Wixson also discusses in great detail the problematic relations between this group of organic intellectuals and the Communist party, which always distrusted the individualism of the midwesterners. But as Wixson makes clear in this fine biography, the same elements that made Conroy such a suspect Communist—his belief in democracy, decentralization, and grass-roots activism—made him an effective spokesperson for the “disinherited.”

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Here is a Wisconsin version of Studs Terkel’s “The Good War” with the important qualification that all the oral history interviewees are women. The second in the State Historical Society of Wisconsin’s series Voices of the Wisconsin Past, this volume is a small sample from over a hundred interviews done in 1992 and 1993. The editors have arranged their selections topically, with sections on working women, women in uniform, raising families, schooling, loved ones, and the end of the war.

The most compelling reaction for many readers will be the immediacy of the war—the degree to which these women fifty years later remember events, people, and feelings. Their recorded memories constitute powerful testimony to the emotional power of oral history to make the past seem real. The reader can feel the joy still persisting as these women recall with pride their contributions—as in the case of Rose Kaminski, who learned to operate an industrial crane in just three days, not the three weeks she was told it would take: “It just came to me: I loved it” (p. 12). These memories include too the strong bonds that the war forged among women on the home front—the kind of support groups that would come to life in more formal ways three decades later. And there are the stories that capture the heavy hand of ethnic differences among Wisconsin’s people, most poignantly in the struggles caused by marrying out of one’s ethnic neighborhood or community. In the end, many of these women comment on the ways in which the war accelerated the pace of change and forced them to grow up more quickly.

These Wisconsin memories are a welcome addition to the growing body of recorded World War II voices. It is still possible for others to add to that record—but not for long.

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