

I have always loved the way a drama can portray vulnerability and realism to an audience. There is something special about watching characters go through real world problems. They become relatable. I was taken aback the first time I read *These Shining Lives* by Melanie March. I had never heard about Radium Dial or the women that worked there but was appalled by their experience and treatment by the company. In the 1920's and 30's, these four historical women had the "job of the century". Radium was known as "medicinal" and advertised as being in dozens of everyday products. Starting in Orange, New Jersey, the company Radium Dial hired women all over America to paint watch faces with a luminous paint for a high wage. In 1922, the company opened a branch in Ottawa, Illinois when suspicion about the radium paint began to rise in New Jersey. What the women experience in this production is just a glimpse of hundreds of women who suffered from fatal radium poisoning.

Though the circumstances were hopeless, the women were not. Leading the path to justice, Catherine Donohue, Charlotte Purcell, Pearl Paine, Frances O'Connell, and many other dial painters fought the Illinois Employee Act and Supreme Court for better laws in the work force. They were not victims, and they did not give up until they saw victory. Together they changed history.

Though the women who fought Radium Dial have passed away, their stories are very much alive. Thousands of workers are still exploited in giant money-making companies today. With hundreds of factories in America, Catherine's story has great relevance to the twenty-first century. She began the process that would give employees rights for their safety and health, but the story can not end there. Americans need to be aware of working conditions and, like Catherine Donohue, fearlessly pave the way for a better future.

It has been an honor to direct this show and work with a wonderful creative team. A huge thank you to my stage management team and cast for their devotion to this show, the designers who brought the world to life, and the USI theatre faculty who have supported me from day one. God is so good.

I hope you enjoy *These Shining Lives* by Melanie Marnich.