

THE ELEANOR ROOSEVELT PROGRAM

October 26, 1950

Description: In this segment, Elliott Roosevelt and ER respond to a listener's question about the books and articles that ER reads.

Participants: ER, Elliott Roosevelt

[ER:] What've you got in your pile today, Elliott? (00:07)

[Elliott Roosevelt:] Well, Mother, I have a great many letters here, but I've selected one that I think that a great many listeners might like to hear the answers to. Uh this letter is from uh Mrs. Rachel Edwards of New Brunswick, New Jersey. And she asks uh, "I think the people who listen to you would like to know sometime how you go about selecting the books and articles that you read in order to be so well informed on so many different things. It is so easy to read books that are biased, many not noticeably, and thus we form biased opinions. Now that I've had the time, I've always wanted to read. It is difficult to know just where to begin."

[ER:] That's a very difficult answer because -- I mean that's a very difficult question because um I just uh read whenever I can and whatever is at hand to read. And uh I think I rely very largely on what I have read in the past. For instance, I read a great deal more as a child when I was alone and um spent days in reading and that um gave me a background of all kinds of--we had a very- very varied library in my grandfather's-- grandmother's house and um I was allowed to just browse. Nobody ever said I couldn't read this book or that book, and I read a lot of books that I didn't understand, but nevertheless they all left something that um meant something to me. And then uh I read-- later I had a lot of different kinds of friends, and everybody was always suggesting different books, and I read all kinds of different books and um began to choose between them. And I always read a variety of periodicals. I never try and read just one—

[Elliott Roosevelt:] Let me try to pin you down a little bit here, you [Elliott Roosevelt clears throat]--the substance of your statement so far is that you read a variety of books and a variety of periodicals. Let's start on the periodicals. What kind--uh what are some of the periodicals that you particularly reach for in order to get meat and substance.

[ER:] Oh dear! [ER laughs] Well, I think that to some people, probably, they'd seem rather uh--well, I don't know. I read *The Atlantic* and *Harper's* usually for one type of thing and uh *Foreign Policy* uh magazine which comes out as a-as a quarterly. Eh then I read uh *The Nation*, and I read uh the *Saturday Review of Literature*, and um I look at *Life*, and I look at *The Saturday Evening Post* to see what people say they don't agree with me very often.

[Elliott Roosevelt and ER laugh] And I—

[Elliott Roosevelt:] And uh *McCall's* and *Look*?

[ER:] Yes, and oh *McCall's* and *Look* and—

[Elliott Roosevelt:] And- and uh—

[ER:] Um but those I don't read every--I always read, of course, uh the Sunday *Times* um magazine and um uh -- but you know, I don't read everything in any of them. I just pick out things. I glance through the whole [Elliott Roosevelt: But I--] magazine.

[Elliott Roosevelt:] I think that one of the things about keeping up with current affairs uh that you should uh tell the audience about is the fact that you do read, uh from my own personal observation, you read at least two morning papers and one evening paper—

[ER:] Two evening papers.

[Elliott Roosevelt:] Two evening papers. And uh that makes four papers a day, and you read them rather carefully. Although I must admit that when you get over to the financial and sports pages that you seem to move through those a little more rapidly, but uh the news sections and the literary and the theater pages and the things of that kind, you seem to pretty well know what's in those.

[ER:] Yes, I even do read the financial pages. Not as carefully as perhaps you do, but I do read them.

[Elliott Roosevelt and ER laugh]

[Elliott Roosevelt:] Well now--well now, let's get back to books again. Uh do you-- do you--you like to read the --I know that you like to read the current fiction uh when uh you feel that it sounds as though it was interesting.

[ER:] Yes, I like to read fiction very much. I like fiction. And um I often think that novels um can tell more of life than uh even um even biographies, because novelists will very often write the truth about people, which if they were writing about people and giving their names they couldn't ever write, [Elliott Roosevelt: Yes.] so that I-I think a really good novel is uh--often will stay with you for a long while.

[Elliott Roosevelt:] So in actuality, one might say that the novel--the good novel is at the top of your favorite reading and--and books, and then next to that would probably be the good biography.

[ER:] Yes, I think so.

[Elliott Roosevelt:] And uh what about uh historical and uh-uh geographical travel books, are you interested [ER: I am not--] particularly in those?

[ER:] I am not, especially. I think now, I am interested in um political uh-uh opinion books, I mean books about um current questions, to a certain extent. But I would, again, not read steadily through uh any one of those books, probably. I would um pick out the things that I thought promised to be interesting. I'm afraid I'm a bad person—

[Elliott Roosevelt:] Let me ask you what you mean by "interesting." So you just mentioned books of political opinion. Do you like to read books of political opinion that are at great variance with yours?

[ER:] Oh yes, oh yes! (6:50)

[Elliott Roosevelt:] For instance, let's say for the sake of argument uh that uh Mr. [Thomas] Dewey or Mr. Herbert Hoover were to write a book, would you immediately read that book very carefully?

[ER:] Um I don't know that I would read um uh--yes, I think I would read uh not very carefully, but uh you've chosen two rather bad examples. For instance, I would read anything um that um Mr. [Elihu] Root had written. [Elliott Roosevelt: Oh you mean the--] And um—

[Elliott Roosevelt:] The old senator?

[ER:] The old senator. And I would read anything that Mr.[Charles Evans] Hughes had written.

[Elliott Roosevelt:] Well, you're going reaching way back in ancient history. After all, there's a lot of live people who don't agree with you [Elliott Roosevelt laughs].

[ER:] Well, um don't you think that Mr. Hoover and Mr. Dewey are perhaps a little ancient history too?

[Elliott Roosevelt:] Why, Mother, you can't say things like that! After all now, they're extremely [ER: They're like me!] s pry!

[ER:] They're like me! Oh Mr. Dewey is younger than I am in his body.

[Elliott Roosevelt:] Why now, Mother, I think that's dreadful of you to say that. You're practically classing yourself right into uh senility when you put yourself uh -- and you say [ER: Well, I am getting--] that they're old.

[ER:] I am getting very old!

[Elliott Roosevelt:] But you like to express an opinion.

[ER:] Well, surely! And I like--uh I'm sure I want them to express their opinions, but that doesn't mean I have to read them most carefully. I can read them uh [Elliott Roosevelt laughs] I can read them quickly! [Elliott Roosevelt: I think--] And I know them pretty well, [Elliott Roosevelt laughs]and you see one reason--the reason I said I didn't read political opinions too--books on political opinions too carefully eh is that you so often know just what certain people will say. And I could almost write some of these books.

[Elliott Roosevelt:] You could.

[ER:] And therefore I can just skim through them and get the highlights here and there [Elliott Roosevelt laughs] you see. And then whenever I see something really that I think is interesting, I stop and read it all the way through.

[Elliott Roosevelt:] Uh-huh. Well now, let me ask you this: would you-- [ER: But I will tell you this. That is I have] read all the way—

[ER:] I have written--I have read and uh quite um with a great deal of interest and quite a good deal of what Mr. Hoover have written. And I should be truthful in saying that I've read some of the things with great interests.

[Elliott Roosevelt:] All right, now what about uh books like the classics? Do you still like to pick them up and read them?

[ER:] Oh yes, I love to pick up some.

[Elliott Roosevelt:] So you do re-read a great many classics?

[ER:] No, I don't read a great many--I don't read a great deal of anything now except government papers. [Elliott Roosevelt laughs]

[Elliott Roosevelt:] All right, well then I like--I think that one thing--point that you ought to bring out is the fact that you talk to such a great deal of people that you do get a great deal of information from just meeting people.

[ER:] Well, that's one way that leads me to read. I talk to people, and then they mention things, and then I either read um a digest of what they have spoken of, or I get someone to read it and give me a digest, or I really read it if I get the time [ER laughs]. (10:05)

(10:08)

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