

Rebirth, Renewal, and Recognition of the Other Major League

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E. H. Carr has said that the historian is engaged in a continuous process of moulding her facts to her interpretation and her interpretation to her facts. History cannot be written unless the historian can achieve some kind of contact with the mind of those about whom she is writing.

Reunion '82, the first national gathering of the All American Girls Baseball League, provided a rare opportunity to touch the collective psyches of this country's only female major league. In July of 1982, 175 veteran's of Philip K. Wrigley's wartime endeavor, arrived in Chicago, site of the League's birthplace. They came to recognize the 40th anniversary of the League's founding and to re-live and recall the days of their youth. They are the surviving members of baseball's most unusual chapter.

Chapter Two, the rebirth of interest in this eccentric league, began in earnest two years ago. June Peppas, winner of the the last game played by the female pros decided to reconstruct the loosely connected network of All American Girls. Peppas began a newsletter in hopes of stimulating interest in a national reunion. In the Fall of 1981, the Fort Wayne Women's Bureau held a women's sports fund-raising festival. The centerpiece of "Run, Jane, Run" was the first exhibition oldtimer's game of the Fort Wayne Daisies, the local entry in the women's pro league. Ruth Davis, former batgirl of the South Bend Blue Sox, joined the Daisies. Ruth signed a contract to play ball with the American Girls Baseball League in 1955 -a season that wasn't to be. During that weekend, Ruth listened to June Peppas' dream, then accepted the challenge to serve as chairperson of the first national reunion. Later, during the reunion banquet, Ruth Davis explained why she took on the enormous task of organizing the four day celebration. "As I stated in the newsletter," said Ruth, "because you were determined, because you were good, because you were an inspiration, then I didn't know that I couldn't do all the things that I've done." Ruth's effort was a tribute to the role models she appreciated as a child.

National Public Radio, reporters from the Chicago, Peoria, Rockford and Grand Rapids papers, Women's Sports Magazine and the crew of "Good Morning America" all came to observe and chronicle the event. Poor kids who's opportunity to change their situation in life, professional women who financed their education playing ball, and fans who were the 1940' version of "groupies" all arrived to share in a four day catharsis of tears and laughter and love. Stars and benchwarmers alike basked in the glory of their youth. They sang songs, told stories and reflected on the meaning of it all. But most of all they smiled and hugged their adopted sisters.

Time was forgotten in Chicago, until Saturday night when the veterans of the All American League spontaneously stood and joined hands in singing Auld Lang Syne. The family had come home.

The first reunion of the All American Girls Professional Ball League was a rare opportunity for this historian, a moment to make contact with the minds of pioneer women, women who through their example are participants not spectators. I understood what poet Alice Walker meant when she wrote, "In search of my mother's garden, I found my own."