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## Posts Tagged "' Therese Ambrosi Smith'

### New novel tracks lives of fictional Kaiser Shipyard Rosies

posted on [October 11, 2011](#)

By [Ginny McPartland](#)

Heritage writer

At first glance, one would think the newly released novel "Wax" is about women working in the West Coast shipyards during World War II. Famed photographer Dorothea Lange's powerful photo of proud, bold "girls" stomping through the yard implies a story about their struggles and triumphs in that setting.

Once inside, however, the reader pretty quickly understands that the stories to be told play out far from the shipyards. Three young women who met in Henry J. Kaiser's Richmond Shipyards in 1943 formed friendships that endured for decades. The "Rosies" earned a bit of freedom and independence that they would refuse to relinquish when they returned home.

First-time novelist Therese Ambrosi Smith says she wrote the book about "Rosie the Riveter" to spark an interest among today's young people, especially girls. Rosie national park Ranger Elizabeth Tucker turned Smith on to actual Rosie oral histories, and the would-be author was off on her quest.

#### World War II's sociological impacts explored

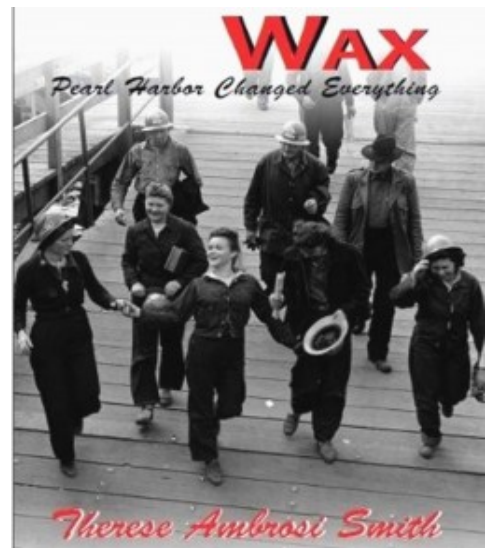
Smith proclaims the novel's premise on the front cover: "Pearl Harbor Changed Everything." Historians know this fact, and they have written millions of words about the social, economic and political effects of World War II.

Smith's approach is to place a spotlight on personal lives. She creates three main characters, Tilly Bettencourt from a small town near Half Moon Bay, California; Doris Jura from Pittsburg, PA, both in their early 20s; and slightly older Sylvia Manning, 32, from Kansas City. She shows a smattering of their shipyard employment experiences and then places them back in their peacetime lives. These war-time experiences will color all they do from then on.

Author Smith takes the theme of women's independence full bore as the young women return home and establish a candle factory on their own. (Yes, that's where the book title comes from!) Such a bold move had seemed impossible before the war. Despite obstacles, Doris and Tilly's dream comes to fruition.

#### Life lessons learned in the shipyards

Other life lessons are to be learned as well. At the shipyards, the girls awaken to the idea that blacks should be treated equally with whites. Smith writes of Tilly's encounter with a caring black coworker who helps her to the clinic when she receives a serious eye injury and is temporarily blind.



*Dorothea Lange photo on the cover of "Wax"*

Later, Tilly ponders the experience: "I don't know why," she (Tilly) told Doris, "but this whole thing has rattled me. I mean being helped by a colored." Smith as narrator explains: "There weren't any coloreds in Montara or Moss Beach; she had no history with them."

Tilly then comes to the realization: "The work was dangerous and difficult, and everyone who did it, regardless of color or background, was helping to win the war. They were all in it together."

Doris chimes in with: "I feel like we are seeing the world up close here. It looks different."

The racial theme doesn't play out when the girls return home after the war. But another issue – sexual orientation – looms large for Tilly. Feeling attraction to other women, the beautiful Tilly has to fight off the eligible bachelors of her home town. She lives in her own personal hell as her parents and others push her toward marriage. In a 1940s world, she has no idea where to turn for help or understanding.

Although this book is fairly light on the historical significance of the Rosie experience, I enjoyed it. The characters are creditable and the description of the settings took me there. At times, I felt like I was sitting in Tilly's uncle's comfortable café perched on the coast near Half Moon Bay.



Author Therese Ambrosi Smith

### More about Rosies at the Home Front Festival Saturday October 15

Learn more about the Rosie experience from 11 a.m. to 6 p.m. this Saturday at the Fifth Annual Home Front Festival in the Craneway Pavilion at the southern end of Harbour Way in Richmond, California. Admission is free.

Area historical societies, the Rosie national park and the Pacific Region of the National Archives will have exhibits and information to share with visitors. Kaiser Permanente Heritage Resources will have displays highlighting the pioneering medical staff who launched the Permanente Medical Care Program in the Kaiser Shipyards during the war.



The Red Oak Victory has been renovated and will be open for the Home Front Festival Oct. 15

The Red Oak Victory, a World War II ship built at the Richmond Kaiser Shipyards, will be open on Saturday for visitors to tour. The ship, owned by the Richmond Museum of History, is just returning to the shipyard Friday from dry dock where it has received an extensive renovation.

Historian Steve Gilford will debut his new book on Saturday aboard the ship. Gilford will be signing the book, "Build 'Em by the Mile, Cut 'Em off by the Yard, How Henry Kaiser and the Rosies helped Win World War II," from 2 to 4 p.m. on the ship. Shuttles will ferry visitors between the Craneway and the Red Oak.

### Lena Horne tribute at USO Dance Friday, Oct. 14

The Home Front party actually starts on Friday night with the Rosie the Riveter 1940s USO Dance, featuring a tribute to Lena Horne, also in the Craneway Pavilion. Robin Gregory will play the role of the legendary singer. Also on the bill are the Singing Blue Stars, Junius Courtney's Big Band and the dance group Swing or Nothing!

Tickets for the dance may be purchased online at [www.HFF2011.com](http://www.HFF2011.com) or by calling the Richmond Chamber of Commerce at 510-234-3512. Advance tickets are \$20 general and \$15 for seniors; tickets may be purchased at the door for \$25 general, \$20 senior. Anyone showing a military i.d. or wearing an armed forces uniform will be admitted for free.



Lena Horne helped launch the SS George Washington Carver in Richmond, May 1943

**Event:** Home Front festival

**Description:** Historical exhibits and 1940s-era entertainment

**When:** Saturday, 11 a.m. to 6 p.m., Oct. 15, 2011

**Where:** *Craneway Pavilion (end of South Harbour Way [1414] in Richmond, California)*

**Admission:** *Free*

**Information:** [www.HomeFrontFestival.com](http://www.HomeFrontFestival.com)

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