JOAN ROSENBERG KOVACHI ARCHIVAL DOCUMENT

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ABSTRACT

Biography

Joan Rosenberg Kovachi was a child during the outbreak of World War II. She grew up with her twin sister and parents in Buffalo, New York, and her father worked for the Merchant Marines as an engineer.

Summary

In this oral history, Joan remembers hearing President Franklin D. Roosevelt's announcement of American entry into the war on the radio. She also recalls memories of her father's work as a Merchant Marine on the Great Lakes during World War II. Joan further remembers her aunts enjoying their factory work, but being forced to relinquish their jobs when the men returned from war.

Keywords

child, New York, Great Lakes, rationing, air raids, Merchant Marines, uniform, Post-traumatic Stress Disorder, women, factories

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STORY TRANSCRIPTS

Story 1: Declaration of War
[03:10 – 04:07]

I remember the day war was declared: 1941, December 7. We were home with my mother, and the phone rang. It was one of my girlfriends' mothers, Kitty. And she said to my mother, "Turn on the radio. We're at war. President Roosevelt has just declared war."

Well, we didn't really know what that meant, my sister and I. But my mother was very upset, and ran to the radio and turned it on. And we heard FDR saying that it was "a day of infamy." I

always remember that, because I never knew what that word meant then. I do now! [*laughs*] It was quite upsetting to all of us.

Story 2: The War at School
[04:20 – 5:05]

Well, when we were at school, we had to practice what they called air raid drills. A siren would sound, and we would have to crouch under our desks and wait until we heard the all-clear.

We were also encouraged to give money for war bonds. They gave you a book and when you donated money, you got a stamp for the book. And when the book—I guess, if I can remember—was filled up, you got a war bond. It was something that you really, really wanted to do.

Story 3: Father and the Merchant Marines
[06:57 – 08:05]

My father's name was John Rosenberg. He was an officer in the Merchant Marine. I always remember his uniform. He had a white jacket with *tons* and *tons* of gold braid on the arms, and on the cap that he wore. It was quite impressive.

I remember one time: we were going with him and my mother to Chicago to see him off on his ship. And we were on a train. And the trains in those years were very, very crowded. And we got on the train and I'll never forget—everybody got [*laughs*]—many people got up to give him a seat. Evidently, that was the thing you did in the war years. If a serviceman got on in uniform, people had to get up and give him a seat. That was something you had to do.

Story 4: Nylon Stockings
[24:20 – 25:00]

I remember that there was—which didn't affect us, but nobody could get nylon stockings. That was the big thing. That was worth gold; it was worth more than money. So the women would [laughs] tan their legs with some kind of brown stuff. And then, they would draw a pencil line down the back of their leg, so that it looked from far away like they had stockings on. And I remember how people had to hoard stockings if they had them and only wore them on very, very special occasions.

Story 5: Women Relinquishing Jobs
[25:01 – 26:44]

I remember my aunts, the ones that did not have children, going to work in factories. They seemed to enjoy themselves; they seemed to like that. I remember my Aunt Becky—who was the

youngest, and wasn't married, had no children. It was the first time she had ever gone out to work! She stayed home and took care of my grandmother.

And it was amazing. She *loved* factory work. She was very upset when they told her she had to leave. She thought she could continue, but they told her the boys were coming home and needed a job, so she had to leave. So, she had to go back home and continue taking care of my grandmother, which *really* upset her.

I think once they [women] got a taste of working outside the home, [they] found out they liked it. They liked the money; they liked the friendships that they developed. I think once they went home, they were very discontent and were going to try again to work. I think it probably caused a lot of upset when the guys came home and they had to go back to being just quote, un-quote "the little housewife."

PHOTO CAPTIONS

Current 1

Joan Rosenberg Kovachi being interview in her home in Ontario, New York (Photo Credit: Celeste Schantz Kovachi)

Artifact 1

Joan holding a photograph of her family during World War II (Photo Credit: Celeste Schantz Kovachi)

Artifact 2

Kovachi family photograph picturing Joan; her twin sister, Jean; and her mother and father, Marie and John Kovachi (Courtesy of Joan Rosenberg Kovachi)

Artifact 3

Shell necklace from Hawaii given to Joan from a relative who served in the war in the Pacific Theater (Photo Credit: Celeste Schantz Kovachi)

Artifact 4

Registration card for Joan's father, John Kovachi, who served in the Merchant Marines on the Great Lakes during the war (Courtesy of Joan Rosenberg Kovachi)