

**INTRODUCTION OF BILL AND JUDITH MOYERS**

*2002 ELEANOR ROOSEVELT VAL-KILL MEDAL*

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Every generation is called upon to contribute to the work of civilization. It is a call each of us must answer -- in the way we raise a child, in the way we care for the dying; in the way we run a factory, in the way we protect a river; in the way we treat our needy, in the way we treat our adversaries. We answer in the hymns we sing, the myths we create, the ideas we teach, the values we nurture, the governments we elect.

These are the stories that Judith and Bill Moyers tell. They tell them so that we can be part of a larger discussion about who we are. They tell them so that we can see ourselves at our best and at our most frail. And they tell them because this is how they have chosen to answer civilization’s call.

As a presenter I am supposed to relate the Moyers’ biographies. Their’s are extraordinary lives devoted to public service. I could easily use the remainder of my time speaking about Judith’s advocacy for children, education and civic engagement beginning with her early years teaching in Scotland and leading to her taking the reigns of Public Affairs Television as its president.

I could speak of Bill’s journey from the seminary to Lyndon Johnson’s White House to the highest echelon of American journalism. I could speak of their innumerable awards and honors and the prolific partnership that has produced the best of public affairs journalism, such as: *Genesis: A Living Conversation; Healing and the Mind; Joseph Campbell and the Power of Myth; Moyers on Addiction, Close to Home; On Our Own Terms, Moyers on Dying*; and, of course, *Trade Secrets*, the expose of the American chemical industry.

In particular, I am reminded to speak about *America’s First River*, a four-hour documentary masterwork that introduced the world to the struggle to save our beloved Hudson River. And for those of you who do not already know, I recommend to you *NOW with Bill Moyers*, very simply the best programming on television.

But rather than spending my remaining moments presenting their full biographies I must instead ask for your attention to a matter of greater urgency that directly involves us all.

It is inspired that we honor Bill and Judith here at Val-Kill. To many, Eleanor Roosevelt will always be the ever-smiling political matriarch, her face a virtual logo for American compassion and optimism. But she was also a fiercely independent progressive, targeted by red-baiters, anti-feminists, the conservative press, the Ku Klux Klan, and J. Edgar Hoover. Happily, the admiration of the American public trumped the politics and prejudice of her
time. Indeed, it galled her enemies that she consistently topped the Gallup Poll’s list of the most admired women in the world.

As we meet here today, the effort to silence Judith and Bill Moyers rolls steadily forward. Influential forces are demanding that public television censor their work, most especially their environmental reporting. The attacks are personal, professional and political, with the ultimate prize being the future of public broadcasting itself. Nonetheless, Bill and Judith refuse to perform a journalistic circus act that balances the truth with known falsehoods. It is a courageous stance at a difficult hour.

We know these are dangerous times in America. It seems our full attention is being diverted to global affairs in a way that it hasn’t since World War II. In times such as these opponents of independent thought, journalistic candor and fair-minded dissent can operate in the shadows, making draconian threats out of public sight and hearing.

But as Eleanor Roosevelt knew well, it is especially during such times that those very qualities, as embodied in the Moyers’ work, must be protected and put in service to the American people.

As did Eleanor Roosevelt, Judith and Bill Moyers help us see the world and ourselves not through the abstract lens of politics and prejudice but the real life experience of the human situation. And I must believe, that like Eleanor Roosevelt’s, their voice is America’s true voice because it is the voice of our better conscience at work.

Join me in showing Bill and Judith our heartfelt appreciation but also in sending out from this gathering the message of our enthusiastic admiration and unflagging support for the remarkable mission they have chosen.

It is with great pleasure that I present them with the 2002 Eleanor Roosevelt Val-Kill medal.