

Iconic face of Rosie the Riveter poster dies

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This "We can do it!", circa 1943 poster courtesy of the National Archives shows a poster also commonly known as "Rosie the Riveter." A Michigan factory worker used as the unwitting model for the wartime Rosie the Riveter poster whose inspirational "We Can Do It!" message became an icon of the feminist movement has died. Geraldine Doyle died December 26, 2010, a spokesman for the Hospice House of Mid Michigan told AFP

Photograph by: AFP, Getty

CHICAGO, Dec 30, 2010 (AFP) - A Michigan factory worker used as the unwitting model for the wartime Rosie the Riveter poster whose inspirational "We Can Do It!" message became an icon of the feminist movement has died.

Geraldine Doyle died Sunday, a spokesman for the Hospice House of Mid Michigan told AFP. She was 86.

Doyle didn't realize she had a famous face until she was flipping through a magazine in 1982 and spotted a reproduction of the poster, her daughter told The New York Times.

But while Doyle recognized her face under the red and white polka dot bandana, the strong arm held up in a fist wasn't hers.

"She didn't have big, muscular arms," Mrs. Gregg said. "She was 5-foot-10 and very slender. She was a glamour girl. The arched eyebrows, the beautiful lips, the shape of the face — that's her."

Doyle was just 17 when she took a job at a metal pressing plant near Ann Arbor, Michigan in 1942.

She quit about two weeks later after learning that another woman had badly injured her hand on the job — she was worried she'd lose the ability to play the cello, her daughter said.

She was there, however, when a United Press International photographer came to the factory while documenting the contribution of women to the war effort.

A picture of Doyle was later used by J. Howard Miller, a graphic artist at Westinghouse, for the poster which was aimed at deterring strikes and absenteeism.

The poster was not widely seen until the 1980's when it was embraced by the feminist movement as a potent symbol of women's empowerment.

The iconic image now graces a US postage stamp and has been used to sell lunch boxes, aprons, mugs, t-shirts and figurines.

The term "Rosie the Riveter" stems from a 1942 song honoring the women who took over critical factory jobs when men went off to war.

Another Michigan woman, Rose Will Monroe, was the best-known "Rosie" after being featured in a wartime promotional film about female factory workers.

Doyle was quick to correct people who thought she was the original Rosie the Riveter, Gregg told the Lansing State Journal.

"She would say that she was the 'We Can Do It!' girl," Gregg said. "She never wanted to take anything away from the other Rosies."

A funeral service is set for Tuesday. Gregg did not immediately return a request for comment.

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