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[Back to Normal View](#)

## 'Hey, Don'tcha Know There's a War On?'

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If you were a young person in the United States in early 1942, you would have known the answer to that question.

"Of course there's a war!" you would have said. And you would remember the day in December 1941 when the radio show you were listening to was interrupted to bring you the terrifying news: The Japanese had bombed the American armed forces at Pearl Harbor! "Sure there's a war on! Everyone knows that!"

But in the early days of 1942, World War II seemed as far away as Europe or Japan to many Americans. People continued to eat, play, sleep, and go to work and school; babies were born, and old folks died of natural causes; people got married or divorced, worrying all the while about the weather, baseball, and crime. Only as the months passed, and hundreds of thousands of young men and women rushed to enter the armed services, did the war begin to seem closer.

If you have ever read books or seen movies or television shows about World War II, you probably think of fighter planes and army tanks or of Pearl Harbor, London, and Hiroshima. All these stories are exciting and portray some of what the war meant to Americans. But there is another story that is just as important, even though it is told less often. That is the story of the American home front.

For the armed forces to have enough money, people, and supplies (food, clothing, weapons, transportation) to fight and win a war in Europe and the Pacific, every American at home had to help and be willing to sacrifice "luxuries" such as sugar and gasoline, which soon became scarce.

If you were a young person during World War II, you would have noticed the first and biggest change right in your own home. Your father (and older brother or sister) might have been in the armed services; your only contact with them would have been by letter, which sometimes would arrive with parts missing because a "censor" had removed important information about the war.

Meanwhile, because millions of men and women were serving in uniform, replacements were desperately needed to fill their jobs on farms, in shops, and in factories. The United States had to produce more food, equipment, and supplies than at any other time in its history, so your mother, and many of your friends' mothers, would have taken a job away from home for the first time in their lives. You might have had to move closer to where your mother worked and maybe shared a crowded apartment with another family.

But adults were not the only people working in the war effort. As a young person during the war, you might have pulled a wagon from house to house, collecting paper and tin cans (there were shortages of both, along with sugar, gas, rubber, refrigerators, cars, car parts, and cigarettes).

You might also have taken nickels and dimes to school for War Stamps and Bonds. In the War Finance Program, schools collected more than one billion dollars through stamps and bonds (an average of twenty-one dollars per child a year). In 1944, that money bought 2,900 planes; 33,000 jeeps; 11,600 amphibious jeeps; and 11,690 parachutes.

In addition, you might have worked in a school workshop building toys (there was a shortage of toys, too!) for

the childcare centers set up for mothers who worked outside the home. Or you might have joined a group making hospital bags, knitting afghans, or sewing simple clothes for children in the war zones abroad.

The Boy Scouts of America were responsible for selling approximately eight billion dollars' worth of War Stamps and Bonds. They collected three million books to be sent overseas, along with large quantities of rubber, tin, scrap metal, and paper. They distributed pamphlets and posters on conservation and planted one and a half million trees.

In fact, young people got so involved in these projects and in jobs on farms and in factories (even though many were too young to work legally) that a great "back-to-school" drive was finally launched. How different from when the United States first entered World War II! In the early days, when store shelves started to empty and lines at gas stations got longer, people complained and sometimes cheated when they were "rationed" (legally limited) in certain purchases.

But as the war continued, President Roosevelt organized agencies to oversee all aspects of home front life—journalism and the media, transportation, production, and science—and most Americans joined in a united effort to win the war. Thanks to the cooperation of government agencies and patriotic workers, the American soldiers were the healthiest, best-fed, and best-equipped fighting men in the war.

If you were a young person during World War II, you still would have followed the baseball season (though with fewer teams and some unfamiliar players). You would have read your favorite comics (Superman failed his army physical because of bad eyesight; his x-ray vision read the chart in the next room instead of his own). And you would have listened faithfully to all your regular radio shows (knowing that they might be interrupted by a news flash at any time). You would have been alarmed to hear about the race riots in Detroit and about the gang of sailors in Los Angeles who attacked Mexican Americans.

But most of all, you would have been proud that Americans banded together to fight what they termed "the good war" for the sake of freedom, not only for Americans, but for our friends abroad. And when someone asked you, "Hey, don'tcha know there's a war on?", you would have said, "Of course I know! I'm helping to win it!"

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