

Biography

CHARLOTTE C. BAER, MD

October 11, 1908 - August 15, 1973



Dr. Charlotte Baer was born into a medical family of Wiesbaden, Germany where her father was a practicing physician. He served with distinction in the medical corps of the German Army in World War I and was decorated for his services. It was perhaps natural that his daughter, an only child, would attend medical school. Her father saw to it that at an appropriate time in her life she also attended a cooking school, which, no doubt, accounted for her excellence as a cook, a trait which continued throughout her lifetime. In the European tradition, she attended medical schools throughout Europe and, more than that, lived for varying periods of time in countries other than Germany, giving her considerably more than an elementary knowledge of foreign languages. By the time of her arrival in the United States, she could converse not only in German, but also in English, French, and Italian.

As the result of her medical studies, she received MD degrees from the Goethe Medical School Frankfurt am Main and the University of Berne, Switzerland. Throughout her college and medical school years, she found time to continue her enthusiasm for swimming and, in fact, became the intercollegiate breaststroke-swimming champion of Europe. By the time of the Berlin Olympics, she was not permitted to compete for the German team by the Nazi regime because of her Jewish heritage. She did, however, attend the Olympic Games in Berlin and recounted with great pleasure seeing Jesse Owens receive his three gold medals for track and field events with Adolph Hitler being among those present in the stadium.

During her medical education in Germany, perhaps the two individuals having the greatest influence on her career were her famous professor from Frankfurt, Franz Volhard, and her friend and teacher Charles Hildebrand. During her time at the University of Frankfurt, she also became acquainted with our own Otto Guttentag who preceded her in her flight from Nazi Germany to the United States.

Dr. Baer arrived in the United States during the fall of 1938 and after a brief stay in New York where she had relatives; she traveled to California where other distant relations lived. In California, she found herself possessed of an MD degree but not a license to practice medicine in Germany. California law then required a degree from a United States university for licensure unless the individual had been licensed to practice medicine in their home country. How many, at age thirty, would embark upon unknown waters in a foreign country to obtain their third MD degree in a language not native to them? This she did and was admitted to January 1939 with advanced standing at the beginning of the second semester of the third year of medical school at the University of California, a curriculum which at that time required five years to complete. This meant she still had two and a half years of requirements to meet. Those of us who knew her well during these two and a half years were aware that all was not easy for her in a foreign culture and language. To use Frost's words, she could be counted as "one acquainted with the night."

She early became a member of the clinical faculty as a Clinical Instructor in Medicine and for many years was a devoted and faithful assistant in the old course of physical diagnosis under Professor LeRoy Briggs. One of the best known of her section members during this era was the future physician in charge of the astronaut program, Dr. Charles Berry. After the first U.S. astronauts landed