

## THE ELEANOR ROOSEVELT PROGRAM

August 31, 1951

Description: Recording quality is poor. Recording becomes inaudible in some sections and not transcribed. In the program's series finale, ER and Elliott Roosevelt discuss their favorite moments and how the show was produced.

Participants: ER, Elliott Roosevelt, Ben Grauer

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[ER:] This is Eleanor Roosevelt speaking. Our program is coming to you here from my living room at the Park Sheraton Hotel in New York City. I'm very happy to have this little while with you each day and I hope you'll enjoy the guest we've invited to be with us today. And now for a moment I'm going to turn the program over to Elliott.

[Elliott Roosevelt:] Today marks the close of the present series of *The Eleanor Roosevelt Program*. So instead of Mrs. Roosevelt having a guest, she is going to take us behind the scenes of how these programs were produced, discuss the guests she's had, and give us a preview of her future plans, and give us some of her views on the state of the world.

[Break 00:44-00:53]

[Elliott Roosevelt:] Today we have another letter from Los Angeles. This one is from Mrs. Mary Gerstle. I will read it in part. "Dear Mrs. Roosevelt, I listen to your most interesting radio broadcast daily. Today, I am not posing a question, but feel I should like to interject a few thoughts on our leaders in the government of these United States. True, we elect our members who promise to do many things for the good of the people they represent. Do they? No they do not. We send letters and postcards asking our representatives to do this, that, or another without avail. It is very disheartening that our members suddenly change and follow a different trend of thought. Personal gain, perhaps indirect, the term which being an older person touches me deeply; this is it later than you think? Also, as a friend remarked to me recently, when I grumbled at the cost of a recent illness, 'my dear, what you have is only loaned to you, so what? You can't take it with you.' The joke is I am not a rich old lady, but living and eating up the little capital I have. I laughed to myself when you remarked that your people do not like you to call yourself an old lady. Such is my case, too. Truly in looks and thought I am not old. In this world of strife and turmoil, do our members in Congress and the Senate stop to think that at any moment life may stop for them, I wonder? Daily, one reads of people passing on between the ages of forty and sixty, who thought they had so much time to reap the reward of honest, or dishonest, hard work. It is unbelievable that the bills for rollbacks on food, et cetera will not pass. What took place last night in the suburb of Chicago ought to make people stop to think. People because of their color have been disgracefully persecuted in trying to get eh a home. When this news is broadcast to the world, what will people everywhere say? Can we seriously say we are fit to be the leading country in the world of nations?" Well Mrs. Gerstle says in her letter that she is not posing a question, but I think she has brought up some very interesting points. (3:24)

[ER:] Well, she has. Of course I wrote a column about Cicero because it seemed to me a very terrible thing that a mob of people who evidently must've gone completely mad had--could um make--put on that sort of a demonstration because some colored people were moving into an apartment house. Um in which there were only white people, apparently. Now I read a letter afterwards which said that they hoped very much that uh these colored people would quietly fade away because of course if they were wise they would realize it was much better to bring up their children un in an environment where there was no hate

and no disgruntled feelings against them. Well I wonder if the person who wrote that ever thought what it would be like to be told that you couldn't live somewhere that you wanted to live, and that the reason was that you were of a different color from the other people.

After all, those of us who were born white can be very grateful that we were born white, but we might've been born colored and there isn't anything, any really good reason why we should feel that we are privileged in any way to look down on those who were born colored. And um, I-I am simply appalled at what happened in Cicero at the present time. I'm-I can't see how a mob could um have been so inhuman as to-to make that sort of a demonstration and from the point of view of what it does to us on the international scale um nothing could play into the hands of the Communists so satisfactorily. The Communists will play it up to the nth degree in every area of the world and two thirds of the people of the world are colored. They will play it up and say "this is what these white people who say they are going to help you uh actually do at home." [Elliott Roosevelt: Mhm.] And it will do us infinite harm, infinite harm on that whole picture of trying to gain a better understanding and trying to keep the underdeveloped areas of the world from going communist. It will do us great harm.

Now, on the first part of her question, I don't think all representatives, either for gain or because they think it's going to bring them perhaps a better standing as representatives, go back on the promises that they have made beforehand. I think you have to realize, or in a campaign, you have to realize that new circumstances come up and that sometimes people find they cannot for a number of reasons support things that they'd hoped they could support. But if in the main, your representative sticks to the objectives which he outlined as being his objectives, I think you should not just write him a postcard or a letter when he displeases you but you should let him know when he is doing something that you think is good. Uh usually our people hear nothing from us except when some one thing that touches us personally comes up and then we write them that we don't like what they're doing. We built up no background to that, we haven't made ourselves uh acquaintances from whom they've heard frequently and whom they knew were watching what they were doing and both praising as well as blaming and I think that if we took a little more trouble we could improve the quality of our representatives, and it's the kind of honestly that--now we had a sermon in church yesterday in which our minister pointed out that we were talking so much about dishonesty on the higher levels, but how many of us though it was dishonest for instance to pick up souvenir in a hotel that he had checked on a hotel where the hotel management said that the habit of the American public of picking up souvenirs cost that hotel \$50,000 a year. Now, that meant they took a towel, or they took a spoon, or they took some other little thing and they didn't think anything about. But fundamentally, that is not an honest thing to do. (8:42)

[Elliott Roosevelt:] But, Mother, it isn't just the-the general public. Uh the minister also pointed out that even in the White House – [ER: They did it in the White House and in Buckingham Palace!] and Buckingham Palace you know, they were very honored guests, supposedly very, worthy, honest people, that they were just as guilty at that level of society.

[ER:] He did. He pointed uh out to-to us that it was--that it ran through every element of society and that when we were suddenly horrified at dishonestly coming up in much wider forms, we ought to go back and look at what we had taught and how we had acted in our own daily lives. And I think there's an awful lot of truth in that; I think if we stopped and thought a little bit, um we'd take--he-he even pointed out that a child will very often begin by taking some of his mother's money eh and say, "well, it belongs to me just as much as it does to Mother," um and uh that the-the beginning of our respect for somebody else's belongings started when you were a small child. [Elliott Roosevelt: Mhm.] And you stop vandalism that way. You stop the um--well just as I was told about a little while ago about the-by the policemen an-who started a club in one town that Halloween always had meant-- oh several hundred dollars' worth of damage to the citizens of the town. And that since they'd started a club which developed a sense of preservation [Elliott Roosevelt: Mhm.] of property and proper use of things in the community, eh that last

year there was one broken windowpane and nothing more in that whole community. Now um I- I-I thought it was all very interesting because it does mean that all this begins with us as individuals and way at the bottom and goes on up to the top. [Elliott Roosevelt: Mhm.] And I think when she complains of our representatives, where she should really pin her eyes is to herself and her neighbors, and try there to establish the kind of pattern that she hopes to find at the top eventually. (11:08)

[Elliott Roosevelt:] yes, well I do feel though that uh there is a certain ground on which possibly the American public could be a little bit sad today because at a time when we should be the great leading nation and we should be moving out with high ideals and high uh [ER: Imperatives.] principles and standards throughout, we are having less and less said to us by our leaders of the necessity for us today in this very important crisis in our whole history for us to prove that we are worthy of being the leading nation. (11:49)

[ER:] Well that may be. Perhaps our leaders should be saying more to us on the subject of the-- what makes leaders valuable in the world. But nevertheless, um I-I still believe we could do a lot for ourselves which would make us better leaders.

[Elliott Roosevelt:] Well, I hope that that answers Mrs. uh Gerstle's letter, and uh I know that it is a very, very interesting series of questions that she did pose even though she said that she wasn't going to ask any questions. And now I see it's time for us to go on to another part of the program.

[Break 12:33-12:36]

And now Mother, as a farewell for the time being to our radio audience, instead of your having a guest, I'm going to turn the [unclear term] and interview you.

[ER:] I'm a little afraid of that.

[Elliott:] You are? [Elliott Roosevelt and ER laugh] Well, uh let's start off by going back in our memory over the uh intervening months since we started on the air last October and uh let's talk about some of the guests that you've had. Out of the various types of guests that you've had, uh who did you consider were your most interesting ones and why?

[ER:] Well, I don't think it'd be possible for me to say because I found a great many of them interesting. They--they were very varied and I was tremendously interested in nearly all of them, I think very few could be more charming than Jinx [Falkenburg] for instance and Tallulah Bankhead [1902-1968]. But um, I found many of the writers that I interviewed about their books extremely interesting. [Elliott Roosevelt: Yes.] And uh I loved seeing old friends and finding myself in the unusual position of being able to interview them like Robert Sherwood [1896-1955]. [ER laughs] [Elliott Roosevelt: Yeah.] Um but I and Lady Reading [Dowager Marchioness Stella Isaacs], and people of [unclear name] and people like that-- even Mrs. [Edith Benham] Helm [1874-1962] who I'm sure had no desire to be interviewed at all. [ER and Elliott Roosevelt laugh] But I-I found all of them interesting, I didn't um--(14:13)

[Elliott Roosevelt:] Well, d-d-do you feel that uh-uh possibly our audience uh gathered a little more information about the political life of our country through the many public officials that you interviewed, such as uh the Secretary of the Navy—

[ER:] Well, judging from the letters, a great many people and strangely enough, [ER clears her throat] today I had a whole batch of letters when I got to town, all about the program and all saying now that they were on holiday they were able to listen to it every day which they had not been before [Elliott Roosevelt: Mhm.] and that they were getting a great deal of um out of it. What interests me most is that frequently

it's not just the visiting guests who's being interviewed, they um apparently like very much um questions and answers. [Elliott Roosevelt: Our question period everyday.] Yes, that question period. Um I-I was quite uh-uh pleased that they felt, several-several of the letters said that they felt it had um cleared up certain things for them. And then one or two of them asked me new questions --how could such and such a thing be so [Elliott Roosevelt: Mhm, yes.] in view of other things? (15:39)

[Elliott Roosevelt:] So uh do you also think that uh some of the uh people that we've had on of international character, for instance the Head of International Red Cross and uh British statesmen and French statesmen, and people of that kind, do you think that uh first of all that the language difficulties were not too serious for the audience? And secondly that what they had to say was couched in a way that the-an-an American audience could understand?

[ER:] Well I have been told that we lost a great deal of our listening audience on the for-foreign programs I did in Europe and that must be partly um difficulties with understanding what the people were saying. Perhaps the different accent variations [Elliott Roosevelt: Yes.] and so forth and probably partly that there was less variety that they were nearly all of them people um in some way connected with public affairs. [Elliott Roosevelt: Yes.] And um [ER clears her throat] since we uh must take what we are told by authorities on paper, um whatever you do to find out what the listening audience is and I have to think that that is the reason that people [Elliott Roosevelt: mhm.] found it hard to understand and didn't not um uh want particularly to have all of one kind of person on the program. (17:13)

[Elliott Roosevelt:] And yet in large measure most of our questions and answers uh that we've had over the past months have dealt with uh public affairs [ER: Public affairs, nearly all of them.] and uh I've noticed that the mail uh-uh voiced extremely strong feelings uh one way or another with regards to questions that we've raised and points of view that we've brought forth.

[ER:] Yes, but apparently they did not like the interviews as much, according to what we were told at least [Elliott Roosevelt: Mhm.]and have been so, and um I think that must mean that they did not um uh--they do not find it easy to understand people who speak with a foreign accent. (18:00)

[Elliott Roosevelt:] Do you know uh we have had so many different kinds of guests uh-uh that I've been interested by certain incongruities that have appeared uh with some of the guests. For instance, uh Burl Ives [1909-1995] uh-uh coming on and uh others of your guests while they're known in a certain field that when they turn up on your program, they turn out to be experts on an entirely different field.

[ER:] Well that's true, of course, because nearly everyone has more than one interest.

[Elliott Roosevelt:] I remember uh the complete incredulity I had when a long time ago you had former heavyweight boxing champion Ezzard Charles [1921-1975] on, and he turned out to be uh a lover of poetry and uh expressed keen interest in the poetry of uh Robert Service [1874-1958]. And it was a great surprise to me to find uh that he was a man who was known more for his uh athletic abilities than through his mental prowess. (19:09)

[ER:] Well, uh that- that very often happens that people are not all wrapped up in just one thing.

[Elliott Roosevelt:] Well, I thought one of the more amusing of all the broadcasts that you've ever had that was a painter that you had on, by the name of Douglas Chandor. [ER: Oh yes, Douglas Chandor. He was a delight.] I never--I never seen something more like as uh--more anxious to do a ham in my whole life than-- [ER laughs][ER: I think he had a wonderful time.] Um, you know you asked uh of many many of your guests what their hopes were for world peace and what they thought uh of the chances of our going to war with Russia were and uh I wondered whether you'd care to give your views at this time on-on that

question because I think that's one of the things that all of us are so concerned with in the United States. We live in this constant fear of the third world war and of having to go to war with the- this other great power following a totally different ideology. Uh do you really think we have a good opportunity to preserve peace and to come to an eventual understanding with the Soviet Union? (20:32)

[ER:] Well, I think when you say a good opportunity um I think that it's worth the effort. I think that um I disagree with the people who um say well um you better cut off the USSR and all its satellites and we better um go to war right now and better prepare perhaps than be beaten later. Uh and uh you're going to have war in the long run. I don't think that you should take that point of view, I think you should take the point of view that it is a difficult thing to understand um people that you know very little about. Um you are suspicious of them, it's impossible not to be, eh because they are cut off, and they are not allowing free access to their country nor their land or countrymen to come out and talk and see the rest of the world. So there is a great deal of suspicion built up by that attitude alone and--but nevertheless there is a bridge furnished by the United Nations. And I think to have um that bridge is valuable and less scary and I am hopeful that if we have great patience we may eventually convince the peoples of the world that we want peace, and that we are willing to do more than our share to adopt a living standard of people all over the world and that we recognize the fact that in the modern world um you really have to live together because the world has been made so small by rapid transportation and rapid communication, therefore even though the ideas clash, and they do clash because when they're based on the supreme power of the state and the obligation of the individual to the state and the other is based on the obligation of the state to the individual and the importance of the happiness and independence of the individual. But even though that is so, I think with patience and with the bridge kept open through the UN, we should be able to live in the same world that we finally to address sufficiently, our varied beliefs and manners of life so that we will not clash and I think the most important thing is to see to it that there is a balance of power so that no one is tempted to attack anyone else because they think they can push them over and put their own ideals on across. [Elliott Roosevelt: Mhm.] But on the other hand, so that there isn't uh a temptation to um--so nobody has so much power that they feel um this is the time to use it, and then our ideas will prevail in the world as a whole. [Elliott Roosevelt: Mhm.] I think that if we can control that and keep the balance of power even between the two great forces of the world and have patience, that they ought to be able to work together and uh finally to have another unified world that we have today. (24:51)

[Elliott Roosevelt:] Well thank you very much for that answer and I think now we will just pause for a moment to hear from our announcer and then we will return because there are several more questions that I would -I would like to ask you on this program.

[Break 25:03-25:07]

[Elliott Roosevelt:] Now, Mother, I'd like to return to a few more questions if I may. Uh to ask you, because I think that the audience would like to know just how you have managed to work this program into your other schedule of duties; they know that you are constantly called upon for public appearances, to travel here, there and yonder. And they hear of broadcasts that you have made that were initiated in Washington, and in Geneva, Switzerland, and in London, and in Paris, and here in New York. Just how were these broadcasts done and how they were arranged? (25:53)

[ER:] Well, you know more about that than I do, [Elliott Roosevelt laughs] but um of course I-I can answer for myself, but then you can answer on the technicalities of how you arranged the broadcasts because it was um Henry Rosenthal and Miss [unclear name] who did the work under you, and so you would know more of how that was done. But as far as I personally am concerned, I um really carried very little of the work that I am supposed to do. Um for instance, on my newspaper column, I dictate it uh to Miss [Malvina] Thompson [1893-1953] on a typewriter and I correct it. She does the typing so that there is very little mechanical work that I do on that. I—

[Elliott Roosevelt:] About how long does it take you to dictate a daily column?

[ER:] Well, I--it depends, it varies with how much you are doing, but I've been doing it for so long that I dictate in my mind during the day, keep track of two or three different things that I want to mention either in one column or in several. And I keep track during the day: don't let me forget these are things that I want to write about either today, or the next day, or two days later." And then I will be thinking about them and perhaps I'll be talking about them with different people. Or reading about them. And um, so actually when you come to do your dictating you're already prepared with what you're going to say [Elliott Roosevelt: Mhm.] and you go right ahead with it. And the actual dictation only takes a very short time. [Elliott Roosevelt: A matter of minutes [unclear speech]] Yes. Sometimes half an hour, sometimes a little bit more of course. [Elliott Roosevelt: Mhm.] But it's-it's--you can't say that's the length time it took to do the work because you're doing it all day. (27:59)

[Unclear speech, ER and Elliott overlapping with heavy static]--material or anything you need and anything you talk about is always um [unclear speech] rather than [unclear speech]. [Elliott Roosevelt: Yes.] So that you are really doing that work twenty four hours or-or twelve or fourteen hours a day, whatever hours you don't sleep. [Elliott Roosevelt: Yeah.] And um that's--and the [unclear term] thing about the page [unclear term] reading, those questions are sent into me, now sometimes [unclear speech] I did read.

[Recording is nearly inaudible from 28:36 - 42:54]

[Ben Grauer:] We'll return to Mrs. Roosevelt and her interview with Elliott Roosevelt in a moment. [Unclear speech] this is WNBC AM and FM New York and you're listening to the Eleanor Roosevelt Program recorded in Mrs. Roosevelt's living room in the Park Sheraton Hotel in New York City. Here again, is Elliott.

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