

MRS. ELEANOR ROOSEVELT'S OWN PROGRAM

June 4, 1940

Description: Broadcast time 1:15-1:30 PM over the NBC Red Network. Reporter Genevieve Forbes Herrick interviews ER about life in the White House.

Participants: Eleanor Roosevelt, Ben Grauer, Genevieve Forbes Herrick, NBC Announcer

(00:23)

[Music 0:23-00:42]

[NBC Announcer:] The National Broadcasting Company presents again today Edward MacHugh your gospel singer, who comes by your way to spend another quarter hour with you today and the beautiful old hymns that have come to take such a staunch place in the lives of us all. Ladies and gentlemen, your gospel singer.

[Music and singing from 1:02-1:14] [Music cuts short]

(01:14)

[Ben Grauer:] This is *Mrs. Eleanor Roosevelt's Own Program* presented by SweetHeart Soap.

[Theme music 1:19-1:47]

[Ben Grauer:] In just a moment, from Maine to California, America will be listening to Mrs. Eleanor Roosevelt. Mrs. Roosevelt speaks to us today from Washington, DC where she has spent the past few days. These programs come to you with the compliments of SweetHeart Soap, one of America's fastest growing bath and beauty soaps. And now your welcome visitor, Mrs. Eleanor Roosevelt.

[ER:] Good day, ladies and gentlemen, I have received a great many interesting letters since we started these radio talks. I want to thank you for writing to me and I would like to tell you how much I appreciate your comments and specific suggestions. As I promised you before, I hope to answer as many of your questions as possible, but because they are of such a varied nature it is necessary to group them and select a number of related questions for each broadcast. So, if your question has not yet been answered, I hope you will bear with me. Your most frequent requests are for information about the White House, how it runs, how the many tasks are divided, and a host of other details. So today, I've invited Mrs. Genevieve Forbes Herrick to come to the studio with me and by acting as your spokesman to help me answer your many questions. Being interviewed by Mrs. Herrick is not a novelty for me. For some time Mrs. Herrick has been a regular member of the group of correspondents with whom I have regular press conferences in Washington. So I want you to meet Mrs. Herrick now. (3:22)

[Genevieve Forbes Herrick:] Thank you, Mrs. Roosevelt. It's indeed a pleasure to act as spokesman for your many radio friends. Having looked through some of their many letters, it seems that almost everyone is interested in the White House and I suppose that's only natural because the White House is the symbolic home of the nation. Just how many people would you say visit the White House every year?

[ER:] Last year we had some one million three hundred and twenty thousand three hundred visitors. Of that number four thousand seven hundred and twenty-nine had meals, either lunch, dinner or tea. Twenty-three thousand two hundred and sixty-seven came in groups to be received and two hundred and sixty-four thousand and sixty were sightseers, three hundred and twenty-three were house guests. You can see, Mrs. Herrick, that the White House is a sort of Mecca for patriotic pilgrims.

[Genevieve Forbes Herrick:] What would you say, Mrs. Roosevelt, is the one thing that most White House visitors want to see?

[ER:] I believe they're most anxious to see the portraits of George and Martha Washington in the East Room, but almost every individual or group has some special thing about which they are most curious. This varies, of course, some want to see the new Lincoln portrait, others the White House china and so on and on.

[Genevieve Forbes Herrick:] Now, do the children who visit the White House have some particular favorite, Mrs. Roosevelt?

[ER:] I think of late the children like best the room where the president exhibits the collection of things which are sent to him personally. This exhibit, which is constantly changed, includes ship models and many other curios some of them are really beautiful.

[Genevieve Forbes Herrick:] What about yourself, Mrs. Roosevelt? Is there some feature of the White House that you find most interesting?

[ER:] That is hard to decide, Mrs. Herrick, because the entire house is so fascinating. Perhaps it is the atmosphere of the second floor that I like best. This part of the house seems somehow to be charged with the personalities of all the great people who have lived there in the past.

[Genevieve Forbes Herrick:] I think I know what you mean. I've had the feeling while visiting some historic places that the greatness of past deeds and men still lingers. And while we're on the subject, which of the symbols of patriotism in Washington seems to you most representative of our American democracy? (5:58)

[ER:] I think perhaps the Washington Monument is the one that most people would mention because you see it from so many different places when you come to Washington, but the monument from which I get the most inspiration is the Lincoln Memorial. The statue of Lincoln is in itself so beautiful and his words carved on the wall always deepen my belief in democracy.

[Genevieve Forbes Herrick:] Well, it seems like a big jump from the Lincoln Memorial to the problems of housekeeping for the White House, but if I'm to be spokesman for your listeners I must get back to their questions. Who does all the shopping and the marketing for the White House, Mrs. Roosevelt?

[ER:] [ER laughs] Well Mrs. Herrick, in housekeeping for the White House there's more than just shopping and marketing. You have to keep the accounts and those are the most complicated kind of bookkeeping. Everything has to be kept in detail so that you know just what every meal costs per person and you know just where to charge it because, of course as you know, there is a division between the personal expenses of the president and his family and state expenses. These are the duties of Mrs. [Henrietta] Nesbitt, the housekeeper.

[Genevieve Forbes Herrick:] Now, another of your radio friends wants to know who does all the laundry and the mending required for such a large house with so many guests.

[ER:] Many of my own friends have asked me that same question. The White House laundry [ER clears throat] is done by two women in their own homes. They're regularly employed by the week. One woman takes all the flat wash and the other takes the body clothes. It is a very large wash and the mending takes a great deal of time. All the housemaids in the White House work on putting the laundry away and mending it in their spare time after the work of looking after the rooms and guests is done. I see you have some more questions, Mrs. Herrick, and we'll get to them in a moment, but first we'll pause to hear from Mr. [Ben] Grauer.

[Ben Grauer:] Thank you Mrs. Roosevelt. Ladies, you'll notice a tremendous difference in the shape of each cake of SweetHeart soap. It's an attractive oval shape, but its good-looking streamlined appearance is only one of the big advantages it gives you. SweetHeart Soap's oval shape is handy. It's especially designed to fit the hand, that means it's easy to keep hold of so it doesn't go bounding across the bathroom floor when you least expect it. And this oval shape helps each cake of SweetHeart Soap to last longer. Because it's rounded top and bottom the air gets at it and dries it quickly after use. Therefore your SweetHeart Soap is yours to use with far less melting away in the soap dish. Take a tip from us and treat yourself and your family to SweetHeart Soap. You'll be pleasantly surprised to see how much delight it can give you. And now, Mrs. Eleanor Roosevelt.

[ER:] Mrs. Herrick, who formerly covered my activities for a large newspaper and who is an old hand at interviews or inquisitions as she calls them, has been helping me answer your many letters asking about the woman's side of the White House. I'm ready to continue if you are, Mrs. Herrick. (9:20)

[Genevieve Forbes Herrick:] Mrs. Roosevelt, we've covered shopping, marketing, laundering, and mending, now we have a question from a woman wants to know if all the historic china, which visitors see in the White House, is actually used.

[ER:] No, not all of it. Much of the historic china of which you see samples in the china room has long been out of use because there is not much of it left and the few remaining pieces are highly prized. There are certain times when some of these pieces are used. For instance, it has been the custom at state receptions to use the beautiful punch bowls which were bought during Mr. [Abraham] Lincoln's administration for lemonade and fruit punch, but for regular White House service china of recent days is used. Certain portions of the older sets are used when there is enough for the number of guests. Some of the china bought in Mr. Theodore Roosevelt's administration and some of the salad plates bought in Mr. [Grover] Cleveland's administration have been used on such occasions.

[Genevieve Forbes Herrick:] That's most interesting to me, Mrs. Roosevelt, because it illustrates so vividly the great historic value of everything in the White House even to the dishes. I believe it was Dolley [Payne Todd] Madison who once called Washington the nation's drawing room. Thanks in part to you that narrowly social definition has been greatly expanded. Won't you give us your definition of Washington today?

[ER:] Washington, or the District of Columbia as I've been urged to call it, today really represents the center of governmental authority. There was a time when financial authority was more important than governmental authority, but today that is no longer so. One is conscious in Washington of being near the really supreme authority of the country.

[Genevieve Forbes Herrick:] You just mentioned something that has changed in Washington. But isn't it true Mrs. Roosevelt that much remains unchanged? I've often heard people in Washington talk about precedence. Perhaps your radio friends would like to know just what precedence means and how the problems of precedence at the White House are handled.

[ER:] I suppose I could refer you to the State Department, Mrs. Herrick, because they are the authority on all rules of precedence, but perhaps I can answer your question. Simply stated, the rules of precedence are traditions handed down which govern the procedure at state ceremonies. Precedence exists in Washington as it exists in no other part of the United States. It is important first because the people representing foreign governments are accustomed to a rule of precedence either because of position or because of birth. Second, because official positions in Washington are also governed by certain rules of precedence, the State Department handles all of these questions. They seat the people at state dinners and they advise us just how we should deal with certain problems when important visitors come from other lands. This is a great help and I've always been grateful that decisions in the very complicated matters of precedence did not lie with me.

[Genevieve Forbes Herrick:] While we're discussing the subject of entertaining in the White House, I'm sure you're going to answer a question that everyone must wonder about. You meet so many people, Mrs. Roosevelt, shake so many hands. Don't they all seem alike to you by the time an affair is almost over? (12:50)

[ER:] [ER laughs] No indeed, Mrs. Herrick. I make it a point to look at every face and it's astonishing how interesting the faces are. Of course, after I've shaken hands with several hundred people I begin to get tired. Sometimes the people blur before my eyes and I can only hope that the smile on my face still expresses my pleasure in seeing them. I think the story, which I've repeated many times, rather expresses what many of my guests are thinking as they are received. One lady wrote to me after I'd shaken hands with several hundred people, "Mrs. Roosevelt do you shake and think or do you just stand and shake?"

[Genevieve Forbes Herrick:] Well Mrs. Roosevelt, I've finished all the questions I can ask today and I promise I won't shake hands, I'll just say goodbye and thank you so much for inviting me here today.

[ER:] You've been a great help, Mrs. Herrick. In fact, it was such a pleasure to have you that I wish you'd return on Thursday and continue with the interview. Will you?

[Genevieve Forbes Herrick:] Oh gladly. (13:50)

[Ben Grauer:] Thank you very much, Mrs. Roosevelt and Mrs. Herrick. Friends, summer is the time for many changes. We change from heavy clothes and heavy meals to things that agree with the season. Now, perhaps your complexion needs something different too. Then try SweetHeart, the soap that agrees with your skin. SweetHeart Soap is pure which means it's gentle, a kind friend to your skin. This gentle purity and its friendly cleansing care can help skin stay soft and smooth by helping your skin defend itself from summer's drying winds and blazing sun. You'll glory in your SweetHeart baths and clean-ups. It's a change that may help make this the grandest summer ever for you. Put SweetHeart Soap on your must list along with your other summer pleasures and, if I'm any judge, you'll quickly decide to make it your year-round, lifelong beauty care.

[Theme music 14:48-15:02]

[Ben Grauer:] [music continues softly] And now we must say au revoir to Mrs. Eleanor Roosevelt, but she'll come to call next Thursday with Mrs. Genevieve Forbes Herrick as her guest again in another interview dealing with Mrs. Roosevelt's life at the White House. [music stops] Remember that Mrs. Roosevelt will select for her future chats the subjects you ask her to speak about in your letters. So, listen at this same time over these same stations next Thursday when you're again cordially invited to be with us by the makers of SweetHeart Soap, famous for fifty years as the soap that agrees with your skin. [music resumes] And since the philosopher says the pleasures you share are doubled, invite a few friends

to listen with you next Thursday when you'll again hear [music crescendos, cuts] *Mrs. Eleanor Roosevelt's Own Program*. This is Ben Grauer Speaking.

[NBC Announcer:] This is the National Broadcasting Company.

[NBC Chimes]

(15:57)

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