

THE ELEANOR ROOSEVELT PROGRAM

October 13, 1950

Description: In the opening segment, ER and Elliott Roosevelt respond to a listener's question about teenage delinquency. In the interview segment, ER discusses civil defense in the time of war with Colonel Lawrence Wilkinson, Lady Margaret D'Arcy, and Francis Littlewood.

Participants: ER, Elliott Roosevelt, Colonel Lawrence Wilkinson, Francis Littlewood, Lady Margaret Darcy

[Elliott Roosevelt:] Mother, uh, on our program yesterday we discussed one of the questions which kept reoccurring in my trek around town and out into the country to find out what people are thinking about and what they're—they'd particularly like to hear discussed. And today I'd like to go on to another question uh in which you, I think, will have a special interest in uh in discussing this question. Uh it is uh do you think that our reformatory system for correcting delinquency on the part of our teenaged youngsters is really operating successfully in the various states of the union?

[ER:] Well, I know more about our own state; I know a little about many states and about some of the things they're doing in many states. I know more about New York State.

[Elliott Roosevelt:] Well let's talk about New York first and then maybe you can expand a little bit later on the other states.

[ER:] Well, I'd think I'd like to talk a little generally first because this question is tied up with the very question that we discussed yesterday because it is in our youth, you remember a saying of the Catholic, the Roman Catholic Church, "Give me a child 'til they are seven and after that you can have them." So that this question isn't just teenage youngsters, it begins much younger and we have to realize that delinquents, uh, come out of the kind of society you have. It's not just, uh a kid is bad, um, it's the society that he is born into. (1:55)

[Elliott Roosevelt:] Well, in other words, it's the existence of slum areas and um very backward areas.

[ER:] It's the existence of slum areas. It's the existence of bad uh influences on his uh parents. And—

[Elliott Roosevelt:] And lack of education.

[ER:] Lack of edu--lack of food very often for the child. Proper food and proper medical care. [Elliott Roosevelt: Mhm.] All those things are involved in delinquency. But in—when you come down to what states do about it, many states don't begin to do anything as young as they should. There are many states in which when small children come into court, and children come into court at the ages of seven and eight and nine.

[Elliott Roosevelt:] Well doesn't uh Justice Polier uh uh have a court where those children do come?

[ER:] Well many states have children's courts.

[Elliott Roosevelt:] Yes.

[ER:] And what I was pointing out was is very often there is no place to send them. And they are paroled back to their families to the very conditions which created whatever they did, or created in them the desire to do whatever they did. Now in our own state, to come down to something concrete um we have had uh for a long time in the state uh an interest, a great interest in what to do with delinquents and we have, which was built when um my husband was governor of this state, a...

[Elliott Roosevelt:][Overlaps ER] Well wasn't quite a bit--[ER:][Overlaps Elliott Roosevelt]reformatory for twelve to sixteen.

[Elliott Roosevelt:]Well wasn't quite a bit done when Al Smith was governor of New York too?

[ER:] Oh yes, he had an interest. Oh, a great deal has been talked about and done. This particular reformatory at Warwick, which was built um when we were in Albany, was supposed to be run on a new pattern um I don't think it always has been run on the pattern and uh it, anyway, reaches children from twelve to sixteen.

[Elliott Roosevelt:]Yes.

[ER:]Now, the courts in New York felt the need of beginning with children younger than that, and I have been interested and--um through the interest of-of, Judge Polier and some of the other children's court judges, in an experiment at Wiltwyck School. That of course is really a private undertaking, though the city pays for the children who are committed there. (4:37)

[Elliott Roosevelt:]Well, just what does uh this experiment try to do that is different from the present reform system? I'm one of the ignorant people although I've heard you talk about this quite a number of times. What does the--when you're committed to Warwick, for instance, how is it different from when you're committed to Wiltwyck?

[ER:]Well, in the first place you're twelve years old before you can be committed to Warwick and you can be committed to Wiltwyck at the age of eight, between the ages of eight and twelve. And um if you go to Warwick you are under strict supervision all the time. You are locked up in your cottage, even though it is a cottage system, you're locked up at night. And you're walked in squads and so forth, it's, it's--

[Elliott Roosevelt:]Well isn't that contrary to the idea of, of what was to be the system when Warwick was built?

[ER:]Oh, quite contrary. But, um, uh, at Wiltwyck there are no-no walls.

[Elliott Roosevelt:] No locks on the doors?

[ER:] There is no barbed wire.

[ER:]There is um--it's perfectly open. And now and then children run away because we have very bad children at Wiltwyck. I was so amused; I have a picnic for them every year, and you know this year, someone overheard some of the little boys as they passed through my living room say, "Gee, wouldn't this be a wonderful place to lift things!" [ER laughs]

[Elliott Roosevelt:] Well have you ever--?

[ER:]So they're really bad little boys, and our neighbors around Wiltwyck, every now and then as boys run away, get their houses broken into and they don't like it at all--

[Elliott Roosevelt:]Well--

[ER:]—and they have to have it explained to them that this experiment is worthwhile!

[Elliott Roosevelt:]Well tell me-- I'm interested that, uh, you've been holding these picnics for the Wiltwyck children for a great many years now; have you ever had anything lifted?

[ER:]Never. I've never had anything lifted and I think there's another interesting story. Once upon a time um Trude Lash and I, uh, went over to uh a party at Wiltwyck and the children are always very much interested in our cars, and I've always been wise enough to put my keys in my bag, but Trude forgot and left hers in. When she came back there were no keys, and um, then the boys who had been appointed as um--

[Elliott Roosevelt:] Guardians?

[ER:]Well not guardians exactly, but they were kind of ushers that day, were all called together and asked--not one of them, nobody had taken those keys. And um they tried their best to find out who, and finally it turned out that a brother of a boy who was there had taken the keys! [laughter]

[Elliott Roosevelt:]Oh no! Well in other words, it is--

[ER:]She got them back alright, but it was several days later.

[Elliott Roosevelt:]Uh-huh, but the difference in the system really then is uh that they're really not confined. (7:34)

[ER:] No, and if you have seen the picture, *The Quiet One*, you will have an idea of the kind of children, because many of these children are almost psychiatric cases. They're very disturbed children in a, in a nervous and emotional way. And that's part-- it's teaching that they need--

[Elliott Roosevelt:]And its psychiatric treatment and giving them the atmosphere of a home, is that right?

[ER:]And they have to have school and they have to be encouraged to learn. They have to be interested in new things, and they have to be given enough to do so that uh life is filled with interesting things and they're not um they don't have time to think. The old thinks a lot of children do things because um there really isn't anything else for them to do at that particular time.

[Elliott Roosevelt:]Yes, nothing but playing in the streets—

[ER:]Exactly.

[Elliott Roosevelt:]And with no play things to play with.

[ER:]They get into a gang and they um--they really belong to gangs sometimes because there isn't anything else to do.

[Elliott Roosevelt:]Well, is it true that there is a great deal less juvenile delinquency in rural areas than there is in uh cities? (8:55)

[ER:]I imagine that is true, but I don't know the statistics. We'd have to really look that up on a statewide basis. I think it would be interesting, perhaps, to-- if we get, if we find that people are interested in this question, perhaps it would be interesting sometime to bring our commissioner of welfare from New York State here to speak on this subject.

[Elliott Roosevelt:]I think it would be wonderful.

[ER:]And also Dr. Papanek, who heads Wiltwyck, and perhaps the new director at Warwick because you go from one to the other, you see.

[Elliott Roosevelt:]Well I see that we're uh, uh, running along in time and I think that we're again going to have to cut this short, Mother, but, I'd like to just ask one question from you, uh, if we can bring, expand on this program and bring some of the experts, I think everybody would be interested and we'll be interested in hearing, uh, from our audience as to any particular parts of this subject that they'd like to know about, but I'd like to know, um, are there other schools throughout the country like Wiltwyck that are being, where the experiments are being tried? (10:06)

[ER:]Oh yes, as you remember, Father um Father Flanagan's Boy Town is one that tried it, perhaps one of the pioneers and there were other copies of that in many other places. There's one, I know--happen to know of a school outside of Chicago, and one outside of Detroit, and so forth. So there are many experiments, but they're too small, they ought to be on a statewide basis.

[Elliott Roosevelt:] Yes. Well now, we'll go onto this other part of the program and we'll uh be returning on another day to this subject.

(Break: 10:37-10:53)

[Elliott Roosevelt:]And now, in this atomic age, all of us have a real sense of responsibility as to just what our duties will be in the event of warfare from a civil defense standpoint. So Mother has some guests who can throw a great deal of light on this problem. Mother, will you introduce our first guest please?

[ER:]Yes, Elliott, I would be very glad to do so. This afternoon our guests will speak on a subject of vital interest to everyone. We go on the theory that it is better to be prepared than to be taken by surprise. So we're talking about the possibility of the United States being bombed and what measures must be taken to handle the resulting damage and panic should such a thing happen. My first guest is Colonel Lawrence Wilkinson, director of the New York State Civil Defense Commission. Colonel Wilkinson.

[Lawrence Wilkinson:]Thank you, Mrs. Roosevelt. Civil defense is most certainly a serious matter and one requiring the serious consideration of every citizen. (12:09)

[ER:]Would you mind telling us, Colonel, what has been done already in this country to mobilize civil defense and whether progress, great progress has been made or not.

[Lawrence Wilkinson:] I returned yesterday from a meeting in Washington at which the civil defense directors of all the states met with the federal authorities to review their local plans and organizations with the representatives of the National Security Resources Board. It was most enlightening to find that, although unevenly, every state in the country has made some kind of a start in the development of its civil defense plans and organization. The degree of progress, obviously, is uh affected by the number of strategic areas which a state contains. I am not boasting when I say that the State of New York, because of its particular position and its awareness of the gravity of this problem has perhaps moved as far forward

as any other state in the Union. We found, in reviewing our plans with the federal government, that we were thoroughly in step with their thinking, which in turn is based upon the vast experience they have been able to accumulate in England and Germany and Japan and other countries which have had firsthand evidence of the very intense disruption which enemy attack can cause. (14:14)

[ER:]Do you think that, um, you can waken people's, um, interest so that they will actually go to work to learn about this, Colonel?

[Lawrence Wilkinson:]We have found so far in New York that that is not a problem. The man in the street and the man in the office uh are both intensely concerned with the possible imminence of this danger, and the number of volunteers, the great mass of correspondence which comes into the commission, indicates quite clearly that public interest will not be a problem.

[Elliott Roosevelt:]Colonel, you said uh the people of New York, when you're in Washington at this conference did the other state directors give indication that they were having difficulty in making the uh citizens of their states and the strategic areas become fully aware of the problems in the same manner that the people of New York are aware of them?

[Lawrence Wilkinson:]I found no such indication, but felt only qualified to speak of my own state.

[Elliott Roosevelt:]Yes.

[ER:]Well, it's good to hear that such strides are being made, and I think we'd like to know a little bit about what sort of defense we're setting-we're setting up.

[Lawrence Wilkinson:]Uh, in the state of New York, and as I've said uh we find that we are working, uh, in perfect harmony with the thoughts and plans of the federal government, we are attempting now to make the most full, flexible utilization of our existing resources. We are setting up a civil defense control, a civil defense command, and a civil defense plan, which will ensure that our existing resources, and manpower, equipment, material, supplies can be brought to bear in case of an emergency, without delay and with maximum effect. We are calling upon our citizens to join the existing forces as volunteers to accept specialized training in the various fields of civil defense, and we are establishing emergency procedures, and we are looking to the establishment of emergency stockpiles to supplement this organization. (17:09)

[Elliott Roosevelt:]Well, Colonel, could I interrupt again on Mother's and your conversation to ask another question, and that is, uh, how soon will the average householder uh be instructed as to what part uh they are going to play in this overall program?

[Lawrence Wilkinson:]The New York State Civil Defense Commission published, with the, uh, assistance of private interests, some two weeks ago a pamphlet called "You and the Atomic Bomb," which is a complete book of instructions for the citizen to follow in the event of atomic attack. It also indicates the part which he and his friends and his family should take in preparing to effectively withstand such an attack.

[Elliott Roosevelt:]How does the average citizen get a hold of this booklet?

[Lawrence Wilkinson:]It is available by writing to Department E of Life Magazine in New York City at the price of ten cents for a single copy and going down to as little as two and half cents in lots of five thousand or more.

[ER:]That's quite a, quite an undertaking to have that prepared and I've always found, however, that the difficulty was to make people read um anything which took more than uh five minutes. Usually, whatever they read--I--primarily I'm thinking of campaign literature, [ER laughs] has to be on one page. I'm wondering whether they will read a whole book. (19:15)

[Lawrence Wilkinson:]I think, Mrs. Roosevelt, that is a very shrewd observation upon the reading habits of uh everyone. However, the response to date would indicate that uh there is a very large reader demand, and the uh press, the radio, television, and other media of public information are assisting the commission in conveying the information in this booklet to the public in, uh smaller doses which I'm sure will not exhaust either their patience or attention.

[ER:]Well, that must mean that they really are conscious of the fact that, um, this is a real menace and they'd better be prepared to meet it. Now that, I think, is half of your battle, probably because if you couldn't make them feel that they were really um menaced and really had to uh prepare themselves, they wouldn't bother to read, so I think that's-that's a very good sign. It's certainly a tremendous undertaking and um I congratulate you on what you have accomplished so far and I hope that you will be able to retain the public's interest. Now, if you will excuse me a minute before I introduce my other guests, I think Elliott has a word to say. (20:54)

[Elliott Roosevelt:]Yes, I have, a, one or two words to say, but I'd like also to uh just bring it to the public's attention again and, Colonel Wilkinson, you correct me if I'm wrong, in order to get this booklet of instructions as to what the average citizen must do, you can write to Department E of *Life Magazine*, New York City, and I hope that all of you who are listening in today will do so.

(Break 21:21-21:28)

[Elliott Roosevelt:]And now, I think we should get back to Mother because she has two more guests who have had a great deal of experience in this field of civil defense, so Mother would you mind uh continuing our uh information on civil defense?

[ER:]No, I'll be very glad to, and I'd like to introduce to Colonel Wilkinson uh two and-two of our guests who are now with us, and I introduce them also to our listeners. They come from a country which has already experienced what to us is only a possibility. They have been through blitz and bombing, and first of all I'd like to introduce Lady Margaret D'Arcy. You're here, aren't you, on a lecture trip?

[Margaret D'Arcy:] Yes, I am.

[ER:]And um you're lecturing to schools, is that right?

[Margaret D'Arcy:]Yes, I go mostly to schools and to parent-teachers associations and other educational programs of that kind in order to talk about England and English ways of living.

[ER:]That's most interesting. And our second guest is Mr. Francis Littlewood, who also comes from England. Mr. Littlewood, perhaps you would tell us how you happen to be here.

[Francis Littlewood:]Well, Mrs. Roosevelt, I came over with the mayor of Cheltenham in England to attend the jubilee celebrations of Cheltenham Township in Pennsylvania. And they gave us a marvelous welcome there, and whilst we are in this country, we thought we'd interest some of the Americans in the Cheltenham music festival, which is to play such an important part in the Festival of Britain next year. The same time we haven't forgotten about civil defense, and both the mayor and myself have been

watching and taking some interest in the most admirable plans which Americans seem to be working out. (23:36)

[ER:]Well, now Lady Margaret will be able to give us a good picture of the part women played in civil defense in England during the Blitz, and certainly you, Mr. Littlewood, were, I believe, Civil Defense Chief in one of the most badly bombed districts of London, can tell us a great deal about how very disagreeable bombing can be as well as dangerous and so I wonder if you would say, um, a little bit about how, how it struck you when it first happened and how you handled it.

[Francis Littlewood:]Well, Mrs. Roosevelt, uh, I was actually town clerk and civil defense controller of Eastham, that is an, a suburb of London with large docks and industrial plants in it. We were and expected to be a target, but it was very unpleasant, as you say. We had thirty thousand houses in the borough, by the time the bombing had finished we had actually repaired fifty-nine thousand houses; that is to say, each house nearly twice. It wasn't quite like that because some houses, uh, went untouched and others were repaired more than twice. Actually, we were bombed for about ninety-two nights in succession, from September the 7th, 1940 until well after Christmas. How some of the homes kept going, I really don't know. It was mainly a woman's task because always it seemed we were without gas, often without electricity, and quite often without water, and how the women kept their homes going, I really don't know. But--as well, many of the women volunteered and did grand service in the many of the women's services, now Lady Margaret could tell you much more about that than perhaps I can. (25:39)

[ER:]Well I think it's dreadful to contemplate uh bombing at all and I saw something of the results when I was in England in the autumn of forty-two, so that I know a little bit of what you all lived through. Lady Margaret, during the war you served as senior commandant in charge of the training of women drivers for Britain's Mechanized Transport Corps, and I happened to go and see that training while I was there. Would you tell us about that work, and also the other civil defense work which, in which women were engaged?

[Lady Margaret D'Arcy:]Yes, I would be glad to. The Women's Mechanized Transport Corps was a largely voluntary organization training women to drive vehicles of all types. Not only cars, but mobile canteens, ambulances, trucks, and anything that came their way. We found that the women not only needed to be trained to drive and to look after their vehicles, but that they needed a great deal of general training as well to cope with the different emergencies which were liable to arise. They all had to have training in first aid work, in simple midwifery, in simple rescue and ambulance work, and, above all, in map reading, because as perhaps some of you may know uh we had all our sign posts removed for fear of an invasion.

[ER:]I remember that very well, I wandered round English roads, having everyone tell me they didn't know where anything was.

[Margaret D'Arcy:]Yes, that was a great difficulty which was added to by the blackout. So we had to teach our women how to read maps from a military point of view, and I expect you know most women are not very good with maps,[Elliott Roosevelt laughs] and that was quite a serious part of the training. We had, attached to us in the Mechanized Transport Corps, a point which I think might interest you, an organization called the American Ambulance Great Britain, which were American women who came over from America voluntarily and of their own free will, bringing with them ambulances which had been subscribed for by American citizens. Those American women with their ambulances did marvelous work during the Blitz. And I suppose they are all now back in America, and I feel sure that they alone would form a very valuable nucleus for any civil defense work for women over here. (28:20)

[ER:]That's most interesting. Of course there are so many sides to it um but women certainly can play an important part in any of this work. Have you anything more you'd like to say, Mr. Littlewood?

[Francis Littlewood:]I would, Mrs. Roosevelt. I would just like to add one or two short points, which seem to me, come out of my experience and come out of our new experience of training now for the--any trouble which may occur in the future. One is that the trained man or woman is worth his weight in gold; an untrained man is a burden on everybody. The second is we must learn to improvise all the time, improvise on a plan, for a plan which is not so good as a better plan, if everybody works to it, will be a better plan. And we must not be guided, I feel, too much by the grand displays and spit and polish of--of peace time, but we must prepare to train on a motto of "first-things-first," which I took as um my own motto when, when I dealt with the air raid--post-raid work in Eastham.

[ER:]I remember going to Eastham and um I have seen most of the very badly bombed suburbs of London, the King and Queen took me there in forty-two. And I think of so many things that people have to be trained to do, and I have a feeling that it's going to take some time to train people in peacetime because what you say about improvising is something that one can do in emergencies because people will stand things that they wouldn't stand um unless they had to uh but um it's not easy. (30:25)

[Francis Littlewood:]But-but I-- providing they have a background of training.

[ER:]Yes.

[Francis Littlewood:]Then, then they can improvise.

[ER:]Then they--

[Francis Littlewood:]But I do want to--I know-- feel sure that Colonel Wilkinson would agree that training is of vital importance at the present time.

[ER:]Well I think training is important for both men and women, because um I think if you have the training and know definitely what the job is that you have to do, why then uh you do it automatically almost no matter what is going on. That's really the great value of it, isn't it? You don't get carried off your feet.

[Francis Littlewood:]Yes, but eh-eh some things one has to realize--visualize--one doesn't get used to being phoneless, phones are a sort of for pro-pro-priority purposes and takes quite a getting--bit of getting used to, to find that the phone on one desk, on one's desk is, after all, useless sometimes.

[ER:]Well that's just one of the many things. Well this has been a very interesting discussion, and I'm most grateful to all of you, particularly to you, Mr. Littlewood, who postponed a trip to Chicago, I understand. And you were good to be my guests this afternoon, and to make it possible for me to bring this first-hand information to our listeners. And now, Elliott, what would you like to say?

[Elliott Roosevelt:]Well, I have just a few more words to add before we bring our program to a close today, Mother. I think that we have all of us enjoyed immensely the opportunity of having our own state director, Colonel Wilkinson, and these two very important representatives of the civil defense program in England. And now I will continue, if you don't mind, for just a few more minutes.

(32:20)

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