Mrs. Eleanor Roosevelt’s Own Program

May 14, 1940

Description: Broadcast 1:15-1:30 PM over the NBC Red Network. ER asks listeners to contribute to the Red Cross in aid of Holland and Belgium. She also discusses nursing as a career and the importance of home life as an incubator of democracy.

Participants: Eleanor Roosevelt, Ben Grauer, NBC Announcer

(32:17)

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

[Theme music 32:23-32:49]

[Ben Grauer:] And now as Americans from coast to coast tune in these stations, Mrs. Eleanor Roosevelt drops in for another friendly chat. Today Mrs. Roosevelt will speak to us from the nation’s capital. These visits are arranged by the makers of SweetHeart Soap, one of America’s oldest and best-liked bath and beauty soaps. And here’s Washington, DC. Please come in, Mrs. Eleanor Roosevelt.

[ER:] Good day, ladies and gentlemen. I cannot begin my regular talk with you this morning without at least mentioning the fact that the new invasions in Holland and Belgium create an ever greater area of human suffering. The national Red Cross, recognizing this, has asked every one of us to cooperate with our local chapters in raising a fund of ten million dollars. This is an appeal to all of us to do what we can according to our means with money and with personal work. We, who do not dread the sound of an aeroplane overhead, who do not listen for the distant sound of guns, nor search our papers for lists of casualties, have much to be thankful for. This is one of the tangible ways in which we can show our appreciation for the blessings of this life and our sympathy for those who suffer.

Yesterday, on the one hundred and twentieth anniversary of the birth of Florence Nightingale, ten thousand nurses from all over the United States went to Philadelphia to meet and discuss nursing in a democracy. Because of a tendency to shorten the hours of work and because of the growth of public health programs, the whole field of nursing is expanding. The American Nurses Association feels that nursing offers opportunities to many young women who wish to find useful, satisfactory life work. In answer to the question is the private duty nursing field overcrowded, the Nurses Association says it has too few well-prepared, capable, enthusiastic, alert, and informed nurses, too few specialists in fields such as psychiatry, care of the tubercular, and of children. Home nursing and teaching were two of the earliest professions in which women engaged and they came to them quite naturally because untrained as they were, they had been carrying on the work of nursing and of teaching in their homes and in their communities from time immemorial. (35:21)

In the next few weeks, I think it will be interesting for us to cover various subjects which touch the home, partly because many people think that home life and its influence over young people has suffered in the United States during the last decade, and partly because I think that in a time of change we should be reexamining the ways in which we’ve made our homes more or less useful as centers for the development of the democratic way of life. What relaxation and entertainment do they provide, and how do they prepare us for participation in wider fields of activity? The first question that confronts anyone in
establishing a home is the adjustment of two human beings to each other. In the case of young married people, the adjustment begins with two personalities: the man and the woman. Gradually as children come along, new elements enter into the adjustment. And if the home is one where people are employed, there is the adjustment between employer and employee. So that in miniature, we have in every home the opportunity to develop qualities of character and the technique necessary for cooperative living in the community. I have always thought that this function of the home was one of the most valuable educational processes.

We know today that we’re confronted with many broken homes and the variety of reasons which bring this about would fill many volumes. I think one important reason, however, is that homes do not emphasize among the children this need for adjusting to their environment. Therefore, they are unprepared when they have to start the cycle over again for themselves, and have no pattern or technique on which to base their first efforts of cooperation and the first experiment of understanding between themselves and the other members of the household. It is one thing to be able to get on with another person when you are so in love that every minute snatched from your separate lives is a romance and a joy. It is quite another thing to discipline yourself so that you can synchronize two separate lives, giving to each personality the liberty to continue their individual life which is necessary, and yet subordinate the personal interests sufficiently to preserve the joy and romance in their joint development which will accentuate the pleasure of companionship. It is important too to keep the element of curiosity alive for the sake of continuing interest; and yet mutual understanding and respect, which are the bases of all permanent relationships, must grow.

In what way can you and I contribute to making our homes centers in which this idea shall be developed? I feel that no matter where we live, our first interest should be to create as gracious and as attractive an atmosphere as possible. What we can do is conditioned to a certain extent, of course, by our economic situation. And yet I am mindful of a resident project for NYA [National Youth Administration] girls which I visited not long ago. There I realized that the expenditure of money was not all that was needed in the improvement of the appearance of a home. These girls had taken an old and rather unattractive house. They had painted the interior themselves, and as the paint had been obtained free, they’d had to make some rather curious combinations of color. However, into the hard work went ingenuity, and above all taste, which triumphed over many difficulties. The bathroom had cream colored walls and above the old wood wainscoting, they had stenciled little red sailboats. They had chosen for their window curtains an inexpensive cotton material print with little red sailboats on it. I assure you that the effect was charming. They had made dressing tables from old packing boxes and had covered them with cheap printed cotton material and they had upholstered some barrel chairs. Not the most comfortable chairs in the world, but certainly not bad to sit in to sew, and they certainly added to the decoration of the room. The bedspreads varied from old-fashioned quilted ones to very inexpensive cotton slipcovers cut to fit the beds and cover the bedclothes during the daytime and keep them free of dust. In every room, the curtain materials were inexpensive, but the taste with which they were chosen and the taste used in the general color scheme was what made the whole house so attractive.

But before we go on, here’s Mr. [Ben] Grauer who has a message for us. (39:46)

[Ben Grauer:] And I’ll make it a brief message, Mrs. Roosevelt. Ladies, when you change to SweetHeart Soap, you’ll have lots of company, because five million people had the same idea just lately. Five million new users in the last two years alone—that’s SweetHeart’s proud record. It looks as though SweetHeart Soap is getting to be the fashion with you ladies, but unlike fashions that are here today and gone tomorrow, SweetHeart is here to stay. This fine, pure soap has been a favorite for fifty years. Yes, ever since 1890, more and more women cherish their natural skin charm with pure, gentle, delicately-fragranced SweetHeart Soap. And now, these millions of new users join the nationwide trend to SweetHeart. How can any one soap please so many people for so long? Well ladies, let SweetHeart Soap
itself give you the answer. Get some this very day. And now from Washington, DC, Mrs. Eleanor Roosevelt again speaks to you.

[ER:] I have seen many a home on which much money had been spent, and for one reason or another it lacked a real homelike feeling. Some people have the gift for arranging furniture, a sure instinct for color schemes, and sometimes an ability to use simple tools, such as a hammer and a saw, which means greater facility in carrying out inexpensive home decoration. If you do not happen to have this gift, it is possible to develop it through studying magazines and newspapers and the displays in shops, which not only show good taste, but a great variety of ideas as to what you can do in your own home. When it is just a matter of planning and supervising somebody else who will carry out your ideas and desires, it does not require so much actual skill or time on your part. Many of us have to do things with our own hands, however. Once we’ve learned to do it, we will find that it is much less difficult than we expected and takes on the whole less time than we thought. The learning period is always trying, but well worthwhile if you want to create an atmosphere which reflects the personality of the occupants of the house and which gives them a satisfying environment.

It is well for a woman to realize that her home is also the home of her family. So many women will not allow their husbands even a corner of the living room for his beloved objects such as pictures, chairs, pipes, et cetera. Of course, if you can have two rooms, one can be given to the man, and that is the ideal arrangement. But if you can have only one room, there should be consideration of the needs of the family as a whole. That includes some kind of provision for the children’s interests as well: either space for games to be set up, or if they have some hobby they like to carry on in the company of their elders, there should be some effort made to arrange the room for these interests so that it is the center for the family group. (42:42)

The kitchen and the dining room are not only the places where food is cooked and eaten. It is interesting to note in the history of all peoples that the women who cook the food and feed the families are the greatest force in keeping the families together. They still continue to be this force under our modern civilization. And the dining table, whether it is in the kitchen or the dining room, should be the place for interchange of thought and discussion and for the development of many of the arts of living. Let me illustrate by a very simple story which was told me the other day. A friend of mine had gone through some very hard times, and the ritual of the family life had more or less fallen apart. There was so little to eat that it seemed foolish to sit around a table. Then things became better and the rehabilitation began. The first money to be spent for anything but the sheer necessities of life was used to purchase a gay set of linens for the table, some cheap but colorful china, and glassware. They sat down again to a family meal. They told me that the effect was immediately noticeable in the family manners of young and old, and in the conversation. It may seem foolish to worry whether you have any flowers for your table, but I’ve seen a bowl of daffodils change the spirit of the family group. This ritual of eating is one of the oldest in the pattern of family life. We should remember that it has a greater significance than mere routine. What is said at the family table may have a meaning in the development of peace and civilized living. Curiosity awakened there in a variety of subjects may mean for the children an interest in learning as against a rather drab acquisition of knowledge.

The old adage that the way to a man’s heart is through his stomach is not the only one which should have been taught to all of us in our youth. A good cooking has much to do with the activity of the mind. No woman need feel that her interest in the arts of the home is an interest to be ashamed of, for running a home well takes as much capacity as running a business and should be approached with a professional attitude. Many women today have learned that they can get valuable information from their state extension services and from the Home Economics Bureau in the United States Department of Agriculture. Both of these bureaus, state and federal, issue pamphlets which are very useful to the
homemaker. On Thursday, we will take up some of the things which we will find valuable in building our home life. (45:08)

[Ben Grauer:] I know our listeners join me in saying thank you, Mrs. Roosevelt. And now ladies, let’s take a look at this business of beauty. The latest fashion in complexions is natural glamour, that freshly scrubbed look. This calls for soap and water, but above all, a really pure soap. Choose SweetHeart Soap because you’re sure it’s pure. Its wonderful purity means SweetHeart Soap is as gentle as it is thorough. That’s how it can clean away stubborn surface impurities, reveal more natural loveliness, and help skin stay soft and smooth besides. It’s why SweetHeart is highly recommended even for young babies’ tender skin. Indeed, many a grown-up glamour girl thanks SweetHeart Soap from the cradle for her naturally lovely complexion. Why don’t you try SweetHeart Soap very soon?

[Theme music 46:02-46:43]

[Ben Grauer:] [music continues softly] And so ends another delightful visit with Mrs. Eleanor Roosevelt. Mrs. Roosevelt’s friends all over the nation will hear her again next Thursday, same time, same stations. The makers of SweetHeart Soap, famous for fifty years as the soap that agrees with your skin, invite you to be with us next Thursday 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]

(46:57)