The Robey Girls:
Marilyn Dawson, Doris Corrigan & Marjorie Frederiksen
The Real Rosie The Riveter Project
Interview 8

Interview Conducted by
Anne de Mare & Kirsten Kelly
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For The
Tamiment Library, Robert F. Wagner Labor Archives
Elmer Holmes Bobst Library
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Dawson: Hi I'm Marilyn Cornell Dawson, and I was born in 1925, December 10\textsuperscript{th}, and 2010 I will be 85 years old. I had a good life and started to work for Mr. Robey's factory, Mr. Robey's factory in 1944 and worked there 'til after the war. And during that time, Bill Edwards, who I was engaged to was killed and – do you want stuff like this? – and Mr. Robey had to come in to tell me and took me up to his dad's house. I mean up to his dad's house and that. But anyhow, so I worked there until after the war – what else do you want I don't know, that's ok?

Kelly: Yeah, that's great.

Dawson: So that was the tragedy of that time. But a wonderful, just a wonderful fella, and, but twenty some years later, thirty five, thirty seven years later I married his cousin, Philip Dawson, and had a wonderful life with him, ok. And that's my life.

Kelly: Thank you, thank you so much. Do you want to introduce
**Corrigan:** I'm Doris Crosser Corrigan and in 1944 I married my husband, Ray. We've now been married 65 years, good years. And when I graduated out of Newaygo High school in 1944, I started looking for a job and I tried here and there and then I heard about Robey's and so I got a job there and worked there 'til uh, let's see, I worked there 'til the following year.

Ray and I started going together in 1943 and then we decided to get married in 1944. But of course he was away in the Navy and so he had a five day leave in October and so he said “We'll get married then.” So I told Mr. Robey, who was sometimes hard to get along with, and but anyway, I said to him “I need five days off to get married in October,” you know. And he turned around, and someone else said “She wants five days off to get married.” But anyway, so that's what happened.

And, so anyway, but and at Robey's, when I first started there, there were of course quite a few people, but Ruby Edwards and Willie Gillette were two of them that I got acquainted with real quick and we remained friends forever, and they were just really sweet people and then Marilyn came to work there too a short time after that, and so...

**Dawson:** We've been good friends ever since.
Corrigan: We've all been friends ever since.

Frederiksen: My name is Margie Frederiksen and I'm 83. Been married 63 years - the same guy, and I worked in Robey's from, for about a year and a half. I left, my now husband came home from the service and he went to Michigan State, so off we went to Michigan State, so we have had a wonderful 63 years.

Dawson: She really has, she really has.

Dawson: In Robey, when we'd be working we'd go to the post office and get our mail - we probably had five minutes to run across the street in Newaygo. And I was - we'd go to the bathrooms and I'd read a letter from my boyfriend, Bill, who his dad - in fact I got a letter from someone that he had wrote to another fellow in Newaygo saying I'm going to be home to marry my girlfriend Marilyn in Newaygo. And his dad was going to get an engagement ring, your grandpa, Bunny, and uh it just never happened. But I was still part of the family all those years and I always will be, but I guess, I don't know.

Oh, well, then Robey, Mr. Robey, would send his wife, Mrs. Robey, who became a teacher later, my children had 'em, and he'd say "You go in and tell them to get out here. They're in there reading
their mail from the boys.” And Olive had to come in one time and say “Marilyn.” So I had to put the letter away, and I wanted to finish reading that letter so bad, but we had to get back to work. We were working piece work then. We didn't stop. Oh, just...

Kelly: Were you all from, you said you were from Chicago.

Corrigan: They were in Newaygo.

Dawson: Well, we came up and spent our summers. That's how I got to know so many people and know my husband that I married after he came back from the war. And Margie too. Margie's my cousin, and she lived with us after her mother passed away. Had a wonderful father, I'll tell you the best – well we both had good fathers. But my mother and her dad were brother and sister.

So every summer for three months, we got out of school, we'd come to Newaygo out to one of the lakes, called Emerald Lake and we had a cottage there and my dad would come up every two weeks, bring our friends up, cousins, and that's how I met Ray, her husband the first time, never think anything of it, but I became best friends with his wife. And Margie met her husband here and married him after the war too. And Bob and it's just a wonderful town to grow up in. So I was already graduated in Chicago, and Margie and my brother
finished up here in Newaygo, so, 'cause my sister married someone from Newaygo here and that's how we got to Newaygo to live, you know, permanently.

Corrigan: You know I noticed that none of us have told you how many children we had, so she had, what, four boys?

Dawson: Four boys that were raised in Newaygo and all retiring now, except my youngest. They played in the band, played football. It was that's why my dad wanted to get us out of Chicago, so and Margie and I both went to the same high school. It was a girl's school. And my brother went to a boy's school, so, but they did good, Margie and... Yep, now I've got a bunch of grand - a lot, a lot of great grandchildren now.

Kelly: Are you from Newaygo, did you grow up here?

Corrigan: No, well just about, we moved to Newaygo, my family did, from Mount Pleasant in 1936, so I've been here a long time, and anyway, we have three children, Carol our oldest one, and then Steve our son and Sherry, our youngest one, so we have three. We had eight grandchildren and let's see, I can't remember how many there are,
grandkids - about 14 great grandkids I mean. So anyway, but, so we have a wonderful family.

Last October we celebrated with every single one of them was there, some came from as far away as Florida, but we had a party for our 65th wedding anniversary and had our pictures taken and all of our kids and grandkids were there. So that...

Kelly: So I want to take you, I want to talk a little bit about your lives before you went to work, before the war. What was this town like and what were your lives like here before you went to work.

Dawson: In Chicago, we had, on the corners, in fact we were head of a group of the kids to plant something for the war days, 'cause in my, Chicago, the houses were right on top of each other. But good friends, you know everybody was such good friends. We played in the streets and everything else there. And a park, big park, but and then we had [Shinpucks?] where we could just buy so much.

And then high school too, and cooking class. One they made, I don't even want to say it was brains we had to cook, it was awful. I think it was something like that. It smelled up the whole classroom in Chicago. I don't know what Margie - she was probably making strawberry shortcake, or something good in her class.

But we had a good thing going in Chicago for the war effort.
Yep, planted gardens. Everybody planted gardens in Chicago, and Newaygo too I think they did that.

**Corrigan:** Well I guess life here was probably like any life in you know a small town. I mean everybody knew each other 'cause it was a small town and...

**Dawson:** We'd all walk to work, down that hill.

**Corrigan:** Yeah, we didn't have far to get to work.

**Dawson:** No cars.

**Corrigan:** But anyway, I had something in my mind a minute ago I was going to tell them. But oh, one day, while we were at work, we had, we were making shovel carriers, they called them. And they were, it was, we had big sewing machines, not like ladies have, but big ones, and then, and this material for the shovel carriers were heavy it was heavy stuff, you know, and it was hard, really hard sewing now, one day I ran a needle...

**clock chimes**
Kelly: I'm going to hold you just a sec 'til this is done otherwise it will cover your...

Corrigan: One day at work I ran my needle down, right down through into my finger and Mr. Robey, that time he was gentle. And he come and he had to take the needle out of the machine and with the needle still in my finger he took me down the street to Doctor Moore's who was the town doctor, you know, and had it taken out and then he took me home and told me I could have the rest of the day off. And so, but anyway, his wife, Mrs. Robey, the one that we, you know, years later, we all thought the world of her. He had a real feisty personality, but she was just the opposite.

Dawson: Yeah, she was a sweetheart.

Corrigan: Anyway, but I enjoyed my work there. And just my life, period, has been good.

Kelly: Can you talk about when the war broke out, can you talk about that?

Frederiksen: Oh yes, I can.
Corrigan: Pearl Harbor.

Dawson: I was in high school - go ahead Margie.

Frederiksen: I was in school and we all went from church to church when they announced the war was over and everybody celebrated. The whole town became one and it was great.

Kelly: And that was when the war was done?

Frederiksen: Yes.

Corrigan: Oh, when it was done.

Dawson: I was going to say, no, before the war.

Frederiksen: When it was done. Before that we weren't here.

Dawson: Yeah, no, I remember.

Frederiksen: We weren't here then, so...

Dawson: Yep, I'm trying to think what song I had to sing for, we went to a girls school, we went, and I'm trying to think what song I was supposed to sing and I got the mumps and I couldn't sing it in the
assembly and boy was I, I was so nervous, but played in the band in high school. Marched down the boulevard in high school in Chicago got a picture of that. I don't even know, the drum and bugle corp. It was just a good life in Chicago too, but the war really, we felt it more when we came up to Michigan 'cause they were drafting, then, kids we knew and like my boyfriend was drafted, Margie's Bob I don't know...

Corrigan: Both those were in my class.

Dawson: They didn't finish high school because they had to go to the war so it really hit hard. Yeah, and I just can't remember if Bill graduated or if he went 'cause we all said goodbye to him - Bonnie was just a little girl.

Frederiksen: He was...

Dawson: And we said goodbye to him at the railroad. I don't think you were born yet, Bonnie, were you?

Off Camera: I was born...

Dawson: 'Cause your dad was gone. And we all went to Grand Rapids and said goodbye to him after he was home on leave and that was the last time Bill, until he came home after the war. That was terrible, devastating, really was. And, but it was after we moved here that
really it hit bad because our young 18 years old were being drafted right away.

Corrigan: Well yeah, that's why I wanted to tell you that both Bob Frederiksen and Bill Edwards were both in my class. The class of 1944. When each one of them had their 18th birthday, even though they were in school, they immediately were drafted into the service.

Frederiksen: No, Bob enlisted.

Corrigan: Yeah but he went ahead of time because...

Frederiksen: Bob enlisted.

Corrigan: Yeah.

Frederiksen: And then the government class, they all, there were the 'sinful six' and they taught them government, so they could graduate. And my husband was the president of the class so he always felt bad he missed that part but he wanted to go into the air force and that's why he enlisted. So he could go where he wanted to.

Corrigan: That's why I said about Bill Edwards. He was a super nice guy. And of course I went all through school with him, we did. But he was her boyfriend, and my classmate and Ruby's brother in law, so we
all had an attachment there.

Kelly: It's a small town, isn't it? Where everybody just...

Dawson: Oh yeah.

Frederiksen: Oh yeah.

Dawson: Well we lived up right on the hill and we walked down that hill in Newaygo to work. Then I also worked at Rowe's factory, but he wasn't making things for the war. He was before it. But we'd see the prisoners come across the bridge from Germany and they had a place in Freemont where they stayed, uh huh. And they were on the back of a truck and they worked the fields they would work in Grant.

Frederiksen: They worked for Gerber's.

Dawson: The prisoners of war were there.

Frederiksen: Baby's food.

Dawson: That would be it.
Corrigan: The summer before that I worked at Gerber's and...

Frederiksen: I did too.

Corrigan: And while I was over to Gerber’s, we seen prisoners, the German prisoners, and it was kind of scary...

Dawson: There was some.

Corrigan: But you know they put them to work at this and that, but anyway, it was kind of scary to see German prisoners when we were at war with Germany you know.

Dawson: But I don't know where their camp was in Freemont, I can't remember that.

Corrigan: I don't know but we seen them around Gerber's when we were over there.

Dawson: They'd come across the bridge and I worked for my brother in law in a big factory as you cross the bridge going into Newaygo it was right where the bridge...

Corrigan: Yeah, Rowe's factory.
Dawson: And it was a great big Rowe's factory there and so I worked for my brother in law. But they were making nothing for the war, I don't think, for the war. It was all wooden parts and stuff. And, but, yep, it was really sad.

Frederiksen: I think...

Dawson: Well and Bob Sherwood was the first one - no Bob was the first one that got killed going to Vietnam, 'cause my son joined the marines. He was two years in Vietnam he was. Right now you can feel for these parents and these young boys going over there. I don't even... It's terrible. I know what they're going through and the parents are going through losing their sons.

Corrigan: I would like to say that the...

Dawson: I'll start crying here pretty soon.

Corrigan: That the people at home, whether they were Rosie the Riveter or anybody else, you know... But the real heros of course were the service men and women, and especially those that died.

Frederiksen, Dawson: Right.

Dawson: Now a friend of ours in Newaygo, Joe Adams had saved all
these letters. Saved one of Bob Frederiksen's that he wrote home during the war and Nancy Carlson...

Kelly: Excuse me, just one second...

Dawson: Wait, oh yes. So he died a couple of years ago, and his nieces and two - Nancy Carlson and Patty Gustom - were going through a lot of things to help the niece 'cause Patty Gustom knew her real well, Joe's niece. And they came across these letters and Nancy Carlson copied one, sent it to me, that Bill had wrote Joe Adams. And Bob had got one before I knew that I had, was on one, and that's when he wrote “The war is hell. Join the navy,” and he said “All we do is learn how to kill.” and that's, yeah, and he was not a killer. And as soon as they landed on Okinawa he got wounded and two other fellas from Newaygo told me about it later. I guess he got shot in his face. He didn't make it. They'd just landed on Okinawa and it was terrible.

Corrigan: That was one of the worst ones.

Frederiksen: I think w...

Dawson: But Bob wrote a letter to Joe and he kept my cousin's, Bob's, letter too, and gave that to Bob. Bob was telling about us when we
were up to...

Corrigan: Can you bring me that scrapbook?

Dawson: And then, um, yep, and you sent me - last year she sent me - a picture of Bill in a heart and she knew how much it meant to me to have that. So its in my Flor... I wanted to bring it home, I wanted to keep it here. It's in my trailer. It was on for my Christmas tree you sent it to me.

Corrigan: I just wanted to show you that I...

Frederiksen: We live in a small town. It's much more personal.

Dawson: Who was the first one that got killed? He worked at the gas station in Newaygo.

Corrigan: I don't remember.

Frederiksen: You know, coming from a small town everybody knows everybody, good and bad.

Kelly: Everybody's involved. Anything hits very hard.

Dawson: Yeah, everybody in a small town. The senior class, this one
at Vietnam and it was Bob Sherwood and he was killed right away and his mother just lives round the corner to me now, and his sister works for the city. But the night of the football game they said a prayer for him, that he'd passed, got killed. It was the saddest football game and everybody was crying there, you know. It just, in memory of Bob Sherwood. God. Young, young fella.

Corrigan: This is, I've been putting this together for the last several years and you asked me if I had a scrapbook. But I just wanted to show you some of the things so you girls can see them in person. I started going through this the other day and low and behold here's one of the first pictures I had put in here, Rosie the Riveter.

Dawson: Can they see that.

Kelly: I think what we'll do is that we'll have you hold up certain things for us and then we might get close-ups later on.

Corrigan: Oh, ok.

Kelly: So if you want to hold it like you just did. And so, can someone talk about exactly what you did at the, at the Rosie the Riveter factory?
Dawson: Oh yes. Well the strap carriers that we had to hold the...

Corrigan: That's to carry the shovels in, you know.

Dawson: Ok, they were about this wide and we had to sew all that together. There was a buckle on each end, so probably that's what you - maybe if something happened - but if you hit that you broke a needle. Then there was somebody else - I wish I could - somebody must have had one of those. Someone in Newaygo told me they did have and I've got - I think we'll have to call around and check.

Corrigan: A shovel carrier you mean. I'd love to know.

Dawson: And but I swear that somebody either, it was after they were making the [junction], 'cause you could not sew those together. Someone I swear was by that window, like stapling, not stapling, what do I want to put a little...

Frederiksen: Well John Botchirk worked...

Dawson: Yeah, but he was in charge of, maybe he...

Frederiksen: And Bill, Bill Corben

Dawson: And Bill Brown was there - his wife was teach... - principal
up to the high school. They called her Tillie, in fact I don't even remember her last name - but her last name was Brown.

Kelly: Was it unusual for women to be working at this time?

Dawson: Yes, I think so, in a factory. 'Cause Mr. Rowe never hired, I was the, during the war I worked there, and he called me Cinderella 'cause I was the only girl there at the factory. With all these older men. I was only 18 years old, and so. But people in Newaygo were all so close, so close. Everybody was close, you know.

Kelly: So what was that like as you all went to work, and many times it was really going to work for the first time?

Dawson: Well we realized we were working for the war effort. Boy Robey let you know that. “Hey, this is something they need, these fellas.” Oh, I know, my cousin Howard said, on Okinawa too, he dug a foxhole and never knowing we were, after the war I heard that, and that we had made those. Probably other states were making 'em too, but our little town had that contract to make the shovel carriers so that was important to us. We felt, hey we were doing something for the war and then just...

Corrigan: Hand me over my diary. I mean I've got a diary there.
Dawson: Your what?

Corrigan: That diary there. 'Cause I had it in there. I was just reading through there and I put...

Dawson: This gal has saved everything from high school.

Corrigan: I save everything. That's how come I've been married so long – I save everything.

Dawson: No, I think it's great.

Corrigan: Anyhow, on September 27th in 1944 it was a Wednesday. And I got up early, went to work. Mr. Robey was gone today. We finished the contract, so that was over, and told, and we were told we could come back on Monday. She must have gave us a few days off. But anyway, so I mention that we had a contract with the government for that.

Dawson: So they must have got another one then too because I worked there too...

Corrigan: And here was a ration book, a real one. Some years back I mentioned to some of my relatives, “I wish I'd've saved a ration book.” And one of them said, “Oh, I've got a couple of them.” I said,
“I'll give you five bucks for one.” And so I have one. This is what they looked like. You girls will remember them.

Frederiksen: I don't really, no. I don't remember, but I can remember, you know, my aunt and my mother...

Corrigan: This was my aunt that this one come from.

Kelly: So what did you, so what did you do with... Do you remember how much you earned? And what did you do with the money that you were earning.

Corrigan: Well, I have to tell you something funny about that. I have a sister, older than me, and she's in a nursing home in Grand Rapids now, but anyway, I told her the other day about we were going to have this meeting, and I said, “They tell us we are part of the Rosie the Riveter.” You know, and then she said, “Well, I was too, then,” she says. “Because I worked...” She only worked there about two weeks, and she had applied at the telephone company in Freemont, which then after she was at Robey's two weeks they called her so, she quit there and so she was only there a couple of weeks. But anyway...

Clock chimes.

Kelly: Wait a minute. Just a sec.
Corrigan: Ray had just had surgery and his brother Bill, who during the war Bill was on the Hornet when it was sunk by the Japanese. And the ship was sunk and they, a lot of the sailors were killed and then the rest of them had to jump into the water. And they were in the water for several hours before they were picked up.

And Bill told us recently that - 'cause he didn't want, most of them didn't want to talk about it, you know, that much. But he said that a buddy of his saved his life because when a ship came up to pick them up that there's great big wheels, which I didn't know, underneath the ship going like this, and Bill was so anxious to get up close to the ship that he got too close and almost got sucked into that. Which would have killed him, except that his, one of his buddies pulled him away from it. So that was a story.

But anyway, while Ray was recuperating from surgery one time, Bill came up and he brought Ray some magazines to read, or whatever, and then he had this big packet of papers. And I said, "What is that?" And he said, "Well, Freida saved these." That's his wife. "She saved these during the war." And I still have them in the other room, 'cause I made copies of them.

And it was copies of almost all the boys in Newaygo - and some women - in Newaygo county who had served in World War II. There's stories and letters from their parents and back and forth. And I
said, “This is a treasure!”

And I called her up and they were raggedy edges and everything, and I said, “If I'm careful with these, can I go and get them copied?” You know, which I did. Took them to a copy shop. So I've got copies of all the boys that were, you know, that, in Newaygo county, so it was other towns around here too. So that was a real thing, find.

Also recently, they've been telling World War II veterans that they want their stories, you know. And so Ray wrote his story, and then he... and Tom his... There were three... There were nine Corrigan boys, and four girls - big family. But three of them went in the service. And Tom went first, and then Bill and then Ray was the younger one. And he quit school right after Pearl Harbor, and he joined the navy. But anyway, so then these guys wrote their stories, and then they were put in the veterans place out here in Newaygo. They put a veteran in each month in their monthly paper, and so these guys were in. So here were the three Corrigan boys, handsome too, every one of them.

Dawson: I cut that out of the paper, you know, saved it.

Corrigan: So this was their stories, you know, that they wrote up about their experiences in the war.
Kelly: Do you remember, so when you started working at the factory, at the Robey factory, do you remember how much you got paid? And what, what did you do with the money?

Corrigan: Oh this is what I first started and didn't finish. When I said my sister said to me just the other day, “I remember,” she said, “that when I worked there,” but she was only there a short time, but she said, “I told Mr. Robey one day,” - we got paid for how many we did.

Dawson: Yeah, it was piecework.

Corrigan: Yeah, piecework. And so at the end of the day you would go up and tell the office girls how many you did. But she... And they would write it down, and you got paid accordingly. But anyway, so, but my sister, Frances, went up, and she told me “I told Mr. Robey how many I did today, and he said, 'Oh,' he said, 'Well then I'll probably have to cut your wages.'” And so I said to her, “Don't ever tell him how many you did.” You know, and so she still remembered that, you know. That was something. That was funny.

Dawson: But he must have trusted us if that's... I can't remember how we did it.
Corrigan: Yeah, yeah we did. We had to turn it in to Arlene how many we did, and they paid you accordingly.

Frederiksen: Yes, yes.

Corrigan: But as far as what'd we do with the money, huh, I mean, I saved as much as I possibly could, because when we got married then I started getting a check from the navy for $50 a month, which was a lot, seemed like a lot. And then all the money that I earned I put with that so that one year later when Ray, the war was over, and Ray came home, I had saved $1,000 which, then, was quite a lot.

Dawson: Yes, it would have been a lot then, oh yes.

Kelly: And what did you, do you remember what you did with that money that you saved?

Corrigan: Well, when he got home? Well of course, we had to just start out. We didn't have anything, you know. And the jobs were scarce after all those millions of people from the service came home. You couldn't, there just weren't any jobs. Ray started out taking some really lousy ones at first, you know. But eventually he got into a good place and from then on he did well through the years.
Dawson: He got to be an electrician.

Corrigan: Yeah.

Kelly: And so talk about when, you know, when the war ended and you started talking about the jobs were scarce 'cause all these people were coming home. Was there any so all stopped working? And what happened after you stopped working, and what was it like?

Corrigan: You started keeping house and having babies.

Dawson: No. Well, I wasn't married yet but after the war I worked down - it was a dime store, Newaygo Curly's Dime store, and Glenna Butler and I worked there, and I think fourteen dollars a week, and that was eight hours a day and every day. We had Thursday afternoon off, and I remember, Marge, we paid my mother so much. And I saved so much, 'cause my mother bought all the food. And my brother. I live in the house now that we moved into. And Marge's husband had lived in that house at one time, rented it, and now then they have a nice home up on the hill by a crick where we used to go swimming.

But I saved it 'cause I had bought a war bond, and then there was after, was it, after I was married and Mr. Henning worked at the bank he said, “You know, you have a savings account here.” I think there was about twenty-nine dollars in it. I had forgotten. I guess
getting married just shook me up or something. And I said, “Oh, I do?” And I couldn't remember that I had savings in there. So we must have saved a little bit of our money, you know. And so that came in handy after I got married. If he hadn't told me, maybe it'd have increased a lot of interest through the years. I'd've been a millionaire. But there was, and the fellas, when they come home, it was so good to see the ones that survived and came home.

Corrigan: I made some copies of this that John got us into a couple of years ago. And over here...

Dawson: It was just last year.

Corrigan: No, it was two years ago, wasn't it?

Dawson: No, it was last summer.

Frederiksen: Last year.

Dawson: When we were the Robey Girls.

Corrigan: Was it last year?

Frederiksen: Last year.
Dawson: This last Labor Day.

Corrigan: Anyway...

Dawson: Doris!

Corrigan: Well, yeah, I'm kinda forgetful. Anyway, this is... he got us together, made us ride in a buggy with horses and get in the Labor Day parade. So there was the write up about that.

You know how that all got started was when Willie died, that was his, John's, mother, they had, the family had, put a little piece in the paper, in the Indicator, that they would like to hear from other people any thoughts they had of Willie. And of course, that didn't take me long to start putting something together because we had worked with her, you know, and been friends ever since. So then I wrote up a little story, which I guess, and I had sent it to his family. I sent it to Willie's address 'cause I knew some of them were living there, but anyway, and I guess they gave it to John, whoever was there, and then he took it from there and decided that we ought to be in that parade, as the...

Dawson: Well that was the honor, what'd they call...

Corrigan: Well, they called us the 'Grand Marshals'. 
Dawson: Grand Marshals. And every year - Margie and Bob were the Grand Marshals one year.

Corrigan: Oh, they were?

Dawson: Weren't you Margie? Yeah.

Frederiksen: Yes.

Dawson: And so that's an honor.

Corrigan: And so I made some copies of this for you girls.

Dawson: We didn't expect and John had us all, has us all up there.

Kelly: And that was because you were the Robey Girls.

Dawson: Yes, and that was on this thing that says 'The Robey Girls' right there.

Corrigan: Grand Marshals of the 'The Robey Girls of World War II' anyway...
Dawson: And a lot of people didn't know anything about the Robey Girls until...

Corrigan: Yes, and so that's why...

Frederiksen: No.

Dawson: Even just having lunch.

Corrigan: A lot of them said to me afterwards, “Well what were you supposed to be?” So I wrote a letter over to the editor, who you'll get to know real well.

Dawson: Nice guy.

Corrigan: He's always around with his camera. Rich Weeder. And anyway, so I wrote him a letter, so he puts the whole letter in here, and telling them that a lot of people didn't know what we were, these old ladies in this carriage were supposed to be, you know. So I explained it to him, but then he put it in the paper. So there's a copy of that. And there was a picture he took, we didn't know he had. That he had taken of us.

Dawson: I don't know who took that. Was it him?
Corrigan: His, right here see, photo by Rich Weeder.

Dawson: Oh, ok, because I got one...

Corrigan: Well you were sitting down to this end.

Dawson: But then I have another one that Joe North took, and it was just the opposite side, but its good, a real nice one.

Corrigan: But anyway, so I...

Kelly: So you want a little drink of water?

00:35:25:01-----------------------------------------------

Frederiksen: No, that's not Newaygo...

Corrigan: No, that's not Newaygo, I don't know what this is.

Off Camera: What did my mother tell me one time, Doris, that Mr. Robey got so angry about something and he threw...

Frederiksen: A machine.

Off Camera: That he knocked a machine over?
Corrigan: Yes, he was... I heard though, after the war, that he started going to church and he made a total change in his life. But he was...

Off Camera: Really?

Corrigan: But he was... Yeah, that's what I heard.

Kelly: We would love to hear that story.

Corrigan: Hand me over that, that little chest which I want to show her.

Dawson: Here I'll get it.

Off Camera: No no, I got it.

Dawson: Do you want the chest?

Corrigan: Yeah.

Off Camera: Oh God, that's a treasure!
Corrigan: It is a treasure.

Dawson: No, I'm getting too old. It's ok, I'm just teasing...

Corrigan: No, I said 'it is a treasure.'

Kelly: She's a joker. I can tell.

Corrigan: No, but I said, “It is a treasure, inside.”

Kelly: I would love to talk about even the story about Mr. Robey, and also about his wife being a supervisor and kind of how...

Dawson: He had a temper – tell her about the temper.

Kelly: ...the views of men or, men or women...

Corrigan: Well, when I first started there, when I first started there I was, really got scared of him. Because he was, let's see, very temperamental. He got mad...

Dawson: Well, he was a drinker.
Corrigan: And I didn't know that, but he wasn't on the job...

Dawson: Not on the job, but when he got home...

Corrigan: Well anyway, he'd get upset real easy if we took a little time off that he - like the day we all cried about Bill being killed and all that. And, she had left - somebody'd come got her, and the rest of us were still in the ladies room and then he come banged on the door and said “Get out here and get back to work you can't... sitting in, standing in there bawling isn't going to help win the war.” And so he put us back to work.

But he was really very, and he'd get angry real quick. And the sewing machines we had were big sewing machines. Like I said, it was canvas - that's what those carriers were made out of, shovel carriers. And they were really hard sewing and everything, so but anyway, so we had lots of broken needles, and then of course he had to fix anything went wrong with the machine. But I remember one day that he couldn't get one back together again. He gets up and just shoves the thing and stuff just flew all over the room. We had a new gal, her name was, remember, Marie Dijon or something?

Dawson: Oh yes.

Corrigan: She had just started and when he did that her eyes was just
huge. So I told her later, “You'll get used to it after a while.” And so...

Dawson: Well he'd tip them right over, he'd get so mad. And then he'd storm out but then later, he got, when Fisher was my minister, and he had swore or something... Bill Martin said, “That's alright, I've heard worse.” He joined our church and directed the choir and I was in the choir for twenty years with him.

Corrigan: Isn't that something.

Dawson: Well, maybe ten. I was in the choir long before that when we first moved to Newaygo, but... Yeah, and he was a whole different person. But it was the drinking I think, putting up with all these women? I, maybe he had a reason to go home.

And when my son was born, the day before my second son was coming, they were coming, Bob, her Bob, and Ed Longcore they were all to my dad's house having a drink and talking about the war. Her husband was on a bomber, Ed Longcore flew the bombers, and Earl was on an island with a good friend of... lives in White Cloud now, three years they were together... and he set Earl J. up, 'cause I was going into labor, but he set my son up at the sink and he started to cry – probably about the first time I ever... - and he said, “You have no idea what hell we went through.”

And then I started to cry. And he said all they needed was one
bomb here to drop and they'll know what we were doing. And that's, he never talked about it again. But I think the emotion from them all talking, in fact they'd been downtown – it was Labor Day – and he's coming up the po... – Bob, Margie's Bob, went home already – and I said, “Earl, I think I'm in labor.”

He turned around. Ed Longcore turned around, walked home up the hill. He wasn't married yet. And Earl turned around and we marched home and I went to the hospital that night. But he was feeling good. So he got sick, and the nurse, she was an old time nurse. Old lady, I'd say at the time too, but she said, “Oh your husband's so worried about you.” And I thought, “Hell, he's drunk.” I didn’t even swear then. “He's not sick over me. He's sick 'cause he drank too much.” That you can cut out.

But that's the only time Earl really said it. And when my son was in Vietnam he wrote, and I just gave him his letters, “If something happens to me I want him...” And he sent one home, a three page letter and he said, “Dad, if you feel mother should read this...” I never did. Earl said, “I don't...” And he was in the marines in a tank. It was really... And when I gave it back I said “I didn't read it. Your dad really thought I shouldn't.” But that was two years of hell, he said to... But you know people... That's what I think about these young kids dying over there now, and it's very sad.

[In the background, while Dawson is talking:
Frederiksen: Doris, how many women worked there?]
Corrigan: I say maybe thirty, thirty five.

Frederiksen: That many?

Corrigan: I think so. Maybe there weren't that many. Probably not that many.

Frederiksen: How many girls were there?]

Corrigan: What their families go through, you know. In fact I was going to say, having lived through, I don't mind that I'm eighty-five years old because things that are history to the younger people are things that we went through, starting with the great depression.

Dawson: Yes.

Corrigan: Lived through all of that and then that went right into World War II, you know. So, but, anything that the people at home, whether the women went to work, or whatever, didn't even, I mean it was, the heroes were the soldiers.

Dawson: Yep, that's right.

Frederiksen: Yes.
Dawson: Well, even during the depression in Chicago if it wasn't for the democrat, or Roosevelt with the WPA...

Corrigan: That stood for 'we putter around.'

Dawson: I mean we had good jobs. People were killing themselves, and I was probably - I don't know how old we were - 'cause you lived upstairs grandpas, and we lived across the street then. So your mother was still alive, Margie, and I can remember then my, that her dad had a good job, and my dad. We were one of the 'lucky one.' But so many... And my grandpa worked for the post office, so he had a income to help everybody, and my uncle, two uncles worked, so but it was terrible, the news in Chicago during depression too.

So we grew up with that and these kids now a days you can't even find someone for ten bucks to do your lawn and the Towers that own the big store downtown here, they come over with their lawnmower, Doug Towers, for three bucks and do my whole lawn.

Corrigan: That was then.

Dawson: You know and these kids today, they're home watching TV. I'd get out and do my own lawn if I could now, but it's hard to find, and even in Florida, your Mexicans are all working on that field. You couldn't get a high school kid out there now. And our boys in Newaygo
went to high school, they would ride their bikes to Grant and make very little in the fields. They did. Earl did and a lot of the kids from Newaygo went there to earn some money. We worked, what, about two hours for somebody, we called my mother, “Come get us.” We were from Chicago, we were going to pick string beans.

Corrigan: You know Ray's sister Pat, you know, and I, one day before I went to Robey's, we were trying to find a job around, and we heard you could work in the onions. What a job. So we went down there. And one day was enough. It was hot. I mean horrible work. And so anyway we both quit at the end of the day. That was enough of that, working in the onions.

Dawson: We didn't even last that long.

Corrigan: Home sunburned and oh, it was awful, but anyway one day of that was enough. So I was looking around, I didn't go to Robey's because they were, I didn't know they were going to be doing any war work. It was a place I found a job, so.

Dawson: It was good. We had good years growing up. Good memories.

Corrigan: But we had fun, made good friends and so. It doesn't matter if he was grouchy. Mrs. Robey was just the opposite, she had the opposite kind of personality, you know.
Kelly: And she was a supervisor at this time?

Corrigan: Well I don't know that she was a supervisor, but she was around there.

Dawson: I wouldn't call her a supervisor. She was there. She didn't work in the office, I don't think.

Frederiksen: No.

Corrigan: No, she was just around there.

Dawson: I don't know what she was doing...

Corrigan: Maybe she wasn't there everyday.

Dawson: ...but I think now probably to keep peace when he'd get so angry. But, I can see him. And he turned out to be one of the nicest fellas you could ever know. You know, just I think everything was strained to get all this done, you know. He had a quota, too, you know.
Frederiksen: But he had... There were thirty women working, and...

Dawson: I'm through talking. I've talked too much now.

Frederiksen: ...if thirty women - going with trying to keep them all at the same level. I could see why he could pick up a machine and throw it.

Corrigan: I remember when we got into the war, of course, was right after Pearl Harbor. And I remember it was a Sunday afternoon when I heard it on the radio. You know what had happened. And that was December 7th, 1941. And Roosevelt immediately declared war on Japan and Germany because Winston Churchill over in England had been trying his best to get us into the war to help them, you know, because of the problem with Hitler. And so anyway, so that war started then.

   And then, but when it ended, after four years of it, you know, that night, we lived up on the hill, and Marilyn lived just down the street a little bit, up on the, I call it the school house hill, but anyway, my sis..., we were eating supper and it come on the radio that the war had just ended. And my sister and I forgot all about supper and we went running downtown, as everybody did. Marilyn beat us down there. She was, there was, the men was either young or old. They had a song going around then, “They're either too young or too old.” I mean, if you was looking for the marrying age.
Dawson: I think they blew that fire whistle too.

Corrigan: Oh yeah. But it was, everybody, it was just wild. And I hear it was this way all over the world, not just, you know, all over the world.

Dawson: We had to go to the show then, to see the newsreel what was going on. We had a theater down town. In fact, Robey's factory was a movie theater. We'd come up from Chicago, and that had turned into a skating rink, during the war, and then he bought it. Now it's the Masonic Temple.

Corrigan: The, well, but that night, anyway, it seemed like everybody rushed down town, you know.

Dawson: It was a little movie theater.

Corrigan: The cars were going up and down the streets on the wrong side. It was just wild. But you know what, I told somebody, all I could do is stand there and think, “He's coming home.”

Dawson: Yep, well you had Ray... yep. Oh that was cheering all over. And then you'd see it on the newsreel, you know, when you went to the show, and everybody in Chicago, I can, you know, they were, oh all over, State Street there and the sailors mostly too. But it was an
experience you...

Oh, I know what I was going to sing in school. It was 'White Christmas.' It was Christmas time. And I must have sang it once before the parents all came for our concert, and then I played in the band too. But I can remember standing up there singing 'White Christmas', oh God. I never got up again. I didn't have that kind of voice to be singing either.

Corrigan: Well, look what you're doing now, with the camera.

Kelly: Do you, can you think back how that time...

Dawson: It was hard.

Kelly: ...changed you as a person? How going to work as women supporting the role, can you think about or talk about how that might have changed the rest of your life or changed you as a person? That experience?

Dawson: I think it did probably everybody.

Frederiksen: Yeah.
Corrigan: Well, it felt good to be doing something for the war.

Dawson: Yeah, that's, I think we were bragging a little bit too.

Corrigan: Yeah.

Dawson: Couldn't help it. We thought we were doing... They dug, they used them in the foxholes, many of them. I know Howard, our cousin, said boy, when he was in Okinawa, and those Japs came in, and that's when our boys were landing and that's, and they talk about Okinawa now, too, just a while ago, something, there's a cemetery there too.

Frederiksen: I think it was foremost in our mind because most of us had a loved one that was in the service...

Dawson: In fact I think it bothers me today with this going on and all. Oh, I'm sorry...

Frederiksen: ...so I think that kept us focused to do what we could do.

Dawson: Well see, in Chicago I was able to get a job, like at WalMart's, it was a... Not WalMart, Weeble, or Goldblatt's, and then
Margie was in school, I had already graduated. Well, I was working after school and Saturdays and so I had a little extra money two days a week working there. My mother worked in Montgomery Ward too.

Frederiksen: I worked I think it was we all worked in the summer at jobs and my kids did too. So, but the kids, kids nowadays.

Dawson: (talking over Frederiksen) I can't remember if you worked then, Margie or not. Afterwards, in high school. Well we had our own money to buy stuff.

Corrigan: Yeah, I know, they're lazy now.

Dawson: But you could buy a pair of shoes for two dollars.

Corrigan: Just a few years ago, some of the fellas that were in the war, that I talked to, and one was Ted Holton – all of these folks know Ted Holton – and he died now. But he was at Pearl Harbor. And he said that sixty years later, every day of his life, he couldn't get that scene out of his, out of his mind. What it was like when those planes hit. I think his, yeah, his ship was sunk too. They had to jump in the water. And he said they swam up to shore. And of course, as you've probably seen movies of Pearl Harbor, what it was like. But anyway, he said that [...] they tossed a great big gun to him, that he didn't really know much about it, because they were trying to shoot
the Japanese planes out of the sky, you know.

Dawson: Well when I was in Hawaii, we was on a tour, we were there three weeks, and we took this boat out to see, the one that was, I can't even remember what it was now, it's only probably four or five years ago I was there, but the sunken ship.

Corrigan: The memorial there for...

Dawson: Yeah, the memorial, and it's really something.

Corrigan: I've got a picture of it in this book, in that book.

Dawson: It's so, and you can see the ship down there. And probably there was bodies on it left, I mean, it was sunk.

Corrigan: Oh yeah. They say to this day there's still a little bit of oil still coming up to the surface.

Dawson: And it had a big... Oh it's really... and a movie we watched, they had that there. If you ever get to, you've got to go.

Corrigan: I've got a picture of it, back there. I got a picture in that scrapbook.
Dawson: Have you?

Corrigan: Mmm hmm. Of the memorial.

Dawson: It's really something. Well, I've probably got them in mine too, 'cause I've got everything when we were in Hawaii. But I remember the first time you went, I thought, Oh is she lucky to get out of Newaygo, isn't that something.

Corrigan: We went to, we took a trip to Japan. Ray was working for a company that made big machines and they sold them around the world and they had sold one to Japan, and then he was the one to go fix it if something went wrong with it. So he went to Japan, and then they wanted him to come again. And the next time he wanted to take me with him, so I went with him. I had sisters that would take care of my kids. And, but anyway, that was quite an experience over there in Japan. And some of the Japanese that he worked with, they were all friendly and everything. But they, but one of them, a young guy said to me one day right out of the blue, “That was an awful thing, that bomb.” And you know I said, I wasn't as mouthy then as I am now, but I should have said, “There'd have been no bomb if there'd've been no Pearl Harbor.” You know, that's what I should have said to him.

Dawson: That was terrible, it was so terrible.
Frederiksen: But it saved a lot of American lives.

Dawson: You can see old movies, probably, of...

Kelly: What were you saying?

Frederiksen: It saved a lot of American lives. The bomb. No matter what you say about it.

Corrigan: In my scrapbook I've got pictures of a lot – Truman. He had, that man had to make the biggest decision anybody ever had to make.

Dawson: The atomic bomb.

Corrigan: To use that bomb. Yeah, but he said it saved millions of American lives.

Dawson: Definitely.

Corrigan: Because so many of those islands, like Okinawa, where Bill was killed. The Japs, I mean, they were just infested with Japanese...

Dawson: All over.
Corrigan: ...and they couldn't get rid of them all on all of those islands.

Dawson: Look what the Germans...

Corrigan: And we were just losing so many lives.

Dawson: Look what the Germans did to the families and everything. It was, it was hell. That's all I've got to say. It was a terrible things that happened there.

Dawson: Well, I got the original. The Sun paper, and it's the date, and a picture, and it was taken on Maude Fox's porch, and I don't remember, but I must have sent it to the service men. We wrote to everybody, everybody in Newaygo.

Corrigan: Yeah, you wrote to them, they told you to write to a lot of people besides...

Dawson: And our little post office. They, I think the girls in Newaygo...
Corrigan: ...our boyfriends.

Dawson: ...'Cause we wrote to all our friends, you know. And Squint Abbot, I have a card gift from him, George Abbot, and yeah, I've kept all those things, isn't that something? And from Bill Edwards, I have his letters and a tape he made on a little 45, yep, I've got that. His voice is on that, maybe you should hear it sometime. But anyhow, What was I saying, I lose track.

Kelly: The pin-up girl.

Dawson: Oh, that.

Kelly: How you became a pin-up girl.

Dawson: No, I just. He said to get it out, and this is here, in 1946.

Kelly: Can I hold the paper bag, so it doesn't...

Dawson: Oh, oh ok. Well, I'll just take this stuff out, that's all. But here's a picture in the Chicago Sun, 1945, and here's the picture here. That's all it said. My mother must have kept it - I didn't. And then the bottom part of it...

Corrigan: This is the picture, here?
Dawson: Yeah. It was taken at Maude Fox's.

de Mare: Can you, can you hold it still for this?

Dawson: Yeah, can you, you want to see the original Chicago Sun? Oh wait, I can open it up. Probably very fragile.

de Mare: That's you on the bottom?

Dawson: Right, right here. Uh huh. That's the one.

Corrigan: So how did it get to be a pin-up girl, by...?

Dawson: Well, there was quite an article about it, and then I got the other half of it, and then I got the other half of it. I couldn't find it at first, but it was in a picture frame in the basement.

Corrigan: Where was it put up, in a barracks or something?

Dawson: No, then the other one well, I'll tell you that one. Yeah, someone found it – you'll have to read it. And this is the one in 1946, April four... Uncle Sam's sailors in hunt for Miss Hula Hula. Well, I came in second and then who was it that had the thing downtown? He said, “Pretty these pe[...] prove our point that the
Republican,” that was the name of our paper, “That let us assure you, it is a judgement that cannot be lightly set aside, we refrain for the good of the service...” Well anyhow, but he thought we should, I should have been Miss Hula, I came in second. That was another, I don't know how we got in it. I haven't read it in so long. But I had this made so my kids could read it. They didn't even know anything.

Kelly: That you were in a contest, for a... a beauty contest?

Dawson: Yea, well, you know, yeah, so now I said to my kids, I made four copies, and they're all going to get one, so what their mother did at one time. That's a play in Newaygo, the Flintstones, that was in the Muskegon paper, us kids in it. That's all.

Kelly: Do you have any...

Corrigan: I want to just show you...

Dawson: Oh, here's the original one from the paper that was written. That's our Republican. But see my mother saved all these things, and Margie, we all... It took me a year to get through all her stuff.

Kelly: Yeah, I think we'll go, we'd like to go through your books, just have you talk about a few of the pictures by yourself, I think.
Corrigan: Oh, but that's not what I wanted to show you.

Kelly: Oh, ok.

Corrigan: I wanted to show you what I have in here. This is every letter and telegram that I got from Ray.

Kelly: Oh, what a treasure. Can you grab that bag for me.

Dawson: I'm sorry.

Kelly: No, it's fine, it just, it crinkles on the thing. So can you say that again, Mrs... Every letter...

Corrigan: This is all the letters and telegrams that I got from Ray, while, after I started going with him and until he came home. There's lots of them in there.

Kelly: That's your treasure chest.

Corrigan: That's my treasure. And I put them in a treasure chest.

Dawson: I remember.
Kelly: Is there any last, is there any favorite memory, or favorite kind of just anecdote from that time during the war that you haven't talked about yet that you think, “Oh this would be a cute little story,” or “This would be an important thing for them to know?”

Dawson: I guess everybody was in the same boat, and just I don't know, I just, made lots of friends during that time, and many happy ones afterwards, you know.

Corrigan: I have them in the other room, but I've been writing poems for about the last thirty years, or most of them, and, just off and on, 'bout different subjects, but I started it after I took a trip to the holy land, which is a never to be forgotten experience, as you can see up there, you know, when you stand in the Garden of Gethsemane, and all that, you know, and, but anyway, so when I came home then that Christmas, I wrote a Christmas poem about it, and then I started writing 'em, so anyway, so I had a poem book published in the '80s that had just 36 poems in it.

Dawson: I have that.

Corrigan: And now I have one that, they just finished it now, publishing it, and its got 95 poems in it, and that wasn't all of them, 95 poems and seven songs. The words I wrote for seven songs,
so, I just got that, so...

Kelly: And was it, it was the World War II one in there?

Corrigan: And the one about World War II, yeah.

Dawson: And the last one was it a week ago, and see I probably missed that paper coming home from Newaygo. But one time I called her and I said, “Hey, the Chronicle's having a test for poems and such, Doris, send him one of your poems.” And you came in first place.

Corrigan: Well, no, not first place. But I got that newspaper, yep, it was...

Dawson: I thought it was first place. I told everybody first place.

Corrigan: Well, it was, I'll tell you what it was. They said they got sent in 114 people sent in poems, and they picked 14 that were all winners, and they were all on the front page of the paper.

Dawson: And your name was on it - must have been. 'Cause I've got it.

Corrigan: Yeah, and that one's in this book too.

Dawson: Yeah, I've got one of her other little... yeah and I said I
wanted to buy one of the books, I said, “Keep one, you know for me.” 'cause the poem about your mother in it, they're just beautiful poems. You've got to read them every once in a while because you forget them, but I always get a poem from her that she's written, or they're in the paper and you can cut them out and I save all those.

01:01:16:18-----------------------------------------------

de Mare: Can you talk a little bit about how it was to be here kind of in the middle of the country, and, I mean, working for the war effort, how you felt about things?

Corrigan: Well, first of all, that wasn't the only factory. Rowe's Manufacturing was a much bigger factory. But they didn't do any war work.

Dawson: Yeah, but they didn't do any war effort, that's what I said.

Corrigan: Yeah, but she said that was the only one in town, so it wasn't. It was just a small outfit.

Dawson: I guess you didn't think about it, 'cause you knew Muskegon was Capitol Wide Cannon, and but we just felt we were nothing, just doing our war effort, you know, that's about, that's what I felt. Hey, we're making these shovel carriers for the boys. But the other
ones were making engines for the planes and Capital Wide Canon had, brought all kind of help up during the war. They was probably ten people in a garage, 'cause they needed the help. 'Cause the boys, young boys, were all gone.

Now that's all gone, that big, big, big foundry and it's a shopping center now. My husband worked there for years. Yeah. Retired from there. But, I guess you just didn't think being in a little town that, that we were just, so this has been something, when we got to be Grand Marshals, John, and think, here we are how many years later.

Corrigan: I hope he's not going to dream up something else here.

Dawson: I think we gave our history of our life.

Corrigan: Can I go just a minute, I wanted to I wanted to show you one of the books. I got, the people, of course, the publishers own the books now, but they gave me fifty that I could, of course I paid to have them published too, but anyway...

Dawson: Yeah, I know you did.

John: Watch that cord. Whoop, whoop...

Dawson: Yeah, careful with that wire, yeah, look, I...
Corrigan: Well I just wanted to show you one. But anyway, they gave me fifty to just give away to friends and family and such. But, and I'll just show you one.

Dawson: The other one is just a paper one she had done up, but... And Margie, then you went to Gerber's to work, didn't you, after the war and that. Oh, after that, 'cause then I worked to Rowe's and you were working to Gerber's yeah, when he finished his contract down town.

Frederiksen: And Grandpa Edwards took me to Freemont every day. He was so...

Dawson: Yeah, well when the war was over, I was on the bus going to Freemont, when we got word, and boy they were cheering on the, it was a little local bus back and forth, and...

Frederiksen: He was so nice.

Dawson: I lost my other hearing aide, so I can't hear good.

Frederiksen: Then I went to...

Dawson: Oh is this what your new one looks like, Doris?

Corrigan: This is my new book.
Dawson: Oh, that's neat. Let me see.

Corrigan: Yeah, oh and then the publishers put in, he put in...

Dawson: Different pictures.

Corrigan: ...different pictures and stuff which made it really nice.

Dawson: Yeah, oh I like that. Yeah.

Corrigan: So it's in... there's the one that was, well that was the one about spring.

Kelly: Do you have the World War II poem?

Corrigan: The World War II poem is in here, too.

Kelly: Is it?

Corrigan: Mmm hmm. But I've made a copy for you girls. But I was thinking today, I think I'll add another verse about Rosie the Riveter. And so, but anyway.

Dawson: I guess I don't have to go. Are you done taking pictures now,
are we through with this?

Corrigan: But anyway, that was my new book.