

## THE ELEANOR ROOSEVELT PROGRAM

July 19<sup>th</sup>, 1951

Description: In this segment, ER and Elliott Roosevelt respond to a listener's question on whether or not wives should follow their husbands to their postings in the military.

Participants: Eleanor Roosevelt, Elliott Roosevelt

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[Elliott Roosevelt:] Our question today is one which all of us wish there were no necessity for asking. It comes from the young wife of an army sergeant. "Dear Mrs. Roosevelt, I would very much like to have your advice on the question of wives following their husbands to camp. Many people seem to think that this is a hardship on the husband, that he would feel much better with his wife safely at home. But when it is possible, although maybe difficult, don't you think that it is better for us to be together instead of parted?"

[ER:] That is a [ER sighs] a difficult question to answer, because it really depends so much upon the woman. Uh a man who is going in the service has certain obligations he is obliged to give uh his first effort to the job, whatever it is. If he is new, he's got to learn a great deal from the bottom-up. If he's already got uh some experience and has some rank, he is responsible for the others who have to learn. And unless the wife goes with the uh-realization that where she goes, she is going to be crowded, she is going to find that there are other people who are there too, and that uh housing is scarce and uncomfortable, food may even be scarce because in many of the places around camps, um the stores are not uh prepared for the great influx of people that sometimes comes -- if she is the kind of person who can adjust to whatever the conditions are, who is resourceful enough to find ways of adjusting herself and realizing that she has to do it alone, that her husband can't do it for her, she has to do it, and still can contribute something to whatever time he has free uh by uh being prepared at short notice, to do what he wants, by being able to adjust the family to his particular hours and his particular work, then I think she makes a great contribution by following her husband. But if she can't -- and there are people who just constitutionally can't -- then I think she'd better stay at home because she'll make him more unhappy instead of giving him a little bit of happiness, and she herself will be unhappy eh and that will not make for better relationships between them. Uh so that I-I would say that is something that each individual couple had to settle for themselves, according to their own personalities.

[Elliott Roosevelt:] Well, there are several questions that come to mind in dealing uh with this subject that I'd like to ask you about. Number one, when a young man is drafted into the service and uh has to leave uh his wife uh to go into the service, uh isn't it true that it is, uh if possible, uh advantageous that he uh be able to return to a home, an established home-uh, that he has to look forward to the fact that there is a home to which he will eventually return?

[ER:] Yes, I think that is a great advantage, but when a man is drafted into the service, there are lots of occasions when, of necessity, the home is broken up and the-the family has to go and live with-with other family. I mean with the mother or the father or-or the parents on one side, or the other. Um and I-I don't think you can lay down any rules for this sort of thing because there is a great deal to be said. Camps are places of temptation to young men and there is a great deal to be said for a wife being there um uh to be with her husband. On the other hand um there are these --if-if it isn't going to be a happy thing, then nothing is gained.

[Elliott Roosevelt:] Well, there's a question of uh cost too, uh isn't there? Uh, in most cases, when a young man is drafted and he doesn't happen to have an independent income, uh it means that the uh young wife has to go to work. Um isn't her opportunity of going to work much better in her home community uh than in following her husband and trying to pick up a job wherever he might be stationed?

[ER:] That, of course, is largely a question of the children in the family-y. All these --

[Elliott Roosevelt:] That is the question I was going to come to next.

[ER:] Well, all these-all these questions are-are difficult questions. Sometimes there is a little backlog and uh the family would rather be together until perhaps a man is ordered away eh. That, if it's going to be happy- eh uh I think is-is a wise plan. And um on the other hand, if it can't be done financially, why there is just nothing that um that you can do about that. I mean, if there are children and she has to be near her family so they can be taken care of, and she has to have a regular job, um sometimes she might be able uh to-to pick up a job where he was going to be, and to leave the children with her parents or his parents. [ER and Elliott Roosevelt overlap] Uh but that is only a temporary arrangement.

[Elliott Roosevelt:] Well uh, th-this question of-t his question of children a-as I uh interpreted your original answer of where it is possible, and where they are suit-suited to each other to-to have her follow, I gathered that you meant in the event that they we-that there were no children. [ER: Oh no, I didn't!] Don't you think that [ER: Oh, no.] having children go from uh station to station with uh their husband is bringing them up in a-in an atmosphere of constant change?

[ER:] Most of these children are young. It won't hurt them to change if it is done um easily. If it is made a very great uh to-do, then it will be bad, then it will be. And if-if the woman is resourceful, it can be done. If she isn't, it can't be done. I've seen a great many families in um uh-ar-around the various camps. One family would be perfectly happy, perfectly well organized, the other family would be miserable uh. It's a case of personality, and there nearly always are young children, and-and there, there isn't the question of uprooting them from school, there is just the question of an added burden to the mother. [Elliott Roosevelt: I see] And if she is able to carry it, well, she is able to carry it.

[Elliott Roosevelt:] What about eh uh the whole problem, though, of the proper care and feeding? You mentioned the uh the fact that in many of these camps are located in-- many times in small towns that aren't adequately able to take care of the huge influx of civilian personnel that follows?

[ER:] Well there -- that's one of the things in point. If a woman can think ahead, if she can order uh everything she needs for those children --it all comes in tin cans today eh --if she can order it all and have it all, well uh, that's her own foresight and her own planning. It can be done. And we know now that it isn't important that you have fresh milk for children, they can get on very well on dried milk if you know how to prepare it-it. But again, it's how she plans and how she um thinks ahead!

[Elliott Roosevelt:] Well now uh there is one other phase of this whole question that I would like to take up, and that is uh do you feel that the husband uh having the added responsibility of -- worry of the settling of his family and so forth, do you feel that uh even though the wife may be very resourceful, that it's too uh good for the husband and this new life that he's taking on to have the added worry of uh the uprooting of his family and their resettlement?

[ER:] Well, you're talking Elliott as though everybody that was drafted into uh-the army had a home. Now, a lot of people uh haven't got a home that they're rooted in. There they've got temporary uh rooms, many of them, where they are living while a certain job uh is open to a man. And now um if the woman doesn't put it all on the man, if the woman -- and goodness knows, I saw plenty women in the last war traveling alone with two or three children um who didn't expect to be met when they arrived, and who

expected to -- sometimes the man had been able to locate rooms for them. But they didn't expect to find everything all ready for them when they arrived-ived. [Elliott Roosevelt: Mhm.] And if it's that sort of a woman, um well then it's all-all right!

[Elliott Roosevelt:] Well, what is the government doing to help the uh wives of uh soldiers who follow their husbands to these camps, towards helping them to gain employment if they so desire in connection with the army post, or [Elliott Roosevelt and ER overlap] do they have an employment service?

[ER:] I don't really know, as I would only know uh what it was done in the last war, and then I don't think anything was done because I don't think they had any desire to encourage women to do this. Um They would much prefer to have wo- women stay at home. But I'm not sure that the government is always correct in that attitude. Therefore, I-uh I-I think that it's a thing that a man and woman have to decide for themselves, according to their own um ability to-to adjust. If it's going to be an unhappy thing, much better settle down in one place and stay there. But if it's going to be a happy thing, I think that's fine.

[Elliott Roosevelt:] Well, I must say that I agree with you, and the only reason that I put all these uh questions to you is to try to get as many sides of the answer as possible to give this lady who wrote this letter, and many other young wives who have similar questions an opportunity to have your opinion on the subject and [ER and Elliott Roosevelt overlap] all of its various aspects.

[ER:] Well, I don't know that my opinion is worth much to them, [laughs] but for what it is, I'm glad to give it.

[Elliott Roosevelt:] All right, well I think that that adequately covers our answer to this question, and now I see that our announcer has a word to say and then we will return to our interview of today.

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