



FREQUENT FLIER? Eleanor Roosevelt (left) made several campus visits in the 1950s.

Tea with Eleanor Roosevelt . . .

When I saw the photo and article about Eleanor Roosevelt (“Ask the Archivist,” November-December), I was taken back to an afternoon on the Women’s Campus in 1950 when about a dozen of us had tea with Mrs. Roosevelt during the visit described in the article. The tea was arranged by Dean Margaret Habein so that some of us could meet Mrs. Roosevelt. She sat in an armchair while we sat around her on the carpeted floor. We were all dumbstruck in the presence of this great lady and did not know what to say.

After a short, awkward pause, Mrs. Roosevelt began telling stories about her experiences and soon we were asking questions as we forgot how awed we were by her. I realized that she knew that we didn’t know how to handle the situation so she set about making us feel comfortable. Her unselfish and generous spirit came through—she wasn’t thinking of herself but of us.

Although I have had many reasons over the years to admire her, this is the impression that I have carried with me and tried to emulate.

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Amherst, Massachusetts*

. . . Her Other Visits to Campus . . .

Eleanor Roosevelt was also at U of R in the mid-1950s. I was a student from 1952 to 1956, and I distinctly remember going to hear her speak at Strong Auditorium. I sat in the first row and never forgot her dynamic speech. It was probably 1954–55.

I still recall that as a highlight of my college experience.

*Arlene Eichen Stolnitz ’56
Venice, Florida*

Eleanor Roosevelt was at U of R in fall of either ’52 or ’53 as I was the head waiter at the Faculty Club in Burton dorm and waited on her and President de Kiewiet and Dean Atkins for the chef, Mrs. Hanson. We served steak, baked potatoes, green beans, and apple pie. She casually ate her whole plate and kept right on talking. Then she reached over to the president’s plate with no hesitation and took his uneaten potato and ate it, too. Needless to say, it was an experience I have never forgotten.

*Don Brady ’55
Greensboro, North Carolina*

I distinctly remember that Mrs. Roosevelt made at least one more visit to the River Campus after the one in February 1950. I recall it clearly because as a geeky undergraduate, my tongue was tied on a quiet Saturday morning when I held open the door to Todd Union as she entered, unaccompanied. I couldn’t muster up even enough courage to say, “Good morning, Mrs. Roosevelt.”

Since I arrived in fall 1951, it had to have been after the visit you wrote about.

*Ed Russell ’55
Charlottesville, Virginia*

. . . and Benjamin, the Dentist

I was accepted to the U of R in 1952 for the Class of ’56. At the end of my freshman year, I was selected for the Sophomore Honor Society Yellow Key for the following year, 1953.

In the winter of that year, Eleanor Roosevelt was invited by the University to speak to a joint class of men from the campus and women from Prince Street, all sophomore honor society members, at Todd Union. As I recall, there were about 15 to 20 students seated at a round table with Mrs. Roosevelt. She was, at the time serving with Adlai Stevenson at the United Nations. She went around the table asking us what our names were, what our major was, and what we planned to do with our lives.

When she came to me, I told her that my name was Benjamin Levy, I was majoring in psychology and chemistry and that I was planning to apply to dental school after my third year at Rochester, which was an option at the time. She then went into an animated discussion with me about the terrible state of her teeth as a result of

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periodontal disease and that her dentist in New York was going to remove all her remaining teeth and place an immediate denture in order for her to continue working without looking “peculiar” as she put it.

I, quite naturally, had no idea what an immediate denture was nor did I know what periodontal disease was. I just kept nodding to this famous and quite intimidating lady and tried my best to look intelligent. She then completed the table and spoke about human rights at the UN and how she did not particularly care for Ambassador Stevenson.

It was a very engrossing experience for me.

At the end of my sophomore year, I was elected to the junior honor society, the Mendicants, and Mrs. Roosevelt was again invited by Dr. de Kiewiet to speak to the honor society members at Todd Union. This was now 1954. When she appeared, her appearance was much different. Her face and hair were much improved, as was her mouth. The new dentures were obviously in place and functioning properly. She again went around the table and when she came to me I told her that I had, indeed, applied to dental schools, and was hoping for an acceptance to the NYU School of Dentistry, which had a program to accept third-year students who had completed their chemistry, biology, and physics requirements successfully. After successful completion of their first year in dental school, the students would be granted their U of R bachelor's degrees.

She got all animated again and told us all the experience of having this innovative dental treatment performed and how much better she felt about herself because she looked so much better. She asked me to repeat my name and said she would remember it; and if I was accepted at NYU, I should come to her office at the UN and report on my progress.

I was indeed accepted at NYU in January of 1955 and began classes that September. During one of my gross anatomy labs in the winter of 1955, the professor of anatomy came over to my table and said to me that I had a very emotional telephone call from my father and that I should take the call immediately.

I thought the worst, that someone in our family had died. But that was not the case. Apparently, while walking on First Avenue past the UN building, my dad encountered Mrs. Roosevelt getting out of her limousine without any secret service accompaniment.

I had told my parents the story of what had happened at Todd Union and right

here in front of him he saw the star of the piece. He approached the former first lady and said, according to his story, “Hello, Mrs. Roosevelt. My name is Charles Levy and I believe you met my son, Ben, at the University of Rochester last winter.”

To his amazement, Mrs. Roosevelt replied, “Oh yes, Mr. Levy. You must mean Benjamin, the dentist.” My father told me after that he could barely speak and mumbled something—he didn't remember what, shook her hand, and walked away.

After a few moments thinking about what had just occurred, he stepped into a local pharmacy and called the dental school. When he spoke to me, I swear he was crying—and my dad was not all that emotional a guy. He said to me, “Ben, do you know Eleanor Roosevelt knows who you are!”

Several years later my wife and our two children traveled to Hyde Park to see the FDR home and estate. My family knew the story and wanted very much to see the graves. When we stepped into the burial area, I broke down recalling how close I came to this terrific lady and that she knew who I was.

*Benjamin Levy '56
Wilmington, North Carolina*

Eternal and Imperial—But Not BCE

I was delighted to see that my alma mater is paying some attention to “Eternal Rome” (“Models of History,” November-December), but it would be better still to keep the facts and dates straight. Professor Renato Perucchio's research does indeed deal with “Imperial Rome,” which is Rome circa 200 CE, not 200 BCE, and it might be worth mentioning that Rome's lack of a “civil engineering code” in any period was a matter of comment even in antiquity.

Some of us do study Rome circa 200 BCE, though, and even use computer modeling techniques to do so. You will find a sample at <http://hvwc-server.ats.ucla.edu/>.

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