

## Lansing's 'Rosie' dies at age 86 Her photo became iconic image of 'We Can Do It' girl

Her face became the symbol of women's empowerment, and her death is the end of an era.

Geraldine Hoff Doyle of Lansing, the woman behind an iconic image of a bandana-clad, muscle-flexing Rosie the Riveter during WWII, has died, according to her family.

Doyle was 86 upon her death, a lifetime older than the 17-year-old factory worker who was captured in a United Press International photo in a metal-pressing plant near Ann Arbor.

Her photo was later used by the U.S. War Production Coordinating Committee in an illustrated poster called, "We Can Do It!"

The poster was designed to encourage other women to enter the workforce in support of the war effort but has grown to become a pop-culture icon of women's equality.

"She was very inspirational," said her daughter, Stephanie Gregg of Eaton Rapids, assistant dean of admissions for Cooley Law School. "She was very kind and generous. She lived the 'We Can Do It!' life every day."

More than 6 million women would eventually heed the poster's call,



This UPI photo that started it all, was taken in Ann Arbor when Geraldine "Rosie" Hoff Doyle was 17.

(Lansing State Journal file photo)

entering the workforce in droves during the war. Nearly half found factory jobs previously reserved for men to churn out bombers, tanks, guns and ammunition.

After the war, Doyle's famous image became a lasting emblem, said Gladys Beckwith, former director of the Michigan Women's Historical Center and Hall of Fame, which honored Doyle in 2002.

"Rosie the Riveter is the image of an independent woman who is in control of her own destiny," Beckwith said. "(Doyle) was a gracious, beautiful woman. Her death is the passing of an era, and we need to take note of that. We need to respect what she stood for."

Ironically, Doyle herself didn't know until 1984 that she had a famous face - not until she was flipping through an issue of "Modern Maturity" magazine and saw a reproduction of the poster.

"She said, 'This is me!' recalled Gregg.

Doyle recounted the story later for a 2002 article in the Lansing State Journal.

She had never noticed the poster before, she said, because she was too busy living her life.

"I was changing diapers all the time," she said in 2002.



'We Can Do It:' Geraldine Hoff Doyle holds a copy of the famous poster in 1997.

(Lansing State Journal file photo)

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Doyle married her husband, Leo Doyle, in 1943 at the age of 18.

Together they had six children and ran a successful dental practice in Lansing.

"My dad died Feb. 28," Gregg said. "My mom said, 'I don't know how I'll live without him.' "

Doyle herself became ill soon after, and she was eventually moved to Sparrow's Hospice House of Mid-Michigan.

She died Sunday, Gregg said.

Over the years, there has been some confusion about who the real woman was behind the famous image.

The term "Rosie the Riveter" stems from a 1942 song honoring women who worked in the factories, but it was later adopted as a nickname for all women assembly workers.

Another Michigan woman, Rose Will Monroe, was featured in a promotional film that same year about women in the factories and was, for a while, the most well-known "Rosie."

There was also a famous Norman Rockwell painting depicting another woman posing as a riveter.

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**Doyle herself was quick to correct people who referred to her as Rosie the Riveter.**

**"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."**

**Still, it was Doyle's poster that would eventually become the central face of Rosies everywhere and the rallying cry for an entire social movement.**

**Her message resonates with women even today.**

**"It's the 'We Can Do It!' attitude," said Cynthia Ghering, 41, an avid Rosie the Riveter collector and director of the Michigan State University Archives and Historical Collections.**

**"My grandmother passed that attitude on to my mom, and my mom passed it on to me, and it's what I hope to pass onto my daughter. It's something that still motivates us. She reminds us that women can take on anything."**

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