

ELEANOR ROOSEVELT

First Lady, humanitarian
1884 - 1962

Eleanor Roosevelt (ROHZ uh velt) was born October 11, 1884 into a wealthy New York family. She was not a pretty child, in fact she was quite homely, and her mother seemed to be disappointed because she had hoped for an attractive daughter. Hurtful comments were made in front of Eleanor.

Her father, Elliot however adored his child. He made her feel loved. There was just one problem; he was an alcoholic and was a constant disappointment to her. He would make promises to her and not fulfill them. Sometimes he would leave her waiting outside a bar while he went in and became drunk.

Her mother died of diphtheria when Eleanor was eight years old, but her father was in a mental institution because of his addictions, so Eleanor and her brothers went to live with Grandmother Hall, their maternal grandmother. She was very strict with the children, but she loved them. Her father would die two years later.

When she was 15 her grandmother enrolled her in a boarding school called Allenswood which was near London. She blossomed at the school. The emphasis at the school was on intellect and what a person was like inside rather than on outward appearances. For the first time in her life she found a place of acceptance and belonging.

She returned to New York at age 18 and there she met a distant cousin, Franklin Roosevelt. He was impressed with the good works she was doing in the slums among the poor immigrants of the city. They became engaged and married in 1905. They started a family. Anna was born first, then James the next year. Franklin Jr. only lived seven months. Next came Elliot, then another son they named Franklin Jr., and John was their last son.

Sara Roosevelt, Eleanor's mother-in-law was always "in the picture". She tried to run their lives. When they married she bought a townhouse for them ... and also furnished it. She bought the house right next to theirs for herself and had connecting doors installed. The family had no privacy. She competed with Eleanor for the love of the children. It was not a happy situation, and her marriage with Franklin was turbulent .

Her husband Franklin Delano Roosevelt became a lawyer, then a senator, and next the Assistant Secretary of the Navy. Eleanor decided she had to make something of her life apart from her husband. She was an organizer and a fund raiser.

Tragedy struck the family. Franklin became ill with the dreaded disease polio . He became paralyzed and could not walk. He went to live in Warm Springs, Georgia to receive treatment for the effects of the polio.

Louis Howe encouraged Eleanor and helped her. She was adept at organizing women. She enlisted the press to help further her causes. She became a powerful force in the Democratic Party. She became a teacher three days a week. She and the children moved into a home of her own; Val Kill Cottage in Hyde Park.

Her husband campaigned for governor of New York and won. She was now the governor's wife. Then he ran for President in 1932 and won that office also. His slogan was "Happy days are here again".

As First Lady she now had even more influence even though she didn't cherish the role. She urged FDR to appoint women to positions in the government. She traveled extensively. In a three month period she traveled 40,000 miles.

From 1935 to 1962 she wrote a syndicated newspaper column six days a week which appeared in many newspapers. It was called "My Day".

She worked tirelessly for the advancement of African Americans in America.

In 1958 the Ku Klux Klan put a bounty of \$25,000 on her head because they didn't want her teaching people how to protest discrimination.

"We can't afford to have two kinds of citizens, We must have equal citizenship for anybody in our country." Eleanor Roosevelt

In 1936 her husband ran for a second term as President and won by a landslide . In 1939 the Daughters of the American Revolution (DAR) refused to let Marian Anderson perform in Constitution Hall in Washington D.C. because of her race. Mrs. Roosevelt resigned her membership in the DAR as a result of the prejudice shown to Marian, and she arranged for the singer to give a performance at the Lincoln Memorial. There were 75,000 people in attendance.

World War 2 started during Roosevelt's third term in office. Eleanor visited the troops and went to the hospitals to encourage the wounded. The soldiers loved her. Her husband was elected to a fourth term as President in 1944. However, his health was declining and he died in April of the following year. Eleanor moved back to her house.

Harry Truman, who was the next President, asked her to be a delegate to the United Nations in London. She was instrumental in the creation of the Human Rights Declaration. She continued to work for human rights the remainder of her life. Her accomplishments were amazing during her latter years. She is one of the most admired women in American history.

Eleanor Roosevelt died of bone marrow tuberculosis on November 7, 1962. She was 78 years old.

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