

Contents

List of Illustrations	xi
Foreword by Allan H. "Bud" Selig	xv
Preface	xxi
Acknowledgments	xxix
Introduction by Martin Abramowitz	I

The 1930s

Henry "Hank" Greenberg: Hall of Fame Infielder and Outfielder, Revealing the Survival of American Judaism Generation by Generation	9
--	---

The 1940s

Thelma "Tiby" Eisen and Anita Foss: Baseball Players and Pioneers for Women's Rights, in a League of Their Own	35
Dr. Martin Abramowitz: Originator of Jewish Major Leaguers Baseball Cards	47
Barney Frank: Fan and Congressman	55

The 1950s

Al Rosen: First-Ever Unanimous Most Valuable Player Selection, the Luckiest Jew Alive	67
Alan Dershowitz: From Avi the Bum and Ballplayer to Alan the Professor, Defender, and Civil Libertarian	79
Sol Gittleman: First-Generation Jewish American, Realizing the American Dream	91

Howard Goldstein, Esquire: Jewish Baseball Memorabilia
Collector, Preserving Memory Jewish-Style. 103

Roger Kahn: Author of the Classic
Baseball Book *The Boys of Summer*. 113

The 1960s

Sandy Koufax: Pitcher Nonpareil and Perfect Gentleman 127

Murray Chass: Hall of Fame *New York Times* Scribe. 137

Ira Berkow: *New York Times* Journalist, Author,
Pulitzer Prize Winner, and Jewish Son 147

Rabbi Michael Paley: Unorthodox Orthodox Rabbi 157

Art Shamsky: Hank Greenberg Redux. 169

Ross Newhan and David Newhan: Hall of Fame Sports
Scribe and Major League Baseball Player, Father and Son 177

The 1970s

Marvin Miller: Baseball Game Changer and Former Executive
Director of the Major League Baseball Players Association 193

Ken Holtzman: Winningest Jewish Major
League Pitcher Ever, Observant Jew. 211

Ronald Shapiro and Mark Shapiro: Father and Son,
the Merging of Judaism into America 223

Ron Blomberg: Designated Hebrew 241

Marty Appel: Former New York
Yankees Public Relations Director 247

Joel Mael: Vice Chairman of the Florida Marlins, Orthodox Jew. . . . 257

Elliott Maddox: Major League Outfielder,
Black Convert to Judaism 267

The 1980s

Donald Fehr: Former Executive Director of the Major League Baseball Players Association.	281
Jerry Reinsdorf: Owner of the Chicago White Sox and the Chicago Bulls	293
Steve Hertz: Major League Infielder, Legendary College Coach	305
Al Clark: Longtime Major League Umpire, Fallen and Redeemed.	313

The 1990s

Allan H. "Bud" Selig: Innovative and Controversial Commissioner of Major League Baseball	325
Jeffrey Maier: Fan and Tenth Player	337
Andrew Zimbalist: Baseball's Economist	345
Leon Feingold: Israel Baseball League Player of the Year, Jewish Physical and Mental Giant.	355
Alan Schwarz: <i>New York Times</i> Columnist and Author.	367
Marvin Goldklang: Multiple Minor League Team Owner and Baseball Man of Influence	377
Brad Ausmus: Gold Glove Catcher	387
Randy Levine: President of the New York Yankees	393

The 2000s

Theo Epstein: The Youngest General Manager in Major League Baseball History	403
Gabe Kapler: Major League Outfielder and Minor League Manager	411

Craig Breslow: Major League Relief
Pitcher, Yale University Graduate. 421

Jeffrey Gurock: Professor of Jewish History at
Yeshiva University, Orthodox Jew, and Sportsman. 429

Stuart Sternberg: From Canarsie to
Tampa Bay by Way of Wall Street. 439

Kevin Youkilis: Euclis, the Greek God of Walks 449

The 2010s

Darren Harrison-Panis: On Course to
Be a Major League Baseball Owner 459

“Superman” Sam Fuld: Outfielder Nonpareil 473

Ian Kinsler: Major League All-Star Second Baseman. 481

Selected Bibliography 493

Index 499

Preface

Providence can be likened to God, and Providence has guided my steps since age seventy, when I undertook a writing career. I write about the “mystery” of that in the preface to my first book, *Voices of Brookline*. That wondrous mystery continued throughout the five years or more it took to complete *American Jews and America's Game*.

In May 2007 I completed teaching an adult education course in Brookline, Massachusetts, on the art of the interview. I based the course on Studs Terkel's book *Working* and my own book about Brookline, teaching interactively through back-and-forth interviews with my students. At the end of the course they were, to my mind, over the top in their evaluations of my pedagogic skills and very interested in my next project, which I had not even thought about. Against my strong disclaimers that Studs Terkel was the master, even the originator, of the art of interview and oral history, the students told me that they preferred my style of writing in the first person for rendering a conversation into a story that, they opined, was livelier than a monologue. I expressed to them my doubts that I could replicate that style while writing about people I would be meeting for the first time, as opposed to the many people I knew and interviewed for *Voices of Brookline*. In any event, I then had no idea what my next project might be.

Providence (God?) paid me another visit two days later. It seemed to me that the remarks of my students catalyzed a notion that surfaced in my mind—to write about the impact of Jews on the history of baseball. I had always loved baseball and was a proud Jew, although totally nonobservant—at least ritually—since the day after my bar mitzvah at Congregation Kehillath Israel in Brookline when I turned thirteen, in 1944.

If, indeed, Providence, God, or some creative force beyond man's power to comprehend was guiding my actions, it seemed to me that would be consistent with those attributes somehow provided to humans to progressively perpetuate and advance their kind: sex, food, shelter, language, and memory to enable the experiences and record of civilization to be written and preserved essentially as true stories passed formally or informally, unbroken, from generation to generation. I believed and was thrilled to think I might

contribute in a very small way on Jewish and American themes to this never-ending process.

I knew there was a plethora of books on Jews and baseball. I had read many of them and had the impression most were limited to Jewish players and were superficial in that they did not probe into the person's roots and psyche. Having completed sixty or more in-depth interviews for *Voices of Brookline*, I knew that my strength lay in getting people to talk deeply about their experiences and thoughts. I believed from the start that interviews with personages connected with baseball could be fashioned into a lively book on baseball, Judaism, and America. Although the book metamorphosed over time, that basic idea remained.

The "force" stayed with me. Some days after my idea first surfaced I found out about the new Israel Baseball League, set to inaugurate its first season in late June 2007. A series of fortuitous events put me in touch with Marty Appel, former Yankees public relations director, PR man for the new league, acknowledged public relations guru, and the best-selling author of many books. Impressive, yes, but no more impressive than Marty personally, one of nature's nicest people. In one fell, gracious, and generous swoop Marty Appel made it possible for me to get off the blocks at a record pace. In a matter of days Marty, in effect, plunked me down in Israel in the company of several former Jewish Major League Baseball players like Ken Holtzman, Ron Blomberg, Art Shamsky, and Steve Hertz, who had been enlisted to manage teams in the Israel Baseball League.

Interviewing them, Marty, and others in those heady early summer days in Israel, and reconnecting with my Jewish heritage in Tel Aviv, Jaffa, and Jerusalem, proved to be the tonic that propelled me on a five-year journey of discovery and creativity.

By the end of September of that year I had sat for three solid hours at the elbow of Marvin Miller, whom I believe to be not only the most influential Jew in baseball history but arguably the most influential baseball personage ever for his leadership of the players in attaining free agency, ridding baseball of its plantation mentality, and changing the economic face of the game forever. Marvin Miller's personal comments showed me an exemplary Jewish life that empowered him to achieve his goals.

Certainly there could be no book without Sandy Koufax and Hank Greenberg. But Sandy Koufax was known to be elusive, if not reclusive. How do you get him? Indeed, where can you find him? Once again the resourceful Marty Appel came galloping to my rescue. Marty had known Sandy from his

days as the public relations director of the Yankees in the seventies, not long after Koufax retired in 1966. I knew that their relationship had continued. If I sent Marty a letter to Koufax, would he forward it? Yes, he would. So far, so good. I sent the letter to Marty, and Marty sent the letter to Sandy.

Early one Saturday morning some weeks later, unpredictably, startlingly, and thrillingly, Sandy Koufax called me at home to gently tell me he would not sit for an interview. In the story on Sandy Koufax in this book I describe that relatively extended conversation and how it gave me the story on the iconic mound-master I so badly needed. Thank you, Marty! Thank you, Sandy!

In late June 2008 I attended a Hank Greenberg weekend at the Baseball Hall of Fame in Cooperstown, New York. Of course, I knew a story on Hank Greenberg was central to this endeavor, he being the most important baseball figure in American Jewish history (as distinguished from baseball history), if not *the* most important twentieth-century American Jewish figure.

Hank Greenberg had passed away at age seventy-five in 1986, so I would have to build a story by interviewing key figures in his life. At Cooperstown that weekend I interviewed his biographer, Pulitzer Prize winner Ira Berkow, his documentary film biographer, Aviva Kempner, and his daughter, Alva, who opened the way to meeting at a later date with Hank's eminently successful and agreeable son, Steve Greenberg, in New York City. I also met with Hall of Fame slugger Ralph Kiner in Palm Beach, Florida, who proved to be an affable and communicative man. Kiner shared with me stories of his almost forty-year close friendship with Hank Greenberg, springing from Hank's mentoring of Ralph when they played together in Pittsburgh in 1947, Greenberg's last Major League Baseball season and Kiner's second. I believe I was able to form a portrait of Hank Greenberg showing how great a man he truly was as a person and a professional with the input of these giving people.

In writing about Hank Greenberg, who seemingly, but not actually, had come close to abandoning his Orthodox Jewish roots, and talking to his son Steve and daughter, Alva, who had gravitated back toward Judaism from an essentially nonreligious upbringing, I realized that the scope of the book had exponentially enlarged into an anecdotal examination of the character of individual Jews in America and issues of American Judaism today, most notably the viability of American Judaism in the future. For manifold reasons, that issue has periodically plagued the Jewish community in America for almost two centuries, as Jews have grappled with, even while enjoying, the license granted by America's freedom and Judaism's tolerance of each person's individuality, a doubleheader that can and has led many a Jew beyond the pale of Judaism.

Along with that, the scope of who was a proper person to interview likewise began to enlarge. In other words, I put the question to myself as to who is a Jewish voice of American baseball. The further I went, the more that concept developed, until at last I thought it was any Jewish person who had a passion for baseball. Thus people with no ties to organized baseball, whose main calling was in other areas or disciplines, were brought into the fold.

The next stroke of luck came in late October 2008, when I met with America's foremost Jewish historian, Professor Jonathan Sarna of Brandeis University, author of the prizewinning *American Judaism* (2004). Jonathan has generously mentored me since that meeting and throughout this process. Like breaking sticks, Jonathan gave me an apt title for this book. When I told him my idea for the title, he thought for a moment and then said, "How about something simple like 'Jewish Voices of American Baseball?'" While neither of our ideas became the ultimate title, can a thought-provoking suggestion for a title condition an author as to how he perceives the book and then conceives its contents? Yes, and yes! Jonathan's wise suggestion advanced my conception of the book to a higher plane—from one anchored in baseball to one growing into the realms of Jewish and American life. Thank you, Professor Jonathan Sarna!

Ultimately I interviewed fifty people in conversations averaging well over one hour each; several extended to two or three hours.

I am not generally given to superstition, mysticism, or the notion that God watches after me personally, but I do invoke Providence once again to answer the query many folks have put to me, which is how I obtained this impressive, probably unprecedented, array of interviewees. I will allow that a dose of perseverance and *chutzpah* inherited from my late nonagenarian mother helped to obtain and draw thoughtful, insightful, and personal responses from such inspiring people.

The real answer to that question is the generous collaborative spirit tendered to me by those working in this same vineyard. Dr. Martin Abramowitz, the creator of several sets of now-famous Jewish baseball cards, whom I had interviewed early on for this book, opined at a point when I thought my interviewing was finished that interviewing some individuals with serious commitment to Jewish life, both religious and secular, who were also associated with baseball would lend needed balance to the book. How right Martin was! He led me to New York rabbi Michael Paley, Yeshiva University professor Jeffrey Gurock, Marlins' vice chairman Joel Mael, *New York Times* columnist Murray Chass, and Tufts professor Sol Gittleman, interviews that expanded not only

the book but also my own thinking about Judaism. Also, Marty's copious literary abilities flowed into the apt and thoughtful introduction he wrote for the book. Finally, there was Marty's ready and giving nod to the notion of using words akin to those he had coined, *American Jews and America's Game*, as the title of this book. Triples are tough to get in baseball, trifectas even tougher at the track, and a triple blessing even more rare. Thank you, Marty Abramowitz!

Providence and perseverance were my helpmates yet again when I sought that eminent person to write the foreword for this book who most appropriately exemplifies and represents the several strands of American and Jewish life and history set forth in its pages. Thank you, Commissioner of Baseball Allan H. "Bud" Selig!

At the last, casting my eyes on the whole body of material I had collected from notable Jews in only one field of endeavor, I realized the book provided at least a partial answer, albeit anecdotal, to a question of great interest to Jews and non-Jews alike: how have Jews gained substantial influence in many fields in America despite their relatively miniscule numbers?

The expansion of the scope of the book and its subjects together with seeking out and visiting those subjects led to a double odyssey, one of the body, the other of the mind. That combination made a singular labor of love into the labor of love of a lifetime; a labor that proved to be an experience I had always envied in others—the total focus on and immersion in a project so quickening to the spirit and imagination as to exclude all else from consciousness while engaged in that work.

Peripatetic is the word that springs to mind to describe my physical peregrinations: among my points of debarkation were Tel Aviv and Jerusalem in Israel; Boston, Cambridge, Newton, Northampton, Brockton, and Wellfleet in Massachusetts; New York City thrice, Cooperstown twice, and Stone Ridge in New York; Los Angeles, La Jolla, Rancho Mirage, Tarzana, and Corona in California; Palm Beach, Fort Myers, Kissimmee, and Winter Haven in Florida; Phoenix, Arizona; and Baltimore, Maryland. I would submit that to visit the United States of America is a good way to put one in mind of writing about it.

Of course, an interview is best conducted in privacy in a quiet place. However, I accepted that opportunity trumps preference, which led to a multiplicity of venues, some close to bizarre: Gabe Kapler at 6:00 a.m. at a Starbucks in Tarzana, California; Craig Breslow and Kevin Youkilis among scantily clad bodies in the Red Sox clubhouse at Fort Myers, Florida, where I was lucky enough to strike up a conversation with Manny Ramirez while waiting for Youk to finish his repast; Brad Ausmus and David Newhan in the tumult of

the Astros clubhouse in Kissimmee, Florida; Jeffrey Maier on the balcony at the Borders flagship bookstore at lunchtime in the heart of historical Boston, directly opposite the Old South Meeting House; Marty Appel, Ken Holtzman, Ron Blomberg, Art Shamsky, and Steve Hertz in the vast lounge of the Dan Panorama Hotel on the shores of the Mediterranean in Tel Aviv; Marv Goldklang and Murray Chass amid the clatter of dishes and boisterousness of conversation in busy restaurants in Manhattan; Roger Kahn in the dining room of his home at the cocktail hour; Tiby Eisen and Anita Foss in the Brentwood Inn, just around the corner from the house where many think O. J. did the deed; many others, including Bud Selig, Alan Dershowitz, Theo Epstein, Don Fehr, Barney Frank, Jeffrey Gurock, Andrew Zimbalist, Michael Paley, Joel Mael, Sol Gittleman, Mark Shapiro, and Ron Shapiro, in the privacy of their respective sanctum sanctorums; and finally, late in the 2011 season, Sam Fuld and then a few weeks later Ian Kinsler, each in the visiting team's dugout along the third base line in my own field of dreams, Boston's fabled Fenway Park.

Speaking of quiet places, the quietest was the Hall of Fame Library in the beautiful village of Cooperstown, New York, where I spent two whole days in the autumn of 2010 culling photos and illustrations from its vast collection with the blessings of its president, Jeff Idelson, and the unfailing ministrations of its librarian, Freddy Berowski, and the excavations of its archivists, John Horne and Pat Kelly. Indeed, a picture is worth a thousand words, old ones especially, and close to thirty of the pictures seen in this volume come from that treasure trove. Thank you, Jeff, and your archeologists of America's game.

And like Odysseus my trek was not without physical danger. Leaving my interview with economist Andrew Zimbalist at Smith College in Northampton, Massachusetts, at dusk during a storm that had only mildly interfered with my progress from Roger Kahn's home in Stone Ridge, New York, earlier that February day, I determined to traverse the hundred miles separating me from home and hearth. To my dismay the storm turned into a display of practically everything Mother Nature can hurl down at mankind: gusty and displacing wind, snow, rain, hail, ice, fog, dusk melting into darkness, and decreasing visibility compounded by huge tractor-trailers closing in and hurling mounds of snow and ice onto my windscreen. Hunkering down, focusing on the task, banishing fear but not caution, getting the most from my no-longer-youthful powers of vision, I slogged thankfully through to my safe haven.

The mental odyssey I experienced was energizing and informative in a more or less utilitarian way and inspiring and personally renewing in a per-

sonal way. I knew a lot about baseball going in and a lot more coming out, not only about the game itself but also about its centrality in and connection to American life and Jewish assimilation.

Personally, I discovered much I never knew about Judaism and its history and values, renewed my connections with my own heritage, and reinvented myself, or at least my thoughts about myself, as a Jew, although that would not be discernible to a casual or even an interested observer. I have never been observant in a ritual sense, and that continues. I was always a proud Jew, and that too continues. I think I was always aware of the parallel between American freedom and Judaism's big tent, which embraces many ways of living as a Jew in the world, but my appreciation and pride in that has been acutely sharpened, honing, too, my appreciation of America. I have always been (I hope) accepting of my fellow humans, forgiving in my attitudes, and generous toward my fellows from wherever they come, but I realize anew and better now how that derives from my beginnings as a Jew, and I now more consciously seek to live those values.

How happy I am to contribute in some small measure to the writings of Jews about their world and the world of all those people with whom Jews share their lives.

LARRY RUTTMAN

Brookline, Massachusetts

January 26, 2012

It is ironic that Hank Greenberg, without question the greatest Jewish position player ever and one of the greatest of all players, an icon to all Jews in his own time for refusing to play on Yom Kippur during the closing games of the hotly contested 1934 American League pennant chase, gave his three children practically no hint of their Jewish heritage during their formative years. Perhaps equally ironic is that Greenberg, despite emerging from an Orthodox Bronx family and then eschewing Jewish observance altogether and Jewish identification to some extent for all of his mature years, lived what might well be described as an impeccable Jewish life, probably unrecognized as such by himself. In some little-understood way, whether traditionally, observationally, osmotically, genetically, or some combination of these, the essentials of the Jewish tradition were powerfully passed through Hank to his children, Glenn, Steve, and Alva, and to most of his children's children—his own grandchildren—perhaps adding some insight into the survival and even the flowering of the Jews over millennia.

So who was Hank Greenberg, slugger and hero, now gone for over a quarter of a century, since 1986? An intimate portrait of this extraordinary person is here painted by his accomplished son Steve, his successful and philanthropic daughter Alva, and his teammate, longtime friend, and fellow Hall of Fame honoree Ralph Kiner. Greenberg's public persona is etched by his Pulitzer Prize-winning biographer, Ira Berkow, and his acclaimed film documentarian, Aviva Kempner.

Steve Greenberg

Steve Greenberg,¹ born after the end of his father's baseball career, graduated from Yale University, where he was the captain of the Eli nine. He subsequently played fine baseball in the Minor Leagues, became a highly regarded baseball agent, at an early age was the deputy commissioner of baseball under Commissioner Fay Vincent, and now is arguably the most important dealmaker in sports. He operates from his position as a partner at Allen & Company, the well-regarded Manhattan boutique investment bank that weaves together complex deals in the oftentimes chaotic media and sports industries.

Was there any Jewish orientation in Steve's home during his growing-up years?

"Neither of my parents, at least by the time I came around, was particu-

1. *Steve Greenberg interview, April 22, 2009, Manhattan.*



3. Captain of the Yale University nine Steve Greenberg and his dad, Hank, ca. 1970. Courtesy of Steve Greenberg.

larly religious, and we really had very little or no religious training when I was growing up. By the time we reached puberty we had to sort of figure out what was important to us and how we wanted to deal with the religious side of our lives. Every application you get from the time you are thirteen, whether it is from junior high school, a private school, a boarding school, or a college, had a little box for religion. I can remember sort of puzzling over that as a teenager.”

Was Steve bar mitzvahed?

“Well it’s strange to say that by the time I should have been a bar mitzvah boy I really didn’t have any Jewish training at all. So I didn’t know really what the Jewish traditions were, what the Jewish history really was, other than the little bit that I picked up by osmosis. So my relationship with my Jewish identity, if you will, came from going to services as a late teenager. The first time I ever went to a high holiday service was when I was eighteen.”

How did that seminal event come about?

“I was dating Myrna Katz, the girl who became my wife. I was a freshman at Yale at the time. She said, ‘Where are you going for the holiday?’ A very good

question. Myrna went on, 'They must have services in New Haven,' and sure enough they did, and she went with me. Then I sort of began to figure it out on my own. I had taken a lot of religion courses in high school and even at Yale, so I had studied the differences between various religions. Obviously, I had read enough of the Old Testament through those studies to know a little bit of Jewish history. What did I figure out? I learned through that reading and other reading and talking to my dad and others about the history of the twentieth-century Jewish experience—particularly about the Holocaust and the Jews in America. I figured out how I wanted to relate to that.

"Now we go to high holiday services. Both of our daughters were bat mitzvahed, but I'm not particularly observant beyond that. We used to have the Shabbat service every Friday night when the kids were little because we thought it was a great way for the family and our friends to get together. [Shabbat is the Jewish Sabbath, a day of religious observance and abstinence from work, kept from Friday evening to Saturday evening.] That said, we were sort of on the liberal end of the Reform spectrum. On Shabbat we lit the candles, said the Hebrew prayers, and we broke the challah [a special braided bread eaten by Jews on the Sabbath and holidays]. Then we had pizza and spaghetti for dinner because that's what we liked to eat. Our rabbi said, 'You know, there's nothing wrong with that. It is not disrespectful.' So we figured out how we wanted to observe and be part of the Jewish tradition."

Steve's family now belongs to the Central Synagogue, a Reform congregation in Manhattan.

"Now I only go to temple on the high holidays and stay home from work on Yom Kippur and Rosh Hashanah. I'm aware of my father's own particular baseball history of not playing on Yom Kippur. We love the holidays. Every year we have a big seder with twenty-five or so people. [Seder is a service and ceremonial dinner for the first two nights of the holiday of Passover, which celebrates the Exodus, when the ancient Jews were freed from slavery in Egypt.] We always host a break fast dinner after Yom Kippur at which we read aloud the Edgar Guest poem. [Guest, an English-born Detroit newspaperman and poet, wrote a laudatory poem about Hank Greenberg not playing on Yom Kippur.] So that is how I think about these things."

Had Steve ever spoken to his father about the different route his father had taken?

"We talked a lot. He was raised in an Orthodox home. His parents were immigrants. He went to temple every week, was bar mitzvahed, and was observant because it was part of his tradition. His mother kept a kosher home. [In

Judaism *kosher* refers to conforming to dietary laws, being ritually pure, or selling or serving food prepared in accordance with dietary laws.] That was a Hank Greenberg I never knew because I never knew the Hank Greenberg who had that upbringing, just like I never knew the Hank Greenberg who hit fifty-eight home runs. I was born after he retired. The Hank Greenberg that I knew, my dad, had moved to a very different place in terms of his Jewish identity by the time he was no longer in the limelight as an icon and hero. But I spoke to him about the years before I knew him and about his views on religion.

"What I came away with was that I would hold up his view of how a Jew should act against anybody else that I've known—whether they went to temple every day, whether they observed everything, whether they kept a kosher household—because his view was basically and simply founded on the Ten Commandments, which he took to heart. And he didn't pass them down to us in the sense of one, two, three, four, five, on a list, but rather in terms of how he acted. He treated people fairly. He didn't cheat people. He believed in honesty. He respected his parents. That is really what I got from him. And he had a certain spirituality that was not textbook, not taken from the Torah [the law of God as revealed to Moses and recorded in the first five books of the Hebrew scriptures (the Pentateuch)], but a view of morality and how to behave that I would emulate over anybody else whom I've ever met. I like to think that all three of us—my brother, Glenn, and my sister, Alva, and myself—are picking up on my dad's example in some way."

What accounts for the lack of exposure Steve and his siblings had to Judaism as they grew up?

"We got up one Yom Kippur morning, and my dad said, out of the blue, 'Boys get dressed. You're not going to school today. I'm taking you someplace special because this is the holiest day for the Jews.' I'm eleven, my brother is thirteen, and we were excited. So what does Dad do? He takes us to the planetarium and we sit there in the dark looking up at the stars. My joke after that was that I thought that Yom Kippur was a day on which the Jews went to the planetarium! But the fact of the matter is that that was sort of the beginning of an awareness. But my brother and I were left to figure it out by ourselves.

"The next spring at Passover we hosted a seder at our home. My grandfather, my father's father, comes, a couple of my aunts and uncles come, my cousins come, there are probably fifteen of us. My grandfather, with his Eastern European accent, and in Hebrew where appropriate, presides over the seder. That was wonderful! It was almost as if someone from a foreign

culture had come. I had never been exposed to a seder. I didn't really know the story of Passover. I was about eleven or twelve at that time. Perhaps then I knew some of the story of Exodus. My father obviously made the decision not to expose us. It's not like he said, you're not Jewish, you're Protestant or something else. There was just never any discussion about it.

"There were two reasons for it: one was that my mother's family on my grandmother's side was German Jewish. I won't say they were anti-Semitic but they were of the group known as 'Our Crowd' [prominent nineteenth-century German Jews famously identified with the banking industry], the assimilated and not-at-all-religious Jews of New York, of which there were many, and still are. My mother, Caral Gimbel, was an heiress to the Gimbel department store fortune, so not overtly but implicitly, my dad 'made a bargain' when he married one of that crowd. Part of the deal was that religion wasn't going to be part of the equation.

"My father also told me that over a course of years, and highlighted by or culminating with World War II, he got turned off by religion. He came to see all organized religion as hypocritical. He certainly saw the Catholic Church as terribly hypocritical historically, and he saw organized religion generally tearing people apart as opposed to bringing them together—wars fought over it, people persecuted because of it, people annihilated because of it. And when he came back from the war he said he just had absolutely no interest in participating in traditional religious ceremonies or events. Then, shortly thereafter, he married my mother, so that was his explanation for why we had no exposure."

Was there a distinction in Hank's mind between being an observant Jew or an ethnic Jew?

"There was no stronger supporter of Israel and its right to defend itself and exist. Not only didn't he deny his Jewishness, but if you read anything about him, you know if someone said something anti-Semitic and he caught it out of the corner of his ear, you better be prepared to fight him because he would fight you over it. While with the Tigers he was very protective and supportive of people in the Detroit Jewish community. As I said, he lived by the standards that his people held most dear. So he was clearly Jewish and thought of himself as a Jew. He just thought that organized religion was gobbledygook. So he just lived his life."

During the last thirteen years of Hank's life, father and son enjoyed an intimate relationship. In those years, Steve says, they would see each other "three or four days a week. We played a lot of tennis together. We had lunch

together frequently. We would have heart-to-heart conversations. I asked him every question I could think of.

"My father was fiercely Jewish. Quite literally, he fought some people over it. He went into the Chicago White Sox clubhouse after a game in which some White Sox players were calling him 'a dirty kike.' He stood in the middle of their clubhouse and said, 'Which one of you bastards was yelling that stuff at me? Get up now and let's deal with it.' But he never came back to Judaism in any formalistic way.

"First and foremost I was fascinated with the baseball part. This was the period of my life when I was a players' agent. I had played some Minor League ball. I couldn't get enough of talking with him about Babe Ruth, Ted Williams, Joe DiMaggio, and other of his contemporaries. It wasn't hard to get him to talk about baseball. My father was fascinated by Babe Ruth. Whenever the subject came up about my father hitting fifty-eight home runs in 1938 and being only two away from Ruth's record of sixty with five games to play, he would say, 'Look, nobody should ever confuse me with Babe Ruth. Ruth hit over fifty home runs first, and then a couple of years later he hit fifty-nine home runs, and then he hit sixty home runs. He was just in a league all by himself. I had one fluke year when everything went right, and I got close, but nobody should confuse me with Babe Ruth.' That was not false modesty. By saying that he wasn't running himself down, or Ted Williams or Joe DiMaggio. He just felt that Ruth was a quantum leap ahead of everybody else."

In fact, Hank Greenberg put on an astoundingly good imitation of his hero "The Bambino," as the record book attests: a .313 lifetime batting average. Hank drove in an almost incredible average of one run in less than each four at bats in his twelve-year American League career and batted .318 in the four World Series to which he led the Tigers. Greenberg was also considered a fine-fielding first baseman and left fielder.

What about Hank's intellectual life and politics?

"He was a voracious reader of fiction, nonfiction, biographies, and history. He loved to talk about current events and history. My father and I talked a lot about world affairs and what was happening from day to day. He never voted for a Republican in his life. He disliked Ronald Reagan. This is interesting because, again, it goes back to Jewish values. The first year that Reagan was president his tax return was published, which showed that he had earned some seven-figure sum and had given only about \$10,000 to charity. My father's reaction was that 'I knew I didn't like that Reagan. He's a cheap bastard like all those Republicans.' He was a lifelong Democrat—FDR was at the top of

his list. I think he would be enthralled by Barack Obama and would love the fact that the country has come to the point that it actually would elect an African American to be president.

“Jackie Robinson broke in with the Dodgers in 1947, which was my father’s last year playing baseball. On the field of play he spoke encouraging words to Jackie. Later he became friends with him. My dad became general manager of the Cleveland Indians when Bill Veeck was the owner. [Veeck was an owner and promoter famous for bringing many significant and imaginative innovations to the baseball scene.] Both of them teamed up to help the advancement of many African Americans into the American League, including Larry Doby [Hall of Fame outfielder and first black to play in the American League and later the second black Major League manager].”

How personal were the conversations between father and son?

“When I was having a problem he would be the first person I would go to because of his world experience. He was as smart as anybody I knew. I often thought that if he had broken a leg when he was sixteen and couldn’t play baseball, there is absolutely no question that he would have done something notable in some other field by his force of will, determination, and raw intelligence. I saw him in his fifties, sixties, and seventies in the company of top businessmen of the time, and he could hold his own with any of them, despite having only one year of college. That is just who he was.

“I tried to explore with him his own romantic life because it was striking to me that the Hank Greenberg that I never knew in his twenties and thirties was an awfully good-looking guy, tall, lanky, handsome, dapper, carried himself well, and at that time he was a bachelor and a ballplayer with lots of money in his pocket by the standards at that time. He talked about it a little bit, not in any great detail, because he was of that era where there was a certain kind of formality and chivalry about that subject, almost a Sir Walter Raleigh attitude—the idea that you just didn’t talk in great detail about the women you dated. But we talked about it some. There is no question that he had a very active romantic and social life.

“Here is a very personal story he told me. He was on a coast-to-coast flight. A very attractive woman got on, whom he knew, who was married. My father was not married at that time. She sat next to him for the six-or-so-hour flight. She propositioned him on the plane. Her husband was in California, my father wasn’t married, she was going to be in New York for a week, and she said, ‘You know, it doesn’t have to be anything serious, but we could have a great week in New York.’ My father declined the invitation. It’s a little thing,

but that is who he was. If you think about athletes today, or people in general, you think it would go in the other direction. It would have shocked me if the story had ended any other way.”

Did Steve talk with his father about friendship and giving?

“My dad had some close, lifelong friendships with people from New York whom he had known for over fifty years, since his youthful days. His friendship with Ralph Kiner was not quite lifelong, but forty years is a long time, and that relationship was special. I am hard-pressed to think of any other friendship in sports that quite rivals it—the veteran player and the sophomore, the impact that the veteran’s mentoring has on the young player, speaking to management to prevent Ralph being sent early in that season to the Minors and tutoring him to the point where Ralph led the league that season of 1947 with fifty-one home runs. Then the friendship goes on. When Ralph was reaching the end of his career, as general manager my father traded to obtain him for Cleveland. Then, after Ralph’s career was over, my father gave him his first radio job in Chicago, with the White Sox. Most importantly, my dad had a big hand in recommending Ralph for the radio job with the New York Mets, where he still broadcasts some forty-five years later, now in his eighties. My father and Ralph Kiner maintained that bond of friendship until my dad passed away. Ralph is a class act. Their friendship was unique. My dad was best man at two of Ralph’s weddings and was asked to be the best man at the third. According to my dad, he said, ‘Ralph, I’d like to come, I will come, I’ll be there, but I’ve been best man twice. I’m not going to do it again, two is enough.’”

Plainly, Hank was a good dad to Steve.

“My dad is my number one role model. That’s not even close. He is to me like Babe Ruth was to my dad—for me it’s my dad and then sort of everybody else. My brother, Glenn, was a great role model for me growing up in many respects. I have a very close relationship with Glenn.

“You know, Larry, for me he was a great father. That is not to say he was a perfect father, and it’s not to say that my brother or my sister couldn’t have had a different experience. Never, as far as I can remember, did he say to me that he loved me. But he wrote me letters which essentially said he loved me and was proud of me. That is the way he did things. If you needed a hug and words out of the mouth, you would be disappointed. He just couldn’t say it, and I came to understand that. If you knew his father, I guarantee that his father never said, ‘Hank, I love you.’ But with a paper and a pen my dad could say anything.”

What was the greatest influence his father had on Steve's life?

"You know, it's just this—when in doubt, do the right thing. Life is so much more simple just telling the truth and doing what you think is right."

The Detroit Tigers have had many great players in their long history, but the two greatest are Hank Greenberg and Ty Cobb (holder of the highest lifetime batting average in Major League history, an incredible .367 over a twenty-four-year career, and the first inductee into baseball's Hall of Fame, getting more votes than Babe Ruth). Since Cobb's career ended in 1928 and Hank's career began in 1930, the two never played together on the same field. Not only that, it could hardly be expected that they would be pen pals. As Steve said, Hank was out there on the left, adoring FDR. Tyrus Raymond Cobb, thought by some to be the greatest player ever, had a reputation as having psychopathic characteristics, as a violent man, a racist who belonged to the Ku Klux Klan, and an anti-Semite. Steve recounted the "friendship" of this oddest of odd couples:

"I don't think anybody knows about this, but my father apparently had a long pen pal relationship with Ty Cobb. I found that out because of an autographed photo that I now have of Ty Cobb inscribed 'To Hank Greenberg from your friend Ty Cobb.' Of course, I have heard the stories that Cobb was a lot of bad things. I said to my father, 'What is this?' and he said, 'One day I got a letter from Ty Cobb. It said, "Dear Hank, I've been following your early career with the Tigers. I want to commend you on your accomplishments."' My dad wrote back, and over the years they had a series of back-and-forth letters, and at some point my dad wrote to Ty Cobb saying he would love to have an autographed picture, and Ty Cobb sent one to him. Unfortunately, Dad didn't keep those letters. I think what it shows is that whatever else may have been going on in Cobb's psyche, he really respected baseball talent. That is the part of the story which I find fascinating. Yes, my dad was a great letter writer and a great communicator."

Alva Greenberg

Almost a year before meeting Steve Greenberg,² I met Hank Greenberg's daughter, Alva, at an event given in his honor in late June 2008 at the Baseball Hall of Fame in Cooperstown, New York, marking the seventy-fifth anniversary of Hank's rookie season in the Major Leagues. Alva, a fine art consultant already successful in a series of entrepreneurial efforts, agreed to be interviewed.

2. *Alva Greenberg interview, June 28, 2008, Cooperstown NY.*



4. Ty Cobb. Courtesy of the National Baseball Hall of Fame Library.

“My father had high expectations for himself, and he had high expectations for his children. He was probably less double-edged for me as a girl because he was sexist in that way and didn’t think that women had to perform the way men had to perform. Certainly his sons, my brothers, Glenn and Steve, were closely scrutinized for their academics and their athletics. I was never pushed in the same way. But when I went out on the courts to play tennis with my father, it was not a social event. On the tennis court you had to play well. He always wanted to win, and as a partner in doubles he was the critical one: ‘Stand here, why’d you let that one go by, move right, move left,’ that kind of stuff. I think every great achiever is self-focused. My father was. He loved us but was very critical. When he was with you, he absolutely was with you.”

After Alva’s mother and father divorced, for a time she lived with her father happily in New York City. Then Hank joined the front office of the Chicago

White Sox. Alva's brothers were away at school, and she faced the prospect of being at home alone for four days a week with the housekeeper/nanny. Under those circumstances, when her father asked Alva whether she would like to go live with her mother, she said she would. The emotions Alva felt surrounding that issue caused her most negative feelings toward her father.

"I loved being with my father. When we were together we would go out to dinner, we would go to the movies, we would play card games. Before his second marriage I would be with him while my brothers were off at school, and it would just be the two of us. I remember Sunday evenings when we'd watch movies. We had a close relationship.

"I was so miserable living with my mother. I went to my father at that time, and he turned me down about coming back to live with him, saying, 'No, you're not going to come live with me.' His stand was that 'I asked you at age ten if you wanted to live with your mother, and now at age twelve don't tell me you want to come back to live here.' He could have said, 'Let's talk about it' or 'Maybe you can spend some time here, we'll see how it goes.' He could have said something like, 'I hear what you are saying, but I'm not prepared now to have you come live here full time.' That would have been the soft way. It is likely he was convinced that he was correctly teaching me that a commitment, once made, is to be kept."

Nonetheless, throughout my hour-long interview with Alva, she used a series of affecting words about her father that demonstrated her deep feelings for him, words like *critical, loving, decisive, old-fashioned, intelligent, eloquent, well-read, humorous, self-effacing, did the right thing, handsome, charming, good manners, industrious, unprejudiced, generous, even-tempered, warm, courtly, and a man's man.*

Did Hank give any gifts or remembrances to Alva?

"I have a tennis sweater that was his. He gave me a wedding band that he had given to my mother. He also gave to me the keychain that was from Ralph Kiner. It says, 'To the king.' I use the keychain. I keep the keys to my apartment in New York on that keychain. So my father is always with me. Those gifts are very meaningful to me. I can remember the two of us being in his study in New York just before he moved to California, when I was a young teenager, and he went into the closet and retrieved those things for me."

Was her father demonstrative toward her?

"He would hug me, he would kiss me, I got the sense he was proud of me and what I was doing. On the other hand, I would get these sort of dismissive answers: 'Whatever you want to do, whatever makes you happy.'

"At moments I still miss him. I certainly wish he could have known my children and they could have known him, especially my son, William, who works with the New York Mets now. I think William would have gotten a kick out of my father. It's always sad not to have your parents be part of your children's lives. We had fun playing tennis, having lunch, playing backgammon. My father was a great raconteur. Some people think they are great raconteurs, and they're not—they are boring. But Dad was a good storyteller."

Alva sees her father as a man having old-fashioned values.

"I think attitudinally he was old-fashioned. At times his opinion was close-minded, like when he'd think long hair means you're gay. But he certainly was not prejudiced. He accepted all people. He was a terrific guy. He was a wonderful man. He did what he said he would do. I think when he didn't play on Yom Kippur he was doing what he thought was the right thing. He wasn't being religious. He was doing the right thing.

"We never talked about Judaism. We never did anything Jewish. He was a fierce proponent of Israel. He never lost his feeling for being a Jew. I once asked him, 'Why don't we observe Judaism?' I didn't even realize what a deal it was until I went to college at the University of Pennsylvania. My freshman year I found out that Hank Greenberg was a big deal to the Jews. I knew for baseball fans he was a big deal, but I didn't know that for Jews he was a big deal. So that was the awakening for me, and I was embarrassed because it was expected of me to be, if not an Orthodox Jew, a conservative Jew, or to know something—but I'd never been to a synagogue in my life."

So what brought Alva to the synagogue?

"Mostly because my middle son went to boarding school at an early age. He adored the image of his grandfather. And then he wanted to be bar mitzvahed when the other kids were being bar mitzvahed. So I thought, 'Maybe I better go to a synagogue and see what this is all about.' So he was bar mitzvahed, and I found a community. This was at the same time I was getting divorced. So I became involved in the synagogue at that time. And still I like to go to Wednesday morning minyan [a quorum of at least ten Jewish adults to pray]. So now I'm a social Jew, if not religiously. I call myself a Jew, as I always have.

"It's in you. My greatest awakening was when I went to a dinner in Connecticut held by the Jewish Federation. I had been living in Connecticut with all these WASPs in Essex, Old Lyme, and Lyme. At the dinner I said to myself, Oh my God. I know what the problem is. I'm Jewish and I felt completely at home right away—everybody is talking too loud, everybody is taking food off each other's plates, everybody is giving each other a hard time, most people



5. Alva Greenberg at her Kenyon College graduation with her dad, Hank, 1974. Courtesy of Alva Greenberg.

are not wearing black. Hello! It's a bunch of Jews. So you can't get away from it by saying you're not Jewish.

"I think there is a genetic component in that. My daughter is Korean. When she was very young, the pattern of her speech was not an American pattern of speech, and I said to her pediatrician, this sounds Asian to me, could she

have sort of a subliminal Korean pattern of speech? And the doctor said, 'Absolutely.'"

What was the greatest influence her father had on Alva's life?

"The greatest influence was giving me an inability to be satisfied with what I do, the idea that you can always do better. I had a successful art gallery, and now I am starting what I call a creative design space. And that is only my business side. I've been hugely active in philanthropy. In business and in life, this need to perform is from my father. I think it is a lifelong thing. Dad was an example of industriousness, focus, living a good life, not being prejudiced, and being generous. One time at around age twelve I had a friend over for the night. My father bought me a skateboard. Then he asked my friend if she had one. When she said no, he bought one for her as well. Dad was very giving."

Did Hank live up to his popular image as a hero?

"He did live up to that image. His most positive characteristic for me was the quality of how he treated everybody. The thing I loved about him the most was his big, warm embrace, the big, warm hug he had. I think the millions of people out there should remember him as they seem to remember him.

I think my father was a great man!"

Ralph Kiner

The friendship between Ralph Kiner³ and Hank Greenberg extended all the way from 1947, when Hank joined the Pittsburgh Pirates for what proved to be his last season as a player, until Hank's passing in 1986. The quality of their friendship over that nearly forty-year span was best expressed by Ralph himself when he was handed a news release while broadcasting a Mets–Red Sox exhibition game, at that time having no inkling of how advanced Hank's illness was. Reflexively, Ralph spoke into the microphone: "This is the worst day of my life. My dearest friend, and the man who was like a father to me, Hank Greenberg, has died."

Ralph Kiner led the National League in home runs for seven consecutive years, from 1946 to 1952, winning election to the Hall of Fame for his exploits. He then enjoyed a long and distinguished broadcasting career in baseball. At the time I interviewed him in 2009, the eighty-six-year-old Ralph was beginning his fifty-first year of broadcasting New York Mets games as an occasional

3. *Ralph Kiner interview, March 27, 2009, Palm Beach FL.*

guest analyst. He started life in a now-extinct mining town in New Mexico and ended up one of the most famous people in the country.

“Well, all that is very true, but I think the turning point in my career was in my sophomore year in 1947 when Hank Greenberg came to play for the Pirates. Hank took me under his wing right away in spring training, saying to me, ‘Son, would you want to join me for batting practice. I’ll work a little bit with you, with your hitting, because you’re not going to hit a lot of home runs the way you are going about it.’ I certainly knew all about Hank Greenberg, but what I didn’t know is that when he gave me that invitation—and I jumped on it—that was really the turning point in my whole career.

“I got off to a horrible, horrible start in 1947. I had only three home runs around June first, and the manager, Billy Herman [offensive and defensive Major League star in the thirties and forties], wanted to send me back to the Minor Leagues. Hank went to management, to a man named Frank McKinney, the chief owner of the Pirates at that time, along with Bing Crosby and a few others. He told McKinney, ‘Don’t send this kid out. He’s going to be all right.’ Thank goodness, Hank was right, because I hit a total of forty-eight home runs after he went up and saved my job, so by the end of that season I had fifty-one home runs.”

How did Hank help Ralph to do that?

“He didn’t change my swing. I always had a great swing, always could hit the ball out of the ballpark, there was no question about that. What Hank gave me was the psychology of hitting and also imparted the knowledge that he had acquired over his many years being one of the greatest home run hitters of all time. So when Hank came to Pittsburgh I could hit the ball as far as he could but he did it a whole lot more often than I did. I learned from him how to do that too. And he gave me the impetus to go out and work hard and take extra batting practice. I really worked hard from the day I met him until the end of my career in Major League Baseball.

“Hank taught me a lot of things. He taught me how to dress, how to enjoy life, drink champagne, a lot of things that I had no idea about. He was very instrumental in my life. He set the example. Probably he was the most sophisticated ballplayer who ever played.

“I showed up in front of Greenberg in a tuxedo and brown shoes. That was the best I could do at the time. It was during spring training. I was invited to a very formal dinner and dance, I had to get a rental tuxedo, and the one thing I forgot about was you had to have black tuxedo shoes to go along with it. Of course, I was pretty naïve at that point in life, so one of the things Hank taught

me was how to dress better than that. One thing about Hank was that he was probably the most demanding person I'd ever been around. If you didn't do it perfectly, you didn't do it at all. He would give you a bad time if you didn't do the things that should be done. So he never let up about that one. Of course, I got some tuxedo shoes to go with the tux I bought."

Were there any other bad times with Hank?

"He was a very intelligent person. He would not and did not tolerate not being 'politically correct,' as the expression goes nowadays. There was nothing easygoing about Hank. He was a very strongly dedicated person about everything he ever did, and he did everything right. But never with a temper. Never a temper at all. He would just let you know. He was always pleasant. He was always courteous. He was never abusive. He would never raise his voice.

"The only time I ever saw Hank mad was in a situation that happened in his one year with the Pirates. He was playing first base. We had a pitcher named Jim Bagby [workmanlike Major League right-handed pitcher for ten years]. Bagby got all over Hank for a play he made at first base. Bagby showed Hank up on the playing field. Hank made the last out of the game. The Pirates lost, and Bagby, who had been knocked out of the game, was in the clubhouse waiting for Hank. When Hank came in the two of them got into a fistfight. It went on for some time. Hank was having a tough time because he had his spikes on and was sliding all over the place. The fight was broken up by Wally Westlake [fine utility player who played in the Majors for ten years], who was a big guy and could do that. That is the only time I ever saw Hank Greenberg really mad."

The soft-spoken and diplomatic Kiner only hinted at the intensity of this altercation. Actually, this was yet another of several anti-Semitic incidents in Hank Greenberg's career. Ironically enough, the details of the dispute have been told by Rip Sewell (thirteen-year Major League pitcher and inventor of the famous "eephus pitch," off which only one home run was ever struck, by Ted Williams in the 1946 All-Star Game in Boston), whose anti-Semitic remark to Greenberg resulted in a famous fight between the two in the spring of 1934. When Greenberg and Sewell came together next as teammates on the 1947 Pirates, Hank hit a double that gave Rip his first win of that season, quickly leading to reconciliation and friendship.

Sewell is quoted as follows in Greenberg's autobiography, *Hank Greenberg, The Story of My Life* (1989), introduced and edited by Pulitzer Prize-winning author Ira Berkow: "Greenberg was on first and Bagby was pitching. When



6. What a difference two years makes! A properly tuxedoed Ralph Kiner, stepping out with all-time beauty Elizabeth Taylor, still a teenager in 1949. Courtesy of the Associated Press and National Baseball Hall of Fame Library.



7. Ralph Kiner, still ready to hit a long ball, Palm Beach, 2009. Photo by the author.

the batter hit the ball, it was a very easy ball, Bagby ran over to cover first and the ball went through Greenberg's legs. So Bagby right there said, 'Hey you big Jew son of a bitch, you make enough money to catch that kind of a ball.' Greenberg said, 'I'm going to kill you after this game is over.'"

Ralph also told the story about Hank giving Jackie Robinson support during Jackie's rookie season in 1947:

"He said to Jackie, 'Jackie, I want to tell you something. You're going to take a lot of abuse, especially from the southerners in the league, because they really are against you playing baseball in the Major Leagues. When I broke in I got the same thing as a Jewish ballplayer. I want to tell you, just hang in there, do what you can do, because you're going to be a great player.' Hank did that without any publication of it in the newspaper. He did it by himself because he wanted Jackie to be able to play. I'm sure those words helped Rob-



8. Documentary moviemaker Aviva Kempner, looking glamorous. Courtesy of Bruce Guthrie.

inson through those troubled times when he was chastised for being a black guy in a white man's game.”

How close were Ralph and Hank over the years?

“The great thing about my knowing him was the fact that even though his social life was way above mine in New York, we remained very friendly. I was just a guy from LA. When I got married to Nancy Chaffee [highly ranked fifties tennis star, mother of Ralph's three children], Hank was our best man.

He had a good sense of humor. We always stayed in contact. He moved to California when I came to New York, but later I moved to California, about a half an hour from where Hank lived. Then for years Hank and I would get together perhaps three or four days every week.

"I liked Caral, his first wife, very much. And I was very close to his second wife, Mary Jo. I have known his kids, Glenn, Steve, and Alva, many years. They are wonderful. I see Steve quite often because he lives in New York. He was a great soccer player at Yale. Steve is an outstanding person. I saw all of them grow up. Hank started his family about the time we were together in Pittsburgh."

After Hank died a memorial service was given for him on November 16, 1986, in Los Angeles. Ralph was the first speaker:

"Hank Greenberg really affected my baseball life, and my life. My father died when I was four years old, so I never had a father. The thing about Hank, maybe not as a father but like an older brother who really took me through all the pitfalls, he, by example, led me into being what I turned out to be. He was very instrumental in that. I saw what a wonderful man he was and how much good he did for the people with whom he was involved. . . . I want to thank the Lord that he gave me a chance to be with Hank."

Aviva Kempner

During the event honoring Hank Greenberg at Cooperstown in June 2008, I met the highly regarded film documentarian Aviva Kempner,⁴ who over a thirteen-year span created an eminently successful documentary on Hank's life. In 2009 Aviva was in the news again with the release of her highly praised documentary *Yoo-Hoo Mrs. Goldberg*, about the mid-twentieth-century radio and television personality Gertrude Berg, who, like Hank, asserted strong Jewish values at a time when that was needed. Aviva shed new light on the Hank Greenberg legend:

"My father was an immigrant Jew, coming from Lithuania in 1925 and settling in Detroit around 1950. He loved baseball. Every Yom Kippur we would go to services and my father would tell the story about Hank not playing in the 1934 pennant fight on Yom Kippur. I always thought Hank Greenberg was part of the Kol Nidre [Aramaic declaration sung at the start of the evening service on Yom Kippur, the Jewish Day of Atonement]. My dad served in the U.S. Army in Europe in World War II. He met and married my mother there.

4. Aviva Kempner interview, June 29, 2008, Cooperstown NY.

She was a Holocaust survivor who lived in Germany through the war posing as a Polish Catholic.

“At a time when American Jews were very frightened, even changing their names, not being able to get a job or live where they wanted to, this superhero emerged. Hank Greenberg! I mean he really was like a Moses for people that he could do so well in this American sport of baseball. Hank Greenberg dispelled false Jewish images.

“Typically you’ll see the Jewish male as a nebbishy figure, for example, Woody Allen. It’s very funny, but he doesn’t necessarily portray the whole range of us. One thing that I love about Hank Greenberg was that he was strong, powerful, striking, a gorgeous-looking Jewish male. Just like now, doing Molly Goldberg and showing a very positive Jewish mother.”

With the coming of World War II, Hank chose to enlist in 1941, months before Pearl Harbor.

“You know, he could have gotten out because he had flat feet, and he could have gotten out a second time because he was too old, but he felt the calling, and just like he said in the late thirties that he felt like each home run was a shot against Hitler, he continued to serve until 1945, rising to the rank of captain, serving in Burma. He may not have been a very religious, practicing Jew, but he felt this great sense of pride. I think Hank Greenberg set a standard for himself not merely to be excellent as a baseball player. He knew that he was a role model. He always felt that responsibility, and he lived up to it.

“In making that film about Hank, I wanted to honor my father, Harold. It took me a long time to make the documentary. I would pray, ‘Hank, I have to finish this film. I have to tell your story. I would pray to both Hank and my father.’”

Did Aviva have a crush on Hank, even though she never met him?

“*[Laughs]* I have my own crushes. You know what, that is interesting. It wasn’t so much of a female crush on a male as it was total admiration. I cannot imagine, I can’t emphasize enough, what it must have meant in Hank’s life to go to work every day and have people yelling and screaming negative catcalls. The man had incredible courage as a player, and to accomplish what he did is a great feat of discipline and tenacity, a kind of coat of arms. It put him under so much pressure to get through it. I just had to succeed with the film. I mean, the story is honorable enough.”

So how does Aviva assess Hank’s true significance?

“The twenties, thirties, and forties were so precarious for American and European Jews that having a strong Jewish player at that time was absolutely

amazing for people, at a time when the Jews were so weakened socially by what was happening in Europe. Talk about being the right man at the right time. In terms of his legacy, for me it is Hank Greenberg going off to war and not playing for four and a half years, then coming back and hitting a home run in his first game back in 1945, and then to win the pennant with a grand slam home run on the last day of the season against the Washington Senators, a team that had done some anti-Semitic things against him. Again, the right man at the right time.”

Ira Berkow

Pulitzer Prize winner and *New York Times* columnist Ira Berkow,⁵ having been Hank Greenberg’s biographer, stands in a unique position to tell us about Hank’s significance in Jewish American history, both as a great player and later as a noted baseball executive. (Berkow’s own story is told later in this book, in “The 1960s.”)

“I think he was a hero beyond just a baseball player. In a lot of ways Koufax was just a baseball player, whereas Greenberg represented something in a critical time in Jewish America, in world history, in Jewish history, in the 1930s. Given what was going on in Europe with the Holocaust, Greenberg understood his significance to a large degree.

“Greenberg was important in that his mere presence spoke to the idea that I am here to show you that that Jewish stereotype is false. I loved what Shirley Povich [legendary, longtime *Washington Post* sportswriter] said—that Greenberg was a great standard-bearer for Jews in that he was talented, he was proud, and he was big [*laughing*].

“In my experience it wasn’t just that Hank Greenberg was a great player. He was! He decided to become a general manager, then an owner. Then, even though he had been an owner, when Curt Flood sued baseball in the antitrust suits, Greenberg volunteered to be a witness, one of the only two owners to do so. [St. Louis Cardinal outfielder Curt Flood was a dangerous batsman and a brilliant-fielding, perennial Gold Glove winner who challenged his 1969 trade to the Philadelphia Phillies, in effect challenging baseball’s reserve clause, which bound players in thrall to one team. Flood brought a court action on the issue, backed by the MLB Players Association under the direction of its executive director, Marvin Miller.] He was an excellent wit-

5. Ira Berkow interview, June 28, 2008, Cooperstown NY.

ness. And that combination of outstanding player and owner, ex-owner, black plaintiff, reserve clause, that's quite a combination of things, and Greenberg was up to it. Greenberg was a progressive owner, and when it came to being a witness, there was nothing in it for him. This was the thing to do. That was the right thing to do. So he did it! It wasn't going to add any luster to Hank Greenberg and his career in terms of what people heard and wrote about him, except people like me. And he did it!"

This story began with a brace of ironies comparing Hank Greenberg's pre-eminent place in the history of American Judaism in the twentieth century with his personally attenuated view of his own place in that Jewish community and of the way in which his three children should be Jewishly educated. A third irony is that he is probably not only the most famous American Jew of the twentieth century (with a bow to Einstein) but, more significantly, the one person having the most influence over that period not only on American Jews but on what non-Jewish Americans think about the Jews in their midst.

In searching for the real Hank Greenberg, the net sum of the testimonies by the above important people in his life leads to the sure conclusion that he was an exemplary athlete, citizen, man, father, and Jew. In short, he was not only a great athlete but a great man. Of course, no man is perfect, and certainly Hank was not perfect. But his life gives us a sort of proof that somehow the Jewish traditions and faith pass on powerfully from each generation to the next generation, despite the belief of some Jews that they have traveled to the outer limits of their faith and ethnicity, or beyond. Hank Greenberg was a great Jew not only to his Jewish brethren and his fellow citizens of America but to himself as well, however differently he may have thought in his secret heart. Henry "Hank" Greenberg's story, and the story of his Orthodox family before him and his largely Jewishly connected family after him, augurs well for continued American Jewish survival and success.