Mrs. Eleanor Roosevelt’s Own Program

July 18, 1940

Description: Broadcast time 1:15-1:30 PM over the NBC Red Network. ER discusses the virtues of coeducation.

Participants: ER, Ben Grauer, NBC Announcer

(31:14)

[Ben Grauer:] This is Mrs. Eleanor Roosevelt’s Own Program presented by the makers of SweetHeart Soap.

[Theme music 31:19-31:46]

[Ben Grauer:] And again there’s a pause in the day’s occupations as the nation welcomes Mrs. Eleanor Roosevelt who will greet us from Hyde Park, New York. These programs come to you with the compliments of SweetHeart Soap, the famous fifty-year favorite bath and beauty soap, now featured in a dramatic, nationwide money-saving offer. But more about that later. Now, here’s Mrs. Eleanor Roosevelt.

[ER:] Good day, ladies and gentlemen. I’ve been asked to talk to you today about co-educational institutions as opposed to institutions founded exclusively for boys and girls--for boys or girls. Fortunately for us, I believe the great mass of our young people attend co-educational schools. Boys and girls are brought up in homes together, and it seems to me a disadvantage in many ways to segregate them in school. I happen to belong in an environment where it is almost traditional to send boys away at the age of twelve or thirteen to a boarding school for boys alone. I feel that it is very fortunate that this custom has existed only among a small group of people in our country. It is true that schools of the finest type for boys are probably better for them than the homes from which some of them come. They may even get an idea of what real home life is like by their contact with the masters and their families in these schools. But this, luckily, is true in very few cases, usually among the very rich or the very poor. For the great mass of American young people, life at home is a natural, normal thing until they leave for college. I personally think this is as it should be. It gives both the mother and the father an opportunity to really mean something in their child’s life, and to develop a real companionship. On the other hand, it gives the child an opportunity to realize what their parents contribute to their development, and while they need not be overdependent, there will be a tie and a devotion to the home which cannot exist if the greater part of a child’s life is spent in a boarding school.

I realize that when boys and girls reach college age, it may be wise to eliminate the distractions which come from the normal emotions developing between young men and young women in close contact with each other. However, this distraction is difficult to remove entirely, even when they are separated, and I imagine that Dr. [Henry Noble] MacCracken of Vassar, and Dr. [James Bryant] Conant of Harvard have to take into account some of the distractions caused by the association with the opposite sex, even though their institutions are limited to educating only one sex. In our public schools, for the most part, boys and girls go to school together, just as they live in their homes together. And I think it is the wise and normal way to work and play. Even the most understanding of parents are sometimes prone to forget that studies are only a part of high school and college life. I think it should be pointed out that all of the extracurricular activities are extremely important. For example, an average day in the life of a
university student includes about four or five hours of actual classwork, two or three hours of home preparation, or library and research work, and the rest of the day is free. Of course, there are dances and other social activities, athletics, club meetings, in addition to pure recreation, such as dates, going to the movies, and so on. Every one of these activities make an important contribution to the personality and character of a young man or woman. Dances, for example, teach a boy or girl the social amenities and a certain amount of poise and give them the ability to talk on a variety of unimportant subjects with ease. Athletics are health--building and also teach young people the spirit of cooperation, teamwork, and fair play. School clubs, such as sororities and fraternities, as well as academic societies, teach young people the meaning and methods of group procedure. I have noticed that in co-educational institutions, the extracurricular activities seem to be well--rounded and more normal. I would even go so far as to say that many young people enter a college or university shy and undeveloped in many ways, and after four years of mingling with maturing young men and women, they emerge better able to cope with life in a broader field. Now, let us pause for a few moments to hear a brief message from our announcer. (36:25)

[Ben Grauer:] Thank you, Mrs. Roosevelt. Friends, the sensational penny sale on SweetHeart Soap is still going on. One cent still buys one full--size cake of SweetHeart Soap with every three cakes at the regular low price. And you’re not limited to quantity. For every three cakes at the regular low price, another cake is yours for just a penny. It’s an amazing bargain, and doubly so because you are not buying a pig in a poke. You get genuine SweetHeart Soap, a nationwide favorite for fifty years. Thousands say it’s no other soap like it. So gentle, it’s highly recommended for the tender skin of infants. So pure and so fragrant, it helps grown-up skin stay soft and sweet as babies’. Order a good supply of SweetHeart Soap now and you save nearly twenty-five percent on every cake you buy. Remember the name: SweetHeart, the soap that agrees with your skin. And it’s again my pleasure to welcome Mrs. Eleanor Roosevelt back to the microphone. (37:21)

[ER:] Of course, the faculty of any school is extremely important. Young people sometimes are so profoundly influenced by their teachers that they carry inspirational and guiding memories all through their lives. I think, perhaps, it would be to the advantage of the boys if there were more able men teachers in our public school system. The type of men who head great private boarding schools for boys are needed, I think, in the general public school system. Teaching is not a profession which should be left largely to women, for by the time a boy is fifteen, he turns to his father for many things, and many a boy in boarding schools which I have known will long remember the value of his association with some really great man teacher. A boy should not in my opinion, however, be entirely removed from the influence of women, but he should have the added advantage in his school years of both men and women of ability to help develop his potentialities. Perhaps when the college years are reached, it does not really matter so much if, for four years, the sexes are divided. They meet frequently, and it is really only a division during working hours. The foundations are already laid for normal association and understanding.

I do not think this segregation in college is necessary, however, for I do not see any very -great disadvantage in keeping on working together during these years which are a preparation for the work which men and women are going to do in the world together. It seems to me that something might be gained if we grow accustomed early to cooperation in order to improve many of the services rendered in a community. For instance, in medicine, a community would be benefitted by having a woman doctor working together with a man doctor for better health in the community. A woman pediatrician seems to have certain advantages over a man, and a man as a surgeon to have certain advantages over a woman. A combination of both their gifts in the services of any community would be ideal. I have never been able to see why a woman could not combine a career with her homemaking, if she and her husband agree that this should be done and are willing to take a joint responsibility in helping each other to plan and live their lives to the fullest possible extent. It is, of course, an individual problem which every young couple must face for themselves. There are so many outstanding examples today pointing the way in which both
the man and the woman can work and still have a successful home life that it seems to me to be not only an advantage to the young couple, but often an advantage to the community as a whole. There are still men who prefer to have their wives dependent upon them, instead of having them develop in a free and open comradeship of equality in every way. This is a personal problem too, though I think it has interest for the community as well. When the desire to subordinate the woman is successful, the community is deprived of all but her biological gift of childbearing. Some women never marry, yet are often useful in their families and in their communities; some women are widowed early in life, or even when their children are grown up. They often carry heavy family responsibilities for others, and do much of the unselfish service in their communities. They can only do this if they are given an opportunity from youth -up to develop their abilities as individuals, and to make their contributions regardless of whether they are married or single so that they can stand upon their own feet. Some women whose husbands like the clinging and dependent type manage to camouflage their abilities. I know one woman who has a great deal of executive ability, and she manages to do a good deal of work in her community. But her husband thinks her a perfectly helpless individual, and I’ve heard him say often that his wife could not possibly get on if he did not attend to all the details of life. In the old days, an unmarried woman either was surrounded by an aura of an unhappy romance or looked upon with pity because no man ever wanted to marry her. Many a woman eked out a sad enough existence looking after the children of some member of her family, or acting as housekeeper or companion. I am glad that that day is over at last in our country. A woman may keep her personal life to herself, and if she earns her way in the world and is useful in her community, no one will inquire as to her right to wherever place she can carve out for herself. She may or may not have been wanted in marriage. This is nobody’s business but her own.

Perhaps because most of us are busier than we used to be, a great majority of women have given up the old gossipy habits which meant that everyone in a community was carefully watched and that their most intimate feelings and experiences became public property. Perhaps we have developed intellectually and spiritually to the point of being interested only in other people’s affairs when they ask for advice or help. I hope if that day is not already with us, that it will be shortly, for more harm has been done to the relationship between men and women and their life in a community by an overzealous gossip than by any other type of human being. We have wandered far from our original discussion of co-education. But in a way, it is all tied together, for boys and girls brought up together, who work together and play together gain much from their contacts and points of view, and the approach to various situations in life. Careers for women being an accepted fact, the only real question we have to face is how best to help both girls and boys to the fullest development of their abilities, so that every community will rejoice in the best services which men and women working together can give. (43:55)

[Ben Grauer:] Thank you very much, Mrs. Roosevelt. And now friends, I have a riddle for you: What is it that’s carried home in shopping bags, that rides home in limousines, that appeals to rich man, poor man, budgeteer and spendthrift alike? It’s SweetHeart Soap, and the sensational one cent sale. Many people tell us that SweetHeart Soap is as pure and delightful as the costliest soap they’ve ever used. Thousands say its thorough gentleness ends their search for the perfect all-around bath and beauty soap. And as for the big penny sale, well everybody appreciates a chance to enjoy the proven quality of SweetHeart Soap, a chance to get a big, full-size cake of SweetHeart Soap for only one penny with every three you buy at the regular low price. It’s your opportunity, ladies. We urge you to profit by it without delay. Order a good supply of SweetHeart Soap, the soap that agrees with your skin.

[Theme music 44:50–45:13]

[Ben Grauer:] [Music continues softly] Next Tuesday, at this same time, Mrs. Roosevelt again comes to call on the women of America. Do your friends a favor, invite them to listen with you, and tell them about the fine product that brings you these programs: SweetHeart Soap, famous for fifty years as the soap that agrees with your skin. And now, it’s goodbye until next Tuesday, 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]

(46:01)