

THE ELEANOR ROOSEVELT PROGRAM

October 20, 1950

Description: In the opening segment, ER and Elliott Roosevelt discuss working for a boss who is a woman. In the interview segment, ER and actress Tallulah Bankhead discuss the Foster Parent Plan and baseball.

Participants: ER, Elliott Roosevelt, Tallulah Bankhead

[Elliott Roosevelt:] Mother I ran into a young lady the other day that wanted me to pose a problem for you. Here it is: "Everybody has warned me that working for a woman is very hard and unpleasant. I've been offered a job at a very good salary, but I cannot decide whether or not to take it because it is with a woman." [Elliott Roosevelt laughs]

[ER:] Well, I should think one would consider it exactly the way one would consider a job with a man. Now I realize that, um, there are a great many women who are very poor employers. They're poor employers in their homes; they're poor employers if they go into business. That's because they never themselves have done the work that they are asking other people to do.

[Elliott Roosevelt:] Mhm.

[ER:] Um, if they do the work themselves, then I don't think there is much difference if they once learn how to work themselves. I've worked a great deal for men in my life. [ER clears throat] I've worked for women too. Um it's commonly said that uh men are better executives uh that men waste less time than women. I've wasted more time listening to men talk than I ever wasted listening to women talk in my life. [Elliott Roosevelt laughs] And I um have worked um for-for men who were very efficient and very well organized, very good executives, and I have worked for men who are horribly poor executives, who weren't well organized at all.

[Elliott Roosevelt:] Well then, you're-you would say that, that as far as uh women are concerned, there are good women executives and poor women executives and good men executives and very poor men executives.

[ER:] Exactly the same. It's the person that makes the difference, and I think you can very often see uh in a women's home whether she's a good executive and know whether she will be a good executive in business.

[Elliott Roosevelt:] So that actually this question uh can apply to even, uh, going to work for a woman uh who is running a home uh just as much as it would in an office.

[Elliott Roosevelt and ER overlap here]

[ER:] It perfectly well--just as much as in an office because if the woman doesn't know how to work, she's never going to be a good executive you see.

[Elliott Roosevelt:] Yes, but you don't mean uh by saying "know how to work" that if she's hiring a stenographer that she must have been a stenographer herself, do you?

[ER:] Not of necessity, though I think it's an awfully good thing if she knows how long it takes her to type a letter. Or to uh--(2:51)

[Elliott Roosevelt:] Well there's something in that, but of course uh, most men executives haven't been stenographers before they hire stenographers themselves.

[ER:] I know, but I don't think it does anyone any harm to have some faint understanding of the length of time it takes to do a thing. I remember very well, two small boys of mine once whom I sent cleaning the bathtub, and [Elliott Roosevelt laughs] uh, who--when they had finished cleaning a bathtub, said to me, "Gee, Mother, we never knew it took so long!" [ER laughs]

[Elliott Roosevelt:] Well did you give them all the uh utensils that they needed to clean the bathtub?

[ER:] I gave them all the utensils they needed, [Elliott Roosevelt laughs] and it wasn't a very good job when it was done, so I have a feeling that there's a lot in-in knowing how much time a thing takes uh when you do know how to do it, and um for instance I would be delighted uh to work for Anna Rosenberg. [Elliott Roosevelt: Mhm]Um, some people would find her odd--

[ER and Elliott Roosevelt overlap here.]

[Elliott Roosevelt:] Well, would you mind telling our audience who Anna Rosenberg is? Because--

[ER and Elliott Roosevelt overlap here.]

[ER:] Well, Anna-Anna Rosenberg is an executive who has uh been an advisor to labor, to many people in government, and to many uh executives of different kinds, at the- heads of businesses, and um I imagine she expects a tremendous amount of the people who work for her, [Elliott Roosevelt: Mhm.] but, I think she would be fun to work with, if you cared about doing a good job, because uh she'd keep you right on your toes. Now I worked um politically under Mrs. [Belle] Moskowitz in Governor Smith's campaign. Everyone said to me, "Oh, you'll have a dreadful time working for Mrs. Moskowitz she expects so much of you." I never had an easier time working for anyone, and I loved working for her, she was a grand person. I ran the women's division of the national uh, campaign headquarters under her, and uh we never had a single bit of difficulty on anything. [Elliott Roosevelt: "Mhm."]But uh she had lots of ideas, and I had lots of ideas, and we worked them out together. Um I-I uh- I think that um there's no difference between working for a man and a woman um if they know how to work [Elliott Roosevelt: Well--] and if you know how to work. (5:22)

[Elliott Roosevelt:] Yeah, but uh what are the biggest mistakes that women executives should guard against in uh their handling of employees under them?

[ER:] Allowing themselves to be emotional. [Elliott Roosevelt: Mhm.] Uh, which is a very common thing for women.

[Elliott Roosevelt and ER overlap here]

[Elliott Roosevelt:] Do you think that women are more emotional than men?

[ER:] Not really more emotional, but they sometimes don't have as much self-control because they very often have not um been brought up uh to certain types of control that come to men very often through their-their discipline in games, [Elliott Roosevelt: Oh, yes.] and in physical things. Now women don't

often have that kind of discipline, and may not have had um the amount of discipline which is really essential um if you're going to run an office, or even a house, really, without friction.

[Elliott Roosevelt:] Yes. Well now Mother I want to ask a question because you've often been quoted uh in the press and uh-uh by people saying that you didn't think that the United States was ready to have a woman president of the United States. That's just about the biggest job in the United States that we have to offer to a male or female. Now, is that because you don't think that women are sufficiently equipped to handle that job?

[ER:] No, I think you could probably find women quite as well equipped as men. But I don't think we are conditioned yet to electing and following women in the same way, and to be president of the United States, you have to be able to hold your following; you can't do anything unless you can hold your following. And I don't think as yet the public is accustomed enough to following women in a political way, to trusting them and to staying with them um and therefore I uh-I think it will take a number of years and a great many more women in office before we reach the point where we can elect people and not ask is it a man or is it a woman, just is it a person who is capable of holding a job. (7:58)

[Elliott Roosevelt:] Well, uh, by public, do you mean uh the women in the public uh, as well as the men, or do you mean more that we have to condition men?

[Elliott Roosevelt and ER overlap here.]

[ER:] Yes, I mean the- I mean the women, no, I mean the women as well as the men. Women are more accustomed to following men in politics and in many other ways. You'll find um-um the same thing holds good of um of big executives. You find comparatively few high-up women executives. There are a few, and they're gaining uh Dorothy Schaver at Lord and Taylor's, and-and quite a number of-of--and Anna Rosenberg as I said, and various others who-who now have big uh positions and carry a lot of responsibility and command a following. But um you-you still have a lot to-to gain in the way of the general feeling about uh what a woman is capable of doing. Then you also have to remember another thing, and that is that um a woman who is going to take any one of these big jobs has had to learn certain things uh about her physical well-being, because almost anyone who carries these jobs has got to know how to stay well. [Elliott Roosevelt: Mhm.] And that's one of the things that isn't often taught to a woman. She's allowed to-to think about her health more um but not to think about it in the right way. You have to think about it just enough to stay well, [Elliott Roosevelt: Yes.] but not enough to be uh worried about yourself, or rather, be easy on yourself.

[Elliott Roosevelt:] I see. Well, I think then that we really have uh, stated an answer to this young lady who asked this question that uh she should take a job from a woman if she is satisfied that that woman is a good executive in the same sense that a man is a good executive.

[ER:] Yes, that's it.

[Break 10:13-10:27]

[ER:] This afternoon my living-room is graced with glamour, as my guest is none other than Miss. Tallulah Bankhead, who of course needs no introductory remarks. Miss. Bankhead--

[Tallulah Bankhead:] Thank you very much, Mrs. Roosevelt. You know it's always a joy for me to see you again. You remember the last time we met? It was under more or less the same circumstances. We were--I was your guest at the UN and we talked about uh the Foster Parent Plan. Well maybe you've seen --uh you know I adopted the little Greek girl. Well in uh most of the magazines these last few months I've

seen an-an ad uh-uh telling the public about the Foster Parent Plan. And in that, is my little girl, Barbara, who they brought over here because she was--her eye, you know, was so badly- [ER: Yes.] wounded and uh when she came to see me, she was perfectly darling, and so gay and sweet and when I heard her background before, how she slept on hard wooden floors and couldn't get used to a soft pillow and couldn't sleep when it was dawn and never knew electric lights or anything you know. And uh she uh want--she has a, a brown eye naturally--her natural eye--and they've got to give her a glass eye, and she insists upon wanting them being blue because she loves blue eyes. [Tallulah Bankhead laughs]

[Elliott Roosevelt:] Oh, that's wonderful.

[Elliott Roosevelt and Tallulah Bankhead overlap here]

[Tallulah Bankhead:] [ER coughs in the background] Going to give her--going to give her a brown eye and a blue eye, [ER: Oh that's-] and uh one night uh she came to the hotel where I was staying, and just across the way from me uh the great Joltin' Joe DiMaggio had an-an apartment, and she brought--she couldn't speak a word of English then naturally--and she brought a um a record of--of a Greek dance for her to do a little dance for us, and I didn't have a phonograph in my apartment at the time, so um, I telephoned down at the desk and asked if they had one, and they said no they didn't themselves, but that Joe across the way had one, so I phoned him and asked if he be kind enough to lend it to me. So he came over and uh little Barbara, I think her name in Greek is spelt with a "V" but it's "Barbara," uh did the dance for both of us and she was charming. (12:22)

[Elliott Roosevelt:] Well Tallulah I think I should explain to Mother, because you know she knows very little about baseball [Tallulah Bankhead chuckles] and uh Joe DiMaggio, Mother, is one of the greatest baseball players of all-time.

[Tallulah Bankhead:] And your mother knows it, there's nothing your mother doesn't know.

[Elliott Roosevelt, Tallulah Bankhead and ER laugh]

[ER:] Well I did know that much [Tallulah Bankhead laughs] but I don't know uh a great deal about it and I'm very much interested that you are a real baseball fan. I'm pretty much of a stranger in a strange land in this particular sport, simply because of lack of opportunity to watch it, I suppose. But I'm curious to know how you, one of our leading actresses, became interested in the game to the extent, I understand, of actually attending every game of the just completed World Series, [ER laughs] is that true? (13:15)

[Tallulah Bankhead:] Well that isn't quite true because uh unfortunately I didn't have an opportunity to go to the World Series and I'm rather lazy, I live in the country and I have my television set there, but I watched them all from the country. But if my [New York] Giants had won the World Series I would have been there. [ER: Oh--] As a matter of fact I'm--

[Tallulah Bankhead and ER overlap here.]

[ER:] Television, I see. [ER laughs] [Tallulah Bankhead: Yes.] So that's how you watched it.

[Tallulah Bankhead:] But it isn't half the same thing. I haven't been down for a long time, the polo grounds, and I'm writing an article for *Flair Magazine* about the Giants, and so I went down to see them and for the photograph, the usual thing that goes with an article in a magazine, and I went in the dugout and met them all, and I'd really forgotten because since I've lived in the country for the last few years I hadn't been going to the polo grounds, how different it is, you think you're seeing it on television. As much as I love television, it isn't anything like the real game, you know? (14:02)

[Tallulah Bankhead and ER overlap here]

[ER:] It doesn't give you the real atmosphere.

[Tallulah Bankhead and ER overlap here]

[Tallulah Bankhead:] Oh no, nothing like it. You forget that.

[ER:] Well--

[Tallulah Bankhead:] I-I am a-a fan more-more emotionally than anything else; I don't pretend to know technically about it. I'm sure, Elliott, you would be able to help me out here as well [ER laughs] as your Mother. But uh I always have to root for somebody, and I usually pick out, not through choice, but the underdog, it just happens they turn out to be the underdog, you know. So of course I'm a national leaguer, being a-a Giants fan. I-I'm sure you know the two leagues [ER: Yes, oh yes.] The American and The National league. And, uh, of course if my Giants can't win, it's up to me to root for the National League, as I did madly for the Philadelphia Phillies, and I thought they made a great showing, much better than it sounds on paper, four straight games.

[Elliott Roosevelt:] But wait a minute, Tallulah--

[Tallulah Bankhead:] What?

[Elliott Roosevelt:] You mean to say that you're more for the Giants than you are for the Brooklyn Dodgers?

[Tallulah Bankhead:] Oh how dare you--

[Tallulah Bankhead, Elliott Roosevelt, and ER laugh]

[Tallulah Bankhead:] Oh, well I've made friends with Leo [Durocher]. He was very sweet uh-and his wife was perfectly charming; she was at the polo grounds that day. She's a lovely woman. They have three children.

[Elliott Roosevelt and Tallulah Bankhead overlap here]

[Elliott Roosevelt:] Well I think he's a wonderful manager.

[Tallulah Bankhead:] I think he is too, and I think next year we may win. Of course that's always the way we sign off next year, maybe next year. [Elliott Roosevelt laughs][ER: Well--] But, uh, my interest in baseball really my father was the uh the first captain fullback of the Alabama Crimson Tide, the University of Alabama, and he also played on the baseball team. And when I was a very young girl in Washington, and Daddy was in Congress then uh the Congressmen played either the firemen or the uh- uh the policemen or something for some charity thing, and Daddy had always been boasting about his prowess in football and baseball, so naturally we were very excited seeing Daddy play. Well, I am ashamed to tell you that he struck out three times [ER and Elliott Roosevelt laugh] and I have never been so humiliated and neither has he. [Elliott Roosevelt and Tallulah Bankhead laugh] He said, "Tallulah, I'd rather have lost the election than to- than to strike out three times." [Elliott Roosevelt and Tallulah Bankhead laugh] (15:44)

[ER:] Well now, I-I realize that I should have been devoting a great deal more time to baseball, but I'm interested that your father really started you off in baseball, and um it's very often said that politics and the theater are two professions with much in common. And perhaps um the Bankheads, having had um-uh baseball in common [ER laughs] and we may find more Bankheads uh who will distinguish themselves in both fields uh though yours will be one as a fan, and not as a participant, I fear. But now it's rumored, you see, that you, the daughter of our former distinguished Speaker of the House, might desert the stage for a career in diplomatic life. Is there any truth to this rumor that you might follow in the footsteps of our illustrious minister to the duchy of Luxembourg, Madam Mesta?

[Tallulah Bankhead:] Mrs.-Mrs. Roosevelt, [ER coughing] the Democratic Party can rest in peace, I am not going to enter politics, so I won't lose any votes for anybody on our side. [Tallulah Bankhead laughs]

[Elliott Roosevelt:] Ah, but--

[ER:] Well, I don't feel it's a good thing to rest in peace. [Tallulah Bankhead laughs] I don't want it to rest in peace. I should think it would be worried that you won't.

[Tallulah Bankhead and ER overlap here]

[Tallulah Bankhead:] Well to press on would be--

[ER:] I think it's wonderful when women want to go ahead and do these things. (17:09)

[Tallulah Bankhead:] Well I just haven't got the uh-[ER coughs] the uh-the uh, facilities and I haven't got the uh training. I-I follow, as you know, all national, international politics always because if you don't follow those I think you're very insular, very stupid. And there's nothing else these days with the world the way it is but to be as up as you can within the limitations of your intelligence and your understanding and uh of-of the thing. But I am a really very rabid reader, uh-uh, avid reader I mean, of uh-of all that's going on. As you know, I watch the UN everyday on my television, and that was a great pleasure the last time I was your guest over there. But as for my going into politics, I think I'll leave that to the [unclear term: might be "Solands"] in the Bankhead family [coughing]. Actually, you know, my father wanted to go on the stage, so that's where I got that from. So he didn't go on the stage and I'm not going into politics. [Elliott Roosevelt laughs]

[Tallulah Bankhead and ER overlap here]

[ER:] Well how it does tie in--well, it does tie in closely together, and I think it's encouraging that in these days we see more and more women at least who are enormously interested in world affairs. I wish you would go into something that at least um brings you into, actively, into this field. But now, I think we'll have to let Elliott say something. (18:25)

[Elliott Roosevelt:] Well-well I, before we do uh-uh close off uh for a few minutes, I'd like to ask uh-uh Miss. Bankhead if uh she doesn't think that she could find time amongst her many other activities to uh maybe take part in some of the organizations that are working to uh try and make the United Nations a successful organization and-and uh help to bring about world peace because through the activities of individuals in support of the United Nations and telling other people of the United States, I think that we're going to bring about better understanding and a complete backing, which we must have, one hundred percent of the American people behind the United Nations. What do you think, Miss. Bankhead? Do you think that uh everybody has uh-uh an obligation to do something in backing up the United Nations?

[Tallulah Bankhead:] I certainly feel that everyone has an obligation, women certainly as much as men, and in some cases when they have more uh time they-they should even devote more time than some men who-who have their other professions. But uh and I do take a very lively interest and I think I'm on many committees that Mrs. Roosevelt's on, though you are on so many that you really probably don't have time to write down a list of responses and things, you know. [Tallulah Bankhead laughs]

[Tallulah Bankhead and ER overlap here]

[ER:] I don't even know what they are. Very often [ER laughs] I don't know each one I'm on.

[Tallulah Bankhead:] I just wish I had a gift of uh of words, say, like I think you remember my father was a natural orator, [ER: Oh] and I'm a--you know, as an actress I learned my lines. I'm really rather just a parrot, you know. I say somebody else's lines, but I uh I-I'm very interested in, Mrs. Roosevelt, always know, in fact I first became interested in politics with your beloved late husband, President Roosevelt. And I had just come back from England, you know I'd been there for eight years, [ER: I remember.] and that was the first time I ever voted. (20:18)

[ER:] Well I think that's really a wonderful thing, and I-I know his feeling was that we should all take a very great interest and have personal responsibility. And now, this time I'm really turning it over to Elliott. [Tallulah Bankhead chuckles]

(20:33)

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