While other girls attend their favorite cocktail bar

Sipping dry martinis,

munching caviar

There's a girl who's really putting them to shame

Rosie is her name

All the day long whether

rain or shine

She's a part

of the assembly line

She's making history,

working for victory

Rosie the Riveter

Roosevelt:

December 7, 1941,

a date which will live in infamy.

The United States of America

was suddenly

and deliberately attacked

by naval and air forces

of the Empire of Japan.

Narrator: World War II dramatically changed the lives

and attitudes

of American women.

At a time when millions of men

were leaving the home front

for the battlefront,

American industry

was forced into high gear

producing war materials,

equipment, and supplies.

The nation was strapped

for manpower.

A staggering number

of workers were needed

for what were

traditionally male jobs.

The government along

with corporations

and the trade unions began

actively recruiting women.

Pardon me, Jane

America's gone to war

You can't waste your life

Sitting under

the apple tree

I think the majority of the

people that did work for Boeing,

the women, heard of it through

the radio or by the newspapers.

Announcer:

More and more men are being

called into the Armed Forces.

Their jobs must be filled

and filled now,

and who can fill them?

You. You women.

You're the ones

who must fill them,

who can give

our boys what they need.

I just felt that the fact that my brother -- oldest brother

was in the service that I could

help out in that respect.

And then when my twin

went in the service,

why, that was more incentive.

Well, my husband was a Quartermaster on a submarine,

and he was sent overseas,

and we lived by the --

Indian Island,

the Bangor submarine depot,

and we went to work.

Everybody just went

to work at the --

for civil service

for the war effort.

All of us felt like we had to do

something to help the effort

and bring our guys

home safely.

I fudged my age

so I could go to work.

They needed people so bad,

they kind of looked

the other way.

I'd never

really worked before,

and it was my sister

that got me the first job

because they were so short

of help, and she asked me to --

why don't I come up and work

and I said, "Oh, I don't know."

My husband was against

a woman working.

But my mother said, "Well,

you're -- the children

are here with me."

And at that time,

we only lived just a few blocks

from the shop.

I decided to volunteer

for defense,

and I was one of the first women

to do that at Boeing.

And went down to the Washington

State Employment Office,

and the man interviewed me,

and I told him I had

gone to night school

and taken artistic metal work.

And he said, "You'll make

a better mechanic than I would."

Announcer: These lassies days

are learning their industrial

ABCs in special government-conducted schools,

and when graduated,

they'll take their place

in our expanding defense plants.

And they seem to catch on

very fast, too.

Virginia: The government paid

companies to train you.

So we all went to -- I can't

remember the number of weeks,

but I'm going to say

three weeks,

I went to training to learn

to do these things.

The War Production Board

came out,

and then they decided

that we had to go to school

and learn how to instruct.

It was only a course of

about three days.

I was the only girl.

The rest were all men that in the class,

and I had to -- either had to go

or I couldn't have my job

as an instructor,

and it was very helpful.

The fellow started out

by putting a part together,

and I watched it.

And then he turned around

and had me instruct him,

which was kind of

nerve-wracking.

I was milking cows

so my husband could go

to the welding classes

at the school

at Mount Vernon.

And he came out and he said,

"Mary, I think

you ought to go to school

and learn how to weld."

and I said, "I don't want to

I can think of three things

that would stop me.

First place, I'm scared spitless of the electricity."

He said, Well, come up and see what it's like.

There's some other women

doing it."

So I went up to see

what they did.

I said, "I didn't come

to do this."

I said, "I came just to watch,"

So he said, "Well, let's see what you could do."

So I made a bead,

just a straight line

just under his,

just what he had done.

And he said, "Oh, you've done that before."

I said, "No. I haven't, and I didn't want to do it."

But the first thing

I know, I'm in class.

You just kind of went out

and watched

to sailors make a grommet,

and then four of them got on -- the sailors got on the line

and made two grommets

and interwove them together.

And that was it. That was a half

a day's training.

I really didn't

have any instructions.

I -- they just told me to put

the bar on the rivet and bucket.

Virginia: There were riveters

and there were buckers.

Buckers were the girls

that stood inside the plane

to hit the backside of the rivet

because you had to have both

sides flat, and we were warned,

you know, if that skin on that plane didn't fit up tight,

the wind would get under there,

pull it off, and our guys

would go down in the sea

or something.

So, man, were we cautious.

You had these various

bucking bars,

and they had different angles.

The riveter on the outside tapped

wherever they wanted to place a rivet.

And according to

the number of taps,

you knew what part

of the bucking bar

you were supposed to press up

against this sound.

Margaret: This is a code

we had -- hit it once

if it's okay, twice

if you need it hit more,

and three times, take it out.

[ Chuckles ]

Narrator:

As the Armed Forces continued to increase their demands for men,

even more women were recruited

into war jobs.

By 1943, women made up more than one-third

of the American labor force.

Announcer: In the sprawling

aircraft factories

on the west coast,

teams of women

flush the rivets

that hold together

the aluminum skin

on the wing of a B-24.

This is like punching holes

in a tin of scouring powder.

Instead of cutting out dresses,

this woman stamps out

the patterns of airplane parts.

They are taking to welding

as though the welding rod

were a needle

and the metal, a length

of cloth to be sewn.

Well, it's working on

a grommet line,

which is -- grommets

are big circles of wire

probably as big around

as your thumb,

and they're 60-feet long,

and there are two women

on one grommet, and you weave it in and out and you make

a big net, and it -- they roll it up on a big roller thing

and it's 100 --

when they get done,

it's 100-feet deep

and 600-feet across.

And then they take that out

and put it in all of the inland waters,

so submarines couldn't get in

on our coastal waters.

That's what that is.

Mm-hmm.

It was the B-17s

that I started in on,

and I worked the tail section

where the tail wheel

on the 17s was,

and that -- all the time

that I was with Boeing,

that's the area

that I worked in.

And so I became --

it was my baby. [ Laughs ]

Announcer: The B-17 --

the fortress that flies.

Julia: Some parts

we made was for the B-17s.

The boss had the toolmaker

put the dye in the machine

to stamp out parts,

and then he'd sit there

and he'd run parts for a while,

and then he asked me

if I felt that I could take over, and I'd take over.

And then when I felt

that I could instruct a girl,

I would instruct a girl

to run the machine.

Sometimes if you did have

two or three men,

and I had one in my department,

they kind of resented a woman

being an instructor

and teaching.

Narrator:

No matter how well-trained

they were, women war workers

had to overcome many obstacles,

not the least of which

was that they were

basically interlopers in a world

that had previously been

exclusively male.

Eleanor: My foreman,

I thought he was very nice,

but he was married of course,

and he was friendly to me,

and he said that I could

have my B rating

because I was a C mechanic

to start, at $0.625 an hour.

And he said I could get

my B rating if I would

go out with him

in his soft-cushion Chrysler.

And the following afternoon,

and just take the afternoon off

and go out with him.

And I told him, I said, "I want

my B rating when I'm worth it."

So the next day, there was a girl in the shop

that bleached her hair blond and she was missing from the shop

and so was the foreman.

And the day they got back,

she got her B rating.

It took me about two weeks,

I got mine.

I had no problems with

the fellows that I worked with.

They were all very nice

and accommodating.

And one thing I can say,

too, about that group

was there was no swearing.

They had to curb

their bad language

in front of us young people.

So they had a game

and if someone heard

the other one say a bad word

or something, cuss, they'd put

a bolt in their pocket.

Well, some of those

poor old guys

could hardly

keep their pants up.

They were so loaded with bolts

by the end of the day,

I never noticed anybody

looking down on any woman

who could do her job.

That was the only criteria,

and I've found that

throughout my life.

If you could do your job,

you're okay.

Narrator: Still, many employers

refuse to hire women.

According to the men

in charge, women did not

have the physical

strength or mechanical ability

to do high-paying,

skilled factory jobs.

Well, we came over

to the Navy yard

and put in our applications.

And the man came

and took our papers

and took them back and

studied them a little while.

And he said, "You've made a mistake in your papers."

And I said, "What's that?"

He said, "Well, you call

yourselves welders.

And I said, "Well, we are."

And he said, "Look, lady,

there's been no woman

welding long enough

to be a welder in this yard.

They're attackers

and helpers,

but they're not welders."

I said, "Well, I am.

I said, "Open your baby blues

and take a good look because

here stands two of us,

not one but two of us."

So they went back,

and then he came back,

and he just

in the snottiest voice,

he said, "Exactly what do

you think you could do

with the Navy test?"

I said, "Well for your

information,

I'll pass the damn thing."

They were all sneaking up

behind you,

looking through a glass to see

whether or not you could weld.

And they'd say, "Oh, my gosh, Mary, you really can weld."

and I said, "Well, that's what I've been trying

to tell you guys

for a long time."

Women generally didn't have

their own tools for the job.

So they had two cribs

and your were given a ring

with a lot of little tags on it.

So if you needed a drill,

you went to the tool crib,

give him a ticket

with your number,

and they'd give you the tool

to do the job.

Eleanor: They required that we buy a tool box

and $25 worth of tools.

I was pinched on the $25

because we were only

making $0.625 an hour,

and I had to rent a room

and pay my room and board

and clothe myself.

And as I say,

I borrowed $5 to get

a few items of clothing

that I could use in the plant.

But I really dressed cute

because I had little jackets,

and I wore t-shirts

that were striped

and multi-colored stripes

and pants to match the jacket,

and some people said

they wished they could dress that way, you know.

Julia: Any girl running a machine had to wear hair nets,

and they all wore slacks.

They'd just started really

just before that wearing slacks.

I saw in a magazine recently

where the women

would wear kerchiefs

to tie their hair up.

We were not allowed to do that.

We had to wear

what they called a snood,

which was

kind of a wide-holed netting

that went around your head,

and sometimes they'd have

ribbons on them and things,

but we all went to work

in snoods. [ Laughs ]

Since I already had jeans

and bib overalls,

that's what I wore.

When my husband came home

from overseas, he came in,

excuse me,

on an aircraft carrier.

And Commander Turner -- and you hated to get this signal,

"Commander wants to speak

to so and so,"

because it pulled you

off the line.

Pulled me off the line,

and I was scared

something had happened to Dad, you know.

And he said,

"You have the day off.

The barge is coming to get you

to get your hair fixed.

Your husband's coming in

on the next shift."

So, and they didn't give you

days off then,

you worked,

so you know, so...

But he -- they did realize

that you wanted to look nifty

when your old man came home.

Announcer:

Once the male domain,

now it's got that feminine touch

you've heard about.

Yes, sir, these gals believe

in preparedness, alright.

I came out

and went to the restaurant

with my hard hat

and everything on,

and the dishwasher says

to the Chef,

"Chef, there's a man

here to see you."

And he didn't know me,

and he knew me well

because I'd worked

with him the night before.

And he said, "There's a man here

to see you."

So the guy came around -- the chef came around the corner

and he said,

"Yes, can I help you?"

And I said, "Well, I don't need

any help."

And he said, "Mary? Mary?

Mary? For God's sake, Mary."

And I said, "Well, that's what I look like

when I get through welding."

These women are working around the clock, around the calendar.

They do a man's job,

and they can draw a man's pay.

And they're doing it safely.

They're safer here

than in their own homes.

I lost part of my finger on one

the machines stamping a part.

The girl came, it was 4:20,

and she asked me

if she could have a relief

to go to the bathroom.

So I says, "I'll run your machine for you."

When she come back, she says, "I'll take over."

And I says, "Oh, we've only got five minutes more,

you stack the parts, and I'll run them through the machine."

And the brake slipped

and repeated itself

and took part of

my one finger off.

I had to take a rivet out.

And I was looking

on the other side

to see what had to be done,

and my drill was still running,

but it had slowed down.

And it caught my bandana

and pulled about a inch

and a half hair long

and about half an inch wide out.

One of my best friends

lost an eye

because you have these

big wrenches,

and you're winding these through, and this wrench

flew out, and the wire came

and got her in their eye.

So, you know,

it was a dangerous job.

You didn't have masks, you

didn't have anything

to guard you,

you know.

We got a taste of what men

go through all of their lives.

Hazardous work.

Narrator: Off the job, women

war workers did double duty

as housewives and mothers.

Although a few employees

built childcare centers,

most working mothers relied

on relatives or neighbors

to take care of their children.

Women relied on each other

for moral support, as well.

Well, there was one woman

in the neighborhood,

I think watched seven kids

from infants

to 5 and 6 years old,

and she was a marvel.

Without her, the grommet line

wouldn't have gotten done.

Yeah, they all helped each other

out and all together

Many of them lost their husbands, their children.

Peggy: I had a dear friend

who lost her husband.

He was in the Army,

and they called her off the line

and it was a sad thing.

In fact that day,

Commander Turner turned

the whole line down because we were all sobbing.

We couldn't work.

Some of the girls

have their fiancés overseas,

and sometimes there'd be one

that I felt

that was wasting a lot of time,

and I would tell her I said,

"You know, if it was me,

and I had someone over there,

I'd worked so hard,

if I dropped at the machine

to get them home quicker.

Narrator: Regardless of what they had to deal with,

most women were determined to succeed.

They were enormously proud

of their skills and abilities,

and they had every reason to be.

During the four years

of the war,

production levels were phenomenal.

War materials

were turned out at a rate

that would have been impossible

without women's help.

Many women also initiated

changes that made their jobs

more efficient

and work environments safer.

Announcer: Once upon a time,

there were beauty parades.

All the girls needed was youth

and culture.

But this is war, today's beauty

contests are in the shipyards

on the assembly lines.

Here at Marinship, California,

women welders have

a lunchtime contest.

Men workers vote on each girls' job record and attendance.

For now,

Miss America is at work.

The winner is expert welder,

Mrs. Gladys Griffin,

mother of two, and

Mr. Griffin's in the service.

You were supposed to vote

one person in your plant

that you thought was doing

a good cause for the war.

When the votes were all counted,

I had all but one vote out of

the 125.

And that's when they came to take a picture

of who was elected in each plant.

And that's why I have

that picture today.

I just -- I kept it.

Announcer:

The call for better, faster production methods goes out,

and in the shops,

the men and women

who are giving their time

and their muscle,

they give their ideas, too.

Eleanor: I was working

on an electrical saw

and I saw that

by designing a new part,

I could avoid the operator

flipping her hands

into the saw blade while it's moving and being injured

or maybe tipping some tubing

into the machinery

while it was still revolving.

So they took my blueprints

and they manufactured it,

and they applied it to the saw,

and that was that.

And I was real happy to do

that.

Oh, it made me feel very good

to get my rating.

It was the top rating.

I think one reason why

I probably got it was the fact

that that I was using

the 25-pound squeeze.

They sent a man down

to help me out.

And when I saw the work

he was doing, his weld

was just full of pinholes,

and he said, "That's alright,

Mary, because the pin holes

on this side

won't coincide with the

pin holes on the other side,

so we won't have

any leak anyway."

And I said, "Pack up your gear

and get off this job.

And you tell the lead man

if he wants to come

and talk to me, he can,

but I'm not going to have

my name

printed on this job

and have it look like that

because you won't find

a pinhole in my work."

I worked on C-47s for Douglas,

and when I'd finish a job,

a plane, they were on hoists

that would move down the line,

you know, for finishing touches.

I always would write notes

and stick them, oh, behind

the fire extinguishers

or under the seats or any place

because it probably would have

been my job if I'd got caught.

And I'd just give

the guys messages, you know,

"Give us one for us,"

and "Come home safe,"

or "We all love you,"

or...

Narrator: As 1945 began, the peak of industrial mobilization

in America was over.

Slowly the jobs

in defense industries declined.

Before the year ended,

millions of men would return

from the battlefront

to the home front.

Announcer: A day of days for America and her allies.

Crowds before the White House

await the announcement

from the President

that the Japs have surrendered

unconditionally.

I deem this reply a full

acceptance

of the Potsdam declaration,

which specifies

the unconditional surrender

of Japan.

Announcer: Washington

is jubilant, and in Chicago,

more than a million

sing and dance in the streets.

I'll never forget the day the war ended,

and they were saying the people downtown were just going wild.

Announcer: Seattle let lose

all the pent-up emotions

of three years

and eight months of war.

Joy is unconfined.

We went down there and,

my lands,

the street,

you couldn't even get through.

Everybody was grabbing

one another

and hugging them and crying.

In fact, somebody grabbed me, some sailor,

and gave me a big kiss

on my cheek,

and he was crying, so excited

that the war was over.

And that was a scene

I'll never forget.

I was in the hospital

when the war ended,

and they were dancing

in the streets and celebrating,

and I couldn't dance

in the streets and celebrate

because I'd had

my second child, Melody.

I blamed her for that.

She's never gotten over the fact

that I blamed her for that.

Narrator: More than 2 million

American women war workers

were laid off.

Although some women plan to work

only for the duration of the war, the majority of women

hoped to keep their jobs.

About two-thirds of them continued working,

but most were shifted to

so-called "female" work

where there was less pay

and less chance for promotion.

Others left willingly

to raise their families.

At the end of the war,

they offered

to find a place for me,

but I told them,

I says, "We have done

what we came here to do."

And so I says, "I just want to

go on with something else."

After the war, I really

didn't want to work full-time.

Dad came home and got a GI loan, bought a house.

He went to work, and he went

to work at the Indian Island

where I had worked and

became fire chief there.

I didn't have to -- really have to work, and so I wasn't --

but when we -- when the boss

sold everything out,

why, the bookkeeper

and several of us, we had jobs

to go to the new places

that bought the machinery.

I worked for 15 years,

and then I decided

I was going to

do something different,

and I went to Alaska,

out on the --

out on the peninsula,

and I cooked in a hotel.

My husband was in

the paratroops then,

and although I didn't know him,

but he found my notes.

And then a few years later,

we met at church

and at a bingo game,

and we got to talking,

and here it turned out,

he was the one that got

my notes and read them.

And we started dating,

and now we're married 54 years.

I felt much more capable

of doing things knowing

that I had been able to do

what I needed to do

at Boeing's during the war.

I look back and I think, I know

I was kind of timid and shy

and little by little, I got

so that I could face things

a lot easier than I did.

I wasn't scared of anybody, not

a one that wouldn't matter.

I thought that was a challenge,

and I like anything

where you can use

reasoning ability

and use your intelligence.

And so, but I think I should have been a songwriter

a long time

before I became one.

[ Laughs ]

Did I ever feel that

I didn't want to keep going?

Many, many times,

but you know, you wake up

in the morning,

and the sun's out or the rain's

coming down or the bird sings,

and you kind of say

to yourself,

"God, I want to be part of this," so you keep going.

That's a pretty simplistic way

to look at life,

but that's

kind of where it is for me.