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ELEANOR ROOSEVELT
PORTRAIT OF A LEADER

Chapter One

"Granny"

The purpose of this study is the examination of the personality of Eleanor Roosevelt: to describe and analyze her role as a mother, to demonstrate the sources and results of her actions, and to suggest that her public activities were a response to an overwhelming personal sense of inadequacy. It is a story of "coping" with a harsh and severe emotional life, and of the means chosen to compensate for this. But most of all it is a story of motherhood, of the heritage of parenting, from which there is rarely any escape. This examination of the evolution of a pathetically shy, homely, insecure girl, into the most widely recognized female leader of the United States, leads to an understanding of the motivations and needs of the future reformer.

To begin the study of Eleanor, it is necessary to

look first to the people who had such a profound effect upon the formation of her personality. These were her parents and her grandparents, particularly her maternal grandmother Mary Hall, who raised the child from the age of eight, after the deaths of her parents.

Her maternal grandfather, Valentine Hall, Jr. was a stern, austere man, strict and authoritarian with his family, and very religious. His great interest in life was theology and his library was filled with books on the subject. At one point he had a clergyman, Mr. W.C.P. Rhoades, come to live with him in order that he might have someone with whom to talk on equal terms.¹ Conversation with equals did not include conversation with his wife, for he had married a Southern Belle much younger than himself, Mary Livingston Ludlow, whom he treated like a cherished, somewhat spoiled child. He bought her gifts, clothes, and "adornments of every kind" but never taught her anything about business, even how to write a check.

Eleanor said in My Story, her autobiography, written in 1939, "grandmother was expected to bring children into the world, but she was not expected to bring them up."² Mr. Hall not only made all the decisions regarding the family finances and business, but he also handled the discipline of the children. He was an unbending man

with firm beliefs, who demanded from his children a strict adherence to duty and responsibility. His two older daughters, Anna and Elizabeth, were deeply influenced by their father's stern character. They were very religious and were allowed only the sort of education that their father considered proper for ladies, such as readings in theology. At their country home on the Hudson they had to walk from the house to the main road several times a day with a stick across their backs, held in the crook of their elbows, in order to improve their posture. Mr. Hall was a severe critic of everything they read and wrote, and how they expressed themselves, holding them to the highest standards of conduct. Eleanor wrote of her mother Anna that the result of this strict training was "strength of character, with very definite ideas of right and wrong, and a certain rigidity in conforming to a conventional pattern which had been put before her as the only proper existence for a lady."³ According to Eleanor's grandson James Boettiger, not only Anna Hall but also Eleanor herself and her daughter Anna Eleanor Roosevelt, all clearly bore the stamp of Valentine Hall's stern personality, and all greatly admired the personality trait called "strength of character."⁴

When Anna, the eldest child, was seventeen, Mr. Hall

died leaving no will. Mary Hall was totally unprepared to manage a household with six active children once the strong hand was removed, so that the four younger children knew no discipline whatsoever from that time on. They became extremely wild, causing their mother a good deal of grief, and she became unhappy and resentful. This was indeed unfortunate for the grandchildren she would later be given to raise, because she was determined that they should have the discipline her own children had lacked, so Eleanor was brought up on the principle that "no" was easier to say than "yes."⁵

Eleanor's mother Anna Hall emerges from the writings of her daughter, grandson, and friends as a strong, vain, resentful person, who was incredibly self centered. The Halls were noted for their beauty and charm in the days when New York City was small enough to have a society spelled with a capital "S", and they were related to "all the right people," the Livingstons, the Clarksons, the DePeysters, who lived in the various houses up and down the River Road near them. Eleanor was always a bit envious and in awe of her mother, and revealingly began her autogiography "my mother was one of the most beautiful women I have ever seen."⁶ In a portrait that describes both the times, and her mother's perception of life, Eleanor

wrote:

My mother belonged to that New York City Society which thought itself all-important. Old Mr. Peter Marie, who gave choice parties and whose approval stamped young matrons a success, called my mother a queen, and bowed before her charm and beauty, and to her this was important.

In that Society you were kind to the poor, you did not neglect your philanthropic duties in whatever community you lived, you assisted the hospitals and did something for the needy. You accepted invitations to dine and to dance with the right people only, you lived where you would be in their midst. You thought seriously about your children's education, you read books that everybody read, you were familiar with good literature. In short, you conformed to the conventional patterns.⁷

One of Anna's close friends remembered her as very severe in self judgement and "peculiarly sensitive; sometimes as a child almost painfully so.....she was quick to feel the slightest change in voice or manner.....Anna's love of the approbation of those dear to her was remarkable. Many times I noticed that the least failure to please was a disappointment to her; and, on the other hand, words of approval made her glow with delight."⁸ It was this "peculiarly sensitive" woman who would later nickname her daughter "granny" out of embarrassment over the child's homeliness, shyness and uncompromisingly serious

demeanor. Anna quite clearly felt that her daughter's homeliness was a cruel reflection on her and she was bitter about it, repeatedly reminding the child that she was plain. In My Story Eleanor recalled how her mother used to read to the children in the afternoons, the two infant boys on her lap. She said:

I felt a curious barrier between myself and these three....I still can remember standing in the door, very often with my finger in my mouth (which of course was forbidden)...and I can see the look in her eyes and hear the tone of her voice as she said: 'Come in Granny.' If a visitor was there she might say 'She is such a funny child, so old-fashioned, that we always call her 'Granny.' I wanted to sink through the floor in shame, and I felt I was apart from the boys."⁹

Eleanor was serious, even in her own memory, and she wrote: "I was a shy, solemn child even at the age of two, and I am sure that even when I danced, which I did frequently, I never smiled."¹⁰

Her father Elliott, could not have come from a more different family setting. He was the third of four children from a vigorous and demonstratively affectionate family. His father, Theodore Roosevelt Sr., was a successful businessman and a warm, loving parent. His mother, Martha Bulloch Roosevelt, was a charming, gracious south-

erner much loved by her husband and children. Accordingly, the family was exceptionally happy during the formative years in spite of the chronic asthma of Theodore Jr. and the mysterious "weakness" of Elliott. This "weakness" was never properly diagnosed, but when Elliott was eight or nine years old he began to have periods of severe dizziness, headaches, fainting, and nervousness. These symptoms suggest that an organic disorder may have been related to his later alcoholic disintegration, perhaps epilepsy or a brain tumor.¹¹ However, there were also emotional and psychological stresses which might have contributed to his drinking, beginning with the profound shock he experienced at the death of his beloved father when the son was seventeen.¹²

When Elliott was sixteen years old he spent several months in the Southwest as a recommended "cure" for his mysterious weakness, and upon returning home he discovered that his father had intestinal cancer. Elliott had been exceptionally close to his father throughout his childhood and during the increasingly painful progress of the disease he remained at his father's bedside, nursing him until his death. His sister Corinne said of their father "he was the most intimate friend of each of his children, and in some unique way seemed to have the power of responding

to the needs of each, and we all craved him as our most desired companion."¹³

After a long and painful illness, which was traumatic for the whole family, Theodore Roosevelt Sr. died on February 10, 1878, at the age of 46. His youngest son Elliott was effected enormously by his death. James Boettiger, Elliott's great-grandson, wrote in his book Love in Shadow that "Elliott may have assumed, as surviving children often do, that his own inadequacy was in part responsible for his father's death. If so, the consequent burden of impotence and guilt must have powerfully shaped his later life."¹⁴ At any rate, and whatever Elliott's personal reasons, it was soon after the death of his father that he began to drink heavily.

When Elliott was nineteen he took part of his inheritance and left on a hunting trip around the world. When he returned a year later for his sister Corinne's wedding, he appeared in better health and spirits. This is when the man whom Eleanor described as "charming, good-looking, loved by all who came in conact with him"¹⁵ courted and won the beautiful, rigid, Anna Hall. As his daughter rather jealously describes the union in her autobiography:

He adored my mother, and she was devoted to him, but always in a more reserved and less spontaneous way.

I doubt that the background of their respective family lives could have been more different. His family was not so much concerned with Society (spelled with a big S) as with people, and these people included the newsboys from the streets of New York and the cripples whom Dr. Schaefer....was trying to cure."¹⁶

The wedding took place on December 1, 1883, and the newlyweds immediately embarked upon a very active social life which was shadowed from the very beginning by Elliott's drinking and recurrent bouts of depression.¹⁷ They went to theatres, balls, dinners and charity events, and also entertained rather lavishly at home, making the society pages with great regularity. The first child (Eleanor) arrived only 10 months after the wedding and was promptly given over to the care of nurses by the active couple. Eventually Anna became disenchanted with the constant round of parties and began reprimanding Elliott for his drinking and his conduct. This criticism caused a great deal of fighting in the family.

When daughter Eleanor was only two years old her parents set out for Europe on the first of many trips designed to facilitate a "cure" for Elliott's problems. Unfortunately, just as the boat was pulling out of the harbor, there was a collision with another ship, and the little girl was so frightened that she refused to immediately board

another ship for the trip. As a result, her parents decided to leave her in New York with relatives, and they went on to Europe for several months without her. She felt deserted and frightened by this first of many such family displacements caused by her father's illness, and she must have been very confused by what was going on because nobody thought to tell her what the problem was. Eleanor only knew from overheard snatches of conversation among relatives that something was wrong with her father, which she found very distressing "because from my point of view, nothing could be wrong with him."¹⁸

Eleanor was very attached to her father, and felt that he was the only one who loved her. Her mother was vain about her beauty, and bitter that she had not made a better marriage than the one she had made to a wastrel. She was annoyed that the daughter she bore was not a beauty, and reminded her of it constantly, with the result that the girl became withdrawn, retreating into a fantasy world of her own, where she shared a lovely life with her beloved father. Many years later she wrote "He dominated my life as long as he lived, and was the love of my life for many years after he died. With my father I was perfectly happy,"¹⁹ and "I have a curious feeling that as long as he remains to me the vivid, living person

that he is, he will.....be alive and continue to exert his influence which was always a very gentle, kindly one."²⁰

The marriage was under great strain as the problems of Elliott's erratic behavior grew worse. Anna took her husband and two children to Europe again for the winter of 1890, when Eleanor was five. They went to a sanitarium in Paris, where Elliott could hopefully gain in his fight for health and his power of self control. Eleanor claims only vague memories of this trip, but those she mentioned are unusually vivid, recalling lovely rides in the canals of Venice with her father singing and acting as gondolier, and of throwing pennies into Vesuvius to be returned encased in lava. Although she speaks with joy of being with her father, a side of the man appears of which she seems unaware, an unconscionably cruel side.

She was an extremely fearful child, but Elliott was disdainful and angry whenever she showed signs of physical cowardice. He often "tested" her, making her force herself to be brave by speeding with her in carriages, racing on horses, etc. If she showed lack of courage in these "tests" he was annoyed with her, and in her own words "I disappointed him quite often."²¹ On this trip, as Eleanor wrote in My

Story:

We went to Sorrento and I was given a donkey and a donkey boy so I could ride over the beautiful roads. One day the others overtook me and offered to let me go with them, but at the first steep descent which they slid down I turned pale, and preferred to stay on the high road. I can still remember the tone of disapproval in his voice, though his words of reproof have long since faded away.²²

[In Germany] We often went to the cafes, and the older people drank steins of beer with the delicious looking foam on top. I saw little German children drinking it too. I begged my father to let me have one of the small mugs, as the other children. He refused for a while and then said: "very well, but remember, if you have it, you have to drink the whole glass." I promised without a suspicion of the horror before me. When I took my first taste, instead of something sweet and delicious, I found I had something very bitter which I could hardly swallow. I was a disillusioned and disappointed child, but I had to finish the glass! Never since have I cared for beer.²³

When they arrived in Paris where Elliott was to "take the cure," Anna took a house in Neuilly and settled down for several months, as another baby was expected at the end of June. Because the house was small, it was decided that Eleanor would be put into a convent in order to learn French and to be out of the way when the baby

arrived. Eleanor was extremely unhappy in the convent. She was not yet six years old, did not speak the language, and did not belong to the religion of the other little girls. As a result she was very lonely the entire time she was there. She remembered wandering by herself in the walled-in garden, watching the other girls tend their little shrine and chatter together. She wrote that part of the reason for her loneliness was that:

I must have been very sensitive, with an inordinate desire for affection and praise - perhaps brought on by the fact that I was fully conscious of my plain looks and lack of manners. My mother was always a little troubled by my lack of beauty, and I knew it as a child senses those things. She tried very hard to bring me up well so my manners would in some way compensate for my looks but her efforts only made me more keenly conscious of my shortcomings.²⁴

During this time Eleanor witnessed another girl at the convent accidentally swallow a penny, and noticed that she became the center of attention and concern for awhile. Unable to resist the suggestion, she later told one of the nuns that she too had swallowed a penny, hoping for the same results. The nuns didn't believe the story, but since they were unable to shake out a confession they called her mother and she was taken home in disgrace. She

recalled that while her mother was able to get her to admit the lie, she was never able to understand the child's motives and was furious with her for many months afterward.²⁵ Eleanor wrote that between her shyness and her lying she was "always disgracing my mother."²⁶ She said that only her father, who was temporarily home with the family for the birth of the new baby, refused to treat her like a criminal, and that lying became a habit that "stayed with me for many years, though it must have been a great trial to my mother, as she did not understand that a child may lie from fear."²⁷

In Eleanor Roosevelt's writings the word "fear" reappears with truly astonishing regularity. She was afraid of many things; water, speed, the dark, authority. She wrote at the end of her life that although she was a notoriously bad driver, still she preferred to drive herself "because at least I can be in control."²⁸ Psychologist Joan Erickson wrote regarding Eleanor that "pervasive fearfulness in young children is often grounded in an absence of consistence in maternal love and care."²⁹ This was very probably the case for Eleanor. Although she professed an "inordinate" admiration for her mother as a beautiful vision, who was very gay, she recalled her

mother's attitude towards her as sternly judgemental. She wrote of Anna as a woman who tended the tasks of motherhood from a sense of duty, without love or joy, and with no sense of empathy or understanding, who was keenly disappointed in her daughter.³⁰

Shortly after the birth of Hall in June of 1891, Anna Roosevelt left Europe for New York. She left Elliott behind in the sanitarium considering this break to be permanent, the end of the marriage. During their final winter (1890-91), Elliott had become more and more erratic, and had begun to treat his family badly. When she arrived in New York, Anna had her husband committed to a hospital for the mentally ill in Paris. With his brother Theodore's help she tried to have Elliott declared legally insane in the United States Courts, in order to try to hold on to the remainder of his inheritance. He was freed in Paris while the case was being considered and he remained there for awhile, taking up with a French woman whom he said gave him love instead of lectures.³¹ Years later Eleanor confessed to her son James that her father probably was right in believing that he deserved more than he had been given by his wife.³²

The family had spent over a year in Europe and Eleanor had become quiet, withdrawn and self-sustaining. Upon

their return she missed her father intensely, wrote to him whenever she had an address, and retreated into her fantasies. She sustained herself on hope, dreaming of the day in the future when he would return and she would make a home for him. In Love in Shadow Boettiger has printed a supposedly fictitious story Eleanor wrote as a child about another little girl with such dreams:

I knew a child once who adored her father. She was an ugly little thing, keenly conscious of her deficiencies, and her father, the only person who really cared for her, was away much of the time; but he never criticized her or blamed her, instead he wrote her letters and stories, telling her how he dreamed of her growing up and what they would do together in the future, but she must be truthful, loyal, brave, well-educated, or the woman he dreamed of would not be there when the wonderful day came for them to fare forth together. The child was full of fears and because of them lying was easy; she had no intellectual stimulus at that time and yet she made herself as the years went on into a fairly good copy of the picture he had painted."³³

After her return to New York and the disintegration of her marriage, Anna Hall Roosevelt began to suffer from severe migraine headaches. Although her son James said that Eleanor had lost all feeling for her mother by this time, she would sit at the head of the bed for hours stroking her mother's head. "As with all children," Eleanor said

in My Story, "the feeling that I was useful was perhaps the greatest joy I experienced."³⁴

Her nurses and the nuns had taught her to be in total control of herself at all times, to have great respect for duty, and to make herself useful to others, and she explained in her autobiography how this rigid sense of duty and control was introduced:

Thanks to my childhood, I was very disciplined by the time I grew up. I remember the method by which a nurse taught me to sew, when I was only six. After I had darned a sock, she would take the scissors and cut out all I had done, telling me to try again. This was very discouraging, but it was good training... when people have asked how I was able to get through some of the very bad periods in my later life, I have been able to tell them honestly that, because of all this early discipline I had, I inevitably grew into a really tough person."³⁵

Elliott had meanwhile returned to America and supposedly wanted to return to the family, but Anna wouldn't let him. He wandered all over the country affecting various "cures," occasionally just disappearing for months at a time, then reappearing to work on some family properties in Virginia. These two years before the death of Anna, the children lived with her in New York, spending the summers at Tivoli with their grandmother Hall. They did not see their father,

although he wrote from time to time, telling Eleanor about his work in Virginia, and of the nice children who played and rode the horses on the ranch there. She was extremely jealous of these playmates of his, and fantasized of the day when he would return to her and she could be the one to sit at his feet and be read to.

This period of Eleanor's life ended at age eight when Anna Hall died of diptheria in December, 1892. She had been ill for several months before dying and during this time Eleanor slept in her bed and cared for her, but said herself in her memoirs that she felt no love for her mother. Eleanor was bitter that her mother had refused to let Elliott visit since his return from Europe, so when her mother died the child was pleased that at last she could see her father.³⁶ But even then he didn't come to her in the way she had hoped.

Before her death Anna had had Elliott declared incompetent so that her mother was made guardian of the children. Elliott had no rights other than the occasional visits that Mrs. Hall allowed.³⁷ At last though, she was allowed to see her father, and she still recalled every detail vividly thirty years later, to write in My Story:

After we were installed (at Grandma Hall's house) my

father came to see me, and I remember going down into the high ceilinged dim library of the first floor of the house on West 37th Street. He sat in a big chair. He was dressed all in black, looking very sad. He held out his arms and gathered me to him. In a little while he began to talk, to explain to me that my mother was gone, that she had been all the world to him, and now he had only my brothers and myself, that my brothers were very young, and that he and I must keep close together. Some day I would make a home for him again; we would travel together and do many things which he painted as interesting and pleasant, to be looked forward to in the future together.

Somehow it was always he and I. I did not understand whether my brothers were to be our children or whether he felt that they would be at school and college and later independent.

There started that day a feeling which never left me - that he and I were very close together, and some day would have a life of our own together. He told me to write to him often, to be a good girl, not to give any trouble, to study hard, to grow up into a woman he could be proud of, and he would come to see me whenever it was possible.

When he left, I was all alone to keep our secret of mutual understanding and to adjust myself to my new existence.³⁸

Although Eleanor remembers exactly what he wore and said, and lived on the fantasy throughout the rest of her childhood, and indeed, even her adult life, of becoming her father's wife and her brother's mother (which she achieved), she somehow forgot that her father did not keep his promise. She hardly saw him again, although he wrote admonishing letters to her from his various places of "cure," telling her how he wished her to behave. She spent the rest of her life trying to live up to this ideal of a "good girl" set out by her father.

Several months after the death of her mother her brother Elliott also died of diptheria, from the same epidemic. Both of the little boys had been sick but the baby Hall recovered. Her father had been to see the children, but because of his concern for the health of the boys he was unable to give Eleanor a great deal of his time. Then on August 4, 1894 Elliott Sr. died also, just one and a half years after his wife and one year after his son. The fathers death was an accident, apparently suffered while he was drunk. Eleanor was not yet ten years old.

When Eleanor received the news of his death she at first reacted very strongly, crying and carrying on, but she wrote that by the next day she had successfully convinced herself that it wasn't true. She continued to

pretend to herself that he was alive and well, and some day would come to see her if she became the kind of woman he had asked her to become.³⁹

Thirty years later she wrote in My Story:

My aunts told me, but I simply refused to believe it, and while I wept long and went to bed still weeping, I finally went to sleep and began the next day living in my dream world as usual.

My grandmother decided that we children should not go to the funeral, and so I had no tangible thing to make death real to me. From that time on I knew in my mind that my father was dead, and yet I lived with him more closely, probably, than I had when he was alive.⁴⁰

Eleanor and Hall had become settled into their grandmother's household, becoming part of the family with their mother's younger siblings. The two uncles and two younger aunts were all pleasant to the children, helping them to feel welcome. The young aunts, Maude and Fussie, became quite close to Eleanor and were her mentors in many things, but her grandmother was exceptionally stern. She was so determined to avoid repeating the mistakes she had made with her own children that she said "no" to almost every request. Eleanor read a great deal, rode with her aunts and uncles, and studied under tutors. She watched the

social life of her young aunts with envy, especially the lovely, talented Pussie who sang and painted, and had many beaux. Eleanor later said:

I would have given anything to become a singer, partly because my father loved to sing, and when he came to the 37th Street house he would sing with Maude and Pussie, and partly because I admired some of their friends who were professional singers. I felt that one could give a great deal of pleasure and, yes, receive attention and admiration! Attention and admiration were the things through all my childhood which I wanted, because I was made to feel so conscious of the fact that nothing about me would attract attention or would bring me admiration!⁴¹

She had no friends or playmates of her own age during this period but was exceedingly impressed with, and fond of, some of her aunt's friends. In speaking of Alice Kidd, a friend of theirs who had been very kind to her as a child, she says "I loved her - I was a little self-conscious about this devotion and I doubt if she ever knew or if any of the others knew for that matter, how much I admired her and how grateful I was for her rather careless kindness."⁴² But Eleanor should she learned something then which served her in good stead many times, "that the most important thing in any relationship is not what you get but what you give. It does not hurt to worship at a shrine

which is quite unconscious, for out of it may grow an inner development in yourself and sometimes a relationship of real value. In any case the giving of love is an education in itself."⁴³

Grandmother Hall kept the children away from the Roosevelt side of the family as much as possible, perhaps to avoid their influence, so Eleanor and Hall scarcely knew their father's side of the family until adulthood. The only close friendship that Eleanor acknowledges in her childhood though was with Alice Roosevelt, her uncle Theodore's daughter, but cousin Alice was lovely and sophisticated. She teased Eleanor mercilessly, taking every opportunity to humiliate her in front of other young people, so that this "best friend" could not offer much comfort to a lonely child.

When her granddaughter was fifteen years old, Mary Hall decided that there was probably too much "gaiety" around the household for such a young person, so it was decided to send Eleanor off to finishing school with Mlle. Souvestre at Allenswood, in England. This was the first and only formal schooling that Eleanor Roosevelt ever received. She made much in her writings of the influence of Mlle. Souvestre in her life, crediting the teacher with instilling in her a sense of duty to others and a need

to make herself useful. It appears however, that the strong impression made by her beloved teacher is actually due to the fact that, by her respect and admiration for all the things Eleanor already was, she simply confirmed the girl in her determination to become what her father had told her to: to be a good girl, not to give any trouble, to study hard, and to grow up into a woman he could be proud of.⁴⁴

By devoting herself to these pursuits the girl won the admiration and friendship of the teacher, and for the first time in her life she felt "cherished." Since she was unaware of the fact that her grandmother and her aunts had written to the school regarding her, she felt as though she was beginning a new life free from all her former sins and traditions. For the first time in her life, she said, all her fear of authority left her, because she felt that if she lived up to the rules and told the truth, there would be nothing to fear.⁴⁵

She remained at Allenswood for three years, from age fifteen until almost eighteen, for what she remembered later as the happiest years of her youth. Her grandmother brought her home then, in order that she might "come out," although Eleanor says that she very much wanted to spend another year on her education. But not to "come out" was

unthinkable to the Halls.

Her return home was traumatic. During her absence her uncle Valentine (Vallie) had deteriorated into alcoholism, and her aunt Pussie was in a neurotic state over yet another unhappy love affair. Because of this her aunt was feeling very peevish at the time, and quite bluntly told Eleanor that she would never have the beaux that the rest of the women in the family had had, because she was the ugly duckling. At the same time she was told some of the painful and distressing facts about her father's last years, and as Eleanor understated it, "the combination made me very unhappy."⁴⁶

Uncle Vallie was so bad that it was not safe for the young women to invite friends to visit them at Tivoli, so Eleanor and Pussie lived together in New York in Mrs. Hall's house. Eddie, the other uncle, was also drinking heavily at this time, and having marital problems. In My Story Eleanor said "This was my first real contact with anyone who had completely lost the power of self-control, and I think it began to develop in me an almost exaggerated idea of the necessity of keeping all of one's desires under complete subjugation."⁴⁷ She felt that her grandmother Hall had allowed love for her children to cloud her judgement, and "up to a certain point it is good for us

to know that there are people in the world who will give us love and unquestioned loyalty to the limit of their ability. I doubt, however, if it is good for us to feel assured of this without the accompanying obligation of having to justify this devotion by our behavior."⁴⁸ In other words, Eleanor had already decided that a mother's love must be earned, deserved, not just freely given.

Her brother Hall was sent off to Groton at this time, in part to protect him from the influence of uncle Vallie, and Eleanor began her social life in earnest, doing all the proper things; debutante balls, dinners, etc. This was a painful ordeal for her due to her shyness. She knew that she was the first in her mother's family who was not a belle, and though she never acknowledged it to any of them, she was "deeply ashamed."⁴⁹ Her own coming out was very difficult for her, but she eventually began to make a few friends. It was during this period that she became reacquainted with her distant cousin Franklin.

Perhaps partly due to not being a "belle," Eleanor soon tired of doing the social rounds and determined to begin making herself useful to society. She began by teaching "fancy dancing" and calisthenics in the slum schools, devoting all her time and energy to charity work. While it was fashionable, even a duty, to help the poor,

it was not common to actually go into the slums to work and her family was not enthusiastic about her project. Franklin appears to have been impressed however, which may have been the basis of the budding friendship.

Friendship seems to be the proper word to describe the courtship which followed, as nowhere in her memoirs does there appear to be the slightest sign of passion. In her own words, she was naive about sex, but felt that her lack of education in these matters was not unusual for her class at that time. She conceded that she may have been perhaps more strictly kept to the formalities than many of her friends, but that her attitudes were common. This seems doubtful however, because she confessed to her son James many years later that she was so unsophisticated about sex that she had not even kissed Franklin until they were married.⁵⁰ In her class "it was understood that no girl was interested in a man or showed any liking for him until he made all the advances. You knew a man very well before you wrote or received a letter from him."⁵¹ She did concede that she had painfully high ideals and a tremendous sense of duty at that time, entirely unrelieved by any sense of humor or any appreciation of the weaknesses of human nature. Also, "I had a very high standard as to what a wife and mother should be and not

the faintest notion of what it meant to be either a wife or a mother, and none of my elders enlightened me."⁵²

Franklin's proposal was accepted without any evidence in her memoirs of any personal, emotional commitment on her part. When an aunt asked her if she was in love, Eleanor said "yes," but wrote later in My Story that it was years before she even understood what being in love was, or what loving really meant.⁵³ She mentioned also, without explaining, some "tragedies" of their early married life, and of Franklin's patience in dealing with them. These "tragedies" were probably never really cleared up, for a sexual distance and coldness plagued their marriage from the very first. There are references to separate beds on their honeymoon and even to separate bedrooms in their early houses. It appears that Eleanor and Franklin never achieved more than a common friendship in the years of their marriage before Franklin's affair with Lucy Mercer, and not even that in the thirty years afterward when their marriage was for appearances only.

Whatever the reasons for the decision however, the cousins were married in New York City on March 17, 1905 when Eleanor was twenty years old. The bride's uncle Theodore, then President of the United States, gave her away.

Chapter Two

"...the Mother we respected"

With her marriage Eleanor's life underwent a radical change. From her early emphasis upon being independent and responsible, she now became totally dependent. This was not due to a doting husband, but to his mother Sara, who had absolutely no intention of giving up her son simply because of his marriage. Franklin was at least as attached to his mother as Eleanor was to her father, but his mother was alive and well, ready to take her place at the head of the household. Not only did Eleanor allow this, she apparently delighted in it. She was, as she said, becoming dependent and appeared to enjoy having no plans to make, having someone to decide everything for her. She found it a very pleasant contrast to her former life, and she slipped into it easily.⁵⁴

Sara Roosevelt began by taking a house for the newlyweds while they were on their honeymoon. It was only three blocks from her own, so she could manage it easily, and by the time they returned she had the house furnished and the

servants hired. Because she had almost everything in order for them upon their return, they had only to spend a few days with her upon landing, while the finishing touches were attended to.

Eleanor showed no resentment of her mother-in-law's place in her affairs, and entered no arguments. She seemed to feel that she knew nothing of running a home and should let Sara do it. She spent her time with her work for the Consumers League and the League of Women Voters which she had begun before her marriage. But while Eleanor showed no resentment, she also showed no pleasure or appreciation. She simply let herself be led.

On May 3, 1906, the first child, Anna, was born. As Eleanor had never had any interest in dolls, or in little children, she let Sara take over here as well. Sara hired the nurses for the baby, just as she had all of Eleanor's servants, and they took orders from her, not from Eleanor. Eleanor's lack of confidence led her to rely entirely on the judgement of others. She wrote that for years she was afraid of her nurses.⁵⁵ Eleanor felt a keen responsibility for the welfare of her children, and dutifully cared for them when they were ill or injured, but like her own mother, she showed little joy or satisfaction in mothering. Daughter Anna wrote years later that "Granny

was the loving presence.... but mother made quite a ritual out of evening prayers and tucking each of us into bed."⁵⁶ She also made a habit of reading to them at a regular hour each evening, as her mother had done.

Eleanor and Anna both have written in their memoirs about an episode which demonstrates Eleanor's conscientious attempts at being a "good mother." According to the story, Eleanor had read somewhere that little babies should have fresh air and sunshine in order to be healthy, so she rigged up a kind of box with wire on the sides and top, which she hung out a window at the back of the house. She would place Anna in this for her morning naps. On many mornings Anna cried so loudly and continuously that finally one of the neighbors became furious. She called up, threatening to report Eleanor to the S.P.C.C. if she did not bring in the baby at once. Eleanor was astonished, as she felt she was being the most modern of mothers: "I knew that you should not pick up a baby when it cried, and that fresh air was very necessary."⁵⁷ Clearly Eleanor's "cage" was the result of her interpretation of the days' child-rearing literature, and she was trying. She was simply and totally lacking in empathy with the child.

James was born the following year, and Sara again hired the appropriate staff. There was a long string of

nurses and governesses over the years, changing rather frequently, and Anna had at least four successive nurses in her first five years.⁵⁸ She commented that most of the nurses were not so much cruel as conventionally stiff sorts who lived by rules and punishments, and who offered little humor, empathy or physical comfort. One nurse in particular stands out in the children's memories however, the one they call Old Battleaxe. This woman was frankly sadistic. On different occasions she knelt on Anna's chest and "cuffed her around a bit," locked Elliott in a closet for three hours, locked Franklin Jr. in a closet, forced Jimmy to eat a whole pot of hot English mustard, and once she even made Jimmy walk up and down the sidewalk outside of the house, dressed in his sister's clothing, with a sign on his back reading "I am a liar."⁵⁹ James said that his mother was so upset on this last occasion that she wept when she found out about it. However, although Eleanor and Franklin were both often furious with Old Battleaxe,¹ they did not fire her until they discovered her bottom dresser drawer full of empty liquor bottles. Then Sara fired her, because as James said, "even granny could not forgive her for being a secret drinker."⁶⁰

In 1909 the first Franklin Jr. was born, but he was

not very healthy and lived for only eight months. .
Eleanor was overcome by remorse and guilt, and she wrote later that:

I was young and morbid and reproached myself very bitterly for having done so little about the care of this baby. I felt that he had been left too much to the nurse and I knew too little about him, and that in some way I must be to blame. I even felt that I had not cared enough about him and I made myself and all those around me most unhappy that winter.⁶¹

Evidently Eleanor had not learned about the rewards of symbiosis in motherhood however, for when Elliott was born less than a year later in 1910:

In addition to the English nurse and the German girl, we had the wet nurse who spoke no language known to us; I think she was a slovak.⁶²

She was very nervous about this new baby so they had taken a wet nurse to be sure of having him properly fed. It had been suggested to them that the first baby Franklin might have been stronger and better able to stand his illness if he had been breast-fed, and it would not have occurred to a woman of her class and time to breast-feed the child herself.

During these years Franklin Sr. was practicing law in New York and Eleanor was doing a great deal of volunteer work for the city's charities. They summered at Campobello

Island, visited Hyde Park for long periods at a time, and often left the children with Sara or the nurses for weeks or months at a time. James wrote:

....it was only when mother found the strength to lead her own life that she became an individual apart from her husband and mother-in-law and reclaimed her children, though by then it was too late for her to become the mother she might have been. The fact is we were fortunate to have a grandmother who would do for us when we had a mother who could not, and a father who would not.⁶³

James is very bitter about his childhood. He conceded that by contrast with the kinds of lives most young people lead, especially the poor, it is ridiculous for him to complain. Yet on a personal level he felt there was something missing from their lives which even the most disadvantaged youngster may have. "We spent so little time alone with our parents that those times are remembered and treasured, as though gifts from gods."⁶⁴

James' resentment of his mother's aloofness is evident in an episode he recalled in his memoirs about his little brother Elliott. Eleanor and the children were summering at Campobello and Eleanor was gone for the day shopping when the infant Elliott fell into a fire on the beach. He was burned rather severely when hot coals got under the braces on his legs. When Eleanor returned from her trip,

she refused to make much of it, and later, when writing to Franklin, she began by speaking of "the splendid cruise" she'd had to St. Andrews to shop. She went on with other chitchat before even getting around to the accident: "When I got home I found that poor baby Elliott had fallen into the ashes of a fire the children had on the beach." We had been burning litter and she noted that "the beach now looks quite nice." As for Elliott, "the ashes got under the strops of his braces and burned...but he only cried a little." Elliott was the child that the other children agreed was his mother's favorite.⁶⁵

This "favorite child" the others envied wrote in his memoirs that his earliest memories of his mother were of a distant, sometimes forbidding woman, who could "seldom find the means of making us children understand that she loved us. Warmth and affection in our lives seemed to come only from father and granny."⁶⁶ Eleanor's emotions appear so rigidly under control that she could not let go even for her children, with the result that she repeated her childhood with her own family in spite of her intelligence and sensitivity.

That Eleanor did not consciously perceive herself as neglectful is evident. Rather, she seems to have convinced herself that she was building independence and "strength

of character" into her offspring. She was convinced that it was an error to ever become dependent upon one's children, allowing all one's interests to be centered in them, and she was certain that her uncles and aunts would have turned out better if they had not been able to count on their mother's (grandma Hall's) devotion and presence whenever they needed it.⁶⁷

In 1912 the family moved to Washington D.C. where Franklin was to serve as Assistant Secretary of the Navy. This is where the last two children were born, Franklin Jr. in 1914, and John, in 1916. Their mother was now more comfortable and secure in the presence of children but was not able to become any more intimate with these younger ones than she had with the first three. According to Elliott, the younger children had much less opportunity to experience closeness with their parents during their formative years because by then both parents were deeply immersed in public life.⁶⁸

There were rumors of war in the country now, and Eleanor became greatly agitated. She left Campobello early that year, in spite of the heat, in order to get home to Washington to assist in the war effort. Although she worked several days a week with the effort she felt that she wasn't really helping the cause enough and she longed

to go overseas, where she believed she could be really useful. By now she had five children however, the eldest of whom was just ten years old, so she felt forced to stay at home.⁶⁹

Shortly after the birth of John in 1916, the marriage went through a violent upheaval. Eleanor had discovered the affair of Franklin and her secretary Lucy Mercer, and asked for a divorce. Because adultery was the only permissible grounds for divorce in New York State at that time Sara was fearful of the scandal. She was afraid that Franklin's political career would be ruined before it got started, so she put pressure on the couple to stay together by threatening to cut off the money Franklin needed to live on, and to run for office. Eleanor's upbringing made divorce repugnant to her so she allowed Sara, and Franklin's political mentor Louis Howe, to persuade her to continue in the marriage for appearances sake, on the condition that Franklin give up Lucy for good. The "marriage" was saved, but they agreed to go on as business partners, not as husband and wife. From then on the two lived an armed truce that endured to the day of Franklin's death, though James wrote that on several occasions he observed his father hold out his arms to his mother, and that she refused flatly to enter his embrace.⁷⁰

This meant that the end of all physical relations between the couple took place in 1916 although the marriage lasted almost 30 more years. After this, Eleanor did just the "dutiful" things in the marriage, acting as hostess and partner, mother and aide, but not as wife.⁷¹ Anna was thirteen years old when the children learned about the Mercer affair, and they were all concerned that they might lose their father. Neither parent ever discussed the problem with them, just as Eleanor had not been told of her father's problems.

Eleanor felt a certain repugnance toward sexuality and passed her attitudes on to her daughter, telling Anna that sex was an ordeal to be borne for the purpose of procreation.⁷² It is possible, as James suggested, that abstinence was the only form of birth control Eleanor knew, but feminists such as Margaret Sanger were promoting contraceptive information prior to 1920, so it is doubtful that that was the case. It may be that after five children she may have been relieved by this excuse to discontinue her sex life, which apparently never a source of pleasure to her.

James wrote of these times:

Mother swallowed her pride and permitted the marriage to go on, but it left a residue of bitterness that remained with her all her life. When the time came

for mother to go out and make something of her own life, she did not feel it a betrayal of her home; he had broken these bonds already.⁷³

It is interesting to note that Eleanor's Aunt Polly had recommended the lovely Miss Mercer to her in the first place, and her best friend, Alice Roosevelt Longworth, had encouraged the affair by having Lucy and Franklin to dinner when Eleanor was out of town. Alice later said "It was good for Franklin. He deserved a good time. He was married to Eleanor."⁷⁴

Eleanor's distaste for sexuality showed up in her mothering as well. In a brief, unpublished, memoir quoted by Anna's son, James Boettiger, she mentioned her mother's sexual inhibitions and feelings towards her children's sexuality. Anna wrote:

....there was another traumatic experience for me in those earlier years....which I relate because it is indicative of the taboos and inhibitions of that time within the social structure in which I was brought up. It was an experience which haunted me through various types of persecution dreams for years. Finally, in my latish teens I asked my mother why, at the age of three or four I had my hands tied, above my head, to the top bars of my crib whenever I went to bed. Her answer was simply that I masturbated and this was the prescribed cure.⁷⁵

Later Anna was graduated to "bells, aluminum-type

contraptions which covered my hands and had air holes in them and cloth pieces attached which were made firm around my wrists." In spite of Anna's "years of dreams of persecution" however, her own son Buzzy recalled "the wire cages for my thumbs Mummy imposed at night."⁷⁶

After 1916 Eleanor filled her time from morning to night with her outside work. Because she was constantly busy, the two youngest boys were not able to benefit from their mother's new self-confidence with children. Anna said that when her mother was concentrating, "and she concentrated on everything she did," talking to someone, reading or working at her desk, "she had a chilling way of putting me in my place. This way persisted with her throughout her life so I remember very well the sound of the low but cold voice which said 'What do you want, dear.'" It was not a question, but an unmistakeable announcement that her mother was busy and preoccupied.⁷⁷ Anna later wrote that the greatest contradiction in her parents was, on the one hand their supreme ability to "relate" to either groups of people or individuals who had problems, and on the other hand, their apparent lack of ability to "relate" with the same consistent warmth and interest to an individual who was their child.⁷⁸ The paradox seemed all the more painful to Anna as she grew older and her

parents public life became more and more remarkable.

During this busy time Eleanor still tried to be home by five oclock for tea with the children, and she kept up her bedtime reading for them. She said that she often had to divide her time between the babies in Hyde Park and the children in Washington. Judging from her diary, she says she was considerably torn as to where she should be the greater part of the time.⁷⁹

The Roosevelt children were known throughout their social set for being wild, and they delighted in such antics as dropping water bags upon the heads of well-dressed visitors to Eleanor's teas. Once they even threw stink bombs to disrupt a formal dinner. Franklin would not, and Eleanor evidently could not, discipline the children, so it was either left to the nurses or not done at all. Eleanor said that her mother-in-law was often angry with her because she seldom told the children what was right or what was wrong. Her rational for this was that she was never sure she really knew herself what was right or wrong, however "everything was always black or white to her Sara ; she had no doubts and never hesitated to tell the children what she thought."⁸⁰

Not only was their mother reluctant to tell them how to behave, Franklin felt very strongly that the boys should

be allowed to make their own decisions and their own mistakes. Perhaps this was an over-reaction, because his mother had tried to make all of his decisions for him, all his life. Occasionally some of his friends suggested that he should give the children a little guidance, but he always said that they must find things out for themselves. As he became busier in his public life, he found it impossible to take time for the boy's interests, which kept them from asking for advice that they might have sought otherwise. Eleanor noted that Elliott and James learned through bitter experience, and became very disillusioned. She said "as life grew busier in the White House, my husband had less and less time for family affairs, and I can remember how resentful the boys were when they found they actually had to make an appointment to see their father, if they wanted to talk to him privately."⁸¹

In 1920 Franklin resigned as Assistant Secretary of the Navy in order to campaign for the Vice Presidency with James M. Cox. During the campaign the family moved back to New York except for James, who was sent to Groton where he was very homesick and did not adjust well for a long time. While his mother wrote that she felt sorry for him because he seemed so sad and lonely when she left him "it was a tradition in the family that boys must go to boarding school

when they reached the age of twelve, and James would be thirteen the following December so of course we had to send him."⁸² She said that it never occurred to her to rebel at the time, but later it did seem ludicrous to have been bound by so many conventions.

Later in the year James became ill at school, and his grandmother Sara had to go get him because Eleanor was busy helping on a campaign. The mother and son both wrote about this incident in their memoirs, and recalled it very differently. Eleanor wrote "It was very hard for me (not to go) but it was probably a very good thing for the children to learn that they could not always be my first consideration."⁸³ James said "I can't help feeling my parents may have had their priorities mixed up."⁸⁴

By 1920 when Franklin was Governor of New York, Eleanor was even busier. She wrote that "in spite of my political activities and having to run the Executive Mansion in Albany, after my husband was elected Governor I continued to teach for two and a half days a week in New York, leaving Albany on Sunday and returning Wednesday afternoons. It was very strenuous....."⁸⁵

Eleanor's perception of her mothering, and her children's perception of it, shows an appalling lack of communication and understanding between them. In This I Remember, the

second book of her autobiography, written in 1949, Eleanor wrote:

Now, years later, I find that those difficulties which were so hard to bear at the time no longer seem important to the boys or to Anna, who had her troubles in other ways. They now recognize the things that were important.⁸⁶

...love is usually selfish; but when sufficiently disciplined, a family may be glad that a man has the opportunity to fulfill his heart's desire and they will work with him in every way they can to help him to achieve his objectives. But something of the personal relationship must be lost. It is the price paid for a life spent almost entirely in public service.⁸⁷

But in My Parents: A Differing View, James wrote:

Elliott has written of "the father we loved, the mother we respected." My first inclination was to differ with this. We grew to love and respect both of them. Mother was always stiff, never relaxed enough to romp. She was a formal person who wore starched dresses to her neck. She found it easier to give than to get, to do for than to have done for her. Mother loved all mankind but she did not know how to let her children love her.⁸⁸

Love was not one of the things mentioned by Eleanor in 1927 when she wrote an article on parenting for Colliers (never published) entitled "Ethics of Parents" to wit:

Ethics of Parents

1. Furnish an example in living.
2. Stop preaching ethics and morals.
3. Have a knowledge of life's problems and an imagination.
4. Stop shielding your children and clipping their wings.
5. Allow your children to develop along their own lines.
6. Don't prevent self-reliance and initiative.
7. Have vision yourself and have bigness of soul.⁸⁹

Child psychology was a newly popular phenomenon in the 1920's and womens magazines were full of advice from "authorities" on how to properly rear children. At this time Eleanor was not only the Governor's wife, but involved deeply in public life herself, besides being the mother of five. Therefore it was not surprising for her to be called upon as an "authority" here. What is surprising is that the entire tenor of her advice was in the negative: "keep away," "leave them alone," "don't interfere." All of the suggestions recommend distancing, implying that loving guidance and advice will somehow be harmful, interfering with the ultimate goal of "building strength of character." In other words this list is the conscious formulation of her entire unconscious rationale of childrearing. It demonstrates with remarkable clarity her emotional removal

from the tasks of motherhood for the consciously rationalized reason that it would prevent self-reliance and initiative, when it really protected Eleanor from the fears of rejection and death that intimacy implied to her.

Eleanor and Franklin allowed their children to develop along their own lines, but to the children this meant that they were refused guidance and help or advice even when it was asked for. The five children have had among them to date a total of seventeen spouses, which may well demonstrate that they had no experience at all in intimate emotional relationships until they left their parent's home.

Chapter Three

"A Great Woman With a Great Heart"

Anna Hall Roosevelt had considered herself Society with a capital S, that Society in which you were raised to be kind to the poor, perform your philanthropic duties in whatever community you lived, assist the hospitals, and do something for the needy. She raised her daughter Eleanor in this same tradition and Eleanor took this idea of duty quite seriously, as she did everything. Driven by a sense of duty that bordered on compulsion, she drove herself relentlessly for the causes and needs of others.

Her years at Allenswood with Mlle. Souvestre had been happy ones for her because for the first time it was not her physical appearance, but her intellectual achievements, upon which she was judged.⁹⁰ She was a favorite student and was rewarded for her diligence and sense of duty by affection and kindness. For the first time she perceived that love and authority could come from the same person, which relieved her fear of authority and greatly improved

her self confidence. She was delighted at the way in which she won acceptance there, and she learned that one could win affection and admiration through service to others. Mlle. Souvestre taught her that one's duty upon the earth was to make oneself useful. From this she formed her basic philosophy of life, three fundamental principles which would motivate all her future activities: "to do my best; to indulge less in myself and more in others; and to find gratification in giving and in bringing happiness to other people."⁹¹ (Italics mine.)

When she returned to New York for her "coming out" Eleanor soon tired of the social life and determined not to spend another such year going from party to party. Acting on this, she began going into the slums to teach poor children and became involved in the Consumers League and the newly formed League of Women Voters.

Perhaps because of the trying problems at home with her alcoholic uncles, Eleanor threw herself into her work. She recorded herself as being totally dedicated and humorless at this time, and determined to make a better world for those whom she perceived as "emotionally deprived." She said she had an almost exaggerated idea of the necessity of keeping all of one's desires under control, caused by the deterioration of her uncles, and their "lack of

will power."⁹²

Her cousin Franklin, who was not yet as liberal as he was to become in the future, joined her family in disapproving of this teaching pastime. Eleanor was adamant however, and perhaps it was this moral severity and straightness, her seriousness, that attracted him in the first place. Seriousness of purpose in the midst of all the frivolity of the debutante circle was certainly unusual.

After marriage Eleanor's public service career accelerated considerably, since she helped Franklin campaign for State Senator, Governor of New York, the Vice Presidency, and the Presidency. While in Albany, beginning in 1920, she spent the better part of each day making "duty calls" upon the wives of the other legislators, whom she perceived as lonely. Still, she tried to have tea with her children, and to see them for an hour each evening.⁹³ She began in Albany what she called a dual existence, which was to last all the rest of her life "public service.....was to be a part of our daily life from now on."⁹⁴

During the summer of 1914 Eleanor offered her help in the United States war effort, working indefatigably. She took in wool and knitting in her own home one day per

week, worked 16-18 hour days at the Red Cross Canteen for Naval personnel three days a week, and once or twice a week she visited the Naval Hospital with gifts and conversation for the wounded men. By 1918 she wanted to go overseas to work, feeling that the efforts made at home were largely inconsequential, yet she knew that no one would help her to get permission to go, and she had not yet sufficient independence to go about getting it for herself. In My Story she wrote "I think I also felt that my first obligation was to stay with my children and do what work I could at home."⁹⁵ She said that she did not want to feel this way, or to acknowledge it, but she felt it, nevertheless.

By the time the family moved back to New York in 1920 Mrs. Roosevelt was serving on the boards of several interest groups and charitable institutions such as the Bryson Day Nursery in New York City. She had already developed an aversion to serving on boards which had no actual contact with the real work involved, so she kept up her teaching through all her other activities. During the 20's, her efforts to keep Franklin's name alive in politics after his bout with polio involved her deeply in reform work. She kept up her voluntary associations such as the League's and a Settlement House movement, but she also began at this time her lifetime support of the Women's Trade Union League, fighting for a minimum wage, sanitary conditions and safety procedures for the factory

women. She worked for its fund raising campaigns, contributed from her own earnings to pay off the mortgage of the clubhouse, attended weekly meetings, listened to problems, and read in the evenings to working girls.⁹⁶

Besides the charity work she was doing at this time she also edited the Women's Democratic News for the Democratic Committee in New York, and served as an intermediary between Franklin and Al Smith, then Governor of New York. He was a key machine politician whose help Franklin would need in any future plans of his own. She also worked from the 1920's on for women's suffrage, and wrote articles and speeches on this subject, perhaps from a new interest piqued by her new role as "business partner" to her husband.

The shy, retiring, Eleanor had become more and more vocal, not only espousing her own causes but attacking those with which she did not agree. One organization she attacked was the Women's Democratic Law Enforcement League, and she found herself in a great deal of trouble for "advocating white and negro equality in the South."⁹⁷ After the controversy quieted she dropped her public speaking for awhile to concentrate on her charitable activities, particularly her partnership in the Todhunter School in New York City. This was a progressive school for wealthy

girls which she bought in partnership with her two friends Nancy Cook and Marion Dickerman.

In This I Remember Eleanor wrote that she continued while in Albany, and even while in Washington as First Lady, to teach at the school, although it involved a great deal of commuting and inconvenience. She accomplished this while in Albany by living half the week in each place. She would grade her papers on the train, and devote her time in the city to various voluntary organizations as well as to the classroom. Then she would return to Albany on Wednesday to participate in the official receptions.

Also during this Albany period she administered a furniture factory which she had founded at Hyde Park with her two partners from the Todhunter School. The purpose of the factory was to supply off-season jobs for the depression-torn farmers in the area, but it never was really a success, with Eleanor and a few friends buying most of the output.⁹⁸ When the factory closed Eleanor remodeled the building for herself to live in, and only went to Sara's house at Hyde Park when Franklin was in residence.

When Franklin was elected President of the United States in 1932, Eleanor was fearful of having to give up her activities, but the fear proved unjustified. After entering the White House she continued teaching at Todhunter

and to write articles and speeches. Besides this she undertook a series of paid radio broadcasts, despite the public criticism of such activities by a First Lady. She realized nearly \$70,000 per year from these ventures, which she donated entirely to the Friend's Service Committee and to the Women's Trade Union League.⁹⁹

It was during this period that the "Great Lady" image appeared, partly because of Eleanor's democratization of the social functions at the White House, which formerly had been exclusive to high society. She invited Negro girls from reform schools, fishermen, delegates of the American Youth Congress, and even groups of school children. She became an unofficial intermediary between the public and their President, serving literally hundreds of different causes in her nearly twelve-year tenure as First Lady.

In 1935 Mrs. Roosevelt added to her list of activities a daily newspaper column which she called "My Day," and used as a way of making the Presidency understandable and accessible to the "forgotton man."¹⁰⁰ In the beginning she simply told her readers about the life of the First Lady, writing a sort of diary of luncheons, receptions, official duties, and events in the day of the President's wife. Gradually however, she began to use the column as a forum for her social criticisms and ideas, which brought

volumes of mail from the legion of "Eleanor Haters" who felt that she was stepping beyond her rightful place.

Her critics complained that it was "undignified" for a First Lady to write paid articles, make radio broadcasts, and appear on paid commercials. She was not free from criticism just because she donated all of her earnings to charity - indeed, Representative Hamilton Fish of New York even accused her of giving the money to charity as a form of tax evasion.¹⁰¹ She was criticized for a great many things, including her travel, her public statements, her involvement in controversial New Deal programs, and her personal defense of the Negro and support of radical groups such as the American Youth Congress. The latter was anathema in the thirties due to its affiliation with the Young Communists. Adding to the very personal character of some of the criticism, was that much was levelled at the Roosevelt children. They were having their own problems, in full public view, and these ranged from marital dissarray to scrapes which sometimes skirted the law.¹⁰²

Her real need to be of service overcame the hurt caused by her critics however, and she worked tirelessly all the years of Franklin's presidency. When he died she filled the void by working all the more. She had believed

that when she was out of the White House there would be nothing more for her to do, because she considered herself as an auxiliary to her husband and felt that her own value had been as First Lady, not Eleanor Roosevelt. President Truman felt otherwise however, prevailing upon her to work for the newly formed United Nations. She spent the last years of her life travelling and working for the possibility of permanent world peace.

After Franklin's death there was a considerable time needed to probate the will and Eleanor found herself strapped financially. Rather than stop the support she had committed herself to for her charities, she withdrew the money from her own rather small and quickly fading capital to keep her pledge to them. For this reason, and also because she really needed rent money, she quickly took up her column and broadcasts again. This released a great deal more criticism, as many people felt it was too soon after the death of her husband.

During these years of furious activity for the causes of the New Deal, social reform, and utopian ideals such as planned villages where work was built in, Mrs. Roosevelt still kept up an almost incredible correspondence with the public. People wrote by the hundreds, asking individual favors, seeking her advice, requesting appointments for

various reasons. Stella Hershan has written an entire book based upon the memories of the general public who had come across the kindness and largesse of Eleanor Roosevelt. Many had never even met her, but the testimonials of these people to the selflessness of this busy woman fill two hundred pages, and range from totally unknown people, to show business "personalities" and cab drivers. Some excerpts from the Table of Contents of this book give a good idea of the variety of people and causes she aided:

- Chapter 2. The Wiltwyck School (for wayward boys)
- Chapter 3. The Refugees
- Chapter 4. The New York Cabdrivers
- Chapter 6. The Reporters
- Chapter 8. People from Other Lands
- Chapter 9. The Handicapped
- Chapter 10. Children and Schools
- Chapter 11. Brandeis University
- Chapter 13. The Entertainment World
- Chapter 14. The Negroes
- Chapter 15. The Depression
- Chapter 16. The Labor Unions
- Chapter 20. Strangers in All Places Everywhere
- Chapter 21. The United Nations and Human Rights¹⁰³

Mrs. Hershan put an ad in the newspapers asking for people to write, telling of their contacts with Mrs. Roosevelt, expecting perhaps a few replies. She was inundated by thousands of letters expressing gratitude for the help

of Eleanor Roosevelt. Many said their lives were permanently changed through her efforts, but the thread of continuity throughout the stories is that she never stinted on her own time, energy, money, or compassion to help a stranger in need. Her greatness was in her kindness and empathy not, as her critics often pointed out, in her intellect.

William F. Buckley wrote of her once in his column:

"Some day in the future a liberal scholar will write a definitive theses exploring the case of Mrs. Roosevelt's mind by a textual analysis of her thought, and then history will be able to distinguish between a great woman with a great heart, and a woman of perilous intellectual habits.¹⁰⁴

Typical of her need to champion the underdog is the deep and lasting friendship she established with Joseph Lash during the time of her support of the American Youth Congress. She had invited the group to the White House and visited informally with the rather shy, awkward young man. In his own attempt to explain how the unlikely friendship between an unimportant student dissident and the First Lady of America began, he wrote that the reasons were:

...in addition to a moral affinity and a real sense of kinship and satisfaction, the fact that I was in trouble and my miseries reminded her of her own when she was young. Insecurity, shyness, lack of social

grace, she had to conquer them all and helping someone she cared about do the same filled a deep, unquenchable longing to feel needed and useful.¹⁰⁵

In An American Conscience, Tamara Hareven said Eleanor "could have limited her activities to being a teacher only, or a wife, or a First Lady, or a columnist and writer, or a public speaker, or a social reformer, or a leader in the United Nations. Instead she functioned effectively in all these roles."¹⁰⁶ Sometimes even her admirers accused her of superficiality, claiming that it was humanly impossible to be involved in so many causes simultaneously.

There is little doubt that she was indeed a "great lady" in spite of her critics however, for she was given more tributes, medals and awards than any other woman in American history.¹⁰⁷ Her books were translated into all major European languages, including Russian and Serbo-Croatian, four Indian dialects and Hebrew, but in spite of all this Eleanor was not satisfied. She judged herself not on what she had accomplished, but what yet remained to be done, commenting that the knowledge of how little one can do alone had taught her humility. So she kept up her struggle against the injustices of the world.

Chapter Four

An Anatomy of Greatness

After examination of the differing views of Eleanor Roosevelt offered by her public and by her children, one must wonder which one was really Eleanor? Was her great humanity an act? Could she have fooled so many people for so long? Or was someone's recollection inaccurate, was someone lying? From her intimate family circle we read of a cold, withdrawn, emotionally repressed person whose method of survival was to withdraw into her own fantasy. But this same woman is also known as one of the warmest and most loved women of the 20th Century. How can this be possible?

There appears at first to be such a dichotomy between the "great lady" and the frigid, rigid, wife and mother, that one cannot reconcile the two to a single person. On closer study however, it appears that this evidently conflicting behavior is not inconsistent with the personality development imposed by her own severely deprived childhood. In fact it is the almost inevitable outcome of her stifled emotional development.

Tamara Hareven remarked that, when reading about the fears of the child Eleanor, it is difficult to avoid a comparison with the fearless woman she became.¹⁰⁸ On the contrary, she did not become fearless at all, but simply learned to control and repress these fears through various psychological mechanisms, including distancing, which gave her the rigid demeanor that characterized her entire life. Young Eleanor was indeed afraid of the water, the dark, high mountains and authority. Evidently she also came to fear intimacy as a result of her early experiences, in which intimacy was repaid by rejection and/or death. The deaths of the three members of her family closest to her reinforced the need to withdraw that she had already learned as a result of emotional deprivation. Coupled with her intellectual rationalization that rigidly repressed emotion was a desirable trait, representing control and "strength of character," this withdrawal and repression became so severe that normal emotional release was no longer available to her.

Eleanor's mother was overtly cruel towards her. As psychologist Joan Erickson said "...one is tempted to wonder how much of this mother's disappointment in her 'uncontrolled' husband was projected onto the little daughter who looked so much like him."¹⁰⁹ This may have been a major reason

for Anna's treatment of Eleanor, but because she had been cruel even while the marriage was relatively good, it seems clear that her personal vanity played an even larger role. As James put it in his memoirs, it is unfortunate when society places so much importance on physical appearance that it could alter a mother's love for her daughter. He said that Eleanor never forgave her mother for this mistreatment and "sadly, it stifled her spirit."¹¹⁰ It is interesting to note that in speaking 30 years later of her own children Eleanor said that, fortunately, all the children got their looks from Franklin's side of the family.

Eleanor was raised by two bitter, rigid, women who resented their lot in life and the taxing responsibilities of raising children without a husband. Both were harshly judgemental of the child and found her lacking, so she learned quickly to keep her thoughts to herself, withdrawing into a world of her own making.

As for the beloved father of Eleanor's memory, she has shown, in her choices of anecdotes, a covert cruelty on his part which was at least as strong as her mother's more overt one. Although she says he loved her dearly, and "to him I was a miracle from heaven," his treatment of her was often deliberately sadistic. When he forced her to drink beer in Germany, and when he raced with her at

high speeds, he forbid her to show fear at the risk of losing his love. He told her often that he could not stand lack of physical courage and his "testing" of her courage was pure torture to the child, for she was desperate lest she lose the approval of the only person whom she perceived as loving her. Thus he taught her very early to hide her fears and emotions in order to avoid rejection.

In this manner the pattern of suppressed emotion and rigidly controlled behavior was set well before the deaths of her mother, father, and brother in the year and a half before her tenth birthday. From then on she was totally unable to give herself in an intimate relationship, to "lose control" as she had been so effectively taught not to do, lest she risk the ultimate abandonment of death. As an adult she wrote:

I never, even to this day, have been able to break myself of the fear of being unable to control whatever I may be in or on, when it goes at too rapid a speed. This holds good of horses and sleds and automobiles, and is perhaps why I much prefer driving myself in a motor, because at least I feel I can control the speed.¹¹¹

This appears to hold true for relationships too - to love means to lose control. Winning the fight for control of her fears and emotions constituted the much-

admired trait "strength of character," with which she was much enamoured. She had an absolute abhorrence of people who let their emotions cloud their judgement, as her Grandmother Hall had, or those who in some way lose control of themselves, such as her uncles Vallie and Eddie. Therefore her total rigidity and austerity of personality is perceived by her as desirable, a successful conquering of emotion, thought, desire.

For Eleanor self-mastery was the ultimate goal and she struggled for it all her life. She fought fear and insecurity, imposing upon herself a facade of calm by emotional distancing, by "feeling" as she wrote, "as though I was looking at someone else's life."¹¹²

Her attitude toward her marriage and her mother-in-law's domination appears to indicate total indifference. If it were conceivable for her not to have married, probably she would not have, but in 1903 a young woman of her class could choose either to be a wife and mother, or a dependent spinster. This latter option was impossible for her given her relationship with her grandmother, and her orphaned status. She might also have devoted her life to reform work in the manner of Jane Addams, but she had a very limited income from her inheritance, and her family would have been outraged. So, she accepted the first proposal she received,

but her writing makes it clear that her father was still the love of her life and always would be. In effect she meant that she was excusing herself from having to love a husband because she had already given her love.

Much has been written of her passivity before her mother-in-law Sara. Probably this was evidence that she just didn't care, since she wasn't in emotional warfare with Sara over Franklin's love. If his mother wanted to keep him, it was all right with Eleanor. A healthy personality, in love with her new husband, would have felt at the least a great resentment toward her mother-in-law for this complete domination of her husband, children, and household. It is revealing of Eleanor's complete detachment that she not only never grew to love Sara, but could not even be bothered to hate her. Of Sara's death Eleanor wrote:

I looked at my mother-in-law's face after she was dead and understood so many things I'd never seen before. It is dreadful to have lived so close to someone for 36 years and feel no deep affection or sense of loss. But it was hard on Franklin.¹¹³

Some writers contend that Eleanor used "passive resistance" with Sara, but it seems more likely that she simply abdicated all her normal functions to Sara and withdrew.¹¹⁴ James recalled that whenever Eleanor did

not agree with Sara in the disciplining of the children, she would pretend that she did "because it was easier to pretend agreement than to pretend she could take command of her own children herself."¹¹⁵

Eleanor herself appeared to understand this process of defensive removal, for as she wrote:

upon hearing of the 1920 nomination of Franklin for the Vice PresidencyI am sure I was glad for my husband, but it never occurred to me to be much excited....and while I was always a part of the public aspect of our lives, still I felt detached and objective, as though I was looking at someone else's life. This seems to have remained with me down to the present day. I cannot quite describe it, but it is as though you lived two lives, one of your own and the other which belonged to the circumstances that surround you.¹¹⁶

and:

The knowledge of how little you can do alone teaches you humility. No matter how much adulation may come your way, once you really understand your limitations you are able to sit and listen to praise and feel quite detached, as though you were looking at the picture of someone else.¹¹⁷

Thus it is clear that she was at least subconsciously aware of her habitual defense of emotional distancing. At one time she actually had a psychiatrist, Dr. Lawrence Kubie, out to Hyde Park to have several talks with her.

She was unimpressed however, saying she feared that psychotherapy might lead to dependence upon outside help (fear of loss of control?) and she believed that one should "hoist oneself by one's own emotional bootstraps."¹¹⁸

Besides fear as a constantly recurring theme in her writing, is the idea of someone "fooling" her. One of her voiced regrets in mothering was that she should have had fewer servants in the beginning, so that she should not be "fooled." This rather paranoid concern was reinforced greatly by the Lucy Mercer affair, because not only Franklin had lied to her, but so many others as well, in their efforts to cover up for him. These included her daughter Anna, and best friend Alice, which cooled Eleanor's relationships with these two considerably after she found out about the deceit.

This resentment of being "fooled" probably relates to her relationship with her father for he had "fooled" her about his drunkenness, which she did not discover until she was an adult. Joseph Lash noted that in her later life she sometimes tended to overestimate and misjudge people, especially those who seemed to need her, satisfying her need for self-sacrifice and affection and giving her the admiration and loyalty she craved.¹¹⁹ Just as her response to being disappointed by her father had been

depression and withdrawal because she did not dare to see him as he really was, so that in later life she became closed, withdrawn and moody when people she cared about disappointed her.

In An American Conscience Hareven wrote regarding Mrs. Roosevelt:

The pressures under which she had found herself, the absence of love in her early life, and her sense of inferiority could have made her into a retreating, introverted, hostile and neurotic person. Instead she transcended the preoccupation with herself and focused her interest on the needs of others. Self pity turned into compassion, restlessness into service, a need to receive into a compulsion to give.¹²⁰

Hareven misses the point here. Eleanor was a "retreating, introverted, hostile and neurotic person," which her inability to form intimate relationships with her own husband and children clearly shows. She not only couldn't love, but she couldn't hate.

But her father had instructed her that she must be "a good girl, study hard, and not give any trouble," and also that she must be "truthful, brave, and well-educated" so that when the time came that they could be together, the woman he dreamed of would be there. So she struggled towards this goal of becoming the woman her father wished for, and "made herself as the years went by into a fairly

good copy of the picture he had painted." 121

She could not allow herself to be found lacking if she was to please this "vivid and alive" father, because she felt that one must deserve, even earn, the love of a parent. As she put it herself, one should not be able to count on a mother's (father's) love unless one's behavior warranted it. She had learned painfully that her father withdrew his love and approval whenever she displeased him, so the woman became compulsive in her efforts to be "good enough."

As for being "hostile and neurotic," her chronic fear of rejection, and therefore intimacy, led her to declare publicly that her dead father was "the love of my life, and always will be" thus excusing herself from having to develop any other emotional relationships. She had committed herself already by being "engaged" to a dead person, which exempted her from the dangers of making any new emotional commitments. With this statement she tells everyone (including Franklin) that she will be true to her promise to her father, to wait for him and be good.

By espousing causes instead, she was able to achieve the attention and admiration she had admittedly craved since childhood, without any possibility whatsoever of

rejection. Thus she had found the perfect solution; to "do her duty" and please her father, while at the same time receiving the emotional gratification she so desperately needed.

Therefore it is correct that Eleanor turned self pity into compassion, restlessness into service, and a need to receive into a compulsion to give. However, this was only possible because she was a "retreating, introverted, hostile and neurotic person." Had Eleanor Roosevelt been psychologically able to receive emotional gratification in the normal intimacy of family relationships, the United States would have lost the services of the most honored woman in its history.

FOOTNOTES

- ¹Roosevelt, Eleanor, This is My Story, Garden City Publ. Co., New York, N.Y. 1939, p. 2
- ²Ibid.
- ³Ibid., p. 3
- ⁴Boettiger, James, A Love in Shadow, W.W. Norton and Co. New York, N.Y., 1978, p. 34
- ⁵Roosevelt, My Story, p. 24
- ⁶Ibid., p. 1
- ⁷Ibid., p. 3
- ⁸Boettiger, Love in Shadow, p. 34
- ⁹Roosevelt, My Story, p. 17-18
- ¹⁰Boettiger, p. 37
- ¹¹Ibid., p. 36
- ¹²Roosevelt, James, My Parents: A Differing View, Playboy Press, Chicago, 1976, p. 11
- ¹³Boettiger, p. 36
- ¹⁴Ibid.
- ¹⁵Roosevelt, My Story, p. 5
- ¹⁶Ibid.
- ¹⁷Boettiger, p. 37
- ¹⁸Roosevelt, My Story, p. 16
- ¹⁹Boettiger, p. 37
- ²⁰Roosevelt, My Story, p. 363

- ²¹Roosevelt, My Story, p. 9
- ²²Ibid.
- ²³Ibid., p. 10
- ²⁴Ibid., p. 11
- ²⁵Ibid., p. 12
- ²⁶Ibid., p. 17
- ²⁷Ibid., p. 14
- ²⁸Ibid., p. 163
- ²⁹Boettiger, p. 37
- ³⁰Ibid.
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- ³²Ibid.
- ³³Boettiger, p. 42
- ³⁴Roosevelt, My Story, p. 13
- ³⁵Ibid.
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- ³⁷Boettiger, p. 39
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- ³⁹Ibid. p. 34
- ⁴⁰Ibid.
- ⁴¹Ibid. p. 22
- ⁴²Ibid. p. 361
- ⁴³Ibid.
- ⁴⁴Ibid. p. 20

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- 46Ibid. p. 89
- 47Ibid. p. 98
- 48Ibid. p. 301
- 49Ibid. p. 101
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- 51Roosevelt, My Story, p. 110
- 52Ibid.
- 53Ibid. pp. 110-111
- 54Ibid. p. 138
- 55Ibid. p. 145
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- 59Ibid. p. 48
- 60Roosevelt, James, My Parents: A Differing View, p. 38
- 61Roosevelt, My Story, P. 165
- 62Ibid. p. 169
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- 67Boettiger, p. 43

- ⁶⁸Roosevelt, Elliott, Mother R., p. 12
- ⁶⁹Roosevelt, My Story, p. 262
- ⁷⁰Roosevelt, James, My Parents: A Differing View, p. 101-102
- ⁷¹Ibid. p. 109
- ⁷²Ibid. p. 97
- ⁷³Ibid. p. 102
- ⁷⁴Ibid. p. 100
- ⁷⁵Boetigger, p. 53
- ⁷⁶Ibid.
- ⁷⁷Ibid. p. 73
- ⁷⁸Ibid.
- ⁷⁹Roosevelt, My Story, p. 303
- ⁸⁰Roosevelt, Elliott, Mother R., p. 11
- ⁸¹Roosevelt, Eleanor, This I Remember, Harper and Row, New York, N.Y., 1949, p. 17-19
- ⁸²Roosevelt, My Story, p. 313
- ⁸³Ibid, p. 318
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- ⁸⁵Roosevelt, This I Remember, p. 36
- ⁸⁶Ibid. p. 20
- ⁸⁷Ibid. p. 21
- ⁸⁸Roosevelt, James, My Parents: A Differing View, p. 59
- ⁸⁹Kearney, James, Anna Eleanor Roosevelt: The Evolution of a Reformer, Houghton-Mifflin Co., Boston, 1968, p. 14

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- ⁹²Roosevelt, My Story, p. 98
- ⁹³Ibid. p. 210
- ⁹⁴Ibid. p. 172
- ⁹⁵Ibid. p. 262
- ⁹⁶Hareven, p. 24-45
- ⁹⁷Ibid. p. 36
- ⁹⁸Roosevelt, This I Remember, p. 36
- ⁹⁹Hareven, p. 40
- ¹⁰⁰Ibid. p. 271
- ¹⁰¹Ibid. p. 272
- ¹⁰²Ibid.
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- ¹⁰⁵Lash, Joseph, Eleanor Roosevelt: A Friends Memoir,
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- ¹⁰⁶Hareven, p. xvi
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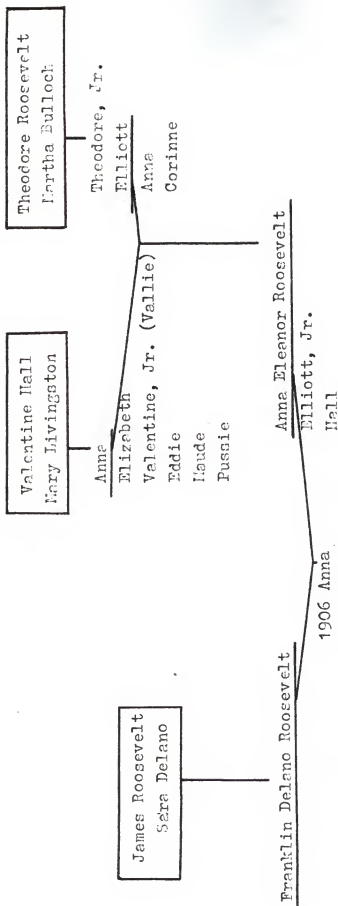
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ELEANOR ROOSEVELT
PORTRAIT OF A LEADER

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ELEANOR ROOSEVELT PORTRAIT OF A LEADER

Abstract

Eleanor Roosevelt was one of the most widely recognized and loved First Ladies in history, deeply committed to a great many causes involving civil rights and philanthropy. She was genuinely loved by strangers and acquaintances, but "respected" by members of her own family.

This study begins with a brief outline of Eleanor's childhood, in order to show the source of many of her crippling phobias as background to the idea that her major adult problem was a fear of intimacy following the traumatic rejections of all her efforts at love previous to becoming a wife and mother. These were then exacerbated by her later rejection by Franklin for Lucy Mercer.

This thesis is an attempt to reconcile psychologically the frigid, rigid, private person with the great humanitarian. While on the surface, the dichotomy may appear so great as to make this task impossible, still the study purports to show that the frigid and the empathetic

sides of Eleanor were not only complementary, but were the logical psychological consequences of her severely emotionally deprived childhood.

Because she was not able to have satisfactory emotional relationships within her intimate circle, she was forced to turn outward for gratification. It is very well documented how much energy and time she gave to strangers, beyond all reason or expectation, and how she came to be loved, even adulated for this. This thesis demonstrates that this was the first "reciprocal" love Eleanor had ever been able to enjoy, and that the very reason she was able to give it, and receive it, is that it did not involve intimacy on any level.