

THE ELEANOR AND ANNA ROOSEVELT PROGRAM

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Description: In this segment, ER interviews Elaine Carrington, creator and writer of several radio serials.

Participants: ER, Elaine Sterne Carrington

[ER:] Thank you, Anna. Our guest today is a woman of abounding vitality and good will, not to mention a lively imagination and a great gift for storytelling. You will understand when I tell you that she's Elaine Carrington, the creator and writer of three well known radio serials: *Pepper Young's Family*, *Rosemary*, and *When a Girl Marries*. Some people, Mrs. Carrington, as you and I both know, call daytime radio serials "soap operas" and under this name they've received some stringent criticism. This is a leading question I know, but do you feel soap operas deserve such harsh appraisal? (0:43)

[Elaine Carrington:] Well Mrs. Roosevelt, I think I can best answer that by telling you about two letters I recently received. One was from a man who was writing about his son. I had just done a show in which a father tells his young son uh that he should not marry quite so young, and gives him all the reasons for waiting a little longer. I must have received a hundred letters from fathers who asked for a copy of the script, saying they wanted to talk to their sons this way but didn't know how to put it into words. And then I also received a letter at the time that one of my characters was having a baby at the hospital and the mother goes up to see her daughter who's a little bit afraid and the mother talks to her about this great adventure of motherhood and what a wonderful thing she has to look forward to. And in the same way, I received hundreds of letters telling me at that time uh asking for the script and saying that they wanted to give it to their daughters and their nieces and so forth. So I feel that soap opera really does have a job to do if you take a responsibility for it.

[ER:] Well [ER laughs] that's-that's really very wonderful, but Mrs. Carrington doesn't mention it but I will say for her that if her works seems to be immune from the criticism that others have had. *Redbook* magazine published a feature article on her recently which pointed out that even the severest critics of soap operas usually exempt Mrs. Carrington's work from their indictments. And the article goes on to say that it is considered quite normal, even in fairly intellectual circles, to turn on the radio in the afternoon to see how the Pepper Youngs are doing. Now, you might think that three separate and distinct casts of characters and a flesh and blood son and daughter would be enough to keep one woman busy, but Mrs. Carrington has just begun work on a new project and this is what we would like you to tell us about today, Mrs. Carrington. (2:40)

[Elaine Carrington:] Well Mrs. Roosevelt, I lived in Washington during the war while my husband, Major Carrington, was stationed there. And I all--heard about the need for good wholesome entertainment for young people, government workers, and those in the armed forces who were stationed there. I know that at that time there were many excellent canteens, but now that the war is over the need is just as great for wholesome entertainment. So, I thought up the idea of having square dances which everyone could join in, young and old, whether they came alone or in couples. And I was able to get the Grand Armory for Friday night dances and also to get the services of one of the best callers for square dances in the country, Ed Durlacher. We opened last Friday night and there were about two thousand people dancing at one time on the floor and it was quite a wonderful sight: children and parents and everyone else.

[ER:] Well, I can tell that the Washington Armory on Friday evenings is going to be a place of gaiety and activity. But speaking of activity, Mrs. Carrington, please tell me how on earth do you keep the eventful lives of all those characters in your three radio serials from getting hopelessly tangled up?

[Elaine Carrington:] [Carrington Laughs] I suppose it does sound difficult, but I've lived with them for so long that they're so real to me it's-it's no trick at all. What I do is write one complete show for the week before beginning another and that way I don't get them tangled up. Besides my people--well I like them and then I like most people I guess, and I suspect you do too, Mrs. Roosevelt from the work you've done helping people all over the world. It seems to me that such tireless work as you have done and are doing must spring not only from a feeling of brotherhood towards your fellow man but also from a deep and very rare sense of responsibility. Many of us think you're the greatest ambassador America has. I hope you don't mind my taking this opportunity to express my gratitude and appreciation, Mrs. Roosevelt. I'm very proud to be on this program with you. (4:40)

[ER:] We're very happy to have you, but I think you still have something to tell us and that is uh-- is it through your contact with your own children that you gained the wisdom which you give to others?

[Elaine Carrington:] I think it probably is exactly that. I--when I wrote *Pepper Young's Family* it was because uh we were a young couple with two small children and the only thing I knew to write about was my own family. And I think the groups of children who have come into the story have been probably have replicas in the children who have come to our house in just a sort of-- are sort of a youth center really; they come all the time. So I think it's partly-- it's practically due to the fact that I know best about families because I love my own so much.

[ER:] Well I-I have a feeling that when we try to tell other people um things that are really helpful it has to come out of our own experience, it has to really--we've had to live it otherwise it doesn't mean much when we try to impart it. Well, I'm very grateful to you and happy to have met you today. And now, back to my daughter, Anna, in Hollywood.

(5:57)

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