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A's Society ICON Passes Away

Max Silberman was born January 20, 1945 during the 4th inauguration of Franklin Roosevelt and was raised in the Wynnefield section of Philadelphia. He was a graduate of Overbrook High School where he played soccer and baseball and was manager of the basketball team. Following his service in the U.S. Navy aboard the aircraft carrier U.S.S. Oriskany CVA34 during the Viet Nam conflict, he received his Bachelors degree from LaSalle University, his Masters degree from Bryn Mawr College and teaching certification from Cabrini College. In 1970 he married Rikki Cohen, had two daughters, Sara (Scott Kawalek) and Susan (John Scalzi) and was blessed with three granddaughters, Emily and Dana Kawalek and Jenna Scalzi. Cancer and stroke forced his retirement from Overbrook High School. He held many union offices. He kept active as Vice Chairman and Historian of Philadelphia Athletics Historical Society. During his teaching career he wrote for Phillies Report, Baseball Hobby News and sometimes contributed to Sports Collectors Digest. He very much enjoyed baseball card shows and his friends in the hobby.



MAX SILBERMAN

Like many people, I first was introduced to Max Silberman, of blessed memory, through the website of the Philadelphia A's Historical Society. I was considering moving to Philadelphia with my family (to become Principal of Torah Academy) and was interested in learning a bit about the history of baseball in what would become my new city. After I accepted the position, he was one of the first people I told. Sure enough, the first week I was here, he was kind enough to take me to the museum.

With Max I found that I had a kindred spirit.

First, Max was a proud Jew. He spoke lovingly of his people, his Jewish education and his commitment to Israel. In our first meeting in person, he told me about his boyhood hero, Lou Limmer. He told me of how, growing up in Philadelphia, he and his friends looked up to this slugger who was proud not only of his hitting but of his Jewishness. He was touched that after his first stroke, Lou called him weekly to tell him that he had made a "Misha Berach" (prayer for the sick) for him at his synagogue that week. Max was proud that this boyhood hero, probably the only Jewish baseball player to ever become a synagogue president, felt so close to him.

Second, Max was an educator. He taught history for 28 years in the Philadelphia Public School system. When I spoke with him during his last week on earth, he told me that he figured he had 3,000 students over the years. He was proud that he hadn't simply taught them facts about events. He taught them to think about why those events he occurred. He was also proud of the connections that he made with his students. After his first stroke, one of his nurses was a former student. When she realized she was caring for the man who taught her so much, she called home to say, "I'm caring for my teacher. He was the best teacher I ever had." Max told me about the year he agreed to teach a ninth grade class that was filled with children who had repeated the grade- some as many as three times. He decided to take these students to see some of the historic sites in the Northeast, including Washington and New York. As the children were getting off the bus after a trip, one young man- already taller than he, hugged him and said, "Mr. Sil, thank you so much. Nobody has ever taken me anywhere. I will never forget this."

Third, Max was a baseball fan. He loved the history and tradition of the sport. And he loved teaching about it. Particularly after his initial stroke made it impossible to continue in the school system, he viewed his work with the A's Society as being an educational opportunity. He knew he could touch and teach others in this way, and he took full advantage of the opportunity.

Of course, when Max could combine all of these things, he was particularly happy. I will always remember that it was he who helped facilitate Lou Brissie's visit to my school, Torah Academy. Not only did he help me make the contact, he actually paid Mr. Brissie's expenses to make sure that the visit could happen. And when it was time for the actual visit, though he wasn't feeling well, Max made sure to come to the school to hear Mr. Brissie deliver his message of perseverance and helping others to the students. Ever the teacher, Max heard one of the boys say he was an Indians fan. Max mailed him a baseball card of Mr. Brissie as an Indian, which made that young man's day.

Max lived as a Jew and he died as a Jew. Before he passed away he made sure that his burial would be conducted within Jewish Law. His commitment in the most difficult of times inspired me to do a good deed on his behalf. In the hours after his passing, I made sure that the "Mourners' Kaddish" (the prayer praising G-d recited on behalf of the departed) will be said three times daily for him in Jerusalem, the Holiest City on earth. It is my way of doing at least a little to repay Max's kindness to me. I hope that now that Max is watching on high he will be pleased to know he's being remembered in this way, as well as by all those he touched for these many years.

In one of my last meetings with Max, he told me that he always tried his best to do what was right and to help others. I am confident that he is now in the World of Truth reaping the rewards spent of a life doing good deeds for all he met. It is my prayer that his soul will be at peace with the righteous ones of previous generations and that his memory will forever be a blessing for all.

Rabbi Shmuel Jablon



Rabbi Shmuel & Max Silberman, Society Historian