

THE BUSIEST GREAT-GRANDMOTHER OF OUR TIME

PHOTOGRAPHS AND TEXT

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Eleanor Roosevelt

WHEN EVEN an active person reaches the three-quarters of a century mark, we usually think of the balance of his life as a time for mellowing, a time when he retires from the hurly-burly of commerce with his fellow man to seek quiet, reflective pursuits.

Eleanor Roosevelt is one of those rare few who does not bow to this stricture of our society.

It has been my honor to know Mrs. Roosevelt for 20 years. In that time, I feel, I have come to know her quite well. I have been her physician since shortly after her husband died. She has always been one of the most active women of our time and, today, as she celebrates her 75th birthday, she shows scarcely a sign of slowing down.

A great-grandmother nine times over, this remarkable lady is as dedicated to service of humanity, at a stage in life where society would have her in a rocking chair, as she was on the day I met her. She has accumulated a vast variety of experiences in her long life and she has the ability to store them away for the time she has need of them. This makes her as old and wise as the woods. And yet, paradoxically, she seems very young because her appetite for learning has never been sated and her ability to retain what she has learned seems as keen as it ever was.

Mrs. Roosevelt is impressed by the number of her years, but only in a vague, detached way, for she doesn't feel old at all. In her case, the 75 figure is a rank deception as many younger people (including myself) who have tried to keep pace with her have discovered.

Her daily schedule is grueling. She rises every morning at 7 or 7:30, refusing to make a concession to the fact that she may have been working at her desk until dawn, and starts her day with gymnastic exercises.

Her travel mileage each year undoubtedly rivals that of our most peripatetic journeyer. Sometimes she makes two or three airplane flights a day and still finds time to attend many receptions and deliver several speeches. In 1959 she has already been to Iran and Israel, crisscrossed our continent many times, and she would have gone to China last month, if it had been possible.

The secret of her heavy schedule is organization and self-discipline. No moment is ever unused. If there is nothing to do for a moment, she sleeps. There are times when she works through most of the night. Then it is only this ability to catnap that gets her through the next day. I have seen her live in this manner for days on end.

Time and again, as I have traveled with Mrs. Roosevelt, I have found that I can't do half of what she does. Once on a trip from New Delhi, India, we stopped about 200 miles north of Bombay. That morning the reigning maharaja showed us the surrounding villages. We started at 6 a.m., driving from village to village over dusty roads in the oppressive heat, going through the primitive huts that housed both animals and humans.

We gulped a hasty lunch with the maharaja and then rushed to our plane for a flight to Bombay. When we arrived, worn out and grimy, we learned that our day, far from being over, was just beginning. A reception had been scheduled for Mrs. Roosevelt at the city hall for that very minute. Many would have claimed fatigue and bowed out, but without a moment's hesitation she declared: "I won't keep them waiting. I am going dressed just as I am."

The approaches to city hall were lined with hundreds of thousands of people. Mrs. Roosevelt stood up in an open car, balancing herself

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At Hyde Park four Roosevelt great-grandchildren enjoy party with Mom, known as "Sisti" in White House days.



Memorial Day observance in Hyde Park rose garden brings together Mrs. Roosevelt and sons John and Franklin, Jr.