



‘Rosey’ booked presidents for WGN; he now corrals support honoring the love of his life

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Posted Friday, May 17, 2013*

Second of a two-part series about two men, their memories sharp at 86, who both started at WGN-TV in 1954. Behind the scenes, these all-time broadcast pros helped make WGN the pre-eminent local producer of baseball telecasts in the country.

Today’s story looks at Jack Rosenberg, longtime sports editor of WGN. He’s walked with presidents and superstars in his broadcast travels, many in tandem with Hall of Fame announcer Jack Brickhouse. But never has his facilitator work been as important as his efforts to support a women’s health center named in honor of his late wife, Mayora.

One of the tenets of Judaism is you haven’t really passed away if your friends and loved ones remember you, if your good name is continually brought up.

Consider Mayora Rosenberg alive every day for her other half, Jack Rosenberg. Mayora married Jack in 1956, raised two children, and waited patiently for her man to come home after six- and seven-day workweeks at WGN. She died six years ago, but Mayora’s fine works continue thanks to Jack’s talents.

Swedish Covenant Hospital, at which Mayora was treated for a number of years, plans to name its new women’s health center after her. She had been a longtime social worker for Cook County Hospital – and that meant a lot of crisis management. What better way to continue her style of caring and involvement for others in many of the same issues with which she dealt.



Jack and Mayora Rosenberg in the mid-1990s.

To re-fit an existing building, the hospital needs to raise \$10 million. Jack is busy putting the lean on people, pressing the flesh and working the phones. He's one of the most experienced men in town for such a job. After all, he booked presidents for interviews on WGN, wrote Hall of Fame acceptance speeches, glued together a sports department full of egos and preserved precious baseball broadcast history all by himself.

Rosenberg loved WGN and his storied colleagues. He loved Mayora even more. So his motivation for this project, occupying his days before and after his 87th birthday on May 21, will have an extra edge to it.

"She believed in anything to benefit mankind," Rosenberg said. "People who worked with her were long gone. She went into the toughest neighborhoods in Chicago to try to help out."

He expressed his feelings to a rabbi in whom he trusts.

"I would like to think in a perfect world somehow Mayora knows what's going on with her name being mentioned all the time," Rosenberg said. "(The rabbi) said, 'Jack, there's no doubt about that.'"

Plans for the women's health center include breast, bone, and mental health programs; cardiac care, and specialized nutritional and fetal counseling.

When the center is finished, they might set aside a wall for the history of the family which will be honored. Rosenberg could probably spare some photos from the Lincolnwood, Ill., home he shared with Mayora for decades. Parts are like a pictorial history of both the family and Chicago sports.

Go downstairs into his office and family room, and the host turns into "Rosey," one of two characters who were known by that nickname while they worked the city's stadiums for decades. The other is Bob Rosenberg, still on the job as official scorer for the Bulls, Cubs and White Sox with his trademark "wi-i-i-i-ld pitch!" call over the PA system.

'Rosey' a soundtrack of summer

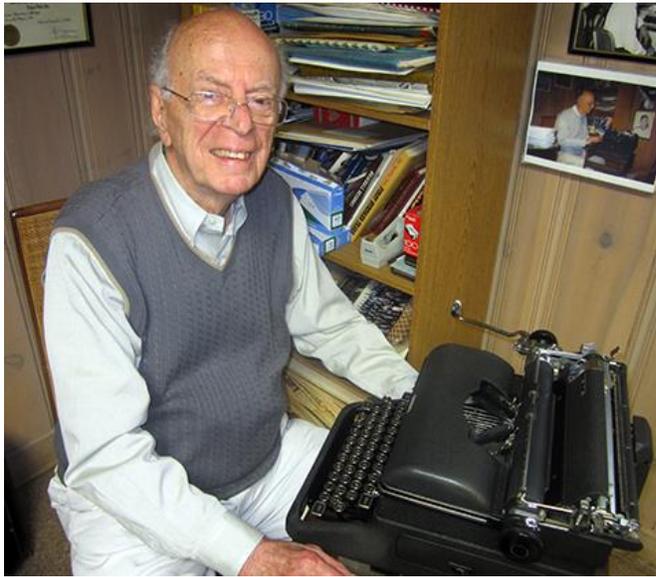
The older "Rosey" once provided a soundtrack of summer at the ballpark. While Jack Brickhouse handled play by play of Cubs and Sox games for WGN-TV, he was accompanied by a constant typing sound in the background. That was Jack Rosenberg providing a lot of Brickhouse's storylines.

The manual typewriter on which Rosenberg cranked copy during those afternoons and a few evenings, at old Comiskey Park, is long gone. But in his basement hutch, there's a trusty old black Royal manual. "I used it yesterday," said Rosenberg. He does not employ a computer or go on-line. Rosenberg is old-school, if not *the* school.

Much of his career was connected to Brickhouse's. They shared a downstate upbringing, Rosenberg in Pekin, Brickhouse a few miles up the Illinois River in Peoria. A gifted writer on the Peoria Journal-Star, Rosenberg was offered a Chicago Tribune sports-

writing job in 1954 by the legendary Arch Ward, who founded the baseball All-Star Game. The salary was \$100 a week. Rosenberg thought it over. Pitched by Brickhouse, he instead ended up at Tribune Co.-owned WGN for \$85 a week.

The pair became almost as one between Brickhouse's gift of gab and Rosenberg's power of the pen. Brickhouse served as an usher at the Rosenbergs' nuptials.



Jack Rosenberg with his trusty old Royal manual typewriter in his home office.

“He’d never been to a Jewish wedding before,” Rosenberg said. “When I stomped on that glass, he jumped about three feet in the air. Then he told people for years later he thought someone had taken a shot at us.”

After booking guests for the Leadoff Man and Tenth Inning pre- and post-game shows, Rosenberg did his running content creation on the typewriter. But he had many more words to pound out. He wrote Brickhouse's sportscasts and newscasts, his Hall of Fame broadcasters' acceptance speech, Brickhouse's autobiography and so much more. All in a day's work. Or as Brickhouse said, “An 80-hour week was like a vacation for us.”

“He had given me my break to come up, and I never forgot that,” Rosenberg said of Brickhouse. “Why did we have such a bond? It just evolved. It just happened where everybody had a comfort level working for WGN television and radio. Nobody worried about time. I impart to kids – when you get a job, it's not always the money. If you're proud and somebody asks you where you work, and what you do, and you can tell them, it's worth everything. There's things that transcend (money).”

‘Not just an ordinary job’

“This was not just an ordinary job, where you get paid at the end of the week and go home. I know this sounds like a cliché. It was not just the money. It was the feeling we had of being part of history. How do you account for the seven-day weeks, flying around all the time?”

Rosenberg, Brickhouse, Vince Lloyd and all the on- and off-the-air WGN staffers had an advantage over the cost-conscious, risk-averse workers and executives of the 21st Century. They were trailblazing and inventing sports production as they went along. After all, WGN was the first to use a center-field camera for the pitcher-batter shot, employed on prime-time “Boys Baseball” telecasts from Thillens Stadium in the early 1950s. Sure enough, Brickhouse was the voice of those games, too.

“We were willing to try it,” Rosenberg said of the workers’ attempts to pull it off after they got their bosses’ OK. “If it didn’t work, it didn’t work. Everything was new. (In 1962) we had the first transatlantic (baseball) telecast to Europe and a Cubs and Sox game at the same time. We were able to do it, and enjoyed every minute of it. The bosses OK’d it because nobody knew how to do things. It was a phenomenal time. I was fortunate to have been part of it. We kept so many top people – they had chances to leave.

“A lot of people didn’t even have TV sets yet,” he concluded about his start at WGN.

If they were paid more in camaraderie and Tribune Co. security than in network-boosted pay, it showed in their work. WGN set the standard for local baseball telecasts. Bill Lotzer also started at WGN in 1954 and is the same age as Rosenberg. Lotzer, director on the baseball telecasts before yielding to the Emmy Award-winning Arne Harris, worked with Rosenberg. They could be persnickety about something that didn’t look or sound right.



A photo of WGN's terrific trio at old Comiskey Park in the early 1960s also displayed at Jack Rosenberg's home. From left are Vince Lloyd, Rosenberg and Jack Brickhouse.

“Bill Lotzer lasted 35 years because he had the pursuit of excellence,” Rosenberg said. “He came through time and again. After we screened the show and if there was one shot we weren’t quite too sure of, we knew that someone in their family room or living room would notice it. We did, and had the engineers go back and insert something else.”

Brickhouse, of course, was the most ubiquitous broadcaster, sports and news, in Chicago history. Rivaling him for working long hours and dashing from assignment to assignment was Lloyd, Brickhouse’s TV partner on baseball before switching over amid tragedy – golden-voiced Jack Quinlan’s death in 1965 – to team with Lou Boudreau as the Cubs’ memorable radio tandem.

“He deserves to be in any Hall of Fame,” Rosenberg said of Lloyd, who died in 2003, nearly five years after Brickhouse. “A fantastic announcer, and fantastic as a co-worker. Probably one of most admired people to have worked with the company.”

Saving baseball broadcast history

There’s a special place in broadcast heaven reserved for Rosenberg, though. While broadcast operations and teams did an overall poor job preserving their history, Rosen-

berg squirreled away the memorable highlights of WGN's baseball coverage starting with the Don Cardwell no-hitter on May 15, 1960. The half-hour remaining of the Cardwell telecast, on which a rail-thin Rosenberg is shown scurrying about the back of the broadcast booth after delivering guests to Brickhouse afterward, is likely the oldest known sports videotape in existence.

Reels of two-inch tape cost about \$600 at the time. Programming on the reels often was taped over to save money and storage space. But Rosenberg set aside space in his office for the great moments, taking the reels out of circulation and away from the bean counters.



Jack Rosenberg with several of his many awards and honors displayed at his home.

His personal preservation program paid off when it came time to celebrate WGN's 30th anniversary in 1978.

“I called (WGN chief) Dan Peccaro,” he said. “I asked if he was interested in picking up an extra big paycheck. I’ve been stashing tapes of key moments in sports all these years in my office. I got some of the key moments over 30 years. What I would like to do is put together a special show. We’d call it ‘Baseball and Channel 9 – A 30-Year Romance.’ I told Peccaro it would be 90 minutes. We’d do it on the regular shifts with engineers over three months. I will tell you this

much, I guarantee a (commercial-time) sellout, no question about it.”

WGN asked Rosenberg to do everything. In the 1980s, he and Lloyd – no longer traveling with the Cubs – were charged with calling stations all over the Midwest, and sometimes beyond, to build up a Cubs radio network. With the colorful 1984 team to prompt interest, the duo were successful.

Rosenberg's greatest feats may have been landing Presidents John F. Kennedy and Ronald Reagan for interviews.

JFK did not sell Danley's Garage

“When we told people in the news department we’d have President Kennedy on the Leadoff Man, they said you’ve got to be kidding,” Rosenberg said. But, sure enough, on April 10, 1961, there was Lloyd engaging Kennedy in a short chat in the box seats of Griffith Stadium in Washington, D.C. before the White Sox-Senators opener. The connection to land JFK was through, among others, Frank Darling, head of the electrical workers union, said Rosenberg.

Reagan's interview with Brickhouse was scheduled at the White House in March 1981. Brickhouse started the ball rolling by calling old friend Bob Michel, the longtime Peoria congressman, who then put in a word at 1600 Pennsylvania Ave.

Arriving at the Executive Mansion, Rosenberg and Brickhouse were told they literally had to do a two-minute drill.

"An aide to Reagan said Brickhouse has just two minutes because Reagan has an ambassador waiting in another room," Rosenberg said. "I said, 'Sir, with all due respect, if you could get two old sports announcers to hold it to two minutes, God bless you.' And he really laughed. Reagan goes 11 minutes."



A re-production of a Chicago Tribune headline about WGN-TV's 1948 sign-on certainly has significance for Jack Rosenberg.

Reagan spoke for the frustrated masses when he told his visitors: "I got to tell you something. In my opinion, the Cubs are never going to win. In my heart, I will always hope they do."

After both retired, Rosenberg sometimes met old WGN boss Ward Quaal for lunch at L Woods restaurant near Rosenberg's home. After all his writing and arrang-

ing, which included penning Quaal's commencement speech at DePaul's 75th anniversary, Rosenberg finally got the ultimate admission from the former broadcast titan.

"Jack, in retrospect, I should have paid you a lot more money," Rosenberg recalls of the many-days-late, many-dollars-short (thanks, Brickhouse) proclamation.

"I'm thinking, this is a great (bleepin') time to tell me that."

But as the man said, money wasn't everything working at WGN. It isn't now in his fund-raising pose. Reputations of two lovers named Rosenberg can never have a pricetag applied to them.