

INTERVIEW WITH: Jennifer Miss
CHATHAM COLOURED ALL-STARS

Interview Status: open to public

Name of interviewee: Jennifer Miss
Name of Interviewer: Alastair Staffen
Name of videographer: n/a

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Editorial Note(s):

0:00:13.0

JM: Hello.

AS: Hi, Jennifer, I am calling about the interview for the University of Windsor, about the All-Stars project.

JM: Yes I'm here.

AS: You're here okay, so I was thinking we'll get started right away, I will just talk to you a bit

about what we are doing here, and then we will get down to some questions. Sound good?

JM: Okay.

AS: Obviously you are being recorded, so we will check in with that, and make sure that is okay, so we are just recording the questions and I'll transcribe them. What we will do is we will submit a copy of that to you afterwards and you can review that, and make sure everything is up to standards and such, okay?

JM: Yup, that's fine.

AS: Okay, so I have a list of questions here, it is probably about half a page long, so it shouldn't take too long. You don't have to answer all the questions, whatever you are comfortable with, it is really up to you.

JM: Okay, I will answer what I can...

AS: Perfect, that is really all we are asking, If you don't know it you can just say can we skip that or whatever, or if you don't feel comfortable, or anything like that, just let me know and by all means we can skip it.

0:01:25.7

AS: So I think we are talking about you father here. He didn't play for the All-Stars, but he was heavily involved in sports, is that correct?

JM: Uh, no he didn't play for the All-Stars.

AS: Okay, yes. So the first question is simply, what is your father's name?

JM: His name was Carl.

AS: Okay, Carl. When was he born, and where?

JM: He was born in 1911, January 5, 1911, in Chatham.

AS: Okay, good. Can you tell me anything about his family, and again, about him growing up there, about his parents, his siblings, that sort of thing?

JM: Well, he was the oldest son of a large family, I'm not sure how many there were altogether, probably about eight of them. A couple, one brother died young, and another died in infancy, that I know of. Leonard was the one that died young. He had nasal surgery and passed away because of complications from that. My dad, he was responsible for the family. He felt very responsible to his family and he got along incredibly well with his parents and his siblings. When he was young he played minor sports in the area. Because of his colour, my father was a white mulatto. He was the only one in the family who was red-headed, a freckle-faced little white boy. He had many complications from his birth, primarily he felt like he didn't fit, and I think he probably had problems with relationships in the neighbourhood because of that. His family was all slightly darker skinned. He was very talented as a boy, he would catch and he would pitch. His other brother, Leonard, was the pitcher and I think that he would catch. When they lost Leonard I think

it was very hard on my dad. That was probably in their 20s. He was good in school, he was good in all sports, and he played hockey and baseball. I don't know what positions... baseball I know he pitched, but hockey I have no idea. I saw him play hockey. As he got older he coached, and when they had me, he lived in St. Thomas and he played for the local teams. Always played for local teams, he loved sports. It was a very important part of his life. That's about all I know about that.

0:05:05.7

AS: Right, you are doing well, you are covering the questions quite well. Obviously I am looking here and you have answered a couple of the questions already. So we have talked a little about sports in the community and stuff like that as well. Are there any specific examples of difficulties or challenges that he encountered?

JM: Yeah there were challenges.

AS: Obviously, you mentioned this already, but do you have any specific examples, or anything more to say about that?

JM: No, he didn't talk about it much. It was pretty hard to elaborate on things he didn't talk about. He talked about it a little bit when I was growing up, but when you are a kid you don't press. So no, and he was the one who left Chatham. He didn't stay in Chatham-Windsor area. He met my mother up north. He played semi pro for, I don't even know what they were called, but he played for a team that was sponsored by a business man in St. Thomas and they were farmed out to other businesses during the 30s and he played for the Lake Shore Mines in Kirkland Lake, and he had been loaned out by his owner "Perce" Spackman who owned a car dealership in St. Thomas. So he played for three years up in Kirkland Lake, hockey and baseball, and that was during the 30s, and he worked for the Lake Shore Mines when he wasn't playing, which he hated.

AS: Yeah, I can imagine...

0:07:05.4

AS: Do you know approximately when he left and moved away?

JM: From Kirkland Lake or Chatham?

AS: Chatham, when he moved away and went to Kirkland Lake.

JM Well, he left Chatham to go and work in St Thomas and that would be in the early '30s.

0:07:29.8 AS: Do you have anything to say about his life up there after he left, his family life up in Kirkland Lake, if he had anything there or afterwards, maybe what kind of job he had after working in the mines, that sort of thing?

JM: Well, when he lived in St Thomas he worked for Perce Spackman who owned the car dealership, and my Dad owned gas stations. He was a labourer, but he was a bright man, and he took charge of the gas station. He was not a mechanic, and he had no profession other than being

very personable, but he loved cars and he worked on cars, and back in those days you didn't have to be a mechanic to do everything. He could do anything with cars. He sort of worked as a chauffeur, worked as a part time mechanic, ran the pumps and he did that for the Spackmans, well, until... 40 years he worked for them. After that, he worked for another car dealership, running gas stations and he was a very personable man, got along with everybody, played sports, coached little league and coached the semi pro... local teams, I guess they weren't semi-pro, they were just local teams in the St. Thomas area. He was very involved in the community.

0:09:20.1

AS: Do you have anything further to say about that? I mean, these are all questions further down the list but we are getting to them now. Perhaps, during retirement did he play?

JM: After retirement?

AS: Yeah, was he involved?

JM: Yeah he played in his retirement. There were the Old-timers teams, they came into town and he played with those.

AS: And was this baseball and hockey as well?

JM: Yep.

AS: Okay, so he played right up until [retirement], okay so very active.

JM: He played as long as he could. He had the same pair of skates for years, they were tattered and torn and he wore CCMs for years.

0:10:14.2

Okay, maybe a weird question, but do you know what he really enjoyed about playing sports, maybe the competition or something like that, but was there something he really enjoyed about playing?

JM: I'm not catching you?

AS: Um, well I guess was there any specific part of the sport that he liked, did he like the competitive atmosphere, did he like getting out there and playing with friends?

JM: He liked everything about it -- he liked the people, he liked playing, he liked the competition, and he liked winning.

0:10:51.8

AS: Okay, yeah of course. Perhaps, do you have any stories about his sporting life? Did he tell you anything about it?

JM: No not really.

AS: Not really? Nothing comes to mind, okay...

JM: Just the working up north, he hated that.

0:11:11.9

AS: Yes (laughs) I can imagine that, I've been up there and seen them (the mines) and can imagine... Did he... as you mentioned before, he was coaching these little league teams, or semi-pros or whatever that was. Did he encourage people in his family to participate in sports?

JM: All his family were in sports, all his brothers were. His sisters I don't think they were, but the brothers, Boomer, and Andy they all played. Leonard...

AS: And his kids too, did he encourage them as well, to go into sports?

JM: Did he encourage his brothers? Oh yes, very much so. I think he saw they had better chances than he did.

0:12:09.3 Brief discussion of audio quality, adds little to the interview, suggest cutting 0:12:40.8 [okay –we will make a note of that]

JM: But no, he really encouraged his brothers to play, and because of his colour I think he felt that he missed out, and because of the time and him being the oldest one. I know when Boomer was doing really well he was younger and my dad felt that he had to encourage him even more, because he was the one who had the extra talent and the one who had the extra opportunity, so he did spend time with him.

0:13:21.2

AS: Okay, good. I think the next couple questions, we are getting down the list very quick, we are just over half way done now, the next questions are about sports in the community, and again, you have already touched these, you have already mentioned his involvement coaching and that sort of thing. So, one of the questions here is why did he think it was important, and this is kind of up to you to answer, I'm not sure if he would have told you specifically, but do you know any reasons why he might have thought it important to promote sports in the community?

JM: Just to keep it going, and he thought it was important for the development of all children. He thought it was important to be involved in sports. Except for me, he wouldn't let me play hockey or baseball.

0:14:12.2

AS: Can you talk further about that?

JM: Well, I resented it, because I felt I should be able to play too, but he wouldn't let me. He said, well, "You're a girl, you watch," (laughs).

AS: Do you play sports now? Have you got out and...?

JM: Well, I have always been involved in sports, I was involved in sports, and I skated, and it was very important for him to be involved with my skating and swimming, and he encouraged it. But I wanted to play hockey, and he wouldn't teach me.

0:14:53.2

AS: So we have a question about the Chatham Coloured All-Stars, which again I know he didn't play for, but do you have any thoughts on that story?

JM: No, I have no involvement with that, because he was the one who left, and my mother and he had some disagreements with his involvement with his family. She didn't want to be as involved with the family, and had her little life in St. Thomas and did not spend a lot of time with his family. He was the one who went and spent time with his family. Until I was about ten or eleven he would take me and I remember that, but then after that I don't remember much involvement with the family at all. And I lost contact...

0:15:49.6

AS: Right, this question, as well, I going to (getting at) what we are doing now, and the story itself, do you have any thoughts on spreading the story, sharing it? Do you think that more people should know about it, that sort of thing?

JM: Well yeah, I think it is important that people know that Carl was a part of the family. Even though he wasn't in the Chatham-Windsor area, he spent time there, he grew up there. He encouraged his family, and he had wanted to be more involved in sports. But because of the colour differences, I feel that he was definitely ostracised, and he encouraged his brothers to be more involved, and he left home. I think he felt that the only way to play the sports that he wanted was if he left the Chatham-Kent area. Which is what he did when he moved to St. Thomas, and what he did when he was sent up to Kirkland Lake to play ball.

0:17:01.1

AS: So we are on the last question, and it is pretty open ended. Did you have any other comments about your father, do you have anything else to say about the role of sports in his life, or anything else that you would like to say, anything that I might have missed, and anything like that?

JM: Well, I think he missed opportunities, and I think that he felt he missed a lot of opportunities because of his colour, and because of his family. I don't think he was accepted as a black kid in the neighbourhood, and he didn't really get to play the sports that he wanted to play in Chatham Kent and he had to grow up and leave. Then, because of his age, he missed opportunities to play. He was very talented. He was a great skater and a great ball player. I didn't see a lot of the family play, but I did see my dad play, and he was animated and very involved and very in love with the game and with sports. He encouraged everybody that he worked with, but mainly the kids that he coached, and the young players that he coached, to play their best and to keep it part of their lives. Which he did. He always watched sports, he loved all sports. He was an avid football watcher.

0:18:46.4

AS: He had a very interesting life for sure, and he was dedicated by the sound of it. So we are done with the questions here that were specifically written, but if you have any final comments

to make?

JM: No, not really. That is about all I know, there is not that much that I know, because of not being involved with the family, and he has been gone for over 30 years and he didn't talk much about it, it was hard to get information out of him. But he kept things, he had baseballs, he had bats, he had gloves, he had his old skates. He kept everything in his little private spots. It was important to him.

AS: Good, very interesting, very interesting for sure. If there is nothing else, I would like to thank you for your time.

JM: Okay, well thank you for calling.

AS: No problem, and thank you, and we will get back to you with some transcripts of what has been said and you will get to look over it, as I said.

JM: Well, I look forward to seeing the whole story completely.

AS: So we will keep you in the loop, and hopefully you will be able to learn more about it as well, and we will share it all with everybody hopefully.

JM: Okay, great, thank you for calling.

AS: And thank you for talking, have a good day.

JM: You too, Bye now.

AS: Goodbye.