

April 13th 1945

Dear Ones,

We heard the news at ten this morning.

It is impossible to try to summarize my reactions to the death of President Roosevelt. They are mixed - there is an overwhelming feeling of loss, there is a feeling of confidence that our country can emerge from the loss of her elected leader with a new strength and a new determination. It is hard to put down on paper the gamut of emotions which his death and the condition of our country and the world at this time create. There can be no doubt but that our loss is great - in fact Franklin Roosevelt has become so closely identified with our role in this world and the cause for which each of us stand that his death is a personal loss to us all.

There is so much that he accomplished and yet so much that was left undone - if at anytime America has been put to the test of greatness this is it. I do not feel that that the death of any one man, even Franklin Roosevelt, will critically affect the course of world events - it is my firm belief that by now we have the basis for world peace on a more secure basis than the relationship of three individuals, or on the personality of key figures. The program for world peace is on a universal foundation. But we will miss Roosevelt; we will miss the strength of his statesmanship, the greatness of his humanity, the ability of his leadership - the mantle of leadership will not fall alone on Harry Truman. Every member of our governments and every thinking citizen must see that with the death of our President who so long was the active personification of our goals the American people must rise above partisanship and pettiness to supply that element of strength which we have lost. The task lies clearly before us and we will not falter before it.

Harry Truman is the President and he will be until 1949. His personal position is perhaps as trying as anyman has faced in the history of the world. He has yet to prove that he has the stature of national leadership - the American people's first step must be to recognize the necessity of giving him the opportunity to do so. His task is one of tremendous scope - he cannot hope to handle it alone. First he must finish the groundwork which is the San Francisco conference; he must participate in the ironing out of the difficulties which are bound to arise - he must stand fast for the principles and programs for which we are fighting and which we have already enunciated. And secondly he must start the process of leading us out of the wilderness of war into the ways of peace at home. Our country must rally to him - sniping and reviling criticism can mean nothing but unconstructive chaos - we must understand that to all extents and purposes the American people are their own leader; as the people stand, so Truman and our administration will stand; we have lost the public personality which so often may have ^{been} a substitute for true national cohesion and true understanding of what the responsibility of democratic agreement is. That is the task before us and the American people will rise to it.

The test of the virility of our democratic way is coming in a sudden way; it seemed that the first test, the acceptance of Dumbarton, of Bretton Woods, of Yalta, and the conferences to follow, would come under the rallying point of Roosevelt's leadership. We have been denied that. But the test is the same - important as his leadership was, it is still the tenor of American thinking that is the crucial factor and if that spirit is not independent of the role of one man, then all of our building even with him is on sand. But that is not the case - the death of Roosevelt may help to crystallize in the mind of each individual what his leadership meant: the responsibilities of a firm peace, of a working peace, of a just peace, combined with the achievement of the promise of America can not escape us.

I hope that what I am writing is not entirely lacking in clarity; I would have wished that Franklin Roosevelt had stayed with us until our goals have been achieved.

I feel that to deny the significance of his leadership even in the face of the expression of faith in democracy is to ignore the obvious. I did not intend this letter to be a eulogy of the man - rather I hope it is a part of the conviction that is our democratic spirit. We have lost a man who symbolized what most of us believed we stood for - now we have the opportunity to show that we do understand what those principles require of us and what our responsibility is. But I cannot write this letter without giving voice to the deep respect and confidence which I felt for Franklin Delano Roosevelt; he is the only President I have ever known. I grew up in an atmosphere unfriendly to him; I had to learn to appreciate what he stood for and what he was trying to do. Despite his many errors, despite his mistakes of judgment, Franklin Roosevelt had the stuff of greatness in him. He was essentially a humanitarian; he understood suffering and unhappiness. He was a human being - he had his ambitions and his desires, he had the requirements of his own personality and character to satisfy, as does any other man. In his leadership he was able to point the way which America must travel, he was able to grasp what our democracy and its functioning mean. The papers will all list the high spots of his life, the legislation he introduced, the conferences he attended - I hope that they also call the nation's attention to the gigantic responsibilities and tasks which are only just begun. I hope that they call upon the American people to look upon themselves, to see where they stand. I hope that this change of leadership will be shown as the proving ground for democracy, as the rallying point for the American people to stand up proud and strong against the forces of bigotry and hate and oppression, the forces of reaction and disunity, and dissension, the forces of fear and destruction and negativism, not only at home but throughout the entire world, to stand firm with our allies and with our own democratic ideal for the inevitable era of peace and justice for all men and all mankind.

When the announcer who broadcast the news to us this morning finished his review, he closed with the words, "This is the United States of America" - just the way he said those words, the thrill of hearing them spoken with pride and courage, will not leave me. We are a great country - it is not a greatness of natural resources or of engineering skill alone - it is the greatness which is humanity and we shall never fail it.

All my love,

Eleanor