

ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW

with

Sylvia (Wronski) Straka

20 March 1995

Transcript and Abstract

Lisa Hutchinson
Oral History
12 April 1995

Interview with Sylvia (Wronski) Straka - Abstract

Introduction

The All-American Girls Professional Baseball League was created in 1943 by Chicago Cubs owner, Philip K. Wrigley, in response to the possible loss men's professional baseball during World War Two. His girls league began in 1943 with four teams, and expanded in 1944 with teams in Minneapolis and Milwaukee. The Milwaukee Chicks won the 1944 Championship, and then were moved to Grand Rapids, Michigan, due to the lack of support in Milwaukee. The league continued until 1954, and only recently has received attention, mainly due to the creation of a league organization of former players and the release of the movie, *A League of Their Own* in 1991.

Background

Sylvia (Wronski) Straka was born in December, 1924 in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, and grew up playing sports with her brothers and local girls clubs. She attended Riverside High School, but dropped out at about age 17 in order to earn money for the family. During this time she played in a West Allis softball league, from which she was recruited to try out for the AAGPBL. The 1944 mid-season tryouts were held at Borchert Field in Milwaukee, and Sylvia was asked to be a pitcher for the Milwaukee Chicks team. She completed that season, and played with the Chicks in Grand Rapids, Michigan for half of the 1945 season. She married Edward Straka in 1947, and had three children. She worked while her husband was in Korea, and then again when he died after seven years of marriage. Throughout her life she had jobs at Gueder, Paeshke, and Frey, Cutler-Hammer, and Briggs and Stratton. Sylvia Straka retired in 1990 after working twenty-one years for Briggs and Stratton.

Interview

The interview was conducted at Sylvia Straka's home on March 20, 1995. We spoke for about two hours and ten minutes. One can hear the sounds of her dog, her canary, and a grandfather clock in the background, but they do not interrupt or muffle the voices on tape. Unfortunately, due to human error, the first thirty minutes of the interview were inadvertently

erased. Below, I will provide a summary of the information provided during the first thirty minutes.

Summary of first thirty minutes

Sylvia Wronski was born in December, 1924. She married Edward Straka in 1947 and had three children, Donald, Christine, and Therese. She grew up playing baseball with her three older brothers. She left high school at the age of 17, to earn money for her family, while two brothers went off to fight in World War Two. During this time, she played softball in a West Allis league. At the age of 19, in 1944, she tried out for the All-American Girls Professional Baseball League, and was placed as a pitcher on one of two expansion teams, the Milwaukee Chicks.

She disliked the charm school classes that the players had to attend, as did most of the women, and felt that the skirt uniforms were "silly" for playing baseball. She stated that the fans, especially the men, probably liked the skirt uniforms, but that many people probably thought the league couldn't be taken seriously.

Ms. Straka signed a contract to be a player in the league, and was paid about \$ 75.00 each week, although she believed she could be mistaken. She said that whatever money she earned, it was considered a good amount to earn, especially for playing a game. She sent most of the money home to her family, but kept a little for herself while away from home.

When asked to describe what it was like to play for Max Carey, she mentioned that he was a great manager, and knew how to coach a team. His previous baseball experience helped the players better their performance on the field. While other players followed men's professional baseball, and knew Max Carey's experience, Ms. Straka knew very little because she said that she had always rather play baseball than watch it. Max Carey's previous record did not really make a difference to her personally.

Dottie Hunter was a good chaperone, more like a friend to the players than anything. Since she was a player the year before, she had the experience to understand what players were going through. A good chaperone made sure the players had everything they needed, gave them advice, and listened to their problems. Dottie Hunter and Max Carey worked well together, and made a great team in helping the players.

Members of the Chicks didn't always go out, socially, as a team. People usually went out in small groups. She liked to go out with Jo Kabick and find restaurants that made good soup. They especially liked to visit the cities on the road that had great waffle restaurants.

Interview with Sylvia (Wronski) Straka, 20 March 1995

TAPE ONE, SIDE ONE

Lisa Hutchinson: How did the members of the Chicks get along with each other?

Sylvia Straka: Oh, I'd say basically we all got along fine. You had your... some were cliques together, but basically we were all one team. But, naturally you pair off and triple off or sometimes four went off. We never went out as a team period, no. We all had our little bunches, you know. Like Jo (Kabick) and I went out together, and then Jo and I and Tommy (Viola) Thompson. And then there was another one... I can't even remember names anymore. But generally two or three would go together, do things, like I said shopping or eating or to a movie or stuff like that. We weren't really into much. I, myself, was not world wise, shall we say, 'cause this is my first time away from home and never went to movies or anything at that time because there was never any money for it. So I never was one for going to movies a lot or anything like that. So we really didn't do a heck of a lot.

LH: So you and Jo and Tommy, you were all pitchers, right?

SS: Well, yeah.

LH: Did most people hang out or go out with people of the same position?

SS: Oh, no no no. There's a mixture, naturally, I mean, it's 'cause you played... Our first baseman, well maybe there was another one, but that didn't mean she'd have to go with another first baseman. That would be dumb. Okay?

LH: Were you allowed to go out on dates while you were playing for the Chicks?

SS: Go out where?

LH: On dates, with boys?

SS: Oh yeah, but I didn't have one at the time.

LH: They say the members of the league had a boyfriend in every town. Is that true for some?

SS: Well, maybe some of them did, and there were some that were very beautiful girls, I'll tell you. That one gal was a... yeah she was a star from... well, maybe I shouldn't say star. But she was a... how did they put it? Eddie Lamar, they say she could fit in for her, double... How could I say that?

LH: Was she an actress?

SS: Yes, up to a point. And she could double for her. She was another Eddie Lamar, oh, beautiful girl. I didn't know what the heck she was doing playing ball, she was really beautiful. But, and there were other ones. And some, well they had their husbands, some of them were married. And naturally their husbands were there and they went out with them. And ones that were, more along with their boyfriends and that. And some maybe did pick up boyfriends. I, myself, didn't. And I don't know of any that did. So, I can't say.

LH: What was the most difficult change in your personal life as a result of playing baseball and touring to different cities?

SS: I don't know if there's anything difficult. (laughs)

LH: Was it hard to be away from home?

SS: No no no no. (laughs) I think anybody would like to go travelling around, and then your chaperone, you never had anything to worry about. But, everything was made sure that you had your bus tickets or whatever, and train tickets.

LH: You had a place to stay.

SS: Place to stay. You never had to worry about anything. So it was kind of a nice way to travel, and not worry about anything. Like today, I would never go travelling around, back then you could have, and not gotten into any trouble. But even so, it's always nice to have somebody arranging everything for you. Like, you feel like a star. We're going here, we're going there and you don't have to worry about

paying for a ticket and what have you. That's all done for you. You just get on the train or get on the bus, and you go into the hotel, and get your room assignment, and there's no money coming out of your hands. So it feels good. (laughs) It felt nice.

LH: Did they pay for any extra-curricular activities?

SS: Oh, no. If you wanted to go to a show or that, that came out of your own money. When you were on the road, they gave you extra food money. Like when we were in Milwaukee, I lived at home. And the ones that were put into homes, I believe those people were reimbursed with money. I don't know how that worked. But when we were on the road, we each got money for food. You had to go out to eat all the time when you were on the road. You stayed in a hotel and you had to eat somewhere. So we'd get extra money for food when we were on the road. Other than that you had your paycheck, and what you'd do with it, that was your problem, you know. But you never had to pay for the rooms or anything like that. But if you wanted to go to shows or buy something, that was up to you to pay out of your own pocket.

LH: So you kept some money for yourself for that type of...

SS: No, not a heck of a lot. Most of mine went home. So I didn't get too much.

LH: So you said that the chaperones, pretty much organized everything, make sure everything's okay. You said before also that people who went to church... Did they find churches of your denomination?

SS: Normally they would have it listed at your hotel when you came into them. They'd have all that information for the girls. Well, they'd do that for anybody, that's what I'm saying, you know. Public information for when people come through your hotel. They have all that information out there. And if the gals wanted to know, well, you could check that. They didn't see that you got there, no. That was up to you to take care of your own.

LH: When you went somewhere, did anyone have a car? Well, in town, in Milwaukee, they might have, but in other cities?

SS: I don't remember... I know one gal had a car. I think she was the one from Wisconsin. I'm not sure who had the car; must have been her because she was the only Wisconsinite. I don't think anybody brought

their cars. You know, these girls came from all over, including Canada. I don't think they would have come with a car, not knowing where they're going to end up playing, or whatever. But being a Wisconsinite and in Milwaukee, she may have been the one with the car. And once or twice, they drove like to Indiana when we had to go play in South Bend. Or Fort Worth (Fort Wayne). I almost couldn't remember that. But not all the time. Most times they travelled with the team. That was only a special... See they were over twenty-one, so they could do things like that. Those of us who were under, we definitely went with the team. There weren't too many cars, no.

LH: So you walked to movie theaters or took buses, public transportation?

SS: Most of the time you walked. 'Cause you didn't know the towns too well. Getting on a bus, you didn't know where you were going. Of course, the towns were smaller. Racine, Kenosha- they're small towns. And Rockford, Illinois was small. I can't hardly remember much about Rockford even. And then South Bend and Fort Worth (Fort Wayne). Back then this was fifty years ago, they're big towns now, but back then they weren't all that big. So if you were in a hotel you were more or less in your downtown districts, more or less, you know. And if you had to take a bus to the ballpark, you were well informed what bus to get on, and so forth, you know.

LH: So when you were in Milwaukee, how did the fans feel about the Chicks? Or the press?

SS: Well, we didn't get too much coverage by the press because we're women. To this day the women don't get covered, like do the men. People who enjoyed us, came out to the park, but there wasn't too big of an attendance, either. Of course, being the war years, and then on top of that, these were just girls playing ball, you know.

LH: They had the minor league Brewers.

SS: Well, yeah they did. But like all of the other teams, most of the good stars were in the service, and they were making do with replacements and whatever. Not that they weren't too good, but I don't know how good they were, but I wasn't worried about them. But people to this day don't back women's sports like they do men. That's why women don't make as much money in sports as men do. The money isn't there.

LH: How did you feel when you were playing for the Chicks that fans didn't come out as much, and the press wasn't covering you?

SS: I didn't worry about it back then.

LH: You just wanted to play.

SS: I just played ball. It wasn't my concern. It was nice to play a game, but it didn't bother my one way or the other. Surely...I suppose, but I wasn't worried about that end of it. But that's why they moved out of Milwaukee, because we didn't have the backing. Minneapolis was worse. They started there, and they didn't get any backing I guess. They didn't even finish the season. They were a team on the road all the time. They didn't have a home.

LH: They were the Minneapolis Orphans for a while.

SS: That's right. That whole summer. That whole year, and then I ain't sure where they sent them. I know they took in Grand Rapids, Michigan. But that's where we went. But I can't remember.

LH: Maybe they went to Fort Wayne.

SS: No, Fort Wayne had a team. Fort Wayne, South Bend, Rockford, Racine, Kenosha. I ain't sure, maybe they just ^{didn't} have it, they just spread the girls around on the rest of the teams. I think. I can't remember. I can't give you an honest answer on what happened to them.

LH: When you were playing in West Allis on the dirt field, how can you compare that with playing at Borchert Field?

SS: Oh, gosh. We had more people backing us that came out there for nothing. Of course they didn't have to pay. But we did have quite a following.

LH: How often did you have games in Milwaukee?

SS: There's another good question. I don't really remember.

LH: Was it once a week?

SS: Well, if we were in Milwaukee, you played more than one day. You played maybe four or five days, or whatever the stay was in any

town. I can't say I really remember. You had your teams coming in, they maybe stayed two or three days, and then another team would come in. But then it was your turn to go on the road, and you'd hit all those other teams and they'd come back home. Just like they do it now. When you're home you have a home stand. How long they lasted, I don't remember. But we had maybe six teams. Actually you would have five teams come in to play, so I'm sure a home stand must have been at least two weeks. Then you hit the road for two weeks or whatever time it took to play at all the other fields. That's about how that would have worked.

LH: So how did you travel from city to city when you were on the road?

SS: I remember mainly taking the North Shore railroad. We may have taken the bus, but I can't remember buses too well. It seems to me that the railroad comes to mind more so than anything else. Maybe between here and Kenosha and Racine, we may have taken a bus, 'cause it wasn't that far. But to Rockford or the ones in Indiana, I'm quite sure we took the train. I remember those trains real well, and I loved them. They still had the steam whistles, and that was right up my alley. And they'd have the dining cars and they'd call you to dinner and breakfast. It was just nice.

LH: Were the meals paid for by the league?

SS: No, you paid for your own meals. You had your extra pay for meals on the road and that's what you used. You could order what you wanted or whatever. But it was just nice. I wanted to show my kids that, further down, and I had mine and we were traveling. I didn't realize it but they had dropped the dining car. It wasn't what I remembered at all.

LH: It wasn't the same experience.

SS: No, no. Not at all.

LH: So you really enjoyed being on the road because of the trains?

SS: It was a part of it. You could sit on the train and see all the scenery. Of course a lot of it was backyard stuff, I mean where do they put the railroad tracks? But it was still nice. I enjoyed riding a train back then. Not today so much, but back then I sure did. I haven't been on a train since I took the kids, and that's, well, a while back. If I'd go

anywhere now, I'd fly. I don't fly too often, but if I did, I'd fly. You get there faster and it costs almost the same from where I'd have to go.

LH: How long were the train trips? A few hours? A couple hours?
Depending on where you went.

SS: Naturally, that makes sense.

LH: Did you have any overnight trips?

SS: We had to have some, because I remember sleeping on them. And getting the morning call for breakfast. "First call to breakfast." That was always so nice. I loved that part.

LH: Did you stay in sleeping cars?

SS: Oh, no no no. You sat in your seat. If you were lucky and it wasn't too crowded, then you had a whole seat to yourself, which worked out pretty well. But a lot of times there were soldiers and stuff getting transferred, so the trains would be kind of filled up with other passengers and not just us, naturally. It was nice though. I had a nice suit made out of... here I go, but I could sleep in it and get up, and the creases would go right back where they belonged. I had a traveling suit, that's what I called it. Gaberdine, I believe it was. And I had it tailor-made. It was the only thing I ever had tailor-made. Oh, it was nice. I could sleep in that. The skirt had three pleats in the front, one in the back. And the suit coat, I used that to cover myself. You'd get up and that skirt would hang down like I never slept in it. It was beautiful for traveling. But we did sleep on some of the trips that we had to take for overnight. How often, that I couldn't say. I imagine that when we went from like Milwaukee directly to Indiana, we possibly would take a night train so we'd be there in the morning. To get organized and get to the ball field to practice and stuff like that.

LH: Did you get enough sleep on the trains?

SS: Oh, I could always sleep, to this day. (laughs) I can sleep very well. If it's quiet and I sit down, I could go right to sleep. That never did bother me. And on the train, I always liked that clickety-clack, clickety-clack. It was like a lullaby to me. I don't know if it bothered anybody else. Some people, it might bother them, but to me it's nice. I liked it.

LH: When you stayed in other cities, you stayed at hotels, mainly?

SS: At hotels. Oh yeah. When you're on the road, you stayed at hotels. Two girls to a room usually. And one bed. But that was alright, you had big beds. Other than that, though, no.

LH: You had mentioned to me previously that there was an incident in Minneapolis, when you went to the hotel?

SS: Oh, yes, the first time we went there. I believe it was the very first time. Well, we didn't get there too often because they were orphaned that same year. We were leaving to go to the ball park and everyone was all "ahub" about something, and when I finally asked what was going on, some woman had just jumped out of the hotel on the other side of the building and committed suicide. Well, being only kids we were all shook up about that. There was nothing we could do, and they certainly wouldn't let us go over there. We had to get to the ball park, that is what we were there for. Leave all the other stuff out of it. I didn't want to go see it anyway. Not really.

LH: Was that the most frightening or exciting moment that happened?

SS: I'd say it was the worst thing that happened the whole time I was in anything like that. Otherwise, nothing like that took place. Thank goodness. (laughs)

LH: What were the good things about being on the road? You said the train and you mentioned the restaurants.

SS: We used to sing a lot on the train or the bus, whichever it was. It was just the fact of traveling, I guess. I liked to travel. Although we weren't going far, and most of the time we were going to the same place again, but it was still travelling. If you like to travel... If you don't like to travel you wouldn't have been happy, 'cause we were traveling a lot.

LH: Was there anything bad about being on the road?

SS: I didn't find anything bad. I don't know if anybody else did. I don't see why. When you were going from one place to the next, you had everything you needed, so. I didn't find anything bad about it, anyway.

LH: You got used to the cities when you went there regularly?

SS: Well you didn't get too far. At least I didn't. You went to the hotel and you went to the ballpark. And like I say, when you're in other cities, in the hotel it's generally in the downtown area, so your movies or whatever were within walking distance, so you didn't have to worry about finding your way around the city. And if you had to have a bus ride to the ballpark, they would inform you what buses to take so you didn't get lost. In those days those towns were rather small, it would have been hard to really get lost I think. At least I didn't hear of anybody being lost. (laughs) I managed to get there, so everybody should have.

LH: Including Milwaukee, and I know this is your hometown, but what was your favorite city to play at?

SS: That's a good one. I think Racine... It was either Racine or Kenosha because the hotel... Most of the rooms I got would face the lake. And I managed to see the moon come up out of the lake one night. I just happened to be in the bedroom at the right time. And it was just that time of night, and I was looking off towards the lake, and to actually see that moon come up... It's a big, huge orange thing come rising up out of the lake. It was fantastic! As a matter of fact, after I got married... Oh, we were married two or three years I think. And I suggested taking a second honeymoon down to Racine just to we could see that. Try it again anyway. Well, we made sure we had a hotel room facing the lake, and we lay down on the bed. We were fully dressed, 'cause I guess we intended to go eat after. Fully dressed, we lay down on the bed watching the lake, and we both fell asleep. (laughs) We didn't get up until about four o'clock in the morning. We didn't get dinner or anything else, we were still all dressed. We missed the whole thing. So it was kind of a bust. I never managed to do that one again.

LH: You never went back there to try it?

SS: I suppose you could stay right here in Milwaukee and sit someplace on the lakefront and watch and wait for it, but I've never done that. It just seems so neat to be able to be in your room and watch this happen. I thought that would have worked out nice for us. Some second honeymoon - we fell asleep! (laughs)

LH: How were the fans different on the road than in Milwaukee?

SS: I think your smaller towns had bigger crowds and they're more with you than they were in Milwaukee. I suppose they're used to... Milwaukee wanted the men's leagues, the other towns didn't have a big team. So, they took to the gals pretty well. We had good backing in the other towns. More so than Milwaukee. And they didn't have the fancy stadiums like they had. Well, Borchert Field compared to what we got today was nothing, but compared to the other towns, it was still a stadium compared to what they had. They were ball fields, yes, but you wouldn't call them a stadium. Well, of course the Brewers Borchert Field wasn't called a stadium, either. We just called them ball fields, back then. Now there's stadiums... But the backing was there, in the smaller towns more so, 'cause they weren't spoiled by big leagues.

LH: So when Milwaukee had the Milwaukee Symphony Orchestra play at Borchert Field, did that bring an awful lot of people?

SS: I don't think so. Maybe it kept them home. Not everybody wants symphony orchestras.

LH: What did you think of the idea?

SS: I thought it was pretty dumb, myself, but I didn't have much to say about anything. I liked music, and I liked symphony music, but I don't think I wanted it for the ballgame. It didn't make much sense to me - symphony music and then to play a ballgame. The two don't mix, I don't think.

LH: Some of the press, that we've said criticized it, but it seemed that the league was proud of it at the time, as a novel idea.

SS: It may be that they're proud of the idea, but like I say, I still can't see where they figured it would. And the press was against women anyway, you know. They're never with you. They're no better now than they were then. They're getting a little better, but they still don't cover women. Even with your skaters, Bonnie Blair has how many medals, and what all. And then this guy, I can't even come up with his name...

LH: Dan Jansen.

SS: Yeah. He finally gets a medal. Well, big deal. I'm proud he got it, but how long did it take him to get the one medal. Bonnie Blair is loaded with them. Did you get any of the ovation she got? Uh-uh. (no) But he was all over the paper all the time, he finally won a medal. Beautiful, I'm glad. But where was the accolades for her when she's winning them left and right, you know. Now that shows you the difference. Sure, they finally had some write ups for her, but nothing like splashing across for him. Sure he deserves some of it, but compared to five or six, seven medals, she's loaded with them. He gets one and he's like the first person in Wisconsin that ever won a medal, I mean, no way. I didn't think that was right, I don't know about anybody else, but I thought that was pretty stupid.

LH: He had a noble story about his sister...

SS: Oh, big deal! We all got problems! I mean, c'mon. It's got nothing to do with your skating. You're either skating or whatever. I'm sure Bonnie Blair must have had a few things in her background, but they ain't exploiting them. I can't see that.

LH: With women's sports being neglected, did you feel that playing for the Chicks was finally going to show everybody that...

SS: At that time I wasn't worried what would show to anybody. None of our sports ever made the paper. I was surprised they even covered the Chicks, to be honest.

LH: Jim Nitz has found almost no press coverage from the Milwaukee Journal or Sentinel, that most of it is in Racine and Kenosha.

SS: That's right. Oh, there was stuff in the Milwaukee Journal, but I'm sure he'd really have to hunt through the paper for it. There was a write up when we did play and stuff, but, especially when they got the symphony, then we had a lot of it, I think. Not praising it by any means. More or less making a joke of it, I think that's what they were doing. If I remember right. No, they never did cover us too well. There was always somebody there, I guess, from the press, but not much got in the paper.

LH: Do you think the lack of press coverage made fans not really know there was a team there?

SS: Oh, I believe that had a lot to do with it 'cause a lot of people didn't realize they had a ball team in Milwaukee.

LH: Even today.

SS: To this day. They never heard of it, you know. All that's lack of press, so what are you gonna do? I don't know why the league didn't get on their backs, that I can't answer, I don't know. You'd have think they'd demanded some coverage, or more coverage. I guess they had some, but they didn't have very much. There were no big splashing pictures in the paper or anything, not like you would have gotten in your small town newspapers. But like I said that was a comparison. Your small towns didn't have a big team to worry about. So when they finally got some team in there, although it was women, they followed them.

LH: How did the Chicks feel, when you were travelling and there were quite a few fans in the stands for the other team, and you might have had your family, if any family members came?

SS: I don't know.

LH: Did it make anyone feel neglected, or I don't know what the word would be...

SS: I don't think so. You played. I mean, how the other ones felt, I have no idea. Naturally, when I was at home and playing, and if there was somebody in the stands that I knew, I wanted to do my best, naturally. It's baseball, sometimes you make a blooper whether they're there or not. How the rest felt, I have no idea. Most of those girls came from all over the states, so a lot of them didn't have their families there. Or anybody that really knew them. They're just fans, period.

LH: Did any of your family go to the championship games in Kenosha?

SS: Not that I know of. There wasn't that much of the family to go, my sister wouldn't bother going, I think. The one that was just after me. And like I say, my brothers were gone. And my folks certainly didn't travel that far. I think my dad came to Borchert Field once. I mean, even to them, she's playing at Borchert Field... it's nice, but so what. That's the way the opinion was in those days.

LH: How do you think the Chicks played during that season?

SS: We must have played very good, 'cause we won the championship.
(laughs) So I guess we did alright.

LH: How do you think you played, personally?

SS: Oh, when I played, I did my best.

LH: How often did you play?

SS: Not often enough to suit me, because they ran it the way they do...

TAPE ONE, SIDE TWO

LH: Did many of the Milwaukee fans attend the championship games in Kenosha?

SS: Well, I guess quite a few fans came down there, but I wouldn't know who they were, you know. None of my family or that, but we had a lot of Milwaukee backers down there cheering for us, so they must have been from Milwaukee.

LH: How did the press or the fans feel about you winning the championship?

SS: I don't even remember if it made the paper. The fans were happy, yes. There was a lot of cheering going on and that after the game. And then when we got home, well, there was nothing. I mean, not like you'd have for men's teams coming home with the championship. There was nothing there, we made our own fun. Like I say we weren't that well received. We were just girls playing ball.

LH: How do you feel about the season you played overall?

SS: What do you mean?

LH: As a pitcher.

SS: Well, overall I did alright. What games I played in I did okay. But I wasn't in as often as I'd like to have been.

LH: How often did you play?

SS: I can't remember that. Not as often as I'd like.

LH: You played one game or four games or how did you...

SS: Oh, god, I don't know. Lady, this was too long ago.

LH: We had talked about you playing one game and then you usually were off for about four or five games.

SS: At least... Well, say maybe... Maybe I only pitched ten games, I really don't know. It's too far back to remember.

LH: But you did pitch a one-hitter.

SS: Oh, I did that. I pitched a two-hitter. Other than that, no, I can't remember. Those stand out naturally 'cause that was good.

LH: So you were a good player, but you didn't get to play as often as you wished.

SS: That's right. I tried my best, and... Well when you got that many pitchers, they want to favor the taller ones and this and that. It makes you look good, you know.

LH: For the show?

SS: For the show. What are you gonna do? It was alright, though. I enjoyed playing at home better than I did that. 'Cause I was better dressed, too. (laughs) I didn't enjoy playing in those uniforms.

LH: So you and Jo (Kabick) and Tommy (Viola Thompson) were really good friends. Was there any competition between the three of you?

SS: Not at all. There wasn't any competition at all from any of us, really. 'Cause we had nothing to say as to who played, I mean. And they were all good in their own. Then we wouldn't have been there. We got along just fine, there was no... The three of us hit it off, right off the bat. We'd be trouncing around together and stuff like that. Once in a while one or two others would go along, but mostly the three of us went bumming around.

LH: Can you think of any incident that sticks in your mind during a game when you were pitching?

SS: Not really, like what?

LH: You had mentioned an incident where you through the ball, when you were trying to...

SS: Oh you mean embarrassments? Oh, well, yes, sure. Like I said we had to learn how to pick a runner off a base, which we didn't do normally. And I think it was Racine. And the fans were quite a ways from the diamond, and I don't know if it was my first or second attempt to try this. Anyway, I took the ball and I was going to pick off that runner on first, and I let go and that ball took off like a flight out of nowhere. (laughs) It landed in the stands, somewhere. Everybody, including myself, laughed so hard, 'cause it was just the funniest thing you ever saw. (laughs) I could hardly stop laughing and try to continue pitching. It was very, very, it was embarrassing, but it was ridiculously funny. (laughs) The way that ball, I don't know where I was gonna throw that ball but it just took off. (laughs) A line drive wouldn't have gone any further, I don't think. (laughs)

LH: What about Max Carey?

SS: I think he was laughing just about as hard as anybody else. The whole bench was roaring, I know I was. I was laughing too hard to even worry about it. (laughs) It was just too funny.

LH: There were no hard feelings.

SS: Oh, no. Nothing like that. No reprimand or anything. It was just one of those things, it was funny, and everybody laughed, including myself. I could hardly stop. (laughs) When you do something stupid, I mean really stupid, you got to either laugh or sit down and cry. I didn't want to cry, I was laughing, it was funny. If you could have seen that ball take off, holy smokes! I don't know where that ball went, where it wound up.

LH: Did you try again during other games and get better?

SS: Yes, matter of fact, if my memory serves me right, up until I got out of there, I was the only player to pick off one at second base. Which is even harder to do. You got to swing all the way around and make

sure you get that ball to the second baseman, and we did pick the runner off. As far as I know, that I can remember, and I'm not trying to brag, it's just... I lucked out, and I did it. And it was better than anybody else did. I don't remember anybody else picking off of second. Or off of first for that matter. So that's the way it went.

LH: So how did you feel that all of your championship games were played in Kenosha and not Milwaukee?

SS: I think they played there to get the more packing... more people turned out for it. As a matter of fact I don't remember them all being played there.

LH: The newspaper says all of the games were...

SS: Then I can believe that. I don't remember, to be honest, that I don't remember. Are sure we didn't play one in Milwaukee or two?

LH: No.

SS: All there?

LH: It says that the seven game streak was played in Kenosha.

SS: Well, that must be. Well, evidently they must have played it there 'cause there'd be more fans out. Might have been a smaller town, but they had better backing than in Milwaukee.

LH: And the Brewers might have been playing.

SS: That's true, too, come to think of it. That may have been the reason. I wouldn't know, though, really. If you would have asked me that, I wouldn't have known where we played it.

LH: Did you play any of the games during the championship?

SS: I don't think so. I don't think so. I don't know. I don't honestly remember. I played in the league, and when it was over, when I was over with that, that was the end of it for me. I was very surprised to find out that they played as many years as they did. 'Cause I did not follow it. I was busy, I was married, and had kids and things, so I never concerned myself with it. And just about two years ago, I get this letter informing me about the league that they've formed, and

that the movie was coming out and all that. It was all a big surprise to me.

LH: So your one full season ended with the championship, and...

SS: And the following season I only played half and then I was out.

LH: In class we were talking about the significance of women's professional baseball during World War Two. Did you see your role as a professional baseball player as patriotic?

SS: No I can't say I did. (laughs) Maybe some of them did, I don't know. Maybe there'd be two ways of taking that. If there hadn't been a war, maybe they never would have had the chance to put it on. Maybe we would have never been, who knows? I really didn't say I was patriotic, because I played ball.

LH: Did you feel you were contributing to the war effort, keeping people entertained, when there was so much other stuff to think about?

SS: I can't say it crossed my mind. (laughs) I was a kid, I didn't know, I was playing ball, something I liked to do. If I was helping the war effort I'm proud of that. I bought E-Bonds and stuff like that, but I didn't know that playing ball was part of it. Maybe it was considered it, but I never gave that a thought.

LH: Did the team do anything to help the war effort?

SS: Well, I know at one time I had to go with another gal and we went to Red Cross for some reason or another with the war effort I can't remember just what it was. I think there was even a picture in a paper. I believe it was the Red Cross we went to, something about the war. And then there may have been other things, but that I think I was in on that one. Well, we played at the veterans' camps. We went to here at Woods, we played. That's the soldiers' camp here. Then we went... I think it was Battle Creek, Michigan. We played at the veterans' hospital there.

LH: It was an exhibition game?

SS: Yes, definitely. Just for them, you know, the soldiers that were there, the veterans, whatever, who was ever there and that they could get them out to the ball game. And we'd put on a game for them.

LH: Do you remember anything specific about the games?

SS: Oh, no, not ^{really} even.)

LH: Were there more fans than in Milwaukee?

SS: Oh, yeah, we had them all captivated! (laughs) None of them could get away. It was basically for them and they all turned out, even the ones they had to get them up into wheelchairs and stuff. They got them all out to the ballgame. Anybody that was transportable was brought out to the game. That was kind of nice, all the soldiers there. Some had just got back, you know. Injured and this and that, you know. We had quite a turn out on both places and all military. I suppose that was a war effort. It was something, you know. (laughs)

LH: What did you think of the role of women during the war? Like you started going to work to earn money while your brothers were away.

SS: Well, the war effort puts a lot of women to work in a factory that maybe never would have gotten into a factory before that. And, well, I got a lot of personal ideas about things that I would not say. But due to that fact that women got into the factories, and then when the men came home, they did not intend to get out of them. So when women got a taste of what it was to work and get decent pay for working, they stayed. A lot of guys were out of jobs when they got back, some of them, most of them got their jobs back, but they could not just dismiss the women. The women had their rights, union rights, when they were there, so they had to keep them working. But that was the start of women going out to work and staying there.

LH: So when the war ended, they tried to take the women and put them back, you know, in the homes.

SS: They couldn't. No more, that was the end of that. Well nowadays, its a little stupid, I mean you have to work to make ends meet, nowadays. But a lot of women want to work, now, they don't figure that being a mother, which is very important in the home care, it should be the number one job for any woman. But that's... I'm old fashioned, I guess. They think you can be both, but I don't think you can. I think that's wrong. Where a woman can be home and be a mother and a housekeeper, that is a very, very important job, and that's why this country is where it's at. 'Cause there are no mothers home, a lot of

them can't be home because of the financial situation, that's understood. But where they could be and they're not, I think that's ridiculous. 'Cause they want to be somebody, they don't figure that being a mother and bringing up kids to be decent human beings isn't important, they can see where the world's at and look back and see where it all went. You need a family to bring up family... Children... that takes a... That should be an all day job. Where you can and you don't I think you're wrong. That's understandable in today's economy, the women have to work too, to make ends meet. I think that's bad.

LH: When you married your husband, did you work?

SS: We were both working at the time. And I worked until... well way back then, and then if they found out you were pregnant, you had to quit. They didn't take a chance on anybody working that was pregnant. Nowadays, they let you work right up to the hour you're going in to deliver, but back then, no. Then I was home. Oh, my gosh... Then I had my son, and then we went into the store business. Then I had my daughter, and then Korea broke out... I had never heard of Korea. He came to the hospital to see me, we had our store business in Waterford, and he came to see me at the hospital, I was here in Milwaukee, he told me he was supposed to have reported for duty, (laughs) like a month ago, but they had lost his address and we had moved and that. And he was reporting late the way it was, so he had to go in late. I went back home by my dad, I had to sell the store and everything, he was already gone. It was a mess. What point was I trying to make?

LH: So you were working when he left then?

SS: No, I wasn't working. We had the store business. But they took him in, in September, and then I had... Chris was August. June, I'm sorry, June. He didn't go in until September. Or was it August he went in? It was very close and then I ended up moving back home by my dad, 'cause I had to sell the store business, I couldn't run the store. At the time, I didn't drive and we used to get our own produce and stuff. I didn't have my driver's license, and with two kids, I couldn't have ran the store, not with two babies, one was two and the other just born. So I moved home with my dad, and the records were all screwed up and I didn't get any money from him. I finally went to Red Cross, and they started paying my dad for me to stay there, and then he got remarried, and then the following January or February, my

stepmother decided she would take care of the kids and I went back to work, then.

LH: You went back to work?

SS: I had to, there was no money coming in.

LH: So the forties, during the war years, changed the fact that more women were starting to work.

SS: In the forties, yes, but I'm talking now this was Korea and that was fifty. I went back to the work force in fifty... fifty-one. She was born in fifty and I went back to work in fifty-one. And then, oh geez, (laughs) I had to work. They finally caught up with him, but what are you going to do until that time. I had no money for anything, it was a screwed up mess, his records, but I suppose because he reported in late, it was one of those things. That's all.

LH: During World War Two, you said you had two brothers in...

SS: I had two brothers in service. I've had five brothers all total. The third brother didn't go in until, I guess he was Korea bit, too. The younger one.

LH: Were there any other family members who went into the service?

SS: No, no. Just my two brothers, two older brothers went in. The oldest one had gotten married, and they didn't take him, he had asthma. Then they took my two brothers, went in right away, and that's when I left school and went to work. And at that time my kid brother was only, what, ten years younger than I was, so, he was only about eight at that time, so. He didn't come around until the Korean bit. My husband came home and he left, I guess.

LH: How did you feel about your brothers being gone, at war, overseas... Were they overseas?

SS: One was. Matter of fact, turned out he was safer than the one that was here. The brother that was training here they took down south, I can't remember the name of the camp... He was training to be a ranger. And the one time he ended up with, poison oak, and I guess he took a good tumble down a training hill of some kind. He got all banged up, with a cane and everything else. And when he was in being checked

for that, they found out he had a perforated eardrum, he should not have ever been drafted. Which he must have gotten when we were all sick kids with scarlet fever. He was deaf for two weeks when it was possibly when that happened, but he should never have been drafted to begin with.

LH: So your other brother overseas...

SS: He was over in Japan and that. He was M.P. He never got to Japan, the Philippines and Australia and stuff like that.

LH: And this was the brother you played ball with.

SS: I played with all of them.

LH: How did you deal with his absence?

SS: By that time we weren't playing no more together, you know. (laughs)

LH: You had your girls' leagues...

SS: Yeah. I'm talking about when we were growing up kids, then we all played in the backyard, you know. Or in the alleyways, and what have you. The whole neighborhood, years ago. Nowadays you don't find that kind of stuff, but years ago, the kids in the area all played together games. The streets used to be full of kids playing baseball or what have you. Nowadays you don't see anything like that. I don't know why, the kids are too... they got too much stuff... they gotta be in the television, or playing with their Atari games and things like that there. Instead of getting out and playing and being exercise. I don't know. They're missing an awful lot of fun, that's all I can say. I enjoyed being a kid a lot more than what I see the kids do today for enjoyment, I think it sucks. In my opinion.

LH: So you were pretty far removed from your brother?

SS: Pardon?

LH: You were pretty far removed from your brother since you hadn't played with him for a while... You missed him, obviously...

SS: Oh, no we weren't that removed, it's just that, hey, you grow up, you know, you do your thing and I do mine.

LH: Dorothy "Micky" Maguire thought she had lost her husband in the war.
How did the team react?

SS: Everyone was happy for her when they found out that he was home.
And then he did come, we did get to meet him.

LH: How did the team react when she received her telegram?

SS: Everybody was happy, shocked.

LH: I mean when they had thought he had died.

SS: Well, how would you react?

LH: How did it happen?

SS: Well, a lot of things happened like that during the war. You'd get a notice that so and so is missing in action. And until you finally got the telegram that he actually was dead or whatever... Well, he had been missing in action, and assumed dead. They weren't sure. And then when they finally got track of him, and got word to her, well then we were all happy. She couldn't even play, you know, that night, when we got the word. She was out of kilter, she couldn't even play ball that night. Naturally.

LH: Did she play ball at all?

SS: Not that day, no. I think she went home to meet him and then they came back together. I guess she got a week off or something like that.

LH: When he came home?

SS: Yeah. It was kind of nice that we got to meet him, too.

LH: Did any other teammates lose any family members? Or thought they had lost...

SS: That I don't know. I really don't know. I'm sure a lot of them did.
'Cause all of them had somebody, you know, everybody was in at that time. But, who, if anyone did, I don't know.

LH: "Micky"... How did she get her notice? Was this at the team or... Was everybody around?

SS: I doubt that... No I don't think so. I believe maybe Dottie, um...

LH: Dottie Hunter?

SS: She may have given her the word. I really don't know how she got notified. That's honest.

LH: How did the team support each other when bad things happened?

SS: Like anybody. What's a bad thing? "Better luck next time," or something like that, or "buck up, it happens to everybody," you know. How do you buck up your friends when something goes wrong?

LH: You had said that "Micky" had gotten the missing in action telegram...

SS: Well, that was a long time... She didn't get that when we were playing ball. That was already in, I don't know how long. All I know is that he was missing in action, period. When we were even starting. When she got that notice, I don't know. But we were playing ball when she got the other notice that he finally was okay.

LH: Were there any other experiences that you remember playing for the Milwaukee Chicks during the war? Anything you did that comes to mind?

SS: Not really.

LH: After you left Milwaukee, did you move with the Chicks to Grand Rapids?

SS: Oh, we went to Grand Rapids and we were living, I and, what was it, two other girls, or was it just one? Two of us were living in this one lady's home and I don't know what religion she was, but she was an organist and a very beautiful voice, and she could sing! Oh, we'd listen to her quite a bit. But that was one of the times I went out with the gang drinking, which I wasn't very good at. And between the other gal and I, when one or the other was going out, we'd leave the key for the other one. And I had just enough beers in me that I couldn't remember where the key was supposed to be, so the gals, we're all searching that front porch. We finally did track it down, and I

managed to get in the house without making any noise and cause no ruckus. I didn't hear anything about it, didn't get fined or anything. Evidently, she didn't hear me come in, 'cause it was after curfew, and got away with it that way. But the next day at practice, word must have gotten out that a few of us had been out too late, and they practiced the living tar out of us. (laughs) I sweated twice as much as I ever sweated, of course, beer will do that for you. If you ever want to sweat, just drink a lot of beer and then go run around in the sun. It just drips off of you all over the place. They worked us pretty good, so I think somebody gave a little hint somewhere along the line that some of us had been out. And just watching us work out, I think they knew who. (laughs) But we never heard anything about it.

LH: The person that you stayed with, did she have any responsibility as to punishing you for anything?

SS: Oh no, but she would turn us in. But like I say, I think I made it in that night without disturbing her.

LH: But word got around anyway.

SS: Well, it wasn't just me. You know, I wasn't out alone. There was a whole gang of us were out. I don't even remember whose car, somebody was driving that night. Somebody had a car. And we got to the house there and I said I couldn't remember where the key was. I think there was five of us in the car. They all got out to help me look for that stupid key. We found it finally and I got in. And nothing happened. If she'd have heard me come in, I'm sure she would have let me know it. But I managed to get in my own room and quiet. Nothing happened, except a good practice the next day, so I figured somebody dropped it, but nobody knew who was out, you know. I don't know, but they sure practiced the living tar out of us, or at least it felt that way anyway. Oh, it was terrible! (laughs)

LH: In 1945 in Grand Rapids was your last season.

SS: Right. I didn't even finish it. Halfway through they released me and I was supposed to go play in Chicago. I had a contract to go play semi-pro down there which I possibly would have really enjoyed even more so, 'cause they wore the regular uniforms and things, plus they set you up with a job, so you made money twice, on the job and then on the team. By that time my boyfriend, who had come back from service could go back to Connecticut to finish college. And he said if

you go play in Chicago, he was going to go back to Connecticut. Well, I didn't want a separation, so I said no, I stayed home if he stayed home. So we both stayed home. And we ended up getting married. And then I finished playing baseball out in West Allis, again. So I played ball until I was pregnant with my first, well, my son, my first child. I guess I was two or three months pregnant, and I slid into second base, and their second baseman was a pretty good sized gal, and I up-ended her, more or less, and she was coming down, I just managed to roll out of her way, so she didn't land on top of me. And that was the end of my playing ball. My husband says, "that's it."

LH: Well two or three months pregnant is...

SS: Well, yeah. I felt good, so why not? I shouldn't have slid in, but I did. (laughs) But he was fine. He's a commander, a retired commander in the Navy. He turned out alright. I didn't hurt him any. (laughs)

LH: Your last season, you only played half of the season. Why did you only play half?

SS: 'Cause they released me, I don't know why. I didn't get along with that manager, like I said, that time when he put Connie (Wisniewski) in. That was the manager that was doing that.

LH: What happened then?

SS: He was trying to pick up, you know, give Connie all the more wins, by using her to... I'd pitch a game, and not just me, another gal, and he'd put Connie in the last inning to give her credit for a save and make her a big star.

LH: In fact that was the year that she and someone were tied for most games won.

SS: Yeah. Right. But that's how she was getting them. Now to me that was, wrong, but that's the way they did it.

LH: Did you get upset with the manager? Did you bring this up with him?

SS: No, but they knew I wasn't happy. Of course, who would be? That's not right, I didn't think then, and I still don't. Then all of a sudden, I was released, but he never even told me why, himself, or anything, and he should have, but he never did. So that was alright, I figured, okay, I'll