

Carrie Thibeault's  
interview with  
Mrs. Koszki

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This is Carrie Thibeault and I'm going to interview Mrs. Koszki about her coaching the girls first basketball team at National Mine. It's Wednesday the 10<sup>th</sup>.

Me: When and where were you born?

Mrs. K: I was born in Ashpeming in 1943, Ashpeming Hospital.

Me: What were your parents names?

Mrs. K: Lloyd and Elsie Hooper.

Me: What are the names of your brothers and sisters?

Mrs. K: I have 2 sisters, Sandy Hooper Para and Linda Hooper Lathillier. I have 2 brothers, Lloyd, Dr. Lloyd Hooper and Dr. Larry Hooper.

Me: Oh (laughing) Were you married? if so when?

Mrs. K: Yeah I was married for almost 25 years. I was married in 1963 and uh, in Norway, Michigan, and my husband died a little

Mrs. K.: (continued) over 5 years ago.

Me: Um, what did your parents do for a living?

Mrs. K.: My mother was a homemaker, my father worked for the DNR as a forest fire person.

Me: Where did you go to school?

Mrs. K.: I went to Ely elementary school. Well, I ~~did~~ went to Ontonagon before that, but I transferred to Ely ~~in~~ 5<sup>th</sup> grade. I graduated from 8<sup>th</sup> grade there. Went to Ishpeming High School as a tuition student. I graduated there in 1961 and I got my, um, degree, um, my undergraduated degree at the University of Michigan. And I got a masters degree ~~at~~ <sup>from</sup> Northern and I've been to about six different colleges along the way.

Me: How old were you when you had your first job?

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Mrs. K: 16, uh, waitressing, um, we did alot of little things odd night crawlers when I was a little kid babysat of course, but I got a waitressing job as soon as I was 16 and I, um waitressed until I was about 19. I, uh, my first actual job, I did some substitute teaching with, uh without having a degree & then, uh, I had a full time job in, uh, Fayetteville, North Carolina teaching service men back in 1968 I think it was. Something like that. So that was my first real full-time job

Me: Well, how did you come around to be a coach for a basketball team?

Mrs. K: Well, they didn't have anybody. They wanted to start an intermural program, & I was new in teaching and, uh, younger than alot of the other teachers, & um, pardon me Mrs. Richards and Mrs. Hubert, for saying that. They were younger than I, but they had other things going, & uh, I was always interested in sports when I was a kid,

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Mrs. K: (continued) played baseball and things like that. So they asked, the girls come & asked, would you help us with our team, and so, we had our first team, and it was, um, we were not allowed to compete. We were allowed to play three games in the year with other schools, but we weren't allowed to keep score. They had some real strict rules on it. We couldn't keep it in a score book. We could keep it on a piece of paper, but there was allowed, not allowed to be anything official on it ~~allowed~~ at all and with the intention of getting the girls some background so that when, um, Westwood opened and girls' athletics was finally accepted they would, um, have some, something to build on.

Me: Do you remember your first practice at all?

Mrs. K: Yup, very well. It was a case of, uh, <sup>5</sup>  
there wasn't a J.V. or varsity game, it  
was just a case of the girls coming in  
and starting to shoot, and uh, many  
of them not even knowing how to handle  
a ball. These are high school girls,  
Freshmen, Sophomores, Juniors, and  
Seniors, and they couldn't even dribble  
the ball, let alone do a lot of the other  
things, and we had to practice, I'd  
set up chairs, this wasn't necessarily  
the first practice. But I asked some  
of the guys what do I do, cause no  
women had had training in how to  
coach, I just kind of did it by guess  
and by gosh, ya know. Uh, cause'  
we'd never played basketball  
competitively, cause we weren't  
allowed, girls didn't have, we didn't  
have track when I was in school,  
we didn't have, uh competitive  
swimming, we didn't have golf, girls  
weren't allowed to do anything,  
cheerleading, and debate and forensics  
and I got durned down for

Mrs. K: (continued) cheerleading so I did the debate and pnoneies and got my letter through that, but we couldn't, we weren't allowed, there wasn't track or anything. So when, uh, this started of course it was, uh, totally new to everybody. And so I'd line up chairs and the guyp told me you gotta get them to use, used to dribbling and I'd make them dribble back and forth between the chairs. And they'd just go back and left handed, then they'd have to go left handed and try moving around things. Cause I didn't know what to do, it was just the guyp why don't you try this. I'd ask Mr. Chin, and uh, Mr. Deardie who was student teaching there at that time I think and, uh, a few of the others, ya know. How do I, How do I train these girls. Cause I didn't know what the heck to do. So that's what I would do. And then we'd practice shooting and we'd just do whatever

Mrs. K: (continued) uh, they needed to do. But their skill level was really, really low.

Me: Were there lots of people who came out or just a few?

Mrs. K: Nah. Just a few. We had uh, we never, and they'd be so excited for a game. I mean this was something new & the girls were really fired up & they really cared. And I had this little station wagon, uh kind of a mini-size station wagon, and a lot of the girls on the team came from around where Westwood is right now. And we would practice after school when the boys weren't practicing, of course, and they lots of times didn't have a ride home and I can remember showing eight girls. They would be lying in the back end of my station wagon, jammed-up against each other, uh, on the floor, ya know, crum, uh crumpling, I'd have like 10 girls

Mrs. K: (continued) the springs on my car were going down to the road. And I'd drop them off and we'd stop at one, uh, one level and then the rest would say ohh we can breathe now. (Laughing) Well we'd have to give, give them a ride home because they didn't have a ride home after practice and fortunately I came right through that area so I was able, able to, uh, give most of them a ride, but the enthusiasm was absolutely tremendous. And the willingness to learn, and being fired-up about being able to do it. ~~The~~ boy can do it I think was a big thing for them.

Me: Did more people come out during the year?

Mrs. K.: For basketball? Not really, we had most of the girls, of course, uh, that was when Champion & National Mine were still both high schools, but the consolidation had come through. So we had the girls who would have gone to D. Shperring High School, that came. And so it was more. Well my first year at National



Mrs. K! (continued) Mine we had, I think 18 in the 9<sup>th</sup> graduating class. And then during that year consolidation passed, and so the next year, um, about half the kids. So then there were about 50 in the graduating class, about half of which were girls. And, uh, so these girls were, uh, and of course not every girl in the class would go out for basketball, and a lot of them liked other things, but we didn't care what their skill, we didn't have tryouts, ya know. If you want to play you come... & play. And we had a game with Rock one time, and we always had one w/ Champion, and Champion's coach was the same thing. Years later one of the girls was criticizing our coaching, and saying, gee they didn't even know what they were doing. And they are correct, we didn't, but no one else would do it. And at least they got a start, ya know. The girls would tell me, Miss K. we gotta have play, and I said girls, you can't even handle the ball. Lets learn to handle the ball first. And they would say we gotta have play. The boys have play, we gotta have play.

Mrs. K: (continued) So I finally said, O.K., O.K., O.K. ⑩  
we'll have play. We'll have play A +  
play B. Now I had one girl on the team,  
Julie Pope, who was kind of a tom-boy  
and was a pretty good ball player & she  
knew how to handle the ball. And the  
rest of them were, uh, like I said very  
weak in their skills. So we had play A  
and play B. Play A was feed Julie the  
ball and play B was do what ever you  
wanna do. So they'd be out there on the  
floor with this ball, they'd be trying to  
get from one end to the other & uh  
Julie would be out in the open, and  
I'd hollar A, A, and they'd look for  
Julie. And then I'd hollar B O.K. and  
they'd go & do what they wanted (laughing)  
to. But we couldn't, there was no way  
we could have play, because we  
were prac, practicing on such things  
as passing, sloppy passing was  
uh prevalent and, uh, like I said,  
they weren't able to dribble, some of  
them could dribble once or twice, and  
their ball would get stolen, and uh,  
and they, uh, didn't have their energy  
level built-up. We'd try doing things

Mrs. K: (continued) like drills, but the season wasn't even that long. So it didn't make much difference. But it was, it was a start. Then the uh, second year I put in the announcements that we were having try-outs and Lulie was still playing cause she had been a junior that <sup>first</sup> year, and a bunch of the other girls who had played came out again and we were to follow the same rules. And I walk into the gym that first day, here's this blonde freshmen standing outside of the key whooshing them through the net. One after another, one handed. And I went 'oh yes God sent me help.' (laughing) So that year it was feed Lulie, feed Loni, or do whatever you wanted to. And, uh, Loni went on to play at Westwood as an outstanding player. Lulie graduated before the program really got started, or she probably could have been a good player. Lots of the other girls could have been real good, too, but you know they didn't start with the framework these other two did. And, uh, Loni went on then to play at Northern and she was a super Northern player. And I teased her when she'd come back to visit

Mrs. K: (continued) umm, I'd say 'yup. I gave her, her start in basketball. (laughing) And, uh, my little claim to fame is I had a gal who was a Northern star, that I uh gave the start to her career, and of course I really didn't have much to do with it except that I allowed them to use the gym. I was there to supervise, and I gave them a little bit of skills that I did have. Hopefully I'm a little better teaching English, than I was at teaching basketball.

me: were the other teams that you played very good?

Mrs. K: They were the same as we were. It was about six and one half a dozen of another. We'd get out on the floor, and they'd be, uh, screaming battles up and down the court. And, uh, whoever had eight points would beat the one with six points, ya know. And, uh, I don't think that the scores were quite that low, we were never allowed, of course, to keep, but, uh, it was a learning experience for everyone. In particular, me.

me: How long were you a coach?

Mrs. K: I coached, I think it was just those two years, uh, and then Westwood opened up. And we came to Westwood and, uh, I abdicated my position to someone who had a degree in physical education, and knew what a play was. I figured it would be much wiser, if somebody could actually teach them plays, so. Of course, they could all dribble better by then. And, uh, at least a little bit of experience, at the competitive spirit and all that.

Me: Do you remember any other humorous experiences that happened or anything?

Mrs. K: Uh, I think I just related a few of those. That were to me the most funny. Uh, let me see if I can think of any, any others. I would say the one about Loni is funny, and the play was a funny one and the car, bringing them home was funny. And the bus trips, of course, are uh, if you have never experienced riding on a bus with, uh, about 20 gals to a ball game, um, you're missed something

Mrs. K: because uh, there were more giggles and more  
 laughs, and, you know, more jokes and things  
 going on than you could ever imagine, more  
 excitement. But, uh, those are the most funny  
 ones that I can remember, that really stand  
 out in my mind. My poor little girl,  
 my daughter was little at that time  
 and I would bring her lots of times to  
 practices and she'd sit on the side  
 and just watch and uh, poor kid ended up  
 spending lots of evenings at National  
 Mine for play practices, and for basketball  
 games, and I dragged her to everything  
 in those years. So the poor kid got, really  
 got an exposure at an early age. I  
 think they still do. I'm real pleased  
 uh, I guess what I would have to point  
 out are the differences. And I know  
 this wasn't a question you had right  
 there, but when I was reading  
 your questions, uh, something came  
 to mind that I think is worthy  
 of mention. In the early years of  
 girls' basketball, and even now,  
 there are not that many women  
 coaches. Personally, I think it's  
 important if u play a sport coach

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Mrs. Ki: (continued) a sport to have played it. So that you know all the things. Like what they're going through, how they feel, all the emotional things that, uh, they go through. And men coaches from the first few years didn't know because they weren't raised with, like the boys are from 3, 4, 5, 6 and have teams, in this day and age thing. My age group. We stepped into it not being allowed to participate in sports when I was in high school because we were too quote Inail. We had to play girls basketball. And the rules are funny. We play girls basketball most of you only run half of the court. There is only one person who can go up and down the whole court. You have 2 dribbles and then you have to pass the ball. So you didn't learn how to dribble. And so all of a sudden we're being asked to coach girls, without the knowledge of the emotions involved in it. The skills involved in it. Of how to do it ourselves because we had not been allowed

Mrs. K: (continued) to do it. And so, right now, I think it's nice because this group of kids, these girls, who have been raised with the basketball are now graduating from college. And they can start coaching with that perspective. So anybody who says women coaches are weaker, are not looking at that fact. But, uh, they're missing out on that whole experience that will make them a good coach. It's not inately that they're not better it's just they haven't been through that procedure and I think the public is too quick to judge that kind of thing. Girls basketball is slower than boys there's no question about it, um, but it doesn't mean that it cannot be as fruitful for girls as it is for boys. There's absolutely no distinction there and a lot of people say, you're spending all that money on girls and it's so slow and boring. Hey, the girls aren't bored, the parents aren't bored, future generations aren't going to be bored. There's a lot more to it than that. And there are things that guys can't do as well as, as fast as, and yet it doesn't mean they can't get



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Mrs. K: (continued) something out of it.

Me: Do you remember, do you know any changes changes that like basketball has changed at all since you've been coaching.

Mrs. K: Oh sure. Quality is certainly better. Girls start off at an earlier age, they start, uh, playing ball in 5th grade and looking for competitiveness. Um, I think that, uh, for a long time what was happening in basketball was, that they were looking for height and cutting a lot of the girls who were shorter because girls, that's also a different problem; you've got short girls more so than you've got short boys. And they're starting to realize that short girls can play too. And they're not just cutting just, I'm going to keep my 5 tallest girls or anything like that. I think that, uh, right now there are a lot, a lot more male coaches for girls than there are females, but I think that's going to change and for the reasons I listed before. It's good that there are males because they know how

MRS. K: (continued) to play the game, they have played the game. And alot of the girls haven't. But say, even at Westwood now, Mr. Hammar Mr. Reiterlie, uh, Mr. Hammars' age group the women did not play ball, you know when he was in school so, anybody his age would not have gone through the experience as Mr. Hammar played ball, Mr. Deiterly played ball. But anybody in Mr. Deiterly's age there's a female hasn't done so. So I think the males are great, but I think one of the things that hurts a little bit is that males don't understand the physics of girls as well. They expect girls to be hyp upstairs, and, in the head and they aren't. They're emotions are different. And girls will start crying over some things that boys don't. And so to some extent boys don't understand that and so I think there's going to be a reflexive more female coaches in the future. And I'm looking forward to seeing that, I think that'll be a nice addition, but it's going to have to be the up and coming ones, like, like the Loris and the Julies that, that had a little bit of training and the ones beyond them now tho-

Mrs. K: (continued) uh, you know that have played (11)  
their whole lives & that they've played  
competitive ball in college. It's got more  
respect. I think.

Me: Um, did you ever feel like quitting  
coaching?

Mrs. K: Oh lots of times. Um I think particularly  
because I felt so impotent, and yet I  
knew no one else would do it. I did my  
best. My best wasn't very good & many days  
I would say I'm not teaching them, what  
they should be learning. I'm not giving  
them, I don't know how to do this. I don't  
know how to tell them that. And that would be  
when I would want to quit and then I would  
sit back and say, O.K. who else is going to do it.  
And is it better to be here and give them some  
experience or to quit and have them have none.  
And I chose the first route. Another reason I  
often thought of quitting was that, uh, being a  
new teacher & having a family was, uh, so time  
consuming. I had a daughter who was about  
5 and I was coaching basketball, I was directing  
uh, plays, working with the yearbook, working  
with the school newspaper, uh having 5  
totally separate classes to teach & about 8

Mrs. K: (continued) sections a day and it just seemed like, uh, there weren't enough hours in a day. So for those two reasons, yeah I thought about quitting.

Me: So, uh, what are you doing right now?

Mrs. K: Right now. As far as my professional life?

Me: Yeah

Mrs. K: I teach English at Westwood High School. I've been here since it opened. I came over when the consolidation occurred, rather than staying on the junior high because I've never had experience with the junior high. And I am the senior member of the English staff and the only one who has been here since the school opened. And, uh, I'm teaching college prep, and Business English and this year I'm teaching a couple of freshman classes. But mainly I've been teaching juniors & seniors for the last, oh a dozen years or so.

Me: Um, if you had a choice to coach again, would you coach again?

Mrs. K: Oh heavens no. Uh I'm not qualified. I wasn't qualified then and I'm even less qualified now. Uh because they have come so far and I've stayed stagnant

Mrs. K: (continued) I've probably um, have a little (21)  
less energy for stuff like that than I  
did then, too. So I would never do that. I  
would never subject myself on a basketball  
team of girls. They don't deserve that. They  
certainly deserve more than I have to  
offer at this point

me: Do there anything that you'd want to add  
or anything?

Mrs. K: Oh. I guess the only thing that I want to  
add is that I'm really pleased that the  
public has accepted the fact that girls  
can be involved in competitive sports. I  
truly feel I've missed something in my  
school. I would loved to have done some  
of these things. Uh, and never had the  
opportunity. And, I think that, I would like  
to tell all the girls who have this opportunity  
to treasure it and take advantage and  
appreciate, rather than taking it for  
granted and griping like so many do  
about things. Cause they have opportunities  
to do things that we didn't have and, uh,  
I think young kids don't appreciate what  
they get a lot of times. They just, Oh so what  
ya know, that's their job. They should do  
that and I think it's so important for  
people to realize what's been given to  
them.

me: well then if that's all, then thanks alot.

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