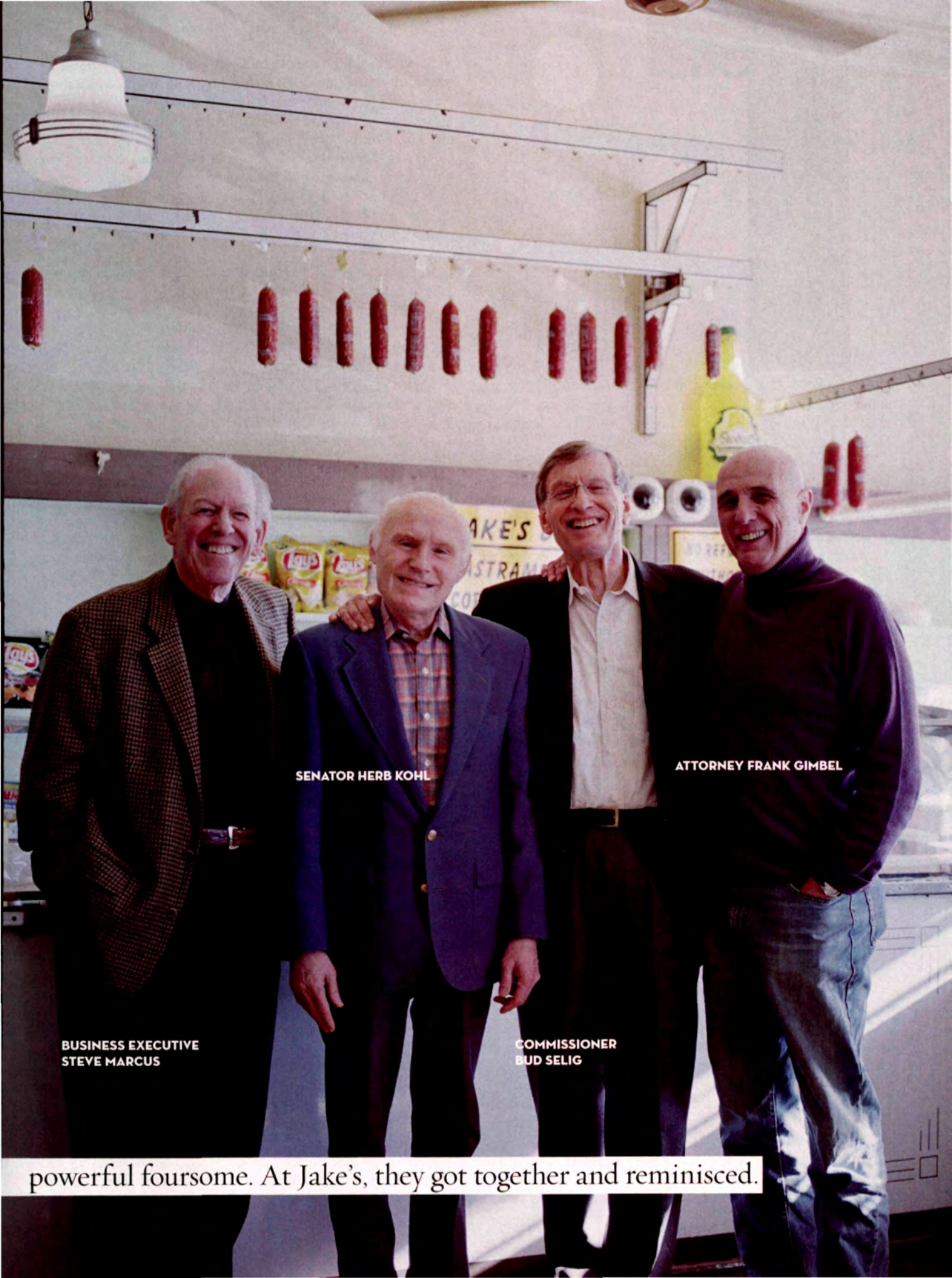


# FUR BROTHERS



They were fraternity buddies 50 years ago and now perhaps the town's most  
**BY KURT CHANDLER PHOTOGRAPHED BY TOM BAMBERGER**



**BUSINESS EXECUTIVE  
STEVE MARCUS**

**SENATOR HERB KOHL**

**COMMISSIONER  
BUD SELIG**

**ATTORNEY FRANK GIMBEL**

powerful foursome. At Jake's, they got together and reminisced.

Scheduling this Saturday interview was not unlike arranging a world summit. Marcus was busy with out-of-town commitments, Selig with owner meetings, Kohl with Supreme Court confirmation hearings of Judge Samuel Alito and Gimbel with the legal defense of former State Rep. Steve Foti.

Yet each agreed – eagerly – to talk. The conversation was lively, tinged with nostalgia and punctuated by playful verbal jabs, as if they were back at the old frat house.

“Herbie, I’m glad the Bucks won last night,” needled Selig. “Because if they would’ve lost, I’m sure you wouldn’t have shown up today.”

Waitresses hustled for tips. Ceiling fans spread the pungent smell of corned beef. And the conversation cut loose, beginning with their early roots.

**Selig:** I was born July 30, 1934, Mt. Sinai Hospital. I went to Sherman School, Steuben Junior High School, Washington High School. I’ve known Herb Kohl for 62 or 63 years. I met Frank when he came to Madison and I was his pledge father. I tried to raise him in a decent way. I’ll have to let it up to history to know whether I did a good job. Steve, I’ve known at least 50 years now. Our fathers were friendly. The first relationship with the Kohl family is that we were raised about 300 feet from each other. He was born in the high-rent district on 51st Boulevard. I was on 52nd Street.

**Kohl:** I was born on February 7, 1935. I’ve lived in Milwaukee all my life. I also went to Sherman and Steuben and Washington. Went to Madison, where Selig and I roomed together. Out of college, I went into the Army for a while, then came back to work at the Kohls stores, where I spent some 20 years.

**Gimbel:** I was born March 18, 1936. My parents didn’t have health insurance. The cost at Milwaukee Hospital to get me and my mother out of hock was \$90. I lived on the West Side. In the sixth

grade, my parents bought a small house in Whitefish Bay. I thereafter went to Richards School and Whitefish Bay High School. I graduated from the University of Wisconsin in 1958, continued at Marquette, got a law degree in 1960. In Madison, I became closely associated with Herb and his brother, Alan. And I was kind of Steve’s watchdog, even though I was a year behind him.

**Marcus:** I was born in Minneapolis, May 31, 1935. My parents moved to Ripon when my father was opening his first movie theater. My claim to fame in Ripon was that I was able to get kids into the Saturday matinee. So I had lots of friends.

At 9 years old, we moved to Oshkosh – big city – and I went to high school there. My family moved to Milwaukee in 1953 at the time that I graduated high school.

#### **Sports were important when you were growing up.**

**Gimbel:** I was a football player, basketball player. But the sport I did the best in was track. I was a hurdler and a sprinter.

**Marcus:** I was a golfer in high school. And we had a fraternity league in college.

**Selig:** I can say this about Herb and Steve: They’re very, very good golfers. I hated the game, the most idiotic game. The last time I played, I quit. June of ’56. I told them I’ll never play that game again....

The first to arrive was Bud Selig. Pulling up a chair in Jake’s Deli at 17th and North on a Saturday morning, sunlight pouring through the big front window, the commissioner shook hands and gossiped with the neighborhood regulars waiting for hot pastramis to go.

“I’ve been up for hours,” said Selig, part-owner of the deli. Well known for his long-winded lectures about the business of baseball, he was uncharacteristically buoyant, as sunny as the day, spitting out baseball stats and crowing about his daily exercise regimen of 50 sit-ups and 45 minutes on the treadmill.

Next to show was Downtown attorney Franklyn Gimbel, Milwaukee’s “Mr. Clout,” as dubbed by his legal peers. But dressed in loafers, a purple turtleneck and jeans, Gimbel suggested anything but a powerbroker. A track man in high school, he was light on his feet, jaunty, his head shaved close since a battle with cancer five years ago.

Then came Steve Marcus, top dog at the Marcus Corporation, all smiles in an unassuming hound’s-tooth jacket and black sweater. And finally Herb Kohl, “The Senator,” relaxed, fresh from a Milwaukee Bucks home court victory the night before – and on the campaign stump once again.

They gathered at a small table in the back of the noisy deli, still located in what was once the heart of Milwaukee’s old Jewish neighborhood, and ordered lunch – three Kosher hot dogs and a tuna sandwich for Marcus.

It was an unremarkable meal with a remarkable group of men, all past 70, still best of friends after 50 years. A half-century ago at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, they roomed together at the Jewish fraternity Pi Lambda Phi, forging a lifelong bond that helped inspire each to excel.

And excel they have: Selig as owner of the Milwaukee Brewers and ninth commissioner of baseball; Marcus as a chief executive overseeing hundreds of movie theaters and hotels; Gimbel as the erstwhile young prosecutor who brought down mob boss Frank Balistreri and now as chairman of the powerful Wisconsin Center District; and Kohl as grocery store exec turned NBA owner and U.S. senator.

Collectively, they’ve amassed an affluence greater than the GDP of many Third World countries – and an influence in the city, state and country that may be unmatched by any other Milwaukee foursome.

“In 1956, I don’t think any of the four of us in our wildest dreams would have believed it would all turn out the way it did.” - BUD SELIG

Somebody asked me one day: What did you guys talk about when you were roommates? *Sports*. We talked about what any other kids would.... I remember we were home for spring vacation, April 1953. And we stopped to look [at the construction of the stadium]. It was sort of stunning. We had gone to Borchert Field as kids for all those years, and that was our baseball. But all of a sudden, here was County Stadium being built. Charlie Grimm was the manager.... Nothing but fun.

**Gimbel:** My brother and I used to go [to Borchert Field] and at the end of the game pick up bottles. We'd cash them in for the deposits, make a dollar apiece.

**Kohl:** I was playing baseball at the Sherman playground the day Franklin Roosevelt died.

**Selig:** You remember how we found out? Our mothers must have been worried. We were playing strike-out against a building. And here come our mothers to get us, to tell us he died.

**Kohl:** All right, listen to this story.... So we're in sixth grade. I'm captain of my baseball team in grade school. Selig's the captain of his baseball team. So now comes the championship game. Saturday morning, everybody's excited. We're warming up, his players and my players. Everybody's about five feet tall. All of a sudden, this guy 6-foot-2 shows up. Starts warming up, pitching. And I say, "Who's that kid, Selig?" He said, "Well, my pitcher couldn't come this morning. His mother wouldn't let him." I said, "Why wouldn't she let him?" He says, "Because he wouldn't drink his orange juice."

**Selig:** He's starting to embellish this....

**Kohl:** So, I said, "Who's this kid?" "Well, he's just a guy. Don't worry about it. I saw him out on the street this morning." I said, "This guy's 6-foot-2, Selig!" So we started arguing and arguing. Finally Selig said, "Come on, Kohl. Let's play ball." So I figured, the hell with it.... So this kid goes out to the pitching mound, and he strikes out all 27 players. We didn't get a hit. We couldn't even put the bat on the ball. They won the game 9-zip.... The kid was semi-pro or something. So much for Selig, the custodian of the game.

**Selig:** I was a more able recruiter than the senator was.

### So what's your favorite sport?

**Marcus:** Uh oh, oh lord.... In the summer, my favorite sport is baseball and in the winter, it's basketball. [Laughter]

**Kohl:** He has interests. All the NBA basketball teams stay at the [Marcus Corporation's] Pfister most often. So do all the baseball teams.

**Marcus:** Herb spends a lot of time at the Pfister coffee shop. The staff there absolutely loves him. They now have an item on the menu called the Senator's Tuna Salad Sandwich. Because he didn't like our recipe for the tuna.

**Selig:** I'm going to speak up for Herb for a minute now. Herb is a

huge baseball fan. Huge.

**Kohl:** I was one of the 10 [investors] Selig put together to buy the Seattle Pilots and bring them to Milwaukee.

**Selig:** You don't want to ask what my favorite sport is.

**Gimbel:** Indoor soccer. He really likes the Milwaukee Wave.

### What were some of your defining moments as young adults?

**Gimbel:** In 1963, I was a chairperson and the toastmaster at the Jefferson-Jackson Dinner at the Milwaukee arena. Lyndon Johnson was the guest. And it was just ahead of the assassination of President Kennedy. I had gotten a job as an assistant U.S. attorney. It started me on the career to having a combination of legal trial experience... and I also became aware of the needs of the community. Watching Herb and Bud and Steve, I marvel at my friends' contributions to humankind.

**Selig:** I thought I was going to be a history professor. But my father convinced me to give the family business [an auto dealership] a try for a year. The more I was there, the more I liked it.... All four of us had loving parents. Extraordinary people. Just look at what those people did, given that they started with nothing. An amazing generation. [Selig's cell phone rings. He walks away from the table to answer it.]

**Kohl:** If it's George Steinbrenner, tell him... [he gestures, as if brushing away the New York Yankees owner].

### Who were your role models?

**Kohl:** With me, it was my father. My mother, too. And my siblings.... In the larger world, presidents like JFK and Clinton and Roosevelt. They were so distant.

**Selig:** When I came into baseball in 1970, I was just a kid. There was a man, John Fetzer. Owned the Detroit Tigers for 35 years. A visionary. He really took me under his wing. It was amazing. I would fly to Detroit on my way to New York. He'd spend hours with me. He really taught me about the sport, what was good.... All these life experiences. You're sort of a sum total of everything you've seen and learned. If we were sitting together in 1956, I don't think any of the four of us in our wildest dreams would have believed it would all turn out the way it did.

**Kohl:** You get shaped by your home. By the time you're 10 or 12, you pretty much have the qualities, good and bad, ingrained in you. Especially if you had strong parents. They put their imprint on you. It's almost like your DNA.

**Gimbel:** Go to Waupun [prison] and ask what influence their mother and father had on them. They didn't have a mother and father....

**Marcus:** But what was it about when we were at Madison? And it wasn't just the four of us. [He names another fraternity brother, Lew Wolff, an owner of the Oakland A's.]





Marcus



Gimbel

**Selig:** It was an amazing group of people.

**Kohl:** Well, let's not forget about the cook – Mary Turo.

**Marcus:** It was something she put in the mess.

**Kohl:** She made the best tuna salad sandwich anybody ever made.

### Talk about growing up Jewish. Any instances of anti-Semitism?

**Marcus:** There were no Jews in Ripon. Two families. But I had no awareness of these distinctions. In Oshkosh, I didn't either, until one of the kids called me a dirty Jew. And that was very upsetting. That was the first time I was aware that some people saw a difference, put it that way. But by and large, I'd have to say it wasn't pervasive in my life. Today, I spend a lot of time with many friends in a wide variety of communities.

**Kohl:** When I grew up, my father, who was an immigrant, was quickly integrating himself into the community because he, like all our fathers, did business in a society where people were of all religions and all backgrounds.... And you worked hard to minimize religious differences if you wanted to get ahead.

**Selig:** The only guy that I had an incident with was a little later.... He went to school with us, and one day he made a comment to me and people jumped in between. He later became head of the Nazi Party.

**Gimbel:** I have a little different experience because my parents lived in a real blue-collar neighborhood. My parents rented a lower flat for \$40 a month, and my father didn't make much money. Neither of my parents went to college.... There weren't many Jews in my school, even on the West Side. So the people I had problems with came from homes where there was some sympathy to Hitler.... I fought fights in grade school because I was called names during World War II. And I fought fights in junior high school and high school.... It was certainly an experience that had some influence in my mind on the need to eliminate those differences between people.... It had a deep impression on me.

**Marcus:** When I think back on it, the bigger dividing factor when I moved to Milwaukee was not Jew and non-Jew, it was East Sider versus West Sider. You guys [Selig and Kohl] were from the West Side. My lord!

**Selig:** We were raised on the *right* side.... I'll tell you my wife wouldn't go out with a West Sider, though she ended up marrying one. That was the real dividing line.

### How often are you in touch with each other today?

**Gimbel:** Steve and I are in touch with many, many things because we're on boards together. Wisconsin Center District board. Greater Milwaukee Foundation board. We have mutual interests in the community that Buddy and Herb also share, but they're at a higher level. We're kind of ground fighters and they're more global

fighters. Bud and I talk fairly regularly about issues. We have some common foes in life and common friends.

**Kohl:** All of us are active, and the community, after all, is not New York, it's a smaller community.

**Gimbel:** If we didn't know each other, I think we'd intersect based on what we do. But the fact that we have a history with each other lends some trustworthiness to our dealings.

**Marcus:** I know that I'll never get anything but a straight answer from you....

**Selig:** This comes naturally. With this group... there's almost an inbred natural loyalty.

**Gimbel:** It's a trusting.

**Selig:** An implicit trusting.

**Gimbel:** That's the difference between the other people we meet and those with whom we have a history. We know their root system. So we don't have to say, look, does this person have his own agenda that's contrary to mine?

**Marcus:** I have to tell you... when Herbie was first elected, and he was inducted in Washington [in 1989], he invited me to the luncheon. I have a tendency to get blasé about stuff like that because I've been lucky. I've done a lot of things. But I remember thinking, this is the most powerful legislative body on the face of the earth. Herb is among the 100 most powerful elected officials. I'll never forget it.... Whereas in later years, my friend Selig here somehow conned all these owners to elect him commissioner. And I thought about that when you were at the World Series in New York when you had the Subway Series. You were out there and you sat in the box.... It's unbelievable.

**Gimbel:** There definitely is a sense of proprietary feeling from the success of friends. I feel the light that flows from these three guys every day.

**Marcus:** You have a special thing, too, Frank. If I get myself in trouble and I'm in jail for doing some dastardly thing, I don't know if they [points to Selig and Kohl] are in a position where they could pick up the phone so fast.

**Gimbel:** I'd get you out better.

### What's your impression of the changes in Milwaukee?

**Kohl:** Milwaukee, economically, has not grown like other communities. Ultimately, even though it's nice to be smaller, you pay a price. Your children don't have the same kind of opportunities. You get too much of an outflow of young talent.... On the other hand, there are indications we're turning the corner. Our Downtown has become a lot more vibrant.

**Marcus:** I've been a creature of Downtown for over 40 years.... Since [the expansion of] the Art Museum, Downtown, the thinking and the attitude has really become transformed. The big challenge... is

our education system. The city desperately needs to improve the education for young kids.

**Gimbel:** We have great cultural assets. The Art Museum, our Public Museum, the two sports franchises. I view those as economic generators that we have to protect. And if we can't protect them with private funds, we have to protect them with public funds. And therefore, I put myself out there with a target on my front to the talking heads who really seek to take the city down. Everyone who's sitting at this table has been the target of the talking heads of this town. I'd like to see a revolt against those negative-attitude people. The listeners of Mark Belling and Charlie Sykes should revolt and say, "We've had enough of this. Get these dogs off the air."

### How much of the cost of new sports venues or corporate headquarters should the public bear?

**Marcus:** I've been watching the debate over the subsidy for Manpower. I happen to agree with how that's come down, simply because it's Manpower. It's symbolic. But it's a slippery slope: Once you do it for one, you have to think about doing it for all of them.... Generally, I'd rather see subsidies go to things that improve the quality of life for all – like the symphony, our parks or Miller Park, for that matter – and thus make our community so desirable that businesses and their employees want to locate here.

**Gimbel:** The flowers in the vase are the sports franchises. Take 'em out and the bouquet is not as beautiful.

**Marcus:** Selig said he wasn't a golfer, but he was a tennis player. We played tennis together, Saturday afternoons. And after we'd play, we'd sit down for the half-hour it took us to recover and have a Coke. And one of the things we'd talk about was that Milwaukee needed a new stadium. And Buddy, you always talked about a Downtown location. That was always his first choice. There just wasn't a place to put it.

**Selig:** Did we want a Downtown stadium? You bet. But it calls for many things, including a mass transit system that would support a [Downtown] stadium. But putting all that aside... I see many other cities of the same size... I'm probably the first and last commissioner who will ever live in Milwaukee. All the other commissioners have lived in New York, except [Kenesaw Mountain] Landis. Does Milwaukee have economic challenges? You bet. When the Braves left, Milwaukee was the 13th largest market in America. When we got a [new] team, it was number 19. Today, it's number 32 or 33. When we were kids growing up, this was one of the great markets in America.... Stadium battles are difficult everywhere. Arena battles are difficult. The Bradley Center, they're going to need a new arena. I don't pay Herb a lot of compliments, [but] there wouldn't be a Milwaukee Bucks basketball team here if it wasn't for him. That's just a fact.

### Why put up with the headaches? Sen. Kohl, you're running for re-election, and Bud, you've said you'll remain commissioner until 2009. Why not retire now?

**Selig:** I've been in the sport all my adult life. I love what I'm doing. I can't conceive of what else I would do. I want to write a book someday, and I'd like to teach. But... I wake up every two hours with things on my mind. I've been that way all my life, and I can't conceive that just laying around and enjoying life is something I would enjoy.

**Gimbel:** I think about people our age that have said, "I'm now gonna sit back and enjoy the flowers." Usually the flowers die pretty damn quickly. I like to think the four of us still have a physical vibrancy and mental vibrancy. We have a good sense of humor.

**Selig:** Some would question the mental vibrancy. [Laughter.] And I don't know about sense of humor. I wouldn't say any of these guys would ever be a stand-up comedian.

**Gimbel:** What I'm saying is, what makes us strong is that we still see challenges. It's energizing. Continuing is energizing.

**Kohl:** What better ways do I have to spend my days? You always have another hill to climb, always people out there trying to stand in your way of getting good things done. I've never thought, "I've got it made" or "I've arrived." It never occurred to me.

**Marcus:** My philosophy has always been, leave this a better place. And that job is never done.... The community has fabulous new young leaders today. You talk about the resurgence of the community, the new vitality. I'm seeing that in lots of the community boards and things I'm involved with.

**Selig:** The things you do come back to you.... I had a writer who used to pound on me quite regularly, and now he's one of my great defenders, oddly. He said, "I find it curious that the things they ripped you for in the '90s, everybody's patting you on the back for now."

### Regrets? Disappointments?

**Gimbel:** A lot of [legal] cases that have been disappointing. I think I should win every case. It doesn't work that way. If it did work, that means I'm not taking any tough cases.

**Selig:** The biggest disappointment as commissioner was the strike of the summer of '94. And we didn't play a World Series because the players were on strike. It was very painful.

**Kohl:** When I was just out of the Army, working at Kohls, my parents were upset with me because they felt I should be working equally as hard at establishing a family. Which I never did.

**Marcus:** Well, I wanted to be a professional golfer....

**Selig:** Thank God you weren't.

### Biggest thrill of your lives?

**Marcus:** Without pandering to my buddies here – going to the World Series and sitting in the Commissioner's Box. Going to the Senate when Herb was sworn in. Going to the ribbon-cutting for the Midwest Airlines Center [whose creation Gimbel oversaw].

**Kohl:** The day I was sworn in as a senator. A happy day.

**Selig:** The day I became permanent commissioner, I drove to Chicago. All I could think all the way down.... When I was a kid living on the West Side, we'd talk about Kenesaw Mountain Landis and "Happy" Chandler. I kept thinking to myself, holy mackerel.

**Gimbel:** I have four children, and they bring me constant joy. From a legal point of view, I argued a case in the United States Supreme Court in 1987, and I won. Not too many lawyers get to do that. With every chapter of life, there are highlights and disappointments. I think that's true of all of us.

**Selig:** [As he stands to leave]: It was a lot of fun to be with you guys. ■

*Kurt Chandler is a senior editor of Milwaukee Magazine.*

**"My parents were upset because they felt I should be working at establishing a family. Which I never did." - HERB KOHL**