

## THE ELEANOR ROOSEVELT PROGRAM

November 23, 1950

Description: In the first segment of the Thanksgiving episode, ER and Elliott Roosevelt discuss what they and their listeners can be thankful for. In the second segment, ER reads a Thanksgiving poem written by her aunt Bye (Anna Roosevelt Cowles).

Participants: ER, Elliott Roosevelt

---

[ER:] Good day to you all, and may your Thanksgiving Day be one of real thanksgiving happiness. It seems to me that in spite of the anxieties that surround us at the present time, we should be able, all of us, to find some things to really bring us joy. I know very well that there are many people who are moved to great anxiety in these days, anxiety for loved ones who are far away, anxiety for loved ones near at hand if there is something wrong. But nevertheless, as we look at the world, I think there are real things for which we can thank uh the creator, who—to whom we are always grateful on this day. We have had good harvests; we live in a country which has been singularly blessed in not suffering from the ravages of war as other nations have been forced to suffer. I think, perhaps, the thing we should be most grateful for this year is that, out of our abundance, we have been able to help those peoples in the world that have suffered far more than we have in material ways and spiritual ways. That is, perhaps, one of the first things we should feel thankful to God for on this Thanksgiving Day. Then there are many other things, but I think perhaps I better leave you to think of some of the special ones, because each one of us has some special thing in their own lives that they want to say a special prayer of gratitude for having on this Thanksgiving Day. And now, I think, I should let Elliott have the microphone for a few minutes. (2:44)

[Elliott Roosevelt:] Mother, did you know that there are Thanksgiving days in other parts of the world, that this is not purely an American custom?

[ER:] Oh yes, of course I did! It goes back all the way to the early Greeks!

[Elliott Roosevelt:] Yes, it goes all the way back to the early Greeks. As a matter of fact uh we've been uh doing a little bit of uh research on the subject in the office and- and uh in the last few days looking up uh about Thanksgiving.

[ER:] I'm sure you've found in your mythology maybe two goddesses? (3:24)

[Elliott Roosevelt:] Yes, uh, we've found out about the uh the uh feast and honor of Ceres, the goddess of growing vegetation in in the er-early Roman days and uh and the feast in honor of Demeter, goddess of the fruitful soil of agriculture and of the fruitfulness of mankind.

[ER:] Now, I was brought up to say Demeter, now which is right? [Elliott Roosevelt:] Well, I'm sure you're right. [They both laugh.] (3:56)

[Elliott Roosevelt:] Now what about the, uh, what do you--we've- we've they have Thanksgiving in Canada too, you know?

[ER:] Yes, but theirs, theirs is a harvest festival really, somewhat more- isn't that more like what they do in England? Don't they have a harvest festival, but earlier in the autumn when the harvest really comes in?

[Elliott Roosevelt:] That's right, it comes the second Monday in October as a rule. But uh, have you, when you've been in England have you ever seen any of their harvest festivals?

[ER:] I can't remember, of course I was always in school and we were not on a farm or in anything so I don't actually remember seeing a harvest festival but I've heard about them.

[Elliott Roosevelt:] Mhm. Well actually uh don't you suppose that our Thanksgiving celebration uh as uh we celebrate it uh probably comes from the fact that our early ancestors were used to having uh harvest festivals in England and in Scotland and the countries from which they came?

[ER:] Well, that might easily be uh they- they were accustomed to having, um particularly in rural areas, harvest festivals in which um the farmer and his workers joined together and had um a feast and- and all uh were equals for that day. (5:27)

[Elliott Roosevelt:] Mhm. Oh yes, that's right, I forgot about that. But then there's also the uh the Hebrew uh- uh harvest uh festival uh and I believe they call that the- the feast of ingathering, or celebrated the day as the feast of the Tabernacles?

[ER:] I think that goes back to the days when they were looking for the Promised Land, doesn't it?

[Elliott Roosevelt:] Yes it does. It's the um it's the feast uh of an agricultural people and the ingathering of the autumn harvest, uh but also, as you say, uh celebrates God's care of the Israelites when they dwelled in frail tabernacles or booths formed of branches of trees during their wanderings in search for the Promised Land. (6:16)

[ER:] You certainly did some research [Elliott Roosevelt laughs]! Well, there you have it all down.

[ER and Elliott Roosevelt overlap]

[Elliott Roosevelt:] [Elliott Roosevelt laughs] Well, I-I can't take all of the credit myself. There were other people helping me. Uh But I think it's very interesting that uh this celebration uh of the harvest, this uh method of celebrating the fruitfulness of the soil uh that uh nowhere else in the world does it seem to have quite as much meaning as it has to- to us here in the- in the United States at the time of Thanksgiving. (6:52)

[ER:] Well, I I don't know about that. I think perhaps what adds to its meaning here um is that we have made it both a religious and a uh family celebration, those two things of course being um closest to the everyday lives of people and then it is always in every country tied to the soil and the soil was always the foundation of everybody's civilization [Elliott Roosevelt: mhm] and all- all your countries began as agricultural countries and slowly developed into industrial countries. [Elliott Roosevelt: yes] But um, So that this is uh going back to the beginnings of a country and is a very down to earth kind of celebration and you tied up with people's religion and with people's family feeling and you have a very close uh type of- of celebration, close to the life of the people. (7:54)

[Elliott Roosevelt:] Mhm. Do you suppose that the- the in the Soviet Union that they have a Thanksgiving, too?

[ER:] I haven't any idea. That's one thing I might ask my neighboring delegate from the Soviet Union, whether they have a Thanksgiving. I shall certainly do so. I noticed that today, when the delegates from Saudi Arabia, uh brought up the fact that um Thanksgiving uh was celebrated in this country and he had been asked to eat Thanksgiving dinner, uh there was no objection from the delegate from USSR.

[Elliott Roosevelt:] Oh you mean there-- they uh agreed to this celebration today? [Elliott Roosevelt laughs] (8:37)

[ER:] Apparently, they did agree to this celebration today!

[Elliott Roosevelt:] Well I think that's very kind of them and I'm certainly delighted that the Soviet delegates allowed you to get the day off today so that we could have a fine Thanksgiving dinner.

(Break 8:54-9:00)

[Elliott Roosevelt:] Mother, you had an aunt who uh was, in her own way, rather a fine poetess, and uh she also was the uh sister of President Theodore Roosevelt, and I think it would be very nice if uh you would read for our audience today the poem that she wrote commemorating Thanksgiving day in nineteen hundred and seventeen. Uh but before you read it, I wish you'd uh maybe tell our audience something about the uh Auntie Corinne and uh what she was like and uh what kind of a person she was, so that they could more clearly have a picture of the person who wrote this poem. (9:51)

[ER:] Well, Corinne Roosevelt Robinson was the youngest of the family, Theodore Roosevelt family. Her oldest sister was Mrs. [Anna "Bamie" Roosevelt] Cowles and the two brothers were my father, Elliott Roosevelt, and Theodore Roosevelt, who was the older of the two brothers. The youngest sister, Corinne, was adored by all the family, and um she in turn adored her oldest sister and her brothers. But I think she had a particular hero worship for her brother, Theodore and what he felt and what he thought was very much in her mind. She had great charm, she had great warmth. We younger people loved her very much and loved being with her. I think that that um, that generation on our- our side of the Roosevelt family, they were very fortunate because they were such delightful people and all the younger people loved to be with them. And I was devoted both to Auntie Bye, as we called Mrs. Cowles, and Auntie Corrine. Now she did have a gift for poetry, and this poem was written of course when it was evident that our country was going to take part in the great struggle of the First World War and um that had been one of the things that her beloved brother Theodore had wanted this country, above all else, to do because he felt that it was an obligation. So this poem was written on Thanksgiving Day 1917. (11:58)

Let us give thanks and lift our ringing voices  
Though not for plenty nor for paths of peace  
Let us rejoice as a strong man rejoices to run his race  
Nor pray for swift release  
We who have doubted, damned with indecision  
Not in our faltering footsteps toward the right  
We who have heeded not the surer vision  
Let us give thanks for we have seen the light  
Let us give thanks that once again compelling,  
Our flag shall float for freedom to the skies  
Ten thousand times, ten thousand voices swelling  
Proclaim our service and our sacrifice  
Let us give thanks, an undivided nation  
One purpose now we press toward the goal  
To thee our fathers, God, and our salvation,  
Let us give thanks, for we have found our soul.  
(13:29)

File(s): 72-30(259)

Transcription: Stavroula Pabst

First Edit: Ruby Johnson

Final Edit: Seth LaShier

Final check: Natalie Hall

The Eleanor Roosevelt Papers Project