

Rosie the Riveter

By Trey Clarkson

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Rosie the Riveter

- 2 -

DEDICATION

To Holly Smith and the last play she saw. Holls, we miss you.

STORY OF THE PLAY

It's January 1942, in the throes of World War II. Eddie, the owner of Eddie's Auto Parts Factory in Cook County, Illinois, is struggling now that there is a freeze on the manufacturing of car parts. His secretary, Rosie, wonders if the factory can secure a government contract and be converted to make airplane parts instead— if only they can find the manpower. At a time when the radio and the mail were the main sources of information, and ration books were in every household, Rosie is willing to shed tradition, roll up her sleeves and do her part. She is chosen to become the iconic image that will inspire so many women workers to join the cause.

Also see the full-length version of this show.

ORIGINAL PRODUCTION

Bishop Sullivan Catholic High School Theatre Company, Barry Robinson Theatre and Fine Arts Center in Virginia Beach, Virginia, April 26th, 2013. Directed by Trey Clarkson. Original Cast: Sarah White, Lizzy Gardiner, Bill Cussen, Carter Garner, Hannah Brown, Catherine Hutchens, Sydney Powell, Luke Sicard, Ryan Layton, Dana Baraki, Rachel Ciampoli, Elizabeth Douglas, Caitlin Stone, Kira Wilson, Megan Wolf, Mariah Moghadam, Sara Hutchens, Julia Lopez, Meghan Hall, Rylee Holihan, Taylor Durham, Justin Sobczak, Austin Lundrigan, Maryanne Peck, Kyrie McLeod, Brett Barney, Brooke Drew.

CAST OF CHARACTERS:

(6 m, 8 w, and ensemble cast of 6 w or more.)

ROSIE O'CONNELL: Eddie's secretary, soon to become a famous face.

HELEN HENLEY: Fiancée of John and head of social club, a traditionalist.

EDDIE KENDRICK: Owner of Eddie's Auto Parts Factory, northern accent.

JOHN STANLEY: Helen's fiancé and top salesman at Eddie's. Also Rosie's love interest.

KATHERINE HARTLEY: Rosie's second-in-command.

MARGARET MILLER: Part of the social club and friends with Katherine.

MARJORIE STINSON: A new hire and the most qualified factory worker.

TOMMY: A mechanic who works for Eddie.

JASPER: A mechanic who works for Eddie.

MARY JANE HILTON: Eddie's niece and a factory worker.

ENSEMBLE: LUCY / MARTHA / IDA / NANCY PRYOR / RICHARDSON / EDNA CLIFTON. Factory workers as well as society club members. Extras as desired.

COLONEL COLE: Military official in charge of reproducing Eddie's success.

HENRY: A mailman.

MARY: Secretary to Colonel Cole.

MELINDA: A model.

Acknowledgements:

Many of the stories and lines are taken from actual letters and accounts of women workers during the WW II time period. Special thanks to Mark Zafra and Lauren Ciampoli for their help editing and researching the script. Thanks to Brant Powell for creating the original art design for the script.

Set Notes:

The play works best when three distinct areas are created and isolated both with light and spacing. The main area should be the factory set. We visited a local WW II airplane museum and were able to borrow period pieces for the actors to work with. Multiple work stations should be created to keep the stage business interesting and part of the production. The other two areas should be Eddie's office and Helen's parlor. Another main element of the play is the radio broadcasts. Each interior set should have a radio prominently displayed. The radio voice and information is important to the show. The classic image of Rosie on the "We Can Do It" poster should also be incorporated into the set later in the show. Images and projections can be used but are not necessary.

Sound Design:

The music of the day is important and easily obtainable. Music opportunities are noted throughout the play. Try to record the radio broadcasts like a period piece. It is important to capture the vocalization from the time period. Resist the urge to cast this character as a live actor because the faceless voice giving the characters the information in "real" time adds to that sense of urgency the characters have about the war.

Prologue

(AT RISE: AUDIO of Roosevelt's famous radio broadcast about the attack on Pearl Harbor with his "Date that shall live in infamy" quote. Audio fades to military-type background drum song. Various ACTORS can say the lines separately, or give the lines to two or three actors and have them voice them simultaneously. Actors can either emerge or are in place and lit.)

December 7th, 1941, changed the lives of a generation of Americans as the United States, the sleeping giant, is awakened and filled with terrible resolve.

(Roosevelt AUDIO clip continues linked with images now.)

This generation of American men and women would later be called the greatest generation as their remarkable actions, during times of war and peace, ultimately made the United States a better place in which to live.

Their perseverance through difficult times ... helped them to defeat Hitler.

(Another brief AUDIO clip of Roosevelt linked with projected images runs followed by a change in music to represent the times.)

World War II was a global conflict ... gave rise to the expansion of the role of women in the work force.

What was previously considered man's work was now in the domain of women.

(Change in MUSIC to represent the times.)

By 1945 more than 2.2 million women were working in our war industries building ships, aircrafts, vehicles, and weaponry.

By the end of the war, 18 million women were in the country's workforce.

But let's be clear...working was not new to women. Women have always worked.

As every factory in the US was converted to the war time efforts by 1942...

Women now had the responsibility of both their private lives and the country's needs placed in their skilled hands...

Scene 1

(AT RISE: In Eddie's office, January 1942. ROSIE, in a dress, TOMMY, and JASPER are present. EDDIE is on the phone.)

EDDIE: Look, George, as of yesterday, the Office of Production Management has frozen delivery and manufacturing of any automobile. *(Beat.)* Yes, that includes orders. I can't....look.... George....

TOMMY: Tell him about the Chevy, Eddie.

EDDIE: George. Look, the Series 62 is a beaut...but my hands are tied.

ROSIE: Sell him the Chevy, Eddie.

EDDIE: *(Holding receiver.)* I've got this. Get to work. *(General reactions from TOMMY and ROSIE as JASPER laughs. EDDIE goes back to call.)* Look, George. I am not supposed to do this, before I start carving these babies up for salvage, what if I could put you in a Chevy...

ROSIE: Blackout.

EDDIE: Blackout. *(Beat.)* You know, the one with the fadeaway front fender *(Snaps his fingers and ROSIE and TOMMY jump to get specs.)*

ROSIE and TOMMY: Parking lights at the edge on each side of the grill. *(EDDIE repeats.)*

EDDIE: Look, George... These Blackouts are going to be a collector's item. They only got to make ...

ROSIE: Two thousand.

EDDIE: Two thousand of them and I just happen to have...

TOMMY: One.

EDDIE: One right here in the shop right now.

Rosie the Riveter

- 7 -

ROSIE: Make the deal, Eddie.

EDDIE: Enough chitchat, George. Rosie here says I got another guy lined up. *(Beat.)* Well, it is supposed to sell for \$800, but we go way back. How does...

ROSIE: Seven fifty.

EDDIE: Seven fifty sound? *(Beat. Positive reaction and relief from the REST.)* Great, George. Thank you. You won't regret it. I'll have Jasper drive it over now. *(Hangs up and sits.)* Is that the last of them, Rose?

ROSIE: Yeah, Eddie. And just in time, too. I heard on the radio they are talking about a national speed limit of 35.

EDDIE: Great. What's next, turning in your silverware for ammunition?

TOMMY: It's a good cause. If I wasn't so young I'd be out there fighting, boss.

JASPER: And if you weren't so dumb and half deaf from having your head shoved in an engine all your life.

TOMMY: Huh?

EDDIE: Jasper, clean that Chevy up and drive it over to George's.

ROSIE: Try not to wreck it; it's paying the rent for the next month.

JASPER: *(Going off stage.)* Give me a raise.

ROSIE: The world has changed, Eddie.

EDDIE: You're right, Rosie. I just can't believe it's over.

ROSIE: It's not, Eddie. I didn't think our little lives with our families in our little corner of the country would be affected. But we are, all of us. We are needed and important, Eddie. We're all in the war business now, and Tommy and I have been working on an idea to use this place for riveting airplane parts.

TOMMY: It really wouldn't be too hard to get us up and running, boss.

EDDIE: Yeah, and who is going to do it? You, Rosie?

ROSIE: I know more about machinery than you do, Eddie.

TOMMY: She has a point, boss.

EDDIE: *(Thinking.)* You really think you can teach ole Rosie here to rivet, Tommy?

TOMMY: You ain't got to be hard boiled to do it. You just need to be able to focus and lift the rivet gun.

ROSIE: Eddie, you can't afford to keep me unless I do something else around here. Let me do this.

EDDIE: It isn't normal, Rosie, for a girl like you to want to get your hands dirty.... You're hired, if, and this is a big if, you can convince some of your friends to do it, too. I gotta work on turning in all the paperwork to get that government contract so we can start making planes or jeeps or whatever...

ROSIE: Thanks. You won't regret it.

EDDIE: Too late, I already do...but I got no options. *(Exits.)*

TOMMY: Congratulations, Rosie.

ROSIE: Thanks, Tommy... Now, I gotta make some friends, I guess.

Scene 2

(Eddie's office, later that same day. JOHN enters carrying paperwork as TOMMY exits.)

TOMMY: Hey, John.

JOHN: Hey.

TOMMY: Be safe over there, John. Keep your head down.

JOHN: Will do.

ROSIE: Hey, Johnny. I was sad to hear we are losing you. Three years together in the trenches of this place is a long time.

JOHN: Eddie is kind of sore with me about the whole leaving thing.

ROSIE: Well, he was grooming you to takeover this place. So, then what brings you by, soldier? I'm sure you're not here to reminisce.

JOHN: I actually did stop by to see you.

ROSIE: Really?

JOHN: Um, yeah. I need to give you my final sales numbers.

ROSIE: Oh.

Rosie the Riveter

- 9 -

JOHN: I know you are trying to get everything organized for the closure. Say, what's going to happen to this place anyway?

ROSIE: We are joining the cause in our own way. Tommy and I are working on converting the assembly line into making plane parts instead of auto parts. Eddie's heading out later today to sign all the paperwork to make it official.

JOHN: Wow. Tommy thinks he can manage this by himself?

ROSIE: No. He's got me.

JOHN: So little Rosie's going to step out of the office and into the line, huh? You are one swell gal, Rosie. Trading in your heels for rivets?

ROSIE: I don't feel like I have a choice really.

JOHN: I am proud of you, Rosie. I think what you and Tommy are trying to do is swell.

ROSIE: Well, hold off on your admiration just yet. It all depends on if I can get Eddie the manpower. He needs workers.

JOHN: You always have a knack for coming out on top, Rosie. Say, why don't you swing by Helen's house with me? She is having one of her social club meetings. You could throw a line out to those gals.

ROSIE: I don't know, Johnny. I have never really gotten along with that kind of crowd. I'm not the social club type.

JOHN: Sure you are, Rose. Besides, I'll be there to protect you from the big bad socialites. I have to drop off Helen and my wedding invitations anyway.

ROSIE: Okay. I gotta start somewhere. Might as well start at the top and work my way down.

(Transition. MUSIC of the times.)

Scene 3

(AT RISE: The parlor of Helen's house, later that same day. Her women's social club is gathered.)

ENSEMBLE: Helen, have you had your meeting with your florist yet?

HELEN: I haven't yet. I have an appointment next week. But, I know what I want. I've always dreamed of having white roses lining the pews of the church.

ENSEMBLE: That sounds lovely.

ENSEMBLE: I prefer chrysanthemums myself.

ENSEMBLE: What are you going to do about shoes? I heard all of the leather is being exported for the war effort.

ENSEMBLE: Oh, Helen, I have a pair of shoes you can borrow.

HELEN: Oh, that would be wonderful.

(MARGARET and KATHERINE enter.)

MARGARET: I'm sorry that we are late, ladies. I was convincing my new boarder to join us.

HELEN: That's no problem. This is the first meeting of the social club in the new year. Margaret, please take roll.

(MARGARET calls the names of all the women and they each answer "Present.")

MARGARET: We have a new member in our group. The newest member of the neighborhood, Katherine Hartley.

KATHERINE: Thank you for your invitation, Maggie. You all can call me Kate.

(ENSEMBLE ad libs various greetings.)

HELEN: Welcome, Katherine. What brings you to Cook County?

KATHERINE: I actually moved from California to take classes in this area.

ENSEMBLE: California! / That must have been quite a trip. / Did you travel by car or train? / Maybe she took one of those new TWA flights they have been talking about over the radio.

KATHERINE: I've never flown on an airplane. I took the bus.

HELEN: You say you want to take classes. How progressive. Ballet, music, or art?

MARGARET: It's more of an art class, Helen. Let's not make her feel put on the spot.

KATHERINE: It's fine. I moved here to attend an Engineering Science and Management War Training course at Perdue.

ENSEMBLE: Goodness. / Oh my! / That sounds very difficult. / I didn't even know there was such a thing.

KATHERINE: I am the only woman in my class, but if I can stick it out I will be able to achieve my certificate in elementary machine and tool design.

HELEN: And why would you want that mouthful of a certificate?

KATHERINE: To aid in the war effort first and foremost. Then, who knows? Maybe I can keep on drafting.

ENSEMBLE: Good for you, Kate / Congratulations.

HELEN: I couldn't imagine wanting to learn about all that machinery. There are so many more appropriate ways to help the cause. Ida, how are you supporting the war effort?

IDA: I planted a Victory Garden just this past week.

HELEN: Anyone else?

ENSEMBLE: I started canning last year. / I have been sewing red and white flags with blue stars to hang in our windows. The blue stars represent each service man in the household. / I gave blood the other day. It was really scary at first, but everyone was kind.

HELEN: You see, Katherine. Every one of us is helping in our own way, the best way we can. It is probably better to leave the engineering to the husbands, fathers, and brothers of the nation.

(ROSIE and JOHN appear outside Helen's home.)

Rosie the Riveter

- 12 -

ROSIE: *(Telling a story.)* So, the husband said to his wife, "Imagine you were the boss in the office, and I was your secretary, what would you do?" The wife replied, "The first thing I would do is raise your pay."

JOHN: *(Laughing.)* I hadn't heard that one. You're a pill, Rosie. *(HE and ROSIE enter the parlor.)* Good afternoon, ladies. *(To HELEN.)* Hello, my darling.

HELEN: You have met everyone before except young Katherine. Katherine, this is my fiancé, John Stanley.

JOHN: I came to drop off the invitations you wanted me to pick up.

(ENSEMBLE makes sounds of excitement and teasing.)

HELEN: And who is this you are with?

JOHN: This is Rosie. She is the secretary at work. I brought her by to pitch you ladies on an idea she and Eddie are working on.

HELEN: What is this idea?

ROSIE: I won't take much of your time. I am sorry to interrupt, but I came by to see if anyone was interested in working at Eddie's.

HELEN: John, you told me Eddie's was closing.

JOHN: It is, in a way.

ROSIE: Since we can't make car parts anymore, we are getting a government contract to make airplane parts. With so many of our men heading overseas, I am willing to roll up my sleeves and do my part. If any of you are interested in doing the same, come by the shop, and we will get you signed up.

HELEN: Rose. It is funny you should come by. We were just talking to young Katherine about our role in this conflict. The home is where we can best support our men at arms. You don't expect the mothers and wives of this group to help Eddie from going under.

MARGARET: Helen!

JOHN: She is not asking you to—

End of Freeview

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