very well, but I lost most of that. I'd read the English side and follow. But I attended the services. I went through the days when the women sat away from the men in the balcony or in the rear. Later the women sat among us. The women would wear a handkerchief or something on their heads, and the men would wear a yamulka. I still have a few yamulkas here in the apartment that my wife brought back from Jerusalem. She used to go there nearly every year. I wouldn't fly so I didn't go.

Simons: What memories do you have of Judaism from your youth?

Kiviat: The poor Jewish didn't have good pronunciation. The educated Jews did; they had better English. You could identify a poor Jew by his pronunciation. I never denied my Judaism. I remember my parents lighting the Sabbath lights and the Yahrzeit lights. I remember my father saying the prayers. Look over there. I have an electric Yahrzeit light in this apartment. I forget the words my parents used. But I remember the anniversary of the death of my wife, my father, my mother, my two brothers, and two dear friends. I follow the Jewish calendar.

Simons: Did your parents observe the dietary laws?

Kiviat: Oh yes. If you brought home a friend, like my brothers who would bring home Christian girls, they had to eat what we ate. They never got any milk, didn't get coffee at the table.

Simons: How did your parents prepare for the Sabbath?

Kiviat: Everything was done before sundown Friday. My parents would send us out to call a non-Jewish boy to light the lights and start the stove once the Sabbath began. Sometimes a Negro boy would do this. Several Negroes lived in the neighborhood. We had a big coal and wood burning stove; it was a big thing, half the width of this room. We'd give the fellow a little money for lighting the stove.

Simons: Did the Blacks in your neighborhood face much prejudice?

Kiviat: No. A couple of Negro guys were good athletes too. They played football and ran with us. They ate in my house with us a lot of Friday nights. One of the Negro guys was named Clarence, the other was Wilbur.

Simons: Did you like Jewish foods?

Kiviat: I got tired of eating Jewish chuck, which was the toughest meat. But I liked the Jewish noodles and things like that. I particularly liked gefilte fish. My mother wrapped the gefilte fish in skin; that's not done anymore.

Simons: Did you ever participate in athletics at a Young Man's Hebrew Association or a Jewish Community Center?

Kiviat: We had a Jewish organization for boys on Staten Island. I belonged, but they never did anything in athletics. It was a boy's organization. I forget what they called it even. It was a long walk from our house, 20 cents per person going and coming was kind of expensive. You had to take two trolleys.

Simons: While you still lived in your parent's house, did you participate in athletics on the Sabbath?

Kiviat: Yes. After my Bar Mitzvah I participated on Saturdays. My parents left us alone after our Bar Mitzvahs. They were fairly broad minded.

Simons: Did you ever participate in athletics on the High Holidays, Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur?

Kiviat: No. That would have sent my parents through the roof. And later my wife and I observed the High Holidays.

Simons: Did you ever hear the comment Jews aren't athletes?

Kiviat: Once in a while but usually in a nice friendly way. I got to know the boys. They'd say your name, Kiviat, doesn't sound Jewish. A couple of them said that to me. I'd explain that my parents wanted to get out of Russia and came to New York. In Russia the name was spelled the same way—Kiviat. Once in a public school athletic guide, there were a couple of people named Kiviatsky—Kiviat with an sky at the end. The guys started kidding me about that.

Simons: Did you think that Gentiles think Jews aren't as athletic as other people?

Kiviat: I personally had only one real unpleasant incident. We had a discus thrower on the Olympic team while we all lived on the SS Finland of the Red Star Line, a small 10,000 ton boat. That's small stuff compared to the 30-40,000 ton cruiser of today. The Olympic team, me included, lived on the SS Finland. The weight men could eat anything and everything. A shot putter gave me a hard time.

I got along well with all types of people. Even on the SS Finland Howard Drew, who was a Negro, and I always got together and talked and sat together. Howard and I got together almost by instinct. I don't tell many people about the incident that happened.

But I had this incident on the SS Finland with a discus thrower who called me a little "sheeney." Pat McDowell, a 325 pound shot putter, and one of the other big weight men grabbed the discus thrower, who looked like an ugly gorilla, and told him next time you say anything to little Abel we're going to squeeze you through that little porthole and that will be the end of you. There was no repeat incident.

Simons: Did you identify with other Jewish athletes when you were an active competitor?

Kiviat: Yes. With Alvah T. Meyer. He became a Wall Street broker. Pretty well to do because he dressed like a dude. We always joshed him about always being dressed up. His clothes were always good quality. He was the Metropolitan 220 yard champion, and he was on the 19 12 Olympic team.

Simons: When did you first realize that there were people who didn't like Jews?

Kiviat: My mother and father now and then would mention some people they had known with Russian Jewish names who were taken away by the Russian Army and never heard of again. And I read in the newspapers about pogroms. But the only time I ever had to face it on a personal level was that one incident on the SS Finland. I've gotten along with all kinds of people.

Simons: How old were you when you first began to go out with girls?

Kiviat: Around 1910 when I was 18. It was October 1910. I went to a social hall where there was a dance with my brother and sister. My brother did everything I did in track. He later went to the University of Pennsylvania and became a dentist. My brother played the violin, and my sister played the piano. When it was time to go home, they introduced me. They said this is our brother Abel-some of you must have read about him running, a high school champion. They built me up. Then I saw this girl. The girl's sister was with a boy, but the girl was all alone. This girl was awful cute, a little short, about 5 foot tall. And I said to her can I take you home. She said all right. I walked her home taking a short cut up a hill that we used to go to the synagogue. We got to the top of the hill about 11 o'clock. And I put my arms around her. She says what are you trying to do? I said I want to kiss you. Why, she said with her eyes popping. I said I love you. She was very petite, small features. Everything matched her size.

Simons: Did you ever see her again?

Kiviat: Yes. I married her. Later we had a son, my only child who is today a 71-year-old retired army colonel. Her name was Yetta Schminsky. She eventually became a world famous designer of theatrical clothes.

Simons: How old were you when you got married?

Kiviat: I married in 1914. I was 21 or 22. She was a few months younger than me.

Simons: Was she Jewish?

Kiviat: Yes.

Simons: Did some of your brothers and sisters date non-Jews?

Kiviat: They dated Jews and non-Jews.

Simons: Did your parents object?

Kiviat: My parents said you can bring them home, but they have to eat what we eat.

Simons: Did you go to college?

Kiviat: No. I got a couple of scholarships, but I couldn't go to college. My parents wanted me to work and get good jobs. Thirty dollars every two weeks meant a lot when there were seven kids to feed. And I was so busy that I could hardly think about going out with girls. My mother would always say my eldest son Abel is not a girl chaser. The only girl I brought home was the one I married later on.

Simons: Did any of your early coaches have a decisive impact on you?

- Kiviat: I didn't know anything in the very beginning. I didn't even know how to warm up or start. But I just ran, and some things I picked up. Later at the Irish-American Athletic Club I was trained so well that I became a good starter. Lawson Robertson was the one who invited me to join the Irish-American Athletic Club.
- Simons: How did your parents react to your joining the Irish-American Athletic Club?
- Kiviat: At that day in June of 1909 when I won the PSAL (Public School Athletic League) High School half-mile and mile championships I was invited to join the Irish-American Athletic Club. After talking it over with my parents I joined. I had to get carfare money over to Celtic Park to train once or twice a week. The races were run every Saturday and Sunday at Celtic Park against clubs you never hear of anymore. There were a lot of Irish clubs like the Ancient Order of Hibernians and the Friendly Sons of St. Patrick.
- Simons: Was it unusual for a Jew to be on the Irish-American Athletic Club?
- Kiviat: Myer Prinstein was the first. In 1900 he won Olympic medals in the long jump and triple jump (hop, step, and jump). For awhile I was the only Jew until they picked up Alvah T. Meyer. Meyer ran a couple of track meets somewhere and was asked to join the Irish-American Athletic Club.
- Simons: Did being a Jew on a predominantly Irish club create any problems?
- Kiviat: No. I've been in a lot of Catholic churches meeting people and at Catholic father-son gatherings signing autographs and answering questions. I don't make speeches but I'll talk my head off answering questions about track and field. I still do that. I get along with all kinds of people.
- Simons: Did the Irish-American Athletic Club have a clubhouse?
- Kiviat: Yes. They had a big clubhouse at Sixtieth Street, between Third and Lexington Avenues in Manhattan. It was a brownstone house three stories high. Next to the North Side of Bloomingdale's. The club had a cash bar on every floor that sold to members, friends, and guests to help pay our expenses. There was a dining hall and a ballroom.
- Simons: Did out of town athletes stay at the Irish-American Athletic Club?
- Kiviat: No. Most of the out of town athletes were put up at the Paramount Hotel. They got a discount at the Paramount Hotel, which was on Forty-sixth Street. Officials slept there too.
- Simons: Besides track and field, what other types of activities did the Irish-American Athletic Club sponsor?

Kiviat: They sponsored Gaelic Association Football and hurling, the game with the curved stick.

Simons: Did you participate in Gaelic football or hurling?

Kiviat: Hurling. Oh no. You had to be a wonder to play that game. You never knew when you were going to lose your teeth. They played so rough. I saw a few games.

Simons: Did the Irish-American Athletic Club ever sponsor a baseball team?

Kiviat: No. They never sponsored baseball.

Simons: Did the Irish-American Athletic Club march in the St. Patrick's Day parade?

Kiviat: Yes.

Simons: Did you march with them?

Kiviat: Yes. they gave us white pants, a white jacket, and a little white cap with a green wing fist. We looked like the street cleaners all dressed in white. We marched in other parades too.

Simons: How many years did you remain a member of the Irish-American Athletic Club?

Kiviat: They made me a life member. But I really retired as a participant just before World War I.

Simons: Who ran the Irish-American Athletic Club?

Kiviat: Mainly politicians. Athletes weren't officers. Athletes didn't go to meetings. The only time the athletes went to the clubhouse was when there was a social event or trophies were awarded.

Simons: After you graduated from high school did you concentrate primarily on the 1500 meter races?

Kiviat: No. I'd run lots of distances.

Simons: Even up until the Olympics in 1912?

Kiviat: Yes. I ran anything from 600 yards to the mile. Prior to the Olympics and after that I used to run on the one-mile relay when they couldn't get the best four-quarter milers. And in the half-mile I was down to 1:54. And I ran the mile. Most of the time, see, in those days we ran handicap races except in championships which were usually scratch.

Simons: Could you explain that?

Kiviat: I'll give an example. I was invited down to Philadelphia to a track meet. I paid my own expenses. For the mile I was supposedly scratch. This indoor track was twenty-two laps for a mile. In the middle of the race suddenly I learned I'm getting a handicap of one or two laps. With different handicaps the judges couldn't keep track in this race of who was third, fourth, or twentieth so the judges stopped the race. I felt bad because I was the only one to run twenty-two laps on that small track. To make up for it they gave me the equivalent of first prize, an alligator bag outfitted with a toothbrush, shaving cream, and other stuff.

Simons: When did you first set the world's record in the 1500 meter?

Kiviat: Outdoors that was at Harvard Stadium at the Olympic tryouts in early June 1912. In Harvard Stadium that day I won the 1500 meter and created a world's record. For 18 years nobody broke my 1500 meter outdoor record. But the odd part of it was, without warning me or asking me in advance, at the finish of that 1500 meters, officials waved their hands for me to go and continue to run for the mile. So I did the mile and ran the remaining distance. I equaled the world's record in the mile. Those were outdoor records in Harvard Stadium, but indoors I held records from 600 yards to the mile inclusive. Indoors I was better than outdoors because I could hold to the inside better than the big guys on turns.

Simons: In your earlier days as a runner you told me you often trained only once a week when you were competing regularly. How did you train at your peak as a world class runner?

Kiviat: The same way. If I ran two races on Saturday or one on Saturday and one on Sunday, I'd only train one day a week on a Wednesday. Our coach, Lawson Robertson, believed in conservation of strength. If you're any good, that means you have ability. So why do you have to do so much work to bring out your ability? If you've got it, it comes naturally. Sometimes I trained a couple of times a week, but then there would be a lot of massages. But if I had two races in a week, either on the same day or different days, I'd work out only once that week. The good athlete, the ones that won, didn't have to train as hard as the ones that finished second, third, or fourth.

Simons: How much running did you do during a workout?

- Kiviat: Some days I did sprints. Some days I did distance running. But if I were training for a mile I'd run a mile and a half once or twice during the week. I went at a steady pace, not the 100 percent mile race pace, but I'm figuring around a five minute, ten seconds speed for a workout mile. That's a little faster than a jog. For shorter distances, the half-mile or 600 yards, I'd do more sprints. I became a good starter. I could shoot off the mark like a sprinter, and that's before we had marks. I'd also get a good massage. In a European massage they shake each part of your body to your fingers down to your toes. It's a massage. They use something like a light thin grease on you and it disappears.
- Simons: Today top athletes have very specific routines they follow in terms of sleeping, eating, even in terms of their social life. Did you follow a rigid routine?
- Kiviat: No. I slept at home. I lived at home. Lived in Stapleton, Staten Island, slept over the store. When I didn't go to Celtic Park in Long Island for training, I ate my mother's food. I'd have a piece of gefilte fish Fridays and Saturdays. I wouldn't put too much horse radish on. I didn't go for condiments. The doctors tell me that helped me.
- Simons: Did you try to eat a certain amount of protein or of complex carbohydrates each day?
- Kiviat: I never even heard of the words protein or complex carbohydrates in those days.
- Simons: Did athletics interfere with your holding a job?
- Kiviat: No. When I worked for Wanamaker's during the summer as a sporting goods salesman, I worked from eight to six. But it was still daylight until eight o'clock. So if it was my workout day, I could work out at my house, up in the woods. I ran on broken leaves and little branches but that didn't hurt. I had a pair of heavy sneakers with thick soles and heels that cost thirty-nine cents wholesale. I got them off my father. Saturday afternoon Wanamaker's closed at one so I'd make it to Celtic Park in Long Island by mid-afternoon.
- Simons: One article I read about you suggested that with your bowlegged stride and thick hands flapping you were a little aggressive in trying to make it difficult for anyone to pass you. Is that accurate?
- Kiviat: You know what a pacer is? I tried to stay ahead. A pacer takes more room, not deliberately. I never got disqualified, never got a warning on anything. Never bumped into anybody. Why is a pacer faster than a trotter? Goes from side to side.

Simons: How do you think that today's runner differs from runners in your time?

Kiviat: They work much harder. They train much harder because they're all record seeking, and they are getting so damn much money today. I can't understand how they call it amateur anymore.

Simons: Do performances in track of your time seem modest compared to contemporary performances?

Kiviat: Wait a minute! Let me interrupt you. I'll give you two items that haven't been surpassed. In 1911 I won the senior Indoor Nationals 600 yard championship, senior National, not junior. Then, maybe two hours later I went out, repeated and won the 1,000 yard championship. And I was the only one that ran the two races and I won both, created a record for both. No one else before or since has ever won both in the Indoor Nationals on the same day. In 1913 at another Indoor National senior championship in the Garden, I did the same thing, won the 600 and the 1,000, and I was the only athlete to repeat. I was the only one and I won both races in the same night, and each year I created a world's Indoor record in one of the two races.

Simons: Maybe an athlete can only be judged within the context of his times. Nevertheless, the times of your era have been surpassed. Do you think that if you had different running shoes, better track surfaces, current training techniques, modern coaching, and contemporary sports medicine, your times would have been better?

Kiviat: Everything has changed so you can't make comparisons. None of the champions in my time trained everyday. Athletes didn't believe in it. Coaches didn't believe in it. The system has changed. Just look at track conditions the day I set a world's record at Harvard Stadium in the Olympic tryouts. The Syracuse University coach gave me a file and said-file your spikes down; the track is sun-beaten, like a rock. So I filed my inch spikes down so they were like indoor spikes.

Simons: Do you think that today's athletes are better or merely the training techniques are better today?

Kiviat: Both are better. But the top athletes of my day would win today. They'd run much faster. They'd train harder. Back in my day they didn't believe in all the work they do now. Today it's work. There's a boy here in Lakehurst, a good boy, the grandson of my friend Tommy Lennon. This boy is 18, just graduated high school and entered Ocean County College and he runs five or six miles before breakfast every damn morning. I think that's pushing too hard.

Simons: Did you ever make any money through sports?

Kiviat: In my day they stopped amateur athletes from making money at sports. I remember a great miler from the University of Pennsylvania who wrote a story for the *Saturday Evening Post* and somehow it got out that they gave him \$400. This was in 1936, even after my time. If he didn't return the money and show proof that he returned the money and get a receipt from the *Saturday Evening Post*, he would have been barred from the AAU. Now amateur athletes make lots of money from commercials. In my day the club a lot of times paid our expenses, and that was all. On the Irish-American Athletic Club the athletes didn't even see the expense money; the coach and the manager handled the money.

Simons: How were you and other US athletes transported to Stockholm for the 1912 Olympics?

Kiviat: We left Hoboken on June 14, 1912, aboard the SS Finland. It was a small ship. Besides the athletes, we had just a few outside passengers. The Olympic Committee rented the whole boat. Someone gave us the money. The rest of the money came from renting first class cabins at high prices to people who could well afford it. That really helped to pay our expenses. The athletes used mostly the second class cabins. And the athletes had a training table so we didn't eat what the few cash customers ate on the boat.

Simons: Beside being a relatively small ship, did the SS Finland have any other distinctive features?

Kiviat: There was a social hall. And the upper deck was eight to ten feet wide so we could do a little running there. There were over 160 athletes aboard.

Simons: How long did it take to cross the Atlantic?

Kiviat: Ten days. First we stopped at Amsterdam. Amsterdam was our first stop. In Amsterdam we were allowed to go on land. We ran so fast down the gang plank it nearly knocked some of us over. We got rid of our sea legs in Amsterdam. But I wasn't seasick anyway. They made a bet that I'd be the first one sick.

Simons: Did you room two nights with Jim Thorpe on the SS Finland?

- Kiviat: Yes. Very nice chap. A poor chap. Never a nickel in his pocket. He'd do anything you asked him that he could. Financially he never had a thing. He'd eat and drink anything. He was about six feet, if I remember right, and weighed about 178 to 180 pounds. I think he weighed more when he played football. And he walked on his heels, straight back. And he didn't seem to have any neck. Fellows said he was about 18 inches around the neck. He was built like a wrestler around the neck and head. He was not very talkative at all, very quiet. I only roomed with him two nights. He came back late one night. Then they moved him in with the older guys. He was a great athlete.
- Simons: Jim Thorpe won the pentathlon and the decathlon in Stockholm. Do you think it was right to later strip him of his medals for having played semi-pro baseball?
- Kiviat: The only answer that I can give to be honest with you, with myself, and with your public is that those were the rules. They used to enforce the rules in those days.
- Simons: You said it took the SS Finland ten days to go from Hoboken to Amsterdam. When did you reach Stockholm?
- Kiviat: It took another four to five days to reach Stockholm. We didn't stay at a hotel in Stockholm. We docked outside the city and slept on the ship. Everybody lived on the ship except the distance runners and marathoners who were taken to the country. Thorpe asked to go with them, and they took him.
- Simons: What were your impressions of Stockholm itself?
- Kiviat: I didn't really see Stockholm until after the games. Then we'd go up along the main street. We'd buy a glass of beer. There were a lot of gorgeous looking blondes. We didn't do much because we didn't have much money. I mean what athletes had money then?
- Also Lawson Robertson told us to take it easy before the Olympics. He said don't use up extra energy. He believed in the conservation of strength. I watched the games but didn't do much applauding.
- Simons: Were the Swedish nobility there for the Olympics?
- Kiviat: The Swedish nobility was there. The King, the Queen, the Prince, and Princesses. They gave out the medals. There were fences around the nobility so no one could attack them and so they couldn't accidentally be hit by one of the weight men. A lot of the races finished just opposite the royal family. And there was a platform next to the track where the nobility gave out the medals. The medals had big ribbons.
- Simons: Were you favored to win the gold medal in the 1500 meter race?

- Kiviat: Yes. I was favored to win. I won the three trial heats.
- Simons: Could you describe the final race itself?
- Kiviat: I led most of the way. All I remember was all of the sudden something shot by from the outside, and the finish was very close to that turn, not at the usual center of the track. So at this turn, this fellow shot off and got into a five yard lead. I thought I should have got a dead heat out of it. I thought I just barely caught him. But the judges gave it to him. The judges had me second.
- Simons: After all these years do you ever ask yourself how an underdog, Arnold Strode Jackson, an Englishman, beat you?
- Kiviat: Arthur Daley, the *New York Times* sportswriter, once said to me, "Abel, what on earth were you waiting for, a Tooterville trolley car?" Actually I finished only a second behind my world's record in the 1500 meter, 3:56. I'd never heard of Jackson before. I should have started my sprint sooner. I'd do what Jackson did. Shoot out before the turn or when we hit the turn, which is most unusual. The judges gave me one-tenth of a second slower than Jackson, 3:56.9 to 3:56.8. They had judges on both sides of the track, but I thought it was a dead heat. My Irish Club wanted to beat the English.
- Simons: Today neither your time nor Jackson's time would qualify for team trials. How do you feel about that?
- Kiviat: The tracks are better, shoes are better. Athletes train harder. They had to spray our tracks down to keep the wind from blowing the cinders. I never ran for the record. I'd run to win; that's why I had so many championships. To be perfectly honest with you, I don't think track's an amateur sport anymore.
- Simons: Europe produced several Jewish medalists in the 1912 Olympics. Do you know of any other Jewish medalists on the 1912 U.S. Olympic team?
- Kiviat: The sprinter Alvah T. Meyer.
- Simons: What did you do immediately after competing in the 1912 Olympics?
- Kiviat: I went to Paris with some of the athletes, including Jim Thorpe. We athletes gave exhibitions and had contests among ourselves. In a hurdle exhibition somebody told Thorpe to look up at the airplanes. He looked up and hit the next hurdle and went head over heels. Everybody laughed like hell.
- Simons: Did people take advantage of Jim Thorpe?

Kiviat: I think they must have. But he was a great natural athlete. Glen Warner, Thorpe's track coach didn't know anything about track. Warner was a football coach. But Thorpe was a natural great without good coaching. He'd watch someone else do something, and then he'd do it. I'll give you an example. Thorpe came down to Celtic Park while the Irish-American Athletic Club was training before the Olympics. I was living out there. We had living quarters above the dance hall. Thorpe came out, and he watched the training. Then he picked up the javelin, and what do you think he does? He throws it from the discus and shot put range. For the javelin you're allowed 100 feet straight away before throwing it from the line. Glen Warner didn't train him right. And the discus, I think, Thorpe threw from the javelin line; he just had them reversed, until Lawson Robertson caught him and showed him the right way to do it.

Simons: After the 1912 Olympics the American athletes did some traveling?

Kiviat: The Irish Club only went to Paris with the others. The Irish-American Athletic Club athletes wouldn't go where Jews had a hard time. Alvah T. Meyer and I were Jewish so the Irish Club went to Ireland next. They returned to their roots. In Ireland they had the time of their lives. We didn't have to spend a damn cent; everything was free. And all that we could see was green and white. The cottages were green to match the grass. And all the shutters and the trimmings were green. I was a member of the Irish Club, and I got all the beer I wanted to drink and food I wanted to eat. We ran a couple of races in Ireland. Then we had to go back to the ship. We had no tickets. I didn't have a damn cent in my pockets when I reached the ship in Liverpool. Whoever invited us to Ireland paid our expenses back and forth to Liverpool.

Simons: Did you ever see Jim Thorpe again after 1912?

Kiviat: Later he played major league baseball. He was with the Boston Braves in 1919. A gang of us from the Irish-American Athletic Club went to Ebbets Field to see the Dodgers play the Braves. We asked an usher before the game started to tell Thorpe we were there. Thorpe wouldn't even come over to say hello. That was the last I saw of him.

Simons: How would you describe your personality?

Kiviat: I mind my own business. I don't interfere with anybody. And I learned from my mother, God bless her, never say no. That's why I held my job as a federal court clerk 41 years; that's a government record. I was deputy clerk for the Southern District of the Federal Court in Manhattan. I never said no. I never would say no. My mother, God bless her, said always say maybe. I'll see what I can do. A big lawyer during an anti-trust case that lasted over three years asked me if I could open the courtroom early so he could answer his mail each morning. So I did it. This week was the twenty-sixth year since that case, and that lawyer still sends me a dozen pens every year.

Simons: For how long did you continue to run competitively after 1912?

Kiviat: Until 1915 or early 1916. I ran a few times during the war in France. Then after the war I ran again for awhile.

In 1924 I came back for the last time. The Irish Club wasn't active then so I trained mainly on my own in Staten Island. I came close to winning the national championship in the 1,000 yards in 1924. I was in the Olympic tryouts at Harvard Stadium in 1924. But I thought I got a bad deal. While I was waiting for my event, they put me in the steeplechase. They said they were short. I hurt my ankle in the steeplechase. I fell flat on my face on a hurdle. Without that injury I would have made the Olympic team in 1924. I wasn't as good as in 1912, but I was running pretty good. I don't know why they put me in that event. I had never run the steeplechase before. I didn't know how to run it. In later years they sometimes tried to keep Jewish runners out. Makes you wonder.

Simons: Did Jewish fans identify with you?

Kiviat: I don't know. I heard a lot of applause, but I don't know who, why, and when. I remember a Jewish telegraph boy, though, who followed my running.

Simons: Were you in the military?

Kiviat: I joined the national guard before the war. During the war (World War I) I went overseas.

Simons: What did you do during World War I?

Kiviat: I was in a supply outfit in France. One night I got the life scared out of me. A mine broke about 50 feet in front of us. I wasn't a hero.

Simons: After you married Yetta Schminsky in 1914 did she work?

Kiviat: She was a designer of women's theatrical clothes. You can name any Broadway show from 1915 into the 1920s, and she designed the clothes for the women.

Simons: How many children did you and your first wife have?

Kiviat: We had one, and he's a retired Army colonel who will be 71 years old on Christmas. Arthur Louis Kiviat was born while the doctor was at a midnight mass. Some relatives joked that the baby was a Catholic Jew.

Simons: How did your first marriage end?

Kiviat: We were divorced. I remarried 13 or 14 years later. Yetta also remarried; she died seven or eight years ago.

Simons: What was your second wife's name?

Kiviat: Isabel Solomon. She was Jewish. From Pittsburgh. Her family was in the junk business. Isabel and I were married over 40 years. She passed away in 1981. We agreed not to have children. Isabel was a very successful secretary. My friend Tommy Lennon hired her, and she had a lot of responsibility as his secretary in the brokerage business.

Simons: Did both of your wives keep a Jewish home?

Kiviat: Yes. Not 100 percent though.

Simons: Where did you live after your first marriage?

Kiviat: We moved to 910 Riverside Drive in Manhattan. That's when the Jews thought if you said Riverside Drive that meant you were on the way up. Then we moved to St. Nicholas Avenue. Yetta moved in with her parents in Staten Island when I went overseas during the war. When I got back from France, she wanted a divorce. For awhile after that I moved back with my parents in Stapletown, Staten Island.

Then I started living by myself as my brothers and sisters got married and left my mother and father alone. Then I got a big apartment by the high school we had all attended, Curtis High School.

Simons: Is Arthur's wife Jewish?

Kiviat: No. She was in the theatrical business.

Simons: Are your grandchildren Jewish?

Kiviat: Yes. I have only one grandchild, a grandson Denis.

Simons: How old is he?

Kiviat: He's 33 or 34 and has three children. He married a Jewish girl. They live in Prospect Park, Brooklyn, and they have three children.

Simons: Did you encourage your son to participate in sports?

Kiviat: He wasn't an athlete. He was shot in the stomach in an accident at summer camp as a boy. But he loved sports. When he was attending the University of Pennsylvania, I put in a good word with Lawson Robertson. Arthur became an official at track meets, at the Penn Relays.

Simons: Was your grandson Denis an athlete?

Kiviat: No. He had a spinal problem.

Simons: What does Denis do?

Kiviat: He's manager of the social security branch in Brooklyn. He's got a good job.

Simons: Would you like to see your great grandchildren become active in athletics?

Kiviat: That's up to them. I believe help a child find what he wants to do and then respect it as long as its legal. I don't want them to run five or six miles every morning like some of the kids do today. I was a world's champion, but I didn't run that much. Kids today run everywhere. I never ran in the streets.

Simons: Have you ever been to Israel?

Kiviat: No. Because I wouldn't fly. But my wife went every year. I have some yamulkas she brought home.

Simons: Do you have other Jewish materials in the apartment?

Kiviat: I have a mezuzah outside the door. My housekeys are shaped like the Ten Commandments. I have the electric Yahrzeit light. And Hebrew letters on my cabinet that say welcome. And a Jewish calendar.

Simons: What did your wife do in Israel?

Kiviat: She'd plant a tree, do some charity works. She took an extra couple of hundred dollars besides expense money and would make some donations.

Simons: Do you identify with world Jewry?

Kiviat: My brother is a dentist. He went to the Maccabiah games. They wanted to make me the assistant manager of the American track team. I wouldn't go because I don't like to fly. But, I helped out. I once ran a track meet for them. And I contributed money. I contribute to a lot of Jewish organizations.

Simons: Why do you think there are fewer prominent Jewish athletes than there once were?

Kiviat: Maybe they're anxious to make money and make a success of themselves.

Simons: After you stopped doing competitive running, did you do recreational running?

Kiviat: No. But I became an official soon after I came back from the war. By the early 1920s I became an official. I loved track, and I wanted to stay in it. I became a press steward, which meant a lot of running back and forth. I usually had a little table with a telephone. At the University of Pennsylvania relays I had no telephone and no table so I had to yell.

Simons: Were you paid for being press steward?

Kiviat: I did it as a volunteer.

Simons: Were you a press steward at Madison Square Garden?

Kiviat: At Madison Square Garden and all over for 50 years. I became chief press steward. Later I had two telephones, and a woman helping me because women got interested in track. I went all through the northern part of New Jersey. I was a volunteer, but if anyone wanted class rings, class pins, pennants, stationary, I'd get it for them. Sell it to them.

Simons: Were you ever a track coach?

Kiviat: Yes. At Wagner College, Staten Island for one year. I coached baseball and track.

Simons: But your major job for 41 years was deputy clerk for the Southern District of the Federal Court in Manhattan?

Kiviat: Yes.

Simons: What were your responsibilities as deputy clerk?

Kiviat: I ran the court for the judge until he sat down. I got all the judge's papers for him, some I'd take up to his office. I'd take care of everything. I'd go down to the file room. I took care of the card system. In other words if the judge wanted to know about a certain case, when, where, and how, I got the papers on it.

Simons: When did you retire as deputy clerk?

Kiviat: They asked me to retire in 1971. I was over 70. An Irish judge let me stay on a few extra years, but when he retired as chief judge, I had to go too.

Simons: Did you have any hobbies?

Kiviat: With the wife I'd do what she wanted to do. I always liked athletics to watch and to officiate. I officiated at the Millrose until I was 87. I still had pep. They still send me tickets.

Simons: Do you still watch sporting events on television?

Kiviat: Oh yes. I watch the World Series. It was disgusting what the St. Louis team did. They batted .186 for seven games.

Simons: You really do have a phenomenal memory.

Kiviat: One game they got three hits, another they got five and one they got seven. Never been such a team. Imagine being beaten eleven to nothing. I'd rather read a book than watch that.

Simons: If you had it to do over again, would you still be an athlete?

Kiviat: Yes. I love the sport even till this day. A friend of mine here brings me the *New York Times* every Sunday night when he's finished with it. And I give him the News. I read the *Times* sports section in bed Sunday night. And I read the daily local paper I get mornings.

Simons: You returned to Stockholm in 1984. How did that come about?

Kiviat: I was rediscovered by the press on my 90th birthday. Fred Lebow in the New York Road Runners Club, the group that holds the New York Marathon, had a big dinner for me when I was 90. A lot of celebrities were there—Frank Gifford, Howard Cosell. All the newspapers had my name and picture in it. Gifford said he wasn't a track man but we're honoring a wonderful man. After that I got a lot of invitations to banquets and father-son events. I don't give speeches, but I'd answer questions. The older ones get a laugh, and I give the younger ones autographs.

Then Bud Greenspan called me up. I've known him for years. He used to write for the *Brooklyn Eagle*. He's got a big production company now with an office on 68th Street. He did films on the last two Olympics. He's a hell of a good man to get in touch with. He could tell you about Jewish athletics because he's had to meet them all. He said he'd pay all my expenses to go to Sweden and would take care of me when we were finished with filming. He gave me a nice little check. It's the first piece of change I've gotten in my entire life from athletics.

Simons: Why did Bud Greenspan want you?

Kiviat: Every now and then they take an Olympic athlete who's a champion in a certain year and take him back to the place he became a champion. They've done it with other athletes. For me they went back to 1912. They go to the country where the Olympics was held when that athlete won an Olympic medal. They had three camera men in Stockholm.

Simons: What did you do in Stockholm in 1984 when the camera was running for this Bud Greenspan production?

Kiviat: They'd ask questions, and I'd answer them. We walked around the stadium to the spot where I started and where I finished and where I sat. The stadium has a roof on it now. From a platform the king and queen had given out medals.

Simons: How did it feel to actually be back in the stadium after 72 years?

Kiviat: I'll make a confession. I didn't feel anything different except it brought back the sights. That's all. I even recognized how the athletes got in. They've changed that.

Simons: In 1984 various people ran the Olympic Flame across the nation to Los Angeles. How were you chosen to be a torchbearer in 1984? Jesse Owens' granddaughter and Jim Thorpe's grandson ran the first leg. How did they select you to run the second leg?

Kiviat: Fred Lebow did that. He's the one who gave me the party. He's the one who laid out the \$3,000. It was good publicity for him because his name was in there all the time. The New York Road Runners Club sponsored me. Fred Lebow gave me the uniform I wore that day.

Simons: Did someone from the New York Road Runners Club accompany you while you carried the torch?

Kiviat: Fred Lebow did it himself. But the torch people have a little organization of their own; they gave me the torch, put it in my hand. One torch man ran on my left and one torch woman ran beside me on my right all seven blocks.

Simons: How long is seven blocks?

Kiviat: One kilometer.

Simons: How fast did you run the one kilometer?

Kiviat: I didn't run it. I jogged it. Some people could walk faster than I was jogging. I don't know the time. It was raining like hell and the wind blowing. You had to fight the wind and the rain. My arm was almost paralyzed when we finished. I held my arm up in front and extended so the flame wouldn't burn my mustache and my hair. I forgot to get a haircut so I held it high. The torch had propane so it took two hours to wash enough to give it to me.

Simons: Where did you begin the one kilometer jog? On what street in Manhattan?

Kiviat: It started somewhere on the other side of Fifth Avenue.

Simons: Do you approve of woman runners?

Kiviat: Yes. Why not? My sister was a damn good runner. She could run as fast as some of us brothers could. I sat next to Wilma Rudolph at a dinner a few months ago. She won three gold medals.

Simons: How heavy was the torch you carried over your head in 1984?

Kiviat: I'll get it.

Simons: Is this the actual torch?

Kiviat: Yes. I held it straight up when it was filled with the liquid.

Simons: Even without the liquid it must have been heavy holding it overhead for over a kilometer.

Kiviat: Sure. Its three or four pounds. They used different torches. Everyone got to keep their own.

Simons: How did you prepare for your one kilometer jog?

Kiviat: I'd walk a little fast to the mailbox out in front of the house. My mail's in that box, and I'd go out to the garbage dump in front. The only time I really jogged here was when some people came out to take my picture for a documentary on Jim Thorpe. I jogged up and down for them. Later I did that with a torch for the governor. I was trying to hold the torch up, and my hand kept throbbing. I was making faces, and everyone was laughing but me. And that's the photograph they put in the newspapers. I'll show you how I jogged.

Simons: You've been on television and *People* magazine and all over the media lately. Do you enjoy it?

Kiviat: Oh yes. I always say I like it. I try to be a diplomat. The doctor says Abel, as long as you can laugh and can say something funny to other people you'll live a long while.

Simons: You made a lot of people laugh when you appeared on the Tonight Show with Johnny Carson. Do you have any memories of the night you were on the Carson show?

Kiviat: Yes. He had a yellow pad, eight pages, with questions. A good looking girl who talked with me and gave me a scotch on the rocks gave him the questions. The girl typed out the questions for Johnny Carson. They paid me to be on the show and paid my expenses. From the yellow pad Johnny Carson asked me about having the same job for so many years. Yes, I said to him, I had one of the longest jobs known in the history of the federal courts, 41 years. The same place, the same building. And I kept my job because my mother, God bless her, told her children never say no and she added you'll never get a bloody nose or a black eye if you do the right thing. I said that saying wasn't from Russia. Johnny Carson laughed, and at the end of the program, just as I'm leaving, he says by the way, Mr. Abel Kiviat, I have a Dewar's scotch on the rocks ready for you. Nice of the people there. And that damn Cloris Leachman grabbed the torch out of my hand. As I was leaving, she started imitating me.

Simons: You have an impressive number of plaques, trophies, photographs, letters, and articles in your apartment. Your living room looks like a sports museum.

Kiviat: I have nowhere else to put it. I have a signed photograph of President Reagan. That big I Love New York button was from Mayor Koch. That big bronze statue of Mercury has a base made of the same marble used in Napoleon's tomb. The statue is bigger than I. You can read the inscriptions on all the trophies if you want.

Simons: Would you describe a typical day for you in 1985?

Kiviat: Every day I go to the nutrition center for lunch. The van brings me to the door for a quarter. Lunch is 75 cents at the nutrition center. Yesterday we had meat patties with nice gravy.

Simons: Do you still smoke a cigar each day?

Kiviat: After lunch every day. My wife liked the smell of a cigar; some people don't. She used to buy me a box of cigars.

Simons: Do you still have an occasional scotch on the rocks?

Kiviat: Every day. Doctor's orders.

Simons: What do you watch on television?

Kiviat: I watch sporting events and comedy programs. I like "Three's Company," particularly Joyce Dewitt. I love "MASH."

Simons: Do you still exercise?

Kiviat: Not really. I get around doing things you do in the normal life without purposely exercising. Every other Tuesday I walk to the recreation center. That's a mile away. And being Jewish I move my hands when I talk.

Simons: Why did you decide to move to the Cedar Glen West retirement complex in Lakehurst, New Jersey?

Kiviat: It had to do with my friend Tommy Lennon. Mrs. Lennon is half-Jewish. Her father was a big tailor in Staten Island. She worked for awhile on Wall Street and met Tommy. First thing you know they got married. Tommy Lennon and I had been friends since we were kids and went to school together. I was a year ahead of Tommy in age. We were buddies. We both took up sports. We both took up track. Tommy even tried to make me an altar boy. Tommy was Catholic. And I once got Tommy Lennon to put a yamulka on his head and wear a tallis. Tommy graduated Penn and became a Wall Street broker. He was the chief timer at important track meets and became a member of the American Olympic Committee. My wife used to be Tommy's secretary. Our wives were friendly. Tommy and his wife eventually retired to Lakehurst and had a big house here. Tommy and his wife invited us down here, and we stayed with them. Tommy helped us to move to Lakehurst. Tommy passed on several years ago. August 28, 1972, we moved to the Glen Cove West retirement community in Lakehurst.

Simons: You've lived a long and remarkable life, and you have more energy than most men half your age. What's the secret?

Kiviat: One woman almost slapped my face maybe five or six months ago. Her husband laughed like hell. I used no condiments when I was a kid. Even today I avoid salt. No ketchup, no chili sauce, no highly seasoned food. In my youth they had no canned goods so you didn't have any salt. We had a lot of vegetables growing in our own back yard, and my mother was a good cook.

Simons: Do you think there are things about your personality that have contributed to your longevity?

Kiviat: I like to laugh. But lately I fly off the handle a little. I guess I'm alone too much now. Never been alone before in my life until my wife passed away. When Tommy Lennon was alive, I'd call Tommy if I had no place to go. I'd stop in every day to see Tommy. Tommy and Mrs. Lennon would have me and my wife over dinner. But since my wife died things are too monotonous.

Simons: So a good wife and a good friend are recipes for long, happy life.

Kiviat: Yes. Plenty of sleep also.