

Questions and Answers with Sheri Bell-Rehwoldt, Author
Great World War II Projects You Can Build Yourself
A kid's activity book. Publisher: Nomad Press. ISBN: 0977129411

Q: How did you become interested in writing about WWII?

I love the notion that Americans pulled together to focus on a common cause, willingly putting their wants and needs second. Having not experienced this personally, as our society has not had to hunker down that way since, I enjoyed the opportunity to study how Americans ‘used up, wore out, and made do without.’

Q: In researching this book, what information surprised you the most?

That even kids were expected to do their part to ensure an Allied victory—by helping with recycle drives, buying war bonds during school drives, and planting family Victory Gardens in their backyards. It’s hard to get my head around the fact that Americans planted 20 million Victory Gardens during World War II, as so few people garden today! I also didn’t know that American women canned their butts off once their gardens began producing, and that when pressure cookers became scarce, because of consumer demand, that numerous community canning centers opened up across the country to assist them. That’s a perfect example of how cooperative and resourceful Americans were during World War II.

Q: What was your favorite part of the book?

Though I hate the actual battlefield, I was really drawn to the ingenious tools used by spies behind enemy lines during the war. Hiding a camera in a matchbook is just too cool! But I also liked learning how American women proved, beyond doubt, that they could do a man’s job during the war! It must have been really discouraging to step aside when the soldiers came home from the war and reclaimed their jobs.

Q: What is the purpose of the activities in this book?

To make history come alive for kids. We all learn more by doing than reading or listening. The activities in *Great World War II Projects You Can Build Yourself* will help kids retain information about this critical period of American history. As they make the paper mache piggy bank, for example, they’ll ‘get’ that Americans of all ages helped to fund the war by investing in war bonds. And when they make the secret map from a deck of cards, they’ll ‘get’ how important secrecy is in winning a war.

Q. What is your favorite activity in the book?

I have two, actually: the footprint mold and the wish wheel mobile. I have the kids make the foot mold to understand how the Allies created fake rubber footprints to camouflage their boot tracks

after they secretly landed on beaches in the Pacific. The foot molds looked like human feet! When the Japanese saw the tracks, they assumed they were those of the barefoot locals. I chose to use the wish wheel mobile in the section that highlights the Japanese American internment camps. Some people believe that wishes are answered if they flutter in the wind. I thought this activity was a great way to offer hope that the Japanese American children who left behind non-Japanese friends were eventually reunited with them—and that their friendship endured the separation. Understanding *does* overcome fear and discrimination.

Q: What is the most important invention that came of WWII?

There's no single invention that most important, though some might argue that the atomic bomb enabled the Allies to finally win the war. I'd say radar was pretty important. Without radar, I seriously doubt the Allies would have been so effective against Axis bombers. Of course, kids are probably more impressed that lab experiments accidentally produced the Slinky and Silly Putty!

Q: What is the most important lesson that came of WWII?

To me, it's that war is a terrible waste of resources, time, and human life. Millions of people around the world died because of the private ambitions—and hate—of a handful of men. Hate, in any form, makes the world a dark, dangerous, terrifying place to be. And yet, this trying time gave Americans the opportunity to test their mettle: to learn just how giving they could be when their country asked them to be a part of stopping this evil.

Q: What do you hope kids come away with after reading *Great World War II Projects*?

I want kids to understand the great debt they owe the Americans who worked tirelessly during World War II to ensure an Allied victory. American soldiers battled furiously in the air, on water and land; factory workers put in 10- to 12-hour days to produce tanks, planes, and parachutes; women bravely enlisted as military nurses to care for wounded soldiers; courageous spies slipped behind enemy lines to gather information; teens worked long hours in grocery stores and bowling alleys to help keep American society humming along. Even young kids made many sacrifices. I hope, after reading *Great World War II Projects You Can Build Yourself*, that kids respect military veterans. Yes, war is a terrible thing. But these soldiers deserve our appreciation. I salute them!

Contact Sheri Bell-Rehwoldt for interviews via email at Sheri@Bell-Rehwoldt.com. For more information on *Great World War II Projects You Can Build Yourself*, check out Sheri's website at www.Bell-Rehwoldt.com.