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WWII Red Cross worker to meet artists adapting her letters for the stage

"My War" part of 2008 Minnesota Fringe Festival

MINNEAPOLIS – A World War II-era Red Cross worker is seeing her diaries and letters come to life at the 2008 Minnesota Fringe Festival. "My War: From Bismarck to Britain and Back," presented by Klatch Productions, is an adaptation of Ruth Christianson Register Coleman's letters home and her mother's diaries kept from 1943 through 1945.

A small reception for the now 91-year-old Coleman is being held after the performance of "My War" on Sun., Aug. 3 at 2:30 p.m. The performance is at Theatre de la Jeune Lune (105 N 1st St, Minneapolis); the reception, co-sponsored by Alliance Française and the Northstar Storytelling League, is at Alliance Française Minneapolis/St. Paul (113 N 1st St, Minneapolis).

The performance features Coleman's accounts of the first party held in a French town after the Nazi army fled, streams of POWs coming through Sens, R&R in Cannes and Bastille Day 1945.

Sara Boyle Trautner of Klatch Productions said, "Mrs. Coleman's letters take us into the war as she was experiencing it through loss, joy, camaraderie, hard work and love of family. This is her story, but it speaks for so many others of that time. It's a gift to give voice to these words."

Coleman lost her husband in May 1943 and joined the Red Cross Entertainment Division to set up "Aero Clubs." Her 79 letters home were saved and discovered after her mother's death in 1966. Those letters and the mother's own diary were transcribed by Coleman's daughter, Tina Coleman Woods. The texts are now part of the North Dakota Historical Society's collection.

Both Coleman and Woods are in the Twin Cities for the annual reunion of the 492nd Bomb Group. Although the bomb group's reunion and Fringe start on the same day by coincidence, both the performers and the subjects appreciate the chance to meet.

"It is an honor to welcome Mrs. Coleman to the Fringe," said Robin C. Gillette, Executive Director of the Minnesota Fringe Festival. "It is important to remember stories like hers, to continually breathe life into them. Art is a crucial tool to maintain those memories and I'm very happy our festival can provide a venue for them."

ABOUT THE SHOW'S HISTORY: Paula Reed Nancarrow, President of Northstar Storytelling League, explains the role that organization had in nurturing this piece: Ann Kilgore Reay, Dorothy Cleveland and Sara Boyle Trautner are all members of Northstar, an organization that fosters the art of storytelling in the Twin Cities and beyond. They first introduced us to Ruth and Tina in November 2006, when "My War" debuted at Northstar's annual Tellabration!™ This is an all day event at Open Book where storytellers from around the state gather together to listen and learn from each other, and to share this art form in all its facets with the larger community. We are pleased to welcome them back to Minnesota.

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ABOUT THE FRINGE: Minnesota Fringe is an 11-day annual performing arts festival. This year, 156 shows are presented at 18 venues throughout Minneapolis from Thurs., July 31 through Sun., Aug. 10.