

The View from Val-Kill Cottage

Vol.4 No.2

The newsletter of *Honoring Eleanor Roosevelt* A Project to Preserve Her Val-Kill Home

Winter 2009



Christine Todd Whitman and Vin Cipolla headline New York event honoring Eleanor Roosevelt and Val-Kill

By Melanie McEvoy, McEvoy & Associates
Photos: A.E. Fletcher Photography

and preserve our national historical sites for future generations.

The event attracted a diverse audience— supporters of Val-Kill, Eleanor Roosevelt fans, preservationists, and

On October 21st, a lovely fall evening, a crowd of *Honoring Eleanor Roosevelt* supporters gathered in New York City at the home of National Council member Sally Minard. Headlining the event were Christie Todd Whitman, former New Jersey Governor and Environmental Protection Agency Administrator, and Vin Cipolla, newly minted President of the New York Municipal Arts Society and vice chair of the National Park Foundation.

Governor Whitman spoke of her challenges, women and leadership, and how she managed to buck tradition without losing her grace and charm – much like a modern day Eleanor Roosevelt. Mr. Cipolla spoke of the importance of the preservation of Val-Kill, the impact that Eleanor had on the world, and how we must cherish



Founding Chair Claudine Bacher admires Four Freedom Park illustration presented to her by National Council member Sally Minard.

groups of young women eager to hear about the life of our extraordinary role model. There was much discussion after the speaking program about how lives were impacted after visiting Val-Kill and what could be done to help the National Park Service and Save America's Treasures with priority preservation projects at the site.

All in all it was an evening of inspiration and great energy!



From left: Executive Committee members Betsy Shure Gross and Barbara Levy join *Honoring Eleanor Roosevelt* Chair Carol Hillman (second from left), with Andi Milens and Cynthia Wolff (right).



Jan Turnquist Executive Director of Orchard House (left) and *Honoring Eleanor Roosevelt* Executive Committee member Harriet Millrose.



Carol Hillman and new puppy
Hildie

FROM
CAROL HILLMAN
CHAIR

Dear Friends,

Thank you so much for making summer and fall so active and productive. While the economy continues to challenge most non-profit fund raising, we have continued to see strong support for our work at Val-Kill.

October was terrific! To celebrate the 125th anniversary of ER's birthday, an enthusiastic crowd gathered at Stone Cottage to see the new visitor center exhibits created with your generous donations. Keynote speaker at the gravesite was newly elected Congressman Scott Murphy, who assured us he will carry our message to Congress. Celebration highlights are on page 5.

On October 21, National Council member and long-time supporter Sally Minard welcomed an overflow crowd to her home (see page 1). We delighted in appreciative remarks about Mrs. Roosevelt and Val-Kill from former NJ Governor Christine Todd Whitman and Vin Cipolla, former President and CEO and current vice chair of the National Park Foundation and now President of the New York Municipal Arts Society. Many photos were taken at the event. If you would like to see your picture, please visit our website at www.honoringeleanorroosevelt.org.

In addition to these events, we received an unexpected gift: first editions of Mrs. Roosevelt's books (several autographed) from Pat Trentham of Sacramento, CA. This collection is an invaluable research and teaching tool and will be on display at Val-Kill, yet another reason to make a visit.

Our organization continues to grow. We proudly welcome Jeri Cusik of Columbus, OH, who contacted us this summer and offered her time to share Eleanor's message by organizing a chapter of our group.

We also have an exciting new initiative: In autumn 2010, the Boston group is planning an Eleanor Roosevelt Film Festival. Please let us know if you have films or videos you would like us to consider for inclusion. We would welcome you as Sponsors as well. More about this program soon.

Last, we share the sad news of the death of Maureen Corr, ER's secretary and traveling companion in the last years of her life and an ardent supporter of our project. You will find Claudine Bacher's remembrance of Ms. Corr on page 7. If you wish to make a donation to *Honoring Eleanor Roosevelt* in Maureen's memory, we pledge to put it to good use.

Finally, as the end of the year approaches, we, like all private non-profits, seek your year-end gift to continue our work. It is your generosity and faith in our organization which keeps us going and growing. We have accomplished much; much remains to be done. With your help we can continue to do the important things at Val-Kill which enhance Mrs. Roosevelt's legacy. We especially hope for your help to restore her cutting garden which will serve as a memorial to her.

With warm regards and great appreciation and best wishes for a happy, healthy new year,

Carol

Honoring Eleanor Roosevelt

A Project to Preserve Her Val-Kill Home

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THE VIEW from Val-Kill Cottage

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Visit our website:

www.honoringeleanorroosevelt.org



WHY VAL-KILL?

By Marilyn Ogus Katz
Dean of Studies Emerita
Sarah Lawrence College

“Who is the person in public life you most admire? Explain why.”

College applications often ask some variation of this question. Today’s high school seniors struggle to respond, torn between their youthful idealism and their skepticism about political action. As a college educator, I appreciate that application essay question. More than ever, young people need public figures to admire and emulate.

For those women applying to college at mid-century when I did, the answer was simple. Over 90% of the applicants in my first year class named Eleanor Roosevelt as the person they most admired. They cited her independence as a woman, at a time women were defined as someone’s wife or mother, and applauded her commitment to making the world a better place.



If a picture is worth a thousand words, Eleanor’s office is an encyclopedia!

To any woman over 65, a visit to Val-Kill is a pilgrimage. Standing in Mrs. Roosevelt’s living room, staring at her simple desk and bookshelves, we mourn her once again, remembering those long-ago moments when we read “My Day,” or first heard her tremulous, yet strong, voice. Then, roused from our memories, we smile at the strangers on our tour, and nod at those with gray hair and weathered faces, acknowledging our kinship. We wander out into the garden, pick up books and pamphlets at the store, and comment to one another on how relevant her words remain and how, even after the passing of half a century, so many of her battles for the poor and disenfranchised, for human rights and world peace, are still to be won. We agree she would be happy a woman and a black man competed in the presidential primaries and would only wonder why it took so long. Finally, as if blessed by the activism of Eleanor’s own late years, we older people leave Val-Kill and recommit ourselves to causes that matter to us.

But what of our children, grandchildren and the men and women to come? They cannot congratulate themselves on having “known” Eleanor Roosevelt in her lifetime; they do not share our nostalgia. For them, Eleanor Roosevelt is a paragraph or two in a history text book. That’s why I congratulate those who insisted on the restora-

tion of Val-Kill. Here Mrs. Roosevelt comes alive. When young people visit, they open themselves to her life story. In her modest home,



The sleeping porch where Eleanor also did much of her writing.

sharp contrast to the elaborate FDR home, they learn that when her husband took office, she chose activism over ceremony, transcending her class, her race and her gender, long before those became categories people spoke about easily.

She did so with simplicity and humility, with honesty and grace, the qualities that permeate the cottage and grounds of Val-Kill.

At Val-Kill, generations of young people will experience the life and values of Eleanor Roosevelt. I hope that when they wander out into the garden and leave, they, like we, will feel inspired to commit themselves to causes that matter to them.

ELEANOR ROOSEVELT AND WOMEN'S LEADERSHIP

Four times over the course of the past five years, *Honoring Eleanor Roosevelt* has honored a contemporary leader who has followed in Eleanor Roosevelt's footsteps. This year, Secretary of State Hillary Clinton accepted our award at the United Nations. (see *Spring/Summer 09 newsletter for event coverage*). We were thrilled to honor Secretary Clinton with this richly deserved award, for she has followed in ER's footsteps in so many ways: as a senator, lawyer, former First Lady, stalwart defender of women's rights, early advocate for children in Arkansas, director of the Children's Defense Fund, proponent of universal health care for all Americans, and as the founder of Save America's Treasures at the National Trust and of our own organization.

Honoring Eleanor Roosevelt shares Eleanor Roosevelt's core values of advancing women's leadership, equality and democracy. The Following in Her Footsteps Award is an opportunity to shine our brightest light on this remarkable American woman and to honor a current leader who embodies those same values. Based on the enormous response to the recent awards breakfast for Secretary Clinton, it seemed fitting to write about Eleanor Roosevelt and her commitment to and support of women's leadership.

Eleanor Roosevelt did not start out as a feminist. Like many women of her time, she started out believing that men were superior to women, especially in the realm of politics. Her feelings and beliefs changed dramatically and wholeheartedly because she exposed herself to people and places that would nourish her open and curious mind.

Eleanor became a leader of the women's movement by seeking out women through friendship and work. As she recalled in her autobiography, being "drawn together through work...is...one of the most satisfying ways of making and keeping friends." For forty years she remained dedicated to achieving gender equality, working with such organizations as the International Congress of Working Women, Women's International League of Peace and Freedom, League of Women Voters, and the Woman's Trade Union League.

She believed in the potential and capabilities of women. She believed women had a right to safe, fair, and equal working conditions with the same rights as working men. She believed that women are as capable as men in political and economic spheres and should take an active part in framing our country's laws. She believed that women had important qualities and strengths as peacemakers, politicians, reformers, advocates and professionals.

Eleanor lived out these beliefs in all that she did and all that she supported. Across the country, she engaged women's groups to encourage them to get involved in politics and build their political base. In 1924, she and other women leaders worked hard to ensure the Democratic National Convention allowed women to appoint women delegates and alternates. In her first year as First Lady, she worked hard to make certain women participated in establishing and evaluating the New Deal. She also held more than 300 press conferences that she cleverly restricted to women journalists, knowing that news organizations all over the coun-



try would be forced to hire their first female reporter in order to have access to the First Lady. Through the presidencies of FDR, Truman, and Kennedy, she consistently and tirelessly pushed for more women to be appointed to higher level government positions. She worked to oppose child labor, limit the number of hours an employer could force a woman to work, and address the unsafe and exploitative conditions of many women-dominated workplaces.

Eleanor wrote an article called "What Ten Million Women Want," published in *Home Magazine* in 1932. In it she wrote the following words to inspire American women and call them to action:

If ten million women really want security, real representation, honesty, wise and just legislation, happier and more comfortable conditions of living, and a future with the horrors of war removed from the horizon, then these ten million women must bestir themselves. They can be active factors in the life of their communities and shape the future, or they can drift along and hide behind the men. Today is a challenge to women. Tomorrow will see how they answer the challenge!

Tomorrow is now today, and American women are continuing to answer the challenge in many ways. *Honoring Eleanor Roosevelt* is answering the challenge by keeping Eleanor Roosevelt's inspiring words and legacy alive at Val-Kill and through our Following in Her Footsteps Award.

"I could not at any age be content to take my place in a corner by the fireside and simply look on."

-Eleanor Roosevelt

HAPPY BIRTHDAY, DEAREST ELEANOR!



125th anniversary celebration a real crowd pleaser

To celebrate the 125th anniversary of the birth of Eleanor Roosevelt, once known as "The First Lady of the World," a joyous event was held at Val-Kill. More than 45 donors gathered to view the new visitor center exhibits and enjoy a picnic lunch and cottage tours created in partnership with the Park Service. *Honoring*

Eleanor Roosevelt's Chair Carol Hillman and Founding Chair Claudine Bacher placed a wreath at ER's grave. The event's keynote speaker was Hyde Park's newly elected Congressman, Scott Murphy. Congressman Murphy succeeds now Senator Kirsten Gillibrand, who is a great supporter of our organization.



ELEANOR ROOSEVELT AT BRANDEIS UNIVERSITY: THEN AND NOW

Last part in a series of articles by Susan P. Curnan, professor of Social Policy and Management at Brandeis University, where Eleanor Roosevelt was a Founding Trustee, Lecturer, and delivered the first commencement address in 1952.

Part 2: NOW

If anyone were to doubt that Eleanor Roosevelt's legacy is alive and well among young people and the next generation of leaders, they need only do what I did last fall. A few days before the anniversary of Eleanor Roosevelt's 124th birthday (October 11, 2008), I sat down with a small group of Brandeis college students, known as "The Eleanor Roosevelt Fellows," to learn how these students think about their connection to Eleanor Roosevelt. I was delighted with what I heard, learned and witnessed during our meeting. They spoke in highly energized tones about their "spirit of service," one that reflects Eleanor Roosevelt's "commitment to public service, innovation and pragmatism." They identified with what they called her "bridge-builder" qualities – addressing controversial social issues of her time such as race, class, religion and gender. "There is a weight that comes with being a Roosevelt Fellow. It becomes an identity and is much to live up to...." "Her life shows us what democracy means."

When I asked how they thought the peer mentoring aspect of their work reflected Eleanor Roosevelt's values and character, they were quick to talk about "how important relationships are in personal development and academic success." "Creating a caring community is the heart of the matter." "Being down to earth" and "approachable," the way Eleanor Roosevelt was. They perceived that she was perhaps the most influential woman of the 20th Century

because she established personal bonds and relationships with people from all walks of life and all corners of the globe. This, plus a mission of social justice and concern for each citizen, defines the Fellows' agenda. They call it the "Brandeisian-Rooseveltonian Way." For the entire conversation, I was struck with how the Fellows focused on Eleanor Roosevelt's personal qualities rather than a long list of achievements.

At the same time, they were largely aware that her life spanned some of the most difficult, challenging events in modern history, including The Great Depression, World War I and World War II, the Holocaust, establishment of the United Nations, the Cold War and the Civil Rights Movement. I chose this moment in the conversation to tell the students about "Eleanor Roosevelt Day," proclaimed by then President Clinton in 2000. In part, the proclamation reads: "Whether working for the United Nations, the NAACP, the Girl Scouts, the Presidential Commission on the Status of Women, or the National Conference of Christians and Jews, Eleanor Roosevelt devoted her boundless energy to creating a world defined by respect for and dedication to democratic values. She was a woman ahead of her time, and her achievements transcend her generation. As we seek to chart a steady course for America, democracy, and human rights in this new century, we need only look to her values, character, and accomplishments to provide us with an unflinching moral compass."

Today, our democracy once again faces great challenges, and we will look to the Fellows and their generation to use this compass and provide leadership.

I think they will be up to the challenge! "Set your corner of the world on fire" are the words emblazoned on the purple t-shirts worn by the Fellows today. Eleanor Roosevelt used those words in 1952 at the first Brandeis University commencement to encourage people and inspire a student body discouraged by the Korean War and other world events at the time. Indeed, it is said that she cast aside her prepared speech to respond to Gus Ranis's stirring valedictory address that included a gloomy depiction of the times. Today, the Fellows use those words as a fierce reminder that each citizen can and must make a difference – at a university and around the world. Today, Eleanor Roosevelt's legacy is strong. Annual lectures in her honor, celebrations of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Eleanor Roosevelt Fellows are selected each year to carry out community service and scholarship in her name.

Eleanor Roosevelt holds an unassailable place as the most respected woman of the last century. She even received an honorary degree from Brandeis in 1954. In the years before her death in 1962, international polls repeatedly showed her to be the world's most admired woman. Her biographer, Blanche Wiesen Cook, says that today, "Young people seem to know nothing about history, but they know ER. Everywhere I go, people are galvanized and energized by her."

So it is at Brandeis as at Val-Kill.

In Memorium *Maureen Corr*

sparkle. From that day on Maureen became one of our own special "treasures".

This spry, clever lady made herself accessible over the years and never failed to enchant and impress Honoring Eleanor Roosevelt's supporters. Her memories and tales of being with Mrs. Roosevelt brought that extraordinary world leader to life. People loved hearing that



Maureen Corr with Mrs. Roosevelt in 1956.

When I first became involved with Honoring Eleanor Roosevelt, I needed to learn about Val-Kill's history. One of the first people that my friend and colleague Mary Champenois and I sought out was Maureen Corr, Eleanor Roosevelt's last secretary, traveling partner and confidante. When I called Maureen to introduce myself, I was a total stranger to her, but this very gracious lady invited Mary and me to her apartment in New York.

Mary and I were quite excited at the idea of meeting someone who had been so close to our heroine and were not disappointed when Miss Corr ushered us into her apartment, which contained a treasure trove of Eleanor Roosevelt memorabilia that left us awestruck. As Maureen treated us to a proper tea-replete with scones and clotted cream--we were totally put at ease by her wit, intelligence and Irish



Ms. Corr with Val-Kill park superintendent Sarah Olson.

although Mrs. Roosevelt had prodigious energy, she was able to take little cat naps at will and that she had a gift for connecting with everyone she came in contact with, from great world figures to the man on the street.

Maureen had many of Mrs. Roosevelt's qualities: intelligence, grace and tenacity. Her tenacity was proven in her last difficult years when failing health dogged her. She continued to attend mass daily at the church near her apartment. When Maureen died, Georgie Gatch and I were among the many mourners at that beautiful church where the memorial mass was held.

We will miss our own treasure, Miss Maureen Corr.

An Appreciation by Claudine Bacher
Founding Chair, Honoring Eleanor Roosevelt



Claudine and Fred Bacher with Ms. Corr.

My Day

JANUARY 1, 1959

By Eleanor Roosevelt



Shall we make wishes for the new year? Or have we made so many in the past that we have become discouraged? Shall we make new resolutions or repeat old ones, wondering whether we will be able to keep them?

I hope that everywhere in our country the majority of the people will be able to find something for which they can be grateful on this New Year's Day, if it is only gratitude that they are still alive and can hope for better things in the New Year.

For myself, I shall wish for sufficient power of appreciation so that I can be fully grateful for the family and friends and other people who are constantly around me and who really make my enjoyment in living.

Love and its expression is the most important thing in our daily lives, and one of the things I rejoice in most is the great privilege, whenever it is granted me, to be able to give, either in material things or in loving companionship, something which may enrich a little the lives of those I love.

For people everywhere, let us wish this New Year's Day that the opportunities to live a richer, fuller life will develop through international understanding and international effort.

Let us remember, nevertheless, that international achievement depends on individual achievement, that what we achieve in our own minds and hearts and in our own surroundings will spread out like the ripples when

we throw a pebble in an unruffled pool. So no one can say what happens to an individual is unimportant, for no one knows how some individual act may ripple out even into international channels.

May this new year bring to all of you happiness, health, peace on earth, and peace in your hearts, and may all of us be granted the opportunity to work, both for our own interests and achievements and for the achievements of those we love. And may we have our share in helping the world attain the greatest opportunity in peace for development of human understanding and happiness.

NOTE: This is an excerpt. To view the complete text and other My Day columns, please visit www.gwu.edu/~erpapers/myday. World Copyright, 1952, United Feature Syndicate Inc.

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*It isn't enough to talk about peace.
One must believe in it.
And it isn't enough to believe in it.
One must work at it.*

Eleanor Roosevelt

Honoring Eleanor Roosevelt

A Project to Preserve Her Val-Kill Home

An Official Project of Save America's Treasures at the National Trust for Historic Preservation.

All donations made payable to "SAT/National Trust" with "Val-Kill Cottage" on the memo line are 100% tax deductible.