

THE ELEANOR ROOSEVELT PROGRAM

October 30, 1950

Description: This file consists of opening segments to two different episodes. In the first segment, ER and Elliott Roosevelt respond to a listener's question asking the Roosevelts to discuss various Soviet leaders. In the second segment, ER and Elliott Roosevelt respond to a listener's question about how ER runs her household in addition to all the other work she does.

Participants: ER, Elliott Roosevelt

[ER:] [Whispered] Do you want to talk?

[ER:] Well, Elliott, what do you want to talk about this-this day?

[Elliott Roosevelt:] Well, I'd like to ask you a question that uh was sent into us in the mail. Uh you've uh met and talked with uh members of the United Nations about whom the American public uh really knows very little, uh persons such as [Andrey] Vyshinsky, and [Vyacheslav] Molotov, and [Vladimir] Pavlov. What are they like as persons?

[ER:] Well, Vyshinsky is really a very um charming person if you're just talking to him. Um he's agreeable, uh he's a little bit uh stilted because he's never quite comfortable with uh someone of another uh nation. Uh but he has very uh almost courtly manners. And um is-is a very--is a very agreeable person to just talk to. It's quite another thing when you have to meet him on the level of argument. There you're dealing with the very clever lawyer who has been uh a practically a criminal lawyer and a trial lawyer and--

[Elliott Roosevelt:] Yes, he was the uh persecutor in the purge trials in Moscow.

[ER:] Yes, and you see all that training when you have to meet him in an argument because you must expect that he will pick out every flaw and so you must be very careful to have as few flaws in your argument as possible.

[Elliott Roosevelt:] Well, that uh-uh raises a very interesting question in my mind. You first came up in direct argument in the United Nations against Mr. Vyshinsky in the very first of the General Assembly sessions in London in 1945.

[ER:] Yes, we argued--we argued the question of the displaced persons and their right not to be returned to their countries of origin against their will [Elliott Roosevelt: And uh--] and we tried to come to agreement on that, Mr. [A.A] Arutunian was the member in committee three with whom I had um uh tried to reach an agreed form of resolution, and since we couldn't then in the plenary a Mr. Vyshinsky spoke on the questions and said um that anyone who did not want to go back to their own country must of necessity be a traitor or a quisling. And um gave, of course, no right to a person to hold a different opinion if the government of his country had changed since he had left it. And uh after much argument and late in the night the vote sustained our resolution which did not force people to go home to their country of origin against their will. We argued that again in the next session, and I think we've argued it practically every session since [Elliott Roosevelt and ER Laughter].

[Elliott Roosevelt:] Well, uh what interests me is that here was Vyshinsky arguing with all the skill of a trial lawyer so to speak, and a prosecutor in a court against ah yourself, and you had never had any

experience of argument on the level of uh the legal profession uh m-most of your arguing had been with your--in the bosom of your family [Elliott Roosevelt laughs]. (4:06)

[ER:] That's true, but I had conviction, and I had um, I think, the sympathy of people in--among the delegates for something that they felt was right. It was something they had um known and recognized in Europe and therefore uh it was not difficult to uh emphasize the right of a human being to his own beliefs, and to his uh willingness uh to refuse to go home. I mean, his desire to refuse to go home, if the home that he would go to was no longer the kind of place that he wished to live in.

[Elliott Roosevelt:] Well, in other words Vyshinsky really--uh you have the sense when you're arguing against him that he is depending upon the uh the legalistic and the uh formalistic phrasing and the standpoint and the legal pettish-- uh petty points that you can work though to win a case and was not looking--and does not look in his arguments at the broader and more humanitarian side of the picture.

[ER:] I'm not so sure that he would not try to see uh-uh to appeal to a humanitarian argument because he knows its value. He's a very able man. Uh he would try to make his point be the one--with the one that had a humanitarian value if he possibly could, and if he didn't he would try, as he did in this case, to throw the blame on the other people by saying that they must be traitors to their country or quislings or they would go home.

[Elliott Roosevelt:] Well, do you have the feeling though, when you're talking to Vyshinsky or hearing an argument of his, that he is a man who is arguing a point of view uh for the sake of that point of the view rather than for what he in his heart feels.

[ER:] I have the feeling that he is a very able lawyer, [Elliott Roosevelt: [laughing] That's not answering it straight] and that like all-- that like all lawyers trained to see the legal side of the question, he can argue one way or the other and he does not of necessity have to believe what he argues.

[Elliott Roosevelt:] Alright, I won't keep pressing to find out whether you really [ER: Now I really--] think that Mr. Vyshinsky sometimes argues a point which if he were speaking from his heart he might argue differently. I won't press that [Elliott Roosevelt laughs].

[ER:] Well, now as to Mr. Molotov um I had a very pleasant conversation when he stayed with us in the White House, and I don't know whether the Pavlov you mean is the Pavlov who came with him as interpreter and who often interprets for Stalin who is quite young and um spoke English like an American, but I asked him how he happened to know English so well, said he'd never been out of Russia, he'd learned it all in Russia from American students. And I must say I simply marveled at his English. I also think that most of these Russian gentlemen who apparently have to be translated or have everything translated to them know a good deal more English than um we always realize, because I found in my first conversation in Washington with Mr. Molotov that he sometimes answered my questions before Mr. Pavlov had time to translate them. (8:21)

[Elliott Roosevelt:] I ran into the same experience with Mr. Stalin when I interviewed him in 1946. Uh Stalin at that time uh of course uh failed to give any indication that he spoke English, and I spoke to uh Mr. Pavlov in--and he relayed all my questions, but I noticed one thing that was very interesting in talking to Stalin, that when I would say something that had a slight twist of humor to it, uh before Mr. Pavlov could even uh turn towards him, uh Stalin would burst out laughing. Now how would he know enough to burst out laughing if he didn't know what I was saying [Elliott Roosevelt laughs].

[ER:] Well, I rather think a good many of them know a good deal of English than they uh tell us they know.

[Elliott Roosevelt:] Well, I'd like to ask a question, you got--you passed over Mr. Molotov rather quickly.

[ER:] Well, I want to say I enjoyed him very much in our first talk in in um Washington, and I never afterwards had any real talk with him. On that occasion we talked about the um uh type of welfare work that was being--that had been done uh under the New Deal, and he was interested in what I told him, and uh I was interested in hearing what he thought on a number of things, and Mr. Pavlov was certainly a marvelous go-between.

[Elliott Roosevelt:] Well, ah would you say that Molotov uh underneath a rather cold uh appearing face was a rather warm personality?

[ER:] Yes, very decidedly.

[Break 10:17 to 10:23]

[ER:] Well, Elliott, you looked to me as you ah were feeling uh kind of guilty over this question you're about to ask me? I'm rather-I'm rather in fear as to what it's going to be.

[Elliott Roosevelt:] [Elliott Roosevelt laughs] Well, here it is. How do you run your household and carry on all your other activities?

[ER:] Good heavens, you should answer that better than I can because you know whether it runs well or it runs badly. But I-I'll tell you as you know, I decided last year that I couldn't uh come into town and work on the United Nations and have a housekeeping apartment in town, and so last December I moved here and gave up my apartment in Washington Square. I did that because I found that keeping my house in the way I like to keep it, and ordering meals, and seeing that servants were there and doing the things that had to be done was just too complicated when you had to be out of the house uh from quarter of nine in the morning to until seven o'clock at night, and a good part of the time--and also when you frequently had things you had to do in the evening, so ah we moved here and when I come to New York I come to New York to work. I don't come to New York to live or to enjoy myself, except on rare occasions, I come to New York to work and so I live in the way that is the easiest way to do the work. And that's why I come to a hotel and I'm very comfortable and we manage I think on the whole to get through a tremendous amount of work and still do it with the maximum amount of comfort and um lack of friction on any of us.

But um [ER coughs] the secret, really, of how I run a household is that I have so many very good people who are helpful around me. I have Tommy who has been with me for twenty-five years, and who um sometimes they ask her what it means to be a secretary and I see a funny look on her face because it means being everything in the world--um frequently not doing secretary work. Sometimes being a grandmother for me, and some-- by proxy and sometimes um well practically anything falls into that category. Then we have two very good girls who've worked with her and uh one here in the office and one up in Hyde Park. And then I have had one maid at Hyde Park who came to me as a high school girl and has been with me now for about twelve years and we've taught her what she knows, and I think she's a very good cook and a very good all-around person--I have great respect and admiration for uh my Alice. And now I also have a man up there who is gradually becoming very valuable also--William White who does really uh a great many things that you couldn't.

[ER and Elliott Roosevelt overlap]

[Elliott Roosevelt:] Yes, including being one of the best ping pong players in the Hyde Park area.

[ER:] Well, he does all kind uh of uh of things perhaps that are not exactly in the line of a trained servant, but he nevertheless uh um does what we need very well. And then outside we have Mr. Lineker [spelling unconfirmed] who was with Father, and who drives the car when we need it, and does all superintending all about the house for me. And uh then also a gardener. So that in the country I really live, and there I really uh do try and supervise. When I'm home I'm quite a busybody, when uh I have to be in New York

I only get time on Saturdays and Sundays to hurriedly review what has been done [Elliott Roosevelt laughs]. I often think that if anyone watched me when I got home they'd laugh because the first thing I do is put away all the linen. And then [ER laughs] and the second thing I do is to just run round quickly and see where there are flowers and pick them. And that is the description of the way we live. Now I think you want to say something before we go further. [This section repeats 15:28-21:05]

[ER:] Well, Elliott do you think I left anything uncovered in my description of how I run my home?

[Elliott Roosevelt:] Well, yes I think you did leave a few things uncovered. Uh, for instance, you covered very thoroughly the fact that you live in a hotel in New York, but I thought you skipped over rather lightly your household duties in your real home at Hyde Park.

[ER:] Well, they vary so much because while I'm living in a hotel in New York and working I only go home weekends, and I don't go home every weekend, though most weekends and uh so I only have on those weekends Saturday and part of Sunday. And um there are three things that I do immediately, if there are flowers I get them, put them around the house-- um of course good part of the year eh I just have things that grow. But in summer that would be, or spring, that would be one of the first things. And um then I go right into the kitchen and talk over the menus and write everything out for Alice for the time we're going to be there. And so she knows just what she has to do in the way of food, and sometimes I can't tell her the exact hours or the exact numbers but I approximate it as nearly as possible. Now when we're really living there in summer um then have a big family and I have to get an extra person, and I should say that I do have a laundress who comes in by the day a--and um does the wash every week. And um so we um so I-I think what we do in summer is again a question of planning. We have a big family and uh we always have a uh picnic lunch by the pool every day and I just write all the meals out every day and somehow or other it seems to run very well. I'm sure that people who come to stay don't get all the things that they would get at a more meticulously run house but I hope that they are fairly comfortable. (23:20)

[Elliott Roosevelt:] Well, now you mentioned the fact that you write out these menus, uh what experience have you had with the actual requirements of getting things cooked and so forth. I think that uh many of the women in our audience would like to know something about your own knowledge of how a kitchen has to operate.

[ER:] Well, I think they would be amused if they knew that ah when I was a little girl I learned quite a little from my grandmother who was a very old fashioned house keeper. Kept house as no body keeps house today. Every morning I trotted along behind her and we went into the store room and she measured out just so many cups of flour that were going to be needed in the day and so many cups of sugar and they went into the tin that the cook would then use. And I knew and was allowed to go into the kitchen and bake a cake or do this or that. But I never learned to really cook a meal and I never had time. So after--or a while I waited after father had been um Assistant Secretary of the Navy and we came back to New York, we lived partly uh at Hyde Park one winter, and partly with granny in her house because ours was still rented. And that winter, not keeping house myself, I took cooking lessons and I learned to cook. But from that day on I've never had time to cook a whole meal, never! [ER laughs] And I would just be sorry for my family if I had to cook the meal. But I know a great deal about how things should be cooked. Father said I didn't care enough about food and towards the end I think he used to get annoyed because I didn't um I-I think he didn't have much appetite and it-it bothered him that I couldn't um think more about it. But um I-I do really know when I put my mind to it, I don't put my mind to it very often [ER laughs].

[Elliott Roosevelt:] Well, uh now you entertain a great deal at Hyde Park. Uh do you know for instance when you're having twenty or thirty or forty guests approximately how much to order in the ways of foods?

[ER and Elliott Roosevelt overlap]

[ER:] Oh, yes I can. I know exactly how much to order.

[Elliott Roosevelt:] You really do?

[ER:] Yes.

[Elliott Roosevelt:] Alright well now then, another question. This is purely personal. Do you always keep your ice box stocked so it that can be raided by your children and grandchildren [Elliott Roosevelt laughs]?

[ER:] Well, in summer of course I keep in the basement uh large quantities of soft drinks, and then this last summer if you'll remember your David stole all my of ice cream out of the deep freeze on several occasions, and we went to look for it and it wasn't there. But I try to keep well stocked for my children. And now I know you've got something you want to say. [This section repeats 26:28-32:04]

[ER:] My guest this afternoon is a man of many varied accomplishments successful in all, as an actor a radio commentator, and a director for both moving pictures and television. It gives me great pleasure to welcome you-- [Recording Ends]

(32:22)

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Transcription: Becky Mann
First Edit: Andreas Meyris
Final Edit: Seth LaShier
Final Check: Eadie Kremer