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**Irene Kingsbury**  
**Rosie the Riveter and the World War II American Homefront Oral History Project**

Interviews Conducted by  
Arielle Carrick  
in 2012

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Interview with: Irene Kingsbury  
Interviewed by: Arielle Carrick  
Transcriber: Arielle Carrick  
[Interview #1-November 20,2012]

1-00:00:03

**Arielle:**

I am here with Irene Kingsbury and we are going to start with the interview. What is your full name and date of birth?

1-00:00:12

**Irene:**

Irene. You want my middle name too? Irene Kingsbury. And my date of birth is February 28, 1928.

1-00:00:23

**Arielle:**

And where were you born?

1-00:00:24

**Irene:**

I was born right here in Boston.

1-00:00:27

**Arielle:**

Did you live in Boston for your whole life?

1-00:00:29

**Irene:**

Yes.

1-00:00:31

**Arielle:**

What was it like growing up in Boston?

1-00:00:34

**Irene:**

What was it like growing up in Boston? Well it was a neighborhood area. We lived in various neighborhoods depending on where my father had his practice. Mostly I grew up in the Dorchester area. And we did have a few moves but it was always a neighborhood type of thing. They tell me I

lived in an apartment house when I was very young. But then I mostly lived in three deckers.

1-00:01:11

**Arielle:**

What is that?

1-00:01:13

**Irene:**

Three story. Three decker they called them.

1-00:01:16

**Arielle:**

What did your parents do for a living?

1-00:01:18

**Irene:**

My mother never worked because women in those days didn't. But my father was a doctor. He was basically a gynecologist. He eventually went into general practice. But he delivered a lot of babies.

1-00:01:37

**Arielle:**

Did he enjoy doing that?

1-00:01:39

**Irene:**

Yes he did. That was his area of expertise. He was a very good diagnostician. But he was very close to the families of the people that came to him. Many years later people would come up to me on the streets and tell me he was their Dr. Wallaby or whatever that was on television.

1-00:02:07

**Arielle:**

Were your parents born in Boston?

1-00:02:09

**Irene:**

My father was born in, he never knew whether it was Poland or Russia because he came over so young. He said sometimes it was Poland and sometimes it was Russia. And my mother was born in Woodstock, Vermont.

1-00:02:28

**Arielle:**

Did you get along with your parents when you were growing up?

1-00:02:31

**Irene:**

I thought I got along with my parents very well.

1-00:02:35

**Arielle:**

What was a normal day like for your family when you were growing up. Go through your day.

1-00:02:41

**Irene:**

Are you talking about my school time?

1-00:02:43

**Arielle:**

Yeah. When you were a young child.

1-00:02:47

**Irene:**

I remember going off to school and walking. We always had to walk great distances with friends. Going to school, coming home and doing my homework. I don't have a lot of recollection about how my day went. We had to eat dinner promptly at 5:00 pm because my father had office hours from 6:00-8:00 pm. I do remember that. Everything was a set routine.

1-00:03:24

**Arielle:**

Did you like having a set routine? Was it comfortable for you as a child?

1-00:03:30

**Irene:**

I did not know anything else.

1-00:03:32

**Arielle:**

How many siblings do you have?

1-00:03:34

**Irene:**

I have one sister.

1-00:03:36

**Arielle:**

What's her name?

1-00:03:37

**Irene:**

Her name is Janice.

1-00:03:39

**Arielle:**

What was your relationship like with her growing up?

1-00:03:42

**Irene:**

It was a six years difference between us so there was not a close relationship. I remember loving to tease her so she would cry.

1-00:03:52

**Arielle:**

Did you have any extended family nearby?

1-00:03:55

**Irene:**

Oh yes we did. We had aunts uncles cousins and even if they weren't close by we saw a lot of them. We spent a lot of time with extended family in Vermont, New Hampshire, or here in Massachusetts.

1-00:04:14

**Arielle:**

Did your family have a good relationship with all of them?

1-00:04:17

**Irene:**

There was never any problem.

1-00:04:20

**Arielle:**

What was your neighborhood like?

1-00:04:27

**Irene:**

For a time my father had his office and we lived in a two family house. I had friends nearby. I'm not sure exactly what you're looking for.

1-00:04:48

**Arielle:**

Whatever you can remember about the neighborhood.

1-00:04:52

**Irene:**

I remember that we were a gang and we hung out at the drugstore. And that was our place to hang out after school. I don't know what we did. We talked there were times when we went to someones house and put on records and danced. But mostly it seems to me we were out on the streets gabbing and boys and girls. It was definitely a mix, I just don't remember anything in particular.

1-00:05:34

**Arielle:**

Did you enjoy school?

1-00:05:36

**Irene:**

Not particularly. I was there and I tried hard. I was very upset when I flunked latin. I'm not good at languages. I went and it was there it was something I had to do and I tried my best. Did I enjoy it? No, I

can't say I was crazy about it.

1-00:06:03

**Arielle:**

Did you grow up working? When you were in high school did you work at all?

1-00:06:07

**Irene:**

No not at all. I got a job at what was Jordan Marsh at that time one summer. The first day I was supposed to work there it was hot so I went to the beach. That was the extent of my work.

1-00:06:23

**Arielle:**

What was Jordan Marsh?

1-00:06:26

**Irene:**

It's Macy's.

1-00:06:28

**Arielle:**

What do you remember about the Depression?

1-00:06:31

**Irene:**

Nothing about the Depression.

1-00:06:34

**Arielle:**

Do you remember your parents talking about it? Was it hard for your family?

1-00:06:39

**Irene:**

I don't think it was hard for my family. I think my father made a living during that time.

1-00:06:47

**Arielle:**

When did you get married.

1-00:06:50

**Irene:**

I got married in 1947. I was 19 years old.

1-00:06:59

**Arielle:**

What was your wedding like?

1-00:07:01

**Irene:**

It was a big lavish affair. I don't know if they wanted to get rid of me or because I was the first born. It was a very big lavish affair.

1-00:07:12

**Arielle:**

What was your husbands name?

1-00:07:14

**Irene:**

Norman Kingsbury.

1-00:07:17

**Arielle:**

How did you meet him?

1-00:07:18

**Irene:**

We were sort of fixed up. My mother and his mother belonged to the same organization. There was a woman there and the three of them were talking and the woman turned to my mother and said "you have a daughter," and turned to my mother-in-law and said, "you have a son. They should meet." And so when my mother got home, she said, "The President's son is going to call you." I said, "The President's...what are you talking about?" It was the President of her organization. In those days, sons did what their mothers told them to do. He was told to call me, so he did. I had said that I would never go out with him because I had another boyfriend at the time. But he sounded nice on the phone, so I accepted, and it went from there.

1-00:08:13

**Arielle:**

How long were you dating before you got married?

1-00:08:15

**Irene:**

Well the problem was that shortly after that he went over seas. So most of our courtship, if you want to call it that, was by mail. He was overseas for about 9 or 10 months. He went to the pacific but the war had stopped. He was there and they were bringing ships back or whatever they were doing. He was in Hawaii and Guam but it was all after the war was over. Actually he was supposed to be in the invasion of Japan. They told him there was going to be 1 million casualties on both sides and they switched him from being an engineering officer to a deck officer. He would have been on one of those small assault ships. So when the atom bomb was dropped and Japan surrendered, it was a very happy day for my husband.

1-00:09:25

**Arielle:**

What was it like when he came back to the United States?

1-00:09:27

**Irene:**

Well when he came back, we had rented a house at the beach...down on the Cape. His family had too,

because by that time the mothers had become quite friendly. So we came back and he took maybe a month off and he went right to work.

1-00:09:52

**Arielle:**

What did he do after?

1-00:09:53

**Irene:**

He was a heating and ventilating engineer.

1-00:09:58

**Arielle:**

Did he do that for the rest of his life?

1-00:10:01

**Irene:**

No not really. He got out and became head of maintenance. He started out with Stone Webster and eventually went to Honey Well. He had a lot of people working for him and he had a lot buildings when Honey Well was doing well.

1-00:10:26

**Arielle:**

We will come back to your adult life a little later. So now I am going to shift to World War II. How do you remember hearing about Pearl Harbor?

1-00:10:37

**Irene:**

We were on our way in the car to visit family in Framingham and my father had the radio on in the car. We were on Route 9 and we came to a stop light and evidently other cars, there weren't many cars on the road in that day. There were very few cars on the road. We were stopped at a stoplight and everybody got out of their cars. They were talking. The excitement and how everyone felt, I did not get the full impact of what that meant. Soon after that I remember hearing Fireside Chat and The Day of Infamy from Roosevelt. But at that time the full impact of that did not hit me, but it certainly hit my family.

1-00:11:50

**Arielle:**

How did your family react to it?

1-00:11:54

**Irene:**

Upset. I don't remember anything else except them being extremely upset about it. But all these people just stopped their cars, it was amazing. Just stopped their cars at the stoplight and just all got out of the car.

1-00:12:13

**Arielle:**

How did the war affect your life?

1-00:12:16

**Irene:**

How did the war affect my life? Not very much. I remember rationing that was a big thing. I remember food stamps. I don't know what they were...they were stamps for meat. I had an uncle in the cheese business in New York and cheese and meat, maybe because they were both protein, needed the same stamp, so he would send us tons of cheese. I remember rolling bandages at a church in Vermont. I remember, I mentioned this last night at dinner and no one remembers, I remember flattening tin cans. I guess most of our vegetables must have come in tins in those days and I remember stepping on those tin cans. I remember the main way I was affected was my social life. It was very different. Because many of the young boys immediately went to volunteer. The patriotism was unbelievable. A lot of them, like my husband got into many programs but they didn't always know what they were getting into when they went into these programs. So my dating was very spasmodic. I asked another woman what she remembered about the war and she said the dating. We saw boys, they were men really, they would come home for a week and you would see them for several nights, then you would not see them for another year. There was a lot of correspondence with men who were over seas. I remember communicating with a fellow who was stationed in New Guinea. I lost contact with him. Sending letters was very important, mail was extremely important. But the dating and the various programs in colleges and so forth, some went into weather forecasting, others were, like my husband were in V-12. He knew he would get some education but really he did not know what was going to come from that. What was your next question, so maybe I could get into something else.

1-00:15:18

**Arielle:**

This is more of a comparison question. How was it different learning about World War II compared to learning about more present wars such as Vietnam, Afghanistan, or Iraq?

1-00:15:28

**Irene:**

Oh it was very different. We saw news reels at the movies, but they didn't get into the war as I remember like they do today. Most of it as I remember was radio. There was no television in those days. It was radio and newsreels was the predominant way we got our news. There was a lot of propaganda too. A tremendous amount of propaganda.

1-00:16:02

**Arielle:**

Can you tell me about the propaganda. What do you remember seeing? What was effective?

1-00:16:07

**Irene:**

Mostly it was on billboards, you know: "Loose lips, Sink Ships." And once again the movies. That was a very important part of my life going to the movies. There was all kinds of songs, popular songs. I would say the movies, most of the films were propaganda. They made us look very good.

1-00:16:45

**Arielle:**

Do you think the propaganda was effective?

1-00:16:50

**Irene:**

That I can't say. I don't know.

1-00:16:53

**Arielle:**

What did your parents think about the war? Getting involved as a country.

1-00:17:00

**Irene:**

I remember them giving blood and my mother fainting. They couldn't eat before giving blood, so she was feeling weak. The war didn't—rationing of gas was very important and that did not affect my father. By the way he was the only one with the car. In those days doctors made house calls, so there was no restriction on their gas at all, I don't think anybody else that I know could say that. So we were free, not that he took advantage of it. I remember black outs. And I remember the windows and doors being covered and I remember on the cars they taped the top of the headlights so that they only had half a headlight showing. I remember that. But I don't think that they were affected that much—personally affected by the war. They might have worried about cousins that were in the service. But outwardly they didn't show it to me. The only thing I can tell you is that during the war we had a cousin come back and stay with us. He lost half of his leg, up to his knee and he was still in uniform. And his pant leg was pinned up. He and I during the summer would go into Boston every day and he got around on crutches. The kindness of people around was amazing. We would go in by bus or street car or whatever it was. And one day we got on the bus and the bus driver started the bus before Bob sat down. I thought that the people on the bus would kill the bus driver. He stopped the bus quickly. Other than that my family was not terribly affected by the war.

1-00:19:41

**Arielle:**

What did you and your family think of FDR as commander in chief?

1-00:19:45

**Irene:**

Oh they thought he was wonderful. They thought he was the best. We did not miss any of his talks.

1-00:19:54

**Arielle:**

What information did you have about the Holocaust as a Jew living in the United States?

1-00:20:01

**Irene:**

I'm not sure about that at all. I think my grandparents who received Jewish papers knew that there was something going on there because they were very upset about their families still living in Europe. But they didn't talk about it.

1-00:20:24

**Arielle:**

Do you think the information was covered up by the Government or was it just lack of knowledge?

1-00:20:31

**Irene:**

I don't know.

1-00:20:34

**Arielle:**

Were there other Jews in your town growing up?

1-00:20:37

**Irene:**

Yes there were.

1-00:20:39

**Arielle:**

Was it a significant population?

1-00:20:41

**Irene:**

I don't remember any problems at all. My friends were mixed, we were all religions and there was not a problem.

1-00:21:02

**Arielle:**

Do you remember any minorities living in your neighborhood? Like any Japanese or African-American?

1-00:21:07

**Irene:**

No. We were white. Solid white.

1-00:21:15

**Arielle:**

Could your family do anything for the European Jews?

1-00:21:22

**Irene:**

I remember clothes going over there but I don't remember if that was during the war or not. I doubt it, but I do remember clothes going over there.

1-00:21:34

**Arielle:**

How did the Holocaust and World War II shape you as a Jewish women later in life?

1-00:21:41

**Irene:**

How does it shape me? I don't really want to watch any movies about it. I don't really want to know too much about it because it saddens me so that I don't want to deal with it. The thing I remember most is

being in Paris and seeing a memorial in the back of Notre Dame and that really affected me a great great deal. It was a very simple memorial but I cried. I don't want to do a lot of crying so I keep away from it.

1-00:22:44

**Arielle:**

You can talk about your high school.

1-00:22:50

**Irene:**

I do remember while I was in high school the students being let out earlier, in other words graduating earlier, so they could go into offices and replace women like Rosie the Riveter that were in more essential jobs. But I did want to tell you the fact that I graduated on D-Day in June 1944. That was a very very emotional experience. On one hand we were delighted to be graduating, on the other hand there were so many there at 17 years old with boyfriends and brothers and a lot of relatives for some reason they knew that these men were in that invasion and it was a very very traumatic experience. Something that I never forgot. My graduation from high school stands out in my mind because it was such an important day.

1-00:24:13

**Arielle:**

Did you hear about D-Day during your graduation?

1-00:24:16

**Irene:**

Just before. We graduated at Tremont Temple and we heard about it just before we went in, as we were marching in. As for the how the word got out, I can't tell you, I don't know how it got out.

1-00:24:35

**Arielle:**

So it was a very happy experience for everyone?

1-00:24:38

**Irene:**

It was happy and sad. It was a very mixed emotion. People were laughing and crying. It was quite an emotional day.

1-00:24:51

**Arielle:**

So now we are going to switch to your work during the war. Did you work at all during the war?

1-00:24:57

**Irene:**

No.

1-00:25:00

**Arielle:**

Do you remember what sort of jobs that people in your neighborhood did?

1-00:25:07

**Irene:**

No. I think a lot of people worked in the shipyard. I think that was an important place. But that is the only thing I can remember was the shipyard.

1-00:25:20

**Arielle:**

Was there a shipyard in Boston?

1-00:25:21

**Irene:**

Yes.

1-00:25:22

**Arielle:**

Was it big?

1-00:25:23

**Irene:**

Yes.

1-00:25:25

**Arielle:**

Do you know how many people it employed?

1-00:25:27

**Irene:**

I have no idea.

1-00:25:29

**Arielle:**

What did you do for fun when you were at home when you were growing up during the war?

1-00:25:35

**Irene:**

What did we do for fun? You mean besides study? We had fun going to the movies was the big thing. Roller skating at the rinks. After school I mentioned dancing and going to dances. A lot of my friends went to the USO type of dances. I don't remember ever going to one of those, but I know my friends did.

1-00:26:10

**Arielle:**

You said you went to a lot of movies growing up. How far was the movie theater from where you lived?

1-00:26:16

**Irene:**

Walking distance. We paid a nickel or a dime.

1-00:26:21

**Arielle:**

What kinds of movies did you see?

1-00:26:23

**Irene:**

I had to go every Saturday with my girlfriends but that might have been before the war. We had to get there to see the cereals and make sure that Lorraingers horse went off the cliff he was going to be safe. I'm not sure that was during the war. But I do remember that Saturday was movie day.

1-00:26:50

**Arielle:**

Did you go to the movies with your friends or family?

1-00:26:52

**Irene:**

Yes I went with my friends.

1-00:26:54

**Arielle:**

Did a lot of people during the war move into the cities or away from the cities?

1-00:27:00

**Irene:**

No idea.

1-00:27:04

**Arielle:**

How did people living in your community like the Jewish population? Did they get along with the Jews or was there anti-semitism?

1-00:27:12

**Irene:**

As far as I knew we lived on the border of a very Irish Catholic neighborhood, we moved into this two family house. And the woman was protestant and her husband was catholic and it was a strictly Catholic neighborhood. She had a lot of problems with her neighbors being Protestant. It was revenge to rent to a Jewish doctor, however it backfired because my father was the doctor for most of the neighborhood. So we had no problems and my mother became very friendly with the neighbors and I did too so we did not have a problem.

1-00:28:18

**Arielle:**

How did you hear about the bombing in Japan?

1-00:28:29

**Irene:**

I don't remember how we heard about it. I would guess radio because that was really our means of communications. I can't think of any other way we would have heard about it.

1-00:28:48

**Arielle:**

Do you remember having any sort of emotion about it?

1-00:28:51

**Irene:**

We were delighted. We absolutely could not be happier. After the first bomb fell—we did not know the devastation it caused. We knew it caused a lot of devastation but the aftermath we were unaware of. As you know because people watched the atom bomb and the test and they were out there without much protection. Nobody really realized the outcome of it. And I remember being disappointed that Japan did not capitulate after the first bomb but when the second bomb was dropped we were even happier. Then finally Japan surrendered.

1-00:29:39

**Arielle:**

And you were happy when they surrendered?

1-00:29:40

**Irene:**

As I mentioned before, my husband was elated. He was just my boyfriend then but that meant that he did not have to be in the invasion of Japan.

1-00:29:53

**Arielle:**

Did you hear anything about the liberation of Jews from Auschwitz?

1-00:29:57

**Irene:**

We sure did but it was all movies. It was all newsreels.

1-00:30:02

**Arielle:**

And was that during this time or was it after?

1-00:30:06

**Irene:**

It was the same time it was happening. It might have happened a few days later but it was certainly very close to the time when they were liberated. And we did not have an idea of what went on nor at that time did we really realize how closed off this hemisphere was to those people that wanted to immigrate at that time. Nor did we realize that Roosevelt sent back a ship full of Jews that wanted to land here, that got here as far as here I guess that he sent back. We were totally unaware of all that.

1-00:30:52

**Arielle:**

Did you have any family in Europe during this time?

1-00:31:00

**Irene:**

Oh yes, a lot but I did not know them. I had no idea who or what or when—my grandparents were very closed off about it. They did not want to talk about it, so they didn't.

1-00:31:17

**Arielle:**

How did the war experience effect the rest of your life?

1-00:31:23

**Irene:**

It really did not have an effect on my life. Other than I might have been married a little earlier. My husband had come back from overseas earlier. But other than that I can't really think of any effect it had on my life.

1-00:31:38

**Arielle:**

Did you do anything after the war because of the war or the Holocaust?

1-00:31:47

**Irene:**

No.

1-00:31:49

**Arielle:**

Okay is there anything else you want to add that I didn't go over that you want to talk about?

1-00:31:56

**Irene:**

I do remember a few things. I remember being in the school and buying war stamps, I don't know if they led up to bonds. I remember buying bonds that was a very important part of my life. That's what you did for gifts, you bought war bonds. I had some cousins that were in the WACs, the women's army, which I thought was interesting. I thought you touched upon everything that I was involved in because I wasn't really involved that much. I can't really think of anything. I remember cars, my father needed a car so he bought one because cars didn't last very long. He bought a car, and it must have been a car that was made right before the war. It was a piece of junk. He turned it in and bought a used car which was quite unusual for him. But it was a much better car. But other than the rationing and the dating I can't think of an awful lot. I remember treasuring a couple of pairs of nylons that I had. That was the extent of my sacrifice. There was not much sacrifice on my part.

1-00:33:51

**Arielle:**

One last question about the dating, how did it shift from before the war to during the war? You said that dating was obviously a big change, can you expand on that a little bit?

1-00:34:07

**Irene:**

Well I met a lot of boys that I would have not met ordinarily. An uncle of mine fixed me up with a nephew of his who was stationed in New York and he was in the submarine service. I would date him for a while. It was dating in clumps. You would date for a while then they would go overseas and they would disappear from your life. A lot of people did pickups in town. They would go into Boston and a sailor would pick them up and I know a very happy marriage that came from that. But it was not unusual to pick up service men or go to dances with service men. It was something I didn't do.

1-00:35:10

**Arielle:**

Do you remember any victory gardens?

1-00:35:12

**Irene:**

Oh yes there were victory gardens in Boston. Oh yes. Along Fenway and the Charles River, people definitely had victory gardens.

1-00:35:25

**Arielle:**

Did your family have one?

1-00:35:27

**Irene:**

No, my grandmother just always had a garden in Vermont but it was not considered a victory garden. It was an annual thing.

1-00:35:36

**Arielle:**

Well I think that is it, unless you have anything that you would like to add?

1-00:35:41

**Irene:**

No I really don't. I did not have any hatred of the Germans or the Japanese like a lot of people did. A lot of people still won't buy German or Japanese cars after the war. I never had that feelings. I did not have a bad feeling about the Japanese or the Germans that were here in the United States. As far as the Japanese internments camps, there is a vague recollection of that, but I remember feeling kind of indifferent about it. I didn't have any strong feelings about the fact that they put Japanese into camps. After when I realized how devastating it was I became irate. But at the time I was indifferent about it. As far as people tormenting people with German names that was not me. They were Americans and that was how I felt.

1-00:37:02

**Arielle:**

Well thank you for your time.