

Arlene Crary

The Real Rosie the Riveter Project

Interview 24

Interview Conducted by

Kirsten Kelly

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Interview: Arlene Crary

Interviewers: Kirsten Kelly

Date: June 26, 2010

Place: Nashville, Tennessee

Crary: My name is Arlene Crary. I uh am from Madison, Wisconsin and I am 86 and half years old. I uh left Madison, Wisconsin in 1943. It aw in September and I had two youngsters, two daughters at the time. I left to go on a troop train to go to Seattle, Washington because my husband was there working in the shipyards. He had left a month a head of me because he wanted to find a place to live by a brother who was already working in the shipyards in Seattle. So uh after he found a place it was a month that I joined him. And that was a long trip on a troop train, 2,800 miles. The only stop was in Denver, Colorado so me and the little ones got used to eating cold sandwiches and sleeping in uh the seats that were available. I forgot how many hours it took us now but it seemed like a long time. Well then we did join my husband in Seattle in uh we lived wait out on the outskirts near Mount Rainier. And uh I, we got settled, the girls and I got settled in the place my husband found. And then he told me that he heard they were hiring at Boeing Aircraft. And

I said, "but I have to find a babysitter." And I did. I found a nice babysitter. And then uh I went and applied for the job. Of course, I had to take some training first and they hired me because of my size to work on the wings of the B-17s and the B-29s and uh I was taught how to do bucking and also riveting and uh I worked six days a week, eight hours a day and of course well when I come home I was exhausted because I had to take bus all the way so a big double-decker bus that would take me back to when I lived. And of course in the mornings when I would leave for work, I would have to take a flashlight because it was dark when I left and that was the only way they could see me to get on on the bus. Well, anyway, I worked for Boeing for well- I will first tell you that my husband got his draft papers when we were there six months and he had to go into services. Well that was ok. I thought well I'll stay here because I need the money even though I knew I would get money from the government. I stayed and I worked another year. Well he didn't get out of service until well after I a ye- my oldest daughter was uh old enough to start kindergarten. Well I said I must leave and get back to Madison, Wisconsin where my family was so again I made arrangements to get on a troop train and went back to my family in Madison, Wisconsin and of course they were very

happy to have me back. And I thought perhaps I should keep occupied other than with my two children. So my father said, "Well mom will take care of the children. You do whatever you want to do. So I went to work as a waitress and I made quiet good money doing that. And then it was six months after I was home, he got out of service so- then of course uh...I- what a change though in a man because he, he had been in Okinawa and he had he had a drinking problem quiet bad when he came back so...within about six months after being home we separated so uh and

Kelly: (inaudible) hard time.

05:33:09-----

Crary: it wasn't easy but I managed, I managed. At the time he he uh he said, "I want to get a defense job, I don't want to go into service right away yet." And I said, "Well I have these two little ones" Well, it's up to you. You either stay here and work- I worked in a grocery store at the time but of course having the two children, I had to give up my job. So then that's when I thought well I would do the best I could so I followed him, which I guess was a mistake but I don't regret it. I don't regret it because I

said I was very proud and I even put in a garden while I was there in Seattle too. We had a little space when put in what they called at the time, Victory Gardens. So-

Kelly: Why did they call them victory gardens?

Crary: I think it was because of uh the the farm boys were inducted and food was in demand, fresh vegetables so I think that's why they called them victory gardens so because it was the time during the war.

Kelly: Not a lot of the women who were Rosies had children at the time so what was it like balancing those two worlds?

Crary: Yes it was two worlds. Two worlds. The facilities were not the greatest. We lived was a hotel that was turned into living quarters for for people. I cooked out of a wood stove. We had no cars so as far as laundry facilities there was a laundry mat but I couldn't get there because there was no car so I had to scrub board. You can tell my hands. I did laundry by a scrub board.

07:45:03-----

Kelly: So- you know, how old were your girls when you were a Rosie? What did they-

Crary: When I was a Rosie? My oldest one was uh two and a half and my other one was 11 months old but she was walking already. (laugh).

Kelly: Wow.

Crary: But that was no problem when I applied for a job because you know they asked and wanted to know about your family about you and I told them I about the two youngsters and I had an excellent babysitter. And uh didn't have to pay her a lot of money. A lot of them would say, doesn't that eat up your wages and I said, "no."

Kelly: What- what did you have to pay her? And then what did you make as a Rosie?

Crary: Uh uh I only had to pay her \$10 a week for the two children. Of course she didn't she didn't feed them. I always had lunch- had prepared lunch a head of time for them for her to give. And that was all because they ate breakfast before I left and uh the evening meal of course,

I fixed when I got home. My wages when I finally left uh Boeing Aircraft, I was making \$1.48 an hour and I thought that was a good-

Kelly: And do you remember what you saved for? Or what you spent your money on?

Crary: I bought bonds. I bought bonds and uh which was almost a must. They would have you buy a bond, at least one bond a month. And of course then I saved some money to purchase some property when I got back to Wisconsin. I wanted to start my own home so I did. My father knew a lot about real estate and helped me there as far as buying some property and uh I purchased a nice lot and of course, hopefully I thought my husband did get out of service, we could start a home. In those days, people started from the basement. Where I'm from, with cement blocks. Well anyway uh during the time we were together, he was stilling on his mustering out pay. He hadn't gone back to work yet. And I said, "Well now is the time for you to start with our home." Well, I would proceed to the cement blocks and have them delivered and the mortar. And a friend of mine lived close by to where I had purchased this lot and uh he happened to be over there one day watching my hubby use the mortar

with getting the blocks and he leaned up against some of them and they all toppled- So he knew me and he called me and said, "Arlene," he said, "are you getting the right kind of mortar." He said, "something's going on there." He said, "I was over there talking to your hubby and leaned up against the blocks and they toppled over." Well he had been drinking. He wasn't putting the blocks together like they should have been so uh I gave him an ultimatum. I said, "either you straighten up or this is it. I can't go on like this. I saved this money for this lot and to get our home started. Well, he wouldn't listen so- when you have children back where I'm from they ask you to go to a divorce counselor before you they even let you think of getting a divorce so I tried to talk him into going with me because that's the way they wanted and he wouldn't go. So I I just called it quits then. I couldn't take it anymore.

12:00:00-----

Kelly: It's a hard thing at the time when a divorce wasn't- what was that like? Just thank goodness you had your family.

Crary: Well like I said, what a foolish girl the way I was because I right- I was only out of high school six months when I got married. I mean, that's too young. I had I had to grow up fast. My mother died when I was 7 and my father remarried a woman 15 years younger than him. Well, here I mean, she was only 15 years- put it this way- no she was 17 and I was 7. She was only 10 years older than me so it was just like having a big kid sister, you know? So I never then then after I got married whatnot of course my grandmother was really the one who helped me more than anyone. So I said the stepmother was not that- she was too much of a kid. I was more grown up than she was.

Kelly: You had probably been through more.

Crary: Yes I have. Yes I have.

Kelly: Yea

Crary: Yes I have but I said uh I've always been a very patriotic person and to this day whatever apartment or home I've lived in I've always had the American flag. I said, right now, they are in Sun City I had a beautiful post put in with a light. So the flag is out there all the time with

the light at night so I said...uh so my two girls are that way too, very patriotic.

Kelly: Why do you think that is? Why do you love this country?

Crary: I love really everything about my country. I think I've been very fortunate to be an American. Uh I think we have a lot of freedom here compared to a lot of country. We have so much freedom of speech and uh freedom of many many things. We're allowed to go to whatever church we want to go to. I'm not a religious fanatic but I was brought up in a Lutheran home. And of course through the years uh I ended up changing to be a Methodist now where I'm at. So I said, It doesn't matter, it doesn't really, they are so much alike.

15:00:22-----

Kelly: What do you think you learned being Rosie that helped you the rest of your life?

Crary: What have I learned? I've learned that there are many times that I wish I had someone to really love me and

support me and I had found someone now but he's a a- lost his wife, uh about the same time- well I didn't tell you I remarried- I had remarried and uh of course he passed away- how long ago was it- seven years ago. And then I met Bob at the Methodist church and we've been dating but I can't get married because of my passed husband's pension. He was a policeman back in Madison, Wisconsin and Bob has come to live with me now because he's had five bypasses. Recently, he had bladder cancer and different ones said, "Well why do you take care of him." I said, "He's a good companion." We have a lot of things that we like to do together. He likes to travel. He likes to gamble a little bit. He likes to play bingo. And I said, "These are things that in my younger years, I never really did. And with my second marriage, Ray wasn't much for gambling or playing bingo." So..my girls do like him very much. But but as far as- I've always felt it was nice to be a care giver and Hilda is, I do take care of a lot. I am an instructor of water aerobics and I pick her up twice a week and there in the being, I'd always wait for her to shower then I'd think well I'll shower when I get home but now it's gotten so..I might as well go in there and shower too rather than sit around waiting for her.

Kelly: Do you think it's a Rosie bond? Between the two of you?

Crary: Yes, yes, yes. And then before I had Hilda there was another little lady that I always kind of helped too. Her family was back in Chicago and she was out here, in Sun City alone and of course I'd always take her to the bank and take her out to eat once and while so I don't know, that's just me. If I can help- I said, someday I may need some help.

18:05:07-----

Crary: How have I changed?

Kelly: From that moment you walked into that factory to the moment you stopped working as a Rosie?

Crary: I got to be more open minded about things. I mean and and believe you not before that I was a rather shy person. I got over that. (laughs) And then I always thought if there is anyway I could help somebody especially when you're working in a factory and you see maybe someone is having a little problems. I was there to help them and uh

it was teamwork. I learned teamwork. And teamwork is important in everything, even in a marriage. So I think that's what I learned lots. Being a Good Samaritan and teamwork.

Kelly: How many people worked in the-

Crary: Oh my goodness. It was in the thousands.

Kelly: So you got meet a lot different types of people?

Crary: Wilma Reese, who was with us today and her twin sister. They worked there and I didn't even know them. And think they worked the same shift I did. So but Wilma didn't stay there that long. I think they were only there for about 4 months I believe, something like that so-

Kelly: And how- what was the relationship with ah some of the men?

Crary: The men? I was a tiny, petite little thing and they always used to call me "Little One." "What are you up to Little One?" I only weighed 98 pounds.

Kelly: And they wanted your size for-

Crary: Oh yes for, cause the wing.

Kelly: What did you do? Climb up in there?

Crary: (nodding) In the wing, in the wing.

Kelly: So you crawl up in the wing and then rivet and buck?

Crary: Um hum buck, buck.

Kelly: Oh wow, was it hot or what was it?

Crary: It was hot but in Seattle of course it's not like here or Arizona.

Kelly: Right. A little cooler. Oh this was wonderful.

Thank you. I'm so happy you stopped by.

Crary: You're welcome.

The End.