

THE ELEANOR ROOSEVELT PROGRAM

July 19th, 1951

Description: In this segment, ER continues her interview with Miss Michael Drury, author of the article "Women and the New War."

Participants: ER and Michael Drury

[ER:] Now we come back to our talk with Miss Michael Drury, who is doing a special set-set of articles on "Women and the New War" for *Good Housekeeping Magazine*. Now, I'd like to ask you about some of the articles you have written, they are entitled "I Live on the Airbase," "I Cook for Seven Thousand Men," "My Husband was Wounded in Korea," which do you consider the most interesting of these particular three, or is there another one you think more interesting?

[Michael Drury:] Uh I think that's awfully hard to pin down, I get so excited about every girl I interview. [Michael Drury laughs] I have a terrible time [Michael Drury laughs]. I think that-uh um the girl whose husband was wounded in Korea is one of the most inspiring stories I have ever heard, because that girl had a very active faith in God, and she said, "I'm not going to um just believe that he won't get well," which is what they-told her the chances were, that-that recovery was questionable. He was in an airplane crash in combat in Korea. And uh she refused to believe it and she said, "I wanted him to get well, and I knew that he wanted to, and I felt that the doctors and nurses in Japan wanted him to, and were doing everything in their power, and I knew that God wanted him to. And my job on this end was to do for others as I felt others were doing for my husband." And she went out and did errands for friends, and helped a friend move, and took care of children, and went to the hospital to see a girl who just had a baby, and uh it worked. It worked beautifully. I can't explain it, she said, "it's not a miracle exactly," but uh the man is back here now and is on the road to recovery." (1:50)

[ER:] My, that is wonderful, is he in the hospital in San Diego?

[Michael Drury:] Uh no he-he's here in this locality. And um he is um uh he's not in the hospital, as a matter of fact they let him go home because--

[ER:] Oh, he's been here? You mean in-in the East, now?

[Michael Drury:] Yes indeed, he's been here six months, and uh he's now out of the hospital, except that he's facing long months of plastic surgery; he had a very serious head injury.

[ER:] That-that so often happens with an airplane accident, I suppose it's been--

[Michael Drury:] I suppose, yes. They-they let him go home as soon as they can. This is wonderful for their moral, you know, and they put them into wheelchairs and scoot them around like little bugs,

[Michael Drury laughs] it's wonderful.

[ER:] Well is she's wonderful now that she has him home as she was when-when he was first-

[Michael Drury:] She's a very terrific young lady. I sat in her kitchen, and heard her talk and I suddenly realized that the power of love is a very great thing, and that these homes are something really worth preserving and worth fighting for. (2:47)

[ER:] Well, I think that probably makes the man um fight because 'tis a wonderful thing.

[Michael Drury:] Well, her um husband's one-one of the--not his commanding officer in combat, but a man who was his superior officer while he was in the hospital, told me that they attributed part of his recovery to his wife's great love and faith and courage.

[ER:] I think that's wonderful, and something we ought to be very proud of.

[Michael Drury:] Yes, I think she should be.

[ER:] She certainly should be. Do you think it's wise for young girls to marry a man who's already in the service and apt to be shipped ought shortly thereafter?

[Michael Drury:] Sure I do, provided-provided she loves him already. I mean if they were going to get married anyway that's one thing; to-to get married simply because uh-a question of there being a shortage of men or some such nonsense, no. Heavens, I don't think anybody would recommend marriage uh on that kind of a setup. But uh if you've known a boy for a certain length of time and-and your parents approve and-and his parents approve, if uh --if you are a young couple, you can't postpone your life, this is the only time we've got. At least, that's what these girls have told me. And um you know, it's an amazing thing to me, they were children in grade school when Pearl Harbor happened. They were in-in the fifth and sixth [ER: Yes] and seventh grades. They were just--they know nothing except this-this time of crisis that we have now. And um if they go ahead with good sense and courage, who-who are we to stop them? I-I-- (4:27)

[ER:] I-I think you're right, of course. Uh I think they're better equipped, just because they have lived in a time of crisis and have grown accustomed to meeting critical uh decisions and situations which were difficult.

[Michael Drury:] That's true. And service wives are half of a team. A man's got to know that his wife can close up the house if she has to, and get the bills paid, and the train reservations made, and the suitcases packed, and get to his-her new--his new station without his help. Not always, not always but sometimes. [ER: But most of the time.] And he's got to know he can rely on her; [ER: Yes] she's the other half of a very important team.

[ER:] Well now, in general, how did you find the morale of the women at all the various places you've visited? Many of them must have gone through the same thing in World War II, so how did you find their morale was standing up?

[Michael Drury:] I found them, on the whole, without complaint, without regrets, without bitterness. By golly, this is their country, and their-their equipped to realized that and-and to handle it. Um I must have interviewed hundreds of women, literally, all across the country and they-- I heard one or two stories which seemed to me legitimate complaints, and-and sometimes the hardships are quite severe but they face up to them, and that it seems to me is a triumph, it's a wonderful thing. It's a whole--

[ER:] Oh, I think it's an enormous triumph, because it's a-it's a-half--a thing you face, is half-way beaten, of course you won.

[Michael Drury:] Well, that's very true and very good advice

[ER:] Well, I'd like to uh go back to the woman that you wrote about, who cooked for seven thousand men. Would you tell us about her? (6:09)

[Michael Drury:] Oh, she is a wonderful person! That is Mrs. Virginia Beetle, and she is in charge of the cafeteria for the workers at Tinker Field, in Oklahoma City. It's near Oklahoma City. [Michael Drury laughs] Um this too is another place that was a piece of grazing land nine years ago, and is now uh a terrific community. I think there are around nineteen thousand employees there. It is a repair base for um Air Force planes. It is run by the Air Force, but the majority of the people are -- the workers are civilians. So Mrs. Beetle cooks for civilians, but she also cooks for General [Fred] Borum who is in charge there, and his staff--I don't know, this runs something over one hundred officers, Air Force officers. And um I have never eaten such institutional food in my life. [Michael Drury laughs] She is a woman who uh says, "There's no necessity for quantity cookery being dull and tasteless," and uh she really puts it into practice. She-she runs this kitchen much as she would run her uh-her own kitchen, and she plans her menus and buys her food and stores it by color. In other words, she'll go out into the stock room, and she'll say, "Well, I see we're low on yellow vegetables." So she'll buy yellow vegetables, and then she plans accordingly. She has a credo, she says, "It's got to look pretty and then you have to back it up with taste."

[ER:][laughs] I think that's quite wonderful, because I do think that when people cook things in enormous quantities they are apt to be tasteless, you feel that they were cooked in a wash boiler, don't you know? [ER and Michael Drury laugh] And then they-they have the-the taste that it has when it is cooked in small quantities.

[Michael Drury] Well, that-that is true, and Mrs. Beetle set out deliberately to overcome that. She said it wasn't necessary, and I think she's right. She um resented having to make pies in big square tins. She said, "Who eats a square piece of pie? It doesn't taste like pie." [Michael Drury laughs] "I want mine wedge-shaped." One day um uh a salesman, bakery equipment salesman, from Chicago, was in the office, and she said, "Large bakeries, big commercial bakeries, make round pies, why can't we make round pies?" And he said, "Well you buy a thing that looks like a clothes ringer and this rings out the crust. Can turn out one crust a minute." So she bought one, and now they are on their second one, they wore out the first one. And she makes round pies, this makes her very happy, [Michael Drury laughs] and it makes the workers happy. (8:42)

[ER:] Well, I can understand that, because, you see, it's more like the food they would get at home.

[Mrs. Michael Duruy:] That's true. They have a retail bake shop in one corner of the cafeteria. Their bakery uh goods are-are so tasteful and delicious that [ER: They take them home.] people buy it there and take it home, to eat it home, at dinner, breakfast, whatever they—

[ER:] Well, I'm- I-I think that's a wonderful achievement for a woman because [Michael Drury: I do too.] I-I know it's not easy to do, I know it's very difficult.

[Michael Drury:] She's been offered uh more money to go other places. She's a very desirable cook. The place where she worked in Oklahoma City before uh Tinker Field came there, before World War II, uh was known all over the city as the best place in town to eat. And um sh-she is often lured by people who say, "Look here," a hotel man and so on, you know, "I'll give you a great deal of money to come away." But she has a son in Korea and a daughter who is married to a medical student at Oklahoma University and has a three months old son, and uh many of the girls on her staff have people in uniform. And she said, "Like any mother, I ask what I can do to help. And it's right here: cooking for seven thousand men."

[ER:] Well, I- I think that's the spirit, which in this country makes you very proud. Now in closing, what is your best advice to women and--in the new war?

[Michael Drury:] Oh, Mrs. Roosevelt, I couldn't give advice. I just couldn't. But I-I would like to say this, that you go through the country the way I did and talk to these people, listen to their stories, and-- I don't know, somehow you are not afraid anymore. You-you-you know that they're living courageously and with a great deal of faith and, I don't know, I think something good comes out of this. There-there's- there's nothing bad about any of it. (10:36)

[ER:] I'm very glad to hear you say, "I'm not afraid anymore," because in my philosophy it's fear that makes us do the silly things. You haven't any judgement when you are afraid. [Michael Drury: I agree.] And so I'm very glad to hear you say that, because if that comes from the young people that you've been contacting then this country is as safe as it could possibly be.

[Michael Drury:] I couldn't agree with you more. I- I think it's just a wonderful, wonderful thing.

[ER:] Well, I'm so grateful to you for coming today, and I want to thank you very much. Our time has come to a close, but I'm-I have enjoyed it, and I'm sure that our listeners have enjoyed this talk, Mrs. Drury.

[Michael Drury:] Well, the pleasure has been all mine, I assure you.

Transcribed from holdings at Franklin D. Roosevelt Library (FDRL)

File(s): 72-30(204) Track 5

Transcription: Melissa Melvin

First edit: Isabel Maier

Final edit: Seth LaShier