

U-12-00  
Miss to Val Kilmer

**REMARKS BY FIRST LADY HILLARY RODHAM CLINTON**  
**VISIT TO VAL KILL**  
**HYDE PARK, NEW YORK**  
**JUNE 17, 2000**

Thank you so much, Anne. I have counted among my many blessings in the last eight years getting to know Anne Roosevelt, and every time I have had the pleasure of being with her, I feel even more grateful to her and her family, and believe that her grandmother lives on in Anne's very strong, gentle, intelligent presence. I also want to thank the Mid-Hudson Boys Choir for their wonderful music, and for being part of this ceremony today, and to Sarah Olson for your exemplary leadership of this site, and to all of your staff who -- I remember I was here five years ago -- have such a love for this place that you and they convey, and I thank you for that.

I also want to thank Professor Allida Black for her determination, her single-mindedness to both bring about and keep Eleanor Roosevelt's memory and legacy alive, and I think you just got a taste of her enthusiasm for this task. When we were talking together in the house before coming out, she told me that she is on a mission to find every piece of paper that Mrs. Roosevelt ever sent to anyone, plus every speech she ever made. And she's finding them all over the world, in places as far-flung as South Africa and Vietnam, and she told me something I'd never heard anywhere before, which is that Eleanor Roosevelt had quite an argument with Winston Churchill over the future of Indochina. Now that is something I would have liked to have been present for and to have seen for myself. So, thank you so much Allida. I also want to thank the members of the Hyde Park City Council who are here with us, other elected officials who have come and especially the Save America's Treasures Committee, who are represented here in the audience.

Five years ago I came to Val-Kill to receive the Eleanor Roosevelt Val-Kill Medal. It was a wonderful afternoon in a tent -- somewhat bigger than this -- on the grounds with so many people who had so many connections with this place and with Mrs. Roosevelt. I toured the cottage then -- and again briefly today -- where I could see the books that she read, the radio she listened to, the chair that she sat in after dinner as she talked with her many guests. Anne reminded all of us that it really was an extended family here. There would be people from literally every corner of the world who would come for dinner or who were put up in one of the guest rooms, who were part of the real atmosphere that was created here around Mrs. Roosevelt. We also went out on the sleeping porch, which was one of her favorite places in the world, and for those who have read some of her columns over the years, they often take place or refer to her time on the sleeping porch.

This beautiful setting -- which can be remembered personally by someone like Anne who was here as a child, or could be remembered by perhaps some of you in the audience who are here as guests or in some other capacity -- is really a fitting monument to a woman who was larger than life but approachable by all. Mrs. Roosevelt said many memorable things on great subjects, but in some ways I appreciate, maybe more than anything else, the way that she kept bringing everything she did in the world, all of the places she went, all of her many

accomplishments, back home, to the place where all of us can relate to her and feel comfortable around her.

She said: "The greatest thing I have learned is how good it is to come home again." As I recall, this became her home about the time of age that I am now: fifty-two, I believe, is when she finally had a home of her own. After the very difficult childhood, after living in homes that were largely the homes created by and managed by her mother-in-law, after living in the White House -- which is a wonderful place to live -- she finally came home to her own home, here in Val-Kill. And this is where she entertained and greeted leaders from Winston Churchill to Walter Reuther, to American activists like Mary McCleod Bethune, to her grandchildren. She also, every year, invited the boys from the nearby Wiltwyck School for Boys to come for hotdogs and potato salad and a reading of Kipling's story *Rikki Tikki Tavi* on the lawn.

Sometimes there were so many guests, I am told, that they literally arrived by the busload. Perhaps a group of college students, or guests from foreign countries who heard that this is where Mrs. Roosevelt lived, and just turned off the road and came up to find it and to find her. She would always take them in.

There are wonderful stories from Val-Kill and even from the White House -- one of my favorites that I tell the staff there all the time -- is how she one time invited somebody she met on the street, a man who was down on his luck during the Depression, into the White House, invited him to dinner, then invited him to spend the night, only then realized that all the rooms were filled, only after she'd opened all of them to find out if someone was asleep, and then just put up a cot in a corner somewhere so that he too could spend the night.

Mrs. Roosevelt would have loved the fact that we have a lot of students here today, from Poughkeepsie, from Hyde Park, the Girls' Leadership Workshop, sponsored by the Eleanor Roosevelt Center here. (applause) And I think that she would be delighted to know that the secretary for the last ten years of her life, Maureen Corr, is here. Maureen, where's Maureen? There she is. (applause)

And many of you recall that this used to be a furniture factory. And it was set up -- one of the very first women-started, women-organized, women-managed factories in the country -- to try to help farmers here in Dutchess County who had fallen on hard times during the Depression to have another way of making a living. And so the factory ran for about ten years and took a lot of people in. In fact, this is a table that is from the Val-Kill factory, and there is a gentleman here in the audience who worked as a finisher at Val-Kill Industries, Harry Johannesen, and I would like Mr. Johannesen to stand. (applause) We also have Stella Hirschorn, another of Eleanor Roosevelt's biographers, and Stella, where is Stella, is Stella here? (applause) And I would like all the members of the Save America's Treasures Committee who are here today to please stand. (applause)

This is my fortieth Save America's Treasure's visit in the last two years. As many of you may know, this is a public-private partnership that we started back in 1998 as a way of commemorating the millennium by turning our attention simultaneously to our past and honoring the past as well as looking toward the future and imagining a better future. And when we began

thinking about honoring the past, we realized there were so many places, documents, collections around our country that just weren't being given the public visibility and attention that they needed in terms of the contributions that they really illustrated to what we were as Americans as we began this new century. And so the White House Millennium Council was created, and it's been a real joy for us. When the President and I created it, we asked a wonderful preservationist and appreciator of the arts to be the chair of it within the White House, and Ellen, you're here, and I'd like to ask Ellen Lovell to stand because she's been the real driving force behind this.

We partnered with the National Trust for Historic Preservation and we have literally traveled the country. Two years ago we were on a bus tour through, well starting at the Smithsonian, going through Maryland and New Jersey and to the Berkshires in Massachusetts, over into New York, and ending up at Seneca Falls. We have been highlighting and raising money to preserve sights such as Louis Armstrong's archives, to the Ferry Building on Ellis Island, from the Cliff Dwellings at Mesa Verde, to the African Meeting House in Boston. And today Val-Kill Cottage joins this list of endangered treasures that adds to our story as a nation.

Because when we preserve Val-Kill, we preserve, in many ways, a birthplace for the modern human rights movement. It was here that the Val-Kill Industries operated, an early recognition that all of us, men and women, need work, useful work, to do. Not only to make a living, but to feel as though we are making a contribution. And for many of the people that came through this factory, this was a lifesaver. It was here that Mrs. Roosevelt wrote her famous column, "My Day," and reflected on the challenges facing the world and our country, and wrote about everything from racism to war, from child labor to the need for a national health plan. Here she mediated political and labor disputes, and educated students of all ages about democracy. It was also here that she drafted large portions of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, passed by the United Nations, one of her greatest legacies to our world. So when we preserve Val-Kill, we are not just preserving the furniture and the house and the grounds, we are really preserving those memories, those contributions. You know, this nation has lots of monuments to presidents and generals, but few to women who made their marks with their own brand of public service, and I am very grateful this is one of them. (applause)

I think Eleanor Roosevelt would have loved being on our bus trip. We visited Harriet Tubman's home in Auburn, as well as a nineteenth-century young labor leader named Kate Mullany's house in Troy, as well as ending up at Seneca Falls. In her book, titled *It's Up to the Women*, she told Americans that if we were to survive the Depression, save and humanize capitalism, make democracy more vibrant, then women must take risks and get involved. She wrote: "Women, whether subtly or vociferously, have been a tremendous power in the destiny of the world." And that is why we must remember the women who spoke up and took action and changed the course of our history.

This monument has been saved and lived on thanks to the foresight and the hard work of early founders and contributors and friends of Val-Kill, members of the Roosevelt family and the National Park Service. But they cannot do this without the generous support of so many others. We have to do more to conserve the structure of the house and the precious items within it. That's why I'm very pleased to announce today that Val-Kill Cottage has been designated as an official project of Save America's Treasures, and Sarah, I would like to present to you this

certification from the National Trust for Historic Preservation to the National Park Service.  
(applause)

With Save America's Treasures, we have already dedicated to our historic sights \$60 million dollars in federal grants, and \$44 million dollars raised through private donations to match those federal dollars. Nothing has given me greater pleasure than to create the relationships between generous private donors, individuals, corporations, foundations, and the sights that so desperately need these additional funds. So today I am extremely pleased to announce that the Val-Kill Cottage Preservation Project is dedicating more than \$150,000 for this national historic sight.

Now I know that the woman who was the driving force behind this effort does not want to be given credit, but I have to say a word about her to all of you. Claudine Bacher has been one of the stalwart supporters of Save America's Treasures. She was involved with me from the very beginning, she was on the bus trip back in July of 1998, and in the course of our conversations -- as we were driving through the countryside or having a meal together -- she talked about what the Roosevelts, and Mrs. Roosevelt in particular, had meant to her family, particularly her parents. And we began talking about Val-Kill, where I had been, and looked for ways to include Val-Kill in this effort that was a national effort, to raise the visibility for places of importance like this. If it had not been for Claudine's passion for this project and her tireless efforts, we would not be off to such a strong start in preserving this important part of our history, and I'd like to ask Claudine to stand so that we can recognize and thank you.

I'm also grateful to James Freund and Sharon Patrick, Susan Young Shoetz, Jill Irvine Crow, Joan and Allen Bildner, and many of the other donors that are with us today. It is fitting that many of the donors gave their donations in the names of their mothers and fathers as a tribute to Mrs. Roosevelt, and I know that Claudine's family has made a generous gift in Claudine's name which continues that kind of generational connection.

The money will be used to address the most urgent needs of the site, to preserve the building's exterior, repair that old radio, restore Mrs. Roosevelt's desk, her papers, books, and photographs, and study and improve the grounds, including the pond. Returning the landscape to the way that it appeared during Mrs. Roosevelt's lifetime will give visitors a better chance of understanding this place that she loved so well. She used to take a walk through the grounds, I think three times a day. It was a great way for her to reconnect with the nature that she loved so much and that she could see through the windows of her cottage.

When we created the White House Millennium Council, we knew that there were many places that were in danger of being forgotten or of falling into disrepair, and yet their stories tell us so much about ourselves. And since America, in many ways, is more than a place -- it is an idea, it is a set of values -- we have to preserve those connections among generations, so that young people today know about the sacrifices, the struggles that those that came before made.

In this audience, I am sure, there are first-generation Americans and probably tenth- or twelfth- generation Americans, given the settlement of this part of New York, and all of us have to be connected by the thread of memory, and by a constantly rejuvenated commitment to what it

means to be an American. In the words of Mrs. Roosevelt, we can see how she really embodied the struggles of the early part of the twentieth century; how she took what she experienced in her own life and translated it into work on behalf of others. I hope that through the work that we do here we honor her work, her legacy, her timeless values and ideals, her commitment to imagining a better future for all people. Whether educating teachers to teach human rights or providing leadership training to girls or promoting racial harmony among young people, the Eleanor Roosevelt Center is keeping her dream alive, that one day we would live in the future as one world and one people.

So all of us must take part in that effort, on her behalf. She reminded us that it was important to look back to our history, and she was an early preservationist who understood how important it was to preserve those symbols. Val-Kill now, thanks to all of you, will not be a casualty of our indifference, but a real testament to our commitment to keep those memories alive. Mrs. Roosevelt's true home will live on and help all of us share her legacy with future generations of Americans and visitors from all over the world.

Some years ago -- actually I think one of my first public appearances as First Lady in New York City in the midst of a great snowstorm -- I was looking out at this audience at Lincoln Center, and I said, "You know, the White House just encourages me to have conversations with Mrs. Roosevelt." (laughter) I meant it as a metaphor, but it became, yet again, one of those things people talked about, I guess suggesting that I had gone off the deep end. (laughter) But, it's not a bad idea to think about what Mrs. Roosevelt would do or say. If each of us kept in mind in our dealings with one another, in how we treat those who appear different from us, whether we stand up for people who are forgotten, and keep doing all we can to make our country everything it should be, then, in small daily ways, we are paying tribute to her. And the next time I talk to her, I will tell her what you all are doing.

Thank you all very, very much.

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