

THE ELEANOR ROOSEVELT PROGRAM

January 3, 1951

Description: In the opening segment, ER and Elliott Roosevelt respond to a listener's question about the United States' willingness to work with Indian Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru. In the interview segment, ER interviews Dr. Sydney G. Margolin, an expert on family relations.

Participants: ER, Elliott Roosevelt, Dr. Sydney G. Margolin

[ER:] All right Elliot, what have you got in the mailbag today?

[Elliott Roosevelt:] Well I have a letter here that's ah that asks three long questions from Mrs. Hazel Adams of Malden, Massachusetts. Mrs. Adams writes that because Prime Minister [Jawaharlal] Nehru was quoted as saying that the armaments race to which the United States was devoting most of its efforts and resources was not the way to world peace, the American press is subjecting him, Nehru, to a campaign quote "to discredit Mr. Nehru and everything he stands for in the minds of the American people. Do you agree with that?" And then the second question was "Why did President Truman reject Nehru's offer to try to arbitrate the differences between North and South Korea before a single American life had been lost?" Question number two. Ah question number three is, "I would like to hear the whole case of Mr. Nehru discussed: his basic beliefs, hopes, aspirations for the future as they concern world peace and why, if we are a peace-loving nation, do we officially show absolutely no inclination to cooperate with him?"

[ER:] I think ah you are really speaking without ah a great deal of knowledge because I don't think that Mr. Nehru made any offer of mediation to the United States. If he did it to anyone, he must've done it to the United Nations and it would've been up to the United Nations to make the decision. Now I don't know that he officially ever made the offer, ah but if he did make the offer, the decision was in the hands of the United Nations, not in the hands of the United States.

[Elliott Roosevelt:] Well could you maybe throw a little light for Mrs. Adams on exactly what did happen because the American press as I remember it carried ah very definite statements that Nehru's ambassador to the communist government in ah in China had been ah negotiating on behalf of an arbitration proposal.

[ER:] Well why ah in China uh that must be just lately ah because as far I know--

[Elliott Roosevelt, overlapping with ER:] No, this was before, Mother. Ah--

[ER:] Well but why would he be negotiating in China ah for Korea? Korea is an independent country.

[Elliott Roosevelt:] Ah North Korea ah at that time was on the run and the Chinese communists were ah standing up for the North Koreans and making flat open statements of aggression on the part of the United States--

[ER:] Oh yes, yes.

[Elliott Roosevelt]--into North Korea as well as into Formosa. And ah--

[ER:] Well, of course--

[Elliott Roosevelt:] Nehru was interested in seeking an arbitration of the case not only in North Korea but also in ah our stated position of the defense of Formosa against the North Chinese--

[ER:] Well of course if Nor--If ah Nehru ah asked us, which I don't know whether he did or not because I have no way of knowing. I've not talked to the president and I have absolutely no way of knowing. But if ah Nehru had asked the United States whether he could enter into negotiations with communist China, I think the answer would have been that it was impossible for us as long as Chinese troops were already helping in North Korea ah and they were helping a declared aggressor ah that it would be impossible for us to have any kind of communication with them that if they withdrew and I think that has been stated a number of times, that if China withdrew across the border and of course for a long time they kept saying that they were not helping, that any Chinese soldiers found were only volunteers who had gone in on their own. But it was always said that as long as Chinese soldiers and materials which were Russian-make were found ah in the North Korean area, ah that they were aiding the North Koreans who were aggressors and that until that aid was withdrawn there was no possibility of negotiating with them. It was then finally decided at the insistence of the USSR that when the case was discussed that ah the Chinese communists should be invited to come and state their side of the case. They promptly stated after starting that they did--were not coming to discuss their aid in Korea, they were coming to discuss Formosa and they were trying to make out ah that the situation in Formosa was a situation in which the United States or the United Nations forces, but really in this case the United States, had been an aggressor. The reason for that was that it was our fleet and it was a United Nations action because the British fleet ah British ships joined ours that had cut off Formosa and the announcement had been made that the nationalists on Formosa would not be allowed ah to attack China nor the Chinese communists who attacked Formosa until ah whatever happened in Korea came to an end because it was essential to our operations in that area that Formosa remain neutralized. Now ah one thing must always be remembered that the only official spokesman for the United Nations ah is the secretary general. Ah the only official spokesman for the United States on foreign policy is the president of the United States or the secretary of State. There have been a number of statements made and they are frequently reported in the press so that you do not recognize ah that they are not official ah by people who really speak for themselves or for a group but do not speak for the official policy.

[Elliott Roosevelt:] Mhm.

[ER:] And that is one reason why the press is somewhat confusing and why people like this lady ah have ah difficulty ah in-in their thinking I believe, ah--

[Elliott Roosevelt:] Well do you--

[ER:] This lady is evidently a lady who wants very much to have peace and who is willing to make almost any concession to have peace.

[Elliott Roosevelt:] Well do you think that this lady is wrong when she states that the American press is subjecting Mr. Nehru to a campaign to discredit him and everything he stands for in the minds of the American people?

[ER:] Well I haven't had that impression that they were doing that. Perhaps they are. I only read the *Tribune* and the *Times* in the morning and the *World Telegram* and the *Post* in the evening and it may well be that there are other papers that are doing that. I don't happen to have had the feeling that either of those papers that I read have been doing that.

[Elliott Roosevelt:] Well would you say that our government is showing any inclination to cooperate with Mr. Nehru in his efforts to secure a--a form of arbitration?

[ER:] Mr. Nehru's representative in the United Nations ah has I think been cooperating with our representatives and ah while for a time I think Mr. Nehru was more hopeful than many of the--many of us were ah of the cooperation of both communist China and ah the USSR. I would say now that his representatives were perhaps a little more realistic than they had been to bet help towards that and ah there are a number of things that have helped make them a little more realistic than they once were. They thought, I've heard Mr. Nehru say, ah that he believed no one could be conquered who was not conquered in his own soul, which in the long run is probably true, but ah in the meantime you might be pretty well conquered physically.

[Elliott Roosevelt:] All right then, you would say that as far as the American policy ah the United States policy with regard to ah both the communist China, the North Korean situation, and the Soviet Union that we are following the leadership of the majority opinion in the UN. Is that correct?

[ER:] I should think so. (10:13)

Break 10:13 -10:22))

[ER:] Quite frequently I receive letters from persons seeking advice because they are faced with the problem of family relationships. In-laws, grandparents, and so on. As there is so much behind this very prevalent question, I've invited an expert on the subject to be my guest today. He's Dr. Sydney G. Margolin, member of the psychiatric service of Mount Sinai Hospital. It gives me great pleasure to introduce to you Dr. Margolin.

[Sydney G. Margolin:] Thank you Mrs. Roosevelt, I am very happy to be here.

[ER:] First, Dr. Margolin, can a general analysis of family relationships be made? In other words, can the same principles apply to a country family as to a city family?

[Sydney G. Margolin:] Yes, principally because human beings are the same the world over.

[ER:] [ER laughs] And what happens here ah might ah be just the same in China then?

[Sydney G. Margolin:] Yes.

[ER:] That's--that's something I think we might all remember. Now in your analysis of the child, or the parent, or the grandparent and their problems do you favor the side of the child or the older person as a rule?

[Sydney G. Margolin:] I favor the side of the child principally because I'm interested in the preventive psychiatric aspect of the problems of family life and if we start with the child we start aiming for the future.

[ER:] Well, also I suppose you feel that ah it's up to older people to adjust, they're better able to do it. Is that your feeling on the subject?

[Sydney G. Margolin:] Not so much that. The child is a much more plastic and formative person and has a greater opportunity for development along a variety of lines. The older person is more rigid and frequently cannot be worked with as easily as the child. Secondly, in terms of what the future of our

culture should be, it is always best to start with the child. Of course there is a question of its being a kind of a circle. The parent influences the child, the child will be the parent of the future. You do have to start somewhere in this circle. Usually it is best to start with the child and work with the family when it is indicated.

[ER:] But Dr. Margolin, doesn't everybody in that circle which is a constantly changing circle and yet a static one because there are always parents and always children and always grandparents and so forth. Doesn't um doesn't that mean that all of them have to gain a certain flexibility at each stage as they adjust to their new stage?

[Sydney G. Margolin:] Yes of course. A family is an interdependent and an interacting group of people and working with a child really means also working with the family but the goal of the work should be the child.

[ER:] What really constitutes a family and ties them together?

[Sydney G. Margolin:] A number of biological, emotional, and social ties. The social ties because our culture, our civilization would be unthinkable without our present conception of a family. Biological, of course the fact that there is a mother, there is a father to whom the child--on whom the child is dependent in every material and emotional sense. This becomes a tie that will endure for the rest of the child's life and becomes an example of a relationship which the child attempts to reestablish with all people in the rest of his life.

[ER:] That's very interesting. Well ah it's a curious thing though that when instead of harmony, you get disharmony. I think perhaps the-the greatest hatreds come within the family circle.

[Sydney G. Margolin:] Yes, hatreds that will be projected into society.

[ER:] Into society.

[Sydney G. Margolin:] Yes.

[ER:] So the part of the hatred that is in society can be traced right back to the individuals' lives in their own circles?

[Sydney G. Margolin:] Yes.

[ER:] That's also interesting in view of the condition of the world of today. Well ah now as we look at family life ah there still exists I think, though sometimes it's challenged, ah a sense that the father is the head of the family and the respect for the father is sort of the basis of ah family life. What happens when the child awakens to some of his father's failings?

[Sydney G. Margolin:] There are two very general things that happen which depend upon the way in which the child awakens to the father's failings. If the father because of his circumstances or the kind of person he is has been a remote or aloof father, the child has no conception of what the father is in reality and as a result he carries through the-- for the rest of his life a sense of the father being an all-powerful, all-knowing person. This of course is a sheer fantasy, but even though it is a fantasy it seems to operate within the mind of that individual as if it were a reality. Now to that fantasy he can react in two ways. One, he can submit to it and therefore he becomes a very obedient follower of any leader with whom he endows these qualities of omnipotence and omniscience of all power all knowing, or he can rebel against it and become so to speak a chronic protestant or protestant [uses different pronunciation of the word

“protestant” the second time] and object to any form of leadership, any form of authority simply because of the denial and frustration in his own childhood. Of course this has to be reinforced by other experiences as he grows up, but without this original experience of a remote and aloof father the chances are that he would not react in such an extreme and violent way.

[ER:] Well that is when he never does discover the failings, but suppose he finds the failings and comes to think of his father not as a, ah--

[Sydney G. Margolin:] All knowing

[ER:] A type of God or uh something [unclear term] but as another human being which I think is apt to happen as any child grows up if he knows his parents at all. Then what happens?

[Sydney G. Margolin:] That is a very healthy solution. That is the normal thing that happens to children and all of us. And that is that the child sees the father realistically. Sees him with his limitations, his assets, and liabilities and ends up with an attitude of respect, affection, and a recognition that his father is like everyone else.

[ER:] Then what really ah parents should strive for with their children ah as they grow older is the relationship of a friend, isn't it? (18:14)

[Sydney G. Margolin:] Not quite a friend in the sense that we think of it because there are many things that enter into what is known as a friend. There is a kind of a smothering quality that most of us think about. A kind of do-good quality that goes in being a friend. I think the emphasis--

[ER:] Good heavens, I never thought of that! [ER laughs]

[Sydney G. Margolin:] I think that goes into when one speaks of friendship in an abstract sense. Ah, I think what one, what should go into it is the kind of naturalness that the father should have some awareness of his own limitations as a human being.

[ER:] Of course friendship from my point of view means greater equality. The relationship of a child to its parents means more of acceptance of greater knowledge, of greater experience and traditional respect and love. Whereas a friend is someone you choose for your own particular reasons, as a pleasant companion and a-a person you like to be with and it's always seemed to me that that was one of the things that made for an enduring relationship between parents and children.

[Sydney G. Margolin:] And yet our tastes in our friends are derived from our experiences with our parents. For example, we may grow up and make friends with people who are just the opposite of our parents because of our inner sense of rebellion and defiance, which has been created in us because of our relationship with our parents. Or if the ah more affectionate, the more respectful relationship has resulted, such a child will make friends of people who in some how or other carry out the cultural standards of the family. Our tastes for friends are conditioned by our own relationships in our families.

[ER:] That's-that's interesting. Ah, makes it a little difficult on people who ah didn't um perhaps-perhaps didn't have a close family, were not brought up by a father and a mother. [ER Laughs] How do--how do they do it?

[Sydney G. Margolin:] We have discovered that such children have a difficult time in establishing relationships with people, relationships that one could call friendships. Children brought up in orphanages and institutions of that kind had that difficulty. As a matter of fact, the general trend today is not to raise

children in orphanages but to raise them in foster homes where they can establish these relationships with a family and then set up a set of circumstances which they can use in establishing friendships later on in life.

[ER:] Ah, I think that the mother's ah particular position in all this is very important but I see that our time is running out and I'm going to come back to that because I think probably ah the-the mother's place is one that really ought to be carefully studied.

[Sydney G. Margolin:] Very much so.

[ER:] Well then we'll just have to stop for a minute and come back to this question. (21:30)

(Break 21:31 to 22:58)

[ER:] Now Dr. Margolin, I was about to ask you what you felt was the particular place that the mother filled in this relationship between parent and child and grandparent.

[Sydney G. Margolin:] That's a very provocative and very rich question. In the first place, the mother becomes the standard, so to speak, that the boy, the child who is a boy will seek later on in life when he gets married or when he establishes relationships with girls. It isn't necessarily so that he will seek out someone who is just like mother, but someone who will cause him to re-experience some of the feelings that he had in relation to his mother. If it's a girl, the girl will some how or other take over the ideals which the mother set up in the family and attempt to perpetuate them in her own future family life. The mother also is important insofar as she is a representative of society and brings in the standards of society into the family and a kind of indoctrination then takes place on two levels: one having to do with the organization and the interactions in society, and the other having to do with the nature of family life itself.

[ER:] Well now we've talked a great deal about the mother and the father as-as they relate to the child. We've left this question of the next older generation rather out of it. Now what is the place of a grandparent in a modern family? In the-in the old days a grandparent, man or--grandfather or grandmother ah they were useful because hands were needed and ah, ah work had to be done. That isn't so today. Now what is the place of the grandfather and grandmother?

[Sydney G. Margolin:] Well that's an interesting question because of certain developments that have taken place on account of modern medicine. People live to an older age nowadays and in fact our population tends to be older rather than younger and as a result there are more older people about and therefore a good deal of the responsibility of society is in the hand of older people for that reason. On the other hand, with respect to the family, the older people, the grandparents, become the first boundary, the first reality outside of the intimate association between the child and the parents that the child meets. The first test of the world outside of that relationship and the way in which the grandparents behave and function in that relationship gives the child some idea of what his experiences are going to be outside of the family because also, older people dominate the situation a little more today than they did formerly. Th-Older people hold property, hold finances, hold resources which the younger people will tap and use as the occasion requires. So the relationship between the older people and the younger people is not fundamentally very different from what it used to be. Except that perhaps it is a little more specific with the power, if you can use such a word, a little more in the hands of the older people.

[ER:] You think the power is really actually a little more, I was thinking that in the simpler society ah where the--they often--the grandfather still held the head of the house so to speak and the hou--the families lived together to so much greater extent ah when it was not a question of living in cities,

primarily in large cities. Um, that perhaps the older people, as long as they did live, ah had more authority.(26:05)

[Sydney G. Margolin:] I think that is probably a reflection of the socioeconomic or the cultural standards of the particular family and I should say that that's the difficulty of the kind of discussion we are having. You may ask a question that's based upon a conception of one economic or social level and my answer may be in terms of another, but let's consider it in terms of the middle class. Ah, there at the present time I think that the--that the remarks I made would apply ah in the old days. When I say old days, I mean generations ago, the--the sense of property of immediate real property was much more intense than it is now. Today we tend to have a much greater dispersal of such property. Ah, with a consequent distribution of, dispersal of power, so to speak the power that such property gives. I would say that the--the head of the family, ah the immediate family, is the father and the mother, that is the second generation, but the economic reins may very well be held by the first generation, that is the grandparents.

[ER:] Yes and so ah, their effect upon the child is primarily as they bring the outer world into the child's consciousness.

[Sydney G. Margolin:] One other point in connection with what you just said, if by any chance the circumstances of a particular family are such that the grandparents do have the finances, in other words have subsidized the marriage, it may create confusion in the mind of the child as to who is the father and who is the mother in the sense that the parents of the child are being taken care of the way the children are being taken care of and a kind of curious ah childishness if you like in the atmosphere in which the parents and the children share.

[ER:] That's an interesting thought that I ah never really ah given much thought to before but it would it is advisable that a child should never have that feeling I should think. (28:24)

[Sydney G. Margolin:] I would think so because the personality of the father for example may be very different from that of the subsidizing grandfather, particularly if the parents are young, ah very young, as is so often the case.

[ER:] Now do you think that the modern, progressive education methods are the best methods for bringing up a child?

[Sydney G. Margolin:] My answer to that in general is yes. Principally because the ideal of the progressive education method is to orient the child to his culture as rapidly as possible in terms of his capacities and aptitudes. It certainly is much superior to the method in which the child is passively spoon-fed his knowledge, not according to his ability to learn, but according to some perhaps obsolete system which ah which is based on a rate of learning that no longer exists.

[ER:] Well of course my-my only experience is not purely academic in this field. It's in the watching of my young friends and my children ah in their homes with their children. It seems to me sometimes that a child today is more demanding here and there of his parents than they were uh the generations ago that I represent.

[Sydney G. Margolin:] I think that's probably due to the fact that children today get their education if you like to use such a word as applied to infants a little earlier than they used to get. Children years ago, generations ago were trained rather than educated. Today the ideal of so-called spontaneous development and free expression enters in to it and under such circumstances a child turns with a great deal more expectancy and anticipation to his environment, expects gratifications and information and ah expects that

his demands will be satisfied more readily. And that may very well look as though the child is more demanding and clinging.

(Break 30:33-30:41)

I don't think ah actually that one could generalize about the average middle class where, who do not get exposed to progressive education. They still attend the public schools of the country and the city where the educational procedure is pretty well standardized and not often geared to the individual needs of a child.

[ER:] Well ah I, I know one always thinks of specific cases and I do think families have a very ah unconscious influence sometimes through example on, on ah children. But I've also seen children who seem to um in-in-in families where they were being brought up on a modern supposedly progressive education pattern and where they seemed to be allowed to do things um which in my very backward days ah would not, just not have been allowed. If you didn't, nowadays if you don't like to eat certain things you don't eat them. Well now when I was bringing up children they ate what was good for them [ER laughs] Now that's-that's a slight thing but it's in-indicative I think of modern trends.

[Sydney G. Margolin:] Well even our standards of what was good to eat or what is good to eat has changed--

[ER:] has changed [ER laughs]--

[Sydney G. Margolin:] Yes.

[ER:] That's very true. Ah I Ah wonder if there's one more question we have time for because I think it's an interesting one. What about the parent who does things for the child but always with strings attached even though they may be unconscious strings?

[Sydney G. Margolin:] In general, those strings are good if they are based upon love, affection, and respect. But if those strings are the unconscious effort of the parent to control and dominate and bind the child I think that they carry a lot of risks and dangers.

[ER:] Well ah that ah is of course ah a bad thing I imagine always ah but there's another thing that is bad too and some people I think have it in an exaggerated way. The withdrawal from interfering in the life of the child is that advisable?

[Sydney G. Margolin:] No. That's an oversensitive grandparent who withdraws in very much the same spirit that perhaps a child has a temper tantrum, which is a kind of convulsive withdrawal from the love and the affection and the security of the environment. The grandparent cannot have a temper tantrum but can withdraw with pain and sulking and a feeling of disappointment in the children frequently an unnatural reaction.

[ER:] Thank you very much. It's been a most interesting discussion and I'm so glad you came to see us today.

[Sydney G. Margolin:] Thank you, Mrs. Roosevelt. I enjoyed it.

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