

THE ELEANOR ROOSEVELT PROGRAM

July 19th, 1951

Description: In this segment, ER begins her interview with Miss Michael Drury, author of the article "Women and the New War."

Participants: ER and Michael Drury

(0:04)

[ER:] Thank you, Elliott. I'm happy to introduce to you Miss Michael Drury, a free-lance writer now on assignment *Good Housekeeping Magazine* for a special series of articles entitled "Women and the New War." [Michael Drury: It's a--] Miss Drury.

[Michael Drury:] Great pleasure for me to be here, Mrs. Roosevelt.

[ER:] I'm so glad to have you here Miss Drury. I wonder if you would tell our listeners how you got the idea for this series of articles and where you've traveled to get the material.

[Michael Drury:] Well, I can't really claim the idea. It uh originated with the editor of the magazine, Mr. Herbert Mays, who like all good editors, has a sort of feel for these things and he seemed to know that the story was there. And he sent me out to collect it, and I must have gone about twelve thousand miles in this country alone, just uh visiting army posts and navy bases and military insulations of every kind and uh a certain amount of-of civilian um-- oh you know such things as aircraft plants and so on. (1:06)

[ER:] Well now, what type of women did you interview?

[Michael Drury:] Well, I interviewed the wives and mothers and sweethearts of service men, and women who worked in civilian plants, the sort of thing we thought of during the '40s as defense plants. And uh oh just anybody who had any connection with it at all, any woman who's life has been touched by this current crisis. (1:30)

[ER:] I see. Well now, who do you consider has the harder time: women who are working in factories or service men's wives?

[Michael Drury:] [Laughs] Oh golly, I think that's a very difficult thing to answer. Um I don't know. I don't know. It must be a very difficult thing to follow your husband around to these camps an-and so on. I tend to feel--now maybe this is a misstatement that housing is better for the civilian workers. They don't travel around quite so much for one thing and uh the housing can be built easily on-on a more permanent basis. And uh the army wife, the military wife, is uh faced with the problem of living in a suitcase and carrying around what she can, sometimes carrying her own suitcase and twenty pounds of baby on the other arm, and making her own train reservations, and she pretty much takes care of herself. I think it's a hard job. But its--they're doing a wonderful job. (2:29)

[ER:] Well, um you-you think it's pretty well divide then. Uh there's not--on the whole you think that the women who went into the factories had an easier time than the women who tried to follow their husbands around.

[Michael Drury:] I-I would say so. There are more facilities for them. There are more um such things as state nurseries, where they can leave their children. On the other hand, in some of the newer military bases, such places as Keesler Air Force Base in Mississippi, which was built only nine years ago, and is now a humming community with something like forty thousand people in it, um there they have a great deal of facilities for these young wives. Um they have three nurseries there, which for seven dollars a month you can leave your child any day from nine in the morning until virtually midnight. Um there are trained nurses in attendance. They-they just do a wonderful job, and they can do it because they have six hundred families paying seven dollars a month. If you have two children you can leave them for twelve -- no ten dollars, and three in one family for twelve fifty. (3:37)

[ER:] My goodness, that is--and any-any uh limitation of age?

[Michael Drury:] Um I think up until they go to public school, [ER overlapping: Up until they're six, six years old.] which is about six I think. I'm not sure what the laws are in Mississippi.

[ER:] And as they get older, do they have nursery school uh-uh training for them?

[Michael Drury:] Uh they have a grade school there which I believe goes up to the junior high school level. I-I'm not--

[ER:] No, but they don't have nursery school in the nurseries for-for such children as are three and four and five--?

[Michael Drury:] Oh yes. Up to six years of age, they have a certain amount of schooling. I guess like a kindergarten.

[ER:] Yes, like well what would we know as a nursery school.

[Michael Drury:] As a matter of fact they distinguish between the nursery and the kindergarten. The nursery's for very young infants; you can leave a tiny baby there, a few weeks old if you want to.

[ER:] Yes, I see.

[Michael Drury:] They also have uh some wonderful facilities at Keesler: um clubs and hobby shops and that sort of thing. The general's wife there invites every new girl who comes on to the base to come to her house for morning coffee. There are at present I believe a hundred and fifty families a month coming on to that base, and Mrs. Powell sees that a written invitation goes out to each girl. And unfortunately only about half of them go, I-I uh I think that's a great mistake but uh -- [ER: They- They're nervous] I don't know. Well, they get shy, and they think they don't have the right hat and all that, you know, and it's silly because all generals' wives were once lieutenants' wives, [Michael Drury laughs] [ER: Yes.] they know all about this, long before those girls were born. And um Mrs. Powell helps them find the beauty shop and the commissary and the nursery and all the--

[ER:] Tells them about it. [Michael Drury: Yes.] Well, that's a wonderful thing. [Michael Drury: It is.] She must be a wonderful woman.

[Michael Drury:] She's a fine person.

[ER:] Well now, do you think from you observations that it is wise for women to follow their husbands to army posts and navy bases and so on, living in a suit case, so to speak, uh or don't you think so?

[Michael Drury:] Well, I'd hate to advise anybody, but um personally I would say under most circumstances it's a good idea to follow the man. Not to his basic training. This is a six weeks or eight weeks course where they transfer-trans uh what do I want to say? They make uh-uh a soldier out of a civilian. And this is a very rigid and difficult time, and they don't let the-the men off the base very much and, if at all, and uh certainly not then. She should wait until he gets an assignment, but then go. You-you you miss so much of living if you don't, it isn't easy. And-and you can't say everyone should go. There are circumstances, maybe a child is ill, or maybe uh-uh a mother-in-law needs the family at home, but in general um they seem to be going it's rather an academic question I guess in a way, that the services certainly recognize families now, and uh I think it's a wonderful thing for them to go. They-they- they're real pioneer women, these girls, I don't know whether they know it or not but they are. (6:31)

[ER:] They really are. Well, that's wonderful. Now I know that you visited the Convair Plant in San Diego, how many women are working there today?

[Michael Drury:] Uh I think about four thousand or forty-five hundred, and the total employee number is uh around eighteen thousand five hundred. It's close to a third of-of the women-- of the workers are women [ER: The workers are women.] Yes.

[ER:] Are most of them married women, do you think?

[Michael Drury:] I would say 90 percent of them are married, and most of those have children. (6:57)

[ER:] Well, what happens to their children while they're working?

[Michael Drury:] This flabbergasted me too [Michael Drury laughs] I said, "My goodness, how can you do this?" They work from seven-thirty in the morning until three-thirty in the afternoon, which gets them home probably not later than four o'clock. [ER: Hm.] And um uh this means they're home when the children get home from school, if they're that age. If they're younger than that, there are state nurseries. I think California was the-the only state that kept these state operated nurseries, which were quite prevalent during World War II. California has kept them up and uh although there is a in-income limit, uh a level above which you cannot go and leave your child in this-this nursery, but they take them there at the age of two. And uh the nursery runs twelve hours from six in the morning till six at night. (7:46)

[ER:] What do they-what do they do with babies there?

[Michael Drury:] They leave them with mothers or mothers-in-law or sisters. Very often they will have a sister who has a couple of children of her own and has no taste for working in a-in a aircraft plant. And she will take care of them. But they make arrangements, it's amazing.

[ER:] It's arrangements uh made within families then. [Michael Drury: Yes, that's true.] Now are most of these women, whose husbands are home or are whose husbands are already in the service?

[Michael Drury:] The women in the Convair plant?

[ER:] Yes.

[Michael Drury:] Um I would say I-I don't know too much about that, but I think that the women--the-the husbands in general are civilians, in that case. [ER: You think they are?] Uh a few of the younger girls that I talked to had husbands or brothers in the service. But by in large, they worked there during World War II, so you see [ER: Oh, I see.] they're a little older. (8:40)

[ER:] They're a little bit older then.

[Michael Drury:] Yes.

[ER:] Yes. Well now, is there adequate housing for these families around a big plant like that?

[Michael Drury:] As a rule yes, these plants have been there for a long time. Aircraft is now the third largest industry in California, I think um--I don't know whether fishing or-or-or shipping or oil would come first an-and second, but uh-- [ER: Oil, I'm sure, would be] [Michael Drury laughs] Probably the movies too. [Michael Drury Laughs] [ER: Yeah.] But um uh they do have very good housing [ER: They do?] The houses are um--

[ER:] And adequate amount of housing so there's no great overcrowding?

[Michael Drury:] That I couldn't say. I imagine there's always a certain amount of crowding, but this housing was built during World War II, and the plants are not running at full speed at twenty-four hours a day, they run sixteen right now. [ER: Mhm.] Two shifts not three. So that the uh housing, I imagine, is-is adequate.

[ER:] Adequate, for numbers- [Michael Drury: Yes] for the numbers [Michael Drury: Yes] of-of people there.

[Michael Drury:] These people own um deep freeze units and vacuum cleaners and that sort of thing, and they tell me that they couldn't possibly run homes. Most of them do their own- their own house work. They don't have any maids or-or any outside help and they couldn't do it without this modern equipment. It's really wonderful. They-they have um trucks which service these large housing areas. They come in with bread and meat and all dairy products and sometimes vegetables. And they keep uh keys on a great enormous ring, like a bailiff, and they let themselves in these houses and uh put the things away in the icebox or the breadbox an-and uh they have become a part of the family, like the family doctor and the lawyer, minister. It's really very amazing. (10:24)

[ER:] Real -- the delivery man is really part of the family in helping to run the [Michael Drury: Oh yes.] the family life?

[Michael Drury:] He takes a great interest in the children's birthdays, and he will leave a note saying, "Uh we're having a special on ice-cream next week and this is-this is uh Johnny's birthday you know, [Michael Drury laughs] don't you want to take some ice-cream?"

[ER:] And then will he pick up orders that are left for him?

[Michael Drury:] Oh yes. They write the orders out. He'll even answer the telephone sometimes, [laughs] and I know they leave an extra cup of coffee for him now and then.

[ER:] I think that's a wonderful thing to have uh to have that kind of service, and I think it's wonderful for them to have um uh Frigidaires for instance, because out of those their-their evening meal comes fairly quickly.

[Michael Drury:] That's true, and out of electric ovens with timers on them that you can set and put the food in before you leave and then it's uh all cooked when you get there. [ER: All cooked by the time you get back.] Yes.

[ER:] You get back. Well that, of course, is really uh-uh a wonderful um future, its--
[Michael Drury:] It's an exciting thing. It seems to me it's a growing thing and a way we're learning to deal with--

[ER:] With the life of [Michael Drury: Yes.] of [Michael Drury: Yes.] today.

[Michael Drury:] With the modern woman.

[ER:] Well, I see that we have to stop for a minute because our announcer is anxious to say a word, but we'll come right back and [Michael Drury: All right] talk some more on this subject. (11:44)

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Transcription: Melissa Melvin
First edit: Isabel Maier
Final edit: Seth LaShier

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