

THE ELEANOR ROOSEVELT PROGRAM

May 29th, 1951

Description: In the opening segment, ER and Elliott Roosevelt describe spring in Europe. In the following segment, ER interviews Dr. Martha Eliot, Assistant Director General of the World Health Organization.

Participants: ER, Elliott and Dr. Eliot.

[Elliott Roosevelt:] Mother, today again I would like to deal with uh a topic which has not been written into us by a listener. I'd like to talk to you a little bit about Europe in the spring. Uh I think this is a topic which uh is of great interest to you because I know that before you started off on this trip to Europe, you were very loath to come because you would miss spring at Hyde Park, but uh inasmuch as you have had to make the trip, I'd like to ask you how have you found spring in Europe in the three great cities where you have spent most of your time since you came to Europe?

[ER:] Well, I've spent most of my time, of course, in Geneva and um spring is very beautiful in Geneva. It doesn't make me miss spring at home any more, in fact any less and um uh make me any less uh wish that I could be at home [Elliott Roosevelt: Well, I--] to watch the garden grow, but nevertheless, it does give me great joy.

[Elliott Roosevelt:] Well, after all, you know, at home you have a particular interest in practically every flower and every flower bed and every tree and every bush because you personally have superintended its uh coming into flower so that it has a particular reason, and you can't quite get the same enthusiasm over a bed of tulips grown by the city of Geneva.

[ER:] Well, nevertheless, the city of Geneva and all the people do do a very extraordinary job on the flowers. It's really a combination of colors in those formal beds, they are formal beds, and you couldn't imagine them anywhere except in the environment you find them in, but they are beautiful, and the same thing about the Palais de Nation. All the gardens are really lovely, I think, all these flowers.

[Elliott Roosevelt:] Well, I-I think uh it's worthy of note also that in Geneva you find a city that is so extraordinarily clean. I've never seen a city in uh in its location, of course, its location is extraordinarily beautiful at the end of the lake as it is, and where the Rhone River empties out from the lake and goes on into France and then on into the Mediterranean. I think that it is one of the most beautiful cities that I have ever seen. But I am [ER: But it's a small city.] always struck by the fact that these people have such a tremendous pride in the city that they keep it very clean. (2:54)

[ER:] Well, it's not only that, it's a small city, but also they are a disciplined people. Now look at the park um near that um you know that-- you know that house that's been to the government where the government of Geneva always entertains [Elliott Roosevelt: Yes.] and where we went to lunch. Well, all around that house was a park and we saw a big group of children playing some kind of a game. We saw people wandering all around [Elliott Roosevelt: Lots of baby carriages.]. And lots of baby carriages, but people were sitting on benches and they were walking along the paths. I looked with care and I didn't see a single piece of paper. I didn't see a single uh cigarette stub. I didn't see anything thrown around or left lying on the ground or anything of that sort. Our people just aren't disciplined that way.

[Elliott Roosevelt:] No, that's very true, and I think also the fact that Geneva is an international city and is dependent upon the visitors and the groups that meet there to keep coming back has given the people a

greater responsibility about their city. [ER: Well, the whole of Switzerland.] Although, of course, that's true that all of Switzerland is that way.

[ER:] The whole of Switzerland uh at one time, not as much now, because they're growing industrially, but at one time it was always said that the whole of Switzerland was a nation of hotel people because they had to have guests or they couldn't have lived. Now that is not uh so to the same extent because, of course, during the war they didn't have guests to the same extent and they have developed whole-their whole industrial life has changed. But I do think perhaps it's good for her -- for people when they are thinking about what makes their country attractive to other people and how they can keep it and continue to keep it a place that people want to see, because I've never seen anything as generally well-kept and it must have a good effect upon the visitors because I don't think uh any visitor would dream of throwing anything 'round in Geneva. (5:23)

[Elliott Roosevelt:] Hmm. That's very true. Now we-we have dealt with Geneva and the-and the beauties of spring in Geneva, and-and uh the fact that you were there when all of the flowers first broke in June.

[ER:] And the swans that I loved, with the baby swans out on the lake.

[Elliott Roosevelt:] Oh, I think the story that you uh told to Minnewa [Bell] and myself when we first arrived about the swans and their habits is rather a sweet one [ER: Well that was told to me, I think it's very--] that might be interesting for people to know.

[ER:] Well, I just think that was told to me by someone who had lived there for some time, and who had spent a good deal of time watching the swans, and who said that their formations uh meant something. That uh when two swans mated they always swam together. That when the ladies were looking for a mate, they swam in threes. And when the gentleman was going out, he always swam alone. And then when the babies came, first the mother took the babies swimming on her back and then little by little they were flopped off into the water and they swam around with the family group [Elliott Roosevelt: By themselves.] by themselves.

[Elliott Roosevelt:] And in no time at all, they were swimming in twos and threes and singly. (6:50)

[ER and Elliott Roosevelt laugh] [ER:] No, I think those are lovely, but oh I must say that Paris, of course, just at this time when the chestnuts are in bloom--uh are out--is just wonderful. That's always--and-and London was very lovely with the daffodils and the hyacinths and things out [Elliott Roosevelt coughs] because they do have more flowers, more window boxes, more--perhaps because our hotel was--looked out on Hyde Park, I was more conscious of the park--

[Elliott Roosevelt:] Well, don't you think that the-the city governments uh pay more attention to the beauty of their parks and the planting of their flowers and maybe they hire more gardeners than uh cities in America do. Uh I think that uh our civic bodies could do a great deal toward the beautification of all of the American cities, even if we just took our present parks and concentrated in--[ER: You know Central Park is really very beautiful but I--] That's New York City.

[ER:] In New York City, but I think what spoils it is not that we don't have people to look after it, not that there's not, but just that the people themselves are careless. The people don't take care.

[Elliott Roosevelt:] You think that uh if we plant beautiful uh beds of formal flowers the way they do in European cities, probably all the flowers'd disappear the day after they came out.

[ER:] Well, eh that or else we'd go out the next morning and find that people had put all their um cigarette stubs and uh-uh browse some thing they'd stopped to look at for a few minutes and [Elliott Roosevelt: Mhm.] had dropped a half a dozen papers, and children's toys, [Elliott Roosevelt: A couple of banana peels.] and uh in--it would look uh it would--even though we do have people who go around and pick things up, you can't pick them up fast enough. (8:45)

[Elliott Roosevelt:] Well, in other words uh it all comes down to the fact that the people themselves have to take pride in the community in which they live. And the people of Europe uh through the generations and thousands of years that they've lived in these cities have built up a tremendous pride in-in their cities just as in the same feeling that they have about their own homes. [ER: That's it, I think.] Well, I think that uh to end this discussion that I'd like to touch on just one more point, and that is: going back to Geneva again, I was stuck by the fact that there is still a tremendous feeling toward an American president, uh a man who in our country is all too often not paid too much homage, and that was President Wilson. I was stuck by the great gold ball which uh is in front of the Palais des Nations, which is one of the-uh one of the memorials to Woodrow Wilson, and I wish you'd explain to our audience why the people of Europe look with so much reverence and so much uh affection on the life of Woodrow Wilson. (10:05)

[ER:] Oh well, of course, it was his um Fourteen Points that they feel started um the breakup of German morale and therefore brought World War One to an end, and he was greeted here when he came over here on the uh formation of the League of Nations and the Treaty of Peace like a savior really. He um--and um then, of course, even though we--he-he-he tried to get the United States to understand the value of the League of Nations and he failed, he was taken ill. And um but in Europe they -- having formed the uh-uh League of Nations, they never forgot his influence, and so, oh, you-you see it remembered in naming streets in all kinds of ways in Europe.

[Elliott Roosevelt:] That's right. Well, with that note I think we must go on and let our announcer take over at this time and then we'll be right back with our next feature, our interview with our distinguished guest of today.

[Break 11:18-11:39]

[Elliott Roosevelt:] Again from the Palais des Nations in Geneva, Switzerland, Mrs. Roosevelt brings you a distinguished guest. So far one would assume that only men fall in this category here, but today you will hear from a very eminent and charming lady, closely associated with one of the more important organizations within the United Nations. Mother, will you introduce your guest of today?

[ER:] With much pleasure, Elliott. Dr. Martha [May] Eliot [1891-1978] is assistant director general of a very important World Health Organization, and formerly associate chief of the United States Children's Bureau. Dr. Eliot has just completed an extensive trip in the Far East and besides telling us the work of the World Health Organization, she will also tell us some of the very human and touching things which she saw. I'm very happy to present to you, Dr. Martha Eliot. (12:41)

[Martha Eliot:] Well, thank you, Mrs. Roosevelt, it's indeed very pleasant to be here with you. And uh I'm really delighted to be able to tell you something about the World Health Organization.

[ER:] Well, I'm oh so glad to have a chance to talk to you here in Geneva, Dr. Eliot. Our last uh talk was in New York for a few minutes, and then the other night I had the pleasure of having dinner with you here and that was a very happy evening for both Miss [Malvina] Thompson and for me. Now I have a chance to have you tell our audience in the United States what some of the chief tasks and chief opportunities are of this organization.

[Martha Eliot:] Well, Mrs. Roosevelt, I've been wondering whether perhaps uh your audience wouldn't um like to know a little bit about what WHO is first?

[ER:] I think they would! I think very few people know.

[Martha Eliot:] Uh I-I think that's true. I really would like to tell them that the World Health Organization uh is one of the international organizations--it's the international organization that is devoted to improving the health of the people around the world--throughout the world. Uh the organization is composed of seventy-five government members. Uh it was created in 1946 in New York as a specialized a-agency in accordance with the provisions of the charter of the United Nations. Uh it has been brought into the family of the United Nations organizations by an agreement with the United Nations. Uh the World Health Organization works with a lot of the other specialized agencies, with UNESCO, and with the Food and Agriculture Organization, and with that uh world famous organization called UNICEF. Uh I expect your audience knows what UNICEF is?

[ER:] I'm sure they don't. [ER laughs] Please say what it is.

[Martha Eliot:] Well UNICEF is the United Nations International uh Children's Emergency Fund. [ER: That's right.] And because it is interested in health, the World Health Organization works with it very closely. Uh I think um the audience would uh like to know that the World Health Organization is really recognized by all of these various agencies as the uh directing and the coordinating authority in international health. (15:19)

[ER:] Don't you have a great many nations represented in your staff, Dr. Eliot?

[Martha Eliot:] Yes, um in the Geneva staff we have somewhere between thirty and forty nations represented, and if you count the-the staff out in the various regions it goes up to somewhere--uh at least forty and perhaps more.

[ER:] Well, I-I said that for the reason that I happened to drop in on a meeting of the group this afternoon and I was--in the course of a very few seconds, I met a gentleman from India, someone from Ceylon, someone from Indonesia, someone from Pakistan, [ER laughs] that I felt that if I'd just stayed long enough, I'd meet someone from almost every country in the world!

[Martha Eliot:] Well, that's almost true. [ER coughs] We certainly have a great many different uh-uh nations and countries represented on our staff.

[ER:] Well now, you've just been on a very long trip, and the other night you told me a little about it, and I wish you'd um tell us now something about the things you saw and the things which um struck you as being of tremendous interest to all of us because of the human side which they touched.

[Martha Eliot:] Uh it's true. I have had the good fortune to go on a long trip out in the sou--in the Far East including uh India, Burma, Thailand, Indonesia, um--Indo-China, I should have said not Indonesia--uh over to the Philippines uh down to Singapore and then on home. Uh there were--I saw many different kinds of problems uh. I think perhaps they would fall into several categories: there is the category of the medical need, the need for medical care; there is the category of uh-um preventative care, the kinds of uh services that um mothers and children in different parts of the world uh should get and don't get. Uh I saw uh many needs that um are extremely important because they involve the conditions that lead to the development of the communicable diseases. These countries, you see, that I visited, are all in the tropics, and so the tropical diseases are extremely uh important. Now uh the World Health Organization is um interested in assisting these countries because that really is our job: giving assistance to countries when

they want it, when they ask for it, uh to help them in improving the health services for their people. Uh the problems of uh-uh improvement in uh providing good environmental sanitation, the need to provide good environmental sanitation probably is the most important single need in that part of the world. (18:35)

[ER:] How do you go about anything like that in some of the places that you've just mentioned?

[Martha Eliot:] Well, that is a really uh tre--[ER coughs] it's a very great difficulty. Uh you take for instance, this question of uh water supply. When there is no city water supply, when there's no good city water supply. When in the villages, for instance, there is no common water supply for all the people. There -- what has to be done is to um to dig wells, to put in what are known as tube wells so that the water supply can be provided for the people. Many villages will have just one water tap in the middle of the village. Some um villages, of course, have no sewage disposal. The only way in which uh the waste is taken care of is uh through the development of privies, through the building of privies, or in other very primitive fashion. Now when villages and towns don't have adequate water supply, adequate sewage disposal, then many of the tropical diseases, many of the diseases like typhoid fever, cholera, meh--spread freely and easily. And the result is that uh many people are sick. (19:58)

[ER:] Yes, but the difficulty of--in those areas of the world where education is um at a premium, where the average person in a village -- um let's take China because I know about China. The average person in a Chinese village can't either read or write, so you can't ever put a notice up and say, "This is what you must do." Everything has to be done by word of mouth. Well now I know, and you know too, that there are places in the United States which not so very long ago had situations somewhat similar. I can remember when the sewage ran into the same creek that they drank from in a West Virginia village. And it was nothing that was--and the children played in the creek! [ER laughs] Now you can remember that too! The mining areas. [ER laughs]

[Martha Eliot:] Well, I-I can remember when I was in medical school in Baltimore, the sewage ran down the alley behind the house I lived in.

[ER:] Well now, we, you and I, know that this hasn't been a question merely of um the change in sanitation facilities, it's been a question of education and we had the advantage that we did have an educational system. So that sooner or later, the children were able to tell their parents, if their parents hadn't learned to read um what should be done. But what do you do in the parts of the world where that doesn't exist? (21:37)

[Martha Eliot:] It's a long slow process, of course. The education has to be by demonstration. Uh I'd like to tell you about one demonstration that I visited in Thailand in Siam where children with that really terrible disease called Yaws uh are being treated with the new magic medicine: uh penicillin. Uh there the children uh-uh are suddenly and remarkably being cured of this disease that they have had for many years in that land. Now uh this uh demonstration uh has been possible because the World Health Organization and UNICEF together have been able to bring this new drug to the children of that land.

[ER:] Elliott is looking at us anxiously.

[Elliott Roosevelt:] I hate to interrupt this moment because I'm very much interested in this story, and I would like to come back to it in just a few moments if you and Dr. Eliot will bear with us for a moment, Mother. We'll be right back on the air with your interview with Dr. Martha Eliot on the World Health Organization.

[Break 22:58-23:08]

[Elliott Roosevelt:] And now, Mother, we're ready to start again on this very fascinating interview between you and Dr. Martha Eliot of the World Health Organization, which is coming to our listeners from Geneva, Switzerland.

[ER:] Well, Dr. Eliot, have you got another story because in the first place I wonder, you spoke of a disease called Yaws, but I think a lot of people have no idea what Yaws does to a child. What does it do?

[Martha Eliot:] Well, a child with Yaws um very often has severe ulcers on the skin that involve uh the soft parts of the child's body. Uh it's a very disfiguring disease. Sometimes the ulcers and the uh destruction of tissues actually um so uh disfigure a child that a hand, a finger, may ah-may uh-may ha--shriveled up, or part of the face may be severely uh injured. Now uh one dose of penicillin will almost cure that child. Two doses of penicillin surely will cure that child. It won't restore a nose that's been badly disfigured but it will cure the disease completely. (24:29)

[ER:] And then though, what has to come afterwards, you have to teach really how to prevent the conditions, don't you?

[Martha Eliot:] The most important thing is to eradicate the disease completely, uh and so this demonstration that has been put on by the World Health Organization and the Children's Fund together eh in this community in Siam is undertaking to examine every person in the villages where this disease is prevalent. Uh actually somewhere between 15 and 20 percent of all the people in the villages have this rather terrible disease. Uh and of those who have it, 75 percent are children. Uh the important thing is to eradicate it entirely and that can be done with very thorough work. I--

[Elliott Roosevelt:] Doc-Dr. Eliot, I'd just like to ask you a question. During the last war, I was in Africa uh in the early stages of the war, and in certain parts of uh West Africa uh, for instance, around Robert's Field which is in Liberia, they told us that the Yaws existed in latent form in practically the entire population. Is that correct?

[Martha Eliot:] Well, um I suppose that might be true. Uh usually it doesn't affect more than perhaps half a population. Sometimes it's only-it only affects 5 or 10 percent of individuals, but uh on the average it'll be found, where it is common, in about 15 percent of the--

[ER:] What brings it about? Dirt? Or lack of certain foods? Or what?

[Martha Eliot:] No, it's a germ, it's a spirochete. [ER: It's a spirochete?] It's uh similar to the spirochete that uh produces other treponematoses disea-[ER: Mhm, mhm.] diseases with long names and really serious consequences. (26:31)

[ER:] I see. Well now, tell me a little bit about the type of team--I'm always hearing about the teams that the World Health Organization sends to places. How are they made up?

[Martha Eliot:] Um I'd like to tell you about one team um that I visited just outside Delhi in India. This was um a doctor, a pediatrician, from Finland, a very uh competent young woman. And with her was working a nurse from uh Ireland. Uh this team of two people uh had been sent out to this little town outside of Delhi to uh establish what is commonly called "A Maternal and Child Health uh Nurses Training Demonstration Center." Now uh this uh demonstration is out in the rural areas. It's a rural uh health demonstration. It's attached however to the College of Nursing in Delhi, and it is used as the training center for the nurses who are being trained in the hospital in Delhi. Now this team of doctor and nurse are uh advisors to another team. It is the team of Indian doctors and nurses who are really handling

the program in this little uh village outside of Delhi. Uh they are there to put on as good a program of care for mothers and babies and children as can be put on. Uh the Indian team uh has two Indian doctors, a nurse-midwife, and a public health nurse. Now all those uh professional people together are undertaking to demonstrate, to show, how a good child health program can be carried on in a rural area and the nurses who are in training at the College of Nursing in the city can go out there for two weeks, three weeks, a month, or more and actually learn th-the methods and the techniques of good care for mothers and children living in theses rural areas. Now that's one kind of a team.

Um-uh another uh in uh also uh in a child health field is a team of just one person. Uh I hardly call it a team, but I'd like to tell you about one nurse-midwife uh who has been sent to North Borneo. Uh the government of North Borneo--[ER: All by herself?] All by herself. [ER: She's pretty courageous person.] She's-she certainly is. And uh th-the-the government of North Born-Borneo has a hospital, government hospital, where they are training midwives. And they asked the World Health Organization and UNICEF, again because here we team up together uh to do a job in uh-uh different places. So North Borneo said they wanted to improve their school of midwifery uh because most of the mothers in North Borneo are delivered by midwives. Uh and this nurse-midwife went out there fifteen months ago and I recently learned that her period, her term, has been extended so that she's gone to stay another twelve months. At the end of that period she will have established a school of midwifery. She will have um assisted in training uh enough midwives to take over her work and carry it forwards so that when she leaves a year from now, that school will be able to go forward effectively and the nurses of Borneo will be trained. (30:32)

[ER:] That is really astounding. I just wonder whether--did you meet the little Finnish doctor, the little woman in-in-near New Delhi [Martha Eliot: Yes, oh yes, I certainly did.]--in Delhi? [ER clears her throat] Um I just wonder, Elliott and I last summer were enormously impressed by a doctor at the head of the children's hospital in um Finland where we went--[Elliott Roosevelt: Helsinki.] in Helsinki. He was simply extraordinary little bit of a man. [Martha Eliot: Yes--yes, I know him.] And I just wonder if she'd been trained by him.

[Martha Eliot:] Yes, that's absolutely right. [ER coughs] She was trained by Doctor Ilfa.

[ER:] And he would inspire anyone [Elliott Roosevelt: Doctor Ilfa, that is correct.] He just would inspire anyone. He was marvelous. He told us how during the war he built that hospital with cripples, with anyone he could find, and I-I just wonder that--

[Elliott Roosevelt:] The hospital, which is the largest uh children's hospital uh in Finland, was built entirely with disabled veterans of the war who had lost an arm or a leg and were considered "totally disabled" but who volunteered to work. And he brought about the disabled veterans' rehabilitation because they built that hospital.

[ER:] And how he got the materials, he couldn't tell me, he just said "we got them." [ER and Martha Eliot laugh] That's all he could tell me. [Martha Eliot: That's right] Well that's the spirit, [Martha Eliot: Yeah.] of course, that makes this sort of work possible [Martha Eliot: Yeah.]. I don't personally see how-how you-you'd find people who do this kind of thing because Borneo is a pretty difficult place to go.

[Martha Eliot:] Well, we are just today five more nurses arrived here in Geneva on their way out to the field. Three of them are going to Burma, uh one of them is going, I think, to uh Sarawak, and I don't--I can't tell you just where the fifth one is going. There are seventeen more on their way to come here very soon to go out and join teams in one place or another.

[Elliott Roosevelt:] Are these mostly uh from what are known as the "western nations" these nurses?

[Martha Eliot:] Uh most of them. I think that's right. Some of them will come from the United States or Canada, from uh the Scandinavian countries, from England or Ireland, uh--

[Elliott Roosevelt:] Are the South American countries contributing also?

[Martha Eliot:] Yes, South American countries have been contributing an uh a number of doctors uh for our program, both for the malaria, for tuberculosis. Uh one of the doctors out--that I saw out in the Philippines came from Bolivia, [Elliott Roosevelt: Well, that--] uh and he is a member of a team.

[ER:] Well I know that having been in the--our own Children's Bureau, you've had a special interest in children and just, as we only have a minute left, could you tell us um some special thing that you think outstanding in the children's field of the WHO?

[Martha Eliot:] Well, uh I think there's work that we have been developing with the United Nations' Children's Fund is probably the outstanding work that WHO is doing in the children's field. Uh the-the--you know I presume, that the infant mortality in many of these countries that we've been talking about is extremely high. In some of these countries it is ten times as high as in Norway, Sweden, United States, New Zealand, uh--

[ER:] It's more than that in some countries isn't it? I-I read somewhere what it was in--what the expectancy of life was in Pakistan, for instance, in India, and it seemed very--

[Martha Eliot:] Well, the infant mortality in-in countries of that sort probably ranges around two hundred to three hundred, perhaps four hundred or even five hundred in certain small areas. But [ER: Per thousand?] on the average, say--yes, per thousand.

[Elliott Roosevelt:] Can you see an improvement from the work that is going forward?

[Martha Eliot:] In the-in the areas where these demonstrations that I've been talking about uh-are actually being carried out, there is definite improvement to be found.

[ER:] I just hate to have it come to an end but I must uh bring this talk to an end and thank you so much for being with me.

[Break 35:11-35:28]

[Elliott Roosevelt:] This is Elliott Roosevelt speaking and reminding you that you've been listening to *The Eleanor Roosevelt Program*, which comes to you each Monday through Friday at this same time. Today's program was recorded in Switzerland, and we wish to thank the Swiss Broadcasting System for making their facilities available to us, and also Swiss Air for transporting the recordings.

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