

THE ELEANOR ROOSEVELT PROGRAM

October 19, 1950

Description: In the opening segment, ER and Elliott Roosevelt discuss whether or not women can run a household successfully while also working a job that has different hours than her husband works. In the interview segment, ER interviews boxer Ezzard Charles.

Participants: ER, Elliott Roosevelt, Ezzard Charles

[Elliott Roosevelt:] I have a question as to whether you consider that it is possible for an American housewife to have her own business career and at the same time run a household successfully for her husband, especially when the business career calls for working for an organization where the hours of work are not the same as the hours of work for your husband.

[ER:] I doubt very much whether a marriage where both work, but work different hours-- um can be um really successfully accomplished.

[Elliott Roosevelt:] Uh-huh.

[ER:] Uh it seems to me that uh in a case like that, uh the woman would have to decide that she was going to change her work and going to find work where her hours coincided with her husband's. That doesn't mean that there might not be an occasional time when she had to work an evening or work, uh, [Elliott Roosevelt: mm] a day even when her husband uh, [Elliott Roosevelt: well of-] was working differently.

[Elliott Roosevelt:] Well, of course, uh in this modern day and generation where husbands and wives work, lots of times the wife earns more than the husband. So, would it be that the husband would change his hours in that case?

[ER:] No, I don't think so. I think a woman has to make up her mind as a rule um that um she is the one who is going to adjust uh through life. I've always found that that was the only way really uh that um uh that marriage worked. Uh a woman is more flexible as a rule. She learns to be flexible from the time she's a child. And, um if she is wise uh she uh learns also to-to manage other people. And um I think uh it's-it's the woman that has to do the adjusting-- almost always-- if it's going to be successfully done.

[Elliott Roosevelt:] Yes, well, what I'd like to know is uh where a husband and wife are both working and, uh, they have a joint income that is large enough for them to afford children, how can the household be organized uh so that the uh income can still keep on from both of them working and still raise the child successfully? (2:53)

[ER:] Well that of course, the minute you bring children into the picture, the picture becomes more complicated. Um, I don't think a woman can work, um, when a child is a small child because the amount that she would have to pay to really be sure that that child got efficient care-- and even then, it's never the same as if she stayed home. Um now uh of course in the days when you were children uh you had a nurse, but I was always at home too and even then I think it would have been far better if we hadn't had the nurse uh now as I look back upon it. And, um I think that um not to give small children uh th- the daily care uh that a mother gives uh is not a good thing. Now if it means, and I realize it does mean that very often um the parents have to decide to live on a much simpler scale because uh one of them has to give up

her earning capacity-- And that means they think about having children, but I believe that it's better for a few years when you have small children to live on a much more restricted budget and then uh to take it up again when children are able to go to nursery school, and uh then you can have the kind of part time care which you can trust um to deal as you would deal with children. Um that seems to me the only way in which you can really be fair to the children and um having both parents working.

[Elliott Roosevelt:] [interrupts] But you've, you've just stated that you feel that it's important for a mother to be with a child during the very early years while the child is still a baby and uh if I understood you rightly, you said that that once they reach kindergarten age, that you think it's alright for the mother to then start taking up outside uh work again. Uh do do you mean by that that you think that the child, uh, doesn't need, uh, the par- same parental influence and care while it's home?

[ER:] No, but you see uh nowadays, it is thought-- I think even by um doctors, that a child that goes to nursery school is better off than a child that is alone at home. Uh that means the child is gone for a certain number of hours during the day, and it is possible, on a part time basis, to get a college girl or a well-educated person, to come in and be the remaining hours that the child is home-- take the child out and be with it, perhaps get supper for the child until the mother comes home. I think a mother has to, however, be prepared to expend a good deal of her energy if she's going to go to work because she not only has to put in her working day, but she has to be fresh enough not to come home to rest, but to come home to be the mother of a family and even more ready to do whatever the children or the child wants uh during the rest of the waking hours of that child, and she usually has to get up earlier and do the early morning things with the child. Um so, that a woman must have a good deal of both discipline and energy to put through those early years successfully and work. (7:05)

[Elliott Roosevelt:] Well, of course you know uh there are women that think that uh for instance, in those early hours it should be the man that got up and uh did those early chores and prepare the family for, to all get off to work on time and off to school.

[ER:] Well then, then the woman is going to lose um some of the influence and the pleasure. Uh it is true that it can be shared; that, um, the man can do certain things and the woman other things, but I think they have to do it together if they hope to have the child think of the home as a joint home not as a separate thing.

[Elliott Roosevelt:] Mhm. Well uh I think it-- that's a-a very interesting, but what about the couple that have no children and don't plan-- or for some reason or another cannot have children uh do you think then that it is better that the wife work uh uh at a job on the outside than, rather than stay at home and devote her full time [ER: Yes.] to keeping the home.

[ER:] Yes, I think very much better because she can't, with modern, uh, conveniences, it cannot really keep her busy to keep a modern apartment or a small home um and do nothing else. Um if she has occupations that she can carry on at home that's a different thing, but I think a woman needs something to keep her interesting for the man.

[Elliott Roosevelt:] Well now, we've talked about the woman all the way through this, now what about the man? Does he have any responsibilities when he comes home from work with regard to his children, with regard to his wife?

[ER:] [overlapping with Elliott Roosevelt's last sentence] Oh, I think he has very serious responsibilities because uh he will get no joy out of the children unless he is prepared to give them of himself when he comes home and when he is home both morning and night. And, um-

[Elliott Roosevelt:] Yes, but you know the common complaint of husbands is that they come home tired out from the office.

[ER:] [overlapping with Elliott Roosevelt:] Well, so does the woman if she works. [Elliott Roosevelt laughs] And the same thing holds for both. They both have to remember that they have to be able to just take that extra energy out of themselves.

[Elliott Roosevelt:] Well, regardless of whether she works in an office or not, really a woman is working isn't she?

[ER:] Oh yes, she's working and she does all of the work of the home.

[Elliott Roosevelt:] [overlapping with ER] Just in the same way as a man does.

[ER:] She's working, but with modern contrivances, usually it wouldn't keep her busy all day, and if she wants do it. Now it's different, there are some women who are completely contented at home, with just the home work and find enough to do. Um if they keep themselves intellectually alert uh I think that's alright, but the danger of that is that the man will be bored.

[Elliott Roosevelt:] Did you know that you had a grandchild and a uh a granddaughter-in-law that were planning to have six children? They're both working now. [Elliott Roosevelt laughs]

[ER:] Yes, I've heard them talk. [ER and Elliott Roosevelt laugh]

(Break: 10:10-10:32)

[ER:] During the first week in October, some twenty million people saw a young American athlete crowned the undisputed Heavy-weight Boxing Champion of the World. Most of his tremendous audience was sitting at home in front of their television sets. They watched a very tough fifteen-round fight. But it was a match conducted in the best tradition of American sportsmanship. Mr. Ezzard Charles, the man who succeeded Joe Louis to the most highly coveted honor in the sports world, is here with me today. Tell me Mr. Charles, how did it feel to meet the Mighty Joe in the ring? (11:25)

[Ezzard Charles:] Well I had no special feeling about it it was more or less a a routine thing. With me it was just another opponent.

[ER:] Just another opponent. You didn't have-- you didn't feel nervous? You didn't-

[Ezzard Charles:] Well, with every fight, uh, Mrs. Roosevelt, there is some tenseness; it's like a football player or basketball player just before the game. It's that tenseness, but there's never any nervousness or fear.

[Elliott Roosevelt:] Well, uh uh Mr. Charles, I'd like to ask you a question. I, uh, read that for many years that you considered Joe Louis to be, uh, almost your idol. Uh didn't uh that make it just a little more difficult going in the ring to face him?

[Ezzard Charles:] Well no, uh it's true that that Louis uh is my idol. And I imagine millions of other American boys, but oh at the time uh [clears throat] I said that, said those words, uh, it was before the match was signed for me to fight. Uh I still, although I I won the match over Louis, uh, I still hold high regards for his past performances in the ring. Uh but still in all I couldn't let that overshadow uh uh my try for the heavy weight crown.

[Elliott Roosevelt, overlapping with Ezzard Charles:] You, you felt, you felt pretty confident during your period of training after you signed for the bout that you could take him when you got in the ring.

[Ezzard Charles:] I felt confident, but I-I didn't have a feeling that, uh, I knew that I would win, it was no feeling, that's what I-I felt that, if I put my best into, uh, my training and had the faith in uh the fellows who were working with me [Elliott Roosevelt: Mhm.] uh I believe that uh I would emerge triumphant and uh I did just those things and I was lucky enough to win.

[ER:] [laughs] I have to be perfectly truthful with you, I have never seen a fight of any kind either on television or in-in any actual uh being there so uh.

[Ezzard Charles:] Well, [interrupts] well, the next time, the next time, uh, we have a fight or near wherever you are, I will send you, uh, uh a few tickets and, and

[ER:] [interrupts] I-- it isn't it isn't a question, I don't think I'd be a good person to have tickets because while I realize very well, um, the, that there are tremendous number of fine points that one should understand, I've heard people talk about it enough, and I know that there's a tremendous amount of skill that goes into it, and and beside the the training, uh, the physical training and the hardening, but um, I-I just have a feeling I probably wouldn't enjoy it very much because the, I would worry all the time as to who was getting hurt! [ER and Elliott Roosevelt laugh] That that would be my reaction. (14:08)

[Ezzard Charles:] Well, that's, that's supposed to be the thrill of it all is, is when a man is knocked out or or he's helpless that he can't help himself it-it seems brutal-- I mean to talk about it, but to actually watch a match you will see uh the skill and the sportsmanship that's displayed in a boxing match and-and I do believe that you would enjoy one if you, whatever, take the time out to see one.

[Elliott Roosevelt:] Well Mother, I think that I should uh sort of bring you up-to-date a little bit on the boxing game uh I do follow it, and I'm very much interested, and I'd like to tell you that uh our new world's champion, Mr. Ezzard Charles is known as one of the cleanest fighters that there is in the game today.

[Ezzard Charles:] Thank you Mr. Roosevelt.

[ER:] Well, I know that this famous fight at Yankee Stadium lasted for the full fifteen rounds, and um I know too, because you see I've been pretty well uh uh told about this fight. I've heard great many people talk about it, that, uh, you and Joe seem to be pretty evenly matched, um, for a few rounds. I wonder if you can tell me um if while a fight goes on, there comes a moment when you begin to know that you are going to win. (15:28)

[Ezzard Charles:] Well, I-I've never-- I've never experienced that feeling of-of knowing that I'm going to win or the-the time-- well in this fight, uh, it was a little difficult than some of the others that I've had, but uh I-I knew that I had won the fight, uh, when they had sounded the gong for the fifteenth round and uh and uh the announcer, he uh came to my corner and he raised my hand and says the winner and new heavy weight champ. Well, I felt definitely then I had won. [Elliott Roosevelt and ER laugh]

[Elliott Roosevelt, laughing:] You were sure by that time.

[ER:] [unclear terms under Elliott Roosevelt] At that moment you certainly would be definite that you had won.

[Ezzard Charles:] Not, not before, I mean lots of things happen in fights.

[ER:] You don't ever, you-you didn't ever have a time before that that you felt you had won?

[Ezzard Charles:] Uh, like I said, I mean, I feel confident at all times doing a fight even though sometimes it-it seems it's a trouble I mean I'm in trouble uh but I feel confident, but I never uh anticipate uh who should emerge victorious.

[Elliott Roosevelt:] I'd like to ask you a question. How many, uh, fights have you had in your career?

[Ezzard Charles:] I I really can't say off-hand. I have a record, but I-I don't, I don't remember.

[Elliott Roosevelt, overlapping with Ezzard Charles:] You don't remember the record.

[Ezzard Charles:] No, I--

[Ezzard Charles's manager in the background:] Close to 75.

[Ezzard Charles:] Maybe.

[Elliott Roosevelt:] Ah, that was-- that was Ezzard's manager speaking up from the sofa over here and he said that uh Ezzard had close to 75 matches.

[Ezzard Charles's manager] Between 75 and 79 to be correct.

[Elliott Roosevelt:] Between 75 and 79.

[Ezzard Charles:] I probably had I probably had more matches than than uh that the going record [Elliott Roosevelt: Uh-huh.]--you see because uh I-I uh come through the amateurs.

[Elliott Roosevelt, overlapping:] You fought in the Golden Gloves didn't you?

[Ezzard Charles:] Yes I did, and uh I probably have more than what he say. [Elliott Roosevelt: Mhm.]

[ER:] That's a great um that seems to me a terrific number. Doesn't there ever come a time when, when you, um, just don't feel like fighting, when the hour of the moment comes when you should.

[Ezzard Charles:] Well I'm never [clears throat] felt like not fighting at that time, that's [Ezzard Charles and Elliott Roosevelt laugh]

[ER:] [Over Ezzard Charles] Never felt like not fighting!

[Ezzard Charles:] that's a bad time to start feeling that this isn't the time to fight.

[ER:] Well, that that presupposes that you're always in very good condition doesn't it?

[Ezzard Charles:] Well, I feel good at most of the time, but there are times, I mean fighters are human-- I mean we have uh the likes and dislikes like uh other people. Uh the time uh that you're speaking of is doing training. That's uh a time when you-you just don't feel like going and-

[Elliott Roosevelt:] You really hate to go through all that grind.

[Ezzard Charles:] That's right and you, it's a, it's a drive and you just drive yourself out and sometimes, uh, in training and preparing for a fight it's just a religious thing. You do it because you know that you have to do it in order to become ah to become a winner.

[Elliott Roosevelt:] Mhm. (18:05)

[ER:] Uh, It's very strict isn't it, the training, I mean you have to um, uh, do exactly what you're told for that period.

[Ezzard Charles:] It's, it's strict to a sense, uh, but if you box as long as I've been boxing and start when I started, I mean it's a thing that's a habit with you. I mean, the type of life that a fighter lives it's, it becomes a habit and so it's not so strict. [ER: because--] You more or less, or, look forward to training because it, the time you are in training you feel better physically.

[ER:] You do.

[Elliott Roosevelt:] Mhm.

[Ezzard Charles:] You, you're relaxed in training.

[ER:] Well I know only about um uh what uh school boys and college boys uh uh do. I've see my own boys in training for rowing races, or playing football, and I can remember um how they would um uh feel that it was a terrible nuisance they couldn't uh uh do so many things, they had to eat certain things. They couldn't uh uh do anything that was just uh, lay down and of course, the only, the only real knowledge that I have of um, watching sports where people might get hurt-- while watching polo games or football, or um, seeing people row when they get uh, very tired rowing-- I've always felt that was probably the worst of the sports in that way because it does strain hearts sometimes. But I um I know that all the years I watched my children play football, I was always much more worried as to who was going to get hurt than I was as to the fine points of the game and who was really going to win the game! [ER laughs]

[Elliott Roosevelt:] Yes, and I think it'd uh-- probably if you sent, uh, my mother tickets to your next fight, that she'd spend her whole time, now that she knows you-- worried uh if you get a cut on your eye, or one of your eyes gets swollen as it did in the Louis fight. She would be much more worried about that than anything else.

[Ezzard Charles:] Mr. Roosevelt, it's a good feeling to know that I would have on my side. [Elliott Roosevelt and ER laugh]

[ER:] [ER laughs] Well that's very nice.

[Elliott Roosevelt:] Well, that's wonderful.

[ER:] Well, I always used to say that uh every autumn I saw um, somebody in the hospital as a uh, as a result of some of these sports. I didn't know whether it was worthwhile or not. So now back to Elliott.

(20:37)

File(s): 72-30(7)

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