



RUTH'S LONG STRETCH

ON JUNE 15, 1937, diplomas were presented to 54 high school graduates for commencement at the Hough School. Among them was 16-year-old Ruth Bjornberg, the daughter of Amelia and Andrew Bjornberg, born on August 26, 1920. Her family was sports oriented. Her brother played for the Barrington Bears baseball team, and a younger sister, Esther, won the High Jump at the intra-schools play meet in 1936. Ruth (third from left in photo) became a valued softball player, with a team fielded by the Jewel Tea Company.

In October 1937, just 17 years old, like many other local girls, she had gone to work for the Jewel Tea Company in their Jewel Park "Gray Lady" headquarters. In her five years there, she had two secretarial positions. Playing first base on the Jewel employee softball team, she had the ability to keep her foot on the base and stretch far to catch the ball. After seeing her play, her Uncle Carl, who had immigrated from Sweden with her father, nicknamed her "Stretch" after a Detroit Tigers baseball player with the same ability and nickname.

In April 1942, Ruth married Robert H. "Budd" Van Wambeke and they moved to Elgin. Robert enlisted in the army, and their first daughter, Judy, was born before he was shipped overseas. When he returned, they settled in Barrington, and had three more children, Bill, Diane, and Shirley. Robert died in 1985.

Ruth is described by her daughter Judy as "endearing and enduring" for her winsome personality and her persevering spirit. Ruth and Robert were among a small group of charter members of the Village Church of Barrington where she lived out her vibrant life of faith and prayer. In 2012, she and two of her fellow 1937 alumna were honored in the Barrington High School Homecoming Parade, but in 2017, at her 80th alumni reunion, she was the singular Grand Marshall of the Parade.

A 100th birthday party was held for Ruth on August 30, 2020 at her home on Division Street. Articulate and sharp as ever, she was delighted by many people driving by to see her. She passed peacefully on November 26, a few months later. Four children, 14 grandchildren, and 15 great-grandchildren number her descendants and remember her long life—one well played, and well lived. U