

Dorice Dorine Hamilton

The Real Rosie the Riveter Project

Interview 14

Interview Conducted by

Anne de Mare

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Nashville, Tennessee

For The

For the Tamiment Library, Robert F. Wagner Labor Archives
Elmer Holmes Bobst Library
New York University

Interview: Dorice Dorine Hamilton

Interviewers: Anne de Mare

Date: June 27, 2010

Place: Nashville, Tennessee

Hamilton: That's just an old age thing if you uh talking to someone as old as I am, they have one conversation. How do they feel? How well are they- what have they been doing? And they've been going to the doctor. Fortunately for me, I still drive so I can drive myself to the doctor in Wichita, Kansas.

De Mare: Fantastic. So can you do me a favor and can you introduce yourself to me and tell me where and when you were born?

Dorice: Well I guess we need to talk about uh not so much the the birth but that the- the name. I'm Dorice Dorine Hamilton. Now uh my father wanted to name me Deloris and my mother didn't like Deloris. And so my name ended up- two names with only one letter difference in 'em. It's Doris spelled funny D-O-R-I-C-E and Doreen spelled not like everyone wants to spell it but D-O-R-I-N-E. So I was born in Willington, Kansas August 18, 1919. Uh Willington Kansas

is a town where they had the first railroad. Where they stocked the cars and made changes for the railroad cars. And so they had what was the first strike in in the United States and so the people that went back to work, possibly everyone knows, they called them Scabs. My father did not want to be a Scab so he would not go back to work, which he would have been much better off if he had gone back to work because he ended up with asthma but we ended up on a farm, which was a bad place for him to be but it was a fun place to grow up. I had been in Willington up to the age of 4 and so for then on I was in Greenwood County, Kansas on a farm- on a farm-160 acre farm. I had said I had never seen a colored person until I went to work in Wichita uh after high school graduation. The- it was a total community where everyone knew everyone else. And uh for sport they they cleared out the dinning room- the living room area and had a fiddle and a guitar and danced. Square dances. Uh my father did the fiddling and my boyfriend did the guitar player so he got to play the guitar and watch me dance with all the other fellas. Now what else would you like to know? What do I go on from there?

03:24:19-----

De Mare: I would like- I would love to know the story about how you got the job as a Rosie and exactly what you did?

Hamilton: Oh we're going to get now to Rosies. We'd like to just talk about Rosies. I- my husband and I were married in June and in October he was drafted so in Wichita they had a training- government training that was teaching riveting. So I went to riveting class. Now uh, there was something about the riveter. The riveting gun was heavy and I didn't think I did a very good job of riveting. So I took the first job Boeing offered cause you know you were in the class because Boeing wanted 'em. And they wanted them fast. So the minute they offered me a job, I took it. I didn't know what it was or anything and my uh instructor was disturbed because he was teaching me riveting and I should become a riveter. But I didn't really think I was strong enough. Uh, they offered me a job at a bench so therefore I spent from the time he went to service in October of '42. It would be '42 because that was the year we were married. And so...then interesting was part not that I worked at a work bench and worked on parts for 10 hours- a 7 days- 6 days a week because I would not work on Sundays so the fellas were just really happy they got to work my Sunday.

05:37:18-----

Hamilton: The temperature was 120° in the building. I was parts from a hydro press and it's one of those things that drops down on forms and uh, the metal is straight but it drops down of the forms and makes parts. But it doesn't do a good job so you had to do what the called hand forming. So you banged out a lot of the little wrinkles and that sort of thing. So that was what I was doing. A lot of them- they had the parts the- they used on the hydro press but then they had some that when you'd hammer them into the right a a form they were usable. And they were lightweight aluminum and normally they had to go to what they called- where they cooked them and made them firm. Where they could be heat-treating that's the right word.

De Mare: And now did you go- did you go- did you travel to Wichita specifically to work at Boeing to get that job?

Hamilton: Oh no. I was I was a high school graduate and my my sister wanted me to come to Wichita so I just took whatever was handy, which was- happens to be the job of taking two little girls uh uh who worked for- I mean who

were the daughters of a lawyer and a Bridget playing mother and so we had a good time when they were gone. But because their parents were gone so much they became you know demons when the parents arrived.

7:29:14-----

De Mare: I know what you mean. So so you were working taking care of those children?

Hamilton: Yea- yes and then we got married.

De Mare: And then you got married...

Hamilton: And he went to the service and I went to the training school.

De Mare: And now-

Hamilton: And then I went to Boeing and the first job that they offered me.

De Mare: And was this the fiddle-playing boyfriend? Was it- Did you marry-

Hamilton: No. My father did the fiddling. He did the guitar.

De Mare: The guitar. That's right.

Hamilton: Yes.

De Mare: But it was the guitar-playing boyfriend?

Hamilton: And it was western music and it was square dancing. Uh, I don't think they do all that much square dancing but in Wichita now they have special time everybody who does square dancing comes to town and really has a good time. Square dancing.

De Mare: So do you remember when you were younger how much money you earned when you started working in the- at Boeing and what that did you change your life?

Hamilton: Well you see that's why the instructor was unhappy that I didn't wait for welding because it was higher paid than standing at that bench. Now I uh, I have a younger sister and she came out of high school and I

encouraged her to come out and apply at Boeing and she she would uh go out there, and it was the same uh person that interviewed her and they would say you're too little. And and I said, 'you just keep going back.' And finally she says, 'I'm tired of seeing you.' And she got a job as a riveter. She's a really happy Rosie but she's down in Florida and not at this convention. But she is the one that that got all the our people- myself and our family into the Rosies because she's the a thoroughly enthusiastic person about her job at Boeing because she riveted the floor in the Captain's cabin. And so we've been to the area in Dayton where we could walk through the shell. And I know she thought that was great and wonderful to stand once again on on the floor of the cabins- of the Captain's cabin.

09:52:16-----

De Mare: Now you are the historian for the society, right?

Hamilton: Yes, but then that's because I worked for the Federal Government for 38 years. And uh uh so, government is strict with regulations and all of this. And I started as a clerk typist and so you know it was from the ground up

and consequently I ended up doing historians for the Rosies because you know I have a library. Uh, I started taking pictures at age 18 and I'm 90.

De Mare: You must have a lot of photographs.

Hamilton: Two very big libraries built by a friend. Uh, they're gorgeous you know and they go to the ceiling.

De Mare: What what is one of your favorite stories and it doesn't even have to be one of your story because you're the historian. But what are some of the stories about Rosie that you wish people would know?

Hamilton: Well the the one I didn't say about Boeing was my husband was in the Army and it was the 13th armored division uh the Army. So he told be that 13 was lucky. And he uh- his group was in the Battle of the Bulge and they sent him home- they were going to train him for the next war we were about to get into. So he- the war ended and everybody you know just walked out the- And so I didn't have that experience because he was on furlough so I was on leave from Boeing so I like to impress everybody that uh, I

worked at Boeing until September you know so they think I'm
a real wheel because I didn't go out with the group

11:56:15-----

De Mare: What um- did you enjoy the work that you did? I
mean you talk about-

Hamilton: Oh heavens no.

De Mare: Yea.

Hamilton: You know all I did was bang this metal down to
the the fitting of the form and and uh pray that my husband
would get home from the service and hope I'd have a letter
when I got home. And that's what I did when I got home. I
wrote him a letter. I wrote a letter to him everyday.

De Mare: Everyday...

Hamilton: But you see the way the mail is it would have to
catch up with him and so he'd get a pack of letters and
that's like about the way they came because he was a good
but then he was a very conscientious Army person and they

would black out if they said something you know that was information that they wouldn't want him- so he never got a blacked out letter because he just says, 'I love you.' And you know good stuff like that.

12:54:08-----

De Mare: Uh when you were in Wichita working at Boeing, where were you living? Were you living at ho- where-

Hamilton: I was working at- living uh a few blocks off of uh Central in uh two-storey house that had been built into compart- to apartments and it had four on the top floor and four below and so uh basically they had a bedroom, a kitchen, dining, living area and that's about all it had in it and the two on one side and the two on the other had to share a bathroom and a hall and uh-

De Mare: Was it mostly-

Hamilton: And at one time I and my relatives had all of them but one. So you know it it was an apartment and not a great place to live and I had a second storey one so I

suppose that might have kept me in good shape walking stairs.

De Mare: Um, was there any- anything that happened to you during that time that you think that is a funny story or a challenging story or something that you'd like to share with us?

Hamilton: Um uh, no the only thing that I think about that was really nice was was I and one other lady were the only ladies in our group and those fellas were very nice to us. I mean they really- they didn't you know act, hey you don't know anything or you're not doing your job good enough or something they they uh some of them were really not that old so they were excused no doubt from the service because they were working about Boeing.

14:48:00-----

De Mare: And what did you- what was being built at Boeing at that time?

Hamilton: The B29 parts uh we had a really really fun thing that I don't remember now whether was a uh the hundredth

one that rolled out or what it was but they rolled it out on the flight line and everyone got to go out and get their picture taken. And so I'm still looking for that picture because I know where I was standing and I know they could see me and when I move and have to throw all this stuff away, I hope I find it.

De Mare: I hope you do too.

Mimi: How dangerous was your job? Were there any accidents?

Hamilton: Well I'm wearing a hearing aid and when the hydro press came down, he came- it came down with a terribly big bang. So I always say they took my hearing. That's my excuse I'm really 90.

De Mare: That's terrific. Thank you so much.

Hamilton: Well we love attention. Old people love attention you know. Uh uh, I think that's one thing about being old, learning how sweet people can be. But uh last year our convention at Las Vegas and we had to go through the wild area you know. Every time- it was nice we had a

meeting room with a dining room area next to it but but but I was at that time just beginning to have a bad knee so so my niece had been taking me. Well hey I finally had to have her go first and follow her or they were just going to knock me flat. So I didn't really think it was a great place to have- but I suppose people who like that atmosphere thought it was great. But then I'm a historian and so we had to you know get the register and get the pictures and the like and so because we were all there we arrived at the same time which you know like here you take care of them when they arrive. I bet you know something about trying to get together and have the time right and get the attention and get the time and you know doing a good job.

De Mare: Yea...thank you so much, Dorine. It was a lovely to meet you. Really lovely to meet you.

Hamilton: Well I wish you uh a good experience with your job. You all seem very enthusiastic.