

# Living HISTORY



*Buddie Curnutte was instrumental to the U.S. war effort during World War II as both a military veteran and a "Rosie the Riveter" — one of the women who "manned" the home front's factories and shipyards during the war.*

For years, Buddie Curnutte was reluctant to say much about her World War II experience. As both a military veteran and a "Rosie the Riveter" — the affectionate nickname given to the women who "manned" the nation's factories and shipyards, and kept America's economy moving during the early 1940s — she had more than her share of tales to tell.

But for her, those stories never seemed to have a "right time" for telling.

Three years ago, Curnutte joined Thanks! Plain and Simple Inc., an organization dedicated to educating the public about the contributions of "Rosies" during the war years.

Soon after joining, Curnutte and other members of the group attended an event at the West Virginia State Capitol in Charleston, after which they stayed to chat with visitors. Before long, one little boy sheepishly approached Curnutte and asked if he could shake her hand.

After exchanging a handshake and some kind words, he walked back to his mother, grinning from ear to ear.

"He looked at his hand and said, 'I just touched history,'" Curnutte recalled. "That was such a thrill for me, and ever since, I've loved telling people everything they wanted to know."

Two years later, the thrills keep coming. As a board member of Thanks! Plan and Simple, Curnutte enthusiastically shares her wartime experience with anyone who asks.

The children, she said, provide most of the high points.

"The kids ask so many questions, and they treat us so well," she said. "They want to escort us everywhere and take pictures with us, and they're always anxious to tell their friends all about it. I definitely feel loved."

During the war, Curnutte riveted the wings of U.S. Army Air Corps planes — P-40 fighters and C-46 cargo aircraft — at the Curtiss-Wright factory in Buffalo, N.Y., her hometown.

After a six-week training course on drills, riveting guns and general safety, Curnutte went to work: eight-hour shifts, six days a week.



*Buddie Curnutte served in the U.S. Coast Guard in the early 1940s.*

"The work was hard, but it was just what had to be done," she said.

Two years later, Curnutte joined the Coast Guard's medical corps. It was during her service at the Philadelphia Naval Hospital that she met her future husband, Earl Curnutte, a Marine who had sustained serious combat injuries on Okinawa.

"I would take him outdoors in a wheelchair and push him around to get him some fresh air," she said. "We got to know each other pretty well during those walks."

Well enough, in fact, to stay in touch after Buddie's discharge in May 1946. The couple married in July 1947 and moved to West Virginia.

Earl spent the first few years after the war working with disabled children and adult drug abusers before eventually becoming an ordained minister. Buddie also did some volunteer work, but finally settled in as a minister's wife and homemaker, raising the couple's two children.

Earl died in 2008 after more than 60 years of marriage.

Curnutte attended the May 11 National Train Day event in Huntington, sharing information about the organization. Since her father's long career with the Erie Railroad, the industry always has occupied a special place in her heart.

She continues to embrace such events, spreading the word about Rosies and their contributions to the country's home front during World War II — especially now that remaining Rosies typically are in their 90s.

"I tell everyone not to forget," Curnutte said. "I'm so thankful for the organization and the chance to tell the world what we did, and what it all did for us. It has been a wonderful life."