

## THE ELEANOR ROOSEVELT PROGRAM

December 15, 1950

Description: In the opening segment, ER and Elliott Roosevelt respond to a listener's question about how to overcome political difference between family members. In the interview segment, ER interviews H.V. Kaltenborn, radio news commentator.

Participants: ER, Elliott Roosevelt, and H.V. Kaltenborn [Hans von Kaltenborn]

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(0:15)

[ER:]Have you a question today for us?

[Elliott Roosevelt:]Yes, I do, Mother. I have a question here that I think is a very interesting one, and, which you probably can have several thoughts on. Uh this one states uh differences of opinion concerning politics and political personalities causes deep and sometimes permanent rifts in many families. How should this be avoided and how do you avoid it in your family? It's so hard to forget a political argument.

[ER:]Oh dear, [ER coughs] if it was hard to forget a political argument, then I don't know whether any of us would ever speak to [ER and Elliott Roosevelt laughing] each other again because we argue politically very often just to clear our own minds. Um you remember that I used to argue with Father very often, um-

[Elliott Roosevelt:]Well and certainly all of your children uh argue continuously on practically every political subject there is. [Elliott Roosevelt laughs]

[ER and Elliott Roosevelt overlap]

[ER:]Every political subject and I don't think it ever represents um a thick state of mind. I think we're arguing to gain more light most of the time, or more clarity eh and to get other people's point of view. And I think all political arguments should be entered into from that point of view. They should not be entered into by two people who have a fixed idea which nothing is going to change. Now, it is true that if you have a conviction um it's probably unlikely that you will change, but you ought to be able to argue and get the other person's point of view and even a conviction may sometimes be modified when it's a matter of opinion. I had a lady say to me the other day from a faraway country eh that her opinions might sometimes be wrong but her convictions never [Elliott Roosevelt chuckles] and I wondered whether you could always draw that line quite so clearly as that because um opinions can turn into convictions and convictions can be changed by other people's opinions occasionally and- and hearing them argued. So that I don't think one should enter into the exchange of opinions, whether on its political subjects or any other subject, with a feeling that um you have such a passionate um sense of being right that uh you can't let anybody disagree with you. (2:52)

[Elliott Roosevelt:]Well I think a uh rather a good uh example of a husband and wife who certainly disagreed politically was your grandmother and your grandfather uh during the Civil War years. I think that there's a very good example.

[Elliott Roosevelt and ER overlap]

[ER:] Oh yes, Grandfather Roosevelt uh Grandfather Roosevelt was a Northerner. Grandmother Roosevelt came from Georgia uh and when the war came on- on she had her mother and her half-sister come and live in the North with her down on the old house which is now a museum in twentieth street [Elliott Roosevelt: Mhm.]. And uh the result was that here was my grandfather who didn't go in as a soldier because of his wife's feelings but who organized the sanitary service which was the beginning, really, of the Red Cross [Elliott Roosevelt: Mhm.], who spent all of his time, practically, down in the Union camps getting the men to make allotments of their pay and trying to organize their families' situation while they were gone-on, and at home he knew quite well, though they never mentioned it, that his wife and her mother and her half-sister were sending packages surreptitiously through the lines to the Confederates. [Elliott Roosevelt: Yes.] And [chuckling] yet they never spoke of any um difference of opinion because that did go very deep, you see, so on that subject they left it alone. The only time that a real tragedy occurred, and I always remember Auntie Corinne, Mrs. Robinson, telling me about it when we went up to the bedroom in that old house, which is now anyone can go to it, it's a museum here, where the children used to sleep, and she said that her mother had told her of the time when Uncle Ted, who was I think five years old at the time, was later to be president Theodore Roosevelt, uh was saying his prayers to Auntie- um Auntie Gracie, she was not yet married at that time but we children all knew her as Auntie Gracie later on [Elliott Roosevelt: Mhm.], who was the half-um, sister of my grandmother, and she was hearing his prayers, the little boy said, "Dear God, please lick the Confederates and let the Union armies win!" [Elliott Roosevelt laughs] And she burst into tears and her sister was standing in the door and heard this prayer, came in and said, "Theodore, how could you be so unkind?" And he said, "I thought I could say the truth to God!" [ER and Elliott Roosevelt laugh] (5:39)

[Elliott Roosevelt:] That's wonderful. But, let me, I know of a couple I- uh two people uh who-- whose lives were split apart, who were married, because of a difference of uh political opinion after uh they had visited Germany.

[ER:] Well I know that [Elliott Roosevelt: When--] couple too. I think that's one of the few cases when fundamental beliefs um were the ultimate parting point, but it came out of difference in character, I think. They were two people uh one of them became convinced that the Nazi ideology was a good one, and the other fought it. And, I think, that that was a fundamental difference in character [Elliott Roosevelt: Mhm.] though the split came over uh beliefs. It- it wasn't, uh [Elliott Roosevelt: No] because of the beliefs, it was [Elliott Roosevelt: But there are--] their emanation from the kind of people they were. (6:45)

[Elliott Roosevelt:] Mhm. Uh don't you think though that- uh that where families have, uh, different backgrounds, uh say a husband and a wife and through that a difference of political outlook, that sometimes that can be uh a very great cause for uh grief and lack of understanding.

[ER:] I don't know. I think it depends, now look at Belle-Belle Willard Roosevelt, who'd been brought up in Virginia as a good Democrat and married Kermit Roosevelt who was [ER laughs] certainly the Republican side of my family because he was Theodore Roosevelt's son. [Elliott Roosevelt: Mhm.] And yet there never has been any split in that family on political things and yet they talked about political subjects and argued them very often [Elliott Roosevelt: Mhm.]. But, um I think what happened there was, and what should happen, that you talk, or you come to think in terms of what is best for your country, and perhaps you dissociate yourself a little from your political party [Elliott Roosevelt: Mhm.] and try to think in terms of either party um what actually meets the needs as you see them at the time. (8:11)

[Elliott Roosevelt:] Well, now, I know of a, you know during the thirties many young people were attracted to the- the intellectual side of Communism and I know of uh families where the parents were certainly, uh, conservative in their outlook who were deeply shocked and split as-apunder from their children because their children in school learned to have an attraction for the other extreme.

[ER:]Well I think one of the things you will nearly always find is that if parents are conservative their children are radical when they first grow up, and if parents are more or less radical their children start always by being conservative. But in the long run--not always, but very often--

[ER and Elliott Roosevelt overlap here]

[Elliott Roosevelt:]What, what would you say that you and Father were, conservative [ER coughs] or radical? And we were good children. [Elliott Roosevelt laughs]

[ER:]Well, curiously enough I think that uh we were a very strange mixture, uh I think we were radical in some ways and conservative in others. And um I think it had the- um the effect on some of you of making you slightly radical in spots and yet in other ways rather conservative uh other--it- it differed in, in different characters. (9:34)

[Elliott Roosevelt:]You make us all rather spotty in our convictions. [Elliott Roosevelt laughs]

[Elliott Roosevelt and ER overlap here]

[ER:]Well, I think most people are rather spotty,[ER laughs] they're not all of a piece.

[Elliott Roosevelt:]Well I- I would say though, on the whole that uh politically our outlook is-uh is rather a conservative outlook under present day standards.

[ER:]Well I think that from our point of view, it's more or less conservative but some people in this country would still call us radicals.

[Elliott Roosevelt:]Oh I suppose so ther--certain people who certainly [Elliott Roosevelt chuckles] wouldn't agree with our political views or, but uh on the whole then you feel [ER: That I think--] political arguments should not uh really--

[ER:]I don't think they should ever remain bitter or ever come bet-um, between the members of a family or between friends, but I do, uh think they should go on. (10:30)

(Break 10:30-10:44)

[ER:]Of all the well-known and widely listened to news commentators on radio today, my guest today is really the pioneer in this field. As a reporter and interviewer of leading figures he's recorded world history for quite a few years. I would now like to introduce to you Mr. H.V. Kaltenborn [Hans von Kaltenborn].

[H.V. Kaltenborn:]Thank you, Mrs. Roosevelt. I suppose I've lived long enough to be called the Dean of Radio Commentators.

[ER:]Well, that's a good name to carry, I think. I know, Mr. Kaltenborn, that one of your favorite subjects is free speech on the air. Do you feel that radio allows full free speech for news commentators?

[H.V. Kaltenborn:] Well, if you've read my book, Mrs. Roosevelt, *Fifty Fabulous Years*, which I see you have alongside of you there, I'm sure you'll realize that I did not always have free speech on the air. On the contrary I had to fight uh for a good many years to get it and even now the battle is continuous, I'm sure that uh you have found that uh free speech is not always coded with that generosity which uh we who are on the air would like. There're always various reasons why something shouldn't be said in the way

that perhaps we'd like to say it. And we've got to be considerate of those uh conditions and those circumstances, but the essential thing is that opinions should not be suppressed. That is my feeling eh that is the most important thing that radio should welcome the free presentation of opinion, and I don't mean one-sided opinion I mean every kind of opinion. (12:30)

[ER:]Uh you mean that one should be able to say what one feels oneself and anyone else um having a different opinion should also have that right, according to you.

[H.V. Kaltenborn:]Quite right, I certainly believe that uh that's the fundamental condition of free speech, that it is free speech to answer free speech as well as free speech itself.

[ER:]Well I feel that just now that's one of the most important things to fight for because um I- I think we really built our early years on differences of opinion and having, having a free uh they certainly quarreled over what they thought--whether it was on religious subjects or anything else in those very early days, but it really built the country. Roger Williams went off and various other people and it built the country.

[H.V. Kaltenborn:]Quite right and this is such a marvelous medium for reaching people with different opinions that it offers a wonderful opportunity for the education of people in public affairs.

[ER:]Well now in the early days what was some of the factors which controlled the commentators reporting? I mean what, what really was the--were the things you ran into?

[H.V. Kaltenborn:]Well it took quite a number of years, let me say, ten years after broadcasting began. I began myself in 1922; the first use of radio to broadcast uh politics was the uh report of the Harding-Cox election that went out over station KDKA. I began my commentary on the news and my analysis of the news in twenty-two. I was the first one to editorialize on news over the air. Well, for a decade from that time, there was a great deal of hesitation on the part of radio stations to permit anyone to express opinion. Stations were timid, it was a new medium, they weren't sure that they could tolerate difference of opinion. The stations became alarmed if they would get as much as one letter that objected to what a speaker had said. And so, I was called the wandering voice of radio because I wandered from one station to another, being thrown off from one after another because of my free expression of opinion.

[ER:]Well um I don't believe that would happen today. Now, there is of course, I know, the um difference of opinion on whether over the radio one should just give uh the facts of the situation and not give opinion, but I don't believe that once somebody, like yourself, has established the desire to give opinion and the right to give it, that there's much trouble now. Do you have much trouble now? (15:17)

[H.V. Kaltenborn:]No, I think that uh stations have become accustomed to the free expression of opinion and after all those of us who have established a background, and who have demonstrated that we have the capacity to express opinion, that we are fair, that we are sound in our facts. We have, today a very large privilege of freedom of expression on the air. (15:42)

[ER and Elliott Roosevelt overlap]

[ER:] E-Elliott I [Elliott Roosevelt: Mr.--] think wants to ask you a question.

[Elliott Roosevelt:] Mr. Kaltenborn do you think that uh-uh under our system of the federal government licensing radio stations that there is an ever-present fear on the part of uh the licensees that uh the federal government might step in and uh take away some of their uh of their precious franchise, take away their franchise, if uh they were to allow commentators along one line or- or another line that might prove objectionable to maybe the party in power, we'll say, in Washington at that time?

[H.V. Kaltenborn:] Yes, there isn't any doubt that there is a timidity on the part of radio stations with regard to commentators particularly in campaign time, and also, on a good many topics. For example, one of my uh sources of trouble came when uh the Scottsboro boys case was up down in Alabama, and I went on the air and made the remark that those boys had as much chance for a free fair trial in Alabama as a Jew would have in Hitler's Germany. That was very bitterly resented [Elliott Roosevelt: Mhm.] by large elements in Alabama and the Attorney General of that state approached the federal radio commissions with a request that I be put off the air. And it caused quite a stir and there was a good deal of debate back in fall, but finally nothing was done about it. Well it's that sort of episode that makes stations timid about uh permitting free expression of opinion on a topic as highly controversial as that one. (17:24)

[H.V. Kaltenborn and Elliott Roosevelt overlap]

[Elliott Roosevelt:] Of course, of course I remember uh I've been in radio for quite a number of years too, and I remember a very famous uh case of a radio station owner in uh Shreveport, Louisiana, who used to get on the radio and he used uh his franchise purely and simply to sell his opinions and uh he would tolerate no other opinions on the radio station. It so happened that he had one of the best franchises and one of the best wavelengths in radio in those days.

[H.V. Kaltenborn:] Of course it was a station owner up in Boston who did that during the political campaign and that resulted in his being barred from the air under the famous Mayflower Decision [Elliott Roosevelt: Yes.] which was only recently modified. [ER coughs]

[ER:] I should think that there was room on--in the regular um sort of--um arrangements of programs partly for um certain pro-commentators who would just give the facts of what was going on. For instance, I um am always very busy; I listen to the news every morning at half past seven. I'm not expecting opinions; I'm just expecting to know what's actually happened. And it's uh only a fifteen minute program, and it just tells me what I want to read in the newspapers, that's--(18:49)

[H.V. Kaltenborn, ER, and Elliott Roosevelt overlap]

[H.V. Kaltenborn:] Of course, that is a news program. That's not [ER: yes.] a program of a commentator or of [ER: no.] a news analyst [ER: not at all.] I think the two should always be separated--

[ER:] Always be separate. And--

[Elliott Roosevelt:] And properly labelled.

[H.V. Kaltenborn:] And properly labelled.

[ER:] That seems to me important because [H.V. Kaltenborn: It is important] then um then you are looking--now for instance, if I have an evening, or um a time when I'm not busy [clears throat] then, um I would look for someone that I really wanted to get their ideas and then I'd turn on that program just to get that man's thinking.

[H.V. Kaltenborn:] But you are in a position where you direct the thinking of other people, whereas the great mass of people depend very much on others to do at least some of their thinking for them.

[ER:] Well I don't know that I direct much thinking but I like to get the thinking of a number of people and I like it to be opposition thinking. I like it to be good on both sides so that you get the best of both

sides, but I like to always have it because even if I am opposed I like to know what I'm opposed stated in the best, to what I am opposed, stated in the best possible way. (20:05)

[H.V. Kaltenborn:]Quite right. For years I have always listened to commentators with whom I vigorously disagree because I find that I do get some information and perhaps a greater balance through listening to their opinions.

[ER:]Well, also it's valuable I think because you know your public has two kinds of opinions and, therefore, you want to see how they're going to feel about things.

[H.V. Kaltenborn:]True, if you're too definitely disposed constantly towards one side of opinion I think you lose a large part of your audience and your work is less valuable.

[ER:]So do I.

(Break: 20:36-20:50)

[ER:]Now, Mr. Kaltenborn, in your recent book, Fifty Fabulous Years, you deal with the old League of Nations. How do you think that organization compares with the United Nations, and why do you think that the League failed?

[H.V. Kaltenborn:]That, Mrs. Roosevelt, is a question that I had thought I should have a chance to put to you because I'm sure that you were keenly interested in the old League; I don't remember seeing you at, uh Geneva, but--

[ER:]No I never was in Geneva.

[H.V. Kaltenborn and ER overlap for next few lines]

[H.V. Kaltenborn:]In at the meeting? You never we--

[ER:]Those were the years I had little children; I didn't do much else.

[H.V. Kaltenborn:]Oh, yes. I--That must be the reason because [ER: Mhm. know that otherwise I would have seen you at--

[ER:]Oh I was interested, very interested, but I was never there.

[H.V. Kaltenborn:]--many meetings of- of- of the League. And of course um I know that um your husband was very keenly interested in the League. He was interested uh in it from the beginning [ER: Oh that's] and for a time I think he worked for it and was interested in having the United States join. Later on, I think he became a little less sure that it was the wise thing to do. But if I may answer your question, I think the League differs from the United Nations in that it was never made up of the United Nations. For years the United States was never in it. For years Russia was not in it. Germany was not in it. And consequently, since Russia and the United States and Germany were, at that time, three of world's leading powers, the League never had a fair chance. We could've done much to strengthen it, but because we held aloof, the League failed. I think that's the primary reason why it failed. [H.V. Kaltenborn coughs] (22:40)

[ER:]Well, I- I've had a feeling that of course in setting up the United Nations um those who worked on it had the advantage of having watched what happened in the League and, therefore, trying at least, I don't know if they succeeded, but trying to meet some of the difficulties that they thought had made the League

unable to cope with the situation. And yet I see in groups in this country today, many people who think that we would do better if um we were for, for instance, a, um a League of the Democracies or the Atlantic uh powers, or whatever you choose, in-instead of trying to go on in the United Nations. How do you feel about that?

[H.V. Kaltenborn:]I have, within the last six months, come to the definite conclusion that the United Nations would be stronger and better off without the Soviet Union, and I say that because as I have observed, what Russia has done in the United Nations I see it largely as negative. I note her vetoes, I note her uh constant sabotage, I note her effort to use the United Nations platform for propaganda purposes, and I don't believe that the advantage of having Russia in offsets the disadvantages. I came to that conclusion reluctantly, but, uh I'm now convinced that--

[ER:]Well the only thing that troubles me about that is that you leave out then, not only Russia, but the satellites, now you would leave out China and heaven knows how many more eventually you will leave out, and that troubles me because inevitably it sets up two worlds, and I- I see an ultimate, uh very difficult decision in that, and so that's why I've never quite agreed with you [H.V. Kaltenborn: Yes] on that. And I'm- I'm interested because I don't think any of us are sure of what we, um--what we think today.

[ER and H.V. Kaltenborn overlap here]

[H.V. Kaltenborn:]No, that's--no one can tell just what the development is going to be. Eh I think it's- it's quite proper to be concerned about that, but I don't think that the two worlds would be any more definitely outlined or circumscribed with Russia out of the United Nations than those two worlds are established with Russia in the United Nations. (25:19)

[ER:]Well the only- the only question in my mind um and I- I almost hesitate to say, to say this to you because I know you have a longer uh background of watching world affairs carefully than I have, but um the only question in my mind is the one chance, it's an off-chance I know, but the chance that if you close every bridge uh you cut off all manner, all ways for education, and I can't help believing but that with the intercourse something must eventually seep through.

[H.V. Kaltenborn:]Yes, but uh I should think that things would continue to seep through even though we did not have the United Nations contact.

[ER:]That seems though the- the um best contact in a way because it brings people together regularly and it makes them sit down around a table and argue things.

[H.V. Kaltenborn:]Eh there's a tremendous difference between the Russia to which I first went in 1926, as I explain in my book, the reactions that I got at that time. And then as I kept on going in later years, the difference, how more and more they turned away from any contact with the Western World, and it's my feeling that they are accepting it here in the United Nations only because they feel that it is a very good propaganda platform and has extreme value to them on that account. (26:54)

[ER:]Well it's a propaganda platform though um which um I wonder how much value uh--I mean what they would lose by being out, because they still could reach um the other nations that they now um are primarily making their bid for, the uh Far East and the Near East and Africa, and um I'm afraid they could still reach those nations.

[H.V. Kaltenborn:]I'm sure they could. But, my concern is with the fact that we are giving them a moral standing as a power that is devoted to the causes that are outlined in the charter of the United Nations;

they have accepted that charter and they are supposed to live up to it. We know that they are not living up to it, and while we accept their membership, we do, in a sense, give them standing as a moral power on an equal moral peace-seeking basis with the other nations.

[ER:]Well, how- how would you feel, sir, about um uh new people coming in, for instance, what's your feeling about China? What's your feeling about um Spain? What's- what's your general feeling?

[H.V. Kaltenborn:]Well let me take those two specific countries because I think both raise uh very good issues. In the case of Red China, I would say that a country that is at present engaged as Red China is engaged in aggression against Tibet, in aggression against Indo-China and very definite aggression with troops and planes against Korea, I do not see how we could admit that kind of a nation to the United Nations. Its acceptance of the Charter would be a hollow mockery. Therefore, for me, Red China is out until her policy of aggression is transformed into a policy of peace. As for Spain, the situation is different. Spain is a pro-fascist country in the sense that her leader, Franco, was a leader of the fascist bosses at the time of Hitler and Mussolini. I don't think he's a fascist in the same sense now. I think Franco, thanks to his holding power over so many years, has become much more mellow. I saw him during the height of the Spanish Revolution in 1936, I saw him again two years ago when I went to Spain and had a one-hour talk with him. [coughing]I think he's a man who is more mature, more mellow, less insistent on a fascist point of view, more willing to be on good terms with his people, and certainly eager to be on good terms with the United States and with other countries. Therefore, I think the time has come as we showed in the United Nations by withdrawing from the resolution to withdraw ambassadors, I think the time has come now for us to send back an ambassador; we're going to make loans to Spain, I think it's sound, we need the quicksilver, we need the Tungsten which she can provide. And I think for the same reasons that we deal with Marshal Tito, even though he is a Communist, we should deal with Franco, even though he is a fascist. (30:06)

[ER:]Do you think President Truman's decision to go all out in defense of Korea under the UN banner was a wise move, sir?

[H.V. Kaltenborn:]I think it is the finest decision that he has made in the whole course of his administration, the one that required the most courage and the one that will draw with it the largest consequences.

[ER:]Well, do you think also that Communist aggression in Asia is going to spread?

[H.V. Kaltenborn:]Yes. [H.V. Kaltenborn coughs] Communist aggression in Asia is spreading at this very moment. It will continue to spread until we have administered a decisive defeat.

[ER:] Whew, that means uh that means-- that gives us kinds of visions of a future that in some ways is rather terrifying, but I agree with you, I think we have to be prepared to stand by our guns and oppose Communism wherever we come in contact with it. (31:01)

[H.V. Kaltenborn:]I'm glad you say "stand by our guns" because that's the perfect analogy if you will add "planes."

[ER:][ER chuckles]I certainly will. Thank you so much for being with us today. We have to stop, I'm sad to say.

(31:16)

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Transcription: Katie Woods  
First Edit: Isabel Maier  
Final Edit: Andreas Meyris  
Final check: Natalie Hall

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