

**The Catcher 'n' the Spy:**

**A Life in Three Acts**

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## Introduction

Ken Mack, my younger stepson, was bursting with enthusiasm, of which he has a vast and joyous reservoir, as he welcomed Jackie and me to his East Village condo. “You’ve got to see this,” he exclaimed. Framed on a living room wall was a New Jersey bank check made out to one Charles Caldwell, from Morris Berg for \$3.60. “Isn’t it amazing,” he exulted, while I stared dully at the framed piece of paper. Ken is a CBS Sports producer of considerable talent. He has been an Omniscient Being about virtually every sport on earth, so I expected an education. He simply said that Morris, a.k.a. Moe, Berg was an American League catcher with remarkable longevity and hinted at a fascinating story behind that name. I took the bait and began the search for Moe. The strange brilliance and brilliant strangeness of the person I discovered is well worth sharing.

. This is the story of the smartest man every to play the game of baseball; a Princeton star athlete; a Columbia-trained lawyer; a Jewish outsider; and the man who was assigned to assassinate German physicist Werner Heisenberg while spying, during World War II, for the O.S.S., the Office of Strategic Services.. His acquaintances and admirers ranged from Babe Ruth and Ted Williams to Cardinal Spellman, Anthony Eden and Nelson Rockefeller. He was, in fact, a real catcher ‘n’ a spy. “Berg’s was a life of abiding strangeness. The secret world of Moe Berg was charming and seamy, vivid and unsettling, wonderful and sad.”\*

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\*All phrases in quotations are from Berg’s biography by Nicholas Davidoff, noted in the bibliography of this paper.

## Chapter One

Morris Berg was born on March 2, 1902, the youngest of the three children of Ukrainian immigrants, Bernard and Rose Berg. Bernard, brilliant, ambitious, and demanding, expected an extremely high level of achievement from all his family. He went to work at once in Manhattan in 1894, ironing clothes while he studied every available moment, learned six languages, and passed the course of study at the New York College of Pharmacy. A professional success, he purchased two pharmacies in Newark and moved to the middle class neighborhood of Roseville. As a very young child Moe badgered his parents to send him to school like older siblings Sam and Ethel, and at age three-and-a-half they did. He quickly proved to be an exceptional student with a photographic memory. But what he loved most was a game of catch. His family recalled his tossing a ball with a neighborhood patrolman to whom he was always yelling, "Throw it harder!" He was superbly coordinated, with sure hands and a fearless attitude.

He accelerated his studies to graduate from high school in two years, entering NYU at age 16 where he must have been an athletic as well as an academic star, playing collegiate basketball and baseball. Ambitious, and hungry for greater academic challenges, he sought admission from Princeton University in 1919 and became a member of the class of '23. He was a superb student, a polymath who studied seven languages, including Sanskrit, mathematics, philosophy, and biology. Moe graduated *magna cum laude*, but before earning this honor he had also developed into the best baseball player in Princeton history, the starting shortstop for his last three years, even though he was so slow of foot his coach told him, that "he'd get to first base just as fast wearing snow shoes." However, his baseball instincts were unerring; he always knew

where the ball was headed at the crack of the bat. That skill, and a strong accurate arm, made him a star. As a senior he batted .337, and an astronomic .611 in five games against Harvard and Yale. In typical Moe Berg fashion he confused opposition runners on second base by teaching his second baseman to yell signals back and forth with him---in Latin!

His athletic reputation in the New York area was impressive as he prepared to graduate. Both the great John McGraw of the Giants and the Brooklyn Robin manager, Wilbert “Uncle Robbie” Robinson, knew that a Jewish athlete would draw large crowds in New York with its significant Jewish population. Since Brooklyn had a truly mediocre team, Berg thought he’d have more playing time there, and a \$5000 signing bonus helped make his mind up. He was headline news in Brooklyn, although his first three months as a pro were so undistinguished that he was optioned to the Minneapolis Millers and then, insult of insults, to the Toledo Mudhens. Here his fielding was impressive, although his prowess at the plate was less so. A major league scout filed a brief, cutting, remorseless dispatch about Berg, one which has been subsequently echoed thousands of times: “Good field, no hit.” But in his 1925 season, played at Reading, PA of the International League, he ended up with an astonishing .311 batting average, and he was called up by the Chicago White Sox.

Meanwhile Moe and his siblings had always been under unremitting pressure from their intense and demanding father to become highly educated. Older brother Sam was the designated physician, sister Ethyl the graduate educator, and Moe was expected to become a lawyer. And so he entered Columbia Law School after the 1925 season. where he studied until late May, 1926, then returning to his “day job” with the White Sox, who had tolerated Berg’s two month absence from their season, plus spring training. This

strange alternation of law school and pro baseball continued for the next few years with the help of a favorite law professor, also a baseball aficionado, who helped Berg take extra courses at Columbia when he had the time and arranged for his attendance at spring training during the school year. In February, 1928 Sox owner Charles Comiskey had threatened bodily harm, or certainly his career, if Moe didn't report to the White Sox training camp immediately. Moe came, books in hand but spent the first three long months of the season on the bench. Then, one by one, the Sox' three catchers were injured. As Ray Schalk, the distressed manager (also one of the three injured catchers), looked around the dugout for an answer to his acute dilemma, Berg spoke up, "You've got a big league catcher sitting right here." Moe was referring to the backup first baseman, who had caught in the minor leagues, but the manager hadn't figured that out and sent Berg in instead. Moe had never been a catcher but knew the hazards of the position, including trying to get a hold of a projectile swooping and diving at 90 m.p.h. and blocking home plate from an oncoming runner hell bent on scoring. Berg gloomily responded, "Send the body to Newark" and put on the catcher's "tools of ignorance," to play well until one of the real catchers healed.

Berg returned to Columbia Law School for the winter and was admitted to the New York Bar in the spring of 1929. He then rejoined the White Sox and, to the surprise of the sportswriters, proceeded to bat .288 for the season, receiving his LL.B just before 1930 spring training was to begin.

In April, 1930 Berg's spikes caught in the soil as he led off at first base and tried to change directions quickly. The sharp pain in his knee did not end his career, but the injury eventually led him to become that consummate baseball mediocrity, a third string

catcher. He tried to catch for the White Sox that year, but the pain must have been considerable, and he played in only 20 games, hitting .115; nevertheless the Cleveland Indians claimed Moe when he was put on waivers, although the Indians already had three catchers, and Moe Berg had only one hit that entire 1931 season.

Moe had always been a loner, and as he receded to the fringes of baseball, his eccentricities became more pronounced. Beginning at this time he began to wear dark gray suits, white dress shirts, a black tie, black shoes, and sometimes a gray fedora. What made the sartorial choices remarkable was their variety. There was none. He wore this uniform every day of his life from then on until his death in 1972. The New York reporter Jimmy Breslin once asked Moe about his clothes, and Berg replied that he was “mourning for the world.”

In 1930 he also began his brief career as a New York lawyer. The country’s economy was spiraling downward, but Moe Berg had two Ivy League degrees. He was promptly hired by a prestigious Manhattan law firm co-owned by one of J.P. Morgan’s sons-in-law. The records of his employment are lost now, but his legal work seemed to have lasted over two or three winters. He was apparently quite a good lawyer, good enough to be given leave to play summer baseball for several years. Yet a legal career could not offer Moe the enormous pleasures he derived from baseball, even at many times the salary. As a ball player he was unique, a scholar surrounded by men often with less than a high school education, and he achieved a strange celebrity with sports writers, professors, actors, scientists and politicians, all of whose languages he could speak fluently; he loved the role of Moe Berg, the brainy baseball player. He could travel to major cities around the AL, receive a generous food allowance, and enjoy large chunks of free time for

reading, dining and adventure. And he got to play catch! But so often, no one knew where Moe was.

It was inevitable that the Indians would release Moe in early 1932, but catchers with experience were rare, so the Washington Senators picked him up. Sports writer for the Washington Post, Shirley Povich remarked to Senators outfielder Dave “Sheriff” Harris that a new catcher had arrived. and “...he speaks seven languages,” said Povich. “Yeah, I know,” retorted Harris, “and he can’t hit in any of them.” However the 1932 Senators gave Moe Berg new life. He caught half the season, and while only hitting .236, he was quite effective with runners on base. His strong defense contributed to the team winning 93 games in which he threw out 55 runners attempting to steal second base and made no errors.

This performance led to his selection to join an elite Asia-bound group of players to teach the Japanese how to improve their baseball. This gang including the great hitter “Lefty” O’Doul, whose record of 254 hits in a season placed him second on that all-time list (three behind George Sisler), and Ted Lyons, the White Sox all-time franchise leader in wins, a 20 games winner three times in 18 seasons, who was chosen to work with the pitchers. Moe Berg joined this stellar group to educate the catchers.

During the voyage he became fluent in Japanese, and by the end of his few months there he was being consulted by universities to discuss Japanese students’ difficulties with foreign languages. Another remarkable Berg adventure followed, as he traveled alone, often on foot, heedless of the heat, through China to the Middle East. A picture of Moe climbing a pyramid in Egypt shows him predictably wearing his black necktie.

Back with the Senators in 1933 Berg broke the AL fielding record with 117 consecutive errorless games. So when an American All Star team was again selected to play a collection of Japanese stars, the roster heading for Japan included Babe Ruth, Lou Gehrig, Charlie Gehringer and, of course, Moe Berg. Moe was thrilled to be back in Japan and was envied by his teammates for his abilities to charm his hosts and their wives. His adventurous nature did get the best of him when he disappeared from a stadium near Tokyo, disguised himself in a kimono, snuck up the bell tower of one of Tokyo's tallest buildings, and, using an 8 mm movie camera he had secreted away, made panoramic shots of the city, shipyards, industrial and military installations in the area. To his great regret, Berg was never to return to Japan, but his time in that country, one of the happiest for him, filled his stories for the rest of his life.

New Yorker John Kieran, who wrote "Sports of the Times" from 1927 to 1942, created the public persona of Moe Berg. Sports writers covered games but columnists had to come up with entertaining features, "diversions rather than revelations," on a daily basis. Whenever events or inspiration were wanting, Kieran would return to the persona he had invented for Berg as his beloved "Professor" to fill his column, producing good natured accounting of events which seemed like a response to Ring Lardner's fictional baseball character Jack Keefe in his "You Know Me Al" series "Professor Berg proved irresistible to many sports writers, and while none gilded him with prose as witty as Kiernan's, the Berg that appeared in columns and features around the country during his life and afterward was a consistent, recognizable character."

The celebrity Professor Berg appeared on "Information Please," a challenging radio quiz show which ran from 1938 to 1951, where witty and brilliant Clifton Fadiman

sought to stump a panel of experts including the Times' Kieran, Oscar Levant, and Franklin P. Adams, the latter a member of the Algonquin Round Table, plus an invited expert, such as Arthur Rubenstein, Orson Wells or Moss Hart. Kieran had Moe Berg on the show in 1939, and Moe performed superbly. He was on the show twice more that fall, but felt Fadiman had insulted him at one point and stopped talking. His secretive unwillingness to answer personal questions made Fadiman wonder, he noted later, if Berg had been a spy.

Moe's ability to be such an entertaining raconteur probably helped keep him in baseball far longer than his aging talent should have allowed. There were bits of truth in every Berg story, "yet the jolly world of Professor Berg was false at the center." Berg encouraged the caricature of the writers which cloaked the real Moe Berg in shimmering distortion," behind which lurked his secret, solitary life. He never married, although there was one woman, the brilliant Estelle Huni, who might have been the love of his life after he retired from baseball, but he left her forever for the excitement of a life of espionage. He never had children, took vacations or learned to drive. He owned little besides his black and white wardrobe, and enormous stacks of books. The important experiences of his life, his real treasures, were collected in other countries, like the Japanese adventures of the thirties and challenges yet to come in Europe.

But he was still a ball player in the life that gave him the greatest pleasure. Dropped from the Senators' roster, Berg was picked up in Boston where he played for Joe Cronin and the Red Sox for five more years. Some felt that Berg lent Cronin an aura of respectability which accounted for his remaining with the Red Sox so long, since his batting average was always unimpressive, but he did remain a highly respected defensive

catcher with a strong arm. He liked to be around ballplayers, but he didn't always want to play, seeming to prefer talking baseball than playing it. Perhaps Moe was preserving his abilities as he aged by limiting his playing time. Moe was now a lawyer not practicing, a linguist not teaching, a ball player not deeply interested in playing baseball. "Isn't this wonderful," he said once. "Work three hours a day, travel around the country, live in the best hotels, meet the best people, and get paid for it." And when there was no baseball to be played, no one knew where Moe was.

His eccentricities increased. He fasted one day a week, took three baths a day, and became a peripatetic walker. Moe remained kind, witty, gregarious, and yet simultaneously elusive. His friends came from every calling. In other cities he cultivated intellectuals like the director of the Fels planetarium at the Franklin Institute in Philadelphia, who invited him to give a guest lecture on constellations. Moe even wrote an essay in the Atlantic Monthly at the request of editor Edward Weeks, "Pitchers and Catchers," still one of the best concise primers on the art of baseball. Who else but Moe Berg could wax eloquent on the probability of pitch sequences and call the multitasking catcher "the Cerberus of baseball"?

## **Chapter Two**

In early 1940 the Associated Press reported that, "The linguistic Moe Berg, who has mastered all the finer arts except hitting, will be missing from baseball for the first time in seventeen years." When he retired he was honored with a special metal card which entitled him to lifetime free admission in any Major League ballpark. With the coming of World War II, Berg's deeply felt patriotism led him to leave his baseball career to serve

America. In a Boston speech Berg quoted Michel de Montaigne on love of country, “I love her so tenderly that even her spots, her blemishes, are dear to me.”

He knew his playing days, the days where he could be Professor Berg, were over. However a new career so fitted to his personality that it would make him again a star: espionage. He was a man who found it easy to lead others to talk about themselves while remaining quiet. His memory was prodigious, and he was a loner “with a penchant for disappearing,” and a deeply loyal American.

In 1940 Nelson Rockefeller proposed to President Roosevelt a governmental organization that would further the national defense by encouraging close bonds of friendship with the countries of Central and South America.. This became the Office of Inter-American Affairs (O.I.A.A.). Berg was asked to be a sports ambassador, teaching baseball throughout the Americas, so he willingly joined the O.I.A.A. in early 1942. The United States had also sent thousands of troops to Central and South America, so Berg was also a roving inspector, consulting with the FBI and the O.S.S., predecessor of the C.I.A., headed by lawyer and World War I hero “Wild Bill” Donovan. Moe provided the O.S.S. with his secretly obtained roof top films of Tokyo from eight years earlier, for which he was highly praised. Berg was certain that this information was crucial to Lt. Col Jimmy Doolittle’s B-25 raids on Japan on April 18, 1942, but this is undocumented.

Berg traveled widely in South America, keeping an eye on Brazil’s dictator Getulio Vargas, who had flirted with Hitler supporters before throwing his weight behind the Allies. The O.S.S. hired Berg, and in May, 1944, at age 42, he left for the European theater of action. The O.S.S. founder, “Wild Bill” Donovan wanted this organization to be a place for, in his words, the “calculatingly reckless,” young men of “disciplined

daring.” He hired one of the most amazingly diverse, talented and undisciplined gathering of luminaries imaginable: circus impresario Henry Ringling North and film director John Ford, assorted DuPonts, Mellons, Morgans and Vanderbilts; poet Stephen Vincent Benet and “Lucky” Lucian of Murder, Inc.; U.N. diplomat Ralph Bunche and a group of professional wrestlers; a leading ornithologist and music critic Edwin Downs; Tolstoy’s grandson and Toscanini’s daughter. “We had all kinds of egomaniacs and crazies.” A Retired Veterans of the O.S.S president Geoffrey Jones recalled. That included Morris Berg.

The O.S.S. needed a smart, personable operative for the secret assignment of a lifetime: determining the progress of German physicists in harnessing the vast energy produced from atomic fission, the splitting of the atom. Moe Berg got the call.

By 1942 the O.S.S. believed that Werner Heisenberg, the creator of quantum physics, was not only leading the atomic bomb project for Germany but seemed well on the way to success. In late 1943 Nazi propaganda was touting wonder weapons, one of which was said to be capable of blowing up half the globe, possibly by releasing atomic energy. Newsweek, late in Dec., 1943, posited a single German airplane carrying just one bomb capable of wiping out an entire city. That would occur twenty months later, but Germans would not be flying the plane.

Berg had time to study Heisenberg’s works and also arranged for a way to contact Dr. Paul Scherrer, head of the major physics department in Zurich since Moe knew that Switzerland was the most likely place to meet German physicists, as it was the only country outside their own where the German scientists could attend major meetings.

What were the German scientists doing? Despite British intelligence reports that there was no bomb project, the O.S.S. knew that Germany was increasing heavy water production. This was a disturbing finding. Heavy water slows down neutrons bouncing around in nuclear reactors, making them more likely to react with other uranium atoms and continue a chain reaction. Heisenberg had built a chain-reacting pile in 1941, as had Enrico Fermi at the Manhattan Project lab in Chicago. What remained for the Germans to do in developing the A-bomb?

Berg and his colleagues finally got the orders to fly to Rome just after its liberation. Here, in 1944, he began contacting Italian physicists known for their work on atomic fission, from whom he collected three names of German scientists who might be working on the atomic bomb, Otto Hahn, Walther Bothe and, yes, Werner Heisenberg. Berg was also sending back to O.S.S. headquarters his own translations of reports on German radar systems and detectors, the Luftwaffe's radio-directed missiles, Italian wind tunnels, and German-Italian industrial collaboration. And he spent many happy days as a solitary tourist in Rome, Siena, and Florence, when no one knew where Moe was.

Berg had cultivated a friendship with an acquaintance of Heisenberg's in Rome where he saw a postcard from the German physicist indicating the latter was living in Hechingen, a village in southern Germany on the edge of the Black Forest. However Berg's mission to track down Heisenberg in Germany was canceled by Col. Leslie Groves, now in charge of the whole atomic bomb project, realizing "that if he were captured, the Nazis might be able to extract far more information about our project than we could ever hope to obtain if he were successful." While some intercepted documents in Strasbourg suggested that Germany did not have the bomb, aerial

photographs in the Hechingen area showed a new industrial complex which was feared to be a uranium separation facility.

So by 1944, baseball ambassador and sartorial eccentric Morris Berg was now at the heart of the American atomic intelligence effort, symbolized by his attendance at an O.S.S. briefing on Paul Scherrer, the Zurich physics institute director who was organizing a series of physics lectures by prominent scientists. Scherrer had been recruited by Allen Dulles, then Bern O.S.S. bureau chief. By cooperating with American agents, Scherrer had become as a prized source of information. Berg therefore headed for Zurich where Werner Heisenberg had been lured to lecture in mid-December, 1944. His orders: if Heisenberg said anything which convinced him the Germans were close to developing the A-bomb, Berg was to kill him. Attending that potentially explosive lecture, where men might die, while masquerading as a Swiss physics student at age 42 may have been a disturbing experience, but this was his duty. He had a loaded gun in his pocket and was prepared to use it, as well as the cyanide pill he now carried. Moe's problem was that while he had been able to study, and even understand, some of Heisenberg's work, the formulas on the blackboard that day were largely unintelligible to him. However Professor Scherrer, now Berg's good friend, and others in the room with whom Berg could converse, found nothing in the talk that was related to a bomb, so his pistol stayed in its case as did the cyanide. Berg learned that Heisenberg, who claimed to be anti-Nazi but pro-Germany, was working on cosmic ray research. During and after a dinner Prof. Scherrer gave for the conference attendees, Berg spent time with Heisenberg, speaking Swiss-accented German so well that Heisenberg never suspected he was with an American spy.

On reflection it seems unlikely that Germany would have allowed Heisenberg out of the country if he were really working on an atomic bomb project soon to be unleashed on the Allies. Nor, if he were, would it be likely he would discuss this in a Swiss lecture hall. This was O.S.S. wishful thinking, but it was the moment of a lifetime for Moe Berg.

Berg also had to commute to Bern, the Swiss capital, to answer to Allen Dulles. Berg annoyed Dulles immensely. Moe was secretive with the O.S.S. station chief, always appearing to try to hold something back. Dulles was not alone in believing Berg was acting as a prima donna, always demanding special attention.

As soon as the major German physics institute in Gottingen was in Allied hands, the O.S.S. sent Berg and other operatives with a science background to report what the Germans had been doing. There was no German bomb, although two tons of uranium, two tons of heavy water, as well as ten tons of carbon were found buried in a field. Hidden in a nearby cesspool were documents confirming that the German A-bomb effort had been on a ludicrously small scale and with poor central coordination. German scientists and strategists, led by Heisenberg, had believed by 1942 that the A-bomb would be too costly in draining vital men and materials and take too long to be useful in the war effort.

Moe was probably involved in a secret war within a war over the next four months, as the United States attempted to hoard the material and human resources needed to build a bomb not only from a newly perceived threat, the Soviet Union, but from our own Allies.

Moe wanted to attend a Soviet scientific conference, but anyone with knowledge of Los Alamos was forbidden to go to Russia, for fear of being kidnapped and tortured. So, carrying an introduction from Dr. Paul Scherrer, he was off to Sweden to see Lise

Meitner, the codiscoverer of atomic fission. Scherrer was inviting her to come to Zurich to work in his institute, but the motivation for Berg's visit was actually that the O.S.S. feared that Meitner might be a target for kidnapping by the Soviet Union. Berg also tried to convince her to come to the U.S, but to no avail. Within two months after the war ended the O.S.S. became the Strategic Services Unit, the S.S.U. This morphed into the C.I.A early in 1946. Berg was given an assignment to study Soviet interests in German scientists and again saw Lise Meitner. She assured him that she had no plans to visit the Soviet Union. She subsequently became a Swedish citizen, then moved to the U.K. in 1960 and died at Cambridge in 1968. Berg also visited physicist Niels Bohr who had returned after the war to Copenhagen from the U.S.. Bohr had advocated sharing of all atomic secrets with the Russians during the war to speed up to work of the Manhattan Project, but, to the great relief of the S.S.U., Berg learned that he had not done so on returning to Denmark.

A friend of Moe's, Howard Dix, who had run the O.S.S. technical section during the war and had first told Berg of the secret Manhattan project, had remained a Berg booster throughout Moe's peripatetic European adventures, swallowing all Moe's somewhat embellished tales whole. Dix now proposed to nominate Moe Berg for the Medal of Freedom, the highest civilian honor, instituted by President Truman in 1945. Berg rejected the honor but has nevertheless been listed as a recipient ever since. The issue for Moe was probably his fear that his work in the War would be revealed, and his secretive nature hated the thought of anyone knowing what he had been doing.

### Chapter Three

Moe was angry at his government. At the same time that the SSU was giving him assignments, it was demanding that he account for some \$15,000 in cash advances he had drawn on during the war. He was also confused and distressed that he was being slowly pushed out of the SSU which was downsizing (from 13,000 to 1,300) and also that, with the end of the War, he had been forced to give up a spectacular life style which rewarded his spontaneity, tolerated his secretive ways as a beneficial trait, and funded his exorbitant tastes. Now this was all about to disappear. Berg not only had difficulties after the war in dealing with his debts to the S.S.U. but now faced other civilian debts from bad investments as well.

With all of this turmoil surrounding him, he still maintained contact with the C.I.A. In 1952 there was considerable concern about what new kinds of bombs the Soviet Union was building. That had been an area of expertise for Morris Berg in wartime, so the C.I.A. sent him back to Europe, where he disastrously resumed his profligate lifestyle, and, strangely, became almost the caricature of a spy. Once, when he was trying to avoid someone in Frankfurt, he hid behind a clump of bushes, ignoring the fact that there were no leaves left on them, so that he was plainly visible in his perennial black suit. Another time while touring with a friend he suddenly leaped behind a column, then, with no explanation, came out to continue their walk. When he returned to the U.S, he would reveal nothing to his C.I.A. sponsors, because he had failed to find out anything in Europe but wouldn't admit it. And he would not provide the C.I.A. with an expense record. He was no longer the golden boy of the agency whose eccentricities were outweighed by his value in intelligence gathering. His contract was not renewed in 1954.

He never held another job. He blamed Allen Dulles, governmental bureaucracy, and anti-Semitism in the C.I.A., but never his own inaction and indulgent lifestyle.

Without baseball and without the intelligence community, this enormous intellect and talent had lost any semblance of structure in his life, and Moe began to wander about America, living off his wit and charm, and the kindness and charity of friends and relatives. “Broke, disappointed, and disinclined, Berg had one asset that no government could strip away from him—his personality. People were drawn to him, they always had been.”

At Princeton he would stop by the houses of old friends especially during football season and wangle invitations to stay over. The check in the frame on my stepson’s wall which he wrote to Charles Caldwell proved to be payment to a former Princeton seven-letter man who was at the school when Berg was, and who, in 1945, became Princeton’s greatest football coach. Moe was paying him back for some favor, probably tickets. Berg received invitations to parties at the Princeton Institute of Advanced Studies where he drank with Niels Bohr, John van Neumann, and J. Robert Oppenheimer. He tried to explain baseball to Albert Einstein, who lost patience and vowed he could not understand baseball and would never try to again. He loved to tell stories about his life in baseball as well as his trips to Japan, which he embellished with each telling, especially to sportswriters. If he was ever asked what he was doing at the moment, he characteristically held his finger up to his lips as the eternal man of secrets. He was, of course, unemployed. And so often no one knew where Moe was.

Boston was Berg’s favorite American city, perhaps because of its European echoes. He loved talking to the customers of Boston’s bookstores, primarily about himself and

the pivotal wartime role he believed he had played, often embellishing his accomplishments melodramatically, e.g. the nonexistent European spy partner with whom Berg claimed he worked until the mythical partner was found floating, face down, in a drainage ditch. Sometimes he would show up, without invitation, at an acquaintance's house with just his tooth brush and a tattered canvas bag full of books, wearing his worn black suit. Late at night he would be found washing those clothes out to wear again in the morning. And he might stay for weeks. In his stories he was always cunning and brilliant and always came out a winner. Because of Berg's accomplishments, he told those whose guest he became so often, the U.S. could stop worrying about the German A-bomb program. Out of nowhere he would inexplicably say, "No questions about Africa," to whomever he was charming at the time.

With his lifetime pass to any American or National League game he watched a lot of baseball, usually in New York and actually appeared in an Old Timers' game in 1956, at age 54, in Yankee Stadium where he played shortstop once again, hit cleanup and doubled off of Yankee pitching star Allie Reynolds. More and more his society became that of sportswriters, from whom he received free passage into the food-laden press hospitality room. Sometimes they let him sleep in their twin-bedded rooms. Cardinal Spellman wanted to know how his arm was. He stayed for six weeks in Joe DiMaggio's suite in Manhattan, attended meetings of the Linguistic Society of America, of which he was a long time member, as well as gatherings of the American Philosophical Society and American Physical Society.

For seventeen years, 1947-1964, Berg mostly lived, free of charge, with his older brother, Dr. Sam, in Newark who was equally rigid and jealous of Moe's notoriety, also

profoundly annoyed to find newspapers strewn all about his home, Dr. Sam and Moe eventually stopped speaking, and Sam finally demanded he leave. Six blocks away lived his doting, eccentric, demanding spinster sister, Ethel, who gave him refuge for the last eight years of his life. He continued to shun people who wanted to get to know him and be very suspicious even of telephone calls to Ethel's home. He killed time and kept moving when he could, attending hundreds of ball games and horse races, reading manically, sometimes ten books at a time. He still knew all the old timers in baseball and had no difficulty reaching Casey Stengel or Joe DiMaggio to show off to an acquaintance.

Moe was aging. He had an uncomfortable and enlarging recurrent umbilical hernia. With bad knees he was an easy target for mugging, which was not infrequent as Newark decayed. Berg began to become confused at night, the "sundowner's syndrome," an early sign of dementia. He still followed baseball and was probably elated when Willie Mays joined the Mets in May, 1972. In that month he suddenly became acutely and seriously ill. He was taken to a New Jersey hospital where he died of a bleeding aortic aneurysm that, tragically, the doctors had failed to diagnose. He was 70. His last words, uttered to his nurse, were, "How are the Mets doing today?" In life, and at his death, baseball was his consuming passion.

## **Epilogue**

Moe was a man with fabulous talents hampered by a suspicious, quirky personality. He struggled all his life to be great, and spent a lifetime crafting a brilliant persona that fascinated virtually anyone who met him. Yet he did not quite achieve the level of fame as a ballplayer, or as a self-styled savior of his country, that he believed he deserved and

therefore felt embittered and unappreciated. Also his talents came far too easily to him, and the effortlessness of his many abilities seemed to reinforce the feeling Moe expressed several times, only half-humorously: "I'm a fake." He lived a secretive life, perhaps to maintain, for himself and others, some semblance of his old, starring role, that he was still an intelligence agent. Always on the move, he avoided expectation and competition. A clinical psychologist for the C.I.A. suggested he had a schizoid personality. His father's coldness and unattainable expectations were certainly impediments to Moe's maturation.

Two years after Moe died, his sister had his ashes disinterred and flew with them to Israel. An Orthodox Jewish burial of cremated remains was impossible, but a sympathetic Jerusalem rabbi suggested a lovely, shaded spot for Moe's urn atop Mt. Scopus, overlooking the Old City. Ethel and Dr. Sam did not speak after 1934, for unknown reasons, so she never told her brother about Moe's grave site. Dr. Sam tried to learn the whereabouts of his brother's ashes for years after Ethel died, but the Israeli rabbi could not or would not tell him. So the final mystery of the inscrutable life of Morris Berg, the catcher and the spy, is that, yet again, no one knows where Moe is!

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