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J

Nov. 9 2007

Joe

This is every thing I
have on Martha Rountree
Good luck with your
ambitious project

Helen Bentley

Date: 8/25/99
File: _____

The Press Moderator of 'Meet the Press'

In 1938, she moved to New York City, where she worked as a freelance and wrote advertising copy for several magazines. She founded radio's first panel show, "Leave It to the Girls," in 1940 before creating the "Meet the Press," which became the template for the Sunday political talk shows.

Ms. Rountree married Oliver M. Presbrey in 1952. Mr. Presbrey, an advertising executive, died in 1988.

She is survived by two daughters, Martha Wlethorn of Bethesda, Md., and Mary Greene of Duxbury, Mass.; a sister, Ann Rountree Forberg of Greenwich, Conn.; a brother, Calvin Rountree of Hayesville, N.C., and three grandchildren.



1934
Martha Rountree produced several radio and television programs.

Record, before returning to Florida as a reporter for The Tampa Tribune.

Martha Rountree, 87, a Creator of 'Meet the Press'

By JOHN FILES

Martha Rountree, the co-creator and first moderator of the NBC News program "Meet the Press," died on Monday at Sibley Hospital in Washington. She was 87 and lived in Washington.

On June 24, 1945, Ms. Rountree and Lawrence E. Spivak introduced the show on radio, unveiling it two years later on television, where it has since become television's longest-running program. In 1997, at the 50th anniversary celebration of "Meet the Press," held at the National Building Museum in Washington, Ms. Roun-



Martha Rountree produced several radio and television programs.

tree was honored as the only woman who had moderated the program.

In addition to her work with "Meet the Press," she produced several other radio and television shows, including "Keep Posted," "Washington Exclusive," "Leave It to the Girls," "Press Conference" and "Capitol Close Up."

Ms. Rountree lost a coin-toss to Mr. Spivak in 1953 to determine who would buy out the other's interest in the program. They agreed that she would not develop a competing program for at least two years.

"She was a news pioneer who helped create a national treasure," said Tim Russert, the chief of NBC News's Washington Bureau who now serves as moderator of "Meet the Press."

After leaving the program and becoming a popular lecturer, Ms. Rountree in 1965 founded Leadership, a nonprofit political research foundation based in Washington, and served as president of the organization until 1988. A member of the National Press Club and the Women's National Press Club, she received awards in recent years from the Women for Achievement, the National Fraternity of Women in Journalism and the American Legion.

Martha Rountree was born in Gainesville, Fla., in 1911. After spending her youth in Columbia, S.C., she enrolled at the University of South Carolina. She then worked in South Carolina for The Columbia Record, before returning to Florida as a reporter for The Tampa Tribune.

In 1938, she moved to New York City, where she worked as a freelance and wrote advertising copy for several magazines. She founded radio's first panel show, "Leave It to the Girls," in 1940 before creating "Meet the Press," which became the template for the Sunday political talk shows.

Ms. Rountree married Oliver M. Presbrey in 1952. Mr. Presbrey, an advertising executive, died in 1988.

She is survived by two daughters, Martha Wlethorn of Bethesda, Md., and Mary Greene of Duxbury, Mass.; a sister, Ann Rountree Forberg of Greenwich, Conn.; a brother, Calvin Rountree of Hayesville, N.C., and three grandchildren.

Martha Rountree Dies; First 'Meet the Press' Moderator

By MARTIN WRILL
Washington Post Staff Writer

Martha Rountree, 87, who helped shape television history and public affairs journalism as the co-creator and first moderator of the NBC News interview show "Meet the Press," died Aug. 23 at Sibley Memorial Hospital. She had Alzheimer's disease.

"Meet the Press," the longest-running network television show in the world, first went on the air in 1945 as a radio show on the Mutual Broadcasting System. It was created jointly by Miss Rountree and Lawrence E. Spivak. It jumped into television in 1947, before there were even 1 million sets in the nation.

On the show, as its name implies, figures from public life submit to the questions of journalists. It set the pace for public affairs interview journalism and became must viewing for the political community. It remains a Sunday morning ritual in many Washington homes and supplies the substance for many Monday morning newspaper stories.

Besides her role in creating the show and with urging its shift to TV, Miss Rountree, a Florida-born former newspaper reporter, was also said to be the only female moderator in its history.

Unrehearsed interview shows with statesmen and public figures, commonplace today, were a novelty on the airwaves when "Meet the Press" began.

"I think it is important that the public should hear its elected officers speak out and take their stand in answer to direct questions without preparation or oratory," Miss Rountree said in 1946.

"There is nothing so refreshing as unadorned conviction."

Among those who appeared on early shows were such significant figures of the mid-20th century as President Harry S. Truman, Sen. Robert A. Taft (R-Ohio) and Henry A. Wallace, who had been vice president during Franklin D. Roosevelt's third term.

Sen. Joseph R. McCarthy (R-Wis.) appeared, as did United Mine Workers chief John L. Lewis and New York Gov. Thomas E.



1953 FILE PHOTO

Martha Rountree helped create an array of broadcast news shows.

Dewey, who was defeated by Truman in the 1948 presidential campaign.

These were among the most formidable figures of their time, in an age when public life was an almost exclusively male preserve, but Miss Rountree "never felt intimidated by anybody," her daughter Martha Wiethorn said yesterday.

Miss Rountree also produced several other public affairs television shows, including "Keep Posted," "Washington Exclusive" and "Capitol Closeup." The first three guests on "Capitol Closeup" were President Dwight D. Eisenhower, his vice president, Richard M. Nixon, and FBI director J. Edgar Hoover. According to one newspaper account, Hoover was never again interviewed live on the air.

Another of Miss Rountree's shows was "Leave It to the Girls," which began as a radio show in which female panelists sought to give amusing answers to listeners' questions on romance and other matters. In 1960, she was involved in a debate-style TV show called "The Nation's Future."

In a newspaper interview more than 40 years ago, Miss Rountree

described herself as a "blunt-speaking, down-to-earth television news reporter, and I'm proud of it."

"She was a news pioneer who helped create a national treasure," said Tim Russert, NBC News Washington bureau chief, who is current moderator of "Meet the Press."

Miss Rountree sold her share in "Meet the Press" and "The Big Issue" to Spivak in the fall of 1953. Wiethorn said the flip of a coin decided who would buy out whom.

Three years later, she brought to the air a new public affairs show called "Press Conference." It premiered July 4, 1956, with U.S. Attorney General Herbert Brownell responding to the queries of 16 reporters.

Martha Rountree was born in Gainesville, Fla., and was brought up in Columbia, S.C. Interested from an early age in writing, she wrote a short story when she was 9 and worked for the Columbia Record newspaper while in college at the University of South Carolina. She left school before graduating and joined the Tampa Tribune as a reporter.

She moved in 1938 to New York, writing advertising copy and freelancing articles to magazines. "Meet the Press" has been described as designed originally to serve as a promotion for American Mercury, a magazine edited and published by Spivak.

On the original radio show, Miss Rountree was moderator and Spivak the permanent member of the rotating panel of journalistic questioners. Spivak died in 1994.

"Freedom of the press is America's first line of defense," she said in a speech in 1950, at a time when civil liberties were seen as under attack. "It is something that must be fought for continuously—not taken for granted."

Miss Rountree was a longtime Washington resident.

A first marriage ended in divorce. In 1952, she married Oliver M. Presbrey, who died in 1988.

In addition to Martha Wiethorn, who lives in Bethesda, survivors include another daughter, Mary Greene, of Duxbury, Mass., a sister, a brother and three grandchildren.

Martha Rountree, Television Pioneer; at 87

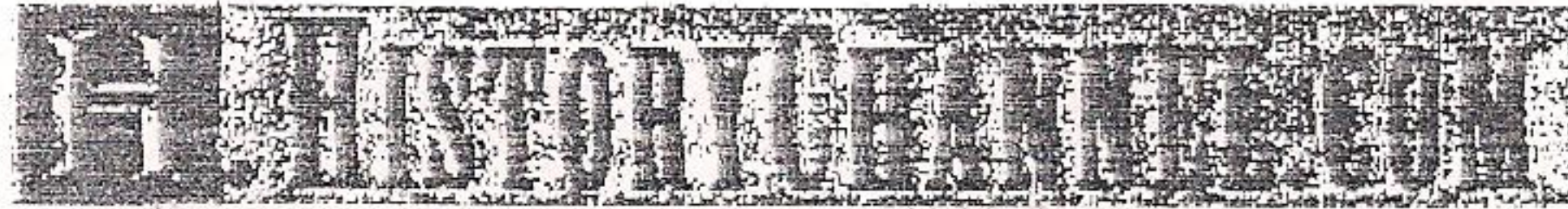
Martha Rountree, best known as the co-creator and first moderator of television's "Meet the Press," died August 23rd at Sibley Hospital in Washington, D.C. after a long illness. She had Alzheimer's Disease. Rountree originated and co-produced "Meet the Press" with Lawrence Spivak, establishing it as a standard of news reporting and news making. Other shows produced by Rountree include "Keep Posted," "Washington Exclusive," "Leave It to the Girls," "Press Conference," and "Capitol Close Up." She is described by Helen Thomas, Chief of UPI's White House Bureau, as "an outstanding woman who was a true pioneer and pathfinder in television. She created 'Meet the Press,' the forerunner of the talk shows we now see on Sundays. She also was an important journalist and had the respect of all of her peers." In November 1997, Rountree was honored at the 50th anniversary celebration of "Meet the Press" at the National Buildings Museum in Washington. She was hailed not only as the first moderator of the discussion program, but also its only woman moderator to date. On learning of her death, Washington Bureau Chief for NBC News and current "Meet the Press" moderator Tim Russert said, "She was a news pioneer who helped create a national treasure: 'Meet the Press.'"

Martha Rountree, born in Gainesville, Florida in 1911, spent her youth in Columbia, South Carolina. While studying at the University of South Carolina, she worked for the *Columbia Record*, then returned to Florida to become a reporter on the *Tampa Tribune*. In 1938 she moved to New York City, where she free-lanced and wrote advertising copy for several magazines and founded a radio production firm with her sister, Ann. Rountree then served as roving editor for *American Mercury* magazine and joined its publisher, Lawrence Spivak, in introducing "Meet the Press," first as a radio program in 1945 and then on television in 1947. The show went on to win the George Foster Peabody Award, as well as the Radio and Television Arts and Sciences Award and the Sylvania Award in its early years. Commenting on her goals for the program in a 1946 *New York Times* article, Rountree said, "I think it is important that the public should hear its elected officers speak out and take their stand in answer to direct questions without preparation or oratory. There is nothing so refreshing as unadorned conviction." Longtime Washington journalist and McClendon News Service founder Sarah McClendon says Rountree was "a world renowned journalist, who put talk show journalism on the air in both television and radio."

After selling her half of "Meet the Press" to Spivak in 1953—the partners flipped a coin to determine which one would buy out the other's interest—Rountree became a popular lecturer. In 1965 she founded Leadership, a nonprofit political research foundation, and served as its president until 1988. In recent years Rountree was active in efforts to restore prayer in public schools. She received awards from the Women for Achievement, the National Fraternity of Women in Journalism, the American Legion and many other national organizations. She has been a member of the National Press Club, the Women's National Press Club, and was the first woman member of the National Space Club.

In 1952 Rountree married advertising executive Oliver M. Presbrey, who predeceased her in 1988. An earlier marriage ended in divorce. She is survived by daughters, Martha Wiethorn of Bethesda, Maryland and Mary Greene of Duxbury, Massachusetts; a sister, Ann Rountree Forsberg of Greenwich, Connecticut; a brother, Calvin Rountree of Hayesville, North Carolina; and three grandchildren.

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301-229-1273 or lihp@aol.com



Tuesday August 24 6:07 PM ET

'Meet the Press' Co-Creator Dies

WASHINGTON (AP) - Martha Rountree, co-creator and first moderator of the NBC News program "Meet the Press" has died at age 87.

Rountree, who suffered from Alzheimer's disease, died Monday at Sibley Hospital.

In addition to originating and co-producing "Meet the Press," she was also the only woman moderator in the show's 52-year history. She also produced several other television shows, including "Keep Posted," "Washington Exclusive" and "Capitol Close Up."

In 1945, she joined Lawrence Spivak in introducing "Meet the Press" as a radio show, and two years later the program aired on television for the first time. She went on the lecture circuit in 1953 when she sold her share of the show to Spivak after a coin toss.

"She was a news pioneer who helped create a national treasure," said Tim Russert, NBC News Washington Bureau chief and current moderator of "Meet the Press."

Rountree was born in Gainesville, Fla., in 1911, and studied at the University of South Carolina. She returned to Florida as a reporter for the Tampa Tribune but moved in 1938 to New York, where she worked as an editor and freelance journalist. She joined NBC seven years later.

In 1965, the award-winning journalist founded Leadership, a nonprofit political research organization, and was its president until 1988.

Rountree's husband, advertising executive Oliver M. Presbrey, died in 1988.

She is survived by two daughters, three grandchildren, a brother and a sister.

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Eulogy of
Martha Rountree Presbrey
Delivered by
The Honorable Helen Delich Bentley
At The
Memorial Service Of Worship
In
The National Presbyterian Church
Washington, DC
August 28, 1999

I'm both honored and humbled to have been asked by Martha Rountrees family to deliver her eulogy today. How appropriate to have this memorial service to Martha Rountree Presbrey in the Chapel of the National Presbyterian Church.

My first direct contact with a woman named Martha Rountree occurred in 1971 after I had read a speech of hers about drugs - and the threat they posed for the United States and our young people.

Martha's dire prediction was the only one I could find at that time - but it was something that was bothering me - the drug threat to the United States. However, no one else seemed to be bothered by it - except that very perceptive lady, journalist, television producer Martha Rountree. I called her up, we chatted, and I asked her if I could use some of her speech and comments in a talk I was to give that week before the Maryland State Dental Association.

In her very charming Southern way, Martha responded with a yes - she was particularly delighted that someone else was going to spread the message. What a different outlook we would have in this country today in many ways if more people would have listened to her warning, a warning she issued only after very careful research.

Research was one of her main fortes. Research for facts; research because she never wanted to issue any papers or talk on any radio or TV show without having full command of the accurate facts involved on the subject to be discussed. And it was her research capability which made it evident to her that a major internal threat to the lifestyle, security, and safety of the United States and its citizens was that of illegal drugs. How right she was three decades ago!

Her voracious appetite for facts was developed early in her youth, along with a desire to be a writer. The combination of the two enabled her to work on the community newspaper in Columbia, South Carolina, while in college at the University of South Carolina. And the combination of the two enabled her to be employed as a reporter with the Tampa Tribune before she had graduated from the university. From there it was on to New York writing advertising copy and freelancing articles to magazines - by combining her two wonderful talents of writing and research - and developing the nation's first radio show panel in 1945 - Leave It To The Girls.

One of those magazines was American Mercury, edited and published by Lawrence Spivak. And it was for the promotion of that magazine that the "Meet The Press" panel show was originated by Martha Rountree. On the original radio show, Martha served as moderator and Spivak as the permanent member of the rotating panel of journalistic questioners. Television came two weeks later. Although many of her friends feel Martha was short changed in the sale of "Meet The Press," in her typical straightforward manner, she made it clear that she and Spivak had agreed that a flip of the coin would decide who would buy out the other. He won. But Martha never was one to bemoan anything negative that might have happened to her. She's still the only female moderator in the history of "Meet The Press."

Her pride drove her to develop new concepts and new ideas. So instead she simply waited out her two years of no compete agreement and then brought to the air a new public affairs show called "Press Conference" which premiered on July 4, 1956, with Attorney General Herbert Brownell as the guest.

The producers of today's parade of Sunday morning news shows and even the news documentaries which are growing in numbers on weekday nights can thank Martha Rountree for opening the doors to have Washington leaders and celebrities as the guest interviewee on all these shows ... which have made them all so popular and "must viewing" if you work in and around the nation's capitol in any way. It remains a Sunday morning ritual in many Washington homes and supplies the substance for many Monday morning newspapers.

Never one who did not have a fresh new idea to put forth, Martha Rountree over the years also produced several other public affairs television shows including "Keep Posted," "Washington Exclusives," and "Capitol Closeup." The first three guests on "Capitol Closeup" were President Dwight D. Eisenhower, Vice President Richard M. Nixon, and FBI Director Herbert Hoover. According to one newspaper account, Hoover never again allowed himself to be interviewed live on the air.

Significant personages who made history in the mid-20th century and who appeared on her early shows included President Harry Truman, Senator Robert Taft, and Henry Wallace, who had been vice president during Franklin Delano Roosevelt's third term. And there was Senator Joseph McCarthy, United Mine Workers Chief John L. Lewis, and Thomas Dewey, who lost the 1948 election to Truman.

"I think it is important that the public should hear its elected officials speak out and take their stand in answer to direct questions without preparation or oratory," Martha said in 1946. There is nothing so refreshing as unadorned conviction.

"Freedom of the press is America's first line of defense," she said in a speech in 1950, at a time when civil liberties were seen as under attack. "It is something that must be fought for continuously not taken for granted."

After leaving the program and becoming a popular lecturer, Martha Rountree in 1965 founded Leadership Foundation, a nonprofit political research foundation based in Washington. She served as its President until 1988 and I served on the board for several years.

Despite all her activity in the media field and the promotion of women taking the lead to "turn things around in this country," Martha Rountree remained close to her family - her beloved Ollie Presbrey and their two daughters Martha and Mary. No mother ever loved her children more than Martha who was constantly trying to find ways to make their lives easier and more comfortable. She loved them so much.

And of course her love for her niece Kristen and nephews Lois and Eric were part of the close love she held for her brother and sister and her pride in her ambassador brother in law ... Everyone except herself

And outside the family she was always worried about someone else - whether it was her Gladys whom she adored, Hugo Seiler who like Martha had dreams and knowledge of the media world and the world of business but let his caring of people always interfere with reaching the pinnacle of fruition.

One part of her life that was typical of Martha- She was legally blind, but never made an issue of it - or told anyone - other than to say they had to write bigger for her to be able to read. One friend found out another way. If you ever had an umbrella around Martha, she would comment on the color.

Martha began to collect umbrellas in every color. She was childlike in her insistence that she have an umbrella to match every dress when she went out, rain or shine. If the sun was out she would laugh and call them parasols, but she always insisted on taking one along - even though she never opened them on a sunny day and she rarely went out in the rain!

One day when she was going into a building with a slight step up, I noticed her using the umbrella ahead of her to feel the step, without faltering and she did the same thing at the door. She couldn't see. This remarkable woman with her great strength and incredible pride was handling her growing problem with her sight in her own inimitable way.

She loved antiques and had a wonderful collection of her own which was fabulous. And the decorations at Christmas time were breath taking, they always made you think about that long ago Christmas painting on the cards.

In a newspaper interview more than 40 years ago, Martha described herself as a "blunt speaking, down to earth television news reporter, and I'm proud of it."

Tim Russert, the chief of NBC News' Washington Bureau who now serves as moderator of "Meet The Press" paid tribute to Martha Rountree with this statement which she would have loved "She was a news pioneer who created a national treasure."

Thank you Martha Rountree for being a true pioneer!