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# First Lady of the World: Eleanor Roosevelt

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## First Lady of the World: Eleanor Roosevelt

Eleanor Roosevelt once said, “You must do the thing you think you cannot do.” (Freedman, 1) And in taking on being the First Lady of the United States, Roosevelt overcame her fears and did many things she thought she could never do—including being First Lady! This paper will discuss Eleanor Roosevelt’s years as the First Lady, a title she held from 1933 to 1945, and her experiences in that role. It will show aspects of her daily life during that time, using her daily newspaper column “My Day,” which Roosevelt started in 1936, to show some of her day-to-day routines. “My Day” also highlights what Roosevelt particularly enjoyed about her days, from having a fire and food alone in her room to her children to hot dogs. Also to be reflected upon are the many duties Roosevelt had as First Lady (such as campaigning for her husband; hosting countless teas, lunches, and dinners; and writing letters back to the many people who wrote her), the numerous extra things she did as First Lady (for example, hosting women reporters, flying with Amelia Earhart, and all the traveling she did as her husband’s eyes and ears), the special causes she fought for (her fight for racial justice being the most noteworthy), and her enduring legacy as the First Lady. This paper strives to show the reader what being the First Lady is like, how Roosevelt took on the job, and how she changed the role of the First Lady forever with her enthusiasm and involvement.

However, the road to becoming the active and enthusiastic First Lady she is acclaimed as being was a tough one for her in many ways. In 1932, which was the first time Franklin Roosevelt ran for president, Eleanor Roosevelt was not told by her husband of his plans to run; instead, she heard from Louis Howe, who was the overseer of FDR’s campaign. (Roosevelt, 65)

In her autobiography *This I Remember*, Roosevelt plainly states, “From a personal standpoint, I did not want my husband to be president.” (69) Despite this, Roosevelt was supportive of her husband’s endeavors. She says in *This I Remember* that, “I did not work directly in the campaign, because I felt that that was something better done by others, but I went on many of the trips and always did anything that Franklin felt would be helpful.” (69) Once FDR had the Democratic nomination, he went on a long trip campaigning. Roosevelt joined him later in this trip in Williams, Arizona on his return. Roosevelt says people tend to exaggerate the influence she had over her husband while campaigning, for example the common rumour that she played a large role in the development of her husband’s speeches. She states clearly in her memoirs that she had no part in them other than reading them occasionally beforehand and telling him when she thought his speech was good, “...He was much too good a speaker to need any advice from me.” (73) She was well aware of her husband’s unique capabilities such as being a good speaker and being particularly well suited to radio, and felt those gifts would give him a definite edge over his opponent (Roosevelt, 73).

When election night came and word came that FDR had been elected, he came over to his wife and said, “I wish I knew what you are really thinking and feeling.” (Roosevelt, 74) Roosevelt was, of course, pleased her husband had won. She had absolute confidence in his abilities to help the country out of the Great Depression. But she also realized his election meant, “...the end of any personal life of my own.” (Roosevelt, 74) Having seen her uncle Theodore Roosevelt and his wife in the White House, she knew what being the First Lady entailed better than most. As she herself put it: “...I cannot say that I was pleased at the prospect.” (74) Roosevelt was used to earning her own money and coming and going as she pleased. Now, that was all about to change.

As soon as FDR was elected, the secret service was responsible for the protection of the president and his family. And plans for the inauguration had begun. Roosevelt had to start becoming a First Lady. She was charged with the duty of going to the White House and figuring out which rooms would be given to whom and how they would be used. She met with the chief usher at the White House at that time, Ike Hoover, who she had known when Theodore Roosevelt was President. She says in her memoirs she was much comforted by his familiar presence, and he helped to get her started as First Lady. In talking with the last First Lady, Lou Hoover, Roosevelt asked Hoover what she would miss most about the White House. Hoover listed such things as feeling taken care of, never needing to make her own reservations or to have to plan her affairs (Roosevelt, 78). It was at this time Roosevelt decided she had to not become dependent on the niceties in the way Lou Hoover had.

This desire to be independent and to keep control of her own affairs is what made Roosevelt such a unique First Lady. Her realization after talking with Hoover gave her early on the motive for a lot of what she later did. As her husband was busy in his first days, Roosevelt herself was busy organizing the household and her own office. She unconsciously did many little things that surprised (and sometimes horrified) those on the White House staff, such as running the elevator herself, helping move furniture, and letting workmen into her office to install a phone even when she was in it (Roosevelt, 80-81). Roosevelt became known as a First Lady who liked to take risks and do new things. Just two days after her husband's inauguration, Roosevelt held the first of her women-only press conferences, an idea given to her by reporter Lorena Hickock, a woman reporter for the Associated Press who Roosevelt gave an interview to when FDR was first elected. These all-women press conferences were also the first press conference ever given by a First Lady (Freedman, 98). Roosevelt refused to be driven in a secret

service limousine, and instead bought a light blue Plymouth roadster convertible with a rumble seat that she drove herself in the first years (Freedman, 98). She was the first of the First Ladies to fly frequently. She loved it, and famously went out with Amelia Earhart for a flight from Washington to Baltimore in which both wore evening dresses. When asked how she felt about being piloted by a woman, Roosevelt replied, "Absolutely safe. I'd give a lot to do it myself!" (Freedman, 100)

Roosevelt from the start had strong beliefs on certain subjects that wouldn't be hidden. The most important one to her was racial equality. Roosevelt was a strong supporter of equal rights, and did many things over her First Lady years to make this known. Once, Roosevelt went to a meeting in Alabama with African-American activist and educator Mary McLeod Bethune. When they went to sit, they were told that blacks and whites had to sit on different sides of the room. Roosevelt refused, and was threatened with arrest. She obeyed the absolute letter of the law and didn't sit with her friend, but instead put a chair in the center aisle between the black and white seating (Harris, 494). Most famously, Roosevelt helped singer Marian Anderson sing at the Lincoln Memorial. Anderson was to sing at Constitution Hall, but the Daughters of the American Revolution, a group Roosevelt was involved with, wouldn't allow Anderson to sing in their auditorium. Roosevelt immediately resigned from the group as a protest. She had already asked Marian Anderson to sing at the White House, but she also asked that the steps of the Lincoln Memorial be opened for Anderson in place of the cancelled concert. About 75,000 people showed up to this concert that happened only thanks to Roosevelt (Harris, 494).

Roosevelt, even in her first year, did a lot of traveling around and checking on the state of the country. It was all started by Louis Howe. Howe was a bit of an invalid, and often asked Roosevelt to take him for an afternoon drive. One day, he asked her to drive to a veterans' camp.

Once there, he announced he was staying in the car, but that Roosevelt was going to get out and walk around and see how the men were doing (Roosevelt, 112). And thus began Roosevelt's long term project of checking up on parts of the nation for her husband. Even on trips of leisure, such as a trip to Maine in her first year, Roosevelt came back to FDR's questioning about how the people were doing, what life was like in Maine. (Roosevelt, 122) Later that year, Roosevelt was asked by a group of Quakers to go down to West Virginia to meet with coal miners (Roosevelt, 126). And so started Roosevelt's long interest and support for the needy, and her appreciation for the value of work. Roosevelt says FDR never said she was a good reporter, but realized, "...that he would not question me so closely if he were not interested, and I decided this was the only way I could help him, outside of running the house, which was very soon organized and running itself under Mrs. Nesbitt." (Roosevelt, 125) Roosevelt needed a purpose and job to not become idle and dependent, and being reporter to her husband filled that need.

In the first year FDR was president, Roosevelt was busy learning to be a president's wife. In her memoirs, she devotes a whole chapter to this very topic because there was much to learn. Along with the basic nature of the household, she had to get her own office in order and deal with the communications a First Lady had to do. She and her secretary Miss Thompson quickly found a system to deal with the mail she received, as from March 1933 to the end of that year, Roosevelt got 301,000 pieces of mail. (Roosevelt, 99) In addition, Roosevelt had to learn how to deal with press conferences. Although she was the first First Lady to hold one, she was unexperienced and nervous that she would accidently land her husband in trouble. Louis Howe trained her in how to answer questions, even ones meant to throw her (Roosevelt, 103). Once, a man asked her if her husband's sickness had affected his mental state. Without batting an eye, Roosevelt said, "I am glad that question was asked. The answer is Yes. Anyone who has gone

through great suffering is bound to have a greater sympathy and understanding of the problems of mankind.” (Freedman, 104) Roosevelt became a pro at answering questions and holding press conferences, and even learned to enjoy them. She said in her memoirs that, “By and large, I think my weekly meetings with the women of the press were one of the most rewarding experiences of my White House life.” (106)

Another of her rewarding White House experiences was the start of her weekly newspaper column called “My Day.” Roosevelt started her column on December 30<sup>th</sup> of 1935, and it continued in various forms until the last column appeared on September 27<sup>th</sup>, 1962. (My Day, vii) During the time of her husband’s presidency, Roosevelt used her column to inform the public about what she was doing as First Lady. The idea for the column has been credited to Lorena Hickock, the same woman who suggested the all-women press conferences. Roosevelt often wrote her letters about what she had done in a day, and Hickock thought the US at large would love to hear what Roosevelt was up to, and that the letters would work well as a column. The United Feature Syndicate (UFS) agreed, and thus began the columns. The general manager of UFS, Monte Bourjaily, wanted Roosevelt to keep the column informal—as if she were still writing to a good friend. And that was precisely what Roosevelt did. While some critics called the column too wordy, and said the topics were unimportant, people loved hearing what Roosevelt was doing. And while many, FDR included, cautioned Roosevelt that a daily column would become a chore, it never did. Her one break was for four days after her husband passed away. (My Day, vii-viii)

The topics of her column were wide and varied. Roosevelt wrote her articles in many different styles, she wasn’t locked in to just one way. Some were deep, meaningful looks into life, such as the column from July 13, 1936 in which Roosevelt muses on whether one must

always do one's duty, not matter what it is, and how to know what that duty is (My Day, 21). Others were light, funny pieces about amusing things that happened to her. A great example is the time in October 31 of 1936 when some women didn't recognize her and handed her a campaign button for Landon, the man running against her husband (My Day, 35)! Roosevelt also wasn't above poking some fun at herself, such as in the column from July 29<sup>th</sup>, 1939, in which she confessed that she had been stopped the other day for speeding (My Day, 133). Some of the columns are capsules of history with the covering of events, such as the December 9<sup>th</sup> column from 1941 in which she talks about the bombing of Pearl Harbour (My Day, 226). And some are purely informational pieces regarding her opinions on the books, movies, and people of the time, for example her column on June 28<sup>th</sup> of 1939 in which she talks about having finished reading *The Grapes of Wrath*, by John Steinbeck (My Day, 130). Roosevelt also told her readers about important news of her family, such as in her article on June 10, 1940 in which she tells the country about her new grandchild (My Day, 168).

A First Lady is the host of the White House, and due to this, Roosevelt had to learn the correct protocol for events, but also how to manage her days. She hosted breakfasts, teas, lunches, dinners, garden parties, and much more. In *This I Remember*, Roosevelt says that in 1939:

“4,729 people came to a meal. 323 people were house guests. 9,211 people came to tea. 14,056 people were received at teas, receptions, etc.; all of them had some light refreshments. 1,320,300 people visited the public rooms of which 264,060 had special passes from their Congressmen to see the state dining room, the Red Room, the Blue Room and the Green Room.”(95)

She also had to learn how to stand at these functions and meet so many people. In her memoirs, she recalls learning how to stand with her knees slightly bent so as not to tire them. In addition, she writes, her hands grew much stronger due to all the handshaking (Roosevelt, 90)!

After the initial learning, Roosevelt became good at hosting, and over her time as First Lady hosted many important individuals. In her first year alone she hosted such people as the President of Panama, but also groups such as Italian, German, and Chinese missions (Roosevelt, 110). Among her most important guests of all time were the King and Queen of England, who visited in 1939 during FDR's second term. Their meeting shows very well what Roosevelt did and found important when entertaining guests. The King and Queen were to be given a formal dinner and reception with entertainment while staying at the White House. Roosevelt says in her memoirs people thought the entertainment should include such things as the Metropolitan Opera, but Roosevelt was of a different mind (187). She felt the entertainment should mostly include things that the King and Queen wouldn't see at home. She wanted to show what was special about the United States to her visitors. To this end, she had performers do folk arts type pieces. She had Marian Anderson, for example, singing some African American spirituals (Roosevelt, 187).

The Roosevelts also invited the King and Queen to their house at Hyde Park, which was something FDR enjoyed to do because he felt he could know people better after they had been at Hyde Park. While there, they had a picnic, where Roosevelt again did her best to give the King and Queen an American experience. In her memoirs, she outlines the meal:

“I had corralled two friends to cook hot dogs on an outdoor fireplace, and we had smoked turkey which their majesties had not tasted before, several kinds of ham, cured in different ways

from different parts of the United States, salads, baked beans, and a strawberry shortcake with strawberries from Henry Morgenthau's farm in Dutchess County. I had also provided a little entertainment by two American Indians." (197)

Roosevelt wanted to show the King and Queen just what America had to offer, and give them new and exciting experiences. However, this shocked more than a few people. In her "My Day" article on May 26<sup>th</sup> of 1939, she begins with, "Oh dear, oh dear, so many people are worried that 'the dignity of our country will be imperiled' by inviting royalty to a picnic, particularly a hot dog picnic." (119) She assures her readers that, "...the more important guests will be served with due formality," and that "I am afraid it is a case of not being able to please everybody and so we will try just to please our guests." (119) Roosevelt was always aware of the needs of her guests, but felt that they deserved something out of the ordinary; she was adamant to not serve the King and Queen of England only their stereotypical tea, but to broaden their horizons by offering alternatives in addition to the stereotypical British cuisine.

At the end of FDR's second term, Roosevelt recalls being unsure for a little while about whether or not her husband would be running for a third term. She says she thought he didn't really want to run again, that he would be perfectly happy to be an elder statesman and advisor (Roosevelt, 212). But as no one stepped forward as an alternative, Roosevelt realized she would be First Lady for another four years. No one wanted to change horses in the middle of the stream, and with the possibility of a coming war, FDR's leadership seemed strong and trusted. FDR was indeed elected as the Democrat's candidate. Roosevelt again wasn't too active with the campaigning, but because she was such a public figure, and so active a First Lady, she did get some of the negative press that a campaigning president would receive. In *This I Remember*,

she recalls seeing large campaign buttons that read “We don’t want Eleanor either.” (219) FDR was reelected, and Roosevelt was about to become a wartime First Lady.

Roosevelt says the start of 1941 was like any other. She had visitors, she had her conferences and teas. But then, FDR’s mother, Sara Delano Roosevelt, passed away on September 7<sup>th</sup>. Roosevelt and FDR had to make funeral arrangements, and get Sara Delano Roosevelt’s house in order according to her plans (Roosevelt, 227). Shortly after, Roosevelt’s brother, G. Hall Roosevelt, was taken ill. Roosevelt had to watch her brother slowly fade over the next few weeks. In her memoirs, Roosevelt said losing Hall, “...was practically like losing a child.” (228) Hall had lived with FDR and Roosevelt for a time, and the two siblings were close. Roosevelt said Hall’s death was especially hard on her because she watched him deteriorate over time. She writes at length about his innate goodness, his love of children, his work in social service. But she also states that Hall lacked self-control, and had a hard time seeing points of view other than his own. Roosevelt wrote, “Sorrow in itself and the loss of someone whom you love is hard to bear, but when sorrow is mixed with regret and a consciousness of waste there is added a touch of bitterness which is even more difficult to carry day in and day out.” (Roosevelt, 230)

Hall’s death greatly affected Roosevelt, and she herself said in her memoirs that it was to distract herself from this that she worked so hard at the Office of Civilian Defense (OCD) in the fall of 1941 (230). Roosevelt had agreed to work with New York Mayor Fiorello LaGuardia and take control of activities that were useful for the protection of the civilian population (Roosevelt, 230). As with all things she did, Roosevelt worked hard for the OCD. When Pearl Harbor was attacked, she went to the West Coast with Mayor LaGuardia to talk about plans for upcoming war. Although Roosevelt says she wasn’t sure how useful they were because so many of the

supplies deemed necessary weren't always available, she still felt like that tour helped prepare people for war (Roosevelt, 237). Roosevelt also worked on organizing a youth division, and tried to get cabinet wives to help her with the multitude of young girls coming to Washington to work in the departments (Roosevelt, 240). However, Roosevelt's experience with OCD wasn't to last. She was too controversial a figure, and when members of Congress were saying she had been doing bad things, Mayor LaGuardia said he had no responsibility over Roosevelt or her ideas. When the mayor resigned from the OCD, Roosevelt was to have a major role in picking his successor. However, Roosevelt soon realized that with the attacks Congress was making on her, she couldn't be a real help to the OCD, and decided to hand in her resignation as well in February of 1942 (Roosevelt, 240).

The next big part of Eleanor Roosevelt's journey as First Lady was a trip to England in the fall of 1942. She was invited by Queen Elizabeth to come to see how British women were helping the war effort. Roosevelt asked her husband whether or not she should go, and he said it was a good idea to see what the women were doing to help, but also with the imminent invasion of North Africa, he wanted his wife to take a message to the men stationed in Britain (Roosevelt, 260). Always wanting to be useful, Roosevelt was off to England. She went to Buckingham Palace, and was pleased to see that the royal family was functioning just like anyone else; she had a line on her bathtub to show where not to fill over, and nothing was served for dinner that wasn't also served in the war canteens (Roosevelt, 265). While in England, Roosevelt got to see first-hand the devastation that had struck England, and the effect of the bombing. She visited women war workers, and was amazed at the work they did, from being nurses, to driving trucks, to flying planes to keep them from being bombed, to helping men load guns (Roosevelt, 268).

Roosevelt also visited many Red Cross clubs in England, and visited with the men in them. It was here she began her practice of collecting from servicemen the addresses and names of family members so she could write to them and tell them she saw their man (Roosevelt, 269). This was important to her, especially as all four of her sons were in the armed forces. John and Franklin Junior were both in the Navy, Elliot was in the Air Force, and James was in the Marines (Freedman, 132). During the course of the war, Roosevelt always tried to see her boys when she could, but also tried to meet and create friendships with other service men. She had an amazing memory, and often remembered boys from the army days when they came up to her in later years. This was a part of Roosevelt's popularity and what made her unique: she was able to recall people over many years, which made them feel special.

Once Roosevelt established her expertise as a traveler, and her good-will trip to England was a success, it was only a matter of time before she was on the road again. This time, it was to the Pacific. This trip was suggested by FDR as a goodwill voyage, but also to bring a bit of cheer to the regions in the Pacific. The Pacific front hadn't had many visitors, and Roosevelt knew there had been an influx of men going there. She had also gotten letters from women in Australia and New Zealand suggesting that she come and see how they were handling the war, since she had gone to Britain on a similar mission. Roosevelt agreed to go, and immediately said she wanted to go the Guadalcanal. FDR said no, but Roosevelt said that she wouldn't like to go if she couldn't visit the places where the men she would be visiting with had sustained their injuries. FDR finally agreed to say she could go as long as it didn't interfere with war plans. Only later did Roosevelt discover FDR had actually told the Australian prime minister and Admiral Halsey that Roosevelt was not to go to Guadalcanal under any circumstances (Roosevelt, 295-6). Roosevelt says in her memoirs that, "...he did not have the courage to tell

me, knowing quite well that I would refuse to make the trip at all under those limiting conditions.” (296)

But Roosevelt didn't know this, so she was off to the Pacific. As always, Roosevelt wanted to have a real job to do, so it didn't just seem like she was a tourist or busy body. This time around, she asked Norman Davis, who was the Red Cross's chair at the time, if he would like her to visit Red Cross stations while there. Davis said that would be helpful, and asked if Roosevelt would mind visiting them in Red Cross uniform, and giving him a report when she returned. After talking this idea over with FDR, Roosevelt agreed to this arrangement for two main reasons: One, it would mean she only had the uniform to wear, so there would be less luggage. And, two, she would feel more comfortable visiting the hospitals with a familiar uniform on. Roosevelt went as a Red Cross representative, and looked over all the stations in the areas she went and reported back. While in the Pacific, Roosevelt also contributed half of her earning from her column to the Red Cross, as she was traveling on a military plane. The other half went to the American Friends Service Committee (Roosevelt, 297).

Over the course of her trip, Roosevelt visited 15 different islands (Roosevelt, 310). She first went to Hawaii, where she found the men having to be on constant watch because they were protecting the route supplies followed. But this wasn't very exciting, and the men had a hard time keeping morale up because they felt useless. There wasn't much to do. Roosevelt tried to entertain the men as best she could and visit with them all (Roosevelt, 298). Following her sons' advice, she had a meal with the officers, non-commissioned officers, and the enlisted men. This meant getting up and eating her breakfast with the men before six o'clock (Roosevelt, 299). Visiting these islands gave Roosevelt an idea of the conditions these boys had to live under, from lack of supplies to the physical area. A major concern she encountered was the lack of clean

water. Men were given one cup a day for drinking and washing up (Roosevelt, 304). The actual climate and area was also problematic. Once, when Roosevelt walked into her quarters after dinner one evening, she found her floor covered with small red bugs (Roosevelt, 299). When Roosevelt asked an Australian nurse what the worst thing she had to deal with was, the nurse replied without hesitation it was the rat that sat in the middle of the floor and wouldn't go away no matter what you did (Roosevelt, 304).

Despite what her husband had originally ordered, Roosevelt was allowed to go to Guadalcanal. When she arrived, she was driven around in a truck, and she leaned out to wave to the men. It was here where the soldier famously said, "Gosh, there's Eleanor!" (Roosevelt, 2307) On Guadalcanal, Roosevelt visited all the improvements made to the island since the US took it. She also visited the hospitals to talk with the men. But the most memorable experience for her was visiting the cemetery there. She found a church that had been built by the natives of the island and given to the soldiers. There were crosses as grave markers, and friends of the men would carve the appropriate religious symbol or a message at the bottom (Roosevelt, 308). In her diary, Roosevelt wrote about this experience, "It was very moving to walk among the graves and to realize how united these boys had been in spite of differences in religion and background." (Roosevelt, 308) Roosevelt was also pleased to discover the chaplain took pictures of the graves to send home to the families of the men (Roosevelt, 308).

While Roosevelt enjoyed her trip, and felt it was worthwhile, she also felt a sense of sorrow over being there while so many others weren't able to be there. In her memoirs, she wrote,

“Over and over again on this trip I wished that I could be changed in some magic way into the mother of the sweetheart or the wife or sister that these men longed to see. It is one thing to tell yourself you are a symbol and that it must give the men a sense of satisfaction to know that their commander in chief is interested enough to send his wife to carry a message to them, but it is quite another to feel adequate when you know so well what the boys really want and you can do nothing about it.” (298)

In the end, Roosevelt felt the trip to have been a success, and it changed her forever. About it she wrote, “The Pacific trip left a mark from which I think I shall never be free.” (313)

Her next trip was to the Caribbean area. This trip was “interesting, but not soul-stirring.” (Roosevelt, 313) Roosevelt was tiring of the disapproval of critics over her making such trips, but FDR told her the Pacific trip had been so successful and useful, it convinced Roosevelt to make this voyage too. The trip was from March 4 to 28, and covered many places, from Cuba to Puerto Rico to Brazil to the Virgin Islands (Roosevelt, 319). Here again Roosevelt was struck by how little these men had been visited, how dull a time they were having, and the rough conditions they were placed in. The perfect example of this was in the Galapagos Islands, where there wasn’t any rain, and the soldiers had to drink distilled ocean water (Roosevelt, 324). In Guatemala, she went to a recreation room that had a sign over the door that read “Home of the Forgotten Men.” (Roosevelt, 324)

In 1944, FDR was up again for election. It was a given he would run, and almost certain he would be elected. Roosevelt recalls knowing he wasn’t well, but that his sense of duty and following through was too strong to let him think of not running again (Roosevelt, 328). Over the campaign, Roosevelt says doctors were worried about all the traveling and speaking he did,

but Roosevelt felt that that her husband got strength from his interaction with the people (Roosevelt, 337). After the election, FDR wanted to have the whole family at the White House over January 20<sup>th</sup>. Roosevelt said she was unsure about having all thirteen grandkids from ages three to sixteen there, but FDR was so insistent, she said ok. She said FDR realized this would be his last inauguration, and might have had a premonition he wouldn't be with them long (Roosevelt, 339). But he kept busy and cheerful, and no one was aware, or perhaps willing to admit, that FDR was fading. After going to the Yalta conference, FDR decided to go down to Warm Springs to take some time to recover and relax, which Roosevelt thought was an excellent idea, as it always rejuvenated him (Roosevelt, 342). Roosevelt's daughter Anna's little boy, Johnny, had a severe infection which caused great concern in the family; so much so that no one was thinking about FDR (Roosevelt, 343). The family was sure Warm Springs would revive FDR and make him better. But on April 12, Roosevelt got a call from Laura Delano, FDR's cousin, saying FDR had fainted. Roosevelt said FDR's doctor wasn't too concerned, and told her to continue with her plans for the afternoon, but she planned to go down to Warm Springs in the evening to be with her husband (Roosevelt, 343). It was at a benefit where Roosevelt was summoned to the phone and told to come home immediately. She wasn't told what had happened, just to come. In her memoirs, Roosevelt wrote, "In my heart I knew what had happened, but one does not actually formulate these terrible thoughts until they are spoken." (344) In her sitting room, Roosevelt was told of her husband's death. She sent for the Vice President, then cabled her sons that their father had died, but to continue on with their duties as FDR would have wanted (Roosevelt, 344).

Roosevelt traveled with her husband's body on the train ride to Washington. During this ride she left her window shade up and looked out upon all the people along the train route who

had come to say goodbye to the president. Roosevelt took care to make funeral plans as her husband would have wanted; the two of them had talked in the past about how in Capitol funerals, the person was laid in state for people to walk by and peer into the open coffin. FDR hated that, so Roosevelt didn't allow it. She just had the coffin opened in the East Room for a few moments while she put in a few flowers (Roosevelt, 345). Of the funeral, she says, "It seemed like everyone in the world was the East Room for the funeral services except three of my own sons." (345) FDR wished to be buried in the rose garden at Hyde Park, and had left exact directions, which were followed (Roosevelt, 345).

President Truman and his wife told Roosevelt to take her time moving out, but Roosevelt wanted out as quickly as was possible and get on to a new stage in her life (Roosevelt, 346). In her musings on being First Lady in her memoir, she wrote, "...I think I lived those years very impersonally. It was almost as though I had erected someone a little outside of myself who was the president's wife. I was lost somewhere deep down inside myself. That is the way I felt and worked until I left the White House." (350) While the White House was a cage in many ways, and Roosevelt sometimes felt like she was only there to serve her husband's purposes, she knew deep down she had made a difference.

This difference has lasted through the years. In the New York Times obituary for Roosevelt, the title said she was often called the world's most admired woman, and outlined the difference she made in the world. The obituary pointed out that she was sometimes mocked and resented, in her final years she had an almost worldwide respect. And while Roosevelt felt at times she was only known as the president's wife, this article was fast to say this was not true: "She had become not only the wife and widow of a towering President but a noble personality in herself." ("On This Day") Time has listed Roosevelt as among the top 25 Most Powerful

Women of the Past Century (“The 25 Most Powerful...”). In a 1948 poll by the Woman’s Home Companion, Roosevelt was named the most popular American. Roosevelt also came in first in Gallup Poll’s ranking of the world’s most admired women for multiple years in a row (Harris, 499). Her work clearly lives on.

Eleanor Roosevelt was not only an amazing First Lady, but an amazing and inspiring woman. She kept herself busy, doing the things others forgot. She was always concerned with being useful, trying her best to help. Her selfless nature, and wish to help others, often made her put the needs of others above her own. She loved her family, supporting them through thick and thin. She believed in her husband and his judgment as the president of the country. She felt the average Joe was important and deserved to be heard. She firmly believed in the power and goodness of America, and strove to make the country a better place in any way she could. She changed the role of First Lady forever, making herself approachable by the press or the average person, and by putting herself out there. She helped her husband better run the country; while she wouldn’t admit it, her input and assistance had a huge impact in the running of the country. Her legacy is remarkable, but well deserved. Roosevelt truly was, as Harry Truman aptly put it, “The First Lady of the World.” (Harris, 501)

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