

THE FORGOTTEN CHAMPS: THE 1944 MILWAUKEE CHICKS

GRADUATE STUDENT ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

INTERVIEW
with
ALMA ZIEGLER

8 April 1995
via telephone
by

Kathleen E. Coughlin

presented to

Dr. Michael Gordon
University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee

Interview and Abstract

ALMA ZIEGLER INTERVIEW

Introduction

The Milwaukee Chicks of 1944

In 1942, major league baseball was threatened with closure because of the war-time manpower shortages. The owner of the Chicago Cubs, Phillip Wrigley, wanted to keep baseball on Wrigley Field even if major league play was no longer possible. He decided to form a women's professional softball league which would play its games in the major league stadiums while the men were at war. Thus, the All-American Girls Professional Baseball League (AAGPBL) began in 1943 with four teams. The teams were the Racine Belles and the Kenosha Comets, both from Wisconsin; the Rockford Peaches from Illinois; and the Blue Sox, from South Bend, Indiana. Originally, the game was to be a combination of softball and baseball, with shorter pitching distances, shorter basepaths, and mandated underarm pitching, with a softball. In 1944, Wrigley added two more teams, the Minneapolis Millerettes, and the Milwaukee Chicks. During the 1944 season the game was slowly changed from softball to baseball. The changes included: overhand pitching, longer basepaths and a smaller ball. The women were now playing baseball, not glorified softball. The Chicks played in Milwaukee for only one year, 1944. While here, they won the championship, which they had to play in Kenosha, rather than Milwaukee. Then the team moved to Grand Rapids, Michigan after the 1944 season. The women playing ball in the AAGPBL were chosen because they were excellent athletes, not because they were girls, as it had been in the past. It was a remarkable change for women, to be accepted as professional baseball players. The AAGPBL was in existence from 1943 to 1954, 500 women played in the league during this eleven years. After the League folded, due to poor management, in 1954, it was forgotten. During the 1980's a group of former members organized a players association, and lobbied to have the League recognized in the National Baseball Hall of Fame. In October, 1988, the Hall of Fame opened a permanent exhibit of AAGPBL memorabilia. Then in 1992, the League was further acknowledged when it became the subject of the film, *A League of Their Own*.

Background

Alma Ziegler was born in 1918 in Chicago, Illinois, where she lived until 1934, when her family moved to California, because her father lost his job due the Depression. Her father had been a linotype operator in Chicago, but went into different work after moving to California. Her mother was a housewife and "an avid bridge player." A brother, Frank, was three years older than "Ziggy." During high school she was quite active in sports, and was a member of the Girls Athletic Association. After high school she wanted to go to college to become a "phys ed" teacher, but her family could not afford college. They could afford a business college, and she became a secretary. She heard about the League in late 1943, and was invited to spring try-outs in Peru, Illinois in 1944. She made the team, the Milwaukee Chicks, and played with the League until 1954. The Milwaukee Chicks became the Grand

Rapids Chicks in 1945. Ziggy played second base, and after the game changed to baseball, she also pitched. Earning the honor of "Player of the Year," in 1950, she was considered to be a prime motivator of the team. She was also captain of the club for a few seasons. After the League ended, she went back to California and became a court reporter. She is now retired and lives in Los Osos, California. She is an avid golfer, and owns two cats. She helps out the elderly with "Meals On Wheels." Ziggy is 78 years young.

Interview

I interviewed Ziggy over the telephone for about an hour and forty minutes on April 8, 1995. She was at her home in Los Osos, California, I was in my home in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. In the background you can hear her drinking coffee. You can also hear her grandfather clock chime. A couple of times during the interview she got up and walked around with her cellular phone. Once she walked over to look at a paper that her great-niece, Jill, wrote about Ziggy; the second time to let her cats back into the house. This was our second interview, the first was accidentally not recorded. Because it was our second chance, we were very comfortable with each other. There is lot of laughter on the tape, she has a great sense of humor. Some of her details did not match the information we had researched, but I did not think it critical. She gave many details and personal memories about the Chicks, women's roles in sports, World War II, and the AAGPBL.

Abstract

This document is an abstract of the taped interview, it includes a few short, verbatim quotes as well. The abstract lists the topics covered on each tape in the order of their discussion. Also indicated in the left margin, is the counter number on the transcribing machine used to do this interview. The type of machine used is a portable Panasonic mini-cassette recorder, model # RQ 360. Please note that this may not coincide with counters on other tape machines. Each number is where a new subject begins. The abstract is meant to provide an outline of the interview, and cannot serve the researcher as well as listening to the tapes. It is only intended as a guide to the transcription.

Index

There is no separate index for this interview.

Restricted Sections

There are no restricted sections.
Kathleen E. Coughlin
Public History Graduate Student
University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee
April 19, 1995

Alma Zeigler Interview

TAPE ONE, SIDE ONE

KC: This is the oral interview of Alma "Ziggy" Zeigler, on April 8, 1995, by Kathy Coughlin.

KC: Ziggy! Hi there. How're you doing today?

AZ: Hi there, I'm well, thank you.

KC: Good. Let's start the interview with some biographical information. Basically, where you were born, when, and if you'd want to tell me a little bit about your parents and their lives, and the rest of your family.

AZ: Well, I was born in Chicago back in the dark ages, January 9, 1918. (laughs) And I had good parents, and I had one brother. We weren't too athletically inclined, the family per se, but my brother was a good basketball player and swimmer; but I was an avid baseball fan and player, softball. And we moved from Chicago back in 1934, moved out to California where I went to high school and graduated from Franklin High; and in as much as the Depression was on and my folks were...didn't have any money...and in those days they didn't have scholarships, per se, to go to college. I wanted to go to college and become a Phys Ed teacher, but in lieu of not having enough money I went to a Business College and got a little degree there. And then I worked some, and then I heard about the All American Girls' Baseball League.

AZ: I read a big article, I think it was in the Life Magazine, and gosh, I was really thrilled, and thought, "Gee, wouldn't that be wonderful if that could ever happen to us out here in California?" Well, it did. They sent a scout out and scouted some of us, 'cause we had a real good softball league here, 'cause gals weren't playing baseball then, so they had to draw us from softball. You want me to stop?

KC: No, you're going great.

AZ: Okay. So then they chose six of us to go back for tryouts in the League, for spring training, and I happened to be one of the six. We went by train to Peru, Illinois, is where we had Spring Training. I never saw so many gals in my life. I thought, "Geez, we have a chance?" But they kind of diminished as the days went on. And we, all six of us, hung in there from California, and we all got positions on a couple of the ball clubs. That year they had expanded, Mr. Rigley had expanded from four teams to six, they started in '43, and was such a success. Mind you, this was really glorified softball, because, as I said they didn't have baseball... we didn't play baseball, so they had to draw from our ranks in softball. So it was a glorified softball...we had Milwaukee and Minneapolis as the two new teams in the league and I was chosen to play on the Milwaukee team and we were known as the Milwaukee Chicks. The other team was known as, I believe, the Minneapolis

AZ: Millerettes, or something like that. We had to play on the Brewers' baseball diamond, and softball on a baseball diamond doesn't really look good and we didn't draw too well, unfortunately, because Milwaukee's such a lovely city, but that's the way it was.

KC: Yes.

AZ: So the next year, Mr. Rigley removed both of those teams: Minneapolis went to Fort Wayne, and Milwaukee went to Grand Rapids, Michigan. And that's where I played for ten years.

KC: Okay. Well that was a wonderful introduction. How about... what was your father's name, and what did he do; what was his occupation? And what was your mom's maiden name and her occupation?

AZ: My dad's maiden...(laughs), my dad's name was, Frank Zeigler, Frank George Zeigler, and he was a monotype operator, a printer. At about that time linotype was taking over and that, with the Depression and everything, he was out of work, which was tough, but never once did we go on Welfare. We didn't eat steaks and such, but we never had a penny of Welfare. But at any rate he was a good dad. And my mom was a good egg, she was a lot of fun. Her name was Mae Blanche and her maiden name was Connal, C-O-N-N-A-L. Scotch. And she was a real, real, good person, a good homemaker, and she loved to play Bridge, belonged to about three bridge clubs, kept a beautiful house. So that's about

AZ: the...and my brother wanted to become a fireman. He was doing real well, he passed the written and oral tests and was in his probation period and when they gave another exam they determined he had a heart murmur and so therefore he couldn't get on the fire department. But heart murmurs, I understand, are very prevalent, and he had it until he passed away a year or two ago, and it never bothered him at all. Anyhow, he never became a fireman, he became a plumber. That's my family.

KC: Oh! Okay. Did your family move to California because of the Depression and...

AZ: Yes. Because my aunt, my mother's oldest sister, had a nice little house out in Los Angeles and she would rent it to us for \$25 a month and it was nice, just a nice little house. And so, we moved into that and it was probably one of the reasons we never had to go on any Welfare. My dad didn't want to hear of that, you know. He was pretty proud. Anyhow, so that's how we came to California.

KC: What kind of work did he do when you moved?

AZ: Well, he wasn't doing anything until a couple of years later. He even went out with...well, my cousin finally got him into a nice position. It was with a company, they made... oh, what the heck did they make...? Anyhow, my dad was a perfectionist. He was not a fast worker, but anything he did was done perfectly, you know. Which today they just

AZ: rush through, kind of.

KC: Yeah, that is true. You said you wanted to go college to become a Phys Ed teacher.

AZ: That was my...you know kids, when you're interested in sports and such that's one of the things that comes around to you. And I thought, "Gee, that'd be fun!" because I belonged to GAA, which was Girls' Athletic Association, in high school, and I thought that was great and I liked our coach. She was a real nice gal. Anyhow, that wasn't possible. So the counsellor from high school said to my dad, "Well, your daughter is such a good typist," -- I had taken shorthand -- she said, "I suggest if you could garner enough money together to pay her first month's tuition we could get her a job working earning tuition the rest of the way." So that's what happened. Old Zig went to school at Woodbury and I liked it alright, but it wasn't my heart's desire.

KC: Had you wanted to teach in high school as a Phy Ed teacher? Was that what your plan was?

AZ: If I became a Phys Ed teacher that was certainly what I would have done.

KC: Okay, so you went to college and became a secretary?

AZ: A secretary.

KC: Okay. And where were you working when you heard about, when you read about, in the Life Magazine about the girls'

KC: baseball league being set up?

AZ: I was working for a concern called, Payne, P-A-Y-N-E, Heating Company. They made gas-fired furnaces, and it worked out very well because in the summer that was their slack time and in the winter that was, of course, their busy time. So, I'd be able to play ball in the summer and come back and I'd have a job in the winter. Counting the days until next Spring Training would come about.

KC: And when you read the article in Life Magazine what year was this?

AZ: It came out in either late '43 or very early '44. I believe it was late '43, though.

KC: Okay, I'd like to ask you another personal question. Have you ever been married? Do you have any children?

AZ: No, my dear, I have not been married. I wasted eight years on one man, if you'll pardon the expression. I shouldn't say that, because I didn't think it was a waste, but it was. So I didn't. I have two lovely nieces and now I have two lovely great-nieces.

KC: Wow! And these are your brother's daughters?

AZ: That's right.

KC: And where are they living? Are they near you?

AZ: One of them is married and with her husband, and as I say, they have two little nie...,daughters. One of whom is going to graduate from Cal-Berkeley in May. I'm going up to

AZ: the graduation. And the other, my other neice, the one in Auburn, who has two daughters, is Heidi, and the other one is Sherry. She and her husband live in Tempe, Arizona.

KC: Well, that's travelling distance at least. Let's discuss more about your occupational history. You've already told me about your first job. Did you have any jobs during high school?

AZ: No, no jobs at all.

KC: Okay, okay.

AZ: I looked like a little runt. A big toad. [Laughter]

KC: [Laughter] Oh, gosh! Why do you say that?

AZ: I'm just kind of kidding, but I was very thin and short...

KC: Teeny?

AZ: Yea, but I just loved sports.

KC: When did World War I start in relation to your lifetime?
World War II, I'm sorry.

AZ: It was before I was born. That's even back farther in the Dark Ages! I don't remember the year it started but, didn't it end in...

KC: 1918. World War II is what I should have said.

AZ: Well, that started long about 1942 didn't it?

KC: Yeah. What time period was this for you in your personal life?

AZ: Well, I was out of high school and I was working. I was playing softball, you know, and that was the period and

AZ: that's when I was going with this fella, part of the eight years.

KC: Okay. Did he go into the service?

AZ: No, if you actually want to know what happened to him. He became the manager of the Rockford Peaches. His name was Bill Allington. Maybe you've heard of him?

KC: Oh, yes. Oh my.

AZ: He was about fourteen or fifteen years older than I but I thought he was God Junior. [Laughter]

KC: [Laughter] So you had a relationship before you were playing...before you both were involved with the All American Girls League?

AZ: In fact, the scout that came out to scout us, he was put in touch with Bill Allington, and Bill Allington knew all the ball players and that helped, too.

KC: That's great. So it was to your advantage.

AZ: ... Yes ...

KC: Not,... I don't mean to demean how you played because you had to be very, very good to be accepted.

AZ: No, but it surely didn't hurt.

KC: You played in neighborhood leagues before you were accepted...

AZ: Softball leagues. They had good softball leagues in Los Angeles. Some nights when I wasn't playing they hired some of us to sell peanuts and we'd earn it. The dollar and a

AZ: half or two dollars a night. And I remember I liked that, "cause I could throw peanuts way up to somebody high in the stands. (Laughs) You'd get a lot of laughs.

KC: (Laughs) Gosh, that sounds like fun.

AZ: We had a lot of fun.

KC: Did they ask a lot of the girls who weren't playing that night, "Would you like to earn a little extra money tonight?"

AZ: Well, they had some of us I don't know how they chose us, I happened to be one of them. I had a good arm, you see, I could throw. (Laughs)

KC: (Laughs) How did the peanuts not fall out of the bag?

AZ: Oh, they had them tied pretty good.

KC: I see. Now did your company have a league team?

AZ: He did but I didn't even play with them. I played with Goodrich, B. F. Goodrich, the tire outfit.

KC: Oh, okay. And how often did your team play?

AZ: You played twice a week in the league, league games you know. Sometimes three times a week, but mostly twice.

KC: Okay, what was your team's name?

AZ: The Goodrich... we had a really good name... the Goodrich... What a good memory, eh? They really didn't name them so much in those days, so. They just named them by the Sponsors.

KC: I see, so you were...

AZ: We were B.F. Goodrich. And they had various teams. And then we also had Mark C. Bloom, which was another tire outfit out here, and later I played for them.

KC: Okay, did you watch men's professional baseball? Did you go to any games, were you able to go to any games?

AZ: Yes, with Bill Allington, he was a semi-professional. He was a great hitter, a scholar of baseball, for sure, his arm wasn't good enough to get him into major league ball. He knew the rule book back and forth. Incidentally, I knew the rules pretty well, too, because he'd always be quizzing me. I'd go watch him play semi-pro baseball every Sunday afternoon.

KC: Oh, and who did he play for?

AZ: He played for a plumbing outfit in our area. I forget the name of it, but it was a plumbing concern.

KC: Okay. And what year... when the magazine came out in 1943, was that the year you went to the tryouts or was it the following year?

AZ: No, that was '44. When we went. The season was over by the time the article came out in Life Magazine and so then we later heard that they were going to broaden their scope looking for ball players and one of them was on the West Coast.

KC: Did the magazine article tell you who to contact if you wanted to play?

AZ: I don't believe it did, as my memory serves me. I don't believe it did, Kathy.

KC: Then was Bill your connection with who to contact?

AZ: Well, we didn't contact anybody until the scout came out. And then we contacted, I think, Ken Sells, who was President of the League. And we had very little to do with that. They did most of the work and sent us back. Got us train tickets, you know, and away we went. It was on the train back going back for Spring Training that I had received a telegram saying that I was the aunt of little Heidi Victoria Zeigler.

KC: How exciting!

AZ: Yeah, and now she's a school teacher, teaches eighth grade, her daughters are grown now.

KC: Oh my goodness. Oh that is so exciting.

AZ: Time flew over these years. She is sure a nice gal.

KC: She teaches eighth grade, she must teach in a junior high then?

AZ: They have a one school deal in Auburn now, they go through eighth grade and then ninth grade is in the high school.

KC: I see.

AZ: That isn't all over. But it is up there in Auburn County.

KC: Right. We have the same thing here. Was your family excited for you, to go out to Chicago?

AZ: They knew it was a good deal. I know Bill had talked to them and told them it was legitimate and they had seen the magazine article and everything. They were quite pleased and anxious to see whether our gals made a team, you know.

KC: Okay.

AZ: So they accepted it.

KC: What was your motivation behind joining the team?

AZ: How would you like to do something you absolutely loved? And then get paid for it? That was the motivation. (Laughs)

KC: (Laughs) It sounds like a dream come true.

AZ: As people said, "Well, Zig, you could've paid them and played."

KC: So this was a major part of your life at this time?

AZ: It certainly was.

KC: Could you explain if you had a tryout in your hometown before you went to Chicago or...

AZ: Well, we had a game or a few games and this scout saw us play too, you know. Beside accepting Bill's word for these people they were going to send back.

KC: What was your tryout like in Chicago?

AZ: Well, see there were a whole group of gals and I don't remember the name of the hotel where we stayed. Anyhow you'd be out in a great big field and they'd divide you up into various groups with the various managers and first were calisthenics and running, and that way, you know. And then

AZ: you'd start having pepper practice, if you know what that is.

KC: No, could you describe that?

AZ: Pepper practice is just a little deal where four of you line up and one hits the ball... just short thing, just loosen up that way. They do that in major league baseball even today. And then, of course, hitting and then the manager would hit ground balls and you'd field 'em and throw 'em to first and outfielders, they'd hit flyballs, too. Various things they do in baseball in Spring Training.

KC: What time of the year was this?

AZ: Late April or early... late April, I believe it was.

KC: Okay, so the weather was fairly decent?

AZ: Yes, it was pretty good down there.

KC: Okay, great. Did anyone within your family accompany you to Chicago?

AZ: No, none of the parents followed...accompanied. However, a lot of the gals' parents, boyfriends came back to see us play. But not going to Spring Training, no.

KC: What was the most exciting thing about being in Chicago for the tryouts?

AZ: It was actually not in Chicago, it was in Peru, Illinois, which was South of Chicago. Well, the most exciting thing was hoping and praying we'd be good enough to be able to play in the League. And that excitement carried us over and

AZ: along with all that we hustled. A hustling ball player is what is good for anybody. So we all hustled and played our best...we were all... we all made a team. Some of the girls didn't, and were sent home, and that was kind of sad, but fortunately our six made the teams.

KC: Where did you stay where you where in Peru for the tryouts?

AZ: We stayed in a hotel and I can't remember the name of the hotel.

KC: Okay. Do you still have contact with the other girls, the other six girls from California who made the other teams?

AZ: Well, I sure do. One of them was Annabell Lee, I've been to a baseball card show with her. And Dottie Wiltse, she's now Dottie Wiltes Collins, she's very active in our association, our players association, and Tibby Eisen, who lives down in southern California, she also is active in that, and Faye Dancer, she lives in southern California, and I saw her last November at a baseball card show. But some of our ex-ball players I sure keep in touch with, like Beans Risanger, one of our pitchers, good pitchers, she and I are in contact with each other all the time. And also our chaperone, Dottie Hunter, I'm in contact with her. And Marilyn Jenkins, one of our catchers on the team. So I have kept in touch with some of our Grand Rapids Chicks.

KC: Great. Now Dottie Collins, you mentioned her.

AZ: Dottie Wiltse, W-I-L-T-S-E, Collins

KC: And could you spell, Eisen?

AZ: E as in Edward, i, s, as is sam, en. Eisen. _____, (Cannot hear) was her real name, but, Tibby, she goes by.

KC: And Leis, is leis?

AZ: Lee. Annabelle Lee. L, e, e.

KC: And Dancer is just as it sounds?

AZ: F, a, y, e.

KC: And then Risanger?

AZ: Ris, as in sam, anger, Risanger.

KC: Thank you. That's wonderful that you've kept in contact.

AZ: Yes, they're all fun. And I hope to see them all at our next reunion which will be the end of October this year, down in Palm Springs, California.

KC: And which reunion will this be? How many years?

AZ: 52. [Laughter]

KC: Wow!

AZ: Fifty-second. We had the Fiftieth in South Bend two years ago, and that was great.

KC: Tell me about that.

AZ: Well, a Fiftieth reunion and we wondered, "Gee, how many?" We knew that some of our members had passed away, of course, but they all looked hale and hearty, the ones that were there, and there were a bundle...a whole bunch of us there. 'Course, most of them married, you know, and had families and stuff, and there were a few that hadn't married and

AZ: everybody looked fine and we had a great reunion.

KC: Great. You must've had a lot of fun together.

AZ: We sure did.

KC: Okay, let's go back to the tryouts. How long were... did the tryouts actually last?

AZ: Actually, Spring Training lasted two weeks. Nigh on to two weeks.

KC: Ok, and... what was... when did you find out that you had made the cut?

AZ: Just about, toward the end of Spring Training.

KC: And at that time they told everyone?

AZ: That's right.

KC: Okay.

AZ: And, in fact, a few of them had gone home earlier.

KC: Oh, I see. And when you found out were you all grouped together at the same time?

AZ: By then, some of us were on the Milwaukee Chicks, those of us who were from California, and some of them were on the Minneapolis. So we were in different groups at that point, you know.

KC: Mmm-Hmm. And did they post a sign, or did they call out your names?

AZ: Oh, they had a great big meeting and they named the rosters and you listened very intently to hear your name.

KC: Boy, that must've been hard on the girls who didn't make it.

AZ: Yes, yes it was. However, some of them realized they weren't material for the League, you know. But it was a nice trip for them anyhow.

KC: Yeah. So what was your reaction? Did you whoop or scream...?

AZ: Well, you waited until it was all over and then you really did, yeah.

KC: Okay. And did you call your family or did you write them when you found out?

AZ: I'm sure I called. (Laughs) But I was in close touch, letter-wise, and so was my mom. She wrote regularly.

KC: And how did they react to it?

AZ: They were thrilled. Basically knowing that all six of us made it, made them even happier.

KC: Oh, yeah. So you said you said you were in close contact with your mom in letter writing. Did this continue while...

AZ: All throughout the League. I wrote her about every other day.

KC: Oh, is that wonderful! Are... Is there any other experiences, any other memories you can dredge up?

AZ: Well for Spring Training, all I can say is that it was a lot of hard work and you kept moving, you know. And I can't think of too much more other than we all got together at night for dinner and stuff. We had, like, little meetings,

AZ: and then you'd go your way. But when you're in Spring Training you don't do much but play ball, eat, and sleep.

KC: Sounds like a lot of hard work.

AZ: It was, it was. But it was well worth it.

KC: When did they start bringing in the Decorum Classes, and what were they like?

AZ: I believe that was a couple of years, maybe a year later, or something. Yea, I think it was a year later. And he, Mr. Rigley, of course, who started the League, he wanted the girls to look and act like ladies, yet have the ability to play ball like men. And he thought if he could brush up the gals to be even more lady-like, it would be a good deal. So he got some beauty counsellor down there at Spring Training and a couple of nights after dinner, we'd have these meetings, and everybody'd have to attend, and she gave a lot of little lessons on charm. We called it the Charm School Class. (Laughter)

KC: (Laughter) So what were they like for you? Were you comfortable in them?

AZ: It was interesting. But one funny thing was, this particular night it was about hair. And, you know, because we had to have our hair long enough so that it came below the caps, the baseball caps. And so my hair has never been a crowning glory for me, but at any rate, she was showing various hairstyles and she said, "Maybe someone would like

AZ: to come up and I could give a pointer or two," something to that effect. And so all my friends said, "Go, Zig, go, go!!" and they practically pushed me up there. And so they got their laughs for the day 'cause she kind of looked at me, and she was very nice, and said, "Well, there isn't too much we can do with this." And that gave them their laughs, and that was fine. (Laughter)

KC: (Laughter) Oh, gosh. Well, it sounds like you enjoyed them.

AZ: Oh, every one. I sure did.

KC: Great.

AZ: Later in life my hair became much better because when I went to work as a court reporter, which I did later, I would get a permanent about every four months and I would wear high heels...spikes, down the marbled halls of the courthouse. But anyhow, my hair became better.

KC: Now, how did the other players feel about taking the classes? Were they comfortable as you...?

AZ: We kind of thought that was kind of silly, just like we thought the uniforms were silly, because we never played in what you call dress, you know. But we became used to those uniforms and kind of liked them after while; because underneath them we wore tight shorts, so that when you hit the dirt, meaning sliding, your dress would fly and it wouldn't matter, because you had these shorts on underneath, you know. And they fit snugly around your legs. We became

AZ: used to the uniforms and it was fine. And it was just like the Charm School lessons, we kind of enjoyed them.

KC: Well, how did the... how did you think the uniforms influenced the fans' perception of the League?

AZ: Well, I think the fans knew they were getting femininity and good ball playing and that was a big factor. The uniforms didn't digress from the ability of the gals to play ball.

KC: Okay. Could you tell me a little bit about the Rules of Conduct you had to follow?

AZ: They weren't tough if you followed them. You had to be in... on the road you had to be in the hotel two hours after the ball game. That gave you time to shower and dress and go out and have a sandwich, you know, and return to the hotel. At home it was a little tougher because you were spread around, you know, you lived in various places, they couldn't check on you so much. That was one of the rules. And another rule was: you couldn't wear jeans and stuff but a lot of the gals would sneak them on. And you couldn't fraternize with other ball players on other teams. This was to make it very competitive, you know. And, let's see... there weren't too many. And you'd cooperate by signing autographs and never denying anybody that privilege.

END OF TAPE ONE, SIDE ONE.

TAPE ONE, SIDE TWO

AZ: Kathy, the rules and regulations kind of influenced me to the extent--I learned a lot about cooperation and teamwork and of course that's the big thing when you are on a team. The individual is not important, but the team as a whole is the thing, you know. That was one good thing. The other thing was that it taught me a little bit about tact and that's kind of stayed with me, I think, through life. And I guess I can't think of much more than that.

KC: Why tact? How would you define that?

AZ: Well, you know, there are ways to approach people and ways not to approach them. If you want somebody to do something, and there's a tactful way of doing it. And another way you get a lot more cooperation out of person if you are tactful. It's just like a lot of times a gal would be moaning about the manager and I'd say, "Yea, but we have one manager and he's running the show so we go according to him." That was the big thing to me was knowing... in any thing you have to have rules, and sometimes they are not to everyone's liking but you carry through. Does that makes sense?

KC: That makes a lot of sense. It's wonderful that you went through this experience and it is something you can carry forward into your later life.

AZ: That's true.

KC: Let's talk about the League Administrative now. Could you explain the length of the average season, specifically the Chicks' season in 1944? And the number of games that you played?

AZ: We usually had a 110 game schedule, running from May to Labor Day, after which we'd have play-offs. The teams that finished high would be in the play-offs and then the season ended. So we had quite a stiff schedule and didn't start as early as Major League Baseball but their schedule was 160 games I believe, and it won't be this year on account of their strike. (Laughter) But at any rate, those are a lot of games and you'd have some rain-out nights and you'd have make up games which you'd have to play a lot of double-headers later on in the summer to make up for the rain-out games. So that kept us pretty busy.

KC: Boy, I'll bet. Were most of your games evening games?

AZ: Most of the games were evening games, I'd say 90 per cent of them were evening games. Once in a while we'd have a day game on a Sunday.

KC: How did you feel about when, let's say you had a rain-out and then you had to play a double header, was this something you didn't look forward to or did it bother you at all?

AZ: Well, we would rather play the game but if it was a bad night or something we sure didn't like to play in the

AZ: terrible weather so we'd just accept it. You have to accept the weather, you know. But later on we'd make that game up with the double header, next time we came to their town or they to ours.

KC: Now if you played a double header, was... I'm not familiar with it... you played one game and then you had an hour break or...

AZ: Not even an hour, maybe half an hour and then you'd start your second game. You'd start the first game earlier; if you were having a single game, they usually started at eight o'clock, but double-headers started at seven usually.

KC: Oh, okay. So then, how much later would you end up playing?

AZ: Well, depending upon, sometimes you had a tie ball game and you had to play until somebody wins. But the normal game ran about an hour and ... about an hour and a half, an hour and forty minutes.

KC: So you would start the second game maybe about nine or so?

AZ: Yes, even a little sooner maybe.

KC: Okay. So it was...

AZ: And sometimes a double-header did start at six-thirty.

KC: Okay, so it was a long evening for you.

AZ: It was a long evening; on those dates.

KC: What position did you play?

AZ: I played second base, once in a while shortstop, but mostly second base, until it became regulation baseball, over the

AZ: years. Because the ball got smaller, the base lengths longer, and the pitching distance farther 'till it became 60 feet 6 inches which is actually the same distance as mens' organized baseball. So then the softball pitchers were out because you can't throw a softball 60 feet 6 inches. So then it went to strictly overhand pitching and then it was really a good game.

KC: Then what did your position change to then?

AZ: I still played second base, but when our pitching staff ran thin due to maybe make-up games and stuff, I could pitch and I *did* pitch.

KC: Oh! Did you like that better than second base? What was your favorite?

AZ: I didn't like it better, but I was never a real great hitter, I used to say, "I hit like a pitcher, I guess I should." (Laughter) You know a pitcher's arm. They are known for being poor hitters, you know. But then say for instance I pitch tonight, well maybe tomorrow I'd be right back at second base, which would make me happy because I loved to play all the time.

KC: Did you feel more comfortable on second base?

AZ: Yes, yes.

KC: Less pressured, maybe?

AZ: But I had good control pitching and that's a big asset for a pitcher, you know. And I had a fairly good curve ball and a

AZ: slider, and so I was able to get through. I had... I wasn't a real strike-out pitcher but I got the ball over the plate and we had a good outfield and they ran those fly balls down. (Laughter)

KC: So you worked well together, then?

AZ: That's right.

KC: Did you sign a contract when you started playing for the...?

AZ: Yes, everyone had to sign a contract.

KC: Okay, and can you remember some of the terms?

AZ: I surely can't! All I can remember was... we had to sign them and they'd put your starting salary in it and you knew what you were signing for and all of our expenses were paid on the road. Food was paid for on the road, when you're in your hometown you're on your own.

KC: Okay. What was your starting salary?

AZ: I think mine was something like \$75 a week which then, was, to me, was a bundle. Because back in those days a dollar went a long way. And that was good money and throughout the years I went up to \$100 a week and that was pretty much the top salary. There was probably a little higher than that for some of the star pitchers but that was about the top.

KC: Hmmm. Okay, well, it sounds like you started out at quite a bit more money than other women.

AZ: Other women got less, I don't know why I started out, I don't know why, but that's the way it was.

KC: Hmmm. Okay.

AZ: I guess because I was loud. Gabby, you know.

KC: Pay me more! (Laughter)

AZ: That was the reason.

KC: Were you loud out in the outfield... when you were playing second...?

AZ: Oh we used to talk it up. They don't do that anymore. You encourage your pitcher all the time. Well, I was one of those "holler"gals, or whatever you call them.

KC: Can you give me an example of that?

AZ: Come on! Get that ball! Come on!! Blah, blah. It's hard to say it over the phone, it kind of came naturally.

KC: Now were you paid weekly or bi-weekly?

AZ: Bi-weekly we were paid.

KC: And what did you do with your money?

AZ: Well, we'd go out on shopping sprees. (Laughter) And it was fun. And if you were smart, you'd save some of it.

KC: Did you send any home to your mom to hold for you in an account or something?

AZ: Actually I didn't. I did open an account in... I know I did in Grand Rapids, I don't know if I did in Milwaukee or not. (Sound of opening door) But, I just opened the door to let my two cats in, but I'm back. (Laughter)

KC: Later you'll have to tell me about your cats.

AZ: They're darling.

KC: Did you like the changes in the League, I think you already answered this, that made the game more like baseball?

AZ: Most definitely, most definitely! Baseball I don't think was...a comparative. I think softball is nice, don't get me wrong, that's what we had to play and everything. But once you've played baseball, per se, it's the best game.

KC: Yeh. Let's see. Do you feel like when they changed the game over to baseball that you got better at the game?

AZ: Oh, yes, yes! We progressed right with it each year, and it wasn't... it was a gradual progression because they couldn't make it too sharp, too severe, so the balls kept getting smaller and smaller until we used a regulation baseball, and so by then we had grown into it. And baseball is better, I think, for this reason, it opens the game up, there's more hitting in baseball. In softball, I think, it's strictly a pitcher's battle, a lot of one-to-nothing ball games, and they're not as exciting as some hitting and runs scored.

KC: Right. Isn't softball...Doesn't it have less outs than baseball?

AZ: No. Some of them play seven innings. It's a very prominent game in softball, seven innings as opposed to nine innings.

KC: Okay. Is there any incident that is strong in your memory that happened during one of the games, whether at home or out on the road?

AZ: Well, I guess probably the most exciting was when we were

AZ: down near the end of the season, and you're hoping to get into the play-offs and every game became crucial, so to speak, and we had one that went extra innings. And boy, we finally ended up winning it in fifteen innings, which was a long night. But it helped us into the play-offs 'cause the competition was real good, and that was one. We won the pennant twice while I was in the League. I mean, we won the pennant more than twice, but the Championship twice, I should say.

KC: Okay, and once was with the Milwaukee Chicks and the other time was...

AZ: That's right! That's right! Too bad we didn't have enough people to appreciate it, you know. That's too bad.

KC: Yea, yea, the shortage of fans was an unfortunate part of that. How did you feel while you were playing in Milwaukee that the people of Milwaukee and the press received you?

AZ: Pretty well. And those fans were very loyal and very nice but the point is, we didn't have enough of them. (Laughs)

KC: Oh, yea. When you said you won the Championship twice the second one was with the Grand Rapids Chicks, right?

AZ: Yes, it sure was.

KC: Okay, did the press ever bad-mouth your team because you were girls or anything? Or were they more positive toward you?

AZ: They were positive toward us, I must say that. You bet.

KC: That's great. Did you stay in a...live in a motel when you were at your home base in Milwaukee?

AZ: No, our chaperone, for those... she got rooms in various homes, people's and I stayed in some very nice ones, and they were all very nice to us.

KC: In rooming houses?

AZ: No, just your own residences. And, of course, we'd pay them for living in their house. We had our own bedroom and stuff so that's how we lived at home.

KC: Then did they... did you also pay them for board? They feed you meals?

AZ: No, we didn't eat meals there. Some of them did. Once in a while you'd eat there, but, no. A lot of fans would invite us out for dinner. I can remember in Grand Rapids, there wasn't a Sunday that I hadn't been invited out to dinner.

KC: My Goodness! Was this by families, or women, or men?

AZ: Like the Sandro family. They were a good Italian family in Grand Rapids, and they were bigger than houses, (Laughter), which is understandable, because they had, like, seven-course meals. Yeah, they really ate! But they were really nice, and that was the way it went. We'd go out and buy our own meals, at home. On the road, we'd also eat, but we got meal money, on the road.

KC: Could you spell the name of that family you just mentioned?

AZ: S, as in Sam; A; N, as in Nancy; D, as in David; R-O. Sandro.

KC: Sandro, ok. While you were living in these people's homes in Milwaukee, what did you do for breakfast? Did you have a cold breakfast in your room...did you still go out for that?

AZ: Being a food-coholic, I'm sure I ate more than just a cold breakfast. (Laughter) We had nice little restaurants around there...and I never missed a meal, I know that! (Laughter)

KC: What was it like to play at Borchert Field?

AZ: That was nice...Borchert Field...It was overwhelming, let's put it that way, for softball. Glorified softball. But it was a nice ballpark.

KC: When you were playing there and sharing the stadium with the minor league Milwaukee Brewers, how did you feel about that?

AZ: That was where we were supposed to play, I don't know how the Brewers felt about it. The field was quite far away from the stands, and when you didn't have many people, it didn't feel as though we fit into it. And we didn't. So that was the situation there.

KC: How often did you have home games in Milwaukee in relation to your away games?

AZ: The number of games on the road were commensurate with number of games you played away. Half the season on the road, and half the season at home.

KC: Do you have a general idea on what was the average attendance at the home games?

AZ: Yes. At home, this is a pretty good average, I'd say in Grand Rapids we averaged about 3,000 people, that's an average. Even maybe more than that, maybe 3,500. Some games, we had maybe 5,000, but that was real big crowd.

KC: Right. Was the number of fans at your Milwaukee games the same size, or smaller?

AZ: We might have 1,500 on a good night there.

KC: Oh, boy. Was there advertisements?

AZ: In the papers, yeah. It just didn't seem to gell in that ballpark.

KC: Oh boy. What about when you went to play the championship games in Kenosha, did the fans follow you?

AZ: Well, there were a few that did follow us down to Kenosha, yes there were. The loyal fans, you know. It's too bad, being a winning ballclub, that we couldn't play at home, 'cause it's always nicer to play at home in something like that.

KC: Right, yeah, that would have been much better for you guys.

AZ: Yes, but it wasn't to be.

KC: What kind of a drive was it at that time, for the fans to come down to Kenosha?

AZ: I don't think it was that far, what about 80 miles, 70 miles, something like that.

KC: So it was maybe a two hour drive?

AZ: Yeah, no more than that.

KC: Ok. So it still was quite an outing for them, to follow you down there.

AZ: Yes, that's right.

KC: When the fans in Milwaukee had found you won the championship game...

AZ: They were absolutely delighted. The good loyal fans who made up the 1500. (laughter) They were absolutely delighted.

KC: Boy, I'll bet. Is there any incident that stands out in your mind about the championship games, was there one incident that really stands out for you?

AZ: Well. I can remember that, as I say, it was glorified softball to start with, and pitching is the name of the game in softball. And we had one of the best in Connie Wisniewski. And she, I think she pitched three of our seven games in the championship, and won all three of them! Now that was exciting!

KC: Let's talk about Max Carey for a few minutes. Your manager?

AZ: Yes, Max was our manager.

KC: What was it like being a player for him?

AZ: Well, Max was a good manager to play for, he taught us a lot about baserunning, because he was such an excellent baserunner. He held the record for major league baseball for stolen bases for many, many years. And so, he taught us that you don't have to be a speed demon to be a good baserunner, and we learned that, you know. 'Cause you steal on the pitcher, you don't steal on the catcher.

KC: Hmmm. I see.

AZ: You learn the pitcher's moves, and that's how you can get a good jump on them, to steal a base. And that was an important thing.

KC: So you keep an eye on the pitcher while...

AZ: That's right! And the minute you detected her move to home plate you were off, if you were gonna steal.

KC: And did you steal?

AZ: Well, even I stole, I wasn't a real fast runner, not real slow either. Yes, I learned a lot about baserunning from Max.

KC: Great! Was he a nice manager, was he a good man to work for?

AZ: YES! He was a good man to work for! Kind of an inspirational guy, And he was ... ran a good ball club, I would say.

KC: Hmmmm. Would you describe his coaching style as inspirational?

AZ: Well, he emphasised teamwork, which was an important thing. And each night, before a game, we'd all get in a circle, and somebody have some short, inspirational thing to say. And it kept us all together. So... we did that. Sounds funny in a profession, but we did it, for a year or two.

KC: Now when you moved to Grand Rapids, did he follow you there?

AZ: YES! YES! He became President of the League. So then we had different managers, the longest one, John Rawlings, who used to play with the New York Giants. He was a good manager, but his temperment was not like Max Careys'. But he was good manager.

KC: Hmmmm. How long was Mr. Rawlings your manager?

AZ: I think he was our manager for about four years.

KC: How was he different from Max?

AZ: He didn't have much patience, Max had a lot of patience. John, he was stricter. But he also produced good ball clubs.

KC: And how many years were you under Max?

AZ: (Repeats question.) I think four.

KC: Do you have good memories about him?

AZ: Well he cracked the whip. We might have blown a ball game this particular night, he'd say, "practice tomorrow morning at ten o'clock!" Try to correct the faults that we had made the night before. He was good, but he didn't have a sense of humor, like Max Carey did. And it's tough not having a sense of humor. No matter who you are, or what you do, a sense of humor carries you along way.

KC: Max, of course, was in charge of how often you practiced, right?

AZ: Oh, the manager runs the ball club.

KC: Could you tell me how often you did practice, and any other things the manager does?

AZ: Actually, once the League starts, the number of practices depends on how well you're playing. If you're winning ball games and stuff you don't have to practice very often. If you're in a slump, and you're losing ball games, or if you're in a hitting slump, then you come out for hitting practice, so it's hard to say how often. The style of play dictated it I guess.

KC: Yeah, I see. What other things did he do?

AZ: Well that was enough! To run a ball club is a big factor. We had chaperones to do other things. As you probably know.

KC: Yeah! I was just gonna ask you about your chaperone, Dottie Hunter?

AZ: Yes, Dottie was our chaperone. From the inception of our...from '44 to the end of our League, 1954. The first year of the League, she played first base for the Racine Belles. Then the next year, she became a chaperone because she was little bit older, and a bit slower, but she was good hitter, I guess. Anyhow, she became a WONDERFUL chaperone for the Chicks! Everybody thought the world of Dottie.

KC: That's great. Was your family happy that you had a female chaperone?

AZ: Well I think that added to a good operation.

KC: Did everyone on the team like her?

AZ: I can't think of anyone who didn't like Dottie Hunter.

KC: That's good. Was she more like a teacher, or a mother or a friend?

AZ: Well on the field, if someone got hurt, she was the like the trainer. She was in charge of the uniforms. She was in charge of booking reservations in hotels when you were on the road, and generally overlooking the ball players making sure they abided by the rules and stuff.

KC: Ok. Now what was considered to be a good chaperone, what kind of qualities did she need?

AZ: Well one that people liked, but one that could crack the whip once in awhile. And that was Dottie. She treated everybody fairly, no exceptions, and that made it nice.

KC: Well, that's a hard thing to do, also.

AZ: Yes. It is. But it's just like a parent, no showing partiality with their children. And that's one thing that was good in our family, they never showed partiality between my brother and me. And that was nice, you know. Kids are aware of those things, you know.

KC: Yeah, they are. Is there a big age difference between you and Frank?

AZ: Frank Jr., well there were three years and three months. He was older than me. It's hard to know that anybody was older than I...
(Laughter) There are still some.

KC: How did Dottie handle the violations of the rules and regulations?

AZ: Well, if there was a minor infraction, she would handle it herself, but if there was something kind of major, she'd report to John, our manager. And together they'd confront the ballplayer and work it out, whatever it was.

KC: Could you explain any of these situations?

AZ: Well there was a lot of fraternization going on.

KC: Between?

AZ: Between maybe one of our ballplayers, and someone on another ball club. Which is what they didn't want. They'd be warned, and if

AZ: they continued, maybe they would get a little, teeny fine or something. Most of the gals adhered to the rules you know.

KC: Hmm. Now I understand that, I cannot remember her last name, a young woman named Janet was thrown off the team for some infraction of the rules.

AZ: Off our team?

KC: Yeah.

AZ: Geez.

KC: (Tries to remember woman's last name)

AZ: Sweetie, you know, that does not ring a bell.

KC: No?

AZ: Unfortunately, no.

KC: Not in Grand Rapids either?

AZ: Not that I remember. That might be my memory too, you know.

(Laughs) I like to think of the good things.

KC: Well that's good. How did Dottie and Max get along?

AZ: They got along very well. Max thought the world of Dottie, I know.

And I think that Dottie respected him. They got along very well.

That's another important thing, you know. They had to cooperate and get along with each other.

KC: That affects the team, then?

AZ: You betcha!

KC: And in what way do you think it affected the team, by having them get along so well?

AZ: Say for instance, if they weren't getting along, maybe some of the gals would take up for the chaperone, and some would take up for the manager. That's not good, it pulls somebody apart. That sure didn't happen in our ball club.

KC: Then you were lucky that way.

AZ: Yeah, we were lucky.

KC: How did having a chaperone affect your social life at home and on the road?

AZ: Well, on the the road, you saw more of her, you saw more of everybody on the road, because you're so closely confined, you know, at the hotel and stuff. But, actually she'd join us to go out to eat after ball games and stuff. Then maybe once in awhile, maybe John would.

KC: What about when you were at home?

AZ: At home, you wouldn't see as much of her, of course. We were at the ballpark every day, and needless to say, we saw her everyday. But I mean, not in a social situation.

KC: Now I understand, from what you said earlier, that you and Dottie have become close friends over the years.

AZ: Over the years, you bet.

KC: Now how did your relationship with her change?

END OF TAPE ONE, SIDE TWO