

THE ELEANOR ROOSEVELT PROGRAM

December 22, 1950

Description: In the opening segment, ER and Elliott Roosevelt respond to a listener's question about their Christmas customs. In the interview segment, ER interviews United Nations interpreters Rory Crim and David Chang Xi Ho from the United Nations Headquarters.

Participants: ER, Elliott Roosevelt, Rory Crim, David Chang Xi Ho

[ER:] Well, what have we got today, Elliott?

[Elliott Roosevelt:] Well, we have a letter from uh a family this time. Uh the family live up in the Bronx and they want you to tell us uh about your family Christmas customs.

[ER:] Oh goodness that's-[ER laughs] that's quite a story, I feel! [ER and Elliott Roosevelt laugh] Nevertheless um over the years I think we've tried wherever we've lived--to live--to keep certain Christmas customs. Uh I always uh loved Christmas as a child and my father, when I was a little child, always made a great deal of Christmas, and um so that uh all my life Christmas had meant great deal to me. And um when I married, we began to make more of Christmas than Father and his mother had made of Christmas. They had always done, however, one thing, which we have carried on ever since. Um their home was Hyde Park just as our home is in Hyde Park today and when they came to New York they always came on a temporary basis just as we're doing now. And, so it was the people at Hyde Park that were the people they wanted to see at Christmas time, and they always had before Christmas Day--usually either on Christmas Eve or the day before that--a party to which uh--they invited everybody, young and old, from--who lived on the place or who came there to work, and that meant quite a party in those days. There were always a good many children and we lit the Christmas tree um for that party, and then Father and Granny uh and I shook hands with everybody and there was a present for everybody on the tree and then we had ice cream and cake and coffee and I think the children ate about all they could eat and [Elliott Roosevelt laughs] that was the end of--of the party, but it um always was the way we began Christmas. We dressed the tree the night before always, or that morning, and when the children began to be old enough to take their part, they helped dress the tree. The little children were always kept out and not allowed to come in until the tree was lighted. (2:52)

[Elliott Roosevelt:] What size tree did you use to have?

[ER:] We used to have a big tree because it was in the big library at Hyde Park. We usually had it right in the middle of that uh room, a little bit to the side so people could get around. But--and then the children and I always sorted out the presents while Granny and Father talked to everybody.

[Elliott Roosevelt:] Uh well I think you ought to tell uh one feature about the Christmas tree decorations because it's connected with something that I remember as a small boy and that was the large bucket in the corner [ER chuckles] with the mops.

[ER:] Well you see, Father uh in those days, there weren't the electric uh lights, and he didn't like electric lights. He never liked--As long as Father lived we always had candles on the Christmas tree, and I like them better to this day um though in the interest of safety I don't always live up to that old tradition nowadays. But, um he always had candles on the Christmas tree and we always had a bucket of water with one of the canes and a sponge on the end of it standing in the bucket of water [Elliott Roosevelt

laughs] so that it could put out any um candle that seemed to be sputtering. And of course after each lighting of the tree we would have to put new candles all over the tree, which was quite a job. And-- um but then our customs, as we go--went on um would be for our own family to hang up their Christmas stockings uh usually on the mantelpiece in Father's bedroom uh after he was ill. Before that, we sometimes hung them on the mantelpiece in the library and then, early in the morning, the first child who woke up woke everybody else in the house. (4:50)

[Elliott Roosevelt:] [ER laughs]And I remember at a very early age uh I used to get up at six-thirty in the morning and I wasn't, wasn't very popular with the grown-ups.

[ER and Elliott Roosevelt overlap slightly]

[ER:] We always got Granny up, and uh any-any older guests in the house, always.

[Elliott Roosevelt:] Well te-tell where we--all the children gathered.

[ER:] Well, you all gathered uh after Father was ill of course, in Father's room, before that we might have been down around the fireplace, but once he was ill, we always put the two smallest children either side of him in bed. And then, the other children either sat in the foot of the bed or on the floor, and everybody undid their stockings and--I-- we--I always had stockings for all the grown-ups too, and that meant that everybody had to undo their stockings and the papers and everybody mixed their things up and then the children said they'd lost something in the--there was wild time all together. But that would usually go on for about an hour, and then I would shoo everybody out to get dressed for breakfast. [Elliott Roosevelt laughs] And then we'd have a late breakfast and for a long time uh we would-- I would try and get you all to church on Christmas morning, but as you grew older um I got you all to go to midnight service on Christmas Eve [Elliott Roosevelt laughs] and then you were allowed to stay on Christmas morning and take life more leisurely. [ER chuckles] And then when children were small um we always had dinner in the middle of the day--ay uh so that all the family could be at dinner. Later as you grew up we had it in the evening very often, but, um most of the time as I look back over it- it was in the early morning because now it's for grandchildren too [ER laughs] I mean in the middle of the day [Elliott Roosevelt: Yeah.] so we would have, uh- uh, turkeys and Father was very proud of his carving. [Elliott Roosevelt: That's--] He could carve turkeys and any kind of game better than anybody else, and as you boys got older and the family was larger uh one and then two of you would each have a turkey but you were always beaten by Father in the number of people he could serve and the speed with which he did it. (7:19)

[Elliott Roosevelt:] That's very true. As a matter of fact, it was uh I-I think that as the boys uh grew up uh and each of us was uh given a turkey to carve, the guests would much prefer to have a piece of our turkey cause Father got it to be so paper thin in his efforts to beat us out [Elliott Roosevelt laughs] that they didn't get any helpings.

[ER:] Well, [ER laughs] perhaps that was true, but we just had the traditional uh Christmas dinner. We usually had soup first and then turkey and cranberry sauce and sweet potatoes and onions and little um creamed onions, and little sausages and chestnuts, stuffing--as long as we could get chestnuts [Elliott Roosevelt: Mhm.] to stuff the turkey--and um some green vegetable, perhaps, or a salad, and then we always had plum pudding with uh brandy--which burned--and ice cream. And--

[Elliott Roosevelt:] Yeah, and then uh also, I think uh before we leave this topic, you've practically got me with my mouth watering now! [ER and Elliott Roosevelt laugh] Uh before we do leave this topic, I would like for you to explain about the later years when all of your children, yours and Father's children, had grandchildren of yours, how you used to get the--all of the grandchildren and as many of the family as you could together.

[ER:] Well, we always have tried to get as many as we possibly could; of course we couldn't, uh get those who were far away. But the interesting thing to me has been that the traditions that we carried on while all of you were children, I noticed that most of the children carry on pretty much the same traditions in their own homes. Anna does and Jimmy does, and um it--then we always--I forgot to say that we always had a Christmas tree for ourselves [Elliott Roosevelt: Mm.] and all the presents were under the tree in piles for each person, and when they couldn't all get under the tree, each one had a chair of his own, and um--the person who had the most, of course, was always Father, and he--sometimes he'd never let anyone else open a present so of course uh sometimes they didn't get opened for days [Elliott Roosevelt laughs] after Christmas. Well, now I think I've told you all I can tell, and you've got a message, haven't you, Elliott? (9:45)

(break 9:45-9:57)

[ER:] Today instead of my living room I'm speaking to you from the United Nations headquarters at Flushing, New York. With me are two of the interpreters who do the amazing work of translating all the languages you hear on your radio and television from the United Nations. And I thought you would be interested in hearing how this is done and meeting the people. First I want to introduce to you Mr. Rory Crim, of French nationality.

[Rory Crim:] How do you do, Madam.

[ER:] And then, Mr. David Chang Xi Ho, who was born in Nanking.

[David Chang Xi Ho:] Very glad to meet you, Mrs. Roosevelt.

[ER:] I think you might be interested to know that Mr. Crim translates Russian and French and English and that Mr. Chang Xi Ho uh whose name, by the way, I think is interesting, because "Ho" means "why" in English and "Chang Xi" means "enthusiastic." Um he is our Chinese interpreter. Now, I'm going to ask, uh Mr. Chang Xi Ho, I think, first of all, the question of what training--do you have to have any special training before you take up this work of simultaneous translation?

[David Chang Xi Ho:] Uh it's very hard for me to answer, but uh I can give you my personal opinion on this subject. I don't think you need a very uh intensive training before you do the work of a simultaneous interpreter. But you do need to have a basic knowledge, a good foundation of academic knowledge. And when you do the work with uh the help of your colleagues and some training of the interpretation division you can get along if you're--(11:59)

[ER:] You can get along without having taken any special training?

[David Chang Xi Ho:] No, I won't say it's exactly necessary.

[ER:] Well now um Mr. Crim, uh perhaps you could tell me whether you think, on the whole, uh all the translators have to have some special training or whether you think they all uh can just go along on their background education.

[Rory Crim:] Of course uh they do most of their training on the job itself uh they go to uh relatively easy committees at the beginning, and they always have to rely on their background during those first steps. After a while, however, they improve by leaps and bounds and then go to committees where their words are more carefully listened to than in the [ER: Than at first.] small committees in which they might have been used before.

[ER:] Well, now, I think possibly um the radio audience would like to know what is the difference between consecutive translation and simultaneous translation? Would one of you tell me, would you like to tell me, Mr. Ho--

[David Chang Xi Ho:] Well, I'll- I'll do my best, the consecutive uh interpretation is a technique which is quite different from simultaneous interpretation, as you all know. It's not because uh you depend more-uh more on the microphone with the simultaneous interpretation, really, you rely on--uh more on memory and uh constructive--uh I mean uh ability to do [ER: In consecutive.] consecutive--in consecutive interpretation. Whereas in uh simultaneous interpretation you have to depend more on your alertness and quick-wittedness. (13:41)

[ER:] Well, don't you have to be able to do shorthand in order to take down consec-in order to do consecutive translation?

[David Chang Xi Ho:] Well, maybe Mr. Crim can answer this [ER: Yeah.] point better [ER: Yes, Mr. Crim.] than I can.

[Rory Crim:] Well, I believe that each interpreter--each consecutive interpreter--develops his own system of note-taking. And uh shorthand, as such, is pretty difficult to use because the mind is so focused on the meaning of the words uttered by the speaker that it would be very difficult to make the additional effort to read out uh shorthand. So that each interpreter actually has his own system of note-taking, follows the speaker, notes his highlights, and remakes the speech once it's over.

[ER:] That is really a very--in a way, consecutive translation then um is more difficult than um simultaneous translation.

[Rory Crim:] Well, I would say that both are extremely difficult, it can--uh simultaneous translation requires a great degree of rapidity, both in understanding and conveying the speaker's uh meaning. I believe that both are extremely difficult, although they have different difficulties.

[ER:] I can--um I can see that. I should think, for instance, one of your difficulties, and this uh perhaps Mr. Chang Xi Ho, uh would know more better than I do um languages differ so. That sometimes you can't just be translating words, or phrases even, you must at times, be trying--be waiting to get the whole sense of um almost a paragraph and then put it into the words that would interpret the idea in another language, and there must be great differences, aren't there? (15:34)

[David Chang Xi Ho:] I think your remarks are very permanent--uh pertinent, Mrs. Roosevelt. Especially between languages which differ so much in uh context and uh construction. For instance, between Chinese and any European languages, the difference is much greater than uh between European languages, for instance between uh French and Spanish, for instance. When you interpret from uh a European language to another, and more so from one Romance language to another, you can interpret simultaneously. I mean in simultaneous interpretation, word for word sometimes. Whereas interpreting from an Oriental language into an Occidental language, in-in view of difference of construction and syntax, you have to wait and you have sometimes to guess and-and get the right meaning before you can do it.

[ER:] Uh I notice that sometimes as I listen to-to your interpretation, that occasionally um you will get um the words almost as quickly as the person is saying them, and then again--and this comes rather largely with the Russian and the Chinese translation--you will have a lag between the person speaking and what you get over your earphones. I see that very largely when they finish and I still have to listen a while to

get what they've been saying. Those being the two languages that um I am quite unable to understand even a word in, except in Russian I understand um when they say 'no' and 'yes,' 'nyet' and 'da,' [Rory Rim and David Chang Xi Ho laugh] I have learned to understand. But--nothing else! Because it has no relation to any other language that I know, and the same is so, of course, with Chinese. [Rory Crim: That's quite true.] And um so that I have learned to watch more carefully eh listen more carefully for the translation and um uh know when it comes, when you wait a little bit longer, yes. (17:35)

[Rory Crim:] Uh, the lag, madam, is unavoidable bec-in order to avoid any awkward translation since the structure of the language, it is different, you have to lag behind at least half a sentence to convey the meaning. This, of course, gives rise to difficulties when the speaker comes to an end and the chairman calls in another speaker, and we are particularly thankful and grateful to chairmen such as you, for instance, of the Human Rights Commission and of the Third Committee, who permit a lag between ah-two speakers so that the interpreter might be able to finish his interpretation.

[ER:] [ER chuck;es] I never really thought about that very carefully, but I remember now being asked always remember that. and I, of course, have only one difficulty, and that is that when I'm listening to a language um which I know, I'm very apt to go on in that language instead of talking in my own English! [Rory Crim, David Chang Xi Ho and ER laugh] [Rory Crim: Oh, I notice that, too.] Then I have a funny experience of hearing myself being translated into English from French, [Rory Crim, David Chang Xi Ho and ER laugh] which is very odd. Well, now tell me how you went about getting this job.

[Rory Crim:] Uh well, I was lucky, I was ju-I was uh just discharged from a French Air Force in 1945 and was shifting around for a job, when the Council of Foreign Ministers was held in Paris--uh the United States, the Soviet Union, France, and the United Kingdom--and they apparently were short of interpreters. I found out that they were looking for an interpreter, a Russian, French, and English, applied, began in the Economic Committee, and later on in the Council itself, and this was the first step. (19:15)

[ER:] That's how you were there. How about you, sir?

[David Chang Xi Ho:] Well, I was in Europe during all these war years, and uh during the last year there were-I mean in 1946, I was in Paris. And some of my friends hinted that they need personnel in the United Nations, people speaking Chinese, and English, and French. And so they recommended me and asked me to come over and I came, and I won't say I came, I saw, and I conquered, I can only say I came and I saw. [David Chang Xi Ho chuckles]

[ER:] [ER laughs] Well, that is very good. And now we have to stop for a few minutes and then we'll begin again. (19:46)

(Break 19:46-19:59)

[ER:] I'd like to ask you, Mr. Crim uh whether you'll get to know the delegates well enough so that sometimes you can anticipate what they're going to say.

[Rory Crim:] Uh definitely, madam. In many instances, uh we know, especially after four years of work in the United Nations, what the delegate will say in general lines. Of course the specific expressions he might use are not known in a glance.

[ER:] Yes, so that uh it wouldn't help you with um the words particularly, but it would help you in your general line of thought and interpretation and preparation. Uh would you be grateful if everybody spoke from a written script and you could always have it before you?

[Rory Crim:] Well, on the one hand, yes, on the other, it's always pleasant to think that something new might come up. [Rory Crim and ER laugh]

[ER:] [ER laughs] It gets a little boring, in other words [Rory Crim: At--] listening to people [Rory Crim: At times.] [ER laughs] Well now, you are primarily doing Chinese translation, you must've become very familiar um with a great many delegates as you translate into Chinese.

[David Chang Xi Ho:] Well, uh I'm not uh exceptionally familiar with their private lives if I should say so, but I can say I'm quite familiar with their lines of thought.

[ER:] The lines of thought. [ER chuckles]

[David Chang Xi Ho:] I mean roughly speaking. [ER overlaps]

[ER:] Well, I don't think you're expected to translate their private lives, [ER, David Chang Xi Ho, and Rory Crim laugh] just their-just their lines of thought, as you talk-as you listen to them. Well, um do you find them, do you find it easier as you go along, or do you find it harder to keep your attention on what they are saying when you do anticipate their thinking?

[David Chang Xi Ho:] I didn't get your question very well, Mrs. Roosevelt.

[ER:] Well, do you find it easier um as you go along because you do know what they're going to think, I mean the lines along which, or do you find it harder to keep your attention concentrated on it and so, um it's harder to do the translation correctly. (22:02)

[David Chang Xi Ho:] I think you need a certain amount of concentration in order to follow the line of thought.

[ER:] And to concentrate better when it's new; is that it?

[David Chang Xi Ho:] Uh when the subject is new?

[ER:] Yes, or when the person is a new person that you've got to keep right thinking about all the time.

[David Chang Xi Ho:] That's quite true.

[ER:] Uh when you begin to get a little bored with your delegate, then you don't translate as well. [ER chuckles]

[ER and David Chang Xi Ho overlap]

[David Chang Xi Ho:] [David Chang Xi Ho chuckles] And we have to translate anyway, no matter what uh he says—the delegate says. (22:29)

[ER:] [ER laughs] No matter what he says, you have to translate! [David Chang Xi Ho: Yeah.] Well, now, um I'd like to ask you um Mr. uh Crim, whether any of the delegates uh in your mind are particularly easy or particularly difficult to translate.

[Rory Crim:] Well, of course the extremely rapid speakers uh make it rather difficult for their interpreter, yet we have interpreters who follow the most rapid speakers that have ever come across in five years of interpretation.

[ER:] Well, I remember um hearing once that the interpreters, if they had any illnesses, were given to having ulcers [ER chuckles] because they were so keyed up all the time. Do you find that so, that you get very tense listening?

[Rory Crim:] Absolutely.

[ER:] It is?

[Rory Crim:] It is difficult to avoid this tenseness, although we have tried, but you are always tense in a speech.

[ER:] Well I notice, for instance, uh very often that--uh I think it happens with the all of you--that when you are uh simultaneously translating, you frequently translate gestures as well as words. I've watched people and they really do all the gestures the speaker has done. Uh Mr. Ho, do you find that so?

[David Chang Xi Ho:] Well, uh in that event usually we are not working, it's really our subconscious that's working.

[ER:] [ER laughs] It's just subconscious! [David Chang Xi Ho: Yeah.] I imagine a good deal of this is probably done subconsciously.

[Rory Crim:] After a while. [Rory Crim laughs]

[ER:] Do you feel, um for instance uh I should say that the Russian delegates um as a rule, speak very quickly, are they difficult?

[ER and Rory Crim overlap]

[Rory Crim:] Yes, definitely--Definitely.

[ER:] They are difficult, because of their rapidity of speaking.

[Rory Crim:] They are extremely fast, and it does give rise to difficulties.

[ER:] And, um uh-who uh--what nationality is easy? Usually the--um the English speaking peoples? Do they speak more slowly as a rule? What would you say?

[ER and David Chang Xi Ho overlap]

[David Chang Xi Ho:] Well, personally, I think the English speaking delegates have more uh concise uh speech, I mean they speak in a more direct manner. Whereas Latin American or uh Latin races like French, I mean uh delegates, they have-have uh more oratorical, I mean uh [unclear, possibly French].

[ER:] They're more--they're more orators.

[David Chang Xi Ho:]--More orators. And those speeches are usually more difficult to interpret.

[ER:] Just because of that.

[David Chang Xi Ho:] Because of the style of the uh speeches.

[ER:] Well I know um I don't know whether either-either of you have translated much in the Human Rights Commission, though I gathered you had, Mr. Crim. [Rory Crim: I have, Madam.] Well, you have too--

[David Chang Xi Ho:] I haven't translated a Human Rights uh uh Commission, but I've translated you, Mrs. Roosevelt, very often, at the Third Committee. [ER: You have?] Especially it was a great pleasure to do so I think you're really a great protagonist of uh human rights and an element of freedom. (25:27)

[ER:] Well that's very kind of you, I appreciate that very much--

[David Chang Xi Ho:] It is quite true.

[ER:] --But, um I um I-I would like to ask about the Human Rights Committee because that's the committee that I know the best, and am most uh familiar with its workings, and I would say there that you might, uh, have considerable difficulty with, um Monsieur René Cassin because when he talks French he talks beautiful French but it comes like a flow of a river!

[Rory Crim:] Yes, absolutely, Madam. I had an occasion to interpret him in the Human Rights Commission and of course he draws on a very rich legal background; as you know Roman law is quite different from Anglo-Saxon law and to find the equivalents on the spur of a moment is pretty difficult.

[ER:] Oh, that must be very difficult. Well, I have always been amused--you probably uh were not even in the United Nations, but when the first meeting came about of the Human Rights um Commission, even before it was set up as a Commission, when a meeting was called to consider it, um there was a little young girl, one day, who was sent in all by herself--we had consecutive translation then, to translate, and um I watched her. Monsieur Cassin started off with a flow of oratory which was simply like um well I can only tell you that it- it was beautiful, but it was so fast and there was no stop. And I watched this little girl, she'd expected to have somebody else ri--uh taking it with her you see and she was all alone. And when he stopped she put her pencil down and she put her head down and burst into tears, and then she fled from the room! [Rory Crim chuckles] And the only thing we could do was--I offered to translate the gist of the French into English while we waited for a new translator. So I have one tie with you, on one occasion, I did the gist with Monsieur Cassin listening to tell me if I was wrong at any point. [Rory Crim and David Chang Xi Ho chuckling] (27:37)

[Rory Crim and David Chang Xi Ho overlap]

[David Chang Xi Ho:] I'm sure you--

[Rory Crim:] Madame, I was in Paris at that time and I read about this incident in <u>The New York Herald Tribune</u>. [ER: Did you?] Yes, and uh later when I came to meet Professor Cassin I wondered how you made it! [ER and Rory Crim laugh]

[ER:] Well, did um--

[David Chang Xi Ho:] Well, I just wanted to say, at that time if you had wanted to have a contract with the United Nations as an interpreter I'm sure you would have got it.

[ER:] [laughing] Oh, thank you very much! Our time has come to an end; I want to thank you for coming today. It's been so kind of you to be on this program, and I'm sure our radio audience will be interested.

[Rory Crim:] Thank you very much, Madame Roosevelt, we're very happy to meet you, have been looking forward to it for five years.

[David Chang Xi Ho:] It was a great pleasure to talk with you, Mrs. Roosevelt. (28:20)

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Transcription: Katie Woods
First Edit: Jay Fondin
Final Edit: Andreas Meyris
Final Check: Natalie Hall

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