

## THE ELEANOR ROOSEVELT PROGRAM

October 26, 1950

Description: In the opening segment, ER and Elliott Roosevelt respond to a listener's question about the television habits of children and the appropriate age for military enlistment. In the interview segment, ER interviews columnist and socialite Elsa Maxwell.

Participants: ER, Elliott, Elsa Maxwell

---

[Elliott Roosevelt:] Go ahead.

[ER:] Elliott, what do you have in the mail today in the way of an interesting question?

[Elliott Roosevelt:] Well, Mother, I have a-um question here that I think is quite interesting and uh you might uh expound on it a little bit. The uh lady in question uh on uh this particular subject, has written in and asked, uh "Do you think that a teenage girl should be allowed to watch television programs three and four hours nightly? Do you think it will hurt her eyesight and do you think it helps her overall educational outlook?"

[ER:] Well I don't think either a teenage girl or a grown-up person should watch television three or four hours nightly. I uh I--didn't really um believe that there were good programs on that long um but in any case, most teenage girls have to um do their lessons in the evening. They're working uh most of the evening if they're doing at all what uh I remember doing when I was young.

[Elliott Roosevelt:] Yes.

[ER:] And I imagine it hasn't changed very much. In fact, there's much more that a girl or a boy have to learn today than when I was young, so I should think she would need at least two to three hours of work every evening and um that would mean no television during those two or three hours.

[Elliott Roosevelt:] Well--

[ER:] And as to the eyesight question, that I think a doctor would have to tell you. I don't really know. (1:45)

[Elliott Roosevelt:] Well uh going back to though to the question of uh watching for three or four hours and your suggestion that you have to do your homework uh don't you think that uh if the parents uh-uh sort of supervise the schedule, and said uh "this program or that program I think is uh of a certain amount of entertainment value and this program over here is uh one of uh educational value" uh that you could-uh work out a system whereby the children would have an opportunity to watch television and get something out of it?

[ER:] Well I should think it would be a good idea in uh for the people who put on television programs to put on at different times during the day, uh which would perhaps be good times for children, programs for different ages. Now on the question of teenage children, uh usually those girls and boys have a great deal of homework to do, and I would feel that the best thing parents could do would be to perhaps to watch for one good program in the later afternoon or evening, that would really be of interest or of entertainment or

of value in some way, and then I personally would feel that the--uh time for them to uh plan on was Friday evening and Saturday eh because Sunday night a child should go to bed early, uh possibly Friday night they would have to work, but they could work Saturday morning--(3:37)

[Elliott Roosevelt:] Hmm.

[ER:]--If they didn't have other things planned. Um and it would seem to me that it could be planned in that way for teenage children.

[Elliott Roosevelt:] Yes, I see. Well, I-I have the feeling uh having watched these teenagers uh gathered around the television set uh night after night uh that uh they-they do get a certain amount of discrimination as to what they like to look at, and of course, they do have a great deal of fun out of watching the variety shows and some of those other shows, but they're also picking up a great deal of educational uh programs, programs that bring them a lot of knowledge. You'd be surprised at how many of them are- are able to talk on subjects which have come to them as a result of the television programs that they see.

[ER:] Well I have found that um uh in talking to young people, they have much wider general knowledge in these days than we had and um uh I suppose that is because they have a variety of channels for education.

[Elliott Roosevelt:] Yeah.

[ER:] But um uh still I think you require some kind of supervision. Uh Elliott don't you have a message from one of the companies that share this time with us?

(Break 5:06-5:16)

[ER:] And now, Elliott, didn't you tell me you had another question today?

[Elliott Roosevelt:] Ah yes, I do Mother. Uh this question is uh from an old friend of ours, and uh she has one that I think is quite interesting because I imagine that there are quite a number of other people in the uh the same boat that she finds herself. She says about her husband, uh "Do you think that it is right for the Navy Department to call up for active service a man who has been in two World Wars and is a member of the reserve with over thirty years of active experience in the Navy behind him?"

[ER:] Well, I would be very much surprised if a man who had that amount of experience um was really called up. I haven't heard of very many being called who had been in both wars and had that amount of service behind them. Um I- I don't myself think that at present it is warranted uh to do that. If it was an all-out war and every age [Elliott Roosevelt: Yes.] had to be fitted in to a specific job, then that would be quite a different thing. But in the present situation I would not think it was justified.

[Elliott Roosevelt:] Well, that uh of course leads us onto uh the next uh logical conclusion. Uh what about the veterans of the last war who uh are married and have uh children and uh might uh have just started in their business careers in the last few years?

[ER:] Well, I feel the same way about that. I feel that a good many of the veterans of the last war who have uh taken some time to obtain an education and during that time, while they may have married, and they may have one or two children, they have had to live extremely frugally to get through. Now, if they have just got started, and if they are called up, it means that their beginning is so much put off that you wonder whether they will ever get a start. And I personally think that if we are facing a period of our

history in which we have to have um a larger army than we have ever ha-had before, then we should do it in perfectly orderly fashion, and call up, as they have in many countries abroad, a certain number of young people every year for a given amount of service. And um it should be understood that that was a regular obligation and planned for in their educational period, [Elliott: mhm] and it see— would seem to me that if the circumstances are going to be such that we have to enlarge our military forces that that is the only fair way to do it. (8:32)

[Elliott Roosevelt:] Well now, Mother, um that raises uh another point. Uh what about the problem of the uh the boy that wants to become a doctor and uh if he is called up uh into the armed services and his education is uh uh limited during a period of maybe eighteen months, he may be thrown two years behind in getting to be a doctor.

[ER:] That is a very difficult question. And I would almost think that in those cases, they should be allowed to take their preparatory service, I mean what has to be taken in college or university, and then be given some of their practical training after they're taken into the army in the best possible uh hospitals, army or navy, whatever it is.

[ER and Elliott Roosevelt overlap]

[Elliott Roosevelt:] Well now, that raises a very--well that raises a very interesting suggestion that has been made. And that is that uh this question of universal military service be done during the school year, right in school uh similar to the ROTC system.

[ER:] Well, I think that was very much discussed by the Army and the Army eh um and the Navy too, both said that was not feasible, if I remember correctly at the time. Um it may be, I don't know, there may be some change now. But um in any case, I think this is a question to be carefully thought out and discussed, and now, I think that you, Elliott, have something to say again, haven't you?

(Break 10:13-10:22)

[ER:] Today, I'm very happy to have as my guest a friend and a very much travelled lady, who has just returned from Europe, and as I feel, in rather a reminiscent mood, I think she's one of the very best people I could talk to just at the present time. I'd like to introduce to you Miss Elsa Maxwell.

[Elsa Maxwell:] Thank you, Mrs. Roosevelt, and good afternoon, everyone.

[ER:] Well, before we begin to reminiscence, Miss Maxwell, as one columnist to another, why did you give up the one you were writing? It was, I know, very popular.

[Elsa Maxwell:] Well, Mrs. Roosevelt, you've put your finger on the one very tender and delicate spot. I was a columnist for ten years. I really thought for a while, for several of those years that I was good. And I found out that I wasn't so good. It's hard to say that about yourself, and I believe in a certain amount of honesty. I di--I'm not a gossip columnist. I never was, I never could, I'm not interested in the private affairs of my friends, in the human failings of people. I don't want to draw attention to that. I wasn't sufficiently instructed in world affairs, as you have been so ably instructed with your long experience in the White House and with your late and great husband. Thereby, I hadn't that eh incentive as well, or the use-uses of that. Thereby, I fell between two stools, and in these very serious times I did not, and re-I - in fact, I refused to grow into the gossip columnist they wanted me to become, to live on the failings of human nature and the destruction of reputation, which I detest, and I hate and I would not be a party to that, I gave it up. (12:19)

[ER:] Uh that interests me very much because um I can't say that I read your column everyday but I used to read it very often, and I was very much interested in the way you would tell about the people you met who very--almost always were people whose names were in the papers and-and people are usually interested in hearing some little thing, it need not be gossip, it need be just um impressions and uh small things about people that--whose names they hear and whom they don't know and whom they've heard have done this or that or the other thing. And, and then sometimes you would write uh almost a philosophical treatise on um [Elsa Maxwell chuckles] what you felt [Elsa Maxwell coughs] or thought about something that was happening. I thought you put the two together in a very interesting way, and in a way that um I would have imagined would have kept your public. I'm very much surprised.

[Elsa Maxwell:] Well that's awfully nice of you and very generous and very charming of you to say that, but I didn't keep my public and they wanted me to change and they wanted me to become more personal.

[Elliott Roosevelt:] Miss Maxwell, could I interrupt? I'd like to ask you, do you think it was the public so much as maybe the newspaper syndicate or newspaper people who are publishing your column and it was their idea of what the public wanted?

[Elsa Maxwell:] Well, either that, I don't quite know. I enjoyed doing it. I was for ten years-- I wrote a column every day, it's a long time, long period. And I thought it was pretty good, and I found out it wasn't so very good. And I found out that my interests--they wanted me to be more personal, what they call "snappy" [Elliott Roosevelt laughs]. Well I don't know what being "snappy" is, do you, Mrs. Roosevelt? Exactly. [Elsa Maxwell and ER laugh]

[Elsa Maxwell and ER overlap here]

[ER:] No, I don't know what being "snappy," is. And I have an idea uh that um-um it happened--it just happens what particular editor makes up his mind about a thing like that. I should um uh I should be inclined to think that uh one might uh try a- a new audience and- and see a uh--possibly you have such wide knowledge in the field of, of music and--

[ER and Elsa Maxwell overlap here]

[Elsa Maxwell:] Ah yes, that's my favorite sport.

[ER and Elsa Maxwell overlap]

[ER:] And uh art and drama and- and so many things that I think it's just a pity that you can't um give the rest of us some of the benefit of- of a very wide and, and very delightful experience because--(14:58)

[Elsa Maxwell:] Well, I can't tell you how that pleases me to hear you say that coming from you. But they didn't like that so much, they wanted me to be personal, they wanted me [ER: Well, uh--] to tell them why Barbara Hutton was divorcing her fourth husband. [Elliott Roosevelt laughs] And how about Ri-Rita Hayworth's new picture. They wanted to know is she still be friendly with the Aly Khan, to whom she's, at-at the moment married. I'm not terribly interested in those things at all, they're not important today. But they wanted that coming from me as an important thing, [ER: Well, then--] thereby we divorced. [Elsa Maxwell chuckles]

[ER:] Well, I'm very glad you decided not to do that.

[Elsa Maxwell:] No.

[ER:] Well, I'd like to just uh talk a little on- on something that comes out of all of this, I think. Recently, some friends of mine uh were discussing the- the change in the trend of purely social life. Um we all remember in the past there were a great many individuals who had um private homes, big homes, and who gave extravagant dinners and balls and receptions and they were the talk of-of the newspapers and of the town, more or less. Um I'm not talking, of course, now about the public charity parties and that sort of thing, but it seems to me that that type of party has almost disappeared; it's hardly um--you hardly ever read about uh [Elsa Maxwell: No] that in your papers anymore. And I uh was trying to think back it, perhaps the trend um began to change after the First World War. Is that true, do you think? (16:46)

[Elsa Maxwell:] I think it did. I was in England at the time of the First World War and about, until about a year after it where I came back in the end of 1915--1915. And there I went to many great balls by old Mrs. [Ava Lowle Willing] Astor before she married Lord Ribblesdale--was a great friend of mine. She has a great house. All these women in London, Madame [Consuelo Vanderbilt] Balsan, who was then the duchess of Marlborough; she's an American, Mr. Vanderbilt's daughter. All these great ladies gave great parties, to which I went to them all, more or less, and they, led-led a life of, of great elegance, and beauty, and pleasure. And uh all that is gone, completely gone now. It's rather sad in a way, you see.

[Elsa Maxwell and ER overlap here]

[ER:] But it's gone in England and one understands it because they've suffered so much from the war.

[Elsa Maxwell: Yes, of course.] But I think it's gone um and anywhere in Europe it's gone.

[ER and Elsa Maxwell overlap here]

[Elsa Maxwell:] Everywhere, everywhere, everywhere.

[Elsa Maxwell and ER overlap]

[ER:] But I think it's gone here too. (17:36)

[Elsa Maxwell:] Oh, yes, here. Well, I think the night clubs finished that.

[ER:] You do?

[ER and Elsa Maxwell overlap here]

[Elsa Maxwell:] You see-oh, I think the night club took the place of the ordinary or average drawing room. The night club was a place where people can go. They- they were-- had a- they the-- had the advantage of one of the best orchestras. They only paid for their drinks or their meat or their food, or whatever they had. They took their best young ladies or their best young gentlemen, and they had, for, say, twenty-five dollars, a perfectly delightful evening--dancing, pleasure--well to get an orchestra you had to-

[ER:] You can't do it at that price nowadays!

[Elsa Maxwell:][Elsa Maxwell laughs] No, no, indeed not.

[Elliott Roosevelt:] But, Miss Maxwell uh [Elsa Maxwell coughs] you say that it's gone everywhere. I still read in the papers about rather uh fabulous parties that are given on the Riviera and are given at Capri and other places uh on the European continent by Americans. It is true to a large extent uh and sometimes

I read that you have been at those parties. [Elsa Maxwell chuckles] So uh uh do you really think that the private party has gone out all over the world? Or is this sort of a swan song? (18:44)

[Elsa Maxwell:] Well, I don't know. I will always give a party, I suppose, as long as I live. [Elliott Roosevelt chuckles] But my parties are a little bit different because I'm rather spoiled in as I know so many delightful people who entertain for me, who sing for me, all the great artists. And it's easy for me to give a party. It doesn't cost me very much money because I couldn't afford it otherwise. But, in the great, in the- in the great tradition, no, it's a, it's much different now. They're much exaggerated, these parties, they're not at all what you read. I've often given them myself in the last few years. And they're not at all as you would read them to be; they're much more informal and uh- uh, m-mixed and easy, and uh people are not particularly all dressed up. I gave one very beautiful party in the- at the 30<sup>th</sup> uh at the end of the uh- uh the beginning rather of our war in Korea. I gave it in Paris. And I had all the government people there, Mr. [Maurice] Petsche—who now is in this country today—the Minister of Finance, Mr. Jules Moch, who's the Minister of- of at that time Interior and now of Defense, Mr. Herve Alphand, the Minister of Economics. They all came with their wives, I had ambassadors; it was a lovely, lovely party. We ended up that evening, as serious as the moment, in being a sort of a- an affirmation of friendship between America, France, and England, and it was a little more than a party but it was a good party.

[ER:] Well that's worthwhile. Now, I think Elliott wants to say something.

(Break 20:14-20:19)

[ER:] Miss Maxwell, we were in Paris, too uh just at the very- very beginning, and we had a feeling of um almost a lift in- in Europe uh at the de- when the decision was made that um aggression would be stopped by the United Nations. But you were there later, and I think your party must have come later uh when reverses had set in, and I know that um that must of had a great effect on public feeling, and I'd be interested to know how you felt it with your friends.

[Elsa Maxwell:] Well, Mrs. Roosevelt, that's an interesting question because you know I've gone over every year since the war and I see very many of the people in the government and people who fashion the- the- the um French uh government and this time the confidence they had and the feeling of-of uh of-of s-not only self-confidence but, but certainty as to the outcome was very extraordinary. I don't think the same panic at all, or hysteria, or fears were experienced in France today could be experienced here from what my friends tell me in my own country. They had great confidence in us and uh they, they were, they were self-confident. They've done very well, as you know, with the Marshall Plan and the European Recovery Program, and I've found a great confidence over there. (21:50)

[Elliott Roosevelt:] You mean in spite of the reversals?

[Elliott Roosevelt and Elsa Maxwell overlap here]

[Elsa Maxwell:] In-in spite of the reversals.

[Elliott Roosevelt:] Well that's very amazing.

[Elsa Maxwell:] A great confidence and a certainty that I hadn't experienced in any year until then.

[ER:] That's very encouraging because I think it shows a belief in the solidarity of the nations in the United Nations,--[Elsa Maxwell: Oh yes.] and a feeling that now it's established and [Elsa Maxwell: Yes.] it's going to, um, be the instrument that they hope for.

[Elsa Maxwell:] Oh there's no question, I mean it's- our policy has uh produced fine results, splendid results, if we just have time, and I believe we will, to complete it. [ER: Well-] And uh they- they- they-- we are the leaders today of the world, and they recognize it as such. [ER: Well, that's-] We are the leaders today of the world, America, it's an extraordinary thing, and they look forward, they respect us, they like us, and they trust us. (22:42)

[ER:] I'm glad to hear you say that they like us and trust us because I'm always a little nervous um when you are the people who give, nobody in the world likes to be always on the receiving end, [Elsa Maxwell: Yes.] and I always am afraid that people will um get tired of being in that position and will suddenly dislike us just for the mere fact that we are able to give and they are not as yet able to make returns.

[Elsa Maxwell:] Well, I think in the beginning that was felt-- less so now.

[ER:] Less so now.

[Elsa Maxwell:] They're very nearer to us now. And I know them awfully well. In Italy, the same experience I had. I have even been to Spain lately. In England, of course, you know that very well too. But I think that uh they realize for the first time they really realize that what-- our qualities and they realize the unselfishness that is back of all this. For the first time now [Elliott Roosevelt: Mhm] [ER: Oh.] they really- really feel that we are rather unique people.

[ER:] Well I'm very much relieved because um if that is felt by the people in the government [Elsa Maxwell: Oh yes.] and the people on top, I think eventually all the people will have that feeling, because um somehow um there is a sense of friendliness I think uh among um the French people and ourselves [Elsa Maxwell: Oh yes.] that is traditional and um if we [Elsa Maxwell coughs] bolster uh that with a real sense that we'd come to their aid in their hour of need, I think that will be uh a very great leap.

[Elsa Maxwell:] Well, I think if you take Mr. Schuman's Plan for Germany, it's very hard today for any Frenchman whose land has been invaded three times in- in less than a hundred years, to regard any kind of German armament with unadulterated pleasure hardly [Elliott Roosevelt : hm] and yet today they do. And I've talked to General [Alphonse] Juin, General Georges Catroux oh and General um uh General oh the splendid man, [Joseph-Pierre] Koenig. I know them all very well; I've talked to them. And they all agree, that with a certain modicum of restraint, a-uh Germany should arm. Which is amazing coming from the French. (25:02)

[ER:] Yes, I must say, uh-

[Elsa Maxwell:] And that will really go through.

[ER:] Even I find it um I find a certain amount of it, of course, um um essential. But I-- even I want to put the brakes on it.

[ER and Elsa Maxwell overlap until Elliott Roosevelt speaks]

[Elsa Maxwell:] Oh yes, oh yes.

[ER:] Before it gets to a certain point.

[Elsa Maxwell:] One- one always does.

[Elliott Roosevelt:] You know-- you know, I'd like to ask you a question, Miss Maxwell. When uh Mother and I were over there with uh my two children this summer uh we had the opportunity of meeting a lot of heads of state and we did uh meet a few of the crowned heads in Europe. And I believe you were in Paris when uh Queen Juliana of the Netherlands came to Paris and [Elsa Maxwell: Yes, I was. Yes.] some of the other royalty [Elsa Maxwell coughs] that are left in Europe today. What do you feel uh that the general attitude of Europeans is toward royalty today?

[Elsa Maxwell:] Well, I think that they realize that a great many of the royal heads are a little-- their crowns are a little askew, you might say [Elliott Roosevelt and Elsa Maxwell chuckle]. I know some-- it all depends now, there's uh I shouldn't speak unkindly of anybody, including a royalty, but I don't very much admire King Farouk of Egypt, for instance. I think he's behaved-- could have behaved a little more restraint and a little more good than he has done, but I do admire very much the ex-King Umberto of Italy, who's a great friend of mine. Now there's a man who is quiet, subdued, and, uh lives very si—very simply without any kind of unpleasant publicity. There are two crowned heads; one uncrowned, he's an exile, the other crowned. [Elliott Roosevelt: Mhm.] So you can take your choice between the two, it depends on the way they behave themselves. [Elliott Roosevelt: Yes.] Personal Conduct. I very much admire the King of Italy; I don't very much admire the King of Egypt, that's all that's different. (26:56)

[ER:] Well, uh you know, this whole question of- of, entertainment, I want to come back to for one minute because I have felt for a long time that I really was out of touch with um um that type of social life just because my own um life was crowded with uh uh other things, and I didn't have much chance to even see some of the people that I'd grown up with and- and uh had known very well as a young girl. And-- but I do get the feeling that uh there is not uh as much interest among people in their own personal amusement. They're more con-concerned or perhaps touched by the state of the world. What do you think about that?

[Elsa Maxwell:] Well, I only know that I am myself. But I think being what I am, all my life being a person who liked people, who liked the gayer side of life, um various amusements. I've always made my own ideas about parties; I always liked something that was new and different. I never liked the old routine. I still don't like it. For instance, I made an assertion once, I was on lecture tour, ten thousand ladies I think were there. You've lectured there also, Mrs. Roosevelt; I think I followed you there to St. Paul, Minnesota. [ER: Oh, yes.] And with that enormous auditorium, huge.

[Elsa Maxwell and ER overlap here]

[ER:] Oh yes, that's a terrifying auditorium! (28:30)

[ER and Elsa Maxwell overlap here]

[Elsa Maxwell:] Isn't it? It was either twelve or ten thousand women. I--we were four of us, I think, you and um, myself, and two others, I-- Eve Curie I think was the other, and then one other, whom I forget. And I remember when I said one- I have a question period, and they said, "tell me, Miss Maxwell, what is your recipe for a good party, what you consider a good party?" And I answered very quickly, without thinking, "never invite anyone to whom you are in any way obligated." [Elliott Roosevelt: Oh, that's-] Well there was a hush of horror fell over the entire audience, because that implied, as it would, people only entertained to pay back debts. That has always been the old-fashioned theory as gone right through life. But I disagree completely with that. And I never ask anyone to whom I'm obligated, that might have something to do with an extra sense of independent uh magnetism that comes in the air. I don't know, it's my own idea, but I've always been like that.

[ER:] Well I wonder if you are um really obligated um to anyone simply because you have gone to dine or to lunch or to have a- a good time with them. I never feel uh obligated if I've done my share of uh [Elsa Maxwell laughs] enjoying the party. Then I feel I've paid my bill.

[ER and Elsa Maxwell overlap here]

[Elsa Maxwell:] When you, oh when-- wherever you go you do more than your share, but-

[Elliott Roosevelt:] You know, I'd like to just tell you uh Miss Maxwell, Mother's quite a party-giver too. Uh we uh go up to Hyde Park on weekends, and in the summertime we're there more than just on weekends, and the—it's a standing joke in the family, whenever we sit down at Mother's house and there are less than twenty people at the table, it's a very small party.

[Elsa Maxwell and Elliott Roosevelt chuckling]

[ER:] Well, he's just making fun of me [Elsa Maxwell: No, no.] because uh I like to have people I'm fond of around me. A but I agree with you. I think there's less of formal entertaining today and more of informal, and I like that much better.

[ER and Elsa Maxwell overlap here]

[Elsa Maxwell:] Oh, I like it so much better because it makes all the difference in the world. And you even see that today in the chancelleries of Europe and the embassies, everywhere. Our own embassy, as you know, Mr. and Mrs. Bruce, it's like going to see them in their own home today. It's cheerful and cozy and homely and [ER: I know-] delightful.

[ER:] Well that's what I like.

[Elsa Maxwell:] And I know that you like that, and I like that too.

[Elsa Maxwell and ER overlap here]

[ER:] And thank you, Miss Maxwell. Thank you for being with us this day and giving us your advice, your knowledge. (31:04)

(31:08)

---

Transcribed from holdings at Franklin D. Roosevelt Library (FDRL)  
File(s): 72-30(12)

Transcription: Katie Woods  
First Edit: Megan Woods  
Final Edit: Andreas Meyris  
Final Check: Natalie Hall