

JA JEAN ROOK
8/8/80

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Mr. [unclear] o/r
Jean Rook...

Now my first question then is how do you match, Prime Minister, what's it like to have no holiday, no life, no nothing?

No holiday. Well. Now that Parliament rises today the pressures won't be quite so great. It has, I think, been the longest session really we've ever had, certainly since I've been in Parliament. Almost the longest period of - the longest period of. I can't say it's been a strain: it hasn't been. The longest period without let-up, let's just call it that, because you see the way, originally before the Election we went into, we were really at top peak for quite a time because we didn't know when an election would

PS: X is not recorded
And I didn't
hear it.

Quite right.

So we were working at top peak. Then an election came so we were working at top peak for quite a time on then the Election. The moment the Election came one wasn't tired after flowed. I think I formed the Government faster than anyone has ever done before, and really it has been 18 months crammed with activity and I've loved it immensely.

I now you've been waiting for years

Oh yes.

But is it lovely?

Well, it's marvellous because you are in the centre of things. All the difficult problems come here because they're not difficult: someone else has solved them. But it is one thing after another and I can only explain this that you get into a rhythm. But you know several housewives who work and the housewife works like a trojan in business and running a home and coping with the shops. You work like a trojan, but so do I. There a number - I mean you do - I mean - you do 2 jobs. You know what it's like. Do you never have to say "Thank God, what am I going to do next."

I do but I could - I couldn't work

The only thing I could - I - obviously the lot of the work I do carries every single decision that matters.

Thank you.

Every single one. That applies to a lot of people. But I can only say that I'm not finding it a strain. I just haven't. I'm quite glad now to be having a fortnight or so

What do you plan to do?

Well I shall only be at - I shall only have the acutely, you know the really urgent problems to deal with, and apart from that I shall probably go down to Chequers. I'm going to tell you Jean where I'm going and I don't want you to, but I don't want you to tell anyone. That's why. But I'm going to tell you so that you'll know roughly. I'm going to Switzerland to stay with friends for 10 days.

Ah

So I'm right out, because I really feel that I owe it to the job.

Yah,

For 10 days off. Willy will be, 10 days completely off. Well except, not completely off. I shall have 10 days when I shall not do any routine. I won't do the routine that will be done by someone else. Willy Whitelaw is about it. It'll be the really, the emergency and the difficulties of course and the day-to-day information come to me.

Now, important.

Then I shall be back at Chequers.

And how's your standing up to it?

He's made himself so carrying on with the work he has to do and has built up his own esteem. That's the only word that I can use for it because he has. I reason naturally easy with everyone. Of course he is; so we're both always been like that. But the way he's handled everything in his natural enthusiastic and interesting way and total support has built, I think he's won his own place in public opinion and I'm thrilled and delighted.

Does he ever say

Merely by not pretending to be anything he isn't but just by being what he is.

Does he ever say to you "Oh Margaret I wish you'd never done it"?

No! Never! Never!

That's great.

I mean on the contrary, you'll need it and you carry on. Or don't think of doing anything else.

Now

Just exactly what they all need it, and he'll say "You're the only person who really gets through".

That's super isn't it?

Absolutely super.

Before you became Prime Minister you were everybody's darling because you weren't in, but the minute one gets the job the people always of course begin to criticise. How much does criticism worry you, alarm you, upset you?

If you put yourself in the front line you must expect to be fired at and you must expect to be shot at. And you don't say "Well isn't it fair or not" because in a way politics aren't fair. I mean in the end you hope that at the end of the day you made the right decision on big things and that whether people liked them or not you command respect for going about it that way.

Yup. I must give you a message that I - in this hotel in Rome there were some British people who came and spoke to me and they all said "She's taking such a tough line that she's terrific, she's got to keep with it because it'll be good.

As I didn't it would be totally wrong, and if I didn't I think there would - the whole hope for the future would go.

Do you have self-doubt ever?

On the big strategic, on the big decisions and direction. After I've come to a decision no. They're always in the sort of decisions I have to make. Something to be said on one side and something to be said on another. Always. And nothing irritates me more than when people say "Oh I could never be in politics till I see both sides of the question". And I say "What do you think I do?" I not only see both sides of the question: I examine both sides of all sides carefully. The difference between you and me is that I, having examined all sides, carefully make a decision and stick to it and go ahead. I have a tendency, I must say, not to take the easy option. Easy options usually finish up in difficult circumstances, and that's why we never, never, never got out of our problems because people take what seems the easy line now, and I'm determined not to do that. You'll never do anything in life if you take the easy life now. You know you really must accept some challenges in life if you're going to scale the heights. You'll never scale any heights if you take the easy path.

It's always tempting and human to take the easy path to win immediate popularity. And you've had to do some things which have not made you the golden girl.

I know. I know. And what sort of respect would you have if you merely courted popularity? But a great thing now I really think we have done something tremendous in.... I once said changing British opinion because all I've done is bring out things that were there but that have been overlaid with other things for years. People respect a person who takes the decisions which she believes to be right. Even though they're difficult at the time and they do take the difficult path. And you've got to take the uphill road if you want to see the view from the top.

Is that original?

I've no idea. I shouldn't think so. Does the road wind up all the way until it gets to the very end. It's another day's journey take the whole long day from morn to night my friend.

Well that's a view.

Isn't it? It's a poem, isn't it?

So you don't get tired of it, you don't sometimes think

The view from the top isn't original obviously. There's no film "A View from the Top"?

No. We're thinking of "Room at the Top" maybe.

"Room at the Top" am I? Well you go to bed; you put them together,

Anyway, I love the idea. I love the idea. And the uphill road never seems too tough?

No, now and then you shall pause on it and rest a while, learning to go uphill again.

What has astounded me, and these questions are not: they may sound trivial but the article will not be trivial. I think it's important that, that other women put themselves obviously in that position: how on earth do you still look so good, still look so much like a woman. We've always discussed the fact that women are people and we mustn't think of women as women. But on the other hand you are feminine. You haven't become a sort of Golda Meir figure, great as she was. I mean she lost all her looks.

Well she was a very motherly person, yes, well yes. Well no, I, I just don't know, Jean. I have absolutely no idea. I mean some people are made like that and others aren't. I mean I don't have very much time to do very much about it. But don't forget, every single moment of the day there's something interesting going on; something in which you're fascinated by, you're interested in it, or you're disturbed by; all the time there is something going on. It's action and reaction. It might be you're distraught about a particular case and 'please, can I do something about it' and quite a number of those things. It might be the big things you have to do. There's a fantastic amount in foreign affairs that you have to do. But I really think the secret of life is to have enough to do and to be passionately interested in what you're doing.

Are there any advantages?

I mean on the whole the people who work hard stay youngest, don't they?

Yes. I think they do.

The people who work hardest stay youngest. I often notice some, some really very old people - you know some of the over 90s. Well now look at Mayer, the music man. What's it, his first name? The chap who's just had his 100th birthday.

That's the one, the marvellous man.

Yes. Over a 100. Yes, you're passionately interested. Robert Mayer? Robert Mayer. He's passionately interested in young people. Really, if you have a passionate interest in the future, of your family, of your country, of your friends, and do something about it, then you have the means of staying young. Looking young. And, looking at, not looking at them, but, I'll leave it to you. It isn't young: it's being vital and alive, and that's really what it is, isn't it?

You've changed a great deal.

Well you're always telling me that but I have no idea how I could change.

You get better and better.

I've no idea. How have I changed?

Well you are much more, obviously, much more commanding, but you're sort of politer and

Not so tense?

Yes. Exact word.

That's what I thought. Not so tense. Yes.

One wouldn't think, one would think that there'd be more tension. Why, how do you account for this?

Probably because ^{the} knowledge and experience you gain is accumulative, and very few people have it, and therefore you know you've got behind you years of training, years of learning, years of training, years of experience and finally, well, with all of that you should have the means

of reasonable confidence. Provided, I mean, you said you never doubt. Now I don't doubt that. I'm always prepared to question, to re-affirm because the purpose of questioning is not to come to no decision or to overturn a previous decision necessarily. The purpose to question is to say well "Am I right or do we need to change". I'm always prepared to question but so frequently questioning reaffirms what one believed previously.

How do your facts come up?

You always look at them.

How do you react to, how do you react to being called Maggie in the press?

I recognize them. I think it's rather homely. I like it, rather homely, and also it's shorter for the headlines.

Oh you, solving other people's problems.

Margaret's a long word: Maggie is a bit shorter.

I love it. How do you react to violent criticism and caricature?

Well caricature is a part of life, isn't it. I love... you mean the caricatures of Cummings and other people? Ooh, I love them.

Did you mind them?

No they're not only funny but they're pointed, you know; they're, they're curious enough. You and I are word merchants, so I speak and you write, but do you know a caricature or a picture or a snapshot can express more that you can take in instantly.

Yes, quite right.

The paragraphs and columns and articles.

Is there any feature that they pick out that you don't care about in your caricatures?

No. They don't really find me terribly easy to caricature.

No they don't actually. Now I must ask you 2 terribly personal ones.

They observe. I notice that if I'm out in a dress which, you know, has piping round, or some distinctive feature, you'll find it in the caricatures in a couple of days' time. They're very observant. Very observant.

I want to ask you what, one you might find objectionable - I hope you won't. Did you really mind the beer mat of the loo roll that said it's terribly

I thought they were just, they just weren't British. We don't do this. We just don't. I can't explain it anymore. There is something to suggest you don't do it.

Did you mind terribly about all the uproar about your son and the racing and with this and that, and do you mind him racing?

Your children must live their own lives, and I do worry about him racing. But he's, he's, he's very good; he doesn't take risks. He's very responsible about it. And if ever I try to stop anyone from responding to what they regard as their challenge, well I haven't the right to do so. I'd say its none of my, neither of my children will ever attach themselves to my apron strings. Nor have I brought them up that way. And Mark is very, very thoughtful and very affectionate. All right he'd made some mistakes on the publicity side. Who doesn't?

Quite right.

If you're going to do anything in life you'll make some mistakes, and you'll learn from them, and he learned fast.

He did. Yes, that's true.

He's right in, he's right in the firing line, he's right in the front line and that he learnt fast, and I was very proud of ^{him} the way he learned quickly from it. But they're not on my apron strings. They're building their own lives.

But you must

They're taking some pretty enterprising decisions.

But I know how terribly fond you are of them.

Well you guess he's is in, late live in always so thoughtful. If ever I'm under strain he'll always ring up or come in. There's sort of total affection and loyalty is marvellous or there's about.... Never you mind, forget it, or "Don't look at it". And if there's a really nasty personal article and I know it's a nasty personal article, well frankly I don't read it.

Really?

I read very little about myself, personal way about myself. I read about policy things, about decisions; I read very, very little do I read about myself. And if some say there was a rather nasty article some snide remarks this morning, I don't read them and I will tell you why: because I know they would upset me and bother me, and I know that they would bother me. I would be upset for 2 or 3 hours, and I know that that it would, might, might affect the decisions I took in the way that I wasn't concentrating on things in front of me. And it's my job to concentrate on what's in front of me. So I read very little about myself, very little.

How does your husband react to this vicious that is said about you.

I mean,
Oh well, we both know that there will be these things vicious which are said about one, because there are people who are out to topple you. Not merely to topple you, but to topple and destroy everything for which you stand. You know you take the measure of them; you know they will use every tactic however below the belt. All right, so be it. I just say they're not going to win. And that's the way I take, that's the view I take of it. And some of them are vicious. I mean, I'm amazed at how vicious people who meet you and then go and dip their pens in acid. How, usually they haven't met you at all. I'm amazed at how vicious some can be. But it is one of the sins which you get in, if you're in the front line of politics. You must never let it put you off your stroke, and you must never, never, never get a complex of people that persecute you. I've seen people in public life get a complex about what is said about them and they mustn't. Because it will affect your judgement.

But how do you shake off

Well usually I'm on to the next problem, the next piece of work that's got to be done.

Now how do you take defeat, Prime Minister, in your own Party. I mean you've had two - well I'm a bit out of touch with being in Greece - the "Maggie defeated" headline?

Well it wasn't right I'm afraid, because I mean, passionate as I am to get public sector pay into line with what the whole private sector, which is the creative sector, can afford. And strongly as I felt I must tell you that I did feel strongly about the teachers because they've got more than Clegg meant them to have. He made a mistake. Therefore they've got £140 million that I could well do with to help school leavers. Then they got an arbitration award that did not take into account that mistake and quite honestly I did want that money for school leavers; I did want that money to help small businesses and I did want that money to be able to do something else with. But I'm afraid what I've had to do is say, well look, I cannot overturn the arbitration award - I couldn't claw back the £140 million mistake that Clegg had made, he had made it, he apologised, he said he'd made it, they got it, dearly as I would have loved to help school leavers they got that. Then came the arbitration award on top and I had to look to say well you've already had more and you've got a lot more on top of that, can I do anything about it? Now that is, would you understand how I say, it's an arbitration provided for by legislation, not by agreement. In the 1965 Act it was provided by law that if you don't agree with teachers on what they should have you have to go to arbitration. That's provided by law, it's a compulsory arbitration under the law. It's one of the few that is, compulsory under the law. In the law it says the result of that arbitration can only be overturned if national economic circumstances require that it be overturned. Not that national economic circumstances would justify overturning it. Not that it would be advisable in other people's, in the interest of public sector pay generally, to overturn it. National economic circumstances require. And there were one

/or two

or two others in the pipeline that I would have had also to overturn which looks a similar case and I could not say that national economic circumstances required it. I could have said, yes, I believe national economic circumstances justify it. What do we do with MPs and other top but I looked at it and said I cannot say national economic circumstances require it. You know we're not in that total sort of emergency. We're doing everything possible so we don't get into that total sort of emergency so there was just I'm afraid no option. All right it was portrayed as a defeat, it wasn't a defeat, it was observing what the law said.

Now you're going to be very cross with me about this. You promised me that when your Cabinet came in they would all seem so much more marvellous and strong. You seem more marvellous and strong but I'm not

But are the very big things we get really everything we want? I'm sorry, let me put it this way. On the really big economic strategy we're absolutely at one. That's what matters. Of course there are differences on some of the other things, of course there are. You can't get 22 people together without having differences and so we agree what we do and then we abide on the big economic strategy, the strategy on which we won the censure debate. We're absolute at one, we couldn't carry it through unless we were.

Now to come back to a strange thought. What's it like living here and not having a home of your own?

It's something you just have to get used to. There is no private life. I mean you're on the job 24 hours a day. It is just like living above the shop.

Doesn't that grate a bit?

No, it's part of the job and it's very much easier to be here and about when something happens than to find it difficult for them to get in touch with you. At Chequers, you see, there are immediate lines and secure lines of communication. I'd

/rather

rather know than worry that I don't know. Do you see the difference? But it is a much more constricted life. I mean you come in the front door, everyone knows exactly what you're doing, where you're going. It has to be so.

This again sounds trivial, but I think it's so important to so many people. What's it like not being able to cut your own lawn or clean your own oven or do the things that other

You don't cut your own lawn but now and then you do do some of your own things obviously. I don't have any help in if I'm here during the weekends. Now and then someone will come in if I'm going off to lend me a hand on Saturday morning. Otherwise, over the weekends if I'm here I do the cooking

.....you still use a duster

..... well, I don't do much dusting, no. But I will sort things out and cook in the kitchen and clean up in the kitchen when we're here at weekends, of course.

..... and you cook

..... yes, I don't do any great culinary recipes now. I mean you do very simple things. You grill, you do an omelette, poached egg, you grill things, you might do a shepherd's pie or something - nothing really complicated, no. Anyway that's better for you you don't do rich sauces.

Is it very hard to live here?

Anything that's quick, or, two things, it's either got to be quick, you can grill, poach, an omelette, or you can do something like casserole or stew, put it in the oven.

Is that one of the hardest parts of the job living here?

No, no. I don't think I've got any hard parts of the job. You know once you're on top of it all of a sudden you get

two or three things coming up together and then you really are under pressure because you know, acute problems never come singly, they don't. We all say they come in threes and they do. I mean, this last week, when all of a sudden we have Parliamentary problems, all right. We had to take one decision after another and you didn't get the 100 per cent of what you wanted but my goodness we got over 90 per cent of what we wanted. And we got the Bills through. True, we didn't get them through until about 10 o'clock on Thursday night instead of about 10 o'clock on Wednesday night, but if that's the worse thing I've ever had it's not bad is it? And I went across and I was late. If they're late overnight I'm late overnight and we were marching round to Division lobbies altogether. And in the end, just that trouble, I think what the Opposition must realise is that the difference between the Opposition is basically split. If they give us trouble, they must understand that when they face us up with trouble it cements the Party as nothing else does. What they gave me was a totally cemented determined united Party to finish with. Far more, you know, they said just gone away. You know we had to fight for those last two Bills to go through. We had to fight for it and so we were absolutely cemented. They were saying to me, if we have to stay here until Monday, if we have to stay here all weekend we're going to get those Bills through, even if we'd had to put another motion down that we didn't rise on Friday. So we finished up totally at one you know. It was marvellous.

Well, I think it partly answers this question. Has being Prime Minister, is being Prime Minister, all you thought that it would be in the days you spoke to me trying to get your hands on the job.

Well I didn't quite know what it would be and I think, to some extent, it is each of us what you make it. I mean I'm naturally a very, very hard worker. Not only have I had to work all my life but I enjoy working, and of course I'm the most uniquely privileged person in Britain to be doing the supreme job, and it's the job I want to do. But I didn't, I assumed one would be on the go the whole time - one is, I didn't realise one would have to spend quite so much on foreign affairs and the

/reason is

reason is because as people come through this country you're the person they want to see. So you not only receive Prime Ministers, but Ministers of Foreign Affairs, sometimes a Trading Minister, because trade is important to Britain, and quite a lot is doing by contacts between Governments. Also, there is a lot of summitry, Jean, there really is. There's far more summitry than there used to be. There are three European Summits a year. There's one Economic Summit a year. There's a Commonwealth Conference alternate years. Added to that we've now got built into the system a lot of bilaterals, that is to say, we go over to Germany with a few Ministers to meet Helmut Schmidt and his Ministers once a year, they come over here once a year. A lot of bilaterals: two with Germany, two with Italy, one a year with France and then we went to Luxembourg once, we've had a bilateral with the Republic of Ireland once, we're having to go over to Holland. Because you see, what's happening is, on the summitry you don't somehow get nearly as much done at the big summits as you do at the bilateral talks. What happens at the all the bilateral talks is you lay all the groundwork for the summits and you actually get further I think in the bilateral talks than at the big summits and my worry about the big summits is that people somehow think that because 7 or 8 or 9 who get round a table all the problems are going to be solved. And the whole life isn't like that. Magic solutions don't just come out of the air, they come by working at them and working well. Sometimes you will arrange that the final decisions are taken at a summit, and certainly we couldn't have done the European Budget except at summits because I mean they came up finally for Prime Ministers to decide.

I have a delicate question. Obviously you won't want to tell me much, but have you any idea about how The Queen feels about facing a woman Prime Minister?

Oh, none at all. I mean it's the Monarch and the Prime Minister, the Monarch and the Prime Minister and that's the way you meet.

When you look at yourself inside yourself and you're the only person who can see it, how much of Margaret Thatcher is there left or do you see yourself now as the Prime Minister?

/ No, never.

No, never. It's Maggie Thatcher doing this job.

Ah, that is interesting, that is interesting.

I don't like being addressed very much among colleagues as Prime Minister, certainly if you're doing something official, yes, but I still like to be called by my Christian name because I'm a person doing a job and not a job.

Are you as tough as is rumoured, yes you are aren't you?

Yes, I have to be.

Do you mind that? Do you mind having to be tough with colleagues that are dear friends?

No, I've got to be. There's no question of it, I've got to be. They have to be. Sometimes they toughly have to put their decision, you know, their view, and then we have jointly to reach a decision and they know you have to be tough.

Now, perhaps a silly question, but are there any disadvantages to being feminine in a job of such magnitude, either physical or mental?

I think the only disadvantage is that when you get to some extent - here people are used to me - you're more conspicuous and therefore every single thing you do is noted. I mean, you're different and you're more conspicuous. Now Mrs Gandhi is back in India so when we go to the Commonwealth Conference there will at least be two of us, which is fine.

That is a problem.

You see, you're more conspicuous.

Now, you're taken pretty seriously everywhere. Do you ever get the sort of patronising male chauvenist pig anywhere who even thinks that a Prime Minister who is female can be handled?

Years of scientific and legal training don't lead to other people patronising you, in a scientific world where not many other people have that.

No, never. You are an exceptionally good looking woman. Do you find that a disadvantage?

I can't see that

..... oh, believe it

... and to me everything, you must have found out in life it takes you to be much older as you and I are to realise that life isn't a question of looks, it's a question of personality. And after a time, I might put it this way, you cease to notice a person's looks, a person is a personality, and the looks are just a part of that personality. It's the whole personality that counts.

You know I always ask you daft questions so I get marvellous answers.

But really, looks don't bother me at all. I try to turn out tidy and to be nicely turned out, I owe it to my job.

That in itself though can be hellishly difficult when you're watched.

It's an extra thing to think about. I say, nicely turned out, never flamboyant, but nicely turned out. It is important, but it's a routine thing, for me it's a routine thing.

Do you lay it all out the night before?

No, but I know where to find them. One of the things I have to do at weekends is get everything back in the right place so they're ready for the next week. And just to think, now what's coming up next week - I do at weekends. I mean I must think, well is this in reasonable condition, must I have something done to it.

/Do you buy

Do you buy a lot of new clothes.

I buy far more than I would if I weren't doing the job obviously. Far more, because you have to, Don't forget I mean I'm in what I would have called years ago 'best things'. In my upbringing you called best things, when I get up in the morning to the time I go to bed at night except at the weekends, obviously when I'm in the kitchen but you just put on an apron over best things.

So you never get down to the jeans and T shirt scene.

No.

Do you regret not being able to be scruffy.

Well, I mean when you're working late at night you do get scruffy, don't you. I mean when I'm working on a speech at 4 o'clock in the morning you run your hands through your hair, your make-up is practically no longer on because your whole mind is on what you're doing but you can't put something old on just because you don't sit around in good things.

At one time you did say that you were worried and were annoyed about your image. You've so much beaten that image now haven't you

..... I suppose in the end just being what you are prevails.

I know I've got about three minutes. Tell me one thing, when you come towards the end of the term and it's always so that people vote the opposite way - a helluva lot of people do like changing their skirt or something - then, if you're doing things that are unpopular, what will you do then?

I must stick on the path I've chosen.

Even if you lose?

Yes, I must stick to the course I've chosen. I would have

/no

no integrity otherwise. I would not be able, I would have no integrity and I would forfeit all respect and I just must carry on doing what I think is right. I think the trouble with this country is there have been too many politicians who have taken the short-term policy, regardless of the long-term consequences and I'm really long term for getting things right for enhancing the reputation of Britain, the reputation and performance of my country.

That's great.