

## THE ELEANOR ROOSEVELT PROGRAM

October 16, 1950

Description: In the interview segment, ER interviews radio and television critic John Crosby.

Participants: ER, Elliot Roosevelt, John Crosby

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[Elliott Roosevelt:] And now, Mother, uh on a previous program we had a-a veteran performer who expressed his opinion ah regarding the proper techniques to use on radio and television, if you remember Mr. Fred Allen. Well today uh our audience I think will be very appreciative of the fact that you've brought to the microphone a real honest to goodness critic, a man who is a real expert and has won a big name for himself ah as one of the outstanding critics in the business. Um will you introduce him, mother?

[ER:] Yes, I would be very happy to introduce him. Uh we all know that there are writers who are somewhat feared, I'm afraid, because it's their profession uh to be critics, to be critical of those other people who do certain things. And this afternoon, my guest is a critic whom I consider on the whole to be a very well informed one and, as far as I know, extremely fair. He's Mr. John Crosby, radio and television critic for the *New York Herald Tribune*. Mr. Crosby.

[John Crosby:] Oh thank you, Mrs. Roosevelt. I-I hope I'm not as feared as you say I am. Uh but it's very kind of you [John Crosby laughs] to say that I am I'm well informed and-and fair. I am frequently accused of not being [Elliott Roosevelt laughs].

[ER:] Well, I'm afraid all critics are accused of not being fair [ER laughs]. That would be a rather normal reaction on the part of those who are criticized. Mr. Crosby, with the territory you cover in your criticisms, I wonder how you are able to stand having to listen continuously to good, bad, and indifferent radio and television programs without going completely crazy [ER laughs]! (2:06)

[John Crosby:] Well, in-in one way a radio and television critic is in-is in a favored position Mrs. Roosevelt. In it—uh we can always turn it off. I mean, [Elliott Roosevelt laughs] I mean, a theater critic uh has to go there and he has to come back and say something about whatever went –

[ER and John Crosby overlap]

[ER:] And he has to stay through the play too, I suppose [ER and John Crosby laugh].

[John Crosby:] Although some of them don't. I understand. We [ER: Well I—] we can pick and choose a little bit.

[ER:] I suppose-I suppose a theater critic can walk out if it's that bad. But um you, I shouldn't think, would dare turn off the television or the radio because uh eh something might happen after you've turned it off. (2:49)

[John Crosby:] Well yes, except that we have so much to choose from. Uh we have news-- uh critical as I am of say, radio and television almost everything is on it. I mean you have news, you have a-a program like this, you have drama. Uh now with television you're really ranging the whole wide world of-of criticism. I think it's the best critical field there is.

[Elliott Roosevelt:] Well uh Mr. Crosby, in as much as you've got the whole wide world uh to choose from uh aren't you afraid that once in a while that you'll uh miss a program that you should have reviewed?

[John Crosby:] Oh well, I miss them all the time [John Crosby laughs].

[Elliott Roosevelt:] It doesn't make much difference [Elliott Roosevelt laughs].

[ER:] Well, um I suppose in a way it would be impossible to cover every program, you'd never leave the air. You'd be listening all day long and you wouldn't eat or sleep! (3:45)

[John Crosby:] Oh yeah [ER laughs].

[John Crosby and ER overlap]

[ER:] Well, do you have a special field you try and cover? I mean, or do you try and sample every field?

[Mr. Crosby:] No, no, now you can pick and choose.

[John Crosby:] Well, I try to sample everything, one-one thing about radio and televisions is-is that it repeats uh. Let's say this program [Elliott Roosevelt laughs] uh if-if I miss you today uh you will be here tomorrow?

[ER, Elliott Roosevelt, and John Crosby overlap]

[Elliott Roosevelt:] That's right, that's --

[ER:] Well, I've just started.

[John Crosby:] Is it three times a week? Or five?

[ER:] Well, now I'll tell--

[Elliott Roosevelt:] Five times a week.

[ER:] Well, now I'll tell you I just started a very strenuous undertaking. I'm--we're going to do forty-five minute programs five times a week, and as I said in an earlier program I consider myself a novice in this particular type of-of field I-I don't know how it's going to go to do forty-five minutes. (4:39)

[Elliott Roosevelt:] Well, as in a matter of fact, Mr. Crosby, I'll let you in on a secret ah mother is practically one of those virgin performers. She never listens to radio at all, except to news programs, so that she has no bad habits learned from others.

[John Crosby:] Good, good, I'm happy to hear it, Mr. Roosevelt [Elliott Roosevelt laughs].

[ER:] Well, I-I'm oddly ashamed of myself because uh if others are going to listen to me I suppose I should listen to others, so as to know um what they're saying and what they are uh thinking and doing on the air, but I don't have any time. It always seems to me as though it was all I could do--(5:20)

[John Crosby:] Well then, well how are you going to work this in along with all the others --

[Elliott Roosevelt:] Well, she-she manages, you see, she has a great many people. She has a secretary called uh by the name of Miss Thompson, she has myself. And uh we sit behind her with whips and start her off at 7:30 every morning and around 2 o'clock in the morning she goes to bed. Because you see her schedule is very simple really [John Crosby laughs] because uh she goes out and spends about twelve hours to fourteen hours a day out of the UN, she writes a daily column, she uh writes uh a magazine article once a month for *McCall's Magazine*, and then in addition to that she does this forty-five minutes five days a week, and in addition to that she adds to it by doing a television show every Sunday afternoon which you may or may not have seen, [John Crosby: I've seen it.] and uh besides that she finds time to answer about five hundred letters a day [Elliott Roosevelt laughs].

[ER and Elliott Roosevelt overlap]

[ER:] Oh no, oh no. Not as bad as that, that's –

[Elliott Roosevelt:] Almost.

[ER:] No, that would be terrible [ER laughs].

[Elliott Roosevelt:] Almost [Elliott Roosevelt laughs].

[ER:] That would be terrible.

[John Crosby:] I'm-I'm awed.

[ER:] No, it sounds terribly formidable, but it's really--it isn't as formidable as it sounds, because um great many people make life very easy for you particularly when they're people who are--you're accustomed to working with and they're accustomed to working you. The only thing is that you do work up most of the time. That's [ER and Elliott Roosevelt laugh]--(6:49)

[John Crosby:] Well, Mrs. Roosevelt, with this-with this-this radio program what uh exactly is your-your aim uh?

[ER:] Well, I think if you ask me what my aim was; it would be primarily to bring to the public, um in ways that would be palatable, uh things that I hope will make them uh think about different types of things.

[John Crosby:] That's is a very, very fine aim .

[ER:] And um perhaps go out and uh look up a little more a more about the things then they have in the past. Just as exactly as when you go out to speak to groups you know very well, that you're speaking to a very small group. I went out for instance last night straight from the UN to um a new section of a little Long Island place called New Hyde Park. And um they were mostly young people and it wasn't a very tremendous audience but you have a feeling that you're perhaps um activating a-a group of people that will go on and do much better than you can do-- oh if they begin to work along different lines and that's [Mr. Crosby: And that.] and that's what I felt radio should-should be able to do.

[Mr. Crosby:] I do too. I think radio is pretty well crying for that type of program.

[ER and Elliott Roosevelt overlap]

[ER:] I think [Elliott Roosevelt: Well we --] I think we've done it with the television program to a certain extent last year because I had great many letters where people said I never knew uh what it was like to look at someone whom I heard, and now I feel as though I knew more about the people that are doing certain things. And they were nearly all um those programs were on public questions, and I think people began to feel familiar instead of feeling that it was so far away that you couldn't do anything about it.

[John Crosby:] Oh yeah.

[Elliott Roosevelt:] And I think that often times uh the fact that you're able to uh make people feel relaxed if you can uh get people off of the stump and bring them down to the level where they are thinking, and people can either see or hear them speaking spontaneously about questions with which they are thoroughly familiar. They often times come out with much more information than they do when they are making a prepared statement and you hear it on the in the course of a great speech. (9:52)

[ER:] Well, I'm afraid you've been interviewing me instead of my interviewing you [ER and John Crosby laugh]. So now um I'd like to ask you a question because you are one of the outstanding critics of the mere mortals who broadcast and go on television shows, and I'd like to have some suggestions from you as to how I can make my program a really good program.

[John Crosby:] Well Mrs. Roosevelt, I would be presuming. Uh I think that everything that you--you said outlines a good program. One-one thing that is always eh rather distressed me about interview programs of any type is the uh the great amount of uh effort that is-is uh is made getting somebody who has a name or is-is somebody and then uh the two people get together and there isn't well sufficient preparation, they don't know what they're going to do, they don't know what they're going to say. Uh you command an enormous amount of weight and I'm sure that- uh and an enormous amount of charm, I might add, uh that you are going to bring these people out a little more. But uh well uh, I've heard so many interview programs of this sort which people--very, very important people brought before a microphone and all of their talents wasted. That's ah about the only suggestion I can make. Uh it has been done again and again. One of the worst things about radio is that it consumes so much--it consumes so much air time, it consumes so much time, nobody ever seems to know exactly what they're doing. In almost every line of endeavor--in writing, for instance, you- you sit down, if something doesn't come out right, you throw it away, but in radio [John Crosby laughs], there it is.

[ER:] You can't throw it away. [ER laughs] Well now I think Elliott has something he wants to say.

[Elliott Roosevelt:] Yes, I'd like to break in on this interview for just a second to, if you don't mind. I have a message to bring to you and then we'll come right back to the uh interview again.

[Break from 12:11-12:21)

[Elliott Roosevelt:] And now let's get back uh to Mrs. Roosevelt and her guest today, Mr. John Crosby, the radio and television critic of the *New York Herald Tribune*, mother will you take over again, please?

[ER:] Yes, I will with great pleasure. I eh was very much interested in what you said on the subject of lack of preparation. I realize that people who write um write many times over and-and throw away what they don't think good, and um perhaps, if it may be true, that people come to the microphone with too little preparation, and perhaps they should also think out clearly a--the points they want to make and then they won't choose words just to fill time they'll be saying what they think. Is that what you really had in your mind?

[John Crosby:] Yes it is. I-I don't mean that they should come and read a prepared script exactly, Mrs. Roosevelt but uh-uh that they should feel that what they have to say is important--that if they wrote it down someone--they would read it. Uh too much of radio when put in script form, and believe me I have to read a good many of these scripts [John Crosby laughs] uh is something that would appall the people who said it if they actually saw it in print.

[Elliott Roosevelt:] Ah yes, Mr. Crosby, I've on occasion have made uh talks and I've had the script shown to me afterwards and wished that I could have gone through the floor from embarrassment.

[John Crosby:] I have too, I have – [Elliott and John Crosby laugh]

[ER:] Well, my trouble isn't so often—I've had that of course, that same experience, but it isn't so often that I mind the thoughts that were in it, I mind the fact that I suddenly find that I've used such bad grammar. I have said things that I suppose sounded alright when you said them but if you written them you never would have written them.

[Elliott Roosevelt:] That's very true, but um Mother, could I interject one question here? Because after all this is primarily, Mr. Crosby, a woman's program uh coming at this hour of the day it is listened to largely by a woman's audience. And uh we have uh public figures who come on this program as uh my mother's guest people like Dr. Ralph Bunche who just won the award--the Nobel Peace award--and of course we do have theatrical uh personalities and we have others who come on the program. But uh do you think that the women of this country are interested in hearing what the thinking is of people in the positions of the Ralph Bunches of this world? (15:25)

[John Crosby:] Oh yes, very, very much so. Uh and I don't think that it has to be uh dressed up in any--well let's say show business way. There recently was a survey made by a man-- this was about television-- uh but he was interested in in day time television how-how would women get their housework and-and stare at that machine. And he found out that uh women had done a good deal of thinking about it themselves, they felt guilty, actually guilty about deserting uh or leaving something undone while they were looking at-at television. And he-he tracked down their various reactions and they didn't want entertainment for one thing because that made them feel very guilty, they didn't want housewife programs, how to make--bake a cake, because uh that they know that they can find that from different sources. But the one thing they did want to find out, is to feel uh that uh well the-the world wasn't passing them by. That they were learning, that they, uh well let's say competing with men in the political, economic, social, events of the day and anything that gave them uh a positive identification with that sort of thing, something beyond --above and beyond uh a baking a cake or above and beyond, way above and beyond I should say soap opera or a two line joke was exactly the thing they hungered for. Yes, I should say that.

[Elliott Roosevelt:] Yes.

[ER:] I think that's proved by the number of people that seemed to have listened to the broadcast from UN of the Security Council meetings. I never thought that uh my neighbors in the country uh really knew much about UN until those broadcasts came. Now they actually are um-- can't wait to find out what's happening, or now it's off for a while but they couldn't wait to find out what was going on in the Security Council. Now I don't know that always it got across the real truth to them, I don't know that they always understood all the implications, but it certainly awakened uh an interest in the United Nations in the personalities which I never had found before in my own country community. (17:56)

[John Crosby:] [ER coughs] Well, don't you think though that just awakening they will read more about the UN, they will go uh look it up in magazines, do-do--just-just awakening interest, I think, is a very great thing, Mrs. Roosevelt.

[Elliott Roosevelt:] I say--I agree with you, Mr. Crosby. And-and I have a question that I would like to ask of you because I think that maybe you could help to do something about it. Don't you think that through radio and television a great deal could be done to lift the excellence of our representatives in our national government if the general public had an opportunity to check up through radio and television on the uh sessions that go on in the House and in the Senate in Washington.

[John Crosby:] Yes I do. [John Crosby and Elliott Roosevelt laugh] I-I don't know why uh the House and Senate, eh what this resistance is to being broadcast or telecast--

[Elliott Roosevelt:] Well, there are a lot of representatives who don't want that [Elliott Roosevelt laughs].

[John Crosby:] Well, I'm not in the House [Elliott Roosevelt laughs] so I do think that. Uh like everything else, Mr. Roosevelt, uh eh that it would--that radio and television would very materialize--very materially, I'm sorry, uh um would modify the proceedings in the House, just as they did National Conventions. I mean years ago somebody would get up at a National Convention and talk for four hours and [Elliott Roosevelt laughs: Yes.] now they're down to fifteen minutes at least and even then they-they keep up watching and saying "am I on time boys?" They're very crass with these microphones [Elliott Roosevelt: that's right] and I think it would have a very sanitary affect in the case of the House of Representatives. (19:44)

[ER:] Now, that-that's leads me to a question that I want to ask you, Mr. Crosby. Have you ever thought of producing your own program?

[John Crosby:] [John Crosby laughs] Uh yes, I've been broached several times but uh always I've been talked out of it by somebody.

[Elliott:] Have you never been tempted at all and uh--

[Mr. Crosby:] Oh, I've been tempted [Elliott Roosevelt: You have?] and as I say wiser heads have always prevailed-- said uh "stick to your last, Crosby" [Elliott Roosevelt and John Crosby laugh]. (20:12)

[ER:] Well, I want to ask one more question, uh how does your family stand the strain of having you continuously listening to the radio and watching television? [John Crosby laughs] Or do they want to watch it more than you do?

[John Crosby:] Actually they do, Mrs. Roosevelt. I'm the one who has to turn it off every so often because when it's on I'm working and uh occasionally they like to look at it just for pleasure and I take to my room [John Crosby laughs].

[ER:] I'm-I'm told that uh children uh spend many, too many hours uh on television. Would you say that that was likely?

[John Crosby:] Yes, I know with-with my son. In fact, I-I-- one invention somebody ought to make is a lock on television like the lock on a car. Uh I think that a--that a television set that is left uh unlocked is just as dangerous as a car unlocked with young children around it.

[ER:][ER laughs] That's wonderful. Well now, I'm sorry our time is up. Thank you, Mr. Crosby, so much for being my guest today and for giving me such good advice. Now, I think its Elliott's turn for the microphone.

[Elliott Roosevelt:] Well, I would like to join in thanking you, Mr. Crosby, and I will be very much interested uh tomorrow to pick up the papers and read your fellow critics' criticism of your efforts on the radio, [John Crosby and Elliott Roosevelt laugh] it's been very lovely having you and I hope we can have you back again.

(21:52)

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