

Warren Spahn

The greatest major league
left-handed pitcher of *all time*.

Chapter 01 - 0:50

Introduction

Announcer: “The greatest game ever pitched” was an event that may best describe the baseball story of Warren Spahn. For in that game, he displayed the strength and the stamina that earned him the title of the greatest major league left-handed pitcher of all time.

Warren Edward Spahn was a baseball hero and a hero on the battlefields of World War II. His 363 wins on the baseball field made him the all-time winningest left-handed hurler in the game.

In 1973, Warren Spahn was admitted into the National Baseball Hall of Fame. And on the battlefield he was a true hero as he was awarded the Battlefield Commission and a Purple Heart for shrapnel wounds.

As a young boy, Greg Spahn observed his father in the locker room, in the dugout, and on the playing field. And it is Greg who tells his father’s story, on VoicesofOklahoma.com.

Chapter 02 - 3:57

Warren Edward Spahn

John Erling: My name is John Erling and today’s date is August 7, 2014. And we’re here to tell the story of major league baseball pitcher Warren Spahn, who was an Oklahoman. He had strong ties to this state.

Warren was a left-handed pitcher with 363 career wins, the most of any left-handed pitchers in the majors. He was twenty-one years in the majors in the National League.

Here to tell the Warren Spahn story is his son, Greg Spahn. So, Greg, if you’ll state your full name, your date of birth, and your present age, please, and where you were born.

Greg Spahn: I’m Greg Spahn. I was born October 1, 1948, in Boston, Massachusetts. My present age is sixty-five.

JE: And we're recording this in the facilities of VoicesOfOklahoma.com. You live now, where? Where do you—

GS: Broken Arrow.

JE: Your mother's name? Her maiden name and where she came from, where she was born.

GS: Her name is Loreen Hill. She was born in McAlester, Oklahoma. She was instrumental in my father coming to Oklahoma.

JE: Describe her personality. What kind of person was she?

GS: Oh, very loving and a great mother. Loved the McAlester area. She followed Dad in baseball and they spent the first couple of winters in Buffalo and Boston, which were brutal for her. The third winter, she talked him into trying Oklahoma.

He came down and realized that you could see the ground year round in Oklahoma. And out in the country where they weren't around a bunch of people, and he loved it. He decided this was where they were going to make their winter home.

JE: Yeah. Your father's full name?

GS: Warren Edwards Spahn.

JE: Who was he named for?

GS: He was named after President Warren Harding, and his Edward came from his father.

JE: Warren was born what date?

GS: April 23, 1921.

JE: And where was he born?

GS: In Buffalo, New York.

JE: So just as the outset, describe his personality around the family and you. What was he like?

GS: Very complex. Obviously, he was a winner, he was a competitor, he was an absolute great father and a very endearing person. He was a jokester. Like I said, he was a fierce competitor. I think that molded everything.

JE: What is your earliest recollection of your father being in baseball?

GS: I have very little memory of Boston but early Milwaukee, when the team moved to Milwaukee, that was in 1953, I started remembering a little bit of that.

JE: Then you would have been about five or six years old.

GS: Right, five or six years old.

JE: So that's, then, when you realized your dad was a major league baseball player.

GS: Right. And then, of course, the 1957 World Series, which they won, you know, I was older and that was a monumental thing in our lives.

JE: Right. Did he encourage you to play baseball?

GS: Yes, yes. I tried very hard. But I was right-handed, not left-handed, and I was an outfielder. The only thing I could do really well was hit.

JE: Do you remember him, even at five, six, seven years old, playing ball with him or anything like that?

GS: Oh yes. He was the type of father that took me everywhere. And I guess I was the type of kid that stayed out of the way, which enabled that. So I've got so many memories of the ball park and, in fact, I was there so often the Braves decided to hire me.

JE: Did you want to be a pitcher like your father?

GS: I didn't want to pitch, but I wanted to be an outfielder.

JE: Oh. From the beginning?

GS: Yes.

JE: Could you hit?

GS: Yes.

JE: All right. How far did you go with your baseball?

GS: Well, I hit over four hundred in high school, got a scholarship offer from several schools, and I decided to go to Oklahoma. I'd hurt my shoulder for the third time there, had some grade problems, and I hung up the spikes and decided to get my college education.

JE: Was that disappointing to you?

GS: Yes, it was very disappointing.

JE: Um-hmm (affirmative). High school, where did you graduate?

GS: Hartshorne High School.

JE: Hartshorne, Oklahoma.

GS: Right.

JE: And we'll talk more about that.

Chapter 03 - 3:05

Greg in the Locker Room

John Erling: What was it like for you growing up around the Braves in Milwaukee, then? Because you had Hank Aaron, you had Eddie Mathews, Lew Burdette, Joe Torre, and the other great players of the Milwaukee Braves team of the late '50s and '60s. And you were around them.

Greg Spahn: Yes.

JE: And you were in the locker room, weren't you?

GS: Yes.

JE: What was that like and do you have some stories about—

GS: Yeah, the thing that struck me at a very early age, and I really couldn't tell you, nine, eight, somewhere around there, that I was watching something that was unusual, that was fantastic, that was out of the ordinary. And I'm talking about Aaron, I'm talking about Mathews, and Burdette, and some of the other players that won the World Series in '57.

JE: So were you around them a lot? Your dad—

GS: Yes.

JE: Did other ballplayers bring their children?

GS: Not so much.

JE: Okay. But he brought you?

GS: Yeah.

JE: And then I think you alluded to earlier, maybe it was because you didn't get in the way.

GS: Right.

JE: And you kind of made sure you didn't get in the way.

GS: I—I think I was in awe of everything from a very early age and realized the importance of it.

JE: Eddie Mathews, what kind of a guy was he?

GS: He was the enforcer.

JE: What does that mean?

GS: Eddie loved to fight. He was a rough, tough guy. And if anybody charged the mound, went after Dad for throwing inside or anything, Eddie was gonna be there before the hitter got there.

JE: Hank Aaron's personality that you remember?

GS: Hank, you know, when he first came up he was very shy, not very demonstrative. He and I struck up a friendship very early on. He's one of my best baseball friends.

JE: Hmm (thoughtful sound).

GS: Hank was a great guy. You knew that greatness was ahead of him in the early days. Dad always explained that Hank was built like a baseball player should be.

JE: Hmm (thoughtful sound). I think of him maybe as a sweet spirit.

GS: Yeah.

JE: Would you describe him that way?

GS: Yes. And then, of course, after playing for fifteen years and all the media and all the buildup and everything else, I'm sure he changed a little bit. I knew him in the early years.

JE: Lew Burdette, didn't he become a really good friend of your father's?

GS: Yes.

JE: Describe him, what was he like?

GS: Lew was a jokester just like my dad, that's why they hit it off so well. They were roommates for about thirteen years, I believe. I always called Lew my second father. Just a great family guy, fun to be around. And a real competitor.

JE: You probably heard things in the locker room, or wherever, that a boy of your age shouldn't hear, right?

GS: Right.

JE: But you knew that, "Well, that's the way guys are"?

GS: Yes.

JE: Right. Did the players pull any pranks on you?

GS: Not the players so much but the traveling secretary of the Braves was a midget named Donald Davidson. He and Dad and Burdette constantly played tricks on each other. And when I was little, this guy picked me up and put me upside down in a trashcan, to get even with my father.

JE: And you were probably as tall or taller?

GS: Yeah.

JE: At that age.

GS: Close.

JE: Than he was.

GS: Pretty strong guy.

JE: He probably was four feet tall if he was a legitimate midget. But, obviously, a very bright person.

GS: Oh, he was tremendous.

JE: Yeah.

Chapter 04 - 3:21

Warren's Father

John Erling: Let's talk about your dad growing up in South Buffalo. What about his brothers and sisters? Did he have many?

Greg Spahn: Yes, he had six brothers and sisters; one other brother who was not at athletic at all. They were a very poor family. My father is the first Spahn to ever own a car. And I think that my grandfather was a wallpaper salesman.

One of the things that Dad told me early on was that they used to put newspaper or paper bags in their shoes to cover up holes, walking to school and back. He said, "You never wanted to be the last one in line for dinner." And that they ate meat on Sunday, once a week, and the rest was potatoes and vegetables.

JE: Hmm (thoughtful sound). Living in a house or apartment?

GS: A house.

JE: Do you know if Warren's father, Ed, your grandfather, was a teacher of baseball to Warren?

GS: He was. He was a teacher, a driving force. He insisted that Dad play baseball. He loved baseball. He was a baseball player, a frustrated amateur himself. And, in fact, they played on a city league that was like a sandlot team and Dad and his father played on the same team together.

JE: Oh.

GS: For a little while.

JE: What fun that was.

GS: Yeah.

JE: So isn't this interesting, devoted father who understood the game, and he just happened to have a child who was exceptionally talented.

GS: Right.

JE: Who knows, Warren probably would have gone on to win even if his father wasn't interested because he had the interest. But the combination, obviously, gave him a head start.

GS: Right.

JE: Did your father always want to pitch?

GS: No. That's an interesting story. Dad wanted to play every day, he didn't want to play every third or fourth or fifth day. He liked first base and Dad could hit. I mean, he still holds the record for homeruns by a National League pitcher.

He wanted to become a first baseman, but there was an All-City first baseman on the team, on South Park High School. So they didn't want to put him there, they wanted to try him at pitching. And the rest is just an amazing story.

JE: Buffalo was quite a baseball town, wasn't it?

GS: Yes.

JE: And so, I suppose, your dad and his dad would go and watch the Buffalo Bison.

GS: I think it was Bison.

JE: The Buffalo Bison? Is that true? Your dad would play, obviously, in midget teams, I suppose.

GS: Yes.

JE: Early on.

GS: Yes.

JE: So that's how he got started.

GS: Right.

JE: And he would play on the local teams, maybe several of them?

GS: Yes. He played every day that it was allowed in Buffalo. Because of the weather, it's kind of a short baseball season. But he played baseball constantly.

He played a little bit of football in high school but baseball was the emphasis.

JE: And I believe, Ed, your grandfather, died in 1976.

GS: Right.

JE: What do you remember about that?

GS: I just remember going to the funeral with Dad in Buffalo, and it was so cold. I remember them scraping the place for the burial site and there was green grass underneath it, which just threw me for a loop. I never realized that that was so different than down here.

JE: Did you have brothers or sisters?

GS: No, I'm an only child.

JE: Is that probably one of the reasons you were treated special, do you think?

GS: Probably. Yeah. I think my dad was very proud of me at an early age. He always wanted to have a son, and here I came.

JE: And the fact that you liked baseball.

GS: Right.

JE: And wanted to be around it.

GS: Right.

JE: It wasn't a chore to get you to come to any of this.

GS: Right.

Chapter 05 - 3:13

Boston Braves

John Erling: And then you married and had children.

Greg Spahn: Right.

JE: And how many children did you have?

GS: I have five.

JE: Five children?

GS: Yes.

JE: Any of them baseball people?

GS: No. I have one son, his name is Logan. Logan had some talent but he just didn't have the interest to stay with it.

JE: And then the names of the other children.

GS: Cara and Nikki and Morgan and Taylor.

JE: All right. So one boy and four girls.

GS: Right.

JE: They probably have an interest in baseball.

GS: Oh, definitely.

JE: Warren was a high school star and you've already said the name of the high school was South Park High School.

GS: Right.

JE: What position did he play there in high school?

GS: He played some first base, he played in the outfield, but they decided early on he should be a pitcher and started pitching him.

JE: Probably took South Park to some state titles?

GS: Yes.

JE: How did it come about that he turned pro? And who was showing an interest in him?

GS: There was a scout that decided that he had a major league type arm. I don't recall the name of the scout but he recommended Dad to show up at a Boston Braves' tryout. He played in the minor leagues for I think two years.

JE: So he signed with the Braves?

GS: Right.

JE: Any other teams, were they interest in him?

GS: I don't think so. I never heard of any other offers.

JE: I heard and I read that the Red Sox had shown an interest and that they were pointing out that—

GS: Well, they were in Boston also.

JE: Right.

GS: So that makes sense.

JE: And they were pointing out that your dad, Willie Mays, and Jackie Robinson were passed over by the Red Sox. Isn't that amazing?

So he signs with the Braves. And then he plays in 1940, for the Bradford, Pennsylvania, Bradford Bees.

GS: Right.

JE: That's his minor league team.

GS: Yes.

JE: And I believe he had an injury to his shoulder back then.

GS: I believe it was a tendon in his elbow that set him back and they wondered whether or not he'd be able to pitch again. But he recovered.

JE: And I understand he even went into depression and was hospitalized.

GS: He changed his emotion because of that injury, which helped him a great deal.

JE: The high kick that he was noted for, was that your grandfather telling him to do that?

GS: I believe that they came up with that motion to deceive the hitter as well as give Dad leverage toward the plate.

JE: Yeah. So in 1942, he's twenty years old and he actually makes the majors at that age. The Braves manager was Casey Stengel.

GS: Right.

JE: And he spoke highly of Warren. But I understand in his second big league game Stengel wanted him to throw at Peewee Reece and your dad refused to do that.

GS: Dad threw inside but it wasn't going enough. Casey wanted him to throw it at his head and Dad wouldn't do that. He didn't do that. He never did that in his career.

Casey came out, took him out of the ballgame, told him that he would never be a major league pitcher, he didn't have the guts. And then they sent him back to, I think, Bradford for—

JE: Over that incident?

GS: Yes, over that incident. My grandfather always held that and he had an opportunity to be around Casey during the World Series in the Commodore Hotel in New York and my grandfather put Casey up against the wall and challenged him and said, "Now what do you think of my son?"

JE: But Casey warmed to him and realized he was—

GS: Yes.

JE: ...a special player.

GS: Yes, yes.

JE: Later on.

Chapter 06 - 3:05

War Record

John Erling: In that year, then, when he went down, he enlisted in the army December 3, 1942, and he ends up in Fort Chaffee, Arkansas.

Greg Spahn: Right.

JE: Then, of course, he played ball and he moved on to Camp Gruber, which is sixty miles just southeast of Tulsa. And I believe, isn't that where he met his future bride?

GS: Yes. There was a dance that was here in Tulsa somewhere. And a good friend of my dad who had played ball with him, said, "Let's go to the dance. I know a couple of girls."

So they went up there and he met my mother. Their relationship developed but he did not want to get married before he came back from the war, obviously, because he didn't know if he would be back.

JE: Yeah. I suppose your mother could have cared less about baseball, at that point.

GS: Right.

JE: Then he ships out to France with the 276th Combat Engineers Battalion. We want to talk about his war record because it's quite amazing. He fought in the Herkin Forest, Battle of the Bulge. Tell us about what he did in the war.

GS: The Battle of the Bulge was a surprise attack by the Germans to a rear area of the US Army. And I think Dad's battalion was bivvacked trying to get some rest when that attack came. He sustained an injury during that battle.

I remember him telling me that it was a brutal, cold winter when that attack came. And that, you know, basically, war is hell. He really didn't get into specifics of his fighting but the history of where he was and what took place, he was in the middle of a whole bunch of stuff.

JE: He fought on the front lines for thirty days straight.

GS: Yes.

JE: And that was kind of unusual for soldiers to have to do that.

GS: Right.

JE: For that length of time. He earned a Bronze Star, a Purple Heart, and a Battlefield Commission. He was promoted from staff sergeant to second lieutenant.

GS: Right. Battlefield Commission, which I don't think anybody else in baseball ever had happen.

JE: Well, he was one of the most decorated major leaguers of the war.

GS: Right.

JE: But then, I think bullets grazed him in the stomach and the back of his neck.

GS: Right.

JE: He became a second lieutenant and caused him to remain in the army a little longer than if he had remained a buck private.

GS: You're right.

JE: Then he got out on his birthday, April 23, 1945.

GS: One of the things that he told me about that was he was not wanting to go to the Pacific and that Battlefield Commission probably kept him where he was.

JE: Didn't he comment that the war experience was actually good for him?

GS: Yes, well, a lot of people constantly used to ask him, "How many wins do you think you would have had if you hadn't spent three and a half years in the service?"

His rebuttal to that always was, "It molded me. I went away as a young man, I came back as a man. And if I don't do well on the mound—nobody's gonna shoot at me."

JE: Um-hmm (affirmative).

GS: Which puts life in perspective.

JE: It does.

Chapter 07 - 2:57

Spahn and Sain

John Erling: So he gets out in '45. And then, I believe, he makes the roster for good with the Boston Braves, then, in 1946.

Greg Spahn: Yes.

JE: And that's, then, when he marries your mother in August of that year.

GS: They stayed in touch throughout the war years and when he came back their relationship blossomed.

JE: What was your mother doing at the time? What profession?

GS: She worked as a legal secretary, I think it was Dow Chemical Company.

JE: Where?

GS: In Tulsa.

JE: The two pitchers combo, one of the greatest combos would be Warren Spahn and Johnny Sain. In 1948, the team went to the World Series and Warren Spahn and Johnny Sain were a great combination, pitching the Braves to their first pennant since 1914.

What do you know about Johnny Sain?

GS: I met Johnny later in life, because I was born in '48. Actually, right before the World Series. But John wanted to get into the Hall of Fame so badly. He was a very nice man. Dad admired him greatly. Just being around him at various old-timers' games and golf tournaments and things like that I got to know him.

JE: And he went on to become a pitching coach.

GS: Yes.

JE: This Johnny Sain.

GS: Yes he did.

JE: There was a little poem that went around. "First we'll use Spahn, then we'll use Sain. Then an off day, followed by rain. Back will come Spahn, followed by Sain, and followed we hope, by two days of rain."

GS: Yes. You know, I had not realized the statistics of that but I think Dad and Johnny won nine straight ballgames with rain in between them.

JE: Okay, so that's probably how that came about.

GS: And that's what, that's where that came from. And I think that was '48.

JE: To show your dad was such a strong pitcher on September 6th, he threw a fourteen inning, two to one win over the Dodgers, in which he picked off Jackie Robinson. So he became known as the pitcher who could go thirteen, fourteen innings. And then we'll talk about the greatest game that was ever pitched later on. But he had that kind of strength.

In later life, as he reflected on pitchers who today maybe if they go seven innings they say they had a quality game. And then we bring in closers and relievers and that type of thing. Did he have a comment about that?

GS: Oh yeah. He hated the pitch count. He didn't feel like that was a necessary thing at all. He always said, "The hitter tells you the story. If the hitter is hitting line drives, hitting the ball hard, then maybe it's time to come out." But he did not like pitch counts. He did not

like six or seven inning quality starts. He did not want anybody to come in and relieve him because he felt like he was better than who they were going to bring in.

In fact, he had many a conversation with his managers on the mound talking about bringing him out of the ballgame. And he'd say, "Who you got better? Let me pitch out of this." And most of the time he did.

JE: Um-hmm (affirmative).

Chapter 08 - 3:46

1948 World Series

John Erling: In that 1948 World Series, it was the Boston Braves and the Cleveland Indians.

With the great pitcher, Bob Feller, for Cleveland. And this was Warren's first World Series. He lost his first game, four to one in game two, but he won game five, eleven to five. He was also then called out in relief to pitch some more.

Greg Spahn: Right.

JE: However, Cleveland won that World Series.

GS: In the seventh game, I believe.

JE: Is that what it was?

GS: Yeah.

JE: But there was more to come. First of all, he was concerned about life after baseball. So tell us about your dad and your mother and what they did here in Hartshorne, Oklahoma.

GS: Well, it goes back to when they first got married and my mother traveled to Boston to be there in the wintertime because baseball players weren't paid enough money. They had to do some work in the wintertime in the off season.

So Dad worked for the owner of the Boston Braves named Lou Perini. He was a big construction company owner and Dad worked on a runway at Logan Airport in the wintertime.

And my mother just knew that there was a better place called Hartshorne, Oklahoma, and she persuaded him to come down there and lease—I think it was 160 acres—they lived in a house with no water and no electricity that first winter.

And Dad loved it. He bought that original piece of property and then from then on, started buying property that bordered it until we've got about an eleven hundred-acre ranch.

JE: You still have it in the family today?

GS: Absolutely. I'm running it right now.

JE: What's the name of that ranch?

GS: Diamond Star Ranch. And my mother came up with that name because Dad was a star on a baseball diamond.

JE: Oh, great.

GS: So our brand has the diamond with stars at the end of it. And I just carried that on. I just thought that was totally cool.

JE: Yeah. They raised Hereford cows and bulls?

GS: Dad had Herefords early on but we now have all Angus, because that's what the marketplace wants.

JE: Another time in 1951, he proved he could go along, he pitched sixteen innings against the Dodgers before losing two to one. You were just a few years old here. And then he struck out eighteen Chicago Cubs and three to one fifteen-inning loss in June 14th. The same day the Braves signed Hank Aaron.

Then he lost the next to last game the Braves ever played at Braves Field and he went ten innings, one to nothing on Jackie Robinson single he lost.

So when he lived there in Boston he was very charitable with his time and he helped start The Jimmy Fund. What can you tell us about that?

GS: I just remember meeting, I think, it was the head researcher. I think his name was Dana Farber. And they named an institute after him. Dad was very proud to be part of that. And I think the Boston Red Sox took over after the Boston Braves left Boston. I think it's highly supported by the Red Sox today.

JE: And your dad very willingly took on speaking tours.

GS: Sure.

JE: And went around for the charity.

GS: Absolutely.

JE: And I understand he liked to talk to kids and sign notes for them.

GS: Oh yeah.

JE: Did you, as you got older you probably noticed that yourself?

GS: Oh, he was full of that. You know, we made thirty trips to Cooperstown after he was inducted. We did it as a family vacation, a golfing outing for Dad and I. You know, just the kids that accumulate around Cooperstown during the induction ceremony and kids at the airport, kids everywhere. Dad would always stop and take time to visit with some of them.

JE: Hmm (thoughtful sound). He had a gruff side to him too, didn't he?

GS: Sure.

JE: So here we have this man who probably could be real gruff with people, but when it came to children a very sweet side came out of him.

GS: Right.

Chapter 09 - 4:13**Braves Move to Milwaukee**

John Erling: So the Braves move to Milwaukee March 13th of 1953. And that's when your recollections are beginning to come into place.

Greg Spahn: Right.

JE: By the way, we should say, in Boston he had just opened a restaurant, hadn't he?

GS: Yes.

JE: Do you remember what that was about? Or—

GS: It was a little diner. He had no idea the Braves were about to move and got into it right before they moved. So, obviously, it didn't work to run it remote like that.

JE: They say the motto for the restaurant was, "The best in baseball, the best in food."

The move from Boston into Milwaukee, did your dad like that? Did he enjoy Milwaukee?

GS: Yes. He had reservation leaving Boston because he really liked Boston. But the city of Milwaukee was so hungry for baseball that they were treated royally. The ball club was extremely happy to be there.

JE: Milwaukee would have been considered a blue collar town like Buffalo.

GS: Right.

JE: And that's where he felt real comfortable, so that was a great match for him.

GS: Yes.

JE: He was twenty-one and twelve in 1954, and seventeen and fourteen in 1955. Eddie Mathews, I understood, signed for six thousand dollars. The Dodgers would have signed him for fifty thousand, but he stayed with Milwaukee. That's pretty amazing, isn't it?

GS: Yeah, it is amazing.

JE: Because he felt comfortable there.

GS: He probably saw the future.

JE: Right. Wasn't Eddie Mathews kind of a party animal too?

GS: Yes. Well, I never saw that side of him but that's one of the things that people always talk about. But I'm telling you that he was someone that nobody wanted to mess with. I was so proud to have him at third base protecting my father.

JE: Yeah.

GS: Because things happen in baseball. You know? And on the other side was Joe Adcock, who was about six four. He was a big man. So Dad had some protectors on both sides of the bags.

JE: Lew Burdette became his buddy but he actually came over from the Yankees in a trade for Johnny Sain.

GS: Right.

JE: So that's how Lew Burdette came over there. And then they became a great righty-lefty combo. So in 1957, you're nine years old.

GS: Right.

JE: Your dad is thirty-six years old and he wins the first Cy Young Award.

GS: Right. The Cy Young now is given one to each league. Back then, it was one, period. I think he came in second and third a ton of times. You can imagine, Dad won twenty games thirteen times and he only has one Cy Young.

JE: Yeah. Why is that?

GS: It's just that there were always pitchers that would win twenty or more games and then fade off and Dad was there constantly.

JE: Major league baseball put together a list of the top ten left-handed pitchers. Number one was Lefty Grove. Others had more wins but Grove won his three hundredth game in his final start of his career, but in other areas he was unparalleled. So he's number one.

And who's number two? Warren Spahn. The top ten and he's number two. And they say, "Nobody was as good for as long as Spahn, who won 363 games. Tops among lefties." Then it goes on, "He led the league in strikeouts four times, won four World Series games and had a two career no-hitters."

Then you have beneath him, Randy Johnson, Sandy Koufax, Whitey Ford, Steve Carlton, Carl Hubbell, Tom Glavine, Eddie Plank, and last, Babe Ruth. They are the top ten and your father is number two. Does that make you feel good?

GS: I think he should be number one.

JE: Yeah, right.

GS: He's got more wins than any other left-hander. He's still the winningest pitcher since 1930.

JE: Yes, you're right, from the live-ball era, which is actually 1920 to the present time. Most wins, Warren Spahn, 363. Right- or left-hand pitcher, doesn't make any difference. And the most shutouts, Warren Spahn, sixty-three. And then the most completed games, Warren Spahn, 382.

But then, as we're looking at the record, Cy Young overall had the most career wins, 511, and most losses, however too, at 316. That was Cy Young.

And Warren Spahn standing out from 1920 on to the present time.

Chapter 10 - 3:55

1957 World Series

John Erling: In '57, he's thirty-six years old and in the athletic world, we're getting old.

Greg Spahn: Right.

JE: He wins the first Cy Young Award. He was twenty-one and eleven, eighteen complete games league leading, and he won nine times in twenty-nine days. The Braves won their first pennant in Milwaukee and he was the best pitcher in baseball.

Aaron, in that year, had a .322 average, forty-four homers, and 132 runs batted in. There was magic there, wasn't it?

GS: Yes it was.

JE: When it all came together.

GS: I was watching something special.

JE: And that Series, they were playing the Yankees.

GS: Right.

JE: Were you there for that?

GS: Yes.

JE: The Yankees were the favorites.

GS: Yes.

JE: Tell us some memories of that.

GS: I just remember the excitement of the World Series. My mother and dad wanted me to see some of New York, so they had friends take me to the Empire State Building and other things during one of the ballgames. One that Dad didn't pitch, of course.

Then the excitement coming home to Milwaukee with the championship. There was a tickertape parade, which I had never experienced before. I mean, they were just tremendous times.

JE: Were you in the parade?

GS: Yes.

JE: More than likely, they rode in convertibles.

GS: Yes.

JE: So you rode in a convertible—

GS: Yes.

JE: ...with your dad.

GS: Yes.

JE: Wow! All those kids who were, "Who's that little kid?"

GS: Yes. I mean, how many kids get that experience?

JE: Your dad lost the opener three to one, but he went the distance to win game four, seven to five. And if he didn't like pitch counts they still counted him because he had 126 pitches.

GS: Yeah.

JE: And they would have today taken somebody out, I suppose, as they neared a hundred. Game seven, that was when he was ill with the flu.

GS: Right.

JE: So Lew Burdette pitches and Burdette beat the Yankees, five to nothing, for the Braves' first World Series title since 1914.

GS: Yeah, tremendous.

JE: Yeah.

GS: In fact, I wear the 1957 World Series ring.

JE: Is that right?

GS: At my dad's request.

JE: Just let me hold it here a minute. That is amazing. Wow, what an honor for you to be wearing that. An honor for me to even see it and hold it here myself. That is really something. Thank you for sharing that.

GS: You bet.

JE: Then, talking about his age as he's getting older, in 1962, he was forty-two years old. Now he's really in the baseball world getting long in the tooth. And he was eighteen wins and fourteen losses.

GS: Yes.

JE: Did he do things in the off season to build his strength and maintain being in shape?

GS: He didn't throw very much in the off season. He felt like he needed to rest his arm. He did believe in going to a chiropractor and getting loosened up after the baseball season. You know, pitchers have sore arms, sore elbows. So he let all that rest and got limbered up that way.

And he couldn't wait for spring training. And spring training was tough.

I remember Dad coming home from a ballpark when he was in his forties. He would lay down on the couch and Mother couldn't get him up to eat dinner. I mean, he was just exhausted.

JE: Um-hmm (affirmative).

GS: But he worked hard. And that was back in the day when pitchers ran. They went out in the outfield and ran after the day that they pitched. They felt like that created arm strength. To this day, I think it did. Stamina.

JE: Right. Now these ballplayers today, they're training the year round. Can you imagine what he would have done even if it was today?

GS: No.

JE: He would have been in even better shape.

GS: I'll tell you, Dad's delivery, Dad's arm were just magical. I really think that God built him.

He could throw effortlessly. I can remember being fifteen, sixteen years old and out in the outfield with my father. I could throw as hard as he could but I couldn't do it for very long and it took me fifteen, twenty minutes to warm up. It took Dad about three pitches and he was warmed up.

JE: Yeah.

GS: He could do anything with the ball he wanted to.

JE: Hmm (thoughtful sound).

GS: I mean, it was just unbelievable motion.

Chapter 11 - 9:07

The Greatest Game Ever Pitched

John Erling: Then comes a memorable game, July 2, 1963, when Milwaukee and the Giants were playing. Your dad was really defying age. He was how old at that time?

Greg Spahn: Forty-two.

JE: Juan Marichal was much younger, he was twenty-five years old.

GS: Right.

JE: So these two hook up at a baseball game. You were at that game and pitch count was just beginning about that time.

GS: Yeah.

JE: Talk to us about your first memories of it.

GS: Dad decided he wanted to take me on a West Coast road trip and that happened to be the time. I just remember how windy and cold Candlestick Park was. It was in the middle of the summertime, yet it was cold. It was unbelievable.

The game went on and it went on and nobody was getting on base. Marichal was as sharp as Dad was. In fact, in that game, I think Dad was the only Brave to reach second base. He hit a blind drive off the fence that was about a foot, two feet low of being a homerun, and would have been if it would have been higher. And that was it. That was the end of the offense of the Braves the entire game.

And isn't it interesting that both of them pitched with a high leg kick?

JE: Yes.

GS: Marichal had the same style.

JE: Right. So the game, then, goes into extra innings, and we're in twelfth inning, thirteenth inning, we're in the fourteenth inning. Is it true that your Dad between innings would light up a Camel cigarette?

GS: Yes.

JE: And what was that all about?

GS: Well, both Dad and Burdette were cigarette smokers. When one pitched the other one had one ready for him when he came off the field, have a couple of puffs to settle him

down and get ready for the next inning. It's amazing that he was an athlete that continued on until he was forty-four years old, and smoking all the way.

JE: And he never had any problems because of smoking?

GS: No.

JE: So then we're in the fourteenth inning. Then we go into the fifteenth inning. Who was the manager of the Braves at that time?

GS: I believe it was Bobby Bragan, but I'm not certain.

JE: Yeah, I think you're right. Bobby Bragan. I don't know how many times they could go to the mound, but certainly they visited with Warren about taking him out.

GS: Absolutely. They would go out there and ask him, "How you feeling?"

And Dad would say, "I'm fine. My pitches are working. Just leave me alone. I don't want that young kid to show me up."

JE: Yeah.

GS: You know?

JE: The manager of the Giants did the same for Juan Marichal.

GS: Right.

JE: Who says, "No, he's an older man."

GS: Yeah.

JE: "I can't come out. He's forty-two, I'm twenty-five."

GS: Well, that shows you the competition of the era. I mean, those guys would have played for half of what they did play for because of the pride, the competition. It was amazing.

JE: So then we're into the 16th inning. You're probably sleeping somewhere in a corner.

GS: Well, I'm wondering if it's going to go on all night, if they're going to call the game. It was cold, like I said, and I was just hoping Dad would make it through it.

I can remember Willie hitting the shot that won the game and, I mean, there was no doubt that it was a homerun after it left. Dad said he hung a screwball. In fact, he had nightmares of that pitch.

JE: And Willie was in a slump.

GS: Yeah.

JE: Coming up to bat and he had limited Willie to two outfield flies, two infield grounders, a strikeout, and an intentional walk.

GS: Yeah.

JE: Then the first pitch he throws is a screwball and that's the one that Willie Mays hit out of the ballpark.

GS: Right over the center of the plate.

JE: Marichal tells Willie, "I'm gonna come out of the game."

And Mays says, "Don't worry, I'm gonna win this game for you."

GS: Yeah.

JE: And then he went up and hit that homerun. As soon as the ball was hit, they say your dad just started walking to dugout because you could hear the sound of the bat.

GS: Yeah. Well, he knew he hung the pitch, that it didn't break, it was right down the middle and Willie had a classic swing. That's the first thing that the pitcher sees is the swing that's on the ball and where it hits. It was by far out of there.

An interesting note about Willie was with San Francisco he came up and I think he was 0 for 13 and he hit a homerun off my dad. They were going to send him down the next day and they decided, "Well, he hit a homerun off of Spahn, maybe we'd better take another look at him."

From that time on, Willie did what he did and every time he'd come up to Dad and I, after Dad retired, he said, "Oh, man, I love you. You put me in the Hall of Fame." And in fact, Dad and I went to Willie's sixtieth birthday in Atlantic City.

JE: Oh really?

GS: Yeah. We were one of the invited guests.

JE: That's great. So the game ends at twelve thirty in the morning. Giants won and Braves nothing. Is this story true? Willie sent a bat over to the locker room of your dad and wanted him to sign it?

GS: I heard that against Koufax.

JE: Oh, is right?

GS: Yes. Sandy Koufax hit, it might have been his first base hit or certainly his first homerun. Then he sent the bat over for Dad to sign and he broke the bat, sent it back to him.

JE: Okay, it is a true story then?

GS: Yes.

JE: About Koufax.

GS: Yeah, I think Koufax beat him one to nothing or something like that. It was in Milwaukee and I was there.

JE: During this game, which is known as "the greatest game ever pitched," did the ballplayers talk to your dad? Was he visiting or did they just leave him alone, he sat by himself?

GS: I think they left him alone. I was not in the dugout, I was in the stands, but I do remember hearing the players say, "When are we going to get this game over with?" They were concerned about playing the next day.

JE: Um-hmm (affirmative).

GS: You know? Some of the things that ballplayers think about.

JE: At the end of the game, were you in the locker room then—

GS: Yes.

JE: ...at any time?

GS: Yes.

JE: Tell us about the scene there.

GS: Dad was just devastated, he knew he screwed up that last pitch and it cost him the ballgame. All that hard work for Dad, of course, and the other teammates were consoling him, but it was one that Dad didn't get over right away.

JE: You say he screwed up. It was a screw ball.

GS: Yeah.

JE: Did he leave it hanging too high or—

GS: Yeah, it was a pitch he was trying to make break down out of the strike zone and it stayed in the strike zone. You know, it could have been fatigue, I mean, pitchers hang pitches in the first inning too.

JE: Right.

GS: So who knows what it was, but it was one that cost him the game.

JE: Well, it wouldn't be surprising if it was fatigue.

GS: Yeah.

JE: In the sixteenth inning.

GS: Yes.

JE: That we should point out, he threw two hundred pitches.

GS: Right.

JE: Two hundred pitches. Just think about that.

GS: Yep.

JE: At forty-two years old. Carl Hubbell, the Hall of Famer, was there and admired Spahn. I don't know if you ever remember meeting Carl Hubbell or not.

GS: I met him, yes, in Milwaukee.

JE: I would imagine your dad stayed a long time in the clubhouse after that, several hours perhaps.

GS: Yes. The story that I remember was, Juan went to an emergency room somewhere and got a liquid IV to re-hydrate. Dad drank beer in the clubhouse with Burdette and I.

JE: Is that right?

GS: And me watching.

JE: Well, you were probably down to the only two left in the clubhouse then.

GS: Oh yeah, that happened often. Dad loved to just relax and rehash the ballgame. He studied hitters so that he got an idea how he wanted to pitch to them. Then he would discuss it with Lew after the game, what happened, how the hitter reacted to what pitch. They truly worked on the game kind of like today's football watching film of defenses and things.

JE: Um-hmm, um-hmm (affirmatives).

GS: They did it together.

JE: “The greatest game ever pitched,” sixteen innings. Then his next start is July 7, and that’s when he strained a tendon in his left arm, but he finished the game anyway, and he beats Houston five to nothing.

GS: Yeah.

JE: The strength of this man is absolutely amazing, isn’t it?

GS: Well, let me tell you, it was a magical arm. It probably took him half the effort of a normal human being to throw the ball, partly because of his delivery, partly because of his great arm.

JE: And he finishes that season, twenty-three wins and seven losses; he completed twenty-two of thirty-three starts including seven in twenty-seven days. He was a hoss and he became the oldest pitcher to win twenty games in a season. *Time* magazine called him the “great old arm.”

GS: Yeah, he was consistent, it was an amazing consistency to win 363 games and win twenty games thirteen different times.

JE: They don’t build them like that today.

GS: They don’t let them go that way.

JE: That is true, they don’t.

GS: Yeah. I think they curtail the great ones trying to preserve the mediocre pitcher with pitch counts, in my opinion.

JE: So we have a lot of pitchers today that wouldn’t have made it back then.

GS: Right.

JE: They would never have made it.

GS: Never. I think baseball was better in the ’50s and ’60s than it is now—just my opinion. The hitters were very good. I mean, look at the Hall of Famers type hitters that were against Dad.

JE: Right.

GS: And another thing is that when Dad pitched he always got the other team’s best pitcher. Number one against number one.

JE: Right.

Chapter 12 - 4:10

1964 Braves Goodbye

John Erling: So in September, then, thirty-seven thousand fans came to County Stadium in Milwaukee to say goodbye to Warren. Were you there?

Greg Spahn: Yes.

JE: What do you remember about that?

GS: They had us out on a field, that's when I met Hubbell and some other greats. They had them come out on the field and sit and had Dad speak. They gave my mother a gift; they gave me a saddle. That was my first speaking ever.

JE: What did you say?

GS: I just said, "Thank you very much, appreciate it," and shook the rest of the way through the ceremony.

JE: You would have been how old then?

GS: Fourteen.

JE: Fourteen years old right there.

GS: Yeah.

JE: And you're speaking to thirty-seven thousand fans, so—

GS: Yeah, I have pictures of that whole event that I cherish.

JE: They gave your father a planer and a joiner—

GS: Yes.

JE: ...for his workshop. Was he quite a craftsman?

GS: Yeah. He loved to work with wood, that's what he did a lot during the wintertime. Either that or fixing fence on the ranch. He loved to be outside and he loved to work with wood.

JE: So he's on the ranch. He became a cowboy then, didn't he?

GS: Well, he rode a little bit but—

JE: No?

GS: ...I wouldn't call him a cowboy.

JE: Okay. He didn't get into that life.

GS: No.

JE: Did he wear cowboy boots?

GS: Yes. And we worked cattle along with hands that we hired to work the cattle. And he was always involved in that when he could be home. So was I, and I grew up loving it and I'm still doing it today.

JE: He threw his first no-hitter in 1960, when he was thirty-nine. He pitched his second no-hitter the following year. And by the last two seasons of his career he was the oldest active player in baseball.

GS: Yeah.

JE: He lost his distinction for a single day, September 25, 1965, when fifty-eight-year-old Satchel Paige pitched three innings.

GS: Yeah. Satchel was a character.

JE: Were you around him?

GS: I got to meet him when Dad was the manager of the Tulsa Oilers. Satchel was a traveling coach for the St. Louis Cardinals at that time.

JE: Okay.

GS: So he would come through Tulsa and I'd sit and talk to him and Dad and I would sometimes go to dinner with him and hear stories. An amazing guy. They say that nobody knows how old he was because the goat ate the Bible that they put it in.

JE: You know, I collected baseball cards in the '50s, and I distinctly remember having your dad's baseball card. I don't know what the value of his card or others are today. Do you know?

GS: There are so many.

JE: Yeah.

GS: His rookie card is worth about \$120, something like that.

JE: Okay, and that would have been the Topps Company who put that out.

GS: Yeah. Right.

JE: My mother threw all my baseball cards away. I suppose you've heard that story a hundred times. Did you collect baseball cards yourself?

GS: Well, let me tell you my story. When Dad would sign with Topps each year for their cards they would give us a complete set of the national league. I was out on the field shagging fly balls, meeting these guys, talking to them, they didn't mean anything to me. So I started giving them to my neighbors. I put them on my bicycle for the spokes to flap them. I mean, I must have given away a fortune.

JE: You did give away a fortune.

GS: I know.

JE: You were so close to it.

GS: Yeah.

JE: And then quite young too, to not realize these could be worth something.

GS: Yeah.

JE: He also was an actor, wasn't he?

GS: A bit actor, he was in a combat series as a German.

JE: That was in '63, ABC TV's *Combat*. And the episode was called "Glow against the Sky." And he played a Nazi sergeant at that time.

GS: Right. It was out in Los Angeles, of course, and it went too long and he was pitching that night and he had to come to the ballpark in his Nazi uniform to get ready to pitch.

JE: He broke his nose at one time too, didn't he?

GS: He broke his nose several times. I think the first in high school in football. I don't know the incidents in baseball but he broke it several times. It was one of his dominant features. Other ballplayers used to call him Hooks. And it was one feature that just stayed with him, everybody made fun of.

Chapter 13 - 2:08**New York Mets**

John Erling: So he joins the Mets in 1965, he's forty-three years old then. Casey Stengel is the manager, so they get back together again.

Greg Spahn: Right.

JE: Are you there around that at all?

GS: Yes, definitely. Yogi was on that team as well.

JE: Yeah.

GS: Yogi and Dad were very good friends by then. And Yogi had a kid named Larry Berra that was at the ballpark a lot. So Larry and I became good friends. But I've seen him at Hall of Fame inductions several years in the past.

But Casey, one of the things Dad said about Casey was that he pitched for him before and after he became a genius. Meaning something about the fact—

JE: Um-hmm (affirmative).

GS: ...that he sent him down. Anyway, it was a fun time. It was New York City for me and Shea Stadium was fairly new and a big structure. I'd never been in a ballpark that big. I was fifteen, sixteen years old and really knowing what was going on then.

JE: Describe Casey Stengel. Was he kind to you when you were around him at all?

GS: Oh yeah, he respected me because of Dad, I'm sure. But Casey was a character I've never run across since. He was a double-talker. He could talk to the press and say nothing for thirty minutes. After ballgames, he would go into the bar and they'd follow him into the bar. He'd talk until two in the morning. I don't know what age he was but he was old. He was a character.

JE: Yeah. Yogi Berra, talk about him.

GS: Yogi was an amazing athlete. He never had the stature that you would think of other than maybe a catcher. But Yogi was a notorious bad ball hitter, which I think put some fear in pitchers because they didn't have to throw a strike for him to hit the ball hard.

JE: Right.

GS: And tremendous athlete.

JE: Easy to be around?

GS: Oh yeah, lot of fun. And of course, he was full of one-liners.

JE: Yes he was.

GS: Yeah.

JE: We probably quote him once a month, don't we?

GS: Absolutely. And one of my favorites is he used to say, "When you come to a fork in the road, take it."

JE: Right. The one I quote a lot is, “The place is so busy nobody goes there any more.”

GS: Yeah, yeah, exactly.

Chapter 14 - 4:12

Tulsa Oilers

John Erling: Then your dad ends his career with twenty-one seasons. In 1967, he becomes manager of the Tulsa Oilers. What is your recollection of that?

Greg Spahn: I just know that Dad was thrilled to be able to be a manager. It was something that he wanted in his future. The Cardinals gave him an opportunity at a triple A level. He just happened to have some talent coming through at the same time. Their 1968 team won more ballgames than any organized baseball club. They won the Pacific Coast League Championship, which was the top of that season.

JE: On other coaching, he coached for the Mexico City Tigers.

GS: Right.

JE: Pitched a handful of games there. He was the pitching coach for the Cleveland Indians, in the minor leagues for the California Angels, and for six years with Japan’s Hiroshima’s Toyo Carp. Were you with him through any of that?

GS: No, I never went to Japan. I went to Cleveland. I was working and I went up there on a little weekend trip. The Mexico City and the Japanese paid Dad to be a pitching instructor but not for the entire season, just for their spring training. I went to Mexico City with him and saw some amazing stuff there.

JE: He was manager of the Tulsa Oilers for five years?

GS: Yes.

JE: Five seasons won, and then he won 372 games from '67 to '71. Were you here with him for that?

GS: I was in college but I would come back on weekends.

JE: Did he enjoy that? Was he—

GS: Oh yeah, he loved it. He would have loved to have been a major league manager.

JE: Well, I understand he refused a promotion to the Cardinals as a pitching coach.

GS: Right.

JE: And he wanted to be a manager. So they said, “Sorry, but that’s not going to happen here.”

GS: Yeah, I don’t know why other ball clubs would follow suit with St. Louis, but apparently word got out that he was a nonconformist. He refused that pitching coach job and that was something you shouldn’t do. And he never got an opportunity to manage after that.

JE: Was that a big disappointment to him?

GS: Yes. Yeah, I think it was. In fact, he always used to say in his older age that he didn't like the Cardinals very much, it was the only ball club that fired him.

JE: He was fired in '71 after five seasons, one championship and two second place finishes with the Tulsa Oilers.

GS: Right.

JE: So those were good times for him here. And I'm sure he enjoyed the city and living in Tulsa at the time.

GS: Yes.

JE: And your mother was in town?

GS: Yes.

JE: Did she come up here and live with him?

GS: Yes, oh yeah, she was at the ballpark as much as she could be.

JE: Well, he did coach Cleveland pitchers for two years.

GS: Right.

JE: So he did do that for a while.

GS: Right, money was the issue.

JE: He wasn't afraid to speak his mind, was he?

GS: No.

JE: And that's what probably got him into trouble, you think?

GS: Well, I don't know that he really did anything more than just refuse the pitching coach's job and told them that he would rather be a manager, and that he'd rather manage at triple A level than be a pitching coach in the big leagues.

JE: Okay. Younger pitchers, he probably didn't have a whole lot of patience for some of them.

GS: Well, I think that he took great pride in teaching people pitches. Even back when he was playing in Milwaukee some of the other pitchers from the other ball club would come out in the outfield and ask Dad questions about how to hold the ball for what pitch and mechanics of throwing pitches. The Braves finally figured out that's what was going on and they banned the other ballplayers from coming out to the outfield to discuss things with my dad.

Dad's attitude was, "If you're man enough to throw it then I'll be glad to help you with it." You know?

JE: Right. Stan Musial said of Spahn, "Facing Warren was the greatest challenge I knew because this man was a pitching scientist, an artist with imagination." That's Stan Musial, one of the greatest hitters we ever had.

GS: That's a great compliment.

JE: And he said, "I don't think Spahn will ever get into the Hall of Fame because he'll never stop pitching."

GS: As I told you, Dad studied hitters and the mental aspect of pitching was something that he honed to a fine edge. He tried not to give the hitter something that they were looking for, even if it wasn't his best pitch.

Chapter 15 - 4:23

Hall of Fame

John Erling: The Hall of Fame, when his name appeared in the Hall of Fame ballot for the first time he was elected easily, 316 of a possible 380 votes. Were you around when he realized he was going into the Hall of Fame?

Greg Spahn: Oh yeah. Yeah.

JE: Tell us about that.

GS: Well, it's the pinnacle of any athlete, any baseball player could be voted into their Hall of Fame. Dad was thrilled. It was something that he hoped he would obtain some day. He knew he was good enough to be voted in and it was a tremendous time for us. Mom and Dad and I and my wife went up there and enjoyed the weekend so much.

JE: What a thrill.

GS: Yeah.

JE: Remember anything that he said at the induction ceremony?

GS: Just that he thanked his father so much for the guidance and the push for baseball. Of course, he said a few things about Casey along the way. Of course, Aaron and Mathews and all the people that helped him win ballgames.

JE: Um-hmm (affirmative). His dad, that's where he got his early start.

GS: Right.

JE: Six years old, I guess.

GS: Yeah.

JE: We never know what we're doing with six-year-olds. I have a six-year-old grandson who plays tee-ball right now. People watch him play and it looks like he has natural abilities, so you don't know what's going to happen.

GS: No.

JE: With these kids. And some of them, you've probably seen them at that age and then pretty soon they get tired of it.

GS: Yes. That's what happened with my son, I mean, he had some legitimate talent and it just didn't excite him like baseball should.

JE: Back to your Diamond Star Ranch, the ranch house had an indoor swimming pool?

GS: Yes. It was an add-on.

JE: And then it had a large oil painting in the living room.

GS: Yes.

JE: Which was of?

GS: Milwaukee County Stadium. The Braves gave him that for Warren Spahn Night and they called it "Spahny's Workshop."

JE: Oh.

GS: And that painting remains on the wall right where it was put.

JE: Is that right?

GS: Yes.

JE: Wow. Also has a four-and-a-half-acre pond?

GS: We've got several ponds.

JE: Didn't he have a business sense? I think he did commercials, didn't he, for some companies?

GS: Yeah, yeah he did some for Camel cigarettes, and he and I did some for a skin cream called Tackle. He did an ad for a game called Whirlybird, where you threw a projectile with feathers on it to a target. Just several things that came along that he agreed to do.

I think the biggest business sense came from my mother when they were training in Bradenton, Florida, for all those years. They found an island called Anna Maria Island, which is a resort place now, and they started buying property. That turned into a tremendous investment for them.

JE: Yes, way back when.

GS: Yeah.

JE: Is any of that property owned by the family today?

GS: I still own one that I built on a vacant lot and I've sold three others.

JE: His compensation down through the years, was he able to manage his money? It sounds like he was. So that he was able to make investments like that. Do you remember what kind of money he was making back as he pitched?

GS: I honestly today don't know how they did it, but I think his top salary was ninety-six thousand. That was probably when he was forty. He probably made sixty, seventy thousand for a lot of years. He never had a multiyear contract. They didn't do that back then, they didn't have agents. They would simply negotiate by pushing a piece of paper across the table to each other, him and the general manager.

JE: One would write a number down—

GS: Yeah.

JE: ...and the other one would either cross it out—

GS: Cross it out and write another number. He never held out, and like I said, he never had more than a one-year contract. And the Braves always had a young left-hander that was going to come up and take his place.

JE: Which made him work even harder, I suppose.

GS: It never happened.

JE: Yeah, right. Did he have a good relationship with the Braves all the time, front office and management?

GS: Yes, definitely.

JE: It was always good.

GS: There was a mutual respect.

JE: There was respect for him too, he didn't play in Atlanta, but when the Braves went to Atlanta they welcomed him at ceremonies honoring him and the team.

GS: Right. They retired his number.

JE: His number was?

GS: Twenty-one. His whole career. I get invited to their Hall of Fame induction each year. Dad's present all over that stadium. It's just amazing how they embrace the history of the Braves.

JE: Yeah.

GS: Very proud of that.

Chapter 16 - 7:05

With Respect

John Erling: His body eventually just gave in, didn't it? What was it like for him near the end? Had baseball taken its toll on his body?

Greg Spahn: His last season was 1965, and the Braves sold Dad to the Mets, which was just a horrible ball club, actually. Yogi was a player coach, Dad was a player coach, and there was not much else. So it was very difficult to win there. And that frustrated him terribly. Not only was his abilities diminishing with age but he was playing for bad ball clubs. And then half the season was over and the Mets sold him to San Francisco. Again, they weren't winning, their pitching wasn't very good. Dad couldn't win there either. I mean, he won, but the percentages weren't good.

So the following year, they invited him to come to spring training but they wouldn't guarantee him a spot on the roster. He just decided, "That's the end."

JE: Um-hmm (affirmative). You think he tried to play too long?

GS: No. I think as long as you can be in the big leagues I think you ought to be there. It's a wonderful experience. He had the chance to pitch, he didn't sit any time on the bench other than the regular rotation.

JE: Um-hmm (affirmative).

GS: If he had been not used, I think that would have been another story.

JE: Um-hmm (affirmative), right. When he was with the Oilers he lived here in Tulsa, because didn't he spend the latter part of his life in Broken Arrow?

GS: Yes, when he managed the Oilers he lived in Tulsa. After those days were over he lived at the ranch. My mother passed away and I finally convinced Dad that he needed to move up in the Tulsa area because he was traveling all the time out of Tulsa International Airport. So I sold him a house.

We both went back and forth to the ranch but his residence became Broken Arrow.

JE: Okay.

GS: And it was a good move.

JE: You sold him a house, how did that come about?

GS: I was a real estate broker.

JE: Oh, I see.

GS: I'd been a member at Indian Springs since 1978, Indian Springs Country Club.

JE: Yeah.

GS: And there was a house on the golf course that I thought fit him perfectly, and we got it done.

JE: How many years did he live in Broken Arrow?

GS: Oh, I think somewhere around ten.

JE: He died November 24, 2003.

GS: Right.

JE: Where was he when he died?

GS: In that house in Broken Arrow.

JE: It was age, then?

GS: Right.

JE: And he was how old at that age?

GS: Eighty-two.

JE: And his service was held at Boston Avenue Methodist Church.

GS: Yes.

JE: Mouzon Biggs has retired now but he was the minister at the time.

GS: Right.

JE: Mouzon had an interest with your father that went back before a funeral service, didn't he?

GS: Yes. One day I got a phone call, he called me and he said, "Listen, my brother is a tremendous Warren Spahn fan. Would there be any way that we could get an autographed baseball?"

I said, "Absolutely, but would you come and get it?"

So he came and got it. I introduced the two of them, we all hit it off, and he was a great friend.

JE: Did Warren ever attend his church?

GS: I don't think so.

JE: Okay.

GS: I don't really think so but he knew who he was, watched him on television.

JE: When the service was held at Boston Avenue Methodist Church, how much was the baseball community represented there?

GS: Pretty well. Hank Aaron was there, the commissioner of baseball was there, the president of the Baseball Hall of Fame was there, Johnny Logan, one of his shortstops was there. So it was very well represented and I was proud that those people came.

JE: Gary Caruso, editor of the Atlanta Braves magazine *ChopTalk*, said this at the funeral, "Warren Spahn was the Wyatt Earp of the national league. No one maintained law and order against the larger than life hitters of baseball's grandest era better or longer than the man here to day to remember."

GS: Great tribute.

JE: And you heard him say that?

GS: Yes.

JE: He's interred in the cemetery in Hartshorne.

GS: Yes.

JE: They named a street after him in Buffalo, New York.

GS: Right.

JE: A few months before his death he attended the unveiling of his statue outside Atlanta's Turner Field that depicts Spahn in the middle of one of his leg kicks.

GS: Yes. It's great to go down there and see that. We have two more statues like it, one at the Bricktown Ballpark in Oklahoma City, and one at the Oklahoma Hall of Fame.

JE: These statues were created by Sean Gray.

GS: Right.

JE: Who has a fine reputation in that kind of work. Your father was selected for the All-Time All-Star Baseball Team by *Sports Illustrated* magazine in 1991, as the left-handed pitcher. Now this is the All-Star Baseball Team. He's a left-handed pitcher. The other selections were outfielders Ty Cobb, Babe Ruth, and Willie Mays, shortstop Cal Ripken, third baseman Mike Schmidt, second baseman Jackie Robinson, first baseman Lou Gehrig, catcher Mickey Cochran, right-handed pitcher Christy Mathewson, relief pitcher Dennis Eckersley, and the manager was Casey Stengel.

GS: Full circle.

JE: Now is that a team, or what? Huh?

GS: Yeah. That was called the All-Century Team.

JE: Okay.

GS: Yeah, and it was a neat promotion for baseball and I still have memorabilia from that. It was a great honor.

JE: Do you still have the saddle that was given to you?

GS: Yes.

JE: You have it down to the ranch, I would imagine.

GS: Yes.

JE: Right. He was elected to the Wisconsin Athletic Hall of Fame in '73, became a charter member of both the Buffalo Baseball Hall of Fame in '85, and the Greater Buffalo Sports Hall of Fame in '91. So wherever he's been they've treated him right.

GS: Command respect.

JE: Yeah. In 1999, editors of the *Sporting News* ranked Warren Spahn twenty-first on their list of baseball's one hundred greatest players. And on April 4, 2009, the facilities at Broken Arrow Youth Baseball and Spahn's longtime home of Broken Arrow were dedicated in his honor.

GS: Right.

JE: So how does this make you feel?

GS: Oh, I'm very proud. I look at myself as a keeper of what he accomplished and what he accumulated and that sort of thing. And as being an only child I had to come up with that. Had to preserve the history.

JE: You think about him, if not every day certainly—

GS: Oh yes.

JE: But beyond baseball, are there things applicable to life that you think, "Well, he would have done this," or "He would have done that"? Do those thoughts come to you?

GS: Yes, daily. For the limited education he had he was one of the smartest people I've ever known. The way people reacted to him, I bring that with me every day. He had a great sense of fairness, just a good man. He was a great father, he was a great baseball player, he was a great individual.

JE: Um-hmm (affirmative). And I would imagine when people realize who you are you make sure you take time to talk to them, even if they seem to be interrupting what you're doing.

GS: You bet, my pleasure.

JE: Well, it's our pleasure to talk with you and to claim him as an Oklahoman. He spent all those years here in our state. And what a legend he was to baseball. So we thank you, Greg, for sharing the story with us.

GS: Thank you very much.

Chapter 17 - 0:33**Conclusion**

Announcer: This oral history presentation is made possible through the support of our generous foundation-funders. We encourage you to join them by making your donation, which will allow us to record future stories. Students, teachers, and librarians are using this website for research and the general public is listening every day to these great Oklahomans share their life experience. Thank you for your support as we preserve Oklahoma's legacy one voice at a time, on VoicesofOklahoma.com.