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Henry B. Greenberg

Oral History Memoir

July 1980

**William E. Wiener Oral History Library
of the American Jewish Committee
at New York Public Library**



Names sound like:

- Page 1 - Elliot Azenoff
- 2 - Ed Cranepool
- 3 - Irwin Dickstein
- 5 - Fälticeni
- 9 - Joe-Joe White
- 27 - Leland Hotel
- 31 - League Park
- 40 - Gene Debuck
- 40 - Walter Schuster
- 41 - Gene Debuck
- 43 - Alva
- 43 - Morgan Guaranty Bank
- 43 - Mary Jo Tarolla
- 44 - Gahagen
- 47 - Bill Veeck
- 48 - Herbie Score
- 48 - Bill Veeck
- 52 - Cronan
- 52 - Freddie Hutchison



Interviewed by Elli Wohlgernter

July 25, 1980

Q. This is a taped interview for the William Wiener Library, an interview with Hank Greenberg in Los Angeles, July 25, 1980. The interviewer is Elli Wohlgernter. How did you play today?

A. Well, it was a little warm, but it was very enjoyable.

Q. You play every day.

A. Just about. Five times a week.

Q. Someone told me that you're the best seventy-year-old player they ever saw.

A. Well, I wouldn't say that, but I've been playing a long time and it's an excellent game, a very nice, sociable game, and of course it gives you a lot of exercise too.

Q. You're writing a book now.

A. Yes.

Q. When I went to look in the library for different stories and books about you, I saw no biography.

A. That's right.

Q. And now you're suddenly writing one. How come?

A. Well, a friend of mine by the name of Elliot Azenoff, who has written a number of novels. I've known him for a long time, he used to play minor-league baseball. He's been after me for the last few years to write a story of my experiences in baseball and so I finally started on it.

Q. How is it coming?

A. We're getting along very well, I mean we're about halfway through.

Q. Very good. Can we go back to your early youth --

A. Yes.



Q. -- days in New York. You were born in New York City.

A. That's right, in Greenwich Village.

Q. Born in Greenwich Village. What are your earliest memories?

A. My earliest memories of New York is, we were born on the Lower East Side, Perry Street in the heart of Greenwich Village, and my only recollection of those days is going to school, and I think we moved to the Bronx when I was about six years of age, so there's very little I can remember from my early days in Greenwich Village.

Q. Did you know your grandparents?

A. No, they never came to this country.

Q. And you grew up in the Bronx --

A. Yes.

Q. -- and you went to the famed James Madison --

A. James Monroe.

Q. James Monroe. Excuse me.

A. James Monroe High School. Yes, that's what I'm famous for --

Q. taught

A. -- one of the graduates of James Monroe High School.

Q. You and Ed --

A. Ed ~~K~~ranepool.

Q. -- ~~K~~ranepool.

A. Yes.

Q. You were a four-letter man there.

A. I played all the sports that...every sport they had.

Matter of fact, I was on the soccer team and the baseball, the

basketball, the football team, I went out for track and played



on the...did I say the soccer team? .Yes, I guess I played all the sports.

Q. What was your favorite?

A. I liked basketball best when I went to high school and it was a sport I enjoyed and played rather well. Of course my height was a big advantage, I was much taller than most of the other students that went to school at that time. I guess I was one of the tallest basketball players in the City of New York when I was going to school in the mid-twenties.

Q. And you won city championships in what?

A. We won the city championship in soccer and in basketball and we never won in baseball, we lost in the finals in baseball.

Q. How good a hitter were you then?

A. I was a fairly good ballplayer, you know? I was probably better known as a basketball player than I was as a baseball player in my high school days, strangely enough. But of course basketball was not a sport that you could pursue. Baseball was the only sport that you could take advantage of if you wanted to become a professional, so I naturally gravitated toward baseball.

Q. Your coach, Irwin Dickstein --

A. Yes.

Q. -- he said about you, "Hank never played games, he worked them. He wasn't a natural athlete, his reactions were slow and he had trouble coordinating his big body. He couldn't run a lick because he had flat feet, but even in high school he was practicing quick starts to overcome that handicap."

A. Well, I think that's about right. My main assets or attri-



butes was my size, for one thing, and my enthusiasm and the fact that I enjoyed sports and it was sort of an outlet for me because I was overgrown, you know, I was so much taller than the other kids in school that I was almost a freak. You know, someone six foot three inches tall when you're thirteen years of age, why, in those days was Jabbar today, you know, seven foot two, you know. And so in order to avoid all that awkwardness off the athletic field, I spent most of my time playing sports.

Q. And you went into baseball because it was the easiest sport to get into?

A. No, I went into baseball because it was really an escape from, you know... After all, it was a privilege to play professional baseball and I was amazed that the scouts thought that I had enough talent to become a professional.

Q. An escape from what?

A. Well, escape from being in the Bronx and being in a small, you know, little neighborhood environment. You know, in those days people didn't move around like they do today. You know, there were many of my classmates that went to high school with me in the Bronx that had never been downtown, never been to Manhattan. It's hard to believe, isn't it, but they hadn't been two or three miles away from their own neighborhood. People just stayed in their own little section and that was it. Going out of the state was almost unheard of. You know, if you talked about going to Washington, D.C., it was like going to Spain or London today in people's imagination, and also we didn't have the means to travel very far.



Q. What do you mean "didn't have the means"?

A. Well, I wasn't speaking particularly about my own family, but in general in the thirties there was very little money around and people didn't have a lot of money to spend on luxuries such as travel. My family were moderately well-off, we never had any problem as far as worrying about finances. We always had a nice home and my father was a good provider and we had a happy family life. My two brothers and my sister all graduated from college. In fact, I was the only one that only attended college for a year and then dropped out, all the others were graduates.

Q. What were the names of your brothers and sister?

A. Well, my oldest brother is Benjamin and he's about five, four and a half years older than I am. Then my sister is Lilian, she's three years older than I am. Then I have a younger brother, Joseph, who's about four years younger than I am, so I'm the third child.

Q. Your parents were immigrants from?

A. Rumania.

Q. Where in Rumania?

A. As I recall, they talked about a small town called Falticeni. I don't even know if I'm pronouncing it correctly. But they met over here in the United States. Like the typical American of the turn of the century, they were sent over to avoid the pogroms in Europe and they came separately. They met in downtown... You know, what do they call it?

Q. Social clubs?



A. No. I was thinking of...the term I was thinking of is... You know, the Lower East Side where most of the immigrants congregated and the Jewish immigrants congregated in areas where they came from the same country, I mean in the Old Country, so they all spoke the same language.

Q. Landsmen.

A. Yes. And my mother and father both come from Rumania and I guess that's how they met. My dad came over here, I think, when he was about twelve or thirteen and my mother was about fifteen.

Q. And they were Orthodox, were they not?

A. Yes.

Q. What kind of religious training did you receive?

A. I received the, you know, usual training that most Jewish boys at that time. We went to Hebrew school and we were bar mitzvahed and we'd observe the holidays. My mother kept a kosher home all during my youth. But as time went by you become more...if you want to use the word Americanized or Reformed or whatever it is, and my brothers and sister, they still go to synagogue religiously, they belong to the synagogue back East.

Q. Did you go to synagogue on...just on the holidays.

A. Yes.

Q. You didn't go every...you didn't go on Shabbes.

A. No. Well, I did to... You know, when I was taking the training for my bar mitzvah you had to go to Hebrew school to learn the prayers and --

Q. What do you remember about your bar mitzvah?

A. Not an awful lot, it's been a long time ago, so I don't



remember very much about it. I guess I got the usual watch that didn't work. Matter of fact, I still have the watch. It was given to me by an aunt of mine who's long since passed away. It's the old gold watch. It was traditional almost, you know, to give a watch. That was a big deal, to get a watch when you're thirteen years of age. Watch and a fountain pen were the --

Q. Right.

A.-- -- the rewards.

Q. Taugh The neighborhood you were in was very Jewish.

A. Yes, I would say ninety percent Jewish.

Q. Most of your friends playing in the street and around?

A. Yes, most of my friends playing in the street. There were some Christian, you know, students at the school and there were athletes that I played with, but when we moved to the Bronx it was primarily a Jewish neighborhood and I would say that in the school of James Monroe, they had four, five thousand students, I would say at least seventy-five percent of them were Jewish.

Q. What did your father do?

A. My father was in the textile business. As a matter of fact, my brother, my youngest brother still runs the business. It's a service business in which they... The mills used to send the big rolls of material to New York. recorder off In those days for the mills to send their rolls of material to New York and then they were serviced by a firm like my dad's. There they would examine the goods to see there was no holes in it or any damage in it and then they would sponge it and shrink it. See, it had to be preshrunk before they made the clothing then, so



that after people wore the clothes they wouldn't shrink, and that's basically what his business was.

Q. What did your mother do?

A. My mother was a housewife completely. She did all the usual Jewish mother chores of sewing, cooking, washing, scrubbing, baking. We had a traditional home. Every Friday my mother would light the candles and she'd bake the challeh and the cakes and the chicken soup and the chicken. So it was just a traditional Jewish family.

Q. What were their names?

A. My dad's name was David and my mother was Sarah.

Q. What did they think about your becoming a ballplayer?

A. Well, you know, it was foreign to them. Their whole goal was typical of most Jewish families, send their children to school, get them to get a degree so they become a doctor or a lawyer or a dentist or something, and in those days it was foreign to be a ballplayer. There weren't that many ballplayers and certainly there were no Jewish ballplayers. I was probably the... I think when I first broke into the major leagues I was the only Jewish ballplayer in baseball.

Q. Did you feel very alienated being the only Jew?

A. I didn't really think of it. I mean I was conscious of it, I mean no one would ever let you forget it. You'd hear it from the stands all the time and from --

Q. What kind of things?

A. Well, you know, name-calling, which is typical of most sports today and then.

Q. Usual?



A. Yes. Well, you know, they'd call you "sheeny" or "Jew" or "kike" or whatever. That was part of the psychological warfare and of course the fans would ride you, that was...as they do today. Today they throw things at the ballplayers, but even then... Today, you know, they yell down from the stands. There's always a certain number of people who get their frustrations or their...whatever anxieties or whatever it is that makes them feel macho or strong because they can yell at some ballplayer down on the field, and we had it the same way then. You know, I was singled out all the time as... But I was also big and strong, so that even, you know, made me even a bigger target.

Q. Did you hear it from the other team's bench?

A. Oh, sure, all the time. That was part of the game. I'm sure there was some anti-Semitic, you know, ballplayers. I think in those days a lot of them didn't know what a Jew was. A lot of them came from the rural South and, hell, they didn't know what a Jew was. I know my roommate Joe-Joe White, who came from Atlanta. I remember him telling me, he said, "Hell," he says, "I thought all those Jews had horns." So he didn't know what a Jew was. He just had heard the word and knew there were people like that, but, as far as he was concerned, I could have been Frankenstein, I mean that's what a Jew was supposed to look like. I don't know. I was in baseball for thirty-five years, so I'm sure there's a lot of prejudice that existed on the field, off the field, and exists today too. You're going to have a lot of bigoted people in this world and it's not going to change, but I like to feel that being Jewish and being



the object of a lot of derogatory remarks kept me on my toes all the time and made me... I could never relax and, you know, be one of the boys, so to speak. So I think it helped me in my career because it always made me aware of the fact that I had a little extra burden to bear and it made me a better ballplayer.

Q. Did you feel that you were representative of Jewish people?

A. I didn't in that sense. Naturally the, you know, Jewish people were proud, you know, everybody would, you know, point to the fact that...they used me as an example, you know, "If Hank Greenberg can become a ballplayer, so can you," and of course there aren't that many Jewish ballplayers. But in every town of course I suppose, just as we today, when you hear of some athlete or some statesman or some gifted, talented artist, if he's Jewish you take a certain pride in the fact that one of your own people have made good.

Q. Did you find it an odd combination being a Jew and an athlete?

A. Well, yes. As I say, there were no... You know, we're talking about a different era. There were four hundred major-league ballplayers. There was no professional basketball, no professional football, no professional tennis, no professional soccer, no professional golf. Baseball was it, and if you were one out of the four hundred that were in the major leagues and there was no other Jewish athlete in the whole country... There were none in tennis. Well, I don't think in those days there were any Jewish tennis players per se. Actually in a lot of those clubs that they used to play in they were all restricted, you know, it was a kind of a social game, Newport and Sea Bright,



New Jersey, and Orange, New Jersey. You know, they wouldn't even let Jews in the clubhouse, so I don't think there was any Jewish tennis players. As far as the other sports are concerned, I think professional football was just in its infancy in the twenties. Basketball, there was no professional basketball. So, you see, being a Jewish athlete, A., you were the only one and, B., there were no other sports and baseball captivated the attention of the entire American public.

Q. You felt, therefore, that it set you apart as a Jewish athlete from the rest of the Jews.

A. Yes, because there were no other Jewish ballplayers, so... And the thing it did for me is that it taught me to live in a world outside of, you know, a Jewish world. See, my brothers and sisters...or my brothers and sister, their whole life is in the Jewish society. They live in a neighborhood where there are predominantly Jews, they go to school where most of the students are Jewish, their social life is all wrapped up among Jews. My whole life was wrapped up among gentiles.

Q. Growing up you were in a cloistered Jewish environment also.

A. Yes. Yes, growing up and most of my schoolboy friends were all Jewish. But as soon as you got into professional baseball there were no Jews, so your teammates were all non-Jews.

Q. And you had no problem adjusting and --

A. I don't know whether it was, A., because my size, B., because of my talent, but I didn't have any problem with the guys on my team. I was well-liked. I like to feel I was well-liked, I got along with everybody, I never had any problems, and when I played in the South in the minor leagues --



Q. I was just going to ask that.

A. -- every town there might be one family that'd look you up. But, you know, you play in Evansville, Indiana, there were no Jews there, in Raleigh, North Carolina, there were no Jews, Beaumont, Texas. You know, there might be one family in the whole town. Hi, Rabbi. So --

Q. Did you ever feel alone?

A. No, I didn't feel, I didn't feel that. I didn't have that great prejudice. I was so devoted to, you know, baseball, wrapped up in it that it was my whole life.

Q. What did you consider your Jewish identity? How did it express itself, how did you --

A. In what way?

Q. That's what I'm asking.

A. Huh?

Q. I'm asking, in what way did you feel a Jew? Besides not playing Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur, what did you do that made you conscious of being a Jew, or was it just always knowing it and not in terms of practice or --

A. Well, it isn't a case of being conscious. When you're a minority you're automatically conscious of being a minority. I mean if you're in a majority you don't think about it. I'm sure that people who are Protestants, you know, they're not worried about it, even though there are many forms of a Protestant religion. But they're in a majority and they don't stand out. It's like a Negro in a white society, you're aware that you're not white, and being Jewish you're aware you're... If you're in a completely Jewish society, you never think about

it.

Q. Right.

A. There's no reason to think about it. I'm sure if you're in Israel, you don't think about being an Israeli or being Jewish, but if you're in a society where most of the people are non-Jews, why, you're aware of it, conscious of it.

Q. And they never let you forget it.

A. I suppose if you... I've been asked that question many times. I don't feel that I've had the kind of prejudice, you know. I'm not denying that it exists. I think that now that I'm older I realize that to a great extent it exists in people who are not too bright and intelligent and they're dogmatic in their views and they're narrow-minded, and so why worry about their opinion? The average ignorant person, he doesn't have any real opinions at all and I'm not concerned with them. But I find that more and more as you get out, why --

Man's voice: Hank, how are you?

A. How are you, Harry? Everything all right?

Man's voice: Yes.

A. I heard you were coming to town, but I didn't think you'd be playing today.

Man's voice: Yes.

A. I'll join you in a minute. I don't know quite what you're trying to get at.

Q. Just a general sense of what it was like and how you dealt with it. Did you ever... When another ballplayer from another team would call you a "kike," did you answer him?

A. Well, I've been in a number of fights on ballfields. I



don't know the number of course.

Q. Over the calling of names?

A. Oh, well, sure. The first thing they do is they call you names. They get on you, that's the first thing they do. Sure. Particularly when you're doing well they want to upset you. That's the general idea.

Q. Any fights stand out?

A. Well, I was in a fight in Dallas, Texas. We had a riot on the field, you know, fistfight with both teams, you know, on the field. They had a big article in the Dallas newspapers, the whole ballpark was jammed the next day with people and everything was focused on that dirty Jew on the field, you know?

Q. When was this?

A. This was in 1932. In 1931 there was a riot in a playoff game in Decatur, Illinois. I still have that paper home, the headline "Fans Charge Fighting Ballplayer." One of the little guys, the third baseman on the other team just got on me, you know? I'd had a good day and he just kept riding me all the time and fans picked it up and, hell, they had to get the police to get me out of the ballpark. So when you ask me how was I conscious of it, I mean you're never unconscious of this thing happening all the time, you know, fans yelling at you. Every ballpark I went to there'd be somebody in the stands who spent the whole afternoon just calling me, you know, names. If you're having a good day, you don't give a damn, but if you're having a bad day, why, pretty soon it gets you hot under the collar, if you're sensitive a little, and it's hard not to be sensitive. I guess the colored players have the same thing to contend with



today, you know. There are always fans like that at every ballpark in every city and they're out there even now. A lot of them will go out just to --

Q. Ride you.

A. Just to ride you, yes.

Q. In dealing with it, was it easier to put it out of your mind and just ignore it or did you feel you had to respond by saying, you know, "To hell with you," or --

A. Well, you respond when, you know, you reach a boiling point. You know, you accept it up to a certain degree and then there's always, you know, just the straw that breaks the camel's back. I got it even as the general manager in Cleveland all the time, the getting on me. I've had guys yell at me a whole game till I finally just couldn't stand it anymore, I had to go up and punch the guy in the jaw, and he was drunk and he even started to apologize, you know? To them it's a game, you know? It's like certain people who go to the zoo to put a stick into the animals to see how they can agitate them, and to some people, that's their pleasure in going to a ballpark.

Q. Have you felt more Jewish as you've gotten older or have you stayed the same?

A. No, I've felt less Jewish --

Q. Why's that?

A. -- and my objection to the Jewish religion is that, A., in all the years that I was going to synagogue I didn't know what I was reading, the words had no meaning. Maybe today, there's Reformed, you know, and so today maybe you understand what you're saying, but as a boy growing up, those Hebrew words



meant nothing to me. It was just a matter of knowing how to pronounce them so you could be bar mitzvahed. So going to synagogue had no meaning at all, and unfortunately, I've now developed an attitude that I think religion has caused more animosity and hatred among people than anything else. Even for being Jewish. I think the Jews are just as bad as any other religion. I think if the Jewish race -- [recorder off]

Q. You were saying about the Jewish race.

A. I believe that if the Jewish race were the majority I think we'd have the same problems that we have today. I don't think people are any different, you know what I mean?

Q. Yes.

A. Jews always feel they're discriminated against, persecuted. I don't know but if it were reversed that the other people, the minority would feel persecuted and discriminated against. I mean I used to think that being Jewish you were always discriminated against, you know, you were the underdog and it wasn't until I got older that I realized that you're the underdog because there's always someone who's in the minority who's the underdog. But being Jewish, if it had reversed itself, someone else would be the underdog and the people on top would just be the exact same way. I don't feel that the Jews are any different than the Catholics or the Protestants or anyone else.

Q. But do you still --

A. Do you follow me?

Q. Yes. Yes. But don't you still take a pride in being a Jew?

A. Well, how do you take a pride in being a Jew? Do Catholics take pride in being Catholic?



Q. I assume, yes.

A. They do?

Q. I imagine every minority, every group --

A. I don't think they think of it. Do you think of it? I'm just trying to think. I mean what you're trying to get me to say is that...and what I'm trying to think of, is it something special to be a Jew? Isn't it just an accident of birth?

Q. Yes, in a sense, yes. I'm not looking for you to say anything, whatever you say is fine.

A. Yes. Yes.

Q. But not so much that it's special, but that you happen to be a Jew and you are proud of your group's accomplishments. It would be the same if you were black or if you were Catholic.

A. Well, sure. That's right. That's right.

Q. So you do feel that as a Jew.

A. Sure. Oh, I'm very proud when I read about Albert Einstein or I read about what Kissinger's done or I read about anyone who's Jewish who excels. I realize that here's someone who's a minority who's risen above the pack and is able to accomplish something that everybody in the world looks up to, and of course I'm proud of the fact that the Jews, even though they're still a small minority, are the great doctors, are the great authors, you know, they've accomplished so much in the field of music and they have achieved so much with the limited opportunities that... In other words, if the black race had done the same as the Jewish race, with, I would say... What do we have, eight million Jews in the world? They got over twenty-two, twenty-three million, they got three times as many black people as there are Jews, why,



they would be an outstanding race. So on that sense I'm very proud of our accomplishments.

Q. And you realize that you as a Jewish athlete were looked up to in the same way.

A. I don't think of it in that sense, that I, being Jewish, I've done anything. I've done what I had to do. You know, I was a ballplayer, I loved to play ball, I did well, I did it as an individual, I happen to be Jewish, so if other people feel, well, gee, that's great because he's a Jew, they feel proud of it, I don't have that sense. I don't feel I was carrying any kind of a banner or being a leader of the Jewish people because I happened to be the only Jewish ballplayer.

Q. Fine. But you recognize that other people do look at you that way.

A. Maybe they do. I don't know whether they do or they don't. I know that, for instance, in my career the fact that I didn't play on Yom Kippur, a lot of Jewish people took pride in that. Didn't they?

Q. More than just Jews. A lot of gentiles too thought, you know, power to you. They'd, you know, tip their hats that you have enough belief in your faith that you wouldn't play in the middle of a pennant race on Yom Kippur.

A. Well, to me it was a question of two things. One was Yom Kippur is, you know, Day of Atonement and you're supposed to put everything aside and just pray for the sins, atone for the sins of the year, that was one, and the other was the respect for my parents. This is what they believed in, so naturally I would, out of respect to them, go along with not playing on Yom



Kippur. But evidently it made a very big... You see, the press are always looking for unusual news, so they made a big thing out of it. Where it all came about, I don't know if you're familiar with it, but, you see, we were in the pennant race in '34 and Detroit hadn't won a pennant in twenty-five years, so it was very novel, and '34 the City of Detroit was just coming out of the Depression. They were really hard hit because the automotive industry was down and... So the question came up of whether I could play on Rosh Hashanah and they took it to the rabbi, high rabbi in Detroit. So he said that in the Torah it shows that they played ball on Rosh Hashanah. Well, Rosh Hashanah is the New Year, so evidently it's a happy occasion and celebrating. So his interpretation was you could play ball on Rosh Hashanah in those days, so you could certainly play baseball today, so he gave his approval. What happened was, the day we played on Rosh Hashanah we played Boston and we beat them two to one and I hit both homeruns. Well, naturally this was a tremendous story, you know. Here is the chief rabbi giving me permission to play and we win the game two to one; in the tenth inning I hit the second homerun, so it was Greenberg 2, Boston 1. Naturally it made a big story. Well now, when that came up, then the newspapers followed it up on Yom Kippur, was I going to play or wasn't I, and when I didn't play they made a big thing of it. That's it.

Q. And they lost?

A. Huh?

Q. And they lost.

A. Well, I don't remember whether they lost or not.



Q. They lost --

A. They did?

Q. -- and the next day they came back and you helped win the game.

A. Yes. Well, I don't remember now that, but I remember --

Q. In '45 the same thing happened.

A. '45. No, '45, that was much later. We didn't. The only time I --

Q. You won the pennant the next day on a grandslammer in the ninth.

A. Yes, but that had nothing to do with --

Q. That was the day after Yom Kippur.

A. No.

Q. No?

A. No. No, that was not. The only time Yom Kippur conflicted with the baseball schedule was in 19 --

Q. '34.

A. -- 34.

Q. Was it in your contract that you didn't have to play? Did the Tiger organization give you any --

A. No.

Q. -- problems with that?

A. No.

Q. You also then at the time were involved in a consecutive-game streak of the infield of the Tigers that had played together all season.

A. Yes, I guess something like that. I don't remember it now. I mean it's so long ago that I don't recall it. But I do recall



that the press made a big thing of it, you know, and I guess they did the same thing when Sandy Koufax didn't pitch that one day, 1966 I think it was.

Q. Did you have parents come up to you and say, "Thank you for not playing."?

A. Oh no. No. No, never had anything like that. I don't think baseball was followed as much by... There weren't that many Jews, you know, and they weren't that aware of baseball, professional baseball. I would say that the Jewish population was much smaller in 1934 than it is today and there weren't that many kids that followed it, so it wasn't as big an issue except for what the press made of it.

Q. How important do you think Israel is to Jews in this country?

A. Naturally we have to support Israel because of what happened during World War Two. I mean what we had in World War Two was not a war, it was a war plus, you know, a genocide, destroy a whole race by a complete madman and his followers too. So here the displaced Jews all over Eastern Europe, you know, find a home in Israel. To me, I'm annoyed that they have to pick out Israel, which is the... Who the heck knows whose homeland it is, it's changed hands so many times, they're surrounded by twenty-five million Arabs. Fortunately for them, the Arabs can't get together, you know, they're all so... Their culture is such that they don't trust each other and there are so many sects within...in every country. Whether it's Libya, or Iraq or Iran or whatever the hell it is, they're fighting each other. But my objection is that here's a people who have



great ingenuity and a great instinct for survival and great talents hidden within their genes, being forced to survive under the most harrowing circumstances, and they have to pick a place like Israel to do it, you know, a barren wasteland. Now they make a whole country out of it and they're surrounded by hostile people. Now, you ask me. Naturally being Jewish, you have to be sympathetic toward the, you know, Israelis. It's the only country in the world where a Jew is accepted as a citizen, all you have to do is apply. If you're a Jew, you can go there, it's your homeland. I mean even though I'm born and raised in the United States and I'm an American citizen and an American in every sense of the word, but you can still have the feeling that here's one country that will accept you just on the fact that you're a Jew, see. Everybody supports Israel, I don't know what the solution's going to be. My resentment is that it has to be in that wasteland, that these talented people have to do it the hard way, see, which they're doing it, the hard way.

Q. Somehow it seems we've always done it the hard way, have always had to do it.

A. Well, yes, and just to think of what those people did, a few hundred thousand. Now what have they got, two million?

Q. Three million.

A. Three million? Started out... Hell, there's so much wasteland around the world that...you know, nothing happening. You could carve a nation out of...going from the Rockies into Montana and New Mexico and all that wasteland. There's better land out there and they could have their own land there if they were permitted to come here, you know. Or South America



there's plenty of land or there's plenty of land a lot of places. They happen to have to have the land in a desert that has no irrigation, no nothing, and then it has to be the holy site of, you know, Jerusalem. Other nations worship there, the Catholic religion and the Moslem religion, and it's almost an insolvable situation and so they're living on a time bomb, you know. So they've survived from 1948 when it became a state, so now it's twenty-two years later, but what the hell is twenty-two years in the course of history, when, you know, you count history in hundreds of years, in centuries. What will Israel be a hundred years from now?

Q. What do you think?

A. Can't survive.

Q. Can't survive.

A. How can it survive? We're going to build up Egypt, sooner or later. Egypt's got the manpower. Once they get, you know, all the things that we're going to give them, the know-how, the finances, they'll wind up with some despot. Instead of having Sadat they'll have some other, Nasser or someone like that, and Israel, they'll be faced with, you know, an overpowering, overwhelming enemy.

Q. You don't think the treaties to be signed will mean anything?

A. Eh, bullshit! What treaties mean anything? Treaties only mean something when no one wants something from someone else. As soon as they want something from someone else the treaty isn't worth the paper it's written on. Treaty is just to stall things temporarily. But, you see, a lot of people seem to think, I think incorrectly, that the fighting spirit and determination is



what does it. We all had a lot of fighting spirit when World War Two broke out and the Japanese had the Zero plane and we had an inferior airplane. They were shooting our airplanes out of the sky. Their cruisers and battleships were destroying us, right? It wasn't until we had superior...not only manpower, but we had superior equipment, and it's the same thing there. Israel has won three or four wars because they've had the equipment, the other countries had nothing except people. Well, people can't fight against machines. But as soon as you give better and more equipment to more and more people, the odds are going to turn against you. So that's what Israel faces. Israel's population isn't growing. From what I read there's a lot of people who went to Israel who are leaving, they're having trouble getting people to stay there. So the Arab countries are going to grow in population. Now, if, as and when they get the equipment which we're gradually supplying them through Sadat, you know, and the other oil countries, you know, have got the money, they can buy better equipment and it's a question of time.

Q. Have you been to Israel?

A. Yes.

Q. What did you think of it?

A. I think what they've done there is fabulous, I think it's something to be terribly proud of. I have mixed emotions. I'm terribly proud of what they've done and I'm terribly annoyed that they had to do it there, you know? 'Course a lot of Jews feel, well, we had to do it there, it's our homeland, you know?

Q. From the Bible.



A. Yes. But what the... Sure, it's the homeland of the Bible and the Catholics claim it's the birth of Jesus Christ and the Moslems claim it's where their Mecca is or something and so everybody claims it and that's where you have the conflict. So I don't know what the... As I see it down the road, how can you solve that? I don't care what borders you... See, Israel's only survived on the fact that they have the military strength, they've survived. Unfortunately, the rest of the world is so dependent upon oil and, laugh unfortunately, oil comes from those countries. Here the Israelis are in a desert, why isn't there oil in Israel? But --

Q. That's just the way God works, I guess.

A. Whatever it is, that's the way it works, that's the way history works, and I guess the Jews had to go back to Israel, they had to go back there. Of course they didn't have much choice, did they? Where else could they go? You know, during World War Two where else could they go? Nobody else wanted them and so they went there.

Q: Were you aware while fighting in World War Two about concentration camps?

A. Oh, sure, it was well publicized. Sure. I was in the Pacific though, I served in the Pacific. I was in China and India, so we were more conscious of the Japanese, you know, the atrocities that they had so-called committed and Pearl Harbor and all that sort of thing. But everybody knew, you know. I'm fascinated by the World War Two, having been a participant, and I read everything I can on Nazi Germany and everything that's ever written about it, I must read it, you



know? It's almost like I have to be reminded all the time of...

It's hard to believe that in my lifetime a nation of people could have existed that would permit a thing like that. Of course if the military will it, sometimes the population can't do anything, but if you got a population of...say, in the United States of two hundred and what, twenty-five million people? Even if we had a military takeover, you know, I can't believe that millions and millions of people would permit something like that.

Q. Do you think it could happen again?

A. In a different form it could happen. It might not just happen the way it happened with Hitler.

Q. What do you mean?

A. Well, I mean it could happen in this country if we have a tremendous depression, people out of work, great unemployment, which means people can't support their families. It could happen. It could happen, as I say, in a different form. It may not be just Jews, it could be a lot of racial upheaval.

Q. You had a lot of controversy when you went into the service. Your number was in Michigan and you were misquoted in the paper as saying that ballplayers...you were quoted as saying "should not be" when you said "will not be," and it was written down as "should not be" and then everyone said that you were anti-American and then you were called up by --

A. No. That wasn't me.

Q. Certain things I had read in clips about you. And then what happened was you had joined and then you were over twenty-eight, so they gave you compensation. They let out all --



A. No. No.

Q. -- men over twenty-eight and then --

A. Yes.

Q. You came out on December fifth --

A. Right.

Q. -- and then December seventh was Pearl Harbor and you walked right back in and re-enlisted.

A. Yes, but what happened, there was nothing like that as far as "should" or "would." What happened with me was, I registered with my brother. We were coming back from the 1940 World Series and we registered in a town called Geneva, New York, and he --

End of Side One of tape -- beginning of Side Two

Q. So you had enlisted with your brother in Geneva?

A. Yes, and I listed my home as Detroit because I was living at the Detroit Leland Hotel during the season. I don't know what ever prompted me to list Detroit, Michigan. There were six thousand numbers and you were supposed to be drafted according to what number you picked. My number was in the four thousands, so I was in the upper third. My brother's number was two thousand. He went into the Army two years after I did, and the reason for it was that you were listed according to your number, but then they had these draft centers, see, and then they picked the guys with the lowest number in your area. Well now, in the Bronx, where all these Jewish families were with young kids, there were a lot of kids there. I'm listed in the Detroit Leland Hotel, downtown Detroit, right in the heart of Detroit. Well, there's nobody there, no one lives there, see? So I could have had a six-thousand number and I would have



been the first one called. What shocked me was that on May 7 of... We first signed up for the draft in October and in May --

Q. October of what?

A. Of 1940.

Q. Right?

A. And I went in May 7, 1941. So the draft had hardly even gotten underway when I was in. I did have flat feet and I think the first time I was examined the doctor said I had second degree or third degree flat feet or whatever the hell it was, and naturally the papers picked it up, you know, and then the next thing you know, why, they made a big thing about whether I was going to be drafted or whether I was going to be deferred. But there was never any question about it. I mean as far as I was concerned there was no question.

Q. No, not as far as you were concerned, but didn't the press try and make something out of it, that you were trying to duck it or --

A. They always try to do that. They did that with Dempsey in 19...you know, the First World War, you know? See, the press, you know, it's a matter of making a story, there don't have to be any facts to it.

Q. A quote from you, you once said, "The only way you can get along with newspapermen is to be like Dizzy Dean, you say something one minute and something different the next."

A. Well, I don't remember saying that, but that was Dizzy Dean's... Dizzy Dean was famous for making speeches and whatever town he was in, he says, "It's good to be back in my home state." You know, whether he was in Indiana, "Good to be back."

So no one knew where the hell he was born and where he was raised, it made good reading. I don't remember making that quote, but --

Q. Newspapermen did try and make it out that you were --

A. It wasn't very much to it. You know, I was examined in Lakeland, Florida, and the draft board had nothing to do with it. This doctor said that I had third degree flat foot, you know, or second degree, and that was it. He examined me there, but my draft board was in Detroit, Michigan. They just drafted me, so there wasn't anything to it.

Q. How did you advance so quickly in rank?

A. It wasn't that quick. I went in as a private and I got to be a sergeant, but I was in the Infantry from May to December, and then I was discharged as a sergeant for being overage. You know, they weren't going to draft anybody over twenty --

Q. Eight.

A. -- seven years of age, over twenty-five years of age. I was thirty-one. But by the time it passed Congress and by the time they got around to releasing all those over twenty-five, I didn't get my notice till December 5, and of course when the... I was in Fort Custer, Michigan, and I went down to Detroit for the weekend and December 7, why, was Pearl Harbor. I knew damn well I was going to be...you know, go back in the Army again, so I went down to Washington and enlisted in the Air Force.

Q. What made you such a great hitter?

A. I practiced a lot, worked at it very hard, and I had size, strength. I spent all my time playing ball, I was just completely devoted to... Just like a scientist would be devoted to medi-



cine, that's all I did is play ball, there was no other outside interest.

Q. Did you have superior eyes, wrists?

A. No, I think my strength and size --

Q. Pure strength.

A. -- primarily. You know, for someone seventeen or eighteen years of age to weigh two hundred and ten pounds and be six foot three and a half inches tall and you spend all day long out on the ballfield, if you have any talent at all, you're going to develop. I was awkward because, you know, I was too tall for my age. I was very awkward and I did have flat feet, but, you know, as you get older you get stronger and you overcome a lot of those deficiencies that you had when you were young.

Q. Is it true that you paid kids to pitch to you?

A. Sure, I furnished... All my money that I ever got as an allowance went for taping balls. You know, you get the ball, knock the cover off it, then you take the white adhesive tape and tape it up, and when the cover...when that would tear it would take some of the --

Q. String.

A. -- yarn with it, then you'd tape it again. Pretty soon it got pretty small, you'd have to go out and get another ball. But all my money went for that, and since I was paying for the tape and taping the ball, I would do the batting and everybody else would do the fielding.

Q. When was this?

A. All through my high school career. There's guys that still



talk about shagging for me. You know, it's a common thing, everybody claims that they shagged balls for me in the Bronx. I've had a thousand guys come to me and say, "I used to shag balls for you in the Bronx," even guys that were twenty years younger --

Q. Laugh

A. -- but by this time they heard their fathers tell it and pretty soon they... You know, it's the old story, that if everybody had seen the... They say if everybody had seen the triple play in the 1921 World Series in... The triple play unassisted, the first in the history of the game. If everybody who said they were there were there, the stadium would have had to seat two hundred thousand, and it was the old League Park, which was about fifteen, eighteen thousand maximum.

Q. Your best year, 1938, you hit fifty-eight homeruns.

A. That was not my best year by a long shot. There again, it's what history makes it.

Q. What do you consider your best year?

A. My best year was in 1937. I drove in a hundred and eighty-three runs, I hit about .340 and I ^{had} fifty-six or -eight doubles and I had forty homeruns. But history, it's interesting. My whole career was...my goal was driving in runs. If you're a ballplayer, that's what counts, it's who drives in the runs.

Q. Four times you led the league in RBI's.

A. Yes, and my average for driving in runs was almost a hundred and fifty a season before I went in the Army, I was just a few short. But after I come back of course, then my average went way down, but even then I would say, if you took a hundred-

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and-fifty-four-games schedule and you worked it out on runs batted in, you know, per game, I think that I'd have an average of a hundred thirty-five, average. As I say, my goal was to get a hundred-fifty-four season, wind up my career with that, runs batted in per game. That was my goal and that's what everybody's goal is in baseball, that's with the ballplayers. Now, the dramatic part is hitting a homerun, see, that's exciting, you know, Babe Ruth. So here my whole goal and my achievement in baseball was driving in runs and then one year I happened to have fifty-eight homeruns and that's all I'm remembered for, see. Everybody remembers me for having hit fifty-eight homeruns. Nobody remembers me for having hit a hundred and eighty-three runs batted in. Nobody remembers me for having --

Q. Which is one less than the all-time record.

A. All-time record, yes. And nobody remembers me for driving in a hundred and ten runs by the All-Star Game. One year I drove in a hundred and ten runs by the All-Star Game.

Q. What year was that?

A. 1937. Wait a minute. No, 1935. 1935. I drove in a hundred and seventy runs, I think, that year.

Q. '35, you were the MVP that year.

A. Yes. But no one... I mean that's nothing and there's no mention of it. It's just that the fifty-eight homeruns is what captured the... To me, it's always amusing to me, because, you know, that year I had the hundred eighty-three I drove in one run the last day of the season, which was a one-to-nothing ball game, and the day before I had a chance with the bases full, I hit a fly ball to rightfield, fell foul about this far. I would



have driven in three more runs, would have had the all-time record. There was never one line in the paper the whole season about that. I mean today where they keep these statistics on how many times you eat breakfast or how many times you go to the bathroom, then... You know, it was like when Pete Rose last year with his consecutive-hitting streak. When he got to thirty-eight they dug up Tommy Holmes, who had hit thirty-eight, and nobody had known that Tommy Holmes had had the record until then. Today everybody is so statistic-conscious and --

Q. Why do you think that is?

A. The media, the television and radio coverage.

Q. Do you think it's bad for the game?

A. No, it's tremendous! The publicity is what makes it all go around. You know what the advertising world is, the millions and millions and hundreds of millions that are spent on advertising. That's what makes it go. If you print it and show it often enough, people will buy it, and that's what makes million-dollar ballplayers. It's not that they got the talent. The record doesn't indicate that they're worth a million dollars. It's publicity is what does it.

Q. Do you ever regret the fact that...seeing what the ballplayers, mediocre ballplayers at best, are making today, what you could have made playing today?

A. No, never at all. We're living in different times. I think maybe part of that is that I'm fairly well-off, so I... I suppose if I was destitute, [Laugh] I'd feel very bitter and acrimonious about it. But now, it just... In my day I remember Honus Wagner telling me, in 1947, he knew I was making a hundred thousand dollars. He thought that was, you know, a fortune,



which it probably was, but to him it was the same as a guy making a million dollars today.

Q. In your time though you were the highest paid ballplayer.

A. Yes. Yes. Well, after Ruth passed out of the picture I became the highest paid ballplayer.

Q. Did you feel resentment from people because of it?

A. There wasn't that much publicity on it really.

Q. Not like today.

A. Well, Ruth was in a class by himself, so when you talked about salaries, you know, Babe Ruth was...that was it. He was making eighty-two thousand when most of the guys were making ten, fifteen. Great ballplayers never made more than twenty-five. I think Lou Gehrig never made forty thousand dollars a year in his whole career. If you looked at his record, you know, it's staggering. Jimmy Foxx the same way. That was the seven to eight-hundred-thousand-dollar ballplayer of today, forty thousand.

Q. Do you think (?)

A. I had enough...well, I don't know whether to call it ingenuity or chutzpa, to ask for more. You know, they resented my asking for more, but --

Q. But you got it.

A. I asked for more because I thought I was worth it and it was worth trying to get it, you know.

Q. And you did get it.

A. Yes. Oh, sure.

Q. Do you think the high salaries today hurt the game?

A. No. The attendance indicates that it's the high salaries



that bring them out.

Q. What about the ballplayers themselves and how much they hustle and desire and how much they put out for the game?

A. Oh, I don't know whether they... There seem to be more injuries today, but maybe that's because of traveling, you know, plane traveling from one zone to the other and air-conditioning,, and I guess guys aren't as hungry. You know, they're more prone to get a no-cut contract and a long-term contract, and if you don't feel good, you don't feel the urgency to have to play everyday. We had to play because somebody else would take your job away. So the competition isn't there. You got six hundred and fifty major league players where we only had four hundred. There weren't that many major league players in our day.

Q. And now it's really diluted.

A. So now it's completely diluted, so, you know, guys who have a little talent don't have to do it.

Q. DiMaggio once said that you have to be hungry to be a ballplayer. No son of a rich man ever made it to the major leagues because of that.

A. Well, probably right. The son of a rich man, you know, usually goes to school. You know, when you want to be a professional athlete, any kind of professional athlete, no matter what you are, you got to start at a very early age and have to really concentrate on just that. You know, you can't do it with one hand tied behind your back. Whether you want to be a great tennis player or you want to be a great football player, you got to be devoted to it and you got to make sacrifices. Even my



kids, you know, had a lot of talent, they had a lot of ability, but they were raised a little differently, a little easier. They had big hamburgers ready, you know, to be served to them and they had the television set in front of them and they didn't... When I recall my youth, there was nothing else to do. I mean you had very little, limited money. So you went to the movies once a week, that was it, and so the rest of the time you had to provide your own entertainment and your own entertainment was hitting a ball or kicking a soccerball or playing One-a-Cat with a broomstick, you know, that you cut down to make a cat and played on the streets.

Q. Stickball?

A. Stickball or something like that. The equipment was minimal, didn't cost anything, and that's how you spent your time.

Q. Do you remember how old you were when you first picked up a bat?

A. I guess it was some time when I was in the Bronx. Seven or eight, something like that. We all played all the time, all the kids did. If you lived across the street from a park and you had an athletic field a block away, why, all the kids gravitated right to the...everybody gravitated right to the athletic field.

Q. Where did you live in the Bronx?

A. Crotona "Park. I think it still exists even today. Yes, the old stadium is still there, they still play ball there.

Q. Have you ever gone back to the Bronx to look at it?

A. I tried to go back and I couldn't find my house anymore, that's been bulldozed down. Now it's a very very very bad section of town. I accidentally got off the freeway coming down



from Connecticut one time and I tried to find my old neighborhood, but I couldn't, couldn't find it, it's all different. The park is still there though.

Q. Do you think today's ballplayers are better or worse than the players (?) as athletes?

A. It's hard to say. There's great ballplayers today just like there was in the old days, you know. Whether the majority of them are better ballplayers or not, I really don't know. You know, there are good ballplayers today and there are bad ballplayers. There's more bad players because there's more --

Q. Players overall.

A. -- more players overall, yes. But the conditions are different. You got night baseball I didn't have to contend with, you got artificial turf and you got those planerides, you know, jockeying back and forth, and the players have...today have so many other interests, you know. Most of these guys are married. I remember when I joined Detroit over half the team was single. For single guys, you know, that was it, baseball was their whole life, so they spent all their time talking about it and hanging around the ballpark. Today I would say out of twenty-five major leaguers you probably got twenty, twenty-two of them are married with kids, you know, they got a different homelife, they've got different responsibilities. A lot of them are interested in finance and other things, they're thinking about real estate investments and tax shelters and they got agents, you know.

Q. Sports is big business.

A. Today. We didn't know anything. All we knew was to get a



glove and a ball and go out and play ball, that was it. It's hard to make the comparisons, so many different things have changed.

Q. Who's the toughest pitcher you ever faced?

A. Well, the toughest for me of course was Bob Feller. He was tough for everybody, he was a great pitcher. And Grove was awfully tough, for a left-hander. Those were the two toughest pitchers in baseball. There was a lot of good pitchers, but they were outstanding and their records indicate that they were outstanding.

Q. Who were your heroes?

A. I don't know as I had any heroes. Gehrig was a hero and subsequently Ruth was a kind of a hero figure, but I don't know, I didn't have any particular... I never saw any ball games when I was a kid.

Q. You never went to Yankee Stadium or --

A. No. No. I lived maybe a few miles away, but a few miles away was a hell of a long ways. I never went to a ball game. First ball game I ever saw was... I saw one major league ball game and I don't know how I got there. My dad must have taken me there for a double-header with the Giants, because I remember it was Philadelphia and the Giants, a double-header, and it was the only ball game I ever saw. And then when I --

Q. Till you played in one?

A. No. No. Then when I was scouted by the Yankees in 1929, 1929 when I was scouted by the Yankees they gave me passes to go to see the games, so I went to Yankee Stadium a few times,



but that was it. So I only probably saw three...five ball games, major league ball games before I went into the major leagues.

Q. But you'd hear about it and read about it in the papers.

A. Oh, sure. Oh, sure.

Q. You knew the standings and you were aware.

A. Oh yes, we were aware of it of course, aware of it all the time.

Q. Who was your favorite team?

A. We were Giant...everybody was a Giant rooter in those days.

Only reason I... I tried to get in and work out with the Giants and they wouldn't let me in the park. That's how things were then. Excuse me a minute. [recorder off] -- near there? You think you got enough?

Q. Pretty close.

A. All right.

Q. You were a Giant fan, they wouldn't... You were scouted by the Yankees --

A. Yes.

Q. -- by the Senators, by the Tigers.

A. That's right.

Q. The Tigers made the offer that allowed you to go to college --

A. Yes.

Q. -- so you signed with them.

A. That's right. That's right. And I didn't sign with the Yankees, they were the first ones to scout me. Paul Krichell was a Yankee scout, he found me in high school, he was the first

one. But I didn't sign with the Yankees because when I got those passes from Ed Barrow to go and watch the games... You know, they used to have a pad on which they signed the name and it said, "Admit two to a ball game," so he gave me about three of them, see? And when I went to watch them play I saw Lou Gehrig out there, and I was in high school and looking at Lou Gehrig, who was a mature man, you know, his shoulders were like this, you know. He looked so powerful and I decided that I'd never be able to take his place and that was one of the deterrents that kept me from going to New York. And then Detroit came along and they... Gene Debuck was the Detroit scout and a very nice gentleman. He got me a summer job up in East Douglas, Massachusetts, to play ball, first time I'd been away from home. So I finally signed with them. Just happened to be...it turned out to be a good thing for me because it was a good ballpark and a good baseball team.

Q. What did it feel like to be away from home the first time?

A. Ah, it was strange, you know, (?) first time in Worcester, Massachusetts. I remember one of my trips, I went up there. This man Walter Schuster owned the whole town in East Douglas, Massachusetts.

Q. How old were you?

A. I was just nineteen, I guess, eighteen or nineteen. I had just graduated from high school that summer, so I must have been eighteen. And he owned the whole town, he had these woolen mills, and it was just like the old feudal days, you know, he owned everything. He owned all the houses, he owned the movie house, the drugstore, the recreation hall, and in order to pro-



vide entertainment for the people that worked for him he'd have a ball team and he was a baseball nut. He used to bring in major league players at the end of the season and in the summertime he'd bring in college players and Gene Debuck brought me up there and I sat around there for about a month. We used to practice on... We just sat there, four guys, sat in the hotel, you had room and board there, and twice a week we'd practice and play games, and I didn't play for the first month, so finally they put me... I told this Gene Debuck that I was going home. So they put me in a game and I hit a very long homerun and the owner got so excited, you know, I remember he said that... He gave me a ticket back to New York, round-trip ticket. He says, "You got to promise to come back," and he gave me a hundred and seventy-five dollars in new bills. Boy, that was a fortune in those days. That was my first time on a sleeper. I stayed up all night. Put the money under the pillow and was guarding that hundred seventy-five dollars for a whole night long, thinking someone surely is going to come in and rob me of this fortune, you know? But that was quite an experience. It shows you how things have changed. That was a long ride, an overnight-sleeper jump, and for a kid eighteen it was really...it was revolutionary. You read now, you know, about how people... This week I'm reading about Sidney Poitier's life. You know, he came from the Bahamas and he's talking about what it was like to land in New York City with three dollars in your pocket and not knowing where anything was and he was describing... He had to get up to Harlem and he's describing how they told him to go on the subway, and to him, he couldn't believe that you could



walk underground and get in a train, and he didn't know where the train was going to come out. He thought that the city was in the subway --

Q. Underground.

A. -- see? So he didn't know that he... All he knew, he had to get off at a Hundred and Sixteenth Street, see. And so that... He's talking about... What is he talking about, the middle thirties. Well, that's shortly, but... I can imagine what it was like for a kid from the Bahamas coming to New York with no family, no friends or anything. I at least had a place to go back to. But the thought of going up to East Douglas, Massachusetts, it was like a... An overnight-sleeper jump, that was really something.

Q. What did your parents say?

A. Well, they didn't object to it, they didn't object at all, and of course what changed them greatly is when Detroit offered me nine thousand to sign. That was a lot of money in those days for a high school kid and they realized that, you know, I must have some talent or they wouldn't be giving me nine thousand dollars. Nine thousand dollars was a lot more than... A lot of people didn't earn that much or save that much in a lifetime. From then on they were all for it.

Q. Did they understand the game of baseball?

A. Oh, sure. They used to come to the games, they got to be pretty good fans. Loved to come to the games. They traveled wherever I went to. Minor leagues, they always showed up once and, you know, spent a week or two and then go on back to New York. Oh yes, they were very proud of me, they got all kinds



of pictures. They were at the World Series and all that sort of thing.

Q. I've been meaning to ask you about your personal family.

A. Yes.

Q. You've been married twice.

A. Right.

Q. Could you just give me the names d(?)

A. Yes. I was married to a girl by the name of Carol Gimbel, it's C-a-r-a-l Gimbel, and she's a daughter of the Bernard Gimbel of the Gimbel Brothers Department Store. We were married thirteen years, we have three children, two boys and a girl. One's Glenn, second son is Steven and my daughter's Alva, and they all are married now, all have children, all doing very well. My boys are doing exceptionally well. One's an attorney out here with a law firm here in Century City, he's doing very well. My son works for Central National. He was with the Morgan Guaranty Bank for five years in New York, then he's working with a private investment firm and he's very successful. They're in their early thirties. My daughter's around twenty-eight, she's married to a young lawyer, they live in Connecticut, Essex, Connecticut. So they've done very well. Now, I've been remarried. I got divorced in 1959, I remarried in 1966 and I'm married now to a gal by the name of Mary Jo Tarolla. We've been married for, I guess, sixteen, seventeen years.

Q. Is she Jewish?

A. No, not Jewish.



Q. Okay. My question^f was going to be are your children married to Jews.

A. My two boys are married to... Wait a minute. My one son... It's interesting. My oldest boy was married to a non-Jewish girl and --

Q. Did you object?

A. No. It wouldn't have mattered if I did object, but I didn't object. And they were divorced and now he is married to a non-Jewish girl. My second son got married with all the... Well, let me start all over. My first son, at his marriage he had a colored preacher --

Q. Perform.

A. -- perform, yes, the nuptials. My second son, he's married to a gal in which they were married by a rabbi, but they had all of the Jewish traditional trimmings with the --

Q. Canopy.

A. -- canopy and the breaking of the glass and all that sort of thing. My daughter's married to a Christian who^{se} name is Gahagen and I don't even know what nationality he is, might be part German. So they're living their own lives, it wouldn't have any bearing on... I was never really... I don't even know how to say this. It's a little harder to have that same influence. My children were very young when I was divorced and when... I raised them. I got custody of my kids when we got divorced. But the boys went off to boarding school, one went to Hotchkiss, one went to Andover, and they went at fourteen, I guess. And so when they left my daughter, who was going to private school, wanted to live with her mother because I refused to let... I



wanted them all to live together, I wanted to keep the family together, even though we were divorced. And when the boys went off to boarding school my daughter was left at home, see, and she wanted to go live with her mother, so I let her go live with her mother. Well, in the kind of family life we had, the boys were at prep school for four years. The mother had visitation rights in the summertime, see? So I didn't get to see that much of them. Then they go to college for four years, you don't see them then, same thing happened. Then they get older and, you know, summertime comes, they want to do their own thing. So you don't have the same influence you would have if we had had a normal married life without a divorce in the family. I think I would have had a little more control over them, I would have been able to guide them a little better. As it is, they had to guide themselves, you know, and make their own decisions. They didn't have any real Jewish training, and maybe if we'd have had a...you know, if we had not had a divorce when they were younger they might have had... They were never bar mitzvahed or anything like that. It's interesting that my second son is so conscious of being Jewish. My oldest son, I think he'd like to even change his name.

Q. Why do you think that is?

A. I don't know. It's just different personalities, that's all. See, my wife's family were Jewish only in the fact that they were Jewish, but they weren't Jewish in any other respect, see. They moved in a different society, see? And I think my oldest boy is inclined that way. I think he's finding out



though that... I don't care what your attitude is, people are not going to let you forget whether you're Jewish or not, and if your name is Greenberg they're surely not going to let you forget. But he went to Yale and graduated from there and he graduated from business school at Columbia and he took his major in English at N.Y.U., so, heck, he was in college for eight years, I guess, at least eight years. But now he's in the business world and that business world is predominantly a Jewish business world on Wall Street. He's a little more conscious of being Jewish, I guess. But that's the story.

Q. What difference has your life made that you are a Jew?

A. I never thought about that. Why would I ever think about that?

Q. Just reflecting on who you are and --

A. No. I don't reflect on who I am. I know what I am and that's it. I like to feel, as I said earlier to you, that I'm not an example. If I'm an example, I'm only an example in the way I conduct my life, you know? I want to conduct my life in an exemplary manner, so that if people want to emulate me as an individual they're doing it because of what I do as my actions. It's not that I'm a leader of any, you know, Jewish group or... That's my feeling. Now, it's always been that I want to just lead my life and set the example of being a good citizen, live by the Ten Commandments, and if that sets a good example, I think that's fine.

Q. Okay. Thank you very -- [Recorder off]

A. As I say, as I said before, there's prejudice and I sensed the prejudice even as an owner. I had always felt that the owners



at least were working in concert for the good of the game, and then you find a lot of prejudice even in the ownership. But since there are only eight American League owners, of which I would be one... I had the choice of selling out in 1961 with Bill Veeck. I was then the largest stockholder in our corporation that controlled the White Sox and Bill Veeck, he had to go to Rochester to the Mayo Clinic for treatment and he had to sell out, wanted to sell out, and I had a choice then of I could take over, borrow the money to control the club and be the principal owner and run it, or sell out with him, and I decided to sell out. I didn't relish the thought of being in a business where the people who were supposed to be your associates treated you as a club within a club. Certain owners were the ones that were controlling the other owners.

Q. But you were doing it for thirteen years or so, right? '48 to '52?

A. No. I became an owner in about 1955 with Cleveland. I'd been the general manager with them, but I became an owner in '55. And then when I lost my job in '57, the end of the '57 season, I had a contract that they had to pay me for a year after I left, so I was being paid by Cleveland in '58 even though I wasn't working. And then in spring of '59 Veeck and I bought the White Sox, so I went right back in again, I only had one year off. But even then I... Here I was, one of the outstanding ballplayers in baseball, I'd served in the Army for five years, one of the first ones in, and I was an owner with the Cleveland Indians and been general manager for nine years, I was let out. I never had one offer from any ballclub to do anything in baseball. I had a



year in which to sit around and think and I thought to myself, here I been playing ball for all these years, sixteen years, I been in Cleveland as the general manager, which the team finished second or first, except for 1937 when we lost...= Herbie Score got hit in the eye with a line-drive in May, was out for the season.

Q. '37? '47.

A. '57.

Q. '57.

A. '57. And Bob Lemon came up with a sore arm, so we lost our two starting pitchers and we finished fourth, the only year we finished fourth, and I was fired. Even though I was a twenty-percent owner of the club, they let me out as general manager, and nobody else in baseball thought enough of me to even consider me in any other capacity. I thought to myself, well, this is one hell of a business to be in, see. So it just happened that Veeck, who was a good friend of mine, decided that we could buy the White Sox, so I went back in with Veeck.

Q. What a year to buy it. You then won the pennant your first year.

A. What?

Q. In '59 you --

A. And then when we bought it we won the pennant the first year and then unfortunately Bill got sick in '61 and wanted out and then I had the choice of staying on and being an owner, and part of the thing was, my kids were living in New York, as I was, and the White Sox were in Chicago, so I made the deci-



sion that I would rather get out and I've never looked back.

Q. That was your last connection with baseball?

A. Never looked back. I haven't any desire to.

Q. What year were you voted into the Hall?

A. In '56 or '7, something like that.

Q. So you're not sure what you're going to do with your memoirs and your --

A. I don't know what I'm going to do. Why do you ask that?

Q. We started talking before when the tape was off.

A. Yes.

Q. You were saying... I asked whether you were going to give some of it to the Hall of Fame.

A. Well, I don't know. Now, since I've been in the Hall of Fame, I don't think they have anything up there, you know.

They've never asked me for anything. In my display. Have you ever been at Cooperstown?

Q. Yes. Yes, a couple times. I don't recall anything.

A. Well, you don't recall. Well, if you ever go. I haven't been up there in years. They invite me every year because I'm a member of the Hall of Fame, they invite me for the ceremony, but I don't go up. I don't go up partly because it's an awkward place to get to and, two, I hate to see these old fiery ballplayers looking so old and... You know, one of my good friends, Red Ruffing, is in a wheelchair.

Q. I saw him last year.

A. You did? Well, you see him. It's too sickening to see it.

I mean I just want to... It does something to you, you know, to see those guys that were really such great physical specimens



and look at them now and see what age has done to them, you know?

Q. Why is it that they became that way and you're still in the best of shape?

A. Well, I don't know what that is. Maybe part of it is just being around young people and most of the guys that I'm with are like this kid. These are my protégés, you know, I play tennis with them and talk to them and associate with them and it keeps you younger, I guess. I don't know what's happened to a lot of those fellows. But they've never... I don't think there's anything up there in the shrine, you know, of me. I think that they want to put me under the bed. [Laugh]

Q. Because you're Jewish.

A. I don't know, I suppose so. So I figure the hell with it. I haven't made any promises of what I'm going to do. I haven't got that much, you know, outside of the scrapbooks, but... In my day they never gave you anything. Win the Most Valuable Player award, they didn't give you anything.

Q. There was no plaque?

A. Nothing. Absolutely nothing. 1940, the year I won the Most Valuable Player award, I never got a thing.

Q. That's incredible. Today you'd be

(?)

A. That's right. But, you know, the interesting thing is that the... We went in in the Hall of Fame, it was a great honor naturally. I was in Cooperstown in 1937 when the Hall was --

Q. Opened?

A. -- opened, yes, and they inducted seven players, see, who



were then the real famous old names, Babe Ruth, Ty Cobb --

Q. Walter Johnson.

A. Walter Johnson.

Q. Christy Mathewson.

A. He was dead. Cy Young was there, George Sisler and... I don't know the others. Tris Speaker and maybe Christy Mathewson. That might have been the seven and Christy Mathewson was there. They had an all-star game, the all-stars of the American League against the all-stars of the National League. I was on the All-Star American League team, that was in 1937. Now, I was terribly impressed with the Hall of Fame, it was a great honor, you know, to be selected to the Hall of Fame. You finally get into the Hall of Fame. They gave us a replica of the plaque. First of all, the plaque, I don't know if you've ever seen it. Ever see the postcard with it? Doesn't look anything like me at all.

Q./ Laugh That's true.

A. Absolutely no resemblance whatsoever, right? Whoever did the plaque, I don't know what the hell he did it from, what the model was, see? That's number one. They gave you a cardboard picture of the plaque, period, and then they gave you a little tiny pin to stick in your lapel. Now, you know how often you're going to put that in your lapel, see, and that was it. And for years later I used to go up there and I used to say to the... "Why don't you give us a duplicate of our plaque, so we could put it in our home and show it." "Oh no, we can't do that because it'll wind up in some barbershop. Some of the destitute ball-players will sell it to a barbershop and we don't want to see a Hall of Fame plaque...a bust or something in some kind of a



store, you know, in some town in Indiana." So I said, "Well, what the hell, I don't get that at all." Finally when Cronan became American League manager and he became involved in the Hall of Fame, got on the committee, they finally gave us a ring, one of those big college things, you know, a big bulky thing. It's got a silver face of a ball on it and "Hall of Fame" around it. I mean you'd think we graduated from some fraternity or sorority or something. Most ridiculous thing I've ever... And that's all we've gotten for being in this famous Hall of Fame. So I haven't been back since my friend Ralph Kiner was inducted. I went up when he was inducted, that's been, oh, three or four years ago, and --

Q. Do you stay in touch with the old ballplayers?

A. No, I don't. I live out here. Kiner, Ralph Kiner's a close friend of mine, I stay in touch with him. Freddie Hutchison is a good friend of mine.

Q. You look a little bit like Ralph Kiner too.

A. Yes, a lot of people say that. He --

Q. /laugh/

A. He denies it and so do I.

Q. /laugh/

/End of tape/

Ernie Brown

MADE IN U.S.A.

Anti-semitism, from stands and the other team's bench	pp. 8--;10;14--
Azenoff, Elliot	p. 1
Baseball players, today's	p. 37
Best year, 1937	p. 31
Born, Greenwich Village; raised, Bronx	p. 2
Boyhood baseball	p. 36
Cleveland team, owner of	p. 47
Dickstein, Irwin	p. 3
Early days in pros (scouts)	pp. 39--;42
Father: textile business	
Bob Feller, pitcher	p. 38
Hall of Fame, baseball	pp. 49-52
Heroes: Gehrig, Ruth	p. 38
Intermarriage	p. 44
Israel	pp. 21-25
Jewish identity	pp. 15-16;46
Kranepool, Ed	p. 2
James Monroe High School, Bronx	p. 2
Old Times in Baseball	p. 4
Parents: B., Falticeni, Rumania	p. 5
Parents' attitude toward baseball as a career	p. 8
Publicity in sports	p. 33
Salaries in sports	pp. 33-36
Owner, White Sox	pp. 47--
Yom Kippur, didn't play on	pp. 18-19
World War II	pp. 25--

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