

THE ELEANOR ROOSEVELT PROGRAM

November 15, 1950

Description: In the opening segment, ER and Elliott Roosevelt discuss memorable gifts that she and FDR received while in the White House. In the interview segment, ER interviews movie producer Stanley Kramer.

Participants: ER, Elliott, Stanley Kramer

[ER:] Well, here we are, Elliott, have you got any interesting questions today?

[Elliott Roosevelt:] Uh yes I do, Mother. I have a very interesting one here. Uh this is one really not in the form of a question, it's uh--it's more of a request for a couple of stories from you, and I think it'd be lots of fun to hear them. Uh this lady says, "I for one would be most interested in having your opinions on your favorite story or feelings in relation to one or more of the many gifts, photographs, personal belongings, et cetera, of the late President, as they represent tokens of affection and love from people all over the world, rich and poor of every denomination. From the replica of Notre Dame's Cathedral made out of grocery boxes by an Italian grocer to the diamond and ruby-studded sabre from a Shah of the Eastern World, each one tells a story, but your story on one or two of these would in-indeed be of interest to all, not only to those who have enjoyed the rare privilege of a visit to Hyde Park but as an inspiration and incentive to the many thousands more who will share this experience." Now, I agree with that lady because I think that the story of the, of these gifts is often times more uh of interest than uh the--what goes on back of that uh gift than the gift itself.

[ER:] Well, I--if anyone has been up to Hyde Park and has gone--um uh and has noticed the tiara um and--made of gold with precious stones in it, and two bracelets or bangles that go with it uh they um may react the way somebody did who asked me one day when I had worn it and [Elliott Roosevelt laughs] why I had given it to uh the Library. And I think you might be amused um at uh the way in which my husband presented it to me. He came home from his trip, I think it was the trip to Casablanca if I remember rightly--eh, and uh said that the Sultan had sent me a present. And then, beautifully wrapped up, he brought these things out, and I looked at them with unconcealed horror, I'm afraid! [ER and Elliott Roosevelt laugh] I couldn't see just exactly what I was going to do with them. And then Father said, "Well, put them on!" And I said, "Just how?" [ER and Elliott Roosevelt] He--he said, "Well, if you're not going to put them on, then I think we'll put them in the Library at Hyde Park." And I said, "Well, of course, everything that um we obtain as a rule goes to the Library at Hyde Park. So uh here they are, present them to the Library at Hyde Park." So he um sent them up and carefully marked them as having been given to me. And that is the extent to which I ever had them! [ER and Elliott Roosevelt] (3:07)

[Elliott Roosevelt:] Well, did you ever hear the story of how the Sultan of Morocco gave those to Father?

[ER:] No, I never did.

[Elliott Roosevelt:] Well, the story is, I think uh interesting, because the Sultan arrived for this very important dinner with Father, and he came bearing gifts. And Father had been properly alerted beforehand and had a suitable gift for the Sultan. And the Sultan unrolled the uh wrappings from these gifts and presented Father with a very fancy jeweled sabre, and then uh after that proceeded to unwrap this uh very lovely tiara, which I always was very sorry not to see you wear in the White House. I think that would have been a very funny sight [ER laughs]. But uh you uh of course were a little scornful of it, but--

[ER:] Well it was just a little heavy.

[Elliott Roosevelt:][Elliott Roosevelt laughs] Well, it was. Well, Father's--as soon as the Sultan left that night, he just said, "Come over here," to me. And he said, "You see that, as soon as I get back to Washington I'm going to make Mother put that on and wear it for the next White House reception!" [Elliott Roosevelt laughs]

[ER:] Well he never did. He gave that idea up! [ER and Elliott Roosevelt laugh]

[Elliott Roosevelt:] Well, anyway, uh-uh how come there- there are so many gifts from all these different people uh at the- the Library in Hyde Park?

[ER:] Well you know, Father was a collector and he never threw away anything that anybody gave him which he felt showed real interest and affection. And, so uh we now have all these things which are historically very interesting and um just because of that uh--of course Father's mother was just like that too. When I went through the house uh to turn it over to the government I found things that she had put away and forgotten, and Father just kept everything and so you now have all that connection with people all over the world. And now, Elliot, I imagine that you have something you want to say. (5:20)

(Break 5:20-5:40)

[ER:] Well now, Elliott, I imagine that you want me to go on and tell you a little bit more about gifts, don't you?

[Elliott Roosevelt:] Yes I do, if you don't mind. I'd like to find out, uh uh how many thousands of gifts do you suppose that Father did receive during those [ER overlaps here] White House years?

[ER:] I don't know, but I know they're a great many more than the present capacity of the Library will allow us to show, so that they try to rotate what they have and are longing for a new wing so that they can display at least the foreign-- the things from foreign countries on a permanent basis. [Elliott Roosevelt: Mhm.] Otherwise they keep bringing out the things that are put away, and of course things that you put away and bring out are apt to get scratched or broken, and it's not really such a good way to do it. But he had an enormous collection, but I think one thing, well um it stands out in my mind as funny. You know from Yalta when he went down, and the Sultan--and the um King of Saudi Arabia [Elliott Roosevelt: Mhm.] came on board, he gave him a number of quite uh wonderful -- I don't know what you call them, robes, I should say, and Father gave him a wheelchair because he noticed that he walked with difficulty; he'd been uh injured and had some difficulty walking. [Elliott Roosevelt: Yes.] And he evidently liked Father's type of wheelchair. And uh Father had a wonderful time, the night, the-- one of the first nights that I remember after he got home um, he had everything brought in to the oval room on the second floor of the White House and uh then he made Anna, and it happened that John Golden was staying with us, and Anna and John Golden were the models [Elliott Roosevelt laughs] in the various garments that had been acquired as gifts. And we had great fun looking at them and saying whether they looked like real Orientals or not! [ER laughs] (7:45)

[Elliott Roosevelt:] Well, you've uh talked about uh the gifts from heads of state uh all over the world, but what about the- the gifts from the ordinary people, uh-

[ER:] Oh, he had so many canes that people had carved for him with infinite care and-and ingenuity. [Elliott Roosevelt: Yes.] And then he had, of course the things that always interest me were the portraits made of him out of bits of stamps and embroidery and various things of that kind, and things that showed

infinite thought and- and willingness to put a great deal of work into them. Then, of course uh in the Library there are some interesting things that were given him as contemporary things. For instance, a whole series of um watercolors of different views at Hyde Park that Mr. and Mrs. Henry Morgenthau had painted for him, [Elliott Roosevelt: Mm.] and um they are really very lovely and things that he really loved having. And then um there are pictures and photographs that were given him by special people at uh different times as well as the older things connected with his family. I think that um one of the interesting things is an old um Jewish Torah, about which a very interesting uh story was--occurred, I thought. A um rabbi came up who had been in one of the German camps and just escaped going to the gas chamber, but he was--had come from a Polish um village or town which had been practically, completely destroyed. And he remembered that the last thing he had seen in the town before he escaped was a piece of a torn Torah which had on it the malediction for those who did not live up to what they should do, and when he went into the library and looked at the Torah there, he found that Father had opened it, that the benediction for those who lived as they should live and he felt that that was a very wonderful um sort of um augur for the future in this country [Elliott Roosevelt: Yes] and was very happy about it. He came and told me about it afterwards. But there are so many things there that one could go on telling about them for a long time, but now I see you looking at me impatiently, so go ahead, Elliott. (10:38)

(Break 10:38-10:54)

[ER:] Very often when we see [clears throat] an exceptionally good motion picture we think of the actors and actresses as being what makes it good and give them all the credit, forgetting the one man behind the whole thing, the producer. Sometimes, I'm afraid, we don't even know his name. So today, it gives me great pleasure to introduce to you Mr. Stanley Kramer, who has just completed his fourth consecutive hit film. Mr. Kramer.

[Stanley Kramer:] Well, now, Mrs. Roosevelt, that's very- very nice, I do hope it is a fourth consecutive hit film.

[ER:] Oh, I don't see how it can help being. Uh your first three hits were *Champion*, *Home of the Brave*, and the recent picture, *The Men*. All of these dealt with highly controversial subjects, present day subjects, then you turn around to the classics, heroic romance, and produce the ever-favorite *Cyrano de Bergerac* starring José Ferrer. Isn't *Cyrano* a departure from the pictures you have produced before?

[Stanley Kramer:] Well, I rather think that uh it is. I have dealt with a kind of commentary on times in which we live, but in relation to *Cyrano* I-I believe that I couldn't very well talk out of one side of my mouth, as it were uh in relation to breaking pattern and then not break my own, really, which is what I just, exactly what I tried to do. I feel that uh *Cyrano* has a reason for being, but it's entirely different from anything I've done before.

[ER:] Yes, but it's also a little bit timeless, as very good things sometimes are. (12:35)

[Stanley Kramer:] Well, I agree, and I think that uh most certainly when you say that uh most certainly anything like the "no thank you" speech I think will probably live forever.

[ER:] I um uh was very much interested when I [ER clears her throat] met and talked with Mr. Ferrer because I happened to have seen [Benoît-Constant] Coquelin do *Cyrano*.

[Stanley Kramer:] Oh, wonderful.

[ER:] So that I was uh-- it was quite interesting to talk to. [Stanley Kramer overlaps]

[Stanley Kramer:] Well I saw, I saw when I was rather young, I saw Walter Hampden do it, and then of course I saw Mr. Ferrer, but that was as far back as I went [ER interrupts]with *Cyrano*.

[ER:] Well, you see, I'm a bit older than you are, [Stanley Kramer chuckles] and when I was a student and stayed in Paris when I was young, I saw a good many of the very great actors of that day, you see. (13:22)

[Stanley Kramer:] Well did Coquelin impress you at that time or has just, have just the years added to his stature [ER interrupts] to such an extent?

[ER:] No, Coquelin really was um a very good actor, [Stanley Kramer: Mhm.] and also I knew the play rather well, because um I was in a French school, I was [Stanley Kramer: Oh, I see.] in it, in, outside of London, [Stanley Kramer: Mhm.] but we did study a great deal of the plays and various uh things that we might possibly see in our holidays, you see.

[Stanley Kramer:] What a terrible, terribly difficult critic for *Cyrano* you're going to be!

[ER:][ER laughs] Well, I don't know about that. When's it going to be released in New York?

[Stanley Kramer:] Well, it opens here in New York on the sixteenth of November, which is not very far away. And, I-I certainly do trust that it will have a proper reception. I have been to preview with the film, of course, and one of the most encouraging things of all because it does, is done, you know, in the poetic cadence, but one of the most encouraging things of all is that it has had such a wonderful reception from the rank and file audience who are not the professional uh critical uh armchair or otherwise--uh viewpoint.

[ER:] Well, you probably won't have me as a critic anyway until after the end of the United Nations, so--

[Stanley Kramer:] That's true--

[ER:] You'll have a chance to see what's happening! [ER laughs]

[Stanley Kramer:] Well, we do hope then anyhow.

[ER:] Well, we're always hearing about the fabulous amounts of money spent in producing a picture, Mr. Kramer, but I believe you have a theory which has proven to be very successful that much can be done on a modest budget. Is that so? (14:59)

[Stanley Kramer:] Well, I think that much can be done on a mod-modest budget. Of course, in Hollywood- Hollywood-style, each year and each theory and each idea provides a kind of uh peculiar breed of new wun-wunderkindt who uh come up with an idea as to how to do it more cheaply or- or more brilliantly or more this or more that. Actually, things are so tough right now that anybody who manages to get a film on the screen at a reasonable price is looked upon with some awe. [ER chuckles] Uh I- uh I don't know what is responsible for that except perhaps a very good direction and writing and- and designing job and they came together to make these films. They were made reasonably, but people made them that way.

[ER:] One of your ways of saving money has been to avoid star casting. Isn't it usually the stars that attract the audience?

[Stanley Kramer:] Well, I don't know. I'm not sure at all that there is such a thing as a really box-office star today. That is to say I'm inclined to believe that today with an audience which is certainly discriminating it takes a very special kind of motion picture to drag a bulk of population away from their television sets. And I think that it's more than just a costarring team or Technicolor or eight million dollars or twelve years in the making uh which makes necessary, uh-uh an audience, which- which, what gets for you an audience. I--In order words, it's a- a bit of a cliché, but perhaps it is the story which is the thing now and our only way out. When it comes to a star it is to be pointed out that a star may cost today uh these prices having gone up in company with many others unfortunately, a star may cost as much as a hundred and fifty or a hundred and seventy-five thousand dollars, [ER: Oh!] which means that for every hundred and fifty thousand dollars which you spend for your star, it's necessary to gross some four hundred and fifty thousand in order to get that money back. And so you see, perhaps the use of newer people uh while adding vitality also enables you to do it more economically. (17:16)

[ER:] Well I must say I would have thought that José Ferrer was quite a star [ER chuckles].

[Stanley Kramer:] Well Mr. Ferrer is but of course he was a, a star in the New York theater, and, in my opinion uh perhaps America's foremost actor today. But uh it doesn't always follow that the theatrical personality until more established in motion pictures. A necessity represents the salary brackets [ER: Yes.] uh which a motion picture star or starlet uh does command. I think Mr. Ferrer now since he has chosen to alternate between the coast and New York certainly will be unsurpassed in earning power and I only hope that I may come back and get him for some reasonable price sometime in the future.

[ER:] Well [ER chuckles] uh I wonder if what you have done in low-cost productions has had any effect on the picture industry as a whole.

[Stanley Kramer:] Oh, I think that uh it would give me a good, solid glow to be able to say that it had, but I dare say the picture industry as a whole will continue in exactly the form in which it is proceeding: worried about television, a little frightened, and as a matter of fact, not even acknowledging it. Uh the only effect I may have had is that I never hesitate to say that television is not only here to stay but it is hurting, and hurting us very badly, and uh we had better open our eyes and learn something about the medium because we're going to be making pictures for it in the not-too-distant future, in my opinion. (18:52)

[ER:] Yes, well I-I think that's likely from what I see around me. I think that's quite likely. [Stanley Kramer overlaps]

[Stanley Kramer:] I think so too.

[ER:] But um I wonder if you like--if you're willing to go back a little bit now and tell me how you started your independent picture-making.

[Stanley Kramer and ER overlap here]

[Stanley Kramer:] Well uh I started um when I came out of the army. Uh I gathered around me a few young men in whom I had confidence and perhaps they had some--somewhat the same confidence in me. We had very little money and decided to pretend that we had a good deal, and we so publicized the fact that we had, what in those days might have been termed as "financial solidity" to the tune of some eight-hundred and forty-three dollars, [ER and Elliott laugh] which for my motion picture terms is not too substantial. At any rate um proceeding with that eight-hundred and forty-three dollars and a good deal of conversation uh we did manage to promote as it were, that is the polite word for uh financial manipulation in the picture industry. Uh we promoted additional funds and even seventy-five hundred dollars from a

young man who wanted to open a Chinese restaurant. Uh and with his seventy-five hundred uh we proceeded--[ER interrupts]

[ER:] You made a film!

[Stanley Kramer:] To open a picture company [ER laughs]. (20:14)

[ER:] And it, probably um it did him good in his Chinese restaurant.

[Stanley Kramer:] Yes, I think it did. He now has that Chinese restaurant, incidentally, and that's quite a legitimate story.

[ER:] Well now I think that's wonderful because um it really was- was making two things a success at once, wasn't it?

[Stanley Kramer:] Well, good, good, I hope that it-it-that it really did. And I know he has very good Chinese food and uh comes to see all of our pictures.

[ER:] Is he still--is he in Hollywood still?

[Stanley Kramer:] He certainly is. He certainly is. [ER: I see.] He has a wonderful restaurant in the valley.

[ER:] I see. Now we'll have to stop for a minute. (20:50)

(Break 20:50-21:04)

[ER:] I'd like to talk a little more, Mr. Kramer, about these ways of saving money because I've always heard about the long rehearsal times necessary to make a picture. Did you change that in order to affect a saving?

[Stanley Kramer:] Well, Mrs. Roosevelt, it's a peculiar thing but uh I don't know really uh the source of your information, but I believe that it has been exactly the opposite. Uh rehearsal periods are such a--virtually unknown in motion pictures. [ER: Really?] That is to say uh usually it was not at all an extraordinary thing for a cast of a picture to rendezvous on the stage or set on the morning on which the picture started and meet for the first time in many instances. Uh quite to the contrary I had tried to use the idea of rehearsal as a purposeful expenditure uh through the theory that with rehearsal perhaps we might be able to do the films faster when the largest amount of money was being expended, in other words while we were shooting with film.

[ER and Stanley Kramer overlap]

[ER:] Oh, I see. You um there were no, no rehearsals before shooting and you had rehearsals before shooting for the first time.

[Stanley Kramer:] Yes, that's true. That's right.

[ER:] I see.

[Stanley Kramer:] And uh with these rehearsals we found that the actors and the technicians, having become familiar with the material, having rehearsed thoroughly all the camera moves, and gotten the various wrinkles out of the script, that when we started to shoot and to film we were able to move in a far

more rapid pace than had been usual for a quality production. Uh thus uh a film, such as *Home of the Brave*, for example, was shot in sixteen days, which uh for that kind of film was rather fast. And uh that, in essence, is what is necessary today; however that isn't a question of opinion anymore now, or like or dislike. Uh one must rehearse now because today's audience demands that the film be very- very good; they're very selective. And uh if it is not good you find yourself playing to a long line of very- very empty houses. (23:20)

[ER:] I see, well that's a- uh something, the audiences are becoming more discriminating then!

[Stanley Kramer:] I think that they are terribly more discriminating and uh it uh it is making a tremendous difference.

[ER:] Well then you not only have to make these changes, which you've made, in rehearsal in order to have a better performance, but you must also have to make up your mind what type of subject will give you a um a better drawing power [Stanley Kramer: That's right] on your audience.

[Stanley Kramer and ER overlap]

[Stanley Kramer:] I think that that's true. I think that that uh it has to be something over and above what I term uh for the moment, "pattern." That is to say that uh it has to be in terms of of-of an important subject of scope in order to intrigue. Because, after all uh it does seem to me that after so many years of seeing what has been a successful picture duplicated time and time again with only very slight variations, when those very things now are beginning to appear on the television sets themselves, it takes something beyond that to take people into a theater. Now, goodness, that terrible-terrible bugaboo, you know, a film which says something, or takes a viewpoint or a stand on any given issue, this is the thing today which possibly is just intriguing enough to be about most of the others.

[ER:] That's what made you take controversial subjects?

[Stanley Kramer:] I think so. That has an economic base, very definitely.

[ER:] Mhm. Well, that makes sense I think because that's what draws an audience. (25:00)

[Stanley Kramer:] Well, I can only answer you in this way, that times are very difficult and that if you think that makes sense I'm grateful for the good words. [chuckling]

[coughing]

[ER and Stanley Kramer overlap]

[ER:] Well, what were the early influences? You said you just decided to do this when you came out of the army, [Stanley Kramer: Mhm] but you must have had some early influences that made you choose this field.

[Stanley Kramer:] Oh, I was a terribly, terribly bitter young man. That was the main influence. [chuckles] No, I had been in Hollywood and I had held a succession of jobs, many kinds, which have served in good stead since, incidentally. But, I was a writer and I was writing radio, um, just after I got out of the army and I hadn't intended to return to Hollywood. But when the opportunity and the idea came along to go into independent production, I thought possibly that might be the solution for me because it had within it- inherent within it-- the idea of doing a picture as I wanted to do it, when I wanted to do it, and how I wanted to do it. And uh this brought me back to Hollywood and while uh one cannot always count upon

being successful uh, nevertheless, if you are lucky enough to be occasionally successful, it makes possible a few of the failures. And I think when you deal in important subjects uh if the failures are failures of execution rather than a bad selection of material or the making of pictures which you cannot answer as to the reason for having made them, that this in itself is very satisfying. (26:34)

[ER:] Well I know a gentleman who's been a play producer for many years who says that he has um produced um a very large number of real hits but a much larger number--a very much larger number of failures. [ER chuckles]

[Stanley Kramer:] That's true, and I dare say that that may be true of all of us, but uh isn't it true that a-- for a man within himself, without becoming, shall we say, sticky on the subject, isn't it true that in the work that you do, if you can justify the failures to no one else but yourself, that is, in- in other words, if you can justify to yourself the fact that well, I made this mistake but it's because of the fact that I just didn't do the job well enough; I believe in the subject. On that basis, I don't think that when you do fall short that you fall short within yourself.

[ER:] I can understand that. Now, I'm interested in your saying you're a very bitter young man. Bitter, because um of the type of work you've been forced to do? (27:38)

[Stanley Kramer:] No, I- I don't think that at all. I think uh when I say bitter I mean this: the uh road of the creator, as such, self-styled or otherwise, but the role of the creator in things Hollywood has not always been an easy one. Uh control of all the vital things which went into a motion picture: the story, the script, the casting, the approach, the editing of the film, has always been, that control has always been in the hands of those who really are not equipped to make that final decision. So that- that always made me a little bit bitter. [ER: Mhm.] Now the idea which I am now trying to propagate is that I am seeking, not only for myself but for others, to create a climate where the creator, in effect, has the final say on the work which he does. And um this in itself takes a certain basic kind of um perhaps, self-centered viewpoint in saying that I shall determine, that I am a creator and can determine best what that climate is, but I'm trying it, anyhow.

[ER:] But you can't be a creator unless you have confidence in that very power within you so, that uh- that that goes without saying, I think.

[Stanley Kramer:] Well I uh I-I believe that to be true and--

[ER:] Well now, for one minute I'd like to ask you about the-um what you said about television. You evidently do think that it uh-uh does harm the pictures, and um I wonder what um what you feel should be the relationship between films and television in the future.

[Stanley Kramer:] Well I think that there will be a very- very definite clear-cut relationship. I think that films which are important films and are something of a special event, that is to say, what we call in the business a "road-show" film, a "two-a-day" film uh a film which uh quality-wise and prestige-wise, and- and uh sometimes cost-wise, but not necessarily, these films uh will continue to be shown in theaters uh as on the motion picture screen in and of itself. But that vast uh amount of product uh those, that product which has encompassed what we call the "big pictures" up- up until now, the general run of pictures, and a good many of the, what we call too "the shaky A's," as they refer to them. These films, I think, are going to eventually find their way onto the television screens. Now television and films have a definite uh relationship, each to the other. For example, we find and have found that the greatest exportation medium thus far devised for the selling of motion pictures in any given area is television; where television sets exist! Uh when I came into New York with Kirk Douglas originally, he was practically unknown, and not at all uh no one paid any attention to him whatsoever. He did thirty-six television interviews and shows in

a space of ten days and was mobbed in every restaurant in this city before the film opened. This was our key, and since then we have done an awfully lot on television to exploit the films, as in *Cyrano*. We've use many clips of- of *Cyrano* uh certainly the key speeches and many appearances by Mr. Ferrer to exploit the opening of the film. (31:22)

[ER:] Well, that's- that's an interesting thing. It shows what an audience you have on television and how it can help uh to- to interest people.

[Stanley Kramer:] True, and it also proves our faith that they will leave their home television sets to come out to see what we hope is a very special motion picture.

[ER:] Well I, I think that's quite true. Well I am- I am um interested-ed because so far I think television has been a good medium for vaudeville and review and comedy and mystery and so forth, but do you think eventually the public's going to ask for better things on television?

[Stanley Kramer:] I don't think they're going to ask, I think they are going to demand and scream and they're going to get it too, because as soon as many of the creators go into television, why they'll be getting it.

[ER:] Have you any plans for television?

[Stanley Kramer:] I am making some experimental television films. I'd like to learn something about it before I actually make plans.

[ER:] Well I hear that you say that uh your only worry, real worry at present, is tax returns.

[Stanley Kramer:] Well, I do have a few other worries [chuckles] but what a nice thing to worry about in the final analysis. [Stanley Kramer and ER laughs]

[ER:] Well I think that's a good, [ER laughs] a good answer to that question. Well this has been a very pleasant interview, and I thank you so much for coming today, Mr. Kramer.

[Stanley Kramer:] Thank you it was really nice of you to have me.

(32:49)

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