My brother’s vintage 1950s lacrosse stick stood in the corner of the garage for years minus its original gut wall, thanks to a hungry dog as the story goes. Despite its dilapidated state, the stick provided me with hours of entertainment during the late 1960s and early 1970s. Whether I used a tennis ball, a sponge rubber ball (you know, the one that was half-red and half-blue with a white stripe around its equator), or a real lacrosse ball, I spent hours throwing it at the cinder block wall of the garage and catching it on the rebound. When I needed variety, I would toss the ball onto the roof of the garage, the house, or even the dairy barn, waiting for gravity to bring the ball back to earth for another catch, that is, as long as it didn’t get swallowed up by the eavestrough. When the dry leather runners snapped—as they often did given their age—I would simply find a shoelace and make a quick repair. I loved tossing and catching the ball and I was hungry to give the game a try, yet despite its proximity to my family’s farm, the sport of lacrosse seemed far away and inaccessible to me. I was born and raised just north of Brampton, Ontario, the home of the Brampton Excelsiors’ box lacrosse dynasty. The Excelsiors’re were the talk of the town during the late summer when competing in the Mann Cup or Minto Cup finals. With my dad, I also avidly watched the Toronto Tomahawks’ professional box lacrosse telecasts on CHCH-TV out of Hamilton. My dad and my brother shared my interest in sports and readily cheered my sisters and me on in the one competitive sport that was available for girls and women in our rural area—softball. My mom, however, held a very different viewpoint. Girls, according to her, did not play sports. In fact, my mom’s rural Baptist upbringing suggested that girls should simply focus on what was needed (i.e., proper feminine deportment and the skills required to be a good cook and seamstress) to one day attract a husband and thereafter raise a family—not on silly purposeless games. So I continued, as needed, to clandestinely pilfer every shoelace I could find and to fire the ball at that cinder block wall with little hope of ever playing the game. And then came a glimmer of hope when I entered high school in the early 1970s—where physical education classes and after-school sports such as basketball, volleyball, badminton, softball, and lacrosse—gave me the opportunity to explore the depths of my athletic potential.

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In this article, my first attempt at writing an autoethnography, I draw upon my memories of lacrosse beginning with a brief reflection on my own—and to be quite frank—dismissive high school encounters with the game followed by a more extensive essay on my experiences at the provincial, national, and international levels as a player, coach, umpire, and administrator during what I metaphorically term the “golden age” of senior women’s field lacrosse in Canada. Above all else, I believe it is important to tell this story so that the modern-day foundations of the game in Canada during this time period are recorded. Implicit within my analysis, moreover, is an in-depth and deeply personal account and interpretation of the forces that supported its establishment as well as those that impeded its growth or eventually led to its demise at the senior level. As an academic trained in the natural sciences, taking an autoethnographic approach to accomplish this task was not my first choice. I find this manner of writing to be extremely uncomfortable—both because it lacks the objectivity that I was taught to value by my positivist academic discipline and it appears to leave little room for humility. If there was another way to do it, I would. However, extricating my personal experiences from the story of senior women’s field lacrosse in Canada during the 1980s is a difficult if not impossible task. In an effort to assuage some of my aforementioned concerns, I am opting to use what is referred to as an analytical authoethnography approach, which will allow me to describe and systematically analyze my personal experiences with the game in combination with the known facts. In so doing, I must unavoidably share aspects of my athletic and empiricist-oriented academic self, and the impact of key individuals, including family members, physical educators, coaches, peer players, and others along the way. I also acknowledge that I am now older and more educated and, from here on, I am the sole interpreter of events. I am committed to sharing my story and interpretations, but I also acknowledge that in this instance I have the final say in the way they are represented. Critical ethnography supports the acknowledgement of these dynamics and I cannot therefore pretend to be invisible or detached from the data I present. Using autoethnography, I attempt to build on the work of other female scholars, such as Shellie McParland and Megan Popovic, who like me name themselves as a “player” within their chosen sports. I am an insider having lived through my experiences, but I am also now (as a researcher) an outsider looking in. The result of this is “situated knowledge.” Ultimately, by comparing and contrasting my personal experiences against the facts that I have been able to garner through research, my purpose is to illustrate and therefore make familiar to others the Canadian senior women’s lacrosse scene during the mid-to-late 1980s and beyond. Equally important to me is documenting the personal contributions made by many to introduce and develop the game of women’s lacrosse in Canada, and the extent to which their legacy lives on today.

Girls and Women’s Lacrosse in Canada Before 1982

My first introduction to the game of women’s field lacrosse occurred when I became a student at Mayfield Secondary School in the early 1970s. At that time Mayfield was literally “outstanding in its field,” a brand new public high school surrounded by dairy farms, beef farms, and apple orchards located in Caledon,