

Questions in English (Martha Jo); answers in Dutch (Micheline); translated by coach (Lieve) into English

Micheline, please tell us how you started swimming when you were in your early 20s?

I wanted to learn to swim because I like being in the water and I wanted to make friends. I walked to the pool near where I lived and asked to join a swimming group. But they said I was not good enough so they told me to leave.

What happened next?

No one helped me to find a swimming club but I still wanted to swim. I kept looking and one day I met a Special Olympics coach and he said I could join his group.

What did your coach teach you?

My coach taught me to do the crawl, backstroke and butterfly and he taught me to dive. I got faster and better.

How often do you train now?

I swim one hour a week at a local pool with my club. Lieve is my coach.

What countries did you participate in competitions?

I participated in Special Olympics competitions in Belgium, the Netherlands and in the World Games in the United States. I won a gold medal in the 100 m crawl, a silver medal in the 50 m backstroke and a bronze medal in the 25 m breast stroke

Fantastic! How did you feel when you won your gold medals?

I had butterflies in my stomach and my heart was pounding.

What other sports do you do?

I trained in gymnastics and athletics and swimming. Now I play bocce ("petanque") but swimming is my favorite.

Did sports offer you other opportunities?

Yes. In my club I became a coach assistant in athletics and swimming. I also help train very young children.

What do you do when you are not doing sports?

I like to help others so I volunteer at a home for elderly people where I help the hairdresser.

Finally, we are talking about accessibility – opening doors for people so they can participate in sports. Once a door to a sports club was opened, what did it give you?

I made friends and found a family.

Thank you, Micheline. Lieve, you've known Micheline for five years. What do you think is needed to give people with intellectual disabilities access to sports opportunities?

People with intellectual disabilities need:

- more information about the sport opportunities
- more assistance to help athletes participate a sports
- more sport opportunities
- more support from government, including the city
- more platforms to speak about people with intellectual disabilities and sport, like today, and also in schools, in institutions
- more press attention by events
- more possibilities to demonstrate our sports at mainstream sports events

Thank you.

(End of the Special Olympics Presentation)