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**“Heroes and Role Models:  
Hank Greenberg and Deborah Batts”  
by Ben Farber  
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From thinking about values that are important to me, I have come up with two special people. These are people who I look up to, admire, and aspire to be like. A hero is someone who you look up to, without thinking that you could ever be like them. A role model is someone that is more real to you. A role model, you actually can be like. My hero is baseball legend Hank Greenberg, and my role model is the Honorable Debbie Batts.

What I didn't know when I started this paper is that there is a connection between these two people: Debbie's partner, Gwen, is the niece of Hank Greenberg's brother, Ben. Ben Greenberg was married to Gwen's mother's sister, Sylvia, and in fact they lived for many years across the street from my grandparents.

I chose “Hammerin’ Hank” Greenberg because I wanted to pick someone who was involved in baseball. As most of you know, I am a baseball fanatic. I picked Hank because, from what I knew about him, he was the first major Jewish sports celebrity. Hank was good at baseball and good as a person, despite the fact that people were disrespectful to him. He was very moral. He treated people with respect, and he stood up for what he believed in.

A few Jews had played sports before Hank, but, fearing the anti-Semitism that would eventually come to Hank during his playing career, they changed their names to Christian ones. But that is not the only reason I chose Greenberg. I picked him because I wanted someone who represented the values of courage, and hard work.

Hank Greenberg was born Henry Benjamin Greenberg in 1911. His parents had immigrated to America from Romania through Ellis Island around 1905. His parents worked in the Bronx in a clothes-making factory. He would play ball all day, and eventually, after going to high school, attracted attention from scouts. He was originally recruited by the New York Yankees to play first base, but he turned them down. A scout from the Detroit Tigers talked to his father, and said that he could get Hank a scholarship at Princeton. Well, his father jumped at the idea of Princeton, but Hank ended up going to NYU for a year, before signing with the Detroit Tigers in 1930. He got called up to the major leagues in 1933. In 1935, he became the first Jewish baseball player to win the Most Valuable Player award, and to this date the only one to do it in the American League.

In 1938, Hank hit 58 home runs. This created quite a controversy, because, at the time, the record was held by Babe Ruth, with 60. Most people felt uncomfortable with the idea of a Jew breaking Ruth's record, much like people did not want Hank Aaron (a Black player) to break Ruth's all-time home run record. Pitchers would intentionally walk him every time he came up, just to take that opportunity away from him. In 1940, Detroit moved him to the outfield, where he would win his second MVP award. He became, at the time, the first player to win MVP at multiple positions.

In 1941, Greenberg was drafted into the army. On his first day, the general was making anti-Semitic remarks. He was saying "I don't want no Goldbergs, no Hymans, no Sharofskis, none of that!" Hank raised his hand, and said, "Pardon me, but my name is Hank Greenberg", to which the general replied "I didn't say nothin' about no Greenbergs". Greenberg retired from service in 1945, with the rank of general. He then returned to the Tiger lineup, and hit two home runs on his first day back. Greenberg was sold to the Pittsburgh Pirates in 1947, where he played his last season, becoming the league's first \$100,000 player. Greenberg's last season in the majors was also Jackie Robinson's first, and Jackie, as the first African-American player in the major leagues, might have been the one player hated more than Greenberg in his first couple of seasons. When Robinson first joined the Brooklyn Dodgers in 1947, some of the other players on his team signed a petition that said that they would rather be traded than take the field with a Black man. However, Hank embraced Robinson, telling him that things were going to work out, if he just hung in there, and sure enough they did. In 1956, Greenberg became the first Jew inducted into the Baseball Hall of Fame. In 1983, the Tigers retired his number, 5. He died on September 4, 1986, at the age of 75.

Greenberg embodies some values that are very important to me. The first one of those is courage. It took tremendous courage to stand up to all of that anti-Semitism, and say, "I don't care what you think". He had to endure all kinds of heckling. Rumor is that in the heat of the pennant races, the Yankees would call someone up from the minor leagues, just to heckle Greenberg. How did he respond? By hitting a grand slam that clinched the 1945 pennant. People would call him all kinds of names. Everything from Kike to "Yellow, Jewish Bastard." One time someone threw a pork chop at him from over the left-field bleachers. Even though Hank was not religious, as a Jew someone thought it might have been especially insulting to have a pork chop thrown at you even if you did not keep kosher.

Another thing that really stands out for me is that in 1934, he was faced with a dilemma. With the Tigers four games in first place, Rosh Hashanah rolled around. Fans and rabbis all had their own opinion on whether or not Greenberg should play. The rabbis looked in the Talmud, and found a passage somewhere that said something about kids playing on holidays. When this news came to Greenberg, he decided to play. The rabbis did not have the heart to tell him that the passage in the Talmud said things about Roman children playing on holidays. As consolation, Greenberg spent Yom Kippur in a synagogue, and the Tigers lost. That act alone inspired Edgar Guest to write this poem:

Come Yom Kippur - holy fast day world-wide over to the Jew -  
 And Hank Greenberg to his teaching and the old tradition true  
 Spent the day among his people and he didn't come to play  
 Said Murphy to Mulrooney, 'We shall lose the game today!  
 We shall miss him in the infield and shall miss him at the bat,  
 But he's true to his religion - and / honor him for that!

My role model is Debbie Batts, who is here today. I'd like to ask Debbie to please stand up so everyone can meet her. Debbie is a wonderful person, with strong values, and I respect her for that. Her title is the Honorable Deborah A. Batts, and the people who thought up that title could not have picked one that was more appropriate. The reason that I picked her is that she is who she is, and stands up for it, even if people don't like it.

The thing that makes Debbie special for reasons of this project is that she is the only openly gay or lesbian Article 3 federal judge in the country. Those are federal judges who are appointed for life under the US Constitution. I have known Debbie since I was a baby, because she was my mother's partner when I was born. I have also known her children, Alix and James, since then.

Debbie grew up in Philadelphia. She said that her parents were strict, but in a nice way. They had high expectations of their kids, and were pleased when they did well in school, which they always did. They encouraged reading, and their kids used to use flashlights to read under the covers at night.

Debbie came out as a lesbian in 1991, after a previous marriage and divorce with a man. She was a professor at Fordham Law School at that time. To come out takes tremendous courage. I cannot imagine being out while being a federal judge, and facing that kind of scrutiny of representing your entire people. Especially when being gay was relatively new to the public, and was even less accepted than it is now. When Debbie was being interviewed by the FBI, when she had been nominated to be a federal judge and was preparing for her senate confirmation, they asked her if she had anything to tell them after the interview was over, and in typical Debbie fashion, she said “Well, it’s not any of your damn business, but I should probably mention that I’m gay.” One of the FBI people asked, “Do you have anyone who can verify that?” In all seriousness, they were thinking that Debbie could get blackmailed because she was gay, if someone found out and she did not want people to know.

In the cases she hears, Debbie feels that she is especially sensitive to women, mothers, people of color, LGBT people, and addicts. She knows that it is especially hard out there for those people. It was hard for her to balance her career with her family when Alix and James were younger, because she wanted to be there for them, but could not always find the time, and she regrets that. Debbie has a lot of integrity. She always decides what is fair, as opposed to what is the easy way out. She once had a case where she was faced with someone in prison and charged with being a terrorist who escaped from his jail cell, and stabbed the guard through the eye, causing brain damage. The easy thing to do would be to lock the guy up forever, but she did not do that. She gave the suspected terrorist 37 years in prison, because she found that that was the fair punishment that the law required.

Another important case that she is currently working on involves the Environmental Protection Agency. After 9/11, the EPA’s commissioner said that it was okay for people to go out and breathe the air without taking into account all the chemicals and debris floating around. Some people got cancer from just breathing the air, and are suing the EPA.

One of Debbie’s favorite cases occurred in 1999, when the camera company Nikon was being sued by a party led by now basketball hall of famer Charles Barkley, when he was still playing for the Houston Rockets. Barkley and his lawyers came into her court and worked out an agreement, but Charles had just finished a game, and was exhausted, so Debbie invited him into her robing room to lie down. When she came in to check on him, he said he was cold, and so she gave him a blanket covered with Snow White and the Seven Dwarves. I cannot imagine Charles Barkley, at six foot six and 345 pounds, sleeping with a Snow White and the Seven Dwarves blanket!

Debbie Batts and Hank Greenberg both are exceptional people. They have strong moral values, and they stand up for what they believe in. And that’s why they are my role model and my hero.