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Dear Mary,

You are more to me than just a big sister. You are an icon of social change. You sacrificed and accomplished so much more than most people know. The patriotic duty that you and your sister co-workers performed not only helped America win a war, it laid the foundation for the women's movement of today, which, building on your struggle, is still fighting for full equality today. Thank you Mary for all you did for America--and American women! LOVE YA.

”

Your Proud Little Sister, Bertha

Mary

In 1942, at nineteen, Mary became a spot welder at the Fore River Shipyard in Quincy, Massachusetts. From 1942 to 1945, she was a member of a female workforce of six million women (of all races and social-economic classes) across the United States. These women were popularly known as “Rosie the Riveter.” They made up 30% of nation’s workforce, but were paid 57% of their male counterpart’s wages – building guns, ammunitions, tanks, planes, battleships and other tools of war. “We were also known as ‘Winnie the Welder’,” says Mary. “It was horrendous work, with sparks flying, dodging tiny bits of molten steel and white-hot torches burning everywhere. We had to wear gloves, heavy boots, thick overalls, goggles and heavy metal helmets. During those war years over 210,000 women were permanently disabled and 37,000 killed throughout the U.S. for the love of their country.” In December of 1945, Mary left her job to marry her boyfriend when he returned from the war and raise a family.

Her sister, Bertha, was only sixteen-year-old when she graduated from high school, She wanted to follow in Mary’s footsteps but was not old enough to work on a factory floor. She took a job as a payroll clerk at a South Boston company that made raincoats for the Navy. When their 7AM to 3PM work shift ended, Mary and Bertha would return home and join with their parents in writing letters to their brothers and neighbors serving in the war. With few opportunities for dating because most of the boys were off to war, Bertha decided to take a second nighttime job, first at White Castle, then at a United Farmers neighborhood ice-cream parlor where she became the assistant manager. After the war, most women lost their jobs, married, raised a family, and then many re-entered the workforce.



Mary - “Rosie the Riveter”