

## TALKS BY MRS. ROOSEVELT

June 23, 1937

Description: ER and Ida Harris (President of the League of Mother's Club) discuss housing problems in the tenements.

Participants: Eleanor Roosevelt and Ida Harris.

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### ANNOUNCER:

The Pond's Program – with Mrs. Franklin D. Roosevelt!

### BARR:

This is Virginia Barr of the Pond's Company, speaking from Washington, D.C., and bringing you – Mrs. Franklin D. Roosevelt! This evening, Mrs. Roosevelt has as her guest Mrs. Ida Harris who lives on the lower East side of New York. Together they are going to discuss what a home and family life are like in a tenement.

First, may I say a word to women who are home makers. How is a woman who has a full-time job of raising two or three small children as well as running a house to find time to keep her skin nice and soft and fresh-looking, the way it was when she first started housekeeping?

Well, the first thing to know is that it doesn't take more than 5 minutes of your time every night to give your skin a rousing Pond's treatment that will invigorate as well as clean it. The same simple treatment with Pond's Cold Cream that is used by lovely women around the world!

Suppose you get a jar of Pond's Cold Cream tomorrow morning and start treating your skin with it this quick and easy way! You won't be disappointed!

And now I have the honor to present – Mrs. Franklin D. Roosevelt!

(ABOUT 8 MINUTES FROM MRS. ROOSEVELT)

### MRS. ROOSEVELT:

Good evening.

In the studio with me, this time, is Mrs. Ida Harris -- who was born and brought up on the lower East Side in New York. Mrs. Harris knows first hand just what living in a tenement means. She's brought up her family there -- and in recent years she has added to her family duties, the job of being an active member of the League of Mothers Clubs. Now she is President of that organization of tenement mothers, all of whom are determined to achieve better homes for their families.

When I was living more in New York and doing social service work there, I knew well indeed the districts which Mrs. Harris knows -- many is the time I have visited people there -- and this evening, we are going to tell you something about living in slums -- and we hope you will see why we are working so hard to make life in them better.

I remember, Mrs. Harris, it was just about a year ago that you came to the White House with a petition for the President.

### MRS. HARRIS:

Yes, Mrs. Roosevelt, a committee of three members from the League of Mothers Clubs went to Washington to bring a very unique document to the President. It was a book of pictures that our mothers had taken in New York for the President to look at. It showed you the conditions of how the people live - the hallways, the public toilets, the sinks - and some of the people and you could see in the women's faces what they are enduring in those houses.

### MRS. ROOSEVELT:

The President spoke of that document – it was an extremely forceful way of presenting your case.

I shall never forget my first visit, as a young girl, to a tenement. I was going to see a woman who had worked for my mother. She had married, had five or six children, and was very ill. I climbed to the

third floor – the hall-ways were dark – the stairs rickety – and the building so badly built that every sound from all the apartments could be heard clearly throughout the house. There was a drunken brawl in one apartment, I remember, and I was terrified. Finally, I got to the right door – and at my knock a child opened a kitchen door – and inside in a tiny hot room off the kitchen was that mother lying in her bed almost wasted away to skin and bones. She told me that her sixteen year old boy had some work through the church and that was all the income the entire family of seven had. And I know of many other similar cases. In your life and work, Mrs. Harris, what have you found family life in a tenement means?

MRS. HARRIS:

It means misery to the entire family. You know, when the children go to school they are taught everything that's fine in life. And once a child starts to realize the good from the bad, and then has to go home to the bad, that child is ashamed of her own home and her surroundings.

MRS. ROOSEVELT:

I know that, for I have heard the same thing from many others. But in the evenings, for instance, what do you do?

MRS. HARRIS:

There isn't anything at all to do. In the winter time, we all live in one room. There's no central heating, and you have to heat up the house by making a coal stove. There isn't any privacy at all. If you want to take a bath in privacy, either you don't take it, or you put the children out in the hall.

If you are sick – you cannot be by yourself ... or keep warm and comfortable. The only toilets are the public ones in the halls – and you catch more cold in going to one of them. My first child died because of those conditions. It got pneumonia, and I had to take it outside, and it caught cold on top of it. That's true.

MRS. ROOSEVELT:

You have other children though, don't you, Mrs. Harris?

MRS. HARRIS:

Yes, two. My boy is twenty one – going on twenty-two, and my girl is nineteen.

MRS. ROOSEVELT:

What do/ the<sup>1</sup> young people do in these homes?

MRS. HARRIS:

They're only in it as little as they have to be, that's all. They try to go away where they can get a little comfort, something nice. Most of the boys go to the pool rooms, and some of the girls go places where they shouldn't go.

MRS. ROOSEVELT:

I remember one of the most pathetic stories I ever heard was told by a man who came down to Washington. He had lived in an inside tenement, and one day, when he was at school with one of his children, his building caught fire. And when he got back his wife and four other children were burned to death.

MRS. HARRIS:

I know that man – one of those children went to school with my girl. We have her picture home. I had the same experience myself, only thank God my children weren't burned to death.

MRS. ROOSEVELT:

It seems to me that a city and its citizens who allow buildings of this kind to exist in it are partially responsible for deaths of this sort.

As you doubtless know, Mrs. Harris, more than fifty low rent housing projects have been built by the government in New York and in other cities during the depression. First Houses on lower Broadway – the Williamsburg Project – another in the Bronx –. Have you seen any of these new housing developments in New York?

MRS. HARRIS:

Yes, I went down to the "First Houses" when they were open. Once in a while I take a walk over to the Williamsburg Project and no matter when you come around, you find groups of people standing around admiring, and you can see everyone is wishing they could get into them.

MRS. ROOSEVELT:

I visited First Houses while they were being built and after families had moved into them. Each apartment there has a kitchen, a living room and bath room, and one, two or three bedrooms according to the size of the place. And there are so many things to make life easier. I remember in the basements, there are rooms for baby carriages, so the mothers don't have to lug them upstairs.

MRS. HARRIS:

We have to lug them upstairs in our house or leave them downstairs to be broken or stolen.

MRS. ROOSEVELT:

And there are playrooms where children can play on rainy days, as well as playgrounds with trees and flowers and benches where mothers can sit and watch their children.

MRS. HARRIS:

Oh, that must be lovely -- our children can just play in the streets -- and they get hurt so often, ~~and a lot of those children have never seen a tree in their lives.~~

MRS. ROOSEVELT:

The rooms are light and have air. There are windows in all the sleeping rooms.

MRS. HARRIS:

And closets. In our places, you have to hang your clothes on the doors or on the walls .... ~~and there's no air, and two or three, sometimes four people all sleeping in there together.~~

MRS. ROOSEVELT:

And they are trying to keep the rent on those places within the range of the people who are now living in the tenements. I understand that the applications for the Williamsburg project went out yesterday -- to 15,000 families. The rent on those apartments will range from around \$4.50 to seven dollars ~~a week~~ [per room per month.]<sup>2</sup>

MRS. HARRIS:

I hope I can get in the Williamsburg houses .... I know some people who are living in places like it now. They can't stop talking about how lovely the rooms are and the comfort they have.

(OVER)

MRS. HARRIS: (CONTINUED)

But, Mrs. Roosevelt, I know you are very much interested in housing, and you travel around the country a great deal seeing the conditions of other places outside New York. How do you find them?

MRS. ROOSEVELT:

Well now, Mrs. Harris, before we talk about the places outside New York, Virginia Barr has a word to say.

(INSERT MIDDLE COMMERCIAL)

MIDDLE COMMERCIAL

BARR:

Thank you, Mrs. Roosevelt!

One of the nicest letters I ever received is from a woman who works in a canning factory in Texas. She says: "I feel I owe a few words of gratitude to Pond's for the lovely compliments I receive. I have 5 little children to bring up and I work long hours, but that does not prevent my regular use of Pond's Cold Cream. I have used it ever since I was in school. And my skin stays young and fresh -- no coarse pores in spite of the heat and steam I work in. I am always recommending Pond's to people who admire my skin."

Now that letter tells you better than I can the rewards of regular cleansings twice a day with Pond's Cold Cream. It doesn't matter how busy you are, because a Pond's treatment takes only five minutes of your time every night. This is all you do. First, clean your skin by smoothing Pond's Cold Cream all over your face and neck, patting it in gently. It loosens every particle of dirt and makeup. You wipe it all off. Then pat in some more -- briskly, to stir up the circulation and tone your skin.

Do the same thing in the daytime before you put on your makeup. Twice a day with Pond's Cold Cream will do wonders for your skin. Get a jar tomorrow morning and start these easy skin treatments right away.

Now, once again, we have the privilege of hearing – Mrs. Roosevelt!  
(MRS. ROOSEVELT RESUMES)

MRS. ROOSEVELT:

In traveling throughout the country, I have visited families and homes of all kinds.

MRS. HARRIS:

Are some of those places as bad as what we people in New York have?

MRS. ROOSEVELT:

People in other cities, both large and small are up against exactly the same conditions you are. Not always as bad, but sometimes worse. Even in the country there are rural slums. I know of a place which might be called “Shanty-Town” right outside the city of Washington, where conditions are appalling. No sewage disposal, no running water, no streets. It’s a wilderness right at the edge of a city, yet none of the space available in a real wilderness.

But on the other hand, some of the government homesteads, show what suburban life may be. Greenbelt, which is not yet open, about a half hour out of Washington, is designed as a low rent housing project, and there any one can live in all the comforts and decency any American family should have.

(MENTION SOME OF ITS POINTS)

[Unclear]<sup>3</sup>

Then at Reedsville, the Arthurdale project, is one where people have single houses and land to farm. I know where the people came from who live there now, and I know what it means to them.

(ANECDOTE ABOUT ONE FAMILY)

MRS. HARRIS:

I guess we women are more interested in housing than the men are. Perhaps a man doesn’t notice all the bad things. But we’re in the house all day. We see everything that’s wrong. What can we do to get better homes?

MRS. ROOSEVELT:

The way we are going to do it is by awakening the public conscience to a realization of what bad housing means not only to those who live in tenements but to the community as a whole.

I think slums are a liability and no city should countenance them. It costs too much to have them. It would be much cheaper to have places where people could live in safety. Fires would not be such a menace. The city would not have to pay such big doctors and hospital bills for people who contract serious illnesses in the slums. The police department would not have such a list of criminals. Children could be brought up to know other diversions than playing gangster in the streets.

Once everyone understands this there will not be the trouble in finding a way by which governments can help eliminate these conditions.

MRS. HARRIS:

I hope we don’t have to wait very long because we’ve been waiting for quite a long time.

MRS. ROOSEVELT:

Is it an ambition of yours—or of people you know—to own your own home?

MRS. ROOSEVELT:

Do you think the kind of a home a man has has an effect on his work?

MRS. HARRIS:

Of course. If he can walk into a pleasant home, he feels as though he really wants to go on living and working for his family. But when he walks into a dirty, smelly, hovel, it seems hopeless, that’s all.

MRS. ROOSEVELT:

I think that is another important point that should be taken into consideration by everyone who thinks about housing. Those who plan cities should plan industries and housing together. ~~Your~~ A worker<sup>4</sup> occupation and ~~your~~ his<sup>5</sup> home should not be too far apart. And his home should be healthful, so that illness does not take him off the job. It should be clean and neat – so he can reflect that cleanliness and be efficient and smart and on the job. It should be in a place where he can enjoy life so that he can go out from it each day feeling that he wants to work to keep it and his family happy.

I think many men would find their way to better jobs and better pay -- and the country as a whole would have better workers -- if the homes in which the workers live encourage their ambitions and hope instead of killing ~~it~~ them.<sup>6</sup>

Mrs. Harris, if you could have a nice little home, would you like it in the country?

MRS. HARRIS:

Oh, no. I don't want to leave the East Side. It's home. I don't think people should be made to move away from what they know. I like East Broadway. I would just like to have better houses down there.

MRS. ROOSEVELT:

I can understand that perfectly.

You told me that you would like to take all people who are against better housing on an inspection tour so that they could see what life in a tenement is like. I think you've shown us all a good deal tonight, and I hope that the few new developments we have talked about will help people realize what improvements are needed, and how necessary they are.

(PAUSE)

And now Mrs. Harris and I must leave you. Mrs. Harris to return to New York -- and I back to the White House to ~~reeeive~~ be present at a dinner<sup>7</sup> the Belgian Premier. Next Wednesday evening, I ~~will~~ shall<sup>8</sup> be in Wilmington, Delaware at my son's wedding, but I ~~will~~ shall<sup>9</sup> be with you, too, to tell you about White House plans for summer vacations ... some of the things we're planning to do, and a few ideas that might interest you.

Good night.

(CLOSING)

CLOSING COMMERCIAL

BARR:

Next Wednesday evening, the Pond's Company will again bring you Mrs. Franklin D. Roosevelt at this same time! Mrs. Roosevelt will tell you about White House plans for the summer. And may I remind you to get a jar of Pond's Cold Cream tomorrow, and start giving your skin those easy cleansing and toning treatments.

Virginia Barr of the Pond's Company, wishing you -- Goodnight!

ANNOUNCER:

This is the National Broadcasting Company.

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Transcribed by: Lee Febos.

Proofread by: Lee Febos, Matt Girardi, Margaret Swenson, Olivia Kinhan, Crystal Brandenburgh, IK David.

Transcribed from a script held in the Eleanor Roosevelt Papers at the Franklin D. Roosevelt Library.

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<sup>1</sup> This is a typed interlineation.

<sup>2</sup> The words "per" through "month" are a handwritten interlineation.

<sup>3</sup> This is a handwritten interlineation.

<sup>4</sup> The words "A worker" are a handwritten interlineation.

<sup>5</sup> This is a handwritten interlineation.

<sup>6</sup> This is a handwritten interlineation.

<sup>7</sup> The words "be" through "dinner" are a handwritten interlineation.

<sup>8</sup> This is a handwritten interlineation.

<sup>9</sup> This is a handwritten interlineation.