Mrs. Eleanor Roosevelt’s Own Program

June 11, 1940

Description: Broadcast time 1:15-1:30 PM over the NBC Red Network. ER describes the Roosevelts’ Hyde Park houses and the life they lead there.
Participants: Eleanor Roosevelt, Ben Grauer, NBC Announcer

(32:20)

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

[Theme music 32:26-32:51]

[Ben Grauer:] Again, the nation tunes in Mrs. Eleanor Roosevelt who speaks to you today from our NBC studios in Radio City New York. These stimulating programs come to you with the compliments of SweetHeart Soap, the pure bath and beauty soap with the lovely, mild fragrance all its own. And now, your distinguished visitor is at the microphone. Ladies and gentlemen, Mrs. Eleanor Roosevelt.

[ER:] Good day, ladies and gentlemen. Several people have written in asking me to tell something about Hyde Park, what the house and place are like and what kind of life is lived there. I can almost completely forget all official obligations when there except that the mail has to be done every day, and that keeps reminding me of Washington. The president is never quite as free as I am, and even at Hyde Park, whenever he gets into his car, he must be followed by the Secret Service car filled with Secret Service men, and his car is often preceded by a state trooper’s car. Ever since the days when we lived in Albany, when my husband was governor, the state troopers have kept a watchful eye on the Hyde Park place. One member of the state police and two members of the White House police force are always on guard near the house. When the president is at home at Hyde Park, night and day, all around are the watchful eyes of the Secret Service. And at the main gate, the state police and Secret Service scrutinize all those who come and go. And another state policeman stands at the crossroads which connect my mother-in-law’s house with that of the president’s sister-in-law, Mrs. J.R. [Helen Astor] Roosevelt, on one side, and the house of Mr. and Mrs. Gerald Morgan on the other.

So much of the land at Hyde Park is woodland, and so much of it is valueless for cultivation because of its rocky character that my husband has put a great deal of thought into reforestation. That has led him to add to the land which his father bought many years ago. Now the whole place, including his mother’s place and farm, Mrs. J.R. Roosevelt’s place, and his own farm and forest land covers about two thousand acres. Through this run a number of dirt roads which we use primarily for walking and riding, though some of them are possible for a motor if you are moderately careful. (35:12)

The house and place at Hyde Park belong to my mother-in-law and we’ve always lived with her there. My husband was born in this house. The original house which he knew as a boy has been added to and changed some twenty-odd years ago, and this has given us on the main floor a very large library in which are housed most of my husband’s books as well as those which belonged to his father and grandfather. In addition, on this floor, there is a large entrance hall, a dining room, a music room, and two small sitting rooms. The coat room is now used largely by my husband’s secretaries as a work room when
he is at home, and the little room which he uses for an office was once the children’s schoolroom. There is also a pantry, a kitchen, a storeroom, and a servants’ dining room on this floor.

Outside and separate from the house, there is a small building which houses the laundry. There are two bedroom floors which have thirteen family bedrooms besides a number for the servants, with a sewing room, and a pressing room. Some of the family bedrooms are double rooms, and some are single ones. We have on occasion had twenty-two people staying in the house. My mother-in-law had all the gingerbread decorations and covered porches taken off around the house, and had the entire exterior stuccoed, making it tone in with the stone which was used in the new wings. This gave the house a very Georgian air on the whole.

Inside, the house is still filled with pieces of furniture which were bought by the president’s father or inherited from the older generation. No interior decorators ever let their taste run riot in this house. The people who lived here used their own judgment, and bought to suit their own taste. My mother-in-law has always perpetuated certain things because she likes to keep alive the memory of her husband and his wishes, but being a decided person herself, the house reflects her own likes and dislikes as well. My husband has always been a collector, and so in many parts of the house, besides the library, there are bookshelves filled with books which not only he, but other members of the family, bought and preserved. A part of his naval collection, including books, pictures, models, et cetera, is in this house, and in one case in the front hall, there is a collection of Hyde Park birds which he shot before he was fifteen and went away to boarding school. (37:37)

The house has many things reminiscent of Europe and the Far East. There are some Italian and Dutch pieces of furniture, as well as many Chinese things which my mother-in-law’s father or her sister, Mrs. [Deborah Perry] Forbes, brought home from China where they spent many years. The rooms are high-ceilinged and spacious. To the south, there is a lovely view of the Hudson River as the house stands high on a bluff and overlooks the fields and trees which extend down to the river. When my husband was a boy, he always had a pony, and we still have horses to ride over the fields and through the woods. There are miles and miles of paths to walk over with beautiful glimpses of trees and rock and brooks, and if you climb high enough, a lovely view down the river, over to the Berkshires, and up to the Catskills.

My mother-in-law is very fond of flowers, and her flower garden, which is sheltered by a tremendous hemlock hedge, gives her great pleasure. In it, there is a succession of blooms during the entire summer season. Beyond that, there is a big vegetable garden which provides the house with all the vegetables in season. Across the Albany Post Road, on the farm, there is a herd of Guernsey cows of which my mother-in-law is very proud for tuberculosis has never been found in this herd. The milk and cream, eggs, ducks, chickens, an occasional pig or calf, which in various forms appear on the table, are always heralded by my mother-in-law as being far better than anything we can buy. And I must say that there is a particular satisfaction in eating food grown on your own place. But before we go on, I believe Mr. Ben Grauer has something to tell us. (39:20)

[Ben Grauer:] Indeed I have, Mrs. Roosevelt. Ladies, when you buy a new hat, you want it to do more than just keep the sun out of your eyes. You want it to emphasize your best points, to help you look your loveliest. And by the same token, your bath and beauty soap should do more than just get you clean; it too should help you look and feel your loveliest. That’s the reason for the delicate, lingering fragrance of SweetHeart Soap. As SweetHeart’s rich lather creams over your skin, gently and thoroughly removing surface impurities, it leaves behind just a breath of tantalizing perfume. So much more than being merely clean, you’re sweet and clean after a SweetHeart bath. If you want to be fresh as the flowers you wear this summer, get pure, exquisitely fragrant SweetHeart Soap to help you, and accept no substitute when you ask for it. It is now my pleasure to return the microphone to Mrs. Eleanor Roosevelt.
All of our children grew up spending every spring and autumn with their grandmother in Hyde Park so that they have a feeling that this is their real home. They led a very quiet life with few visitors. A tennis court, the horses, and swimming provided enough interest out-of-doors. Books and games were a plentiful occupation for rainy days or quiet evenings, but that alas has somewhat changed of late. There was a time when we had friends who came to stay with us occasionally. We still have them, occasionally, but we always have with us innumerable people who are there for purposes of work in the interest of public business. The president has turned the old schoolroom into an office, and he goes there just as regularly as he goes to his study in the White House, and there is really very little difference for the president in the routine of life at Hyde Park than that which is lived in Washington except that usually, once a day here, the president will leave the house. He drives around to visit a neighbor, or goes to some part of the place in which he is particularly interested, such as the woods where he has done extensive clearing and planting.

A few years ago, when it became evident that even a large house would give me very little quiet under present conditions, I took over an old shop building on the back part of my husband’s land which he has bought adjoining his mother’s, and I turned it into two apartments: one for my secretary and one for myself. Here we work, and here, when my husband is not at Hyde Park, I really stay and have any visitors who desire peace and quiet. My husband liked this refuge so well that a short time ago he decided to build a small house on the very top of a hill with a view up and down the river, and so far back from the main road that I think it would be difficult to find it unless you were familiar with all of our various wood roads. Here, he can go if he wants to do a quiet piece of work, or read on his porch undisturbed. The fact remains, however, that while we have had picnics up there, I doubt very much if he has spent more than four or five periods of an hour or more in what was to be a refuge far from the madding crowd.

My husband’s father was a great lover of horses, and at one time, bred the fastest trotter of his day; his name was Gloucester. A few years ago, someone sent the president Gloucester’s tail, mounted on a board, and it hangs on the wall in his bedroom and is a great curiosity for anyone who sees it. We still have a stable, but since Mr. James Roosevelt’s day, no one has gone in for breeding anything but farm horses and dogs. We’ve always kept three or four horses for riding or driving, and all the children have learned to ride and to love animals. I still ride, and I drive my own car. My husband drives his car also, and he enjoys giving people a thrill by taking them over seemingly impossible roads. Nowadays, of course, automobiles are a necessity, but I often wonder what it would seem like if we went back to the days when we drove or rode horses everywhere, and when everybody was very much curtailed in the radius of their activities. Today, we have a station wagon and three cars which are practically in constant use whenever we are in Hyde Park as a family.

The big house, of course, lends itself to formal living, and my mother-in-law has always lived with a certain formality. She has a number of servants, and you must conform to such things as dressing for dinner, and not come to a meal in riding clothes if you smell too strongly of the stable. My cottage, on the other hand, provides a porch for eating out-of-doors, and I keep one maid there the year round, supplemented in summer according to our needs. But life is always very simple and casual there. I suppose no matter where we live, there will always be friends now and then to share potluck with us, but no one who expects to be looked after could be happy at my cottage, nor would I dream of asking them. We have a swimming pool and a picnic ground which we share with our neighbors, and we really enjoy being out-of-doors as much as possible when we have the opportunity. Of course, much of the time, my mother-in-law is at Hyde Park alone, and then life is much quieter. She goes up early in the spring and stays until Christmas time. The house is never really closed so that one may go up for weekends all through the year. It has been a long time since my husband and I have been able to spend any length of time without interruption at Hyde Park, but we try to come and go during the entire summer, and even occasionally in winter.
[Ben Grauer:] Thank you very much, Mrs. Roosevelt. Ladies, I suppose you have your summer wardrobes pretty well lined up by now, but have you thought about the kind of complexion you’re going to wear with them? We suggest a SweetHeart complexion, with SweetHeart Soap to help you keep it that way. Gentle, thorough cleansing, that’s the help your skin needs when outdoor days tend to make it coarse and rough. And gentle, thorough cleansing is what it gets with SweetHeart Soap as thousands of loyal users will gladly tell you. Because SweetHeart Soap is pure, you can depend on its purity. So of course, you can depend on it to be a true friend to your summer complexion. Make this your summer to rejoice in clean, natural skin charm. Get pure SweetHeart Soap this very day.

[Theme music 45:54-46:05]

[Ben Grauer:] [Music continues softly] Next Thursday at this same time, over these same stations, Mrs. Roosevelt again comes to call on her friends all over the nation. Jot down this must program on your radio log, and make a note also to supply yourself with the fine product that brings you these programs: SweetHeart Soap, famous for fifty years as the soap that agrees with your skin. Invite a few friends then to listen with you next Thursday when you tune in [music crescendos, cuts] Mrs. Eleanor Roosevelt’s Own Program. This is Ben Grauer speaking.

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

[NBC Chimes]

(46:45)