

# Basketball Girl

by Vivian (Morgan) Ulan

*Until she was 13, Vivian Imogene Morgan lived in Clarence, Iowa. The daughter of a school superintendent, James H. Morgan, she climbed trees, hunted rabbits, and skinned snakes. Her family's move to Sigourney when she was 13 coincided with the end of her tree-climbing days, and, as her daughter remembers Vivian recounting, "I tried my best to follow my sisters and be totally female. It was hard until basketball arrived. It was my salvation. We played to win. No one ever preached to us about good sportsmanship. We played with all our hearts, always with a regard to the rules so we wouldn't foul out."*

*In 1967, Vivian's daughter, Mrs. B. J. Wilson (of Riceville, Iowa), decided to write down her mother's description of growing up—from climbing trees to dating boys to playing basketball. Wilson wrote in first person, as if her mother were speaking. She sent the manuscript to the State Historical Society of Iowa (Iowa City) in 1967. Excerpted here are Vivian's memories of basketball.* —The Editor

I was a basketball girl myself. . . . I played center in my senior year of 1907-1908 [at Sigourney]. . . . Our team was started because our high school superintendent was also the coach of the boys' first football teams and being athletic-minded, when two lady teachers [Lillian and Ethel Cunningham of Malvern, Iowa], who had played basketball in college, wanted to or-

ganize a girls' basketball team he gave permission. Volunteers were asked for. I loved any activity of that kind and properly volunteered.

There was a loud outcry from many mothers. It would keep their daughters from bearing children or it would do so much harm that if they were fortunate in bearing a child they would never be able to nurse it. . . .

Uniforms were carefully considered by not only the teachers but the school board itself. Skirts [rather than] bloomers were discarded because the school board felt if we were ever in a position where the skirt might flop over our heads, that it would not only be embarrassing but most immodest. Uniforms were chosen of a heavy, light, gray cravanette with a darker gray stripe in it. They were one-piece suits. The top had elbow sleeves and a sailor collar. A black silk tie went under the collar and tied in a bow held in place by a loop at the front where the end of the collar sides met. Our bloomers were very full so as to not reveal the female form. They came below the knee where they were held taut by rubber bands. We wore heavy, black, cotton ribbed hose that came above the knee so that no space showed any bare skin. We wore black, high-laced tennis shoes. Underneath our suits we wore long cotton vests. What decent girl was ever without one? Some were

heavily embroidered at the top. We wore a garter belt to hold up our long hose. Thank goodness the years of the long, beruffled, white pantaloons were over so our panties were short—coming only to our knees and each pant leg was ended usually with a number of rows of tucks edged with embroidered ruffles or heavy lace.

We had no gym so our games were played outdoors on grass each fall and spring. I never will forget the disappointed look on the boys' faces when we walked on the courts garbed as we were. Every boy or young man in the vicinity was seated on the grass in a circle around the court. One boy in my class aroused my anger by gazing at us in wide-mouthed amazement. At the time I thought since we wore our dresses to cover our shoe tops that he was surprised to know that girls had legs—and what legs we must have displayed with those awful hose on. As I look on the girls who play today with their freedom from extra clothing I often wonder how we ever played as we were garbed without being overcome with the heat. Because we played just as hard as the girls of today. . . .

Way back in the early 1900s basketball was played in many

communities over the state. Our group of girls all married and nursed their babies in spite of the dire prophecies of the few alarmed mothers. We rode in hacks to neighboring teams or went by train to play other schools.

It's a real treat for even my tired old eyes to watch the basketball girls of today.

The following are high school yells we gave. The seniors were bitter enemies of the juniors in Sigourney High in those early days. The seniors took the freshmen under their wings, and the sophomores and juniors sided together. There were really battles between those classes. Each class had its own pennant and they vied with each to place either junior or senior pennants on the highest building in town.



The Sigourney High School takes on South English, in southeastern Iowa, 1907.



Hiro biro diro dum  
 Ruma stick a  
 Bum a diddle  
 Fee fo fum  
 Rip rap flip flap  
 Zip zip zeven  
 We're the class of 1907.

Juniors, Sophomores  
 O! What lubbers  
 O! Slush! Get your rubbers  
 O! Scissors! Cut it out  
 O! Joy! Hear us shout.

Ring-a-rung-a!  
 Ring-a-rung-a!  
 Ring-a-rang-a-ris  
 Sigourney, Sigourney  
 1906.

Hippity, hippity, huss  
 We're not allowed to cuss  
 But never the less  
 We will say this  
 There's nothing  
 The matter with us.

Hulla balloo  
 Balla Balli  
 Basket Ball-o my oh my  
 Record breakers  
 Sakes alive  
 Sigourney High School  
 Still we thrive.

Oh, thee thy thou  
 Ali ca ze ca zi ca zou  
 Sigourney High School  
 Wow wow wow.