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THE WHITE HOUSE
WASHINGTON

May 7, 1976

MEMORANDUM FOR: ROLAND ELLIOTT
FROM: JIM CONNOR *JEC*
SUBJECT: Gertrude Ederle

The attached clipping from the NEW YORK TIMES was returned in the President's outbox with the following notation:

"Letter of congratulations, etc."

Please prepare such a letter and return to this office for signature.

Attachment -
Article from NEW YORK TIMES
entitled -'Gertrude Ederle All Aglow in
Sports Spotlight Again'

Gertrude Ederle All Aglow In Sports Spotlight Again

By TONY KORNHEISER

Yesterday morning the windows were shut tight and the shades were drawn in the three-story house on 41st Road in Flushing, Queens, where Gertrude Ederle lives.

There were some papers scattered on the front lawn, and the grass needed trimming. It appeared as if nobody was home, as if whoever was living there was busy living somewhere else.

But Gertrude Ederle was home; only she was not receiving any visitors. Yesterday morning she was not up to talking; she was saving her strength for a testimonial dinner.

Last night, in the 50th anniversary year of her swim across the English Channel, she was to be a guest of honor along with other outstanding athletes in various sports of the last 50 years who were either born or raised in New York City. The Boys' Athletic League, also in its 50th anniversary year, had selected such noted athletes as Sid Luckman, Whitey Ford, Jimmy Jacobs, Sugar Ray Robinson, Leslie Mac-Mitchell, Nat Holman and Irving Jaffee for similar honors.

But surely none was as legendary as Gertrude Ederle, the butcher's daughter.

On Aug. 6, 1926, Miss Ederle accomplished what many people had called impossible. She became the first woman to swim the English Channel, inching her way through the 21 miles of cold choppy waters despite a storm so severe that the Channel had been closed to normal shipping.

She swam from Cape Griz-Nez in France to Kingsdown on the English coast, answering her trainer's pleas to quit and seek the safety of the trailing launch with hearty cries of, "Wat for?"

When she returned to New York, she returned as a legend in her own time. Two million people rained ticker



The New York Times

Gertrude Ederle swimming the English Channel in 1926

tape on her parade up Broadway.

The William Morris Agency booked her at \$2,000 a week on a vaudeville tour that took her across the United States, into big cities and tank towns where she gave swimming exhibitions and answered questions.

President Calvin Coolidge called her "America's best girl."

As much as anyone, Gertrude Ederle helped put the roar into the Roaring 20's.

Yesterday morning she was not ready to talk about it.

Last night, however, she was radiant. "I think it's a beautiful thing after 50 years," she said. "The fact that they remember you. I'm so deeply grateful."

Although in 1966 she told a reporter—"Don't write any sob stories about me"—the years have not been particularly kind to America's best girl.

She never married.

She lost almost all her hearing soon after the Channel swim, when she suffered a nervous breakdown during the vaudeville tour.

She fell down a flight of stairs more than 40 years ago, injuring her back to such an extent that she remained in various casts for more than four years. Some doctors predicted that she would not walk again.

But she walked. She even swam. In 1939, at the World's Fair Aquacade in

Flushing Meadows, Queens, she swam for the world to see.

And last night, she said: "If God called me tomorrow, I'd go willingly. I've led a full life, a beautiful life."

"There is rain," she said.

But it is not so beautiful now, even though Miss Ederle accepts the situation.

"But isn't there always sunshine after the rain?"

Two months ago, her closest friend—one of the two women who shared the house in Flushing with her—died, almost in her arms. The woman, Julia Latwick, 76, suffered a fatal heart attack falling at Miss Ederle's feet.

"Trudy was changed since then," said Elsie Ostroski, a longtime friend who works as a secretary at the Flushing Boys Club, just down the block from Miss Ederle's house. "Julia's death was really gotten to her. Trudy stays in the house all the time now. It's like the house is grabbing at her, like it won't let her go."

she swam for the world to see.

Miss Ederle has lived in that house for the last 39 years. Miss Latwick lived with her until her death, and another friend and companion, Pura Espada, has lived there the last 32 years.

"We weren't just friends," Miss Espada said yesterday morning. "We were more like sisters—Trudy, Julia and I."

Miss Espada was away, visiting her family in Puerto Rico, when Miss Latwick died.

"Hoolia and Trudy were alone here," she said. "Hoolia





The New York Times/Chester Higgins Jr.

Miss Ederle at Boys' Athletic League dinner last night

But last night she said she was fighting the loss. She said, "A champion never quits. A champion fights. It was a terrible loss, but I have to get over it."

Miss Espada talked from the front porch. She was animated, agitated. Inside, Miss Ederle was excited and getting ready for her trip to Manhattan and the testimonial. But she was not ready to talk about it.

Last night, however, she was radiant. "I think it's a beautiful thing, after 50 years," she said. "The fact that they remember you, I'm so deeply grateful."

'People Scare Her'

"The tension on Trudy is terrific," Miss Espada said. "You realize, people scare her. She is grateful that they remember her, but she doesn't want to go to this. She is deaf, and the people, when they crowd around her and ask her things, she doesn't hear them. She cannot talk to anyone unless she can see their faces. I didn't want her to go. I wanted to cancel it. But her family, they say she should go. So she is trying."

Miss Ederle is described by those who know her as a simple woman, a woman devoted to helping others. She is mechanically inclined to the point where some in the neighborhood call her "Miss Fix-It."

At 69 years old, time has slowed her stride.

She is alone most of the time now. She is in good health, but she is easily excited.

She rarely goes into Manhattan; she and Miss Espada are fearful because of what they read in the papers and see on television. Her days are spent keeping busy around the house, and at nights she watches TV. Miss Espada says, "She loves those cowboys."

In effect, Miss Ederle has gone from a legend in her own time to a relic in everyone else's, trotted out on anniversaries of her triumph to bask in the glow of an America that used to be.

She rarely swims now; only when she visits friends in Highlands, N. J., where they named a park after her, a park that, naturally, has a pool.

Last night she was ready to be a champion again.

And as Miss Espada spoke from the porch, a shadowed figure was seen at the window. And through the lace she appeared almost ghost-like. But it was only for a moment. Then Gertrude Ederle, America's best girl, disappeared back inside to get ready.