

A LEAGUE OF LADIES

By Claire Kent



ILLUSTRATED BY CHAS

A 'NEW WOMAN' NOVEL

Copyright © 2000, Friendly Applications, Inc. - All Rights Reserved

Reluctant Press TG Publishers

This story is a work of fiction. Any similarity to persons living or dead is entirely coincidental. All situations and events herein presented are fictional, and intended only for the enjoyment of the reader. Neither the author nor the publisher advocate engaging in or attempting to imitate any of the activities or behaviors portrayed.

Persons seeking gender reassignment surgery, hormone therapy or any other medical and/or body-altering process should seek the counsel of a qualified therapist who follows the Benjamin Standards of Care for Gender Identity Disorder.

Protect Professional Fiction on the Internet!

We need *your* help! We want to keep providing our readers with low cost, professional quality fiction on the Internet. We spend thousands of dollars to edit, illustrate and typeset *each story*. It is important, therefore, that everyone works to help keep professional fiction alive on the Net.

This story is protected by US and International copyright law, and is owned exclusively by Friendly Applications, Inc, DBA Reluctant Press, which retains exclusive rights to publish these materials. The civil penalties for copyright infringement can be severe, including substantial monetary damages, injunctive relief, and liability for attorneys' fees incurred in prosecuting a case. If a court determines that the infringement was committed willfully, statutory damages of up to \$100,000 for each copyright infringed can be awarded. Even if not found to be acting willfully, a defendant can still be held liable for statutory damages of \$500 to \$20,000 for each copyright infringed. **These penalties apply even if money was not charged.** In addition, criminal penalties may be imposed if someone willfully infringes a copyrighted work for commercial advantage or private financial gain. This crime is punishable by up to five years imprisonment, up to \$250,000 in fines, or both. State civil damages and criminal penalties vary from state to state and country to country, but are always severe.

The best way to keep professional illustrated fiction available on the Internet is to do YOUR part to protect the author's and publisher's copyright. *You can be part of the solution.* Encourage others to purchase our stories. Never share the access rights you've purchased. **You** make the continued availability of TG fiction on the Internet possible. Thank you for your cooperation!

LEAGUE OF LADIES

By Claire Kent

December, 1996

To my Granddaughter Kimberly:

If you are reading this notebook, I have passed on. In my will, I explain that I have instructed my lawyer to keep custody of this book during my lifetime. He was told never to open it and not even to tell anyone of its existence. In the will, he is instructed to personally deliver it to you within 30 days of my death.

Darling, I'm going to miss you, and I know you're going to miss me, but I hope you won't be too sad for too long. I've had an amazing, wonderful life. We've had some wonderful times together while you've been growing up, and I hope you know how very proud I am of you.

The reason I'm writing this book is to tell you the story of my life... the rest of the story. I've been pleased with your interest in our family's history, and especially my years with the All-American Girl's Professional Baseball League.

You're a perceptive young woman. I think you could always tell that I was just a bit hesitant, and seemed to be holding something back when we talked about my youth. You were polite enough never to press me directly, and for that, I'm grateful. But I don't want to leave this world without passing on the truth to someone.

I hope you're prepared for what you're going to find in the pages ahead... I assure you that as fantastic as the story is, every single word of it is true.

So here it is, my story. Just remember: anything in life is possible, if you want it badly enough.

With all my love,
Grandma Susan

As you know, I was born in September, 1925, in Evanston, Illinois. You also know that I was the second of two children.

What you haven't known, until now, is the name that was inscribed on my birth certificate:

Charles Steven Patrick.

Right now, you're probably asking yourself why any sane parents would give a baby girl a boy's name. The answer is really simple. They didn't. I was born a boy.

Remember when you were putting together a family history scrapbook? I had plenty of pictures of myself from my adult years to give you, but from my youth, there were a handful of infant and baby pictures, and that was about it. From about age three to the time I entered the league, you only found a couple of shots of a sad-looking, curly headed girl wearing some very plain looking dresses, remember? Well, that was me, but I was all boy underneath then.

You never knew your great-grandfather. He was a kind man, a loving man, but also a very weak man. Even though Evanston was then, as it is now, a mostly middle- and upper-class suburb of Chicago, it did have its poorer section, and we were one of those families on the wrong side of the tracks. Your great-grandfather could never keep a job, though he kept getting them. But in the long run, he always seemed to be bullied by the stronger men of this world. I think that's how his drinking problem began. While he drifted from job to job, your great-grandmother managed a laundry service, keeping the sheets and clothes of the better off folks clean, fresh and sparkling white. God, it was hot, steamy, brutal hard work- but it kept food on our table and a roof over our head.

Your great-grandmother, my mother, was truly the strong one in our family. Money was always in short supply, and it became even scarcer once the Great Depression began. What all of this is leading up to is that she couldn't see wasting money on boy's clothes, not when there were perfectly good dresses hanging in the closet that my older sister Mary had outgrown. She also couldn't see any point in wasting money on hair-cuts, so my hair was allowed to grow. "Besides, he has such pretty curls," she would say, stroking my forehead, a wisp of a smile crossing her otherwise sad face.

This was one of the few things my parents used to argue about. Normally, my father couldn't find the fortitude to stand up to my mother, but he put his foot down, or tried to, on this issue. I think he really began to worry when he saw Mary and I having a tea party with a couple of Mary's dolls. "You're going to make the boy into a sissy!" he exclaimed. But my mother insisted that wouldn't happen. "We'll dress him as a boy once he starts school," she said, "and you can get him interested in something manly, like baseball."

What a gift of an idea that was. Little did she know that baseball was to become my passion and such a key part of my destiny.

My father must have skipped a couple of trips to the bootlegger's, but somehow he came up with a couple of slightly-used gloves, a couple of bats, and some baseballs. We began playing catch in the yard, then advanced to hitting and fielding practice. It seemed that I had a natural talent for it. "Maybe you'll be in the big leagues one day, son," he said.

The big leagues! I had started following the adventures of the major leaguers on the radio and in the newspapers. Once or twice a summer, as a real treat, father and I would take the train into Chicago, and I would get to watch my heroes, the Cubs, play at Wrigley Field.

Well, mother kept her word, and I was able to put aside the dresses when I started first grade. As the years passed, I forgot about my flirtation with girlish things and baseball grew into the all-consuming force in my life. I played from the time I got home from school until dinnertime, and when there was enough light, I went back and kept playing until it got too dark. In the summertime, the other kids on the block and I would play 12 hours a day. By the time I was in the mid-teens, I had set my life's goal: to be a star in the major leagues. The baseball Hall of Fame had opened in 1939, and I resolved to earn a place there someday. If I was going to dream, why not dream big?

After all, I was the best player on just about any team I was on. I didn't have size or power on my side. My mother was 5-foot-9, my father was just 5-foot-5, and I ended up in between at 5-foot-7. I couldn't hit the ball out of the park too often, but I could spray it to all fields, I could run like the wind, and I could catch any ball that was hit within a country mile of me.

By the time I finished my junior year in high school, in the spring of 1942, the professional scouts were beginning to look me over. The country had gone to war, and my father was dying. Too much alcohol had finally ruined his liver. When the chance came for me to play professional ball, concern about money was greater than ever in our household, so my mother was more than happy to allow me to quit school and get started in pro ball.

My first contract was with Springfield in the old Three-I League. I was, if I may say so, something of a sensation that summer. I won the league batting championship at .397 and led all outfielders in putouts, assists and fielding average.

As I mentioned, there was a war going on, and when 1943 rolled around, I figured I was headed into the Army. I went in to sign up before being drafted... imagine my excitement when I was declared 4-F due to a ruptured eardrum.

So it was back to the ball fields for another season. This time I moved up to Class A ball, Wilkes-Barre, Pennsylvania, in the Eastern League. I was just three points shy of the league batting championship and was second in the league in stolen bases. By 1944, when I signed a contract with Milwaukee in the American Association, one of the very top minor leagues, I figured I was on my way to the majors for sure. I was only 19 years old.

I batted .302 that summer, fielded well and stole plenty of bases. I figured I had my ticket to the big leagues for sure in '45. After all, that was the year the St. Louis Browns signed a one-armed player. But I guess my size and lack of power worked against me, and I was sent back to Milwaukee.

I hurt my shoulder in spring training, was on the disabled list for the first six weeks of the season, and never got on track after that. I only got into 98 games that summer, and finished the year hitting only .259. For the first time, I found myself feeling discouraged. They were sending teenagers to the big leagues that summer, and bringing back old men who had retired years before, but I never got a shot.

I came to spring training in 1946 with a renewed attitude. I was starting my third season in Milwaukee, but my shoulder was healed, and I was still just 21 years old. I told myself that it was just a matter of time before I got my shot at the bigs. But I had a lousy spring training and started the season on the bench.

The first week of the season, I got into just two games, both as a pinch-hitter, and struck out both times. I had a feeling of dread about what was coming... and I was right. Do you remember that scene in the movie, "Bull Durham," where the player gets released? The manager asks him to come into his office, has him close the door, and tells him to sit down. "This the toughest job a manager has," he begins, then clears his throat, stammers, and continues, "The ball club had decided to go in a different direction..." Well, that was the speech I got, almost word for word.

I remember fighting back the tears as I cleaned out my locker; the next several hours after that are a hazy dream. Suddenly, it seemed like my real shot at the big leagues was gone. After all, the war was now over, and all the regulars who had been in the service, like Joe DiMaggio, Ted Williams and Bob Feller, were back to reclaim their jobs. What's more, it looked like baseball was going to become racially integrated; that was the year Jackie Robinson signed a minor league contract with the Brooklyn Dodgers. I was all for everyone getting a chance and knew that racism was totally wrong. But, damn it, that meant more guys going after the job I wanted more than anything! I don't know how long I just sat in front of my locker, dreading having to take off my uniform for the last time, trying to sort things out, trying to figure out what to do next.

I know that I left the ballpark in a cab and ended up in one of the seediest parts of Milwaukee, drowning my sorrows in a bar. I got thrown out of a couple of other places, not just because I was too drunk, but I was so damn mad, snarling at bartenders, breaking glasses.

As I was wandering, or maybe it was staggering along, looking for one more watering hole, I spotted a small sign propped in the dirty window of a little storefront. It said something like: "Fortune Teller- Your true destiny revealed by Madame Mazurka." I don't know why I felt compelled to step inside, but I did. It looked like something out of an old horror movie. There were cobwebs and dust everywhere, and the old wooden floorboards creaked loudly. At first, I could hardly see a thing in the dim light, but as my eyes adjusted, I saw this wizened old woman who wore long flowing robes and a turban.

She looked like she belonged in a movie, for sure... her eyes were like a couple of black marbles. She had a deeply lined, craggy face with a long, beaked nose. I swear that nose had a wart on the end of it. A couple of wisps of gray hair were sticking out from under the turban. Her fingernails were inch-long talons painted a gleaming black. She wore a series of bracelets on each arm. I thought they were so heavy, she must find it difficult to lift her arms. But she could... and did.

The old woman beckoned to me with one of her long, bony fingers, and said in a creaky voice, "Sit down, son, I have the answers to your troubles." There was actually a crystal ball on the table, but she didn't make any kind of show of gazing into it. "You're troubled, and you've been drinking to forget your troubles," she said. I chucked and replied, "That's not too hard to figure out." The words were slurred just slightly.

"You've lost your job," she continued. "Yes? Go on," I muttered, thinking that maybe she was on to something after all.

“You’re a baseball player, and your team has let you go, and it’s breaking your heart. Your desire to make good in baseball burns deeply in your soul.”

I had been slumped in the chair, staring off into space, but now I sat bolt upright. “You’re right, you’re absolutely right,” I agreed, surprised. “Ever since I was a boy, it’s been my dream to play in the big leagues and earn a place in the Hall of Fame.”

She eyed me steadily. “Your goals are not modest ones, young man.” She paused, and then asked a fateful question. “Are you willing to do anything to attain them?”

I figured it was worth playing along. “Sure, why not?” I said. “But I have to warn you, I’m just about broke.”

“Money is not a problem,” she said. “I just need two dollars to cover the cost of the herbs and other ingredients I will need.” I shrugged, reached into my pocket for two crumpled dollar bills and tossed them on the table. “Go to it,” I said. She disappeared behind some thick, musty curtains and was out of sight for at least ten minutes. I heard her muttering to herself in a strange language I couldn’t understand. She finally launched into some sort of odd chant. I probably would have left if I hadn’t given her the two bucks.

When she finally reappeared, she handed me a heavy, wooden cup with a thick, greenish potion in it. “Drink this,” she ordered. “It will make it possible for all your dreams to come true.”

“What will it do, make me the second coming of Babe Ruth?”

“Not exactly,” she said. “But I guarantee it will make it possible for your wishes to be realized.”

What the Hell, I thought. I had put away enough beer to loosen any inhibitions I might have had, so I lifted the cup to my lips and began to drink. The stuff tasted terrible- cold, bitter and spicy. I choked it down, thanked her and left.

I stumbled back to my hotel room about 1 a.m., took off my clothes, and climbed into bed. I almost immediately fell asleep, but it was a troubled sleep, filled with strange dreams. I was playing ball, then I was back in my childhood wearing dresses, then I was playing ball in a dress! I came to briefly a couple of hours later, and I figured these dreams were the product of all the beer I had consumed plus the weird potion. I rolled over and went back to sleep.

I had anticipated a hangover when I came to, but the thing I remember is how good I felt. Rested, refreshed, and as I was about to find out, reborn.

I sensed that something was different, but didn’t know exactly what at first. I reached up with my left hand to rub the sleepiness from my eyes and felt my arm brush against something that hadn’t been there when I went to bed a few hours before. The left hand reached down, the right one shot up; both began exploring. They were at first tentative, then with agitation and surprise I discovered that I had grown a pair of breasts overnight!

By now, I was wide awake. When I sat up, my hair fell across my face. That was the next big shock. I had gone to bed with a crew cut. It was still dark in my room; I hadn’t turned on any lights, and the shades were tightly drawn. I remember thinking it must

be some kind of dream, or nightmare... but something inside told me that it was all real, that it was truly happening.

When I threw the covers back and got out of bed, I felt, well- I wish I could find a better word to describe it- different! I'm not sure how exactly to explain what it was like compared to my former body, except kind of top heavy. "This is so strange," I muttered to myself, loudly enough to realize that my voice was suddenly a few octaves higher. I groped toward the bathroom, still in the dark.

I flung open the bathroom door, flipped on the light and found myself staring into the mirror and what I had half-feared, half-expected to see: the face of a young, attractive girl staring back at me. A girl who seemed to be about my height and coloring; who had some of my same features, but most definitely a girl.

My hair was now shoulder-length, which accentuated its natural curliness. My eyes looked the same, but now they were topped by thick black lashes and delicate, arched brows. My cheekbones were more prominent, my nose was smaller and now was up-turned. My lips seemed to be fuller and a deeper pink.

"My God, this couldn't have happened," I muttered to myself, while I stared at the evidence of what most undeniably had happened.

At this moment, I realized that I needed to pee. I turned toward the toilet bowl, reached inside my pajama bottoms, and found nothing. My manhood was gone. "Of course," I sighed, pulling the bottoms down as I sat. I tried my best to relax, and soon heard a reassuring stream against the bowl. "At least the equipment seems to work," I remember muttering to myself.

After fumbling around with a wad of toilet paper and doing my best to clean myself up, I pulled up the bottoms and stood up. I washed my hands and unbuttoned the pajama top. Two firm, round breasts were staring back at me from the mirror, with large, pink, erect nipples in the middle of them. "What a pair of hooters!" I thought. "Too bad they're mine."

I staggered back to the bed, sat down, and tried to think this through. I knew it had to have been the potion from Madame Mazurka that had done this... but how? And why? I hadn't really expected anything at all, and if the concoction had worked, why wasn't I suddenly six and a half feet tall with a build that would allow me to bash 50 home runs a season? Why the hell was I a girl?

Not knowing what else to do, I took a shower and discovered new sensations of pleasure as I felt the warm water running over my breasts for the first time, and then the roughness of the towel as it rubbed against them while I was drying off. All of this was very interesting, but it was only a momentary distraction from my main quest-trying to figure out what had happened to me and why, and finding out if the change was a permanent one.

I didn't have any girl's clothes, of course, but I found that a pair of my jeans and one of my sport shirts would fit after a fashion, though the jeans were pretty baggy at the waist and too tight around my suddenly widened hips. I left the motel and caught a cab back to the street where I thought Madame Mazurka's was located, intending to confront her and demand to be changed back.

Imagine my shock when we pulled up to the storefront and found it to be empty. “Are you sure this was the place you wanted, miss?” the cabbie asked as I stood on the sidewalk, a dumbfounded look on my face. I pushed open the door, which was unlocked and seemed to be ready to fall off its rusty hinges. The place was empty, dark and thick with dust and cobwebs. It looked like no one had set foot inside in 20 years. “Well, I- I thought so,!” I stammered as I walked back to the cab, a bit unsteadily, as my shoes were now too big for my feet. The reality began to sink in... I was going to be female for the rest of my life.

I got back in, momentarily wondering why the driver had gotten out to open the door for me. Then I realized it was because I was a girl now. It was my first exposure to the fact that I had lost something, but I had also gained something. It was all going to be a matter of perspective in the challenging days ahead.

I thanked the cabbie for his courtesy, and asked him to take me to the train station. I had to get home... home to Mother. She would know what to do. On the train back to Evanston, I took a space pair of socks from my suitcase and stuffed them into the feet of my shoes. I figured that would at least keep me from walking out of them. For the rest of the trip, though, I mostly stared out the window, trying to figure out what had happened to me. And what was going to happen in the rest of my life.

I only had the one suitcase. Wanted to keep thinking, I walked the mile-plus from the train station to our house. I hoped Mother would be home from work, as it was getting on toward evening. Ever since Dad had died in the fall of ‘43, she had lived alone in the place during the baseball season; I still spent the winters with her. I was walking up the porch, about to reach for the front door and step inside, when I realized that I’d better ring the bell. This was, to all appearances, a stranger standing on my mother’s doorstep.

“Yes?” she said pleasantly as she opened the door. “Can I help you, miss?”

“Mother!” I exclaimed, “It’s me, Charles.”

“Is this some kind of sick joke?” she demanded. I was able to give her enough details of our private family history to convince her that I was her son, now her second daughter. I filled her in on the amazing past 24 hours: my getting released, my trip from bar to bar, finally winding up at Madame Mazurka’s, waking up in a new body... “And that’s all I know,” I said, my voice thick with emotion. At this point I dissolved into tears.

She held me and tried to soothe me for a long time, gently stroking my hair and saying, “There, there,” again and again. It was an unusually tender moment from a woman who hadn’t shown her softer, maternal side very often when I was growing up.

When I was cried out, the resolute common sense I had known best returned. “Now, Charles... I guess we can’t call you Charles anymore. You’re going to have to get a hold of yourself! You know what I’ve always told you about life- you have to play the hand you’re dealt. That means making the best of things. If you’re a girl, you’re going to have to figure out how to make a new life for yourself.” She helped me push the stray strands of hair out of my face. “Don’t worry, I’m going to be here to help you as best I can.” She was thoughtful for a moment. “This is pretty amazing. I still find it a

bit hard to believe myself- and I wouldn't believe it, except for the evidence of my own eyes."

"But what will I do?" I wailed, the tears beginning to flow again. "My baseball career, obviously, is over."

"Not necessarily."

"What do you mean?"

"Well, how about the girl's league?"

I thought for just a moment, then realized she was talking about the women's professional baseball league, which had been started in 1943 by Philip Wrigley, the chewing gum magnate who owned my beloved Cubs. He feared that men's professional baseball might disappear during the war, and saw the league as providing an alternative.

The men kept going after a fashion, with the over the hill and 4-F players, but the girls developed a following all their own. Soon the league was thriving. The players had come from all over the country, although the teams were concentrated in a handful of smaller Midwestern cities.

"We'll make some phone calls tomorrow," Mother said. "But first, I'm going to have to go shopping for you. Your sister's married and living 500 miles away. That means she's not here anymore to give you her hand-me-downs."

For the first time since I had awakened that morning, I smiled and laughed. My eyes were swollen from so much crying, but now, I wiped away the tears. "No, I guess she isn't, Mom," I said with just a bit of hesitation. "I think things are going to work out, somehow. I don't know how to explain it to you, but I've just got the strongest feeling that it's all going to be okay."

Now she smiled. "We call that feminine intuition, honey," she said. "It's sort of a sixth sense that provides you extra awareness of things that are happening around you."

"I've been thinking about a new name," I said, continuing to feel my spirits build. "How about Susan?"

"Sounds good to me. Any particular reason?"

"No, I just like it." I paused, then said a bit sheepishly, "And I thought maybe I looked a little bit like Susan Hayward."

She eyed me carefully. "You know, you do," she said, smiling. By this point, she had followed me to my bedroom. I opened my suitcase and began putting my clothes away. "I guess I'm not going to be able to wear these things anymore," I said. "No," she agreed. "Like I said, I'll go shopping for you tomorrow."

I unzipped my shaving kit and held up my razor and shaving mug. "And I'm not going to need these anymore," I declared.

"Wrong, dear," she said.

"What?" I asked, stroking my soft, hairless chin and cheeks. "I don't find any trace of a beard."

She smiled, a bit wearily. “No, you don’t have a beard anymore, dear,” she said. “But you’re going to have to shave your legs, and under your arms.”

I sighed and said, “I’ve got a lot to absorb.”

The next day, mother went out to a women’s shop in our neighborhood and came home with four dresses, a couple of blouses and skirts, a couple of pairs of shoes (one casual, one pair of high heels), some panties, and my first bra and girdle.

I recall asking Mother if she really had to wear these things every single day. Kimberly, you’ve got to understand that lingerie in the ‘40s was nothing like it is today—soft, silky, colorful, lacy and lightweight. These things were plain white cotton, the bra cups were cone-shaped, and the girdle was oh-so-heavy! About all mother had to say as I tried the girdle on for the first time was, “Get used to it, dear, get used to it.”

Then she help up the bra, my first. “This is a brassiere, dear.”

“I know,” I answered. “I have seen one before. But how do you put it on?”

She showed me how to bend forward and let my breasts fall into the cups, then stand up and fasten it. Not too tough.

I stood looking at myself in my Mother’s full-length mirror; I was clad only in bra and girdle. The garments were different, and not all that comfortable. I had to admit that they molded my body into an attractive shape, though. I thought, if I were still a guy, I wouldn’t mind dating this girl at all. First I sized myself up head on, then turned from side to side. Not bad at all, I thought. Mother caught me admiring myself and warned, “Don’t fall in love with yourself, Charles, er, Susan, dear.”

“You can read my mind, can’t you?” I said, laughing. I absently fingered the garters at the bottom of the girdle and asked, “What are these for?”

Mother said, “I’m glad you brought that up.” She reached into one of the shopping bags and pulled out a pair of nylon stockings. “Those are garters, and they hold your stockings up.”

I started to protest, but she said, “Now look, Susan, you don’t know how lucky you are! Nylons are just back on sale, now that the wartime restrictions are easing. I only had a couple of pairs before the war. Ever since, we’ve had to make do with cotton or rayon hose, and they’ve been terrible. They bag and sag. Nylons are great.”

My mind wasn’t fully prepared, but my legs were ready at least. I had showered that morning, and as Mother had instructed, I had shaved the fine hair off of my legs. I only nicked myself once. That aside, I had to admit that I enjoyed the new, sexy feeling of my smooth, hairless legs rubbing together for the first time.

Mother showed me how to roll the stocking, bend my foot, slip it over my toes, unroll it, smooth it, and attach it to the gathers. I felt a tingle of excitement in my legs as the sheer material caressed them for the first time.

I didn’t have too much trouble figuring out how to put on a slip and a dress. It was a simple pullover, with no back zipper. The high heels gave me some trouble. I think being an athlete helped me adapt fairly quickly, though. It was a lot like suddenly having breasts. I just had to get used to the shift in my center of gravity.

As I examined myself critically in the mirror, Mother said, "I think you've dealt with enough for today, Susan. We'll save makeup for tomorrow."

"Makeup?" I said, a little incredulous. "Now, Mother—"

She cut me off again. "Now Susan dear, you may not wear it every day- or very often at all, like me- but it's something that you need to know."

I sighed. "I supposes so."

Mother began to fix dinner, while I surveyed the rest of the purchases she had made. Before I knew it, she was calling me to eat. I sat down, remembering to smooth my dress as I sat, and looked at the half-empty plate of hamburger steak, mashed potatoes and peas she had placed before me.

"Uh, Mother..." I began.

Once again, she was reading my mind. "I know, I know, you want to know what I've done with the rest of your dinner. There's more if you want it, Susan, but if you give it a chance, I think you will find this to be enough to satisfy you."

I guess my stomach was smaller than it had been, because I even found myself leaving a few bites on the plate. "Not that it wasn't delicious, Mother, but for some reason—"

"You're full, right?"

"Right."

She smiled, then reached across the table and patted the back of my hand. "Trust me, dear, I'm going to be right here for you." After dinner, I tried to unwind with that day's sports page but found myself dozing off, and agreed with Mother's suggestion that I head to bed early.

The night before, I had slept in one of my old pairs of pajamas. Now they were just too bulky. So, somewhat reluctantly, I put on one of the two nightgowns Mother had purchased for me. It was an ankle-length, white cotton one with a pattern of small pink roses and a small pink satin bow on the bosom. It had elbow-length flutter sleeves with lacy trim. I walked down the hall to Mother's bedroom to wish her a good night.

She looked up at me and smiled. "What is it?" I asked.

"Don't get upset, dear," she said. "It's just that I think you're really pretty. And even if this isn't what you wished for... well, I was proud of you as my son, and I'm equally proud of you as my daughter."

I found myself blushing- a new experience. I stammered a thank-you and headed off to bed. I was about to climb under the covers, when I remembered Mother's suggestion that I brush my hair 100 times before going to bed. I didn't see the point, but something compelled me to do it. And besides, I didn't feel as sleepy as I had before getting undressed.

I sat down in front of the vanity that had once been Mary's, and that Mother and I had moved into my room that afternoon. I looked at the strange assortment of cosmet-

ics, jewelry, perfumes, brushes and more that was laid out before me. For a moment I felt overwhelmed, but I picked up the hairbrush and told myself to go ahead.

As I counted off the strokes, I noticed it getting progressively easier to bring the brush through my hair. I realized this would make it easier to take care of this new, longer hair; I also noticed it was developing a nice luster. The repetitiveness of the action was helping me to relax, and by the time I was into the nineties, I was fighting to stay awake. Before I knew it, I mumbled, "One hundred" to myself and tumbled into bed, I pulled up the covers and immediately fell into a deep, contented sleep.

That next morning I began making some phone calls until I reached the offices of the women's league. The secretary I talked to told me that normally a girl had to make the cut in a local tryout before earning an invitation to the league's spring training. But the league's tryout camps were over for now, and the spring camp was set to start the following Monday, in Pascalousa, Mississippi. I got passed along to a scout, and talked myself up as best I could. I finally won agreement to be allowed to come down. I would have to pay my own way and would only be reimbursed for my expenses if I earned a place on one of the teams in the league.

The scout handed me back to the secretary, who filled me in on the travel and lodging arrangements. "There's one other thing I need to tell you, dear," she said. "I hope you understand that this league puts as much stress on femininity as it does on ball playing. Frankly, it's part of how we get the fans into the parks. They want girls who can play like boys, but who still look like girls. Do you understand?"

"Oh, sure," I said, thinking back over everything Mother had shown me, and how much I still had to learn about being female. I realized that I was absent-mindedly wrapping and unrolling one of my curls around a finger. The secretary continued: "But don't worry. We have a few days of classes before the season starts; it's sort of a charm school to help you polish your social graces."

I thanked her and hung up the phone. "Mother!" I called. "I've got a tryout next week. And we better get started as soon as we can on teaching me about makeup."

Right after lunch I found myself sitting before my vanity, as Mother showed me the basics of applying lipstick, mascara, powder and more. I felt another of those electric shudders as I coated my lips with the creamy red wax for the first time and blotted them on a tissue. "You know, Susan," Mother observed, "you're kind of lucky."

"How's that?" I asked.

"You could have become a homely girl, but you're not. Like I said last night, you're really quite pretty."

I gave her a stern look and said, "I hope you're not going to be trying to find a boyfriend for me just yet." We both laughed.

"No, you've got enough other things to deal with right now," she said. Then she pulled out a small box. It was wrapped in plain brown paper.

That was my introduction to feminine protection.

Kimberly, you wouldn't believe what a hush-hush subject that was in those days! And remember, I had been a 21-year-old male, and only had the vaguest idea of how

the female reproductive system worked. Thank God Mother was open and patient. Things have changed a lot in a couple of generations. By the time your Mother was a girl, a lot of the taboos had already faded- but let me ask you this: Did your mother ever tell you about sanitary napkin belts? Lord, they were a pain! They dug into your skin, especially if you were a bit bloated; they never kept their shape, and turned gray after a couple of washings... and they didn't even hold the napkin in place too well. She had to deal with these things until she was a teen. I really think that when I went through menopause, the thing I was most relieved about was getting rid of the damn belt!

But I digress. My mother spent the next few days trying to teach me everything she knew about being a lady. As I said, she was a working woman, so she usually didn't have much time for all of what she sometimes regarded as frillery, but she always got dressed up and made up for church every Sunday, for weddings and funerals, and other special occasions.

Sunday morning arrived before we knew it; it was time for me to catch my train south. I put on one of the simple dresses mother had chosen for me, a basic blue one-piece, took one final check of my makeup, and carried my suitcase and equipment bag to the door.

Mother got her brownie camera and took a few pictures before I left. I know you have them now. You see me standing there a bit stiffly, suitcase in one side, bats, glove, balls in the open bag on the other side. You've know that I was on my way to spring training, but what you haven't known, until now, is that I had been female for four days. Are you surprised I looked kind of nervous and uncomfortable?

You can fill in more of the story here from what you already know; how I tore up spring training and soon found myself assigned to the Rockford team.

What I haven't shared with you, though, were my true feelings as I put on the uniform for the first time. First, I had to get used to the name on my chest, or, if I was honest with myself, my bosom. The circular emblem read, "Rockford Robins."

So I was a Robin. Not a Giant, or a Cub, or a Tiger, or any of those other, mostly masculine names proudly displayed across the front of uniforms in the men's major leagues. I was a Robin. Okay, I thought, this I can get used to, but playing baseball in a dress?

As you know, they were simple, one-piece garments with off-center buttons. There was a wide belt at the waist, and at the time I joined the league, a skirt that ended well above the knee. A bit risqué for 1946, yes? When the league had started three years earlier, the skirts had been much longer. However, the needs of the game (and the gate receipts) won out over modesty. The pitchers, especially, had a tough time dealing with those long skirts. I took a deep breath as I stood before my locker. "Oh, well," I thought. "At least the cap and spikes are the same."

A question from the girl changing next to me snapped me out of my deep thoughts. "Have you played much baseball?" she asked.

I smiled. "A little," I said.

I tried to go out on the field without a superior attitude. Yes, I had spent two years in triple-A ball, and yes, these were a bunch of girls, but I could see most of them were very serious about the game and committed to playing it well.

I didn't have too hard a time adapting to this new league, and my new body. Even if I was a half-step slower than I had been before the change, thanks to my new pelvic structure, the bases were only 72 feet apart, instead of 90 feet. The ball was larger, somewhere in between a real baseball and a softball, which made it a more inviting target, though harder to hit for distance. But since I had been a line-drive, spray to all fields hitter of singles, doubles and triples anyway, that didn't matter too much to me.

There were even some famous ex-big league players managing in the league, which lent it an air of credibility. Rockford's Manager, Bob Wellington, wasn't one of the famous, but he was more successful than his better-known competition. He was a skinny, silver-haired, wily guy, who I quickly took a liking to despite his no-nonsense approach. We established sort of a distant father-daughter relationship, I guess.

If Bob was our surrogate father, Mary Parker, our chaperon, became my surrogate mom. I've told you a bit about the chaperons. They really had charge of us for all our off-field hours. They had to approve where we lived, any public appearances outside the ballpark, any dates and the like.

I was first introduced to Mary at charm school that spring. Ah, the charm school... one of the most ridiculed memories of the league, but for me, it was a small Godsend. Not that I didn't take some ribbing over it. A lot of the other girls were on the tomboyish side, and a lot of them had come from unsophisticated small towns, but at least



they had 20 years or more practice at being girls. I was still brand new to it and needed all the help I could get!

We learned how to walk while balancing books on our heads, were taught how to apply makeup (I learned a lot of things Mother hadn't known about or had time to teach me); how to get in and out of a car gracefully while wearing a dress, which fork to use when at a formal meal... all kinds of things.

They were quite explicit about things. For instance, I find in a copy of the charm school guidelines that we were told that our "beauty kit" should always contain the following: "Cleansing cream; lipstick; rouge-medium; cream deodorant; mild astringent; face powder; hand lotion and hair remover."

And in case we didn't know how to use these things, we were given a step-by-step beauty routine for after the game that included showering, applying and removing cleansing cream, washing the face, applying astringent, applying rouge "moderately but carefully"; applying lipstick "with moderate taste"; applying eye makeup "if considered desirable"; and applying powder.

But if you think this was just a detailed beauty handbook and course, consider what the booklet had to say about the eyes: "They bespeak your innermost thoughts... Perhaps no other feature of your face has more to do with the impression of beauty, sparkle and personality which you portray." Similar approaches were given to our hair as well as our hands, face and teeth. Advice on putting together a basic wardrobe, and a condensed course of etiquette completed the handbook.

As I write this, more memories of that week are coming back. Once we had mastered walking with the books on a level surface, we had to walk up and down stairs with them. And I remember now how much importance they put on sitting in a chair gracefully! As I said, I had to be reminded to smooth my skirt before being seated, but at least I didn't just throw myself into the chair like a lot of those farm girls.

Besides learning about cutlery, there was another lesson that I found valuable when we had to go to Rotary and Kiwanis luncheons, and the like. That was how to eat more daintily. My table manners weren't bad, for a male, but I had to break myself of the habit of diving in so aggressively with knife and fork. "Take smaller bites, dear," and "Chew, for goodness sakes, chew," I recall them telling me over and over.

Charm school was also where I was introduced to wearing gloves. I'm not talking about the big, bulky, padded things that keep your hands warm when it's freezing outside. I'm talking about simple, elegant white kid gloves that covered your hands and sent a message to others that you were, or at least aspired to be, a lady! I'm still kind of sad that gloves have gone out of style. I guess their last real heyday was during the years when Jackie Kennedy was first lady.

I discovered during spring camp that although my height was unchanged, my weight had dropped from 175 pounds to 135. My muscles were smaller, and the weight was also distributed differently, of course. I stayed at that weight all through my nine years in the league, and I'm proud to say that 50 years later, I'm only three pounds heavier.

Why did I take to the charm school so wholeheartedly, when most of the other girls laughed it off or looked at it as something unpleasant to be endured? I can't give you a clear answer, unfortunately. After all, I hadn't wanted to become a girl. All I wanted was a chance to keep playing ball, and as I write these words for you, I'm suddenly realizing that's what it was all about. If you had to be feminine to be a success in the league, then by God, I was going to be as feminine as I could be. It was what Mother had always taught me: make the best of things. Play the hand you're dealt.

Out on the field, I quickly showed that I still had what it took. My new body was lighter and my strength was less as a girl. But there seemed to be other, compensating changes. My batting eye was always good, and now it seemed more acute.

This was part of a general sharpening of my senses. I had, up to now, always "played within myself," as the saying these days goes. In other words, I kept my focus on myself. But now, my attention was more on the entire field, and the players on both teams. I found that I had a sixth sense that allowed me to "read" when another girl was tired, nervous or stressed. Baseball is a thinking game, and I can't tell you how much this helped me in the seasons to come.

If I wasn't as strong, or quite as fast as I had been before, I still had as much strength as most of the girls, and was speedier than many. I learned that the league liked base-stealing, so I got in a lot of practice that spring. It was a good thing, too. It helped to toughen the skin on my thighs. Those uniform dresses didn't offer a lot of protection, you know.

Even my sharper sense of smell seemed to be an asset. I swear I could detect fear in opposing players this way. It always helped to gain a psychological edge.

When we got to Rockford for the first time a few days before the season started, Mary Parker helped me to find a room for rent in the home of a very nice older couple. I quickly settled into a routine. We had to spend most of the morning at the ballpark for batting and fielding practice and strategy sessions. We had just a few free hours in the afternoon, then our games at night.

If Rockford wasn't the major leagues, it was a great community, with lots of hard-working people who I found loved to come to Beyer Stadium, often called the "Robins' Roost", and root, root, root for the home town team.

I played hard and I played well. I won the league batting championship that year and was third in the league in stolen bases. I was earning all of 45 dollars a week as a rookie, which might not sound very good to you, but in an era when a working woman was lucky to take home 20 dollars a week, believe me dear, that meant a lot.

And it seemed I never could forget that I was, indeed, a woman now. I got used to dealing with my long hair, which was always a mess after the game, no matter how hard I tried to keep it looking good.

Unlike some of the girls, I never got fined for not wearing makeup in public. You know that publicity photo of me and one of the other girls, Hattie Rosenbaum? She's holding a compact for me while I touch up my lipstick. It wasn't quite like that; but they always made sure we kept to feminine ways.

I think I gave you my copy of the league handbook; have you read the part where it talks about the contrast of feminine-looking women playing baseball as hard, and as well as men, as being one of the prime selling points of the league?

It was my first or second season in the league when the team bus broke down a couple of miles outside of Rockford; we were heading home from a road trip. A lot of us wore shorts on the bus if it was warm, or men's jeans (there weren't any women's jeans back then). When it was finally determined the old clunker couldn't be fixed right away, and we would have to walk back to town, Mary stuck to the rules and made us change back to skirts. Oh, there was a lot of griping, but when the local newspaper heard about it and got a picture of us on our walk, Mary held it up for all for us in the clubhouse the next day. She thanked us for helping to uphold an image.

The worst thing- the very worst thing about playing ball as a woman- was my period. Most of the time my cramps weren't too bad, but sometimes they were pretty painful. And retaining a few extra pounds of fluid didn't help much. But in the pros, they always tell you've got to play through the pain, whatever the source. So I would grit my teeth, reach for the bottle of Midol in my locker, and press on.

As I said, I didn't have a lot of free time. The hours I did have to myself I usually spent napping, writing letters home to Mother, or trying to avoid helping Mrs. Semon-sky, whose house I was living in, with the housekeeping and cooking. She sweetly tried to ask for my help a few times, but when I told her I was too busy, or too tired, she didn't press it.

I told her I really didn't know how to cook, and she asked with some puzzlement, "Didn't your mother teach you these things, dear?" I told her Mom was working a lot while I was little and wasn't home much, which was true.

I didn't do a lot of socializing with the other girls during that first season; I still didn't feel comfortable yet relating to other women as a woman. But sometimes we did get together in groups. We liked to go to the movies and play cards, mostly poker. I guess I was afraid to get too close to any of the girls at first. In part, I was probably afraid of doing or saying something that would betray my amazing secret.

I was also afraid of where my unresolved sexual feelings might lead me. In the wake of what happened four years later, I think I was right. You're probably curious about my sexual orientation at this point. Frankly, so was I.

In high school, as a boy, I had never really given girls much thought; as you know, baseball really was my life. If there had been any girls I had the time and inclination to think about, I'm sure I would have been too shy to do anything about it. I did go to the movies and daydreamed about some of the stars of that era- Rita Hayworth, Vivian Leigh, Carole Lombard- but that was about it.

Now, as a female, I wasn't sure where my feelings would lie. I'm not even sure that as a child I knew what a lesbian was. It would be a little while longer before I found out.

I spent the off-seasons back home in Evanston with Mother. We really grew a lot closer during those years. The first winter she let me take it easy. She said I deserved a chance to rest up from the season, and absorb the shock of my great change. The

second winter, she did encourage me to take part time work. I found a job at a downtown Chicago department store during the Christmas rush.

It was also during that winter of 1947-48 that Mother sat me down for a serious talk about my future. She told me she was happy for my success in the league, but pointed out something that would have been equally true if I had stayed a male: a baseball career can't last forever. I promised to think seriously about it, and maybe look at starting college the next fall.

In the meantime, she managed to persuade me that I needed to learn some of the arts of homemaking. I had been able to put off Mrs. Semonsky, but my own mother was a different story. And I really didn't have a convincing argument to say no. "Cooking and cleaning?" I exclaimed. "that's- that's girl stuff!" I laughed at the irony of my statement.

"That's right," Mother said. "It is girl stuff, and you are a girl now, remember? Look, Susie, I don't know if you're ever going to get married or not, but it's almost certain that you're going to have a home to take care of someday, even if you're just living on your own. And it's a good bet no one's going to feed you."

I nodded; she was making sense. She continued, "I'm not always going to be here to pick up after you. You don't want to have to depend on greasy diners for your meals for the rest of your life. And even if you do wind up married someday, I can assure you that any future husband is going to consider housework to be woman's work."

I sighed and said, "Okay. Where do we start?"

Before I knew it we were in the kitchen, and she was helping me to tie a frilly apron around my dress. "If you can read, you can master the basics of cooking and baking," she told me.

We spent a lot of time in the kitchen that winter. Once I got over my initial reluctance, I found that I really enjoyed the creative aspects of meal preparation. And even more importantly, I found myself growing closer to Mother than I had ever been in my life.

Now, I've got to admit that putting on casual clothes and trying my hair in an old scarf, my basic housekeeping outfit, wasn't exactly my idea of fun. I will say, however, I found a certain sense of pride and satisfaction in making our home as clean and presentable as it could be; I still do.

Gradually, I began to feel less and less like a male trapped in the wrong body and more or more like what I imagined a normal young woman felt like. I don't think there was any kind of epiphany, or sudden magic moment of realization; it was all very gradual. I do recall taking the elevated train home from work one chilly December afternoon, when I realized the entire day had gone by without me once thinking about the fact that I had been a male. I realized that I was just busy living my life, a fairly normal young woman's life. Except maybe for the fact that I was still spending my summers playing baseball, and in my league, I was one of the best.

I mentioned that I was pretty much a loner at first, but gradually I found myself gravitating more and more to the company of other women. It just seemed to be a natural thing. It was in late November of '47, my second or third day on the job at the

department store. I was in the employee's cafeteria and had found an empty table for my meal. Before I knew it, three of my coworkers from the stationery department, all of them young women about my age, had joined me.

A year earlier I wouldn't have known what to say to any of them. Their interests would have seemed totally alien to me, and in some aspects, silly. But before long, I found myself empathizing with their complaints about how our male supervisor lacked understanding and warmth; how most of their boyfriends seemed to have the same problem; and how, despite the fact that all the guys were now out of the service, it was still tough to find a decent, honest, reliable and caring one.

Things haven't changed that much in 50 years, have they Kimberly?

I realized that it only made sense to take advantage of my employee discount and expand my wardrobe a bit. I brought several new dresses, blouses, skirts and pairs of shoes. A couple of favorites I can remember were a silky green dress with billowing sleeves and a plunging V neckline; a cotton number in white, with big red polka dots, short sleeves, and a wide belt; and a navy blue suit with a peplum jacket and slim skirt. I don't why, but it seemed that in those years, every woman had a navy blue suit for semiformal occasions. I thought it would be just the thing to wear to Kiwanis luncheons and the like.

My very first Christmas as a female was a memorable one, if for nothing else, it was when I met my sister for the first time in my new body.

I wore a silky long-sleeved white blouse that day and a black skirt that fell well below the knee, a length I began favoring that winter. The reason for that was simple: the scars on my thighs, the result of stealing 129 bases that season. Those uniform dresses were great for the image of the league, but as I mentioned before, they didn't offer much protection.

I don't think of myself as a vain woman, but I have tried to take pride in my appearance. The only time in my life I ever had cosmetic surgery was in the early '60s, when I was in my mid-thirties. The miniskirt had just come into fashion; I thought I had the legs to carry it off, but didn't want everyone to see my scars. But I digress again...

Mary and her husband Phil were living in Denver. Mom and I had written her, telling her about what had happened to me; we had even sent some clippings and photos, but I don't think Mary really believed it until the moment she walked through the front door.

"Charlie?!" she cried. "My God- your eyes- I'd know you anywhere. It's true, Charlie, it's really true."

I smiled at her and said, "It's Susan, now, sis. And yes, it is true. I hope you can accept this."

She dropped her suitcase and threw her arms around me. "Accept it? To be honest, I love it! I always loved Charlie, but ever since I was a little girl, I dreamed of having a sister. But I never thought it would happen."

But it had.

Mother and I had prepared a turkey dinner with all the trimmings. Our efforts earned plenty of compliments from Mary and Phil. Afterward, while Phil went for a walk, Mary, Mother and I cleaned up in the kitchen, did the dishes, and wrapped up the leftovers. Mary had a question for me:

“Charlie, er, Susan, are you coping okay with what’s happened to you? I’m sure it’s a lot to deal with. If I woke up one day and found I was a guy, I’m not sure that I could handle it.”

I thought for a moment while I was wiping a dish. “I won’t say it hasn’t been a lot to deal with,” I began. “And I can’t say that I would have wished for it in advance. But really, sis, it’s working out just fine. Mom has been such a help to me. I really think everything’s going to work out.”

We hugged again. “And knowing you’re here for me, too, that means a lot,” I said.

“Well, you sure seem to be adapting well, “ she said, slowly nodding her head. “You look great, and now that you’ve learned to cook like this you’re going to be a great catch for some guy one of these days.”

I help up my hand in the “stop” gesture. “Hold it there, please. That’s one thing I’m definitely not ready for yet. Give me a little time before you have me making babies, will you?”

“Okay,” she said, smiling, “that’s fine.”

“But as I’m working on my homemaking skills, there is something you could help me with. I know you’re a pretty good seamstress...”

Over the next few years, whenever we got together for holidays or family occasions, Mary would take an hour or two to work with me, and I’m proud to say that I got to be pretty good at sewing myself.

Before I knew it, that first winter had passed, and it was time to pack for spring training- in Havana, Cuba this time!

Now, 1947 was a great year for me. I was batting champion for the second year in a row and was second in stolen bases. You’ve got all the details in my scrapbooks.

I slowly found myself becoming aware of the cause of women’s rights. The league had been born during the war, in the era of Rosie the Riveter. In those years, women were encouraged to get out of the home and take the places of the men who had gone off to fight the war. But now, in the postwar years, there were a lot of pressures, some subtle, some not-so-subtle to get us (Us? I thought. I had definitely crossed a line by this point) back into the kitchen full-time.

This was when I seriously considered enrolling in college. I decided I would major in physical education and aim to teach high school girls. I thought if I could teach young girls to love athletics the way I did, it could give them important lessons in teamwork and a sense of personal empowerment. I wanted them to know they could be both strong and feminine. But that was going to be years in the future. In the meantime, I still had another season to play.

I had earned a reputation as a pretty fearless player, despite my emphasis on femininity. But something happened my third year, 1948, that gave me a feeling of fore-

boding. The league expanded, adding two teams. There was nothing that troubled me about one of them, the Chicago Tulips. But the other new club was the Springfield Blossoms.

What was the matter with Springfield? Just the fact that I had spent my first season in pro ball there, back in 1942, and had won the league batting title, as you may remember. Now it was six years later, and I had gone through my one-of-a-kind transformation. But for some reason, I had a real fear of being recognized. I figured returning to a city where I had played before, and had been such a standout, would increase the likelihood of this happening.

I don't know why I was troubled by this so much. As it turned out, it happened, and it was no big deal at all. It was after our second road game at Springfield when I was approached by the sports editor of the local paper. It was the same guy who had held the job back in '42. Damn! I thought to myself. He introduced himself and told me that I really looked familiar to him.

"Oh?" I asked, trying not to sound too concerned. "I don't think we've met."

I could see he was thinking seriously. "Yeah," he said. "Your style of play, the way you look, and your last name... you remind me an awful lot of Charlie Stevens. He played here in '42 and was the Three-I league batting champ. He hit .387, I think."

"No, it was .397," I corrected automatically. Oh no, I thought to myself, that's a sure giveaway.

"How do you know that?" he demanded.

"Well, I should know that," I said, the light bulb suddenly flashing above my head. "I'm very proud of him. He's my... brother!"

He slapped his palm to his forehead and exclaimed, "Of course! Now it all makes sense! But whatever happened to him? I thought he was a big leaguer for sure. I know he played for Milwaukee for a couple of seasons, and then I lost track of him."

I cleared my throat. "That was it for him," I said, thinking that statement was true in more ways than one. "He got released at the beginning of the '46 season, and with all the players coming back from the war, he just never caught on with anyone else. He's- he's working in the shipyards now."

"Too bad," he said. "Like I told you, I really thought he had the potential to go to the big leagues."

"So did I."

"But he's rooting for his sister in her own big league now, isn't he?"

I wiped an unexpected tear from my cheek. "That's right," I said.

He told me that he thought the two of us would be a great subject for a feature article. He didn't know of any other brother-sister combination in professional baseball. I thanked him for the idea, but begged off. I told him that Charles was just too embittered by his experience with pro ball to want to remember, or talk about it.

That was the summer I began coming to terms with who I was in a lot of ways. It was the summer, for one thing, when I began my first serious relationship. Jackie

Schultz was one of the utility players on our team; she was one teammate with whom I had developed a real friendship.

I still remember the night things started. It was one of those games you still remember every detail of decades later. We were losing to Ft. Wayne 6 to 1 when we suddenly exploded for six runs in the ninth inning and won the game.

Jackie and I were side by side in the dugout, on our feet clapping, cheering and hollering with the rest of the team. When Doris Olsen slid across the plate with the winning run, Jackie grabbed me and hugged me. "Oh Susie," she cried out, "isn't it so exciting?"

Oh, it was exciting to me, and not just in the way she meant. As I felt her breasts pressing against me, I became aware of feelings stirring inside that I hadn't been aware of before. Jackie was, at 5 feet, 10 inches, the tallest player on the team. She had a lean build, but definitely had womanly curves. If she had been a young woman in the nineties, she could have been a supermodel... or a star in the women's basketball league.

I think Jackie felt the electricity between us, too. That would have to be the reason why we both lingered in the locker room after the game, long after all the other girls had left for their homes.

"Jackie," I finally said, "you want to get together sometime?"

"Sure," she said brightly. We agreed on dinner and a movie two nights later, which was one of our rare off-days that season.

It dawned on me as I began to get ready that afternoon that I was preparing to go out on a date. I suppose I had always expected to go out on a date with a girl someday... but that was before I had become a girl, too. Oh well, play the hand you're dealt.

I took a long, relaxing hot bath that afternoon, and carefully shaved my legs and under my arms after I got out of the tub.

I put on my foundation garments, and then a brand-new pair of stockings. They were a style I had never worn before, sheer black with a seam down the middle of the back of the leg. It takes some time and effort to get the seams straight, but oh, do they look sexy!

Next came a lace-trimmed camisole and half-slip, both in ivory; then I slipped on pumps with the highest heels I had at the time, two and a half inches. Even if Jackie wore flats, as she did most of the time, she would still be half an inch taller than me.

I decided this was the right occasion to do some primping that I usually didn't bother with, things like thinning my eyebrows and using an eyelash curler. By the time I was ready to blot my lipstick on a tissue, one look in the mirror told me I had achieved the effect I wanted. I applied my perfume, a soft, floral scent, and was ready to finish dressing.

I selected a simple A-line black skirt that fell just above the knee, and a silky white blouse with a deep V-neck. Suddenly, I knew just the finishing touches the outfit needed. I reached for my musical jewelry box, which had been a Christmas gift from

Mother the Christmas before. How she found one that played “Take Me Out to the Ballgame” I’ll never know.

Reaching inside, I took out the pearl necklace that had been my gift the Christmas before that. Every time I put on those pearls, then or now, I still remember the joy I felt that morning. Mother had handed me the simply-wrapped package. I opened them, exclaimed how beautiful they were, and saw Mother was choked up as she told me, “They were your grandmothers. I always meant to give them to your sister one day, but never did. Now, I want you to have them. And I want you to know how proud I am of you and what a beautiful young lady you’re becoming.”

I attached the matching pearl earrings to my ears, checked myself over in the mirror once, twice, five more times, then finally decided I was ready. I headed for my car, a 1940 Ford convertible, and drove the short distance to the apartment house where Jackie lived. We had spaghetti at a local restaurant, then walked down the block to a neighborhood theater, where we saw Katherine Hepburn and Spencer Tracy in “State of the Union”.

As we walked out of the darkened theater into the warm summer night, we felt the gentle breeze lift our skirts ever-so-slightly. I turned to Jackie and said, “This has been so much fun; I hate to see the evening end. Want to come back to my place for a while?”

“What about curfew?”

“Oh, the hell with the curfew!”

“Susie!”

“Well, I mean it,” I said firmly. “We work out day after day and play night after night. We need a chance to unwind and have a little fun once in a while, don’t you think?”

She agreed, so off we went. I realized my attitude must have surprised Jackie because I was usually so serious about keeping in shape and following the rules. But gee, I thought, I’m finally developing a close friendship after three years in the league, and that seems like a good enough occasion to bend the rules a bit.

We walked into my apartment and Jackie sat down on the couch. I offered her a beer, and she accepted. As we sipped from the cold bottles, we talked about how the season was going (very well by the way- we were on our way to our first championship). We talked about what we thought of the other girls, our families and a hundred and one things.

Finally, I don’t know what possessed me, but I suddenly blurted out, “Jackie, you know something? You’re really beautiful. You’re so tall and regal, and with those beautiful high cheekbones.... Why, you could be Katherine Hepburn’s sister.”

She blushed and looked away. I momentarily thought I had made a terrible mistake, but then she looked right at me and said, “Thanks, Susie. You know, you’re really attractive, yourself, besides being nice- and a damn good player.”

I laughed at that last comment, but even as I did, I reached out to her, and we soon had our arms wrapped around each other in a tender embrace. We gazed into each

other's eyes for a moment, then I closed mine and reached forward, my slightly parted lips meeting hers. The first thing I was aware of was the taste of her lipstick mingling with mine, then the moistness of her lips... then their warmth.

She tightened her grip on me, her left hand just below my shoulder, her right hand finding the curve of my lower back. I began to moan softly. I was starting to feel a pleasant moistness and warmth between my legs; sensations I had not experienced in my three years as a female. "Oh Jackie," I said, suddenly worried, "What are we doing? Is this right?"

Jackie looked me squarely in the eyes, smiled, and said, "Yes, it's very right." She began to unbutton my blouse. I reached up to stop her, and for a moment she was the one with the concerned look. But she smiled again when I said, "Don't worry, I just thought we ought to continue this someplace more comfortable."

We walked- no, we ran- to the bedroom. I kicked off my heels, Jackie got rid of her flats. Jackie lifted her dress and slip over her head in one quick motion, and threw them in a corner. I finished unbuttoning my blouse, slipped out of it and tossed it aside. I unzipped my skirt and let it drop to the floor.

Our girdles slowed us up, but just a bit. We both laughed about that before throwing back the covers and jumping on top of the sheets. Again, we embraced and began to kiss. I reached up and began gently massaging her already erect pink nipples. I bent down to take one in my mouth and began to nibble on it softly.

"Oh God, that feels so good," she moaned.

Now that my hands were free, I began exploring the region between her legs. I had hardly gotten to know myself in this area, so I surprised myself with the sureness with which I was proceeding. Soon her back was arching, her moans were growing louder and she was crying out in ecstasy.

She decided to return the favor, and before I realized what was happening she was thrusting her long, slender fingers into my moist pussy. Thanks to her expert touch, the juices were soon flowing uncontrollably and I, too, was crying out in sheer pleasure.

More than the sex, the thing I most recall about that night was how we held each other afterward and talked for hours. She told me about her life growing up on a farm in the cold Northern reaches of Minnesota. While I enjoyed hearing about her past, I also felt sad, because I realized I never could share the truth about my past with her.

"Oh, God!" Jackie suddenly exclaimed, sitting bolt upright in bed. The magic was broken. "I've got to get home! Susie, do you realize it's almost 3 in the morning? The damn curfew!"

As you've gathered, the league was very strict, really paternalistic about our behavior. We talked for a couple of minutes; I suggested that maybe Jackie should just stay over, but we finally decided it would be better if I drove her home. We hastily dressed- and yes, we paused to brush our hair and apply lipstick. We crept out to the car and headed toward her apartment. I think our hearts were pounding for the entire 16 block drive.

You're probably wondering how the league dealt with lesbians. You know the US military policy these days, "Don't ask, don't tell?" Well, it was more or less like that in the league. First, you've got to understand what the world was like that long ago. If we couldn't even talk openly about menstruation, we sure couldn't talk about sex... especially homosexual sex.

It was obvious that the league was full of tomboys, and that a lot of those tomboys liked each other. I remember one of the talks manager Bob Wellington gave us in the clubhouse. He was usually very self-assured when it came to talking baseball matters with us, but he was so tongue-tied about this, it was hard not to laugh. "Uh, ladies, you're all adults, or pretty close to it," he said, then paused. "I... I just want to remind you all to be careful, and discreet, about the thing you do in private. And remember what's private should stay private. That's all!" We headed out to the field, most of the team exchanging glances that said, "What was that all about?"

Not long after Bob's talk with us, the gossip really flared up. We finally learned that a couple of the veteran players on other teams had been approaching some of the younger girls, and there had been some tense and awkward situations. Pretty quickly an edict went out of the league office to "Nip this problem in the bud."

All of this was in the back of my mind, and Jackie's, as our relationship developed. For the rest of that summer, the two of us spent as much of our free time together as we could. We didn't get too many more opportunities to get together privately- intimately- and we really treasured those. As for the rest of the time, we sat together on the bench, shared a bus seat on road trips or a table in a diner. Before long, we were known as Rockford's Bobbsey Twins.

Jackie and I would go out to the park extra-early one or two days a week so I could work with her on her hitting. She could field like a whiz but couldn't hit to save her life, so she was relegated to a utility player's role. I was convinced that she needed glasses, but she wouldn't even consider it- too vain! This summed up, I think, Jackie's main problem as a player. I was concerned about looking good mainly because it was expected of me, for Jackie it was an end in itself.

The two of us grew steadily closer that summer, which culminated in Rockford winning the league championship. It was the second in the team's history, and the first since I had joined them. I can assure you that Jackie and I shared a very private and intimate victory celebration. Then it was time to go our separate ways for the winter, which was hard, very hard.

Mother had convinced me to start college that fall, and that helped a bit to take my mind off of how much I missed Jackie. Going to school and doing my best to keep in shape during the off season kept me busy; still, the empty ache inside didn't go away until we were reunited the following spring.

Why didn't we get together over the winter? Fear, pure and simple. Fear of being found out by our parents, by the league, by anybody.

That summer of '49 was a golden one, in more ways than one. Jackie and I learned more and more about how to bring pleasure to each other through sometimes awkward, but always patient and loving, mutual exploration. On the ball field, things were just as joyous: we were winning, winning, and winning some more. As I had finally

persuaded Jackie to start wearing glasses, her hitting was improving and she was finding herself in the lineup more often. She had only been in about one-quarter of our games the year before; now she was in the lineup more than half the time. Bob didn't hesitate to use her to give a slumping player a day or two of rest.

We won our second straight playoff with ease. Life was looking wonderful... until one Saturday morning in late October when the phone rang at Mother's. The operator had a person-to-person call for me, from Jackie. I was surprised and more than a little concerned. As I mentioned before, our contact the previous off-season had been limited to a few letters.

My feelings of foreboding proved to be correct when I heard a soft sobbing at the other end of the line. "Susie," she said, "I just got off the phone with Bob. They've traded me to Ft. Wayne."

"Oh my gosh," I said. "Did he tell you why, or anything?"

"No, he didn't. But he wasn't too friendly. I have a feeling they found out about us."

I don't remember much else about our conversation. The one thing that is vivid in my mind is me hanging up the phone, running upstairs to my bedroom, throwing myself onto the bed and bursting into tears. I was hurt- very hurt, and angry- very angry. How could they split us up? We had been so discreet. Even though we stuck together on the bus and in the clubhouse, we never held hands or did anything else to give an indication that our relationship was anything but a friendly one.

As the tears kept coming, I felt myself becoming angry at my own body and the female hormones that were controlling it. I had been brought up to believe in the importance of self-control, but the waves of emotion surging over me were just too overwhelming, demanding release.

Mother heard my tears, and came to my door. "Susie, honey? What's the matter? Why are you crying?"

I explained about the phone call. Mother looked concerned, but a bit perplexed, unable to understand why I was so upset. "I know you've been really close to Jackie, and I know it's been difficult for you to make friends since your change," she said. "But can't you give one of the other girls a chance?" I promised her I would try; I couldn't bring myself to tell her the truth.

That moment marked the end of my innocence, in more ways than one. When I look back on my years in the league, there seems to be a sharp dividing line between the first four seasons and the last five. My performance didn't drop off- if anything, I was still improving as a player. But a lot of the joy was gone after that moment.

Jackie and I still got together that year whenever Rockford came to Ft. Wayne, or vice versa. Although Rockford had been dominant, it looked like 1950 would be Ft. Wayne's year. Jackie getting to play every day for the first time was a big part of that. She wasn't conditioned to play for a full season though, and her hitting tailed off badly in the closing weeks of the season. Nevertheless, Ft. Wayne hung in there and earned the right to face Rockford as we attempted to win a third straight post-season championship.

During that season I had another tough choice to wrestle with- a chance to return to men's baseball! The Ft. Lauderdale team in the Florida International League actually contacted the Robins and expressed interest in buying my contract.

Oh, did that offer come out of left field! I had long abandoned the idea of making the major leagues, but for a few minutes I let those visions return. I told myself that I could compete with men at that level. And who knows, I might finally find myself setting foot in Wrigley Field for a major league game. Maybe Madame Mazurka's magic was finally supposed to work. But as soon as I envisioned myself in a Cubs uniform, actually stepping onto the grass at Wrigley Field for a big league game, I felt the tears coming to my eyes. I knew that it could never be.

Reality came crashing back in almost immediately. I asked myself how serious the Ft. Lauderdale team was about giving me an honest chance and realized this was probably all about its publicity value. Publicity! That meant hordes to reporters, wanting to know all about this girl trying to earn a crack at the men's game. These would-be reporters who want to know all about me, including my past. And Susie Patrick didn't have a past prior to 1946! It had been easy enough to put off that one sports writer in Springfield, but how could I deal with dozens and dozens of them, this time unwilling to take no for an answer?

Even assuming that I could deflect the questions about my past, and the team was interested in giving me a serious opportunity- a couple of big ifs- what kind of pressures would I be facing? It had only been three years since Jackie Robinson broke the color line in the majors, and he was still subject to the most vile forms of abuse. I knew that a woman trying to enter the big leagues would face torture, although of a very different sort.

Finally, I thought about the league- what I had come to think of as my big league; our big league. It may have been a small pond, but it was my pond, and I was one of the biggest fish. I decided that this was the fulfillment of my wish. Even if it were less fun and more of a job, I was nevertheless a star. I was in the big leagues; and I was here to stay.

About 1953 or so, a minor league team actually signed a woman to a contract. She sat in the dugout for a few games but was never allowed to play. After that, the powers-that-be voided her contract, and a formal ban was imposed on women in men's professional baseball. The whole thing confirmed my worst fears about the offer I had received.

That was one rough decision I had to face in the summer of '50. Another came a few weeks later, as we prepared to head into the playoffs against Ft. Wayne. My worries were mainly about Jackie, and more specifically, her future in the league. As I said, her hitting had tailed off badly in the last weeks of the season. They didn't have anyone ready to step in for her at second base during the playoffs, but they had dropped her to eighth in the batting order. The rumor was that unless she could show something in the championship series she would be released from the team, and probably the league, the following year.

The night before our opening playoff game I should have been home in bed, getting rested up. Instead I found myself walking the streets of downtown Rockford, wrestling

with my feelings. What I was thinking about doing was contrary to the upbringing my Mother had given me and contrary to the way I had been taught to play the game. But my love for Jackie had clouded things. Finally, I reached a decision.

In the first playoff game, I had an opportunity to act on that decision. Jackie was hitless in her first two at-bats. By the time she came up again in the seventh, we had the game safely in hand. I offered a prayer for her to hit the ball to me... a prayer I had sent heavenward a thousand times before, but never for this reason.

Before I knew it, Jackie had lofted the ball on a straight line to my spot in center field. I hesitate for a second before charging it, just enough time to let it drop safely in front of me for a hit. I heard uncharacteristic boos from the crowd and walked back toward my position with my head lowered. Finally, I looked up to face the field and gazed over at Jackie, who was taking a short lead off of first. I don't know what I expected to see in her face. Relief? Gratitude? What I actually saw was anger.

Over the next five games, I managed to "give" Jackie two more hits in similar fashion, both at moments that didn't affect the final outcome. I had done this skillfully enough to avoid being charged with any errors, so they were credited as hits. My three "gifts" meant that after six games, Jackie was 7 for 20, a .350 batting average, instead of 4 for 20, which would have translated to a weak .200 average.

Maybe I had fooled the scorers and most of the fans, but my teammates knew, and so did our manager. I justified my actions in my mind by telling myself that none of these had happened in crucial game situations. I wasn't changing the outcome or hurting my team, I told myself; I was helping someone I loved.

But I was wrong, Kimberly, and if I had looked deeply enough into my heart, I would have admitted to myself that I was wrong then. All these years later, it's still the greatest shame of my life.

I still can't bear to remember or repeat most of the things Bob said to me when he dressed me down after the sixth game. "I know what the Hell you're doing, even if I can't prove a damn thing," he snarled. He made it very clear to me that my future was at stake, and the seventh game would be my opportunity to prove myself to him, to my teammates and ultimately to myself.

I went four for four and we won 11 to nothing, easily taking our third straight championship. During the postgame celebration, I was pretty subdued, and no one went out of their way to include me in congratulations. I sat in front of my locker for a long time in nothing but my bra, girdle and stockings, looking at my Rockford uniform dress hanging there. I felt I had probably played my last game as a Robin.

I drove home to my apartment, figuring to get into bed quickly and be up early the next morning to pack and drive home to Evanston. I was awakened at 5:45 the next morning by a pounding at my door. I had been sleeping nude, but pulled on my satin dressing gown and slipped into a pair of high heeled slippers. I hurried to open the door. When I did, I found Jackie standing there, tears of anger burning in her eyes.

"How could you?" she said over and over. "If I don't have the talent to make it on my own in this league, then that's the way it's going to have to be, but I don't need

your damn charity. Do you realize how degrading it is to me? And how you're putting your own career at risk?"

I was taken aback, and didn't know what to say. Finally, I blurted, "Jackie, I'm so sorry. I- I didn't mean it that way."

"How did you mean it, then?" she demanded. She paused, swallowed deeply, then said. "Susie, I've made a couple of decisions. I'm quitting baseball, and our relationship is over. Don't try to change my mind about either of them."

"But...", I cried.

"I'm sorry," she said, turned, and ran down the stairs. I tried to follow but my slippers slowed me up. I reached the street in time to see her car speeding off. I thought about jumping in my car to follow her, but realized it would be hopeless and went back to my room.

If I had cried for a long time when Jackie had been traded the winter before, this was worse. I felt the Niagara of tears would never stop, but of course they finally did. And when they did, I realized something for the first time. After a good cry, I really did feel better. I thought then that maybe this body is more efficient than I had realized.

I sent Jackie a couple of letters that winter, trying to explain what I had done and to apologize for it; she returned them unopened. I tried phoning once, but her father, a gruff-sounding guy, told me I better get it through my skull that his daughter didn't want to have anything to do with "the likes of you" ever again.



When the phone call came from the Robins' management that winter, I wasn't too surprised. I had been traded to the South Bend team. It was one of the biggest deals in league history. South Bend had given up three regulars and a substantial amount of cash to get me.

My feelings weren't hurt, but what did disappoint me was that Bob never called to wish me well or offer thanks for the four seasons I had given him; four years that had resulted in three league championships. But that's baseball. If Babe Ruth could be traded, and later on Willie Mays, then Susie Patrick certainly could be. I headed to South Bend resolved to give them their money's worth, and I think I fulfilled that pledge.

Even though we took the championship in 1951 and 1952- making five in a row for me, personally- playing for South Bend wasn't a lot of fun. The manager was married to one of the players, and some of the players wouldn't speak to her, so it was a really tense situation. The only relief for me was that I wasn't in the middle of it and could now just concentrate on playing ball.

Now there was a new worry- about how long the league would last. The postwar years had brought new prosperity to the country, and with it, the growth of the suburbs, the construction of new highways, and perhaps most importantly, the coming of television. Suddenly people had all kinds of new options for travel and entertainment. We still had our loyal core of fans, but now some of the more casual ones who had once come to cheer us were now staying home to watch the "real" big leagues on TV. I could tell that the end was in sight.

I was less upset about it than I might have been a few years earlier. I had to admit that after 20-plus years of hard play, I was beginning to feel a little tired. I couldn't keep playing ball forever, and I was getting ready to think about the next phase of my life. I wanted to finish my education, then think seriously about things like a career, and yes, new relationships and eventually a family.

For a couple of years after my breakup with Jackie, I didn't allow myself any conscious sexual thoughts. But, I now believe, my subconscious was undergoing an important shift. Gradually, the heartache of losing Jackie faded; but instead of finding myself looking longingly at other women, for the first time I became aware of lustful feelings toward men. It was timely, then, when Mother sat me down in the kitchen one day in the fall of '51 for a talk.

"Susan," she began, "I'm very pleased that you're doing so well in school, and getting ready for what should be a very rewarding career. There's one thing I've been hesitant to bring up with you... I don't know any easy way to ask this, but..."

"What is it?" I interjected, not getting the drift of her thoughts.

"What about boys?" she asked, a concerned look on her face. "Oh honey, I don't know what kind of feelings you have, and I wouldn't even pretend to; all I want is for you to be happy."

I smiled, and thought for a moment before answering. "It's funny you should bring this up, Mother. I should probably credit your intuition. As a matter of fact, there is a

guy in one of my classes—I think he’s had his eye on me, but he hasn’t talked to me, or anything.”

“Do you want to talk to him?”

“I don’t know. I am confused about my feelings. I feel like I should like guys, but something doesn’t seem quite right about it, since I used to be one. But I’ve got to admit that I do find Stan to be kind of handsome.” I was surprised to realize that my pulse was racing a little faster.

Now Mother smiled. “Don’t worry about it, Susan,” she said. “You’ve got to remember that you are a young woman, and have been for more than five years now. I think this is all very normal, and really wonderful! You’re a normal, healthy young woman, reacting in a very normal and healthy way to an attractive young man. And if you’ll listen to one more piece of advice from your Mother, here’s what I have to say: don’t fight it! Let nature take its course!”

I sighed deeply. “But how do I do that? I’ve seen him looking at me, and I think he’s smiled a couple of times, but then he’s looked away. And he’s never said a thing. And I know it’s not right for me to initiate things. That’s not the way girls do it.” (Remember, this was 1951!)

Mother thought, looked at me for a long moment, and said, “Well, dear, I guess it’s time for some more lessons... I’ve got to teach you what I know about the fine art of flirting.”

I shook my head and asked, “Is this something you taught to sis?”

“No,” she said, “because I really didn’t need to. Most girls, as they’re growing up, just pick it up naturally in social situations. But you didn’t get the chance to be a teenage girl, Susan, so you’re just going to need a little tutoring to make up for lost time.”

“Okay, where do we start?”

She smiled again. “That’s the spirit I like to see from my girl. Let’s begin with the basics.”

Mother encouraged me to be aware of the next time Stan was looking my way, and to be sure to catch his eye and smile back; to find ways to get close to him, to give him opportunities to strike up a conversation. “Hang out just outside the classroom after class lets out, or by the water cooler. Or if he’s not one of the first ones out the door, hang around for a few minutes in the classroom. Pretend you’re getting your things organized for later. And if all of this doesn’t work, you can try some clearer signals.”

“Like what?”

“Oh, like tipping your head back or to the side when you’re looking at him, playing with one of your curls, things like that. Just little signs to show him that you’re interested. And for goodness sake, smile!”

I sighed again and said, “This sure would have been easier if I had stayed a guy, or had been born a girl.” I saw that Mother was ready to speak again. I added quickly, “I know, I know, play the hand I’m dealt.” We both laughed.

Mother continued, "And if you catch him by the water cooler, be sure to bend over and take a long drink... hunch your shoulders forward a bit- to give him a good view of things, if you know what I mean."

"Mother!" I said, more than a bit surprised.

"I do have more to suggest dear, and please don't take it the wrong way," she went on. "But maybe you could do a little more to enhance your appearance, especially since you have such very attractive features."

I realized she was right. I had come to look at the baseball off-season as a time when I could be more casual about my looks. Most mornings, instead of taking time to do my hair, I was content to gather it in a large pony tail. I usually didn't bother with makeup, except for lipstick, and my wardrobe tended toward the casual: bobby socks and saddle shoes instead of high heels and nylons.

So, with my new lessons under my belt, I headed back to class, seeking not only to capture my BA degree, but my "Mrs." as well.

I'm pretty sure Mother and I had this conversation on a Monday evening. By Wednesday afternoon, I was able to burst through the front door, brimming with excitement and calling out, "Mother, it's worked! Stan and I have a date on Friday night!"

She hugged me and told me how wonderful this was. Then she said, "We've got to have another talk, dear,"

"About what?"

"About protecting yourself."

"What do you mean? I can take care of myself!"

"If I'm following your thoughts, dear, you are an athlete, but you are a girl, and that means most men are going to be physically more powerful than you. You are going to need to learn how to use your wits, more than your strength, to stay out of the way of trouble.

"And I'm also talking about... sex. I hope you're going to save yourself for the day when you might choose to get married, but I'm also realistic about what can happen if you let yourself get carried away by the moment. And it is only a moment for the man! But for you, the woman, it can mean changes for nine months- and, really, forever."

It was a sobering thought. This was before the invention of the birth control pill. Suddenly, I felt vulnerable in a way that I never had before. But I didn't let that detract from my excitement about my very first date with a man.

Although this was my fourth winter of schooling, I was still only a sophomore, even though I was now 26. This was actually to my advantage in that era. There were a lot of guys in school, including Stan, who were a bit older; they had been forced to delay their schooling because of the war.

That Friday I sped home from my last class and ran upstairs to my room to start getting ready. All kinds of thoughts were racing through my mind. I only had two hours to get ready before Stan was going to be there, and I wanted to look my best. And then I couldn't help but think what a silly, girlish idea that was.

I was stripping the polish off my nails, getting ready to apply a couple of fresh coats, when I caught a look in the mirror. I saw the attractive young brunette starting back at me. If the world had been different, I thought, I'd have wanted to be the guy dating someone who looked like this. I told myself once more, play the hand you're dealt.

I decided to wear a sleeveless linen sheath in light gray, with a small imitation diamond circle pin on my left breast as the only adornment. It was a look I'd come to like: simple, elegant and classy.

Mother came in to help me as I finished primping. "I'm not saying that you have to play dumb, Susan, but I think you'll be happier if you let him think he's smarter than you are- at least at first."

Before I could open my mouth to protest, she added, "Now, it's not what you're thinking. He doesn't have to think that he's more intelligent than you are, but the man likes to feel that he's stronger, a bit more capable, a little more worldly-wise than his date. Most men like to feel that they're in control of the situation and protecting their girl. And most girls like to feel protected."

The thought of being wrapped in Stan's strong arms and inhaling his musky, manly smell suddenly had an appeal to me I hadn't realized before. I felt a shudder travel down my spine. I was still sitting in front of my vanity in my slip, working on my makeup. Mother saw the shudder. "What's the matter, dear? Are you cold?"

"No," I said, smiling. "I guess I was just thinking about Stan." I was about to apply my lipstick, when I paused to ask, "What happens when it comes up that I'm a baseball player?"

"Hmmm," she said. "Good question." She thought for a moment, then said, "Be open about who you are, and be proud. If it bothers him that a very lovely and very feminine young lady plays baseball, then it's his loss, not yours." She was standing behind me, with one of her hands resting on my shoulder. I reached up to clasp it and said, choking up just a bit, "I can't cry, darn it, or I'll have to redo my makeup." Then I giggled.

Before I knew it, six o'clock had arrived, and right on the stroke of the hour the doorbell rang. I heard the door open and Stan say, "Mrs. Patrick? I'm Stanley Evans. I have a date with Susie tonight."

I took a last glance in the mirror and stood up to get ready to greet him. I couldn't believe how nervous I felt. There were actually butterflies in my stomach! I came down the staircase slowly, a big smile on my face. I said hello.

"Hi, Susie," he said. "You look beautiful." Then he took my hand and kissed it, and I felt another one of those electric shocks travel up my spine. I also realized that I was blushing.

The three of us sat down for a few minutes of small talk, and then it was time to go. I went to take my coat off the rack by the door, when Stan reached out and grabbed it first. He held it for me to slip into and said, "Allow me." Mother was at the door to see us off and said, "Please be home by midnight, dear." I was about to point out to her that I was 26 years old and didn't really need a curfew, but Stan spoke first, "That's just fine, Mrs. Patrick. I'll have her home safe and sound by then."

We walked to the curb where the car was parked, and as he opened the door for me, I thanked him. I thought to myself, "All this attention is really nice. He is making me feel special." We had dinner at a steak restaurant that featured waiters in formal dress, plush booths and low lights. It was a very romantic atmosphere. I found myself apologizing for only being able to finish a little more than half of my steak, but Stan said, "It's okay; I wouldn't want to be responsible for adding extra pounds to that beautiful figure." I found myself blushing again, and hoping that the lights were low enough that he wouldn't be able to notice.

I guess my charm school training was paying off, along with the reality of my smaller stomach. Once I could have easily polished off a steak like this one and asked for more.

Our next stop was a dance club. Oh, Kimberly, those were the days when we really danced, instead of just standing a couple of feet apart in a crowd and shaking to the noise (sorry if my age is showing). With all the time I spent in Stan arms, I think I found myself starting to fall in love with him that very night. Being wrapped in those arms, my head resting on his shoulder or broad chest, was even more wonderful than I could have imagined. It was a warm feeling, a comfortable feeling, a protected feeling. I loved it, and continued to love it until the day he died.

When Stan brought me home that night, he walked me to the door like a good gentleman. I told him, "Thanks for a wonderful evening... I hope we can do it again, very soon." He wrapped his arms around me, and I closed my eyes and tilted my head upward to eagerly receive my first kiss from a man.

I still run into difficulty when I try to define the feeling of being kissed by someone you love. I want to say things like, "I melted," or, "I was transported to another world," but somehow, no words can do it justice.

Mother had stayed up to hear about the date, but thankfully she wasn't waiting at the front door. We had some privacy for our kiss.

Stan and I saw a lot of each other that winter, and it wasn't surprising that on our next-to-last date before I left for spring training, we gave in to our mutual, very strong desires. Kimberly, I want you to know that I'm not excusing or condoning what we did. I was brought up differently, and I know that your Mother has taught you not to approach sex in a casual way. Maybe I didn't have the built-in defense mechanisms I would have had if I had been born female... or maybe it was a case of true love. Given the fact that we enjoyed more than 40 wonderful years together, I think that might be the answer.

It was a warm April evening. I was wearing a short-sleeved white blouse and a light gray pleated skirt that fell just above the knee. We had driven into Chicago that afternoon for a Cubs game. Even though they had entered their decades of futility, I still loved my Cubs. And I still do. We were going to get dinner and catch a movie back in Evanston, when I suggested, "Why don't we get some Chinese take-out, go back to your place... and maybe skip the movie?"

Stan smiled and asked, "What have you got in mind?"

I just smiled back and said, "Let's wait and see."

Back at Stan's apartment, we finished our meal, then settled down on his couch. "Great meal," he said, rubbing his washboard-flat stomach. "I'm stuffed."

"Don't worry," I told him. "You'll be hungry again in an hour."

He reached out to wrap me in his arms and said, "I'm hungry right now. For you."

We closed our eyes and began to kiss. I opened my mouth to admit his tongue. He reached up to begin unbuttoning my blouse, and I moved to help. Before I knew it, I had slipped out of my bra, and he had taken off his shirt.

As we continued to kiss, he began massaging my hypersensitive nipples, which quickly became erect. At the same time I felt a warmth between my legs, and the juices began to flow. The next thing I remember, we were in his bedroom. I think he carried me there, but I'm not sure. I was quickly kicking off my heels, letting my skirt drop to the floor and peeling off my soaked panties.

Stan was racing me to finish disrobing, and before I knew it we were on the bed together.

"I want you, I want you," I kept saying over and over, while he covered my face with kisses. My back arched as he began to knead my breasts. The juices were flowing from me as never before. I wanted him inside me; I wanted it immediately, and I wanted it more than I had ever wanted anything in my life. But Stan was going to make me wait.

Now the kisses were being showered on my breasts, whose nipples had become rock-hard. Then he began taking the nipples into his mouth, first one, then the other, caressing them gently with his tongue as I quivered on the edge of ecstasy.

Then, at last, he climbed atop me and slid his manhood into me. I couldn't believe the intense excitement I felt in every fiber of my body. I had never had sex as a man, but it seemed all the sensitivity and sensations had been centered between my legs; this was something more diffuse, and much more intense. I screamed in delight as waves of an orgasm broke over me.

When it was done, we held each other gently for the longest time. I reached up to stroke his sweaty brow and whispered, "I want this to be the first of many, many times."

"Me too," he said.

It was the next day that Stan asked me to marry him. Like the previous day, this one is still as clear in my mind as if it were yesterday. I had worn a rayon sundress with spaghetti straps, a wide skirt and a multicolored floral print against a pale peach background. I felt soft and sensuous and wonderful. Our luncheon of fried chicken and potato salad was so simple, yet I don't remember a meal ever tasting better.

We had talked about Stan's studies. He was a history major, and was hoping to teach at the high school level, just as I was. We talked about the upcoming baseball season, which would be my seventh in the league. I told him I was finding it harder and harder to think about spending time away from him.

"Gee," he said. "I'm feeling the same way." He reached into his pocket and pulled out a small, velvet colored box. "Susie Patrick," he said. "Will you make me the happiest man on earth? Will you be my wife?"

I remember gasping, then throwing my arms around him and covering him with kisses. When I finally let him come up for air, he panted and said, "I'll take this as a yes."

"Of course that's a yes, you big goof, of course," I said, laughing. We spent the next few hours trying to map out our future. Stan still had one more year of school ahead, and I was probably a couple of years away from finishing my degree. Even though some of the joy had gone out of playing ball, I was still making fairly good money at it, and the competitive fires still burned hotly enough to keep me from quitting.

Our engagement lasted two years... two years that saw Stan graduate and get his first teaching job in the nearby community of Wilmette. Years that also saw my baseball league go through its death rattles.

Nobody made any announcements during that summer of '54, but it was clear that the end was at hand. As the game had moved closer to regular men's baseball, batting averages in general had climbed, including mine. I became the first and only player in league history to hit .400 that year, but with fan interest rapidly dwindling and the whole league structure crumbling, it didn't mean as much to me as it might have. I was 29 years old and I was looking ahead, not backward.

Although the league went broke for some of the reasons I talked about earlier, a remnant survived the next year. My old manager from the Rockford days put together a team of girl all-stars who would travel around the country playing men's semipro and minor league clubs in exhibitions.

He called me that winter to ask me if I wanted to be part of the team. It was the first time we had spoken since I had been traded from Rockford five years earlier. "I'm surprised to hear from you, Bob, very surprised," I told him. "Especially after the way I left Rockford."

Clearly, he was still uncomfortable about the situation. "Well, Susie, it wasn't just my doing," he said. "I had pressures..." He trailed off.

"Well, Bob, I appreciate the offer, I really do. But I'm afraid I can't accept. I've got a lot of things going on in my life right now. I'm finishing school, for one thing, and for another, I'm engaged."

"Engaged?" he said, sounding more than a little surprised.

"Oh, don't sound so shocked, Bob. I know what you were thinking about me, and well, there was some truth to it. All I can say was that I was younger, and exploring who I was... I don't think I have anything to explain, or apologize for."

"No, Susie, you don't. I know you always gave me your best on the field... good luck to you."

The summer of 1955 was a memorable one for many reasons. I earned my college degree in June. It was the first summer in 14 years that I hadn't played professional baseball. Right after graduation, I landed a job with the Evanston schools, teaching high school girl's gym class. In July, Stan and I got married.

Our wedding day was one of the most wonderful days of my life. I wore a simple white satin gown with a floor length skirt. The sleeveless top had a wide, scooped

neckline. The outfit was finished off with a headpiece and veil, and elbow-length white gloves with pearlized buttons. I had never felt so elegant in all my life.

The ceremony was beautiful and went off without a hitch. As Stan and I stood on the front steps of the church, I got ready to toss my bouquet. Mary's five year old son, Petey, caught it. Mother, Mary and I all exchanged knowing looks. I wondered if the magic was going to strike in our family a second time. But it didn't; as you know; your Uncle Petey is all-man.

After our honeymoon, Stan moved into Mother's house with me. It was a big, old, four-bedroom barn that had plenty of space for all of us, even after your mother was born.

That fall, I settled into my life after baseball: teaching. I was pretty well prepared for the job, with a couple of exceptions. Organizing the physical activity classes was no problem. But then, as now, the p.e. teacher was usually also given the job of teaching health to students of their own sex.

As I looked over one of my very first classes, I was struck by what a painful, awkward time this is for many youngsters. I could see how many of them were looking to an adult for guidance, and for answers about what was happening to their bodies. To start that class, I introduced myself and wrote my name (I was still getting used to being "Mrs. Evans") on the blackboard. I told them I wanted them to be comfortable with me, comfortable with each other, and comfortable with themselves. I encouraged them to ask questions, no matter how embarrassing; I reminded them that the only stupid question is the one you leave unasked.

They saw me standing up there in front of them, to all appearances a healthy, normal, confident 30 year old woman. But inside, I was more nervous than I ever had been on a ball field.

I looked at these girls and was vividly reminded of how teens develop at different rates. All of these girls were within a year or two of each other in age; some had full breasts, other hadn't started to develop at all; some still had baby fat, while others now had very womanly curves. I was suddenly reminded of how difficult a time this is, for both sexes.

After I had handed out the textbooks and presented an outline of what we would be covering in the class, I asked for questions. There was silence.

Finally, I said, "Come on, some of you must be wondering what's going on with your bodies. Aren't you curious at all?" Sure enough, the first question came. A tall, skinny girl hesitantly raised her hand and asked, "Mrs. Evans, uh, how old were you when you started your first period? Is it normal for some girls to start a lot later than others?"

I gulped. Had I told her the truth, that I hadn't had my first period until I was 21, she would have thought I was crazy. I knew I had to get some answers that wouldn't be found in the textbook, so I sat down for a long talk with Mother that evening.

The next couple of years were busy, happy ones. Every now and then I felt a small pang of emptiness inside. It didn't overshadow the joy that I found in my work and my marriage. Part of me still missed the competition of the baseball diamond; and part of

me still wondered if I could have made it in the majors. If things had been different, would I have been playing centerfield for the Cubs that summer?

In the context of what had happened in the past decade, it seemed like a ridiculous thought. But it refused to go away.

One morning over breakfast, Stan looked me squarely in the eyes and said, "I know something's eating at you, Susie. What is it?"

"Oh, nothing," I lied.

"Come on, I know you better than that," he said. "I really want to know if everything is okay."

"Yes, everything's fine. I live you, I love my job. Ohh, I know this is ridiculous, but... I still miss baseball sometimes."

My dear, practical Mother looked like she had just swallowed an egg whole. "Oh come on, Susie, you're a married woman with a job now. Don't you think the time for games is past?"

Stan was thoughtful. "Now Mom, let's not be hasty about this. Baseball was a big part of Susie's life for a long time. It wouldn't be natural for her not to miss it, would it?"

"Well, that's fine," Mother said. "But what could she do about it anyway? The women's league is gone."

I spoke up, hesitantly. "Bob Wellington's team of women all-stars is going to tour again this summer. He dropped me a letter to say that my invitation to play still stands."

Stan looked right at me and said softly, "Do you want to play, honey?"

I bowed my head for a moment and then looked up, surprised that tears were forming in my eyes. "Yes!" I said. "Yes, I do. I really, really do."

He took my hand in his and said, "Then I think you should do it. And besides, we can use some extra money if we're going to be starting that family soon."

At the mention of a potential grandchild, Mother's face brightened. She had been trying to broach the subject with me over the past couple of years, and I had kept putting it off. I was speaking to Stan but looking at Mother, when I said, "Yes, the extra money will be a help for when we start our family."

At that, Mother slapped her palms on the table and said, "Well, Susie, I guess you better dig out your bats! Have you kept your glove oiled?" We all laughed.

Over the next couple of weeks, that laughter was replaced by tears as I sought to force my body back into competitive shape. It was the spring of 1957, and I was still only 32 years old, but I had been away from competition for three years and was a little rusty. If not for nightly alcohol rubdowns by Stan's strong hands, I don't think I could have made it.

Stan knew I wanted to prove that I could still compete and was aware that I wanted to save money for our future family. What I couldn't explain to him was that I wanted one final chance to prove myself against male competition.

If you just look at the numbers, you wouldn't see it as that successful a season. I played in just 57 of the 70 games, and only batted .229 with just one home run. But the numbers didn't mean as much to me anymore; and there was one golden moment, in particular, that made it all worthwhile.

One of the games early in the tour found us facing a semi pro men's team whose star pitcher was a potbellied, grizzled guy in his mid-forties. As we were watching him warm up, I told Bill he looked vaguely familiar to me, and Bill said, "Susie, I'm surprised. As well as you know the game, and you don't remember 'Lucky' Wilson? He spent several years in the minors, then finally got called up during the war. He pitched for the Cubs and the Phillies."

Oh my God, I thought to myself. *I'm going to face a real major league pitcher at last.* Never mind that he had been out of the big leagues for 11 years and only had a lifetime record of 12 wins and 33 losses. He was still a pitcher who had been in "the show."

We encountered all kinds of attitudes from the fans and our opponents during the tour; everything from heartfelt support to heavy condescension. The semipro outfit that Wilson pitched for represented the worst of the latter.

"Hey, skirts!" they shouted. "Why don't you put away your bats... and give your husbands back their balls!" This was typical of the taunts we had to face from them.

I was batting second, kneeling in the on-deck circle, and was watching Dottie McCoy, our leadoff hitter, step into the batter's box. When Wilson's first pitch sailed behind Dottie's head, sending her sprawling into the dirt, I knew what we were in for.

I felt the muscles in the back of my neck tightening, but then reminded myself of that old saying, "Don't get mad, get even." I also remembered Yogi Berra saying that "Ninety percent of baseball is half mental." Although I had determined that Dottie was fine, though rusty, I covered my mouth to stifle a scream of mock terror. Then, straining to raise my soprano voice to an even higher register, yelled at Wilson, "Ohh, you mean old bully!"

Then I did something that I knew would get his attention. I dropped my bats, walked back over to the bench, and reached into my bag for a compact and lipstick. I made rather grand, exaggerated gestures of applying a fresh coat to my lips. If he wanted to think of us as a bunch of flighty, easily frightened girls, I was more than happy to oblige his preconceived notions.

After he walked Dottie, I was ready to step in. "Trying to look good for when I strike you out, baby?" he yelled.

"In your dreams, old man," I hollered back. His first pitch was low and outside, ball one.

I knew he would come inside on the next one, and it was breast-high. I got a hold of it right on the sweet spot, sending it caroming off the left-field wall to score Dottie and send me into second with a standup double.

When the dust had cleared, and I stood proudly atop the bag, I saw Wilson glowering at me from the mound. I stuck my tongue out at him and laughed. That run put

us ahead 1-0. Even though I would like to say I got him so rattled that we cruised to an easy victory, we actually ended up losing 4-2. Still, I considered it something of a moral victory- for us and for me.

I left the tour in mid-August to get ready for the school year and give my body a chance to recover. My dear Stan was waiting for me at the front door with a dozen red roses ("To welcome home my champion," he said) and a steaming hot bath all ready for me to slip into.

Finally I thought I had gotten baseball- or the need to prove myself- out of my system. I could turn my attention back to my husband, my career and my future, including our plans to start a family. It turned out that was the final summer that Bob took his girl all-stars on tour, but even if they had been back the next year I wouldn't have been there. I was in no condition to play.

I probably became pregnant sometime around Christmas of 1957. I began showing in the late spring but was able to keep my job through the end of the school year in June. I delivered your mother, Janice Evans, in August of 1958.

Pregnancy was a marvelous thing, and in some ways, I'm sorry I only went through it once. Have you ever heard it said that pregnant women have a glow about them? It's true. Just look in the mirror when it happens to you one day- and I hope that it will. And I don't think it's just the extra flush of hormones. I think it's also the knowledge that the greatest miracle of all, the creation of a new life, is taking place inside of you.

Now Kimberly, I wouldn't be honest if I only tried to romanticize it for you. Yes, there's morning sickness; yes, you get as big as a house; and yes, childbirth itself can be pretty painful. It's tough to get rid of the stretch marks completely and get yourself back in the shape you were in before pregnancy. But all I can say about that is the moment I saw your mother for the first time, then held her in my arms, then felt her begin to suckle at my breast, I was paid back for all the momentary discomfort a thousand times over. It was the sweetest, most tender moment of my life.

Your mother's arrival came just in time to allow me to get back to work. My Mother understood my desire to keep working, and was generous in helping out with child care, even though this was an era with the expectation that women would leave the workforce when it came time to raise children.

I have found some of the greatest challenges and greatest joys of my life in motherhood. As the 1960's began, I at last found myself fully comfortable with who I had become. I now thought of myself as a woman in body and mind. For the first time, I found myself wishing I had been born female so I had a girlhood to fall back on for experience when difficulties cropped up.

Instead I relied on the insights I gained from Mother, my sister, and the girls I taught. Dr. Spock (the author, not the Star Trek character) was a big help, too. All things considered, I don't think I did too badly. And in a way, I experienced my own lost girlhood through your mother. I helped her play with her dolls and host tea parties. When she was a little older and let me, I stayed up for a couple of her slumber parties.

Your grandfather and I were in agreement to limit our family to one child. At 33, I was considered a bit old to be a first-time mother in that era. My pregnancy had gone without a hitch. We had a beautiful, healthy child, and we didn't want to tempt fate.

In light of my past, I found one conversation with your mother when she was a teen to be especially ironic. This must have been sometime around 1971 or '72, when she would have been fourteen; an age (as you know) when all teens have to establish their independence from their parents. One day she asked me why she hardly ever saw me in jeans or slacks. She was living in her bell bottoms at the time, though she'll probably hate me for telling you that.

"You wear dresses or skirts all the time, Mother," she said. I realized for the most part it was true. If you had looked in my closet and drawers then, you would have found them to be much the same as the are today, dominated by what might be called "the classic look." There were plenty of blouses, sweaters and sweater sets; at least a couple dozen dresses and skirts. Not a lot that was overly formal or casual, but all distinctly feminine.

A few T-shirts, a couple pairs of casual slacks and jeans were about all that I had that might be considered unisex, and these were mostly for gardening, housecleaning and the like.

I thought to myself how, as a child, I had fought to get out of dresses, and how the fates had come together a couple of decades later to consign me to a lifetime in them... a lifetime that I was truly happy with.

"Well, dear," I finally told her. "I guess I'm just a product of my upbringing. When I was a girl your age," I lied, "we weren't even allowed to wear slacks or jeans to school.



But there's something else, I think. It has to do with my job. In my work, I try to get girls your age interested in a healthy, physically active lifestyle. I've always hated the stereotype that only mannish women are interested in sports, or good at them. I hope that I've been able to be a positive role model for at least a few of them. To show that you can be feminine and take part in sports."

She looked skeptical and raised an eyebrow as she asked, "Like when you played baseball in a dress?"

"Well, to be honest, that wasn't very practical," I admitted. "That was done to put the fans- the male fans- in the seats." I paused for a moment, then added, "You know, I'm not exactly June Cleaver, vacuuming in a dress and pearls."

She giggled. "No, but sometimes I think you're close."

Other significant transitions came during the 1960's. One came in 1967 when I realized that I had then spent more of my life as a female than a male.

Another came just a few months after that when my Mother, who had been my anchor and confidante as I navigated the first confusing years of my transition, passed away after a brief bout with cancer.

Now my sister and her husband were the only people in the world who shared my secret.

You may be wondering, Kimberly, why I never shared the truth about my past with your grandfather or your mother. I don't have a clear answer. At first, it just seemed too difficult to tell him. As the years went by it got harder and harder to think about telling him that I had deceived him about my past. I didn't want him to think I was crazy, and I didn't want him to stop loving me. And if I couldn't tell him, I couldn't tell your mother.

But now, my ultimate desire that the truth be known has won out. I'll leave it up to you to decide if this story should be shared with future generations of our family. I'm sure your judgment will be wise, Kimberly.

And so the years passed, turning into decades. Family life and work more than filled my days. I took pride in watching a couple of generations of young women become confident in their bodies, knowledgeable and unafraid of the changes taking place in them. I saw many of them grow into health, active women.

All kinds of milestones sped by: menopause, turning 50, our 25th wedding anniversary, your mother's sweet 16 party, seeing her get married, becoming a grandmother when you were born. Memories of my own baseball career slowly receded.

Your mother knew that I had been a player, but few other people her age even knew that the league had existed. It had almost been forgotten in that era. It wasn't until the early 1980s that the league alumni newsletter got started, and we had our first reunions.

Remember Jackie, my first love? I saw her for the first time in more than 30 years at the '82 reunion. It was a surprisingly emotional moment for both of us. We hugged, we cried, we told each other we were sorry, and then spent the next few hours getting

caught up and reacquainted. I introduced her to Stan, and she introduced me to her life partner, a lovely woman.

We've stayed in touch to this day, and both helped each other cope with our own forms of widowhood.

As long as I'm telling all, I might as well share with you the story of one student whose life I affected in the most profound way. I always believed teaching was a wonderful opportunity to mold young lives, but there is one student who can truly say that I changed the course of his- or her life- forever.

Robert was a shy, frail, 14 year old freshman who came to my school in the fall of 1974. Because I taught health and p.e. to the girls, I didn't get to know many of the boys very well. But I had noticed him in the halls and in the cafeteria, and I remember thinking how sad he seemed for someone so young.

We met on Halloween that year. The students had a tradition of wearing costumes to school on that day. I happened to be in the front office when I noticed Robert arrive for school that morning.

He came dressed as a girl, a quite pretty young girl in a white sundress with spaghetti straps, covered with red roses. His mousy brown hair was covered with a shoulder length blonde wig, and he wore full makeup, panty hose and high-heeled sandals. His fingernails and toenails were painted a bright red. He had pierced his ears and was wearing large silver hoops. He carried a large purse over his shoulder and held his books pressed against his (padded) bosom, girl-style.

My first thought was how lovely, how natural he looked. My next thought was that for the first time ever, he looked happy. In fact, he was radiant.

I stuck my head out of the office and said, "Good morning. You're Robert McDaniel, aren't you?"

"Yes, Mrs. Evans," he said in a falsetto, brushing a few strands of the blonde wig out of his face.

"I just wanted to compliment you on your- your outfit. You look very nice. Did your mother or sister help you?"

"No," he smiled, but looked a little wistful. "I did it all myself."

"Well," I said, "good job. Have a good day."

I stepped back into the office and saw the vice-principal, a sour little man. He was shaking his head. I asked what was the matter. "Trouble," he said. "that boy is headed for trouble- and probably before the day is out."

"Oh," I replied, "you worry too much."

But sadly, he was right.

It was about 10 minutes after the last bell of the afternoon rang. I was in my classroom, grading papers. Robert came running into my classroom, his wig askew, his makeup smeared, his dress torn, his left eye bruised and swollen. He was sobbing between gasps for air.

“Oh, Mrs. Evans,” he cried. “It was terrible. Three big bullies jumped me. They called me a fag and a sissy, they knocked me down and hit me, they stole my purse...” At that point, he dissolved in tears. I tried to calm him down, and called the front office and the school nurse. I agreed to give him a ride home after the nurse and I got him cleaned up.

On the way to his house, he exclaimed, “I’m not a fag, Mrs. Evans, I’m not. I just want to be a girl. Is that so terrible? I guess it is, because it can’t happen. Even if I go through all that’s involved in having sex-change surgery and everything, it’s not the same. You can’t have babies...” He began to sob quietly.

I knew I was venturing into dangerous territory; you’re not supposed to become so deeply involved in a student’s life. Nevertheless, I asked him how long he had wanted to be a girl. He told me that it had been the case for as long as he could remember.

He told me how, as a child, he loved playing with his sister and the other girls in the neighborhood. They would play with their dolls, play dress-up, all the normal young girl things. His parents were wealthy and even bought him dolls and dresses of his own. His mother had assumed that it was a phase, something he would grow out of. But it was a wish that had only grown more intense with the passage of years.

At first I didn't know how I could help him. I knew my situation was similar, but there was no way I could tell him about my transformation. Not only would it endanger my career, but it would have scared him off as well. And I knew that this poor boy needed someone to help him.

I offered to drive him home, giving myself a little more time to figure out what to do. It also let him get more comfortable with me. Helping people is two way street, after all.

We were pulling up in front of his house when I made a fateful decision. “Robert,” I asked, “Are you really, really, sure you want to be a girl? If you could truly become one, would you want it? This is something that wouldn’t be for an hour or a day... it would be for the rest of your life”

“Yes,” he cried. “Yes, yes, Mrs. Evans, a thousand times yes!”

I thought carefully about what I was going to say next. “I’m not going to make any promises. I have to warn you that this is a very, very long shot. But it might, and I emphasize might, be possible for me to help you make it happen.”

He threw his arms around me and cried, “Oh, Mrs. Evans, you can’t begin to know what this means to me.”

I smiled and thought to myself, *I know better than you think, dear. Better than you think.*

It turned out that Robert was living alone with his mother at that point; his parents were divorced, and his older sister was away at college. His mother would be going out of town to visit relatives and leaving Robert home alone for 10 days in early November.

I knew this would probably be the only opportunity to introduce Robert to an old friend of mine.

We made arrangements to meet early on the Saturday morning after Robert's mother had left. I had told your grandfather and mother that I had a weekend educational conference. I told Robert to come dressed as a girl, but didn't explain why.

When I pulled into the curved driveway in front of his house, I found him already standing on the stone porch, wearing a knee-length leather coat that he later told me belonged to his mother.

Even though it was a dreary, gray day, with an expected high only in the lower 40s, Robert was wearing panty hose and his high-heeled sandals. His blonde wig was once again secured atop his head, and his face was once again expertly made up. He had the suitcase I asked him to bring along, empty except for a few toiletries and a make-up kit.

"Good morning, Mrs. Evans," he said brightly as he climbed into the front seat next to me. "It's a beautiful day, isn't it?" I smiled and said I hoped that it would turn out to be just that. But I also kept trying to tell him not to get his hopes up, that this was a real long shot. Inwardly I was probably wishing and praying almost as hard as he.

It was a little past noon when we arrived in Milwaukee, and it took almost another hour to find my way to the part of town where my life had been forever altered almost 30 years earlier. So much had changed, but I knew I was headed in the right direction.

I realized when I got in the neighborhood, that I had no backup plan. What would this boy think if I couldn't find that mysterious old gypsy? We would just be wandering around the city. I tried to put that thought out of my head.

My heart leapt when I turned down a familiar street and saw Madame Mazurka's.

"Robert," I said, clutching his hand in mine. "I think your wish is going to be granted."

I held onto his hand as I pushed open the creaky door. There sat Madame Mazurka, looking no different than she had on that spring day in 1946. She peered at me for a moment through narrowed eyes, then said, "Oh yes, I remember you. I trust things have worked out?"

"Well, it was something of a shock at first, to be honest," I said. "But I don't have any complaints. Life has been good."

She looked at Robert, who even to a close inspection, could have passed as a girl at that moment. "Is this your son?" she asked.

"No," I said, "I'm a teacher, and Robert is a student of mine. He needs help- help that I can't give him. Help that only you can provide, if you know what I mean."

"I do, I do," she said. "The passage of time does not diminish my powers."

"Is the fee still the same?" I asked, reaching for my purse.

"For you, my child, this is a gift." Then she disappeared behind the folds of the curtains, leaving a cloud of dust in her wake.

Robert had taken off his mother's coat and draped it on the back of a rickety old wooden chair. He was wearing a flirty little red dress with a hemline that ended several

inches above his knees. If the scoop neckline had plunged any lower, the tissue padding his bra might have been apparent, but it wasn't.

He looked up at me with a mixture of anticipation and fear.

"Who is she, Mrs. Evans?" he asked. "What's she doing?"

I clutched his hand tightly once more and said, "Take it easy, dear. I'll explain everything- at least everything that I know- later."

I listened for the familiar chanting. It might have been 10 minutes, but to me, it seemed like an hour. To Robert I'm sure it was an eternity before Madame Mazurka reappeared from behind the curtains.

She clutched a familiar cup in her bony fingers. "Take this and drink it quickly," she directed Robert.

Robert cast a sideways, questioning glance at me. I smiled and nodded in reassurance. He began to drink. From the pained expression on his face, I could tell that the bitter taste hadn't changed. Robert sat the cup on the table, and in a sweet soprano voice said, "Gosh, that stuff tastes awful!" Then a look of realization lit up his face, now her face, and she sprang to her feet.

"Oh my, oh my," she kept repeating. As she reached into her top, she began to feel her own breasts for the first time. "They're real," she said quietly.

Then her hands were on top of her head, her fingers running through the long blonde strands that had been just a wig moment before. "It's real," she whispered. Then she ran her palms across the cream soft, smooth skin of her face.

"She's looking for peach fuzz," I thought to myself, "and she won't find a trace."

Next, I saw her hand reach tentatively under her dress; I could sense her curiosity and embarrassment. "Don't worry," I told her, smiling. "Things have changed there, too."

I looked at Madame Mazurka. "I don't know how I- we can begin to thank you. But I have to ask... why was her transformation instantaneous, while mine took overnight?"

"Because she was prepared, and you were not." I nodded in what I hoped passed for understanding.

Robert threw her arms around me and said "Thank you, Mrs. Evans, thank you." Then she turned to the old woman and said, "And thank you, Madame Mazurka."

As we headed to the door, I stopped and turned back toward Madame Mazurka. Before I could speak, she said to me, "Your intuition is correct. You will not see me again."

"But will you be here in the future for others who need you?"

"For anyone whose true destiny is to be female, I will always be here. Some, like your young friend, are already aware of it. Others, like you, come to me unknowing, but I steer all toward their proper destiny."

We got into my car. My own heart was pounding with excitement, and I could just imagine what Robert was feeling.

“What now?” she asked.

I explained my plan for us to get a motel room so she could get calmed down and cleaned up; that we then get a nice meal, stay overnight, and go shopping before heading home.

She sat shaking her head in amazement, then turned to me and said, “Mrs. Evans, I just realized from what Madame Mazurka said, you must have once been... you were born-”

I smiled. “Yes, dear,” I said. “I was born a boy, and spent the first 21 years of my life as one. I’ll tell you all about that later.”

Over a nice seafood dinner, we talked about how Robert would deal with his new life. I also told her the story of my life. “You mean you really didn’t know what Madame Mazurka’s potion would do to you?” she said incredulously. Then we turned to the issue of telling his mother.

I suggested that the simplest thing might be to tell her that the change had happened overnight while he had slept, and he had no idea how. I assured her that any doctor who examined her would find her to be a normal young girl in all respects.

“What about a name? Will you call yourself Roberta?” I asked.

“No,” she said. “I don’t think it’s very imaginative, and it reminds of a past that I’d just as soon put behind me. I’ve already been thinking about that. My ancestry is mostly French- I think I’m going to call myself Renee.”

“How appropriate,” I said. “It means reborn.”

“I know,” she smiled.

The next morning, we went to a large mall and hit every shop with young women’s clothing. We carefully choose a selection of clothing that would get Renee through her first days back at school. As a clerk rang up one large purchase on my credit card, the clerk looked at Renee and said, “You’ve got a very patient and generous mother, dear.”

“Oh,” Renee said. “She’s not my mother, but she is a dear friend. And in many respects, a second mother to me.”

I don’t think she noticed me holding back a tear.

A week later Renee enrolled in school. She told everyone that she was Robert’s cousin from the Iowa farm country. She explained that since Robert had run into such trouble fitting in, his mother and her mother had decided life in the country would do Robert some good... and Renee had wanted to experience life in the city.

I still remember how breathlessly excited she was after her first day of school as Renee. She practically came bursting through the door of my classroom. “Oh, Mrs. Evans,” she gushed. “This is so wonderful.”

I noticed that she had followed my advice and had her hair cut a bit, and also permed and highlighted. I thought she shouldn’t look too much like Robert in female dress.

After hearing about her first day, I asked her how her mother had dealt with her transformation.

“She was surprised,” Renee said, “but really not that interested.” I noticed a brief look of sadness cross her face. “She took me to a couple of doctors to be checked out, and we were told that I’m a healthy, normal girl in all aspects. She didn’t tell them about my transformation- I guess she thought they would have decided we were nuts.”

“So what happened next?”

“Well, I told her the cover story we came up with, and how I had decided to call myself Renee. She did ask me how I was dealing with things, and I told her that I had to be honest; I’m very happy that this happened.

“She said something like, ‘Well, that’s good, dear,’ gave me a quick peck on the cheek, handed me one of her credit cards and told me to get any clothes and other things I needed.”

My heart ached for her. “I shouldn’t say this, but it’s really too bad that your mother is so wrapped up in herself. She’s missing an opportunity to get to know a wonderful young woman.”

I complimented her on her new hairstyle, and mentioned that I noticed she had already had her ears pierced. “Perfect,” I told her, “for the gift I have for you.” I handed her a small, wrapped package I had picked up at my favorite jeweler’s the night before.

She quickly tore off the paper, opened the box, and found a pair of gold hoop earrings. “Oh, Mrs. Evans,” she cried, throwing her arms around me. “This is just too much. Thanks.”

Over the next three and a half years, Renee became one of the most popular girls in the school. She was on the cheerleading squad her junior and senior years and was one of the runners-up for homecoming queen as a senior.

She looked at me as a second mother in many aspects, I guess. Her own mother was too wrapped up in her own social life to give Renee the guidance she needed, so I tried to be there for her.

The biggest thing I tried to impress on her was the need to be responsible with her body. This was a challenge for her, because while Robert had never been popular with the girls, Renee was a big hit with the boys.

“You’re going to be overwhelmed with new desires,” I warned her. “And I want you to be aware of the potential consequences. A boy can do his part to create a baby and disappear forever. But a girl is a mother for the life of her child- forever.”

I urged her to practice abstinence until she was ready for a mature relationship. I am sure she tried her best, but I wasn’t too surprised when she got married the week after her high school graduation and became a mother five months after that.

We’ve kept in touch, and just recently she wrote me, “I can’t believe it’s been more than 20 years since my transformation, Mrs. Evans. I haven’t regretted it for a second. Life hasn’t been all flowers and romance and beauty- but who can blame a girl for wishing it was so? As you know, I have a wonderful husband and three beautiful children- two girls and a boy. I hope I can give them guidance as sure and wise as you’ve given me.”

Kimberly, I hope you won't be offended if I tell you that in some ways I've felt closer to Renee than I have to your mother. I love your mother dearly, and I'm very proud of her. But she's always been so headstrong and independent, I've never felt she's needed me in the way Renee did. And you've got to admit that we share a special bond.

In the spring of 1986 I retired, wrapping up a 30-year teaching career. As much as I loved it, I was ready to get out. When I started in the mid-50s, I was helping young girls to understand their first period; by this point, I was trying to help too many of them cope with being pregnant or addicted to drugs. I had seen the transition from poodle skirts and bobby socks to mini skirts and nose rings and realized that the time had come for me to go.

The retirement years have been fulfilling. Before your grandfather passed away, we had several years together to travel and enjoy life. I've been grateful for my extended family, especially you, dear Kimberly; and I've also reveled in the renewed interest in the girls' league.

Once again, I had to face the possibility of my past being exposed. But when I thought about it with a bit more clarity, I came to realize that no one was interested in my life before the league- it was what I had accomplished on the baseball diamond from 1946 to 1954 that was of main interest to people. And besides, even if I did tell the truth, who would believe it?

I was visited in 1991 by a woman who had grown up in Rockford, a die-hard Robins fan in her childhood, who wanted to meet some of her heroines and interview us for a book she was writing.

When she wanted to talk about my childhood, I only had to dust off some of the white lies I had been telling for decades. Was I a tomboy as a child? "You could say that," I answered. Did I play a lot of baseball as a child? "Only from sunrise to well after sunset. It was all I cared about," I told her truthfully.

Well, what about my brother, Charles, who had played pro ball during the war? I could tell she had done her homework. "He was a great inspiration and help to me," I told her. "Is he still living?" she wanted to know.

"No," I slowly replied. "He's been gone for years... but a big part of him is still alive inside of me."

The crowning moment, and one of the greatest days of my life, came in 1988 with the opening of the women's baseball exhibit at the Baseball Hall of Fame.

Kimberly, I am so glad that your grandfather, your parents and you were all there to share that day with me. As you remember, we flew into New York City the night before, stayed at a nice hotel, then got up early for the drive to Cooperstown.

Oh, how I fussed over my appearance that morning! Although I have always tried to take pride in my appearance, I have never thought of myself as a vain woman. But on this day, everything had to be perfect. I must have brought along half a dozen outfits! I tried them all on before settling on a simple A-line dark blue skirt that fell just below the knee, a long-sleeved white silk blouse and a multicolored print scarf that draped over one shoulder.

You may recall how quiet I was on the drive to Cooperstown. I remember how beautiful the countryside was that day, and how hard I found it to contain the emotions that were overwhelming me.

To walk through the doors of baseball's great shrine... to wander throughout the hall of immortals and see what amounted to the game's holy relics... and then to come to the new exhibit... The memories and emotions just flooded over me.

You held my hand for the speeches and ribbon cutting, and then I guided you and the rest of the family into the exhibit, excitedly pointing out the photos and momentos of the league.

"I played with her!" "I hit a home run off of her!"

Then we came around a corner, to find a life-sized picture of me in my Rockford uniform.

Beside it, we read the inscription:

"SUSIE PATRICK

"Rockford, 1946-50; South Bend, 1951-54.

"Susie Patrick is considered by many to be the finest all-around player in League history. No one else ranks at or near the top in so many career batting, fielding and base-stealing statistics. Her hustle and all-around play helped lead her teams to five consecutive post-season championships. As Mrs. Susan Evans, she went on to a 30-year career teaching and coaching high school girls."

I quietly said, "Oh my, oh my," and then starting to cry.

I never cried on the field, as a male or a female, but the tears sure flowed freely on that day. I was so glad you were all there to share it with me.

Although I wasn't officially a member, I was in the Hall of Fame at last. Madame Mazurka had kept her promises. I had asked to be a big leaguer and in the Hall of Fame, and my wishes had been granted, although in a way I couldn't possibly have imagined 50 years earlier.

Not only had all the dreams of my youth come true, but I had enjoyed a loving marriage, motherhood, and finally, becoming a grandparent. I had traveled an amazing journey and knew I wouldn't have changed a moment of it.