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| **OBJECT ID** | 1994.41.17 |
| **OBJECT NAME** | Photograph |
| **OBJECT ENTITIES** | Marina Metevelis, Family (is related to) |

NATIONAL HELLENIC MUSEUM

## RELATED ITEMS

Blanket, 1994.41.1
Assemblage, 1994.41.2
Gown, Baptismal, 1994.41.3.A
Gown, Baptismal, 1994.41.3.B
Bib, 1994.41.3.C
Cap, 1994.41.3.D
Bib, 1994.41.3.E
Bib, 1994.41.3.F
Mortar, 1994.41.5A
Pestle, 1994.41.5B
Link, Cuff, 1994.41.6.A
Link, Cuff, 1994.41.6.B
Stocking, 1994.41.7.A
Stocking, 1994.41.7.B
Shawl, 1994.41.8
Handkerchief, 1994.41.9.A
Handkerchief, 1994.41.9.B
Nightgown, 1994.41.10.A
Pantaloons, 1994.41.10.B
Pillowcase, 1994.41.10.C
Scarf, 1994.41.10.D
Doily, 1994.41.10.E
Doily, 1994.41.10.F
Bootee, 1994.41.11.A
Bootee, 1994.41.11.B
Jacket, 1994.41.11.C
Belt, 1994.41.11.D
Legging, 1994.41.11.E
Mitten, 1994.41.11.F
Cap, 1994.41.11.G
Petticoat, 1994.41.12.A
Cap, 1994.41.12.B
Certificate, Naturalization, 1994.41.13
Icon, 1994.41.14
Icon, 1994.41.15
Purse, Change, 1994.41.16.A
Purse, Change, 1994.41.16.B
Coin, 1994.41.16.C
Token, Tax, 1994.41.16.D
Coin, 1994.41.16.E
Coin, 1994.41.16.F
Coin, 1994.41.16.G
Coin, 1994.41.16.H
Coin, 1994.41.16.I
Coin, 1994.41.16.J
Coin, 1994.41.16.K
Coin, 1994.41.16.L
Pad, Hot, 1994.41.18
Pendant, 1994.41.19
Chain, Key, 1994.41.20
Clasp, 1994.41.21

## OBJECT DESCRIPTION

A black and white formal portrait of two men and two women. The older woman is sitting in a chair in front of the other three adults. She is wearing stripped clothing, and a black shawl. She has her hands crossed and in her lap. The other woman is standing next to her, wearing a black skirt, light colored top, and black floral printed shawl. She has her left hand resting on the other woman's arm. There is a mans tanding next to her with his arm around her shoulder. He has his other arm resting on the older woman's right shoulder. He is wearing a black suit white undershirt, and tie. The other man is standing besides this man, with his right hand resting on the older woman's left shoulder. He is wearing a lighter colored suit and vest with a white undershirt and tie. They are standing in front of a printed backdrop.

## ORIGIN

Marine Metevelis is the director of the cultural center at Tulsa Junior University.
Back in the early '40s, the men were, of course, off fighting the Axis Powers. So, like countless other women, young Marina Balafas became a Rosie the Riveter armed with know how, grit and a pneumatic rivet gun. As the anthemic "Rosie the Riveter" song goes, everyone from the high school-aged Metevelis to stay-at-home mothers were "making history/working for victory" after World War II broke out in a bloodied harbor. But, at least in the beginning, Metevelis' mother, Anna, wasn't much for her baby girl working in the same aircraft plant with, as Metevelis recalled, "all those men." To which her father replied, "Anna, what men? They're all at war."
Exactly. Which meant a teenager like Metevelis could earn more in one night shift than her father, who owned a dry-cleaning plant, could make in a week. Sure, Gus' daughter could help pay for her impending college education, but her father made it clear: "You're going to keep your grades up or you don't work." So with her father's blessing, Metevelis applied for a job at the Wichita aircraft plant, where the hulking bodies of B-17 Flying Fortresses met the wings that carried them into battle. That waiting line seemed to stretch for miles, so Metevelis patiently waited until she got her chance to rattle off her Social Security number and declare, "I'm ready to work."

At that, the interviewer looked over the 5-foot-1, 97- pound brunette and asked, "How agile are you?"

Confused, Metevelis replied, "What do you mean?"

The interviewer clarified, "Do you do any climbing?"

"I climb trees," Metevelis said, hoping she had given the right answer.

"Oh, would you like to go to school to rivet?" the interviewer asked.

You bet she did. The next day, Metevelis picking up her gear for a six-week course in all things riveting. By the time she finished, Metevelis wore the coveralls of a rivet inspector. Then, for more than a year, Metevelis regularly worked a night shift that started after school and ended at midnight. After work, Metevelis often carpooled home, where she stayed up to finish her homework. Each shift, Metevelis found herself crouched in the B-17's "blisters," the site where machine gunners would sit while they blasted enemy aircraft. It was her job to make sure every rivet —ranging from the size of a nickel down to the head of a thumbtack — didn't offend her sensitive right index finger and thumb. If she felt the slightest flaw, Metevelis snatched a red pencil from her apron to mark the faulty rivet for replacement. Although Metevelis' inspection job usually kept her from riveting, she would, on occasion, fill in for an absent employee. That didn't happen much, though. After all, it was wartime and, well, the pay was just too good for those women.

As for the men at the plant, there weren't many—only high school boys, old men and 4-Fs. Before work one day, a Metevelis clad in her work coveralls and saddle oxfords, strolled down a Wichita street with a group of friends. At one point, a friend pulled out a camera to snap a picture of the girl, who wanted to immortalize that moment by standing next to a hunky soldier featured in a grocery store ad. Growing up, Metevelis always favored the tall and handsome boys, even though she was always eyes-to navel when they danced. Eventually, Metevelis found a hunk worth holding onto for some 60 years. His name was Don Metevelis and he was a character. Actually, she hated that Tulsa boy in the beginning —he was such a "smart-aleck," the girl thought. But, in time, the cute soldier, who pined for a pretty Kansas girl doing a man's job, convinced both the beauty—and, more importantly, her mother—that Marina Balafas should become Marina Metevelis. And they needed to get it done in a hurry; he was soon heading off to war.

After their justice-of-the-peace nuptials here in Tulsa, Metevelis finished high school in Kansas and quit her job at the plant. Then she set about following her man from one Army camp to another, even though that meant living in rented bedrooms, basements, attics, etc., while her beau lived with his men. At one point, the new bride and another Army wife rented a shed behind a goat farmer's chicken coop. The next morning, they both woke up covered in lice.

In the following decades, Metevelis raised a family with the smart aleck who survived Omaha Beach on D-Day to spend his life with a real-life Rosie the Riveter. These days, Metevelis, whose husband died in 2003, spends her days working at TCC and sometimes reminisces about life on the assembly line at various local speaking engagements. She has so many stories about those days, but she's able to sum up that moment in time when she lost her fingerprints but did her part in a war that claimed so many lives, including that of her 18-year-old brother, Paul, who died during the Battle of Iwo Jima.

"I think of all things I ever did in my life, that was my proudest," Metevelis said. "Being able to be a Rosie the Riveter—that, to me, was like I had really given back."

Marina Metevelis' father-in-law, George Themistocles Metevelis migrated to the United States in 1902 from Mikromani (Kalamata.) One of eleven children, he learned the shoe repair trade, and went into business. Later he opened up more shops in various Missouri cities, which he turned over to various family and friends who arrived later. In 1910, he married Helen Sikiotis from Parori (Sparta) in New York.

Marina's father Constantinos Mpalamas came from Stefani, Corinth to the US circa 1906 on the Star Shipline. He stayed in New York as a young boy and went into business in Kansas City. He opened the coffee ship in the Liberty Hotel in downtown Kansas City next door to President Harry Truman's haberdashery. He met Mr. Truman, they became friends and together attended Kansas City University evenings.

## CITATION

Photograph, *National Hellenic Museum*, https://collections.nationalhellenicmuseum.org/Detail/objects/. Accessed 11/10/26.