

## Norman Morris, at 80; compiled histories of Boston's Jewish community



---

Mr. Morris, shown pitching for a US military team in Japan, won a city baseball title as a teenager and played professionally in the Brooklyn Dodgers organization.

**By Marvin Pave** Globe Correspondent April 20, 2015

In his mid-60s and undergoing dialysis, Norman Morris wanted to leave a tangible memory for his family and future generations of the once-thriving Jewish community in Dorchester, Roxbury, and Mattapan.

A former star athlete at Roxbury Memorial High School who grew up near Talbot and Blue Hill avenues in Dorchester, he interviewed former residents and old friends, collected photographs, posters, and school yearbooks, and incorporated his research in the book "Ghetto Memories," published in 2002.

He had so much material that a second book, "Ghetto Memories Revisited," soon followed.

"Passing on to another life will eventually occur for all of us," he wrote in the second book's epilogue. "We have little or no control over the end result. What we do have are the memories which remind us of the area from which we came."

Mr. Morris, who played professional baseball in the Brooklyn Dodgers organization and went on to a career in banking, died of kidney disease March 20 in Bethesda Hospital East in Boynton Beach, Fla. He was 80 and had lived in Boynton Beach and Great Island on Lewis Bay in West Yarmouth.

At its peak during the first half of the 20th century, the Jewish community in the city was clustered in an area that stretched from Dudley Street to Grove Hall and down Blue Hill Avenue to Mattapan.

The recollections of Mr. Morris, who lived in Dorchester until 1958 and in Sharon until 1996, included Franklin Field and its "Wall," where thousands converged on the Jewish high holidays and where he once played baseball. He also wrote about political rallies at the G&G deli, which was visited by two presidents, Franklin D. Roosevelt and Dwight D. Eisenhower.

Talbot Bowladrome held a special memory. It was there where he met his future wife, Sandra Arnoldy, in 1957 after returning from Air Force duty in Japan. "It was a prearranged date," she recalled. "I went bowling with a girlfriend when we knew Norm would be there."

They married on Feb. 16, 1958, at Aperion Plaza on Warren Street, which he recounted in the chapter "Wedding Bliss," in "Ghetto Memories."

"On February 15, the temperature was 60 degrees," he wrote. Having served in the Air Force weather service, "I was trained to watch the weather map daily. People in the Kerwin Street/Talbot Avenue neighborhood thought I was out of my mind when I was putting chains on the tires of my car. Who had the last laugh? Twenty-three inches of snow fell on February 16 . . . the family made it, a few of the guests made it, and the band, and eventually the rabbi showed up."

The pages of his books are filled with stories of family and community, such as playing ball on the steps of three-deckers or basketball games at the Hecht House and Young Men's Hebrew Association.

"When Norm started something, he dove into it with both feet, and the books were a personal crusade," said Harvey Vetstein, a close friend who married a cousin of Mr. Morris's wife.

Mr. Morris did not choose the title word "Ghetto" to mean a restricted section. "It describes the area where we first tasted life and learned what the world was all about," he wrote.

His books led to the production of the DVD "[Sidewalk Memories](#)," released five years ago. The documentary includes oral histories from Jewish residents of that same era, and was produced by

Ken Schlossberg, owner of Schlossberg-Solomon funeral home in Canton. Schlossberg and Mr. Morris met often at Maxie's Delicatessen in Stoughton.

"We ran a promo on TV at the deli and that gave us a lot of leads," Schlossberg said. "There was no way I could have gotten the project off the ground without Norm's books."

Mr. Morris was so proud of winning the city baseball championship as a teenager with his club, the No Names, that he saved the jacket presented to the team, which his grandson Josh now proudly wears.

"He was a very good pitcher with a very good curveball," said Norm Shnider, a boyhood friend and teammate. "Norm was confident on the mound and that carried over to when he took on the book project, the scrapbook of his and our youth that brought tears to my eyes."

Mr. Morris graduated from Roxbury Memorial in 1952. He signed with the Dodgers and pitched for the Valleyfield Chiefs in Quebec. After enlisting in the Air Force in 1953, he played baseball for a military team in Japan, but upon returning home he attended Northeastern University, despite an inquiry from the Red Sox.

Because he had been a pro, Mr. Morris was not allowed to play varsity college baseball, so he assisted head coach Tinker Connelly to help defray his tuition costs.

Mr. Morris graduated from Northeastern with a bachelor's degree in business administration and from Brown University with a master's in economics.

He also played baseball in the Boston Park League and with Brewster of the Cape Cod League. Mr. Morris organized and was the winning pitcher in the Cape League's 100th Anniversary Old Timers Game in 1985.

Several years ago, he donated his [framed game poster](#) framed game poster to the league's Hall of Fame.

Mr. Morris was an officer with the Federal Reserve Bank of Boston and the First National Bank of Boston before forming the management consulting firm NMA Inc.

Crohn's disease prompted him to retire from that work in 1988, but he remained active as a baseball camp clinician, a scout for the Milwaukee Brewers, and proprietor with his son, Mark, of Westwood, of two baseball card and memorabilia stores.

He was also an assistant baseball coach at Thayer Academy when his son played there. Mr. Morris was an assistant baseball coach at Sharon High School and Dennis-Yarmouth Regional High School and head coach at Dover-Sherborn Regional High School.

From 1958 to 1994, he was also public address announcer for Northeastern's home football games.

In addition to his wife, son, and grandson, Mr. Morris leaves his daughter, Julie D'Amico of Attleboro, and three other grandchildren.

A service has been held for Mr. Morris, who was buried in Sharon Memorial Park with the baseball glove he wore 60 years ago.

“That was my choice,” Mark said. “It was the glove he used to play catch with me, and none of his grandsons is a lefty.”

In a eulogy, Mr. Morris’s grandson Jacob recalled “sitting out on the porch overlooking Lewis Bay” as Mr. Morris assured him that he could be anything he wanted, in baseball or in life. “There was something about the look he gave you when he talked that told you he was speaking from the heart.”

*Marvin Pave can be reached at [marvin.pave@rcn.com](mailto:marvin.pave@rcn.com).*