

= Marguerite LeHand =

Marguerite Alice " Missy " LeHand (September 13 , 1898 ? July 31 , 1944) was private secretary to U.S. President Franklin D. Roosevelt (FDR) for 21 years . According to Roosevelt biographer Doris Kearns Goodwin , during FDR 's presidency , LeHand became " the most celebrated private secretary in the country " .

Born into a poor Irish @-@ American family in New York , LeHand attended secretarial school , took a series of clerical jobs , and eventually began to work for the Democratic Party 's New York office . There she came to the attention of FDR 's wife Eleanor during his 1920 vice presidential candidacy and was hired as FDR 's personal secretary . After FDR was partially paralyzed by polio , LeHand became his daily companion , to the extent of adopting his favorite hobbies , games , and drinks . She remained his secretary when he became Governor of New York in 1929 and when he became president in 1933 , serving until a 1941 stroke left her unable to speak . She moved to her sister 's home in Boston and died in 1944 .

The exact nature of LeHand 's relationship with FDR is debated by historians . It is generally accepted that their relationship contained a romantic element , though scholars remain divided on whether the pair had a sexual relationship . LeHand was engaged to U.S. Ambassador William Bullitt in 1933 , but never married , later asking a friend , " How could anyone ever come up to FDR ? "

= = Early life = =

LeHand was born in Potsdam , New York , to Daniel J. and Mary J. (née Graffin) LeHand , who were the children of Irish immigrants . When Marguerite was young , her father , a gardener with a drinking problem , deserted the family . She had a sister , Anna , and two brothers , Daniel and Bernard . The family later moved to Somerville , Massachusetts . As a child , LeHand was struck by rheumatic fever , and Eleanor Roosevelt later stated that the disease had left her delicate and barred from strenuous exercise . She graduated from Somerville High School in 1917 and then attended secretarial school . Although she never attended college , in 1937 Rosary College recognized her professional achievements with an honorary Doctor of Laws .

After holding a variety of clerical positions in the Boston area and passing the Civil Service exam , she moved to Washington , DC to serve as a clerk during the First World War . At the recommendation of Charles McCarthy , Roosevelt 's assistant at the Navy Department , she became a secretary with the Democratic Party 's New York headquarters . In 1920 , when Franklin Roosevelt was running for Vice President on a ticket with James M. Cox against Warren Harding and Calvin Coolidge , LeHand 's work on the campaign and her clear personal devotion to FDR caught the eye of the Roosevelts . In early 1921 , FDR hired her as his personal secretary and gave her the initial job of cleaning up his correspondence . Roosevelt biographer Jean Edward Smith described the young LeHand as " five feet , seven inches tall ... warm and attractive , with ink @-@ blue eyes , black hair already turning gray , and an engaging throaty voice . She was also modest , well mannered , exceptionally capable , and thoroughly organized . "

= = Secretary to Roosevelt = =

LeHand quickly became a key part of Roosevelt 's staff , managing his correspondence and appointment calendar . She was nicknamed " Missy " by Roosevelt 's sons and soon became popularly known by this name . In turn , she nicknamed her boss " F.D. " , a name only she was allowed to use . In the summer of 1921 , Roosevelt was struck by polio during a vacation to Campobello Island , leaving him paralyzed below the waist ; LeHand then became his inseparable companion . She once described her early work with FDR thus :

The first thing for a private secretary to do is to study her employer . After I went to work for Mr. Roosevelt , for months I read carefully all the letters he dictated ... I learned what letters he wanted to see and which ones it was not necessary to show him ... I came to know exactly how Mr.

Roosevelt would answer some of his letters , how he would couch his thoughts . When he discovered that I had learned these things it took a load off his shoulders , for instead of having to dictate the answers to many letters he could just say yes or no and I knew what to say and how to say it .

Each winter in the mid @-@ 1920s , FDR would spend four months on his houseboat , Larocco , off the Florida coast . LeHand lived with him and acted as his hostess . She also accompanied him to the spa town of Warm Springs , Georgia , overseeing and encouraging his physical therapy . In early 1927 , FDR sold the Larocco , leaving LeHand distraught by the disruption of their life together ; she had a nervous breakdown , and was briefly hospitalized and placed under suicide watch . She recovered and returned to work in November .

LeHand opposed FDR 's proposed plan to run for Governor of New York in 1928 , telling him , " Don 't you dare " . When he ultimately decided to run , she suffered another illness that Goodwin describes as " probably a second nervous breakdown " . By the time he was elected and assumed office , however , she was well enough to resume work and moved into the second floor of the Governor 's Mansion in Albany , continuing on as his secretary . With Eleanor often away working in New York City during this time , LeHand was FDR 's day @-@ to @-@ day companion . During her long tenure as FDR 's secretary , LeHand came to share many of his likes and dislikes . She enthusiastically learned to play poker , and would spend hours working with him on his stamp collection . She adopted even his figures of speech and favorite drinks .

Roosevelt was elected President of the United States in 1932 , assuming the office in 1933 . There was little doubt that LeHand would follow him to the White House . As her obituary in the New York Times said , " when her employer was elected to the Presidency , it had become an established fact that neither other offers of employment or proposals of marriage could entice the prematurely gray and handsome young woman from the career she had chosen . " During Roosevelt 's tenure as president , LeHand became a federal employee . Until the 1941 stroke that incapacitated her , she lived on the third floor of the White House and continued to manage Roosevelt 's daily business . She also presided as the White House hostess during Eleanor 's absences . In August 1933 , Newsweek ran a profile of her describing her as FDR 's " Super @-@ Secretary " , making her nationally famous .

= = Relationship with Roosevelt = =

The question of whether LeHand and Roosevelt 's relationship contained a sexual component was widely discussed among their contemporaries and continues to be debated by historians . Hazel Rowley argues that " there is no doubt that Franklin 's relationship with Missy was romantic " , but notes the possibility that the relationship could not have been consummated due to FDR 's disability . Goodwin states that " beneath the complexity , it is absolutely clear that Franklin was the love of Missy 's life , and that he adored her and depended on her for affection and support as well as work " . Doug Wead wrote in his work on the parents of presidents , *The Raising of a President* ,

Some Roosevelt historians insist that their relationship was never consummated . Eleanor and the children accepted the relationship , which speaks for its innocence . Sara [Roosevelt] spoke favorably of Missy 's family and upbringing . Years later , only Elliott , of all the children , would declare that it had not been as benign as historians like to believe .

In 1973 , FDR 's son Elliott published *An Untold Story : The Roosevelts of Hyde Park* , in which he recalled seeing LeHand in his father 's lap and alleged that she " shared a familiar life in all its aspects with father " . His eldest brother Jimmy disagreed , arguing that FDR 's illness had made sexual function too difficult for him to have a physical affair . " I suppose you could say they came to love one another " , he wrote , " but it was not a physical love . "

Despite the closeness of LeHand and Franklin 's relationship , Eleanor and LeHand remained on good terms . Eleanor Roosevelt biographer Blanche Wiesen Cook describes the First Lady as treating LeHand warmly , " as an elder daughter or , in the manner of Asian matriarchs , as the junior wife " . The two women went shopping together , and Eleanor took a solicitous interest in LeHand 's smoking and general health . Eleanor also accompanied LeHand to her mother 's funeral

in Potsdam in 1932 . Elliott later stated that he believed " Missy alleviated Mother 's guilt " , allowing her to travel without worrying that Franklin would lack for companionship . In one of her later books , Eleanor wrote that she occasionally failed to " meet the need of someone whom I dearly love " , stating , " You must learn to allow someone else to meet the need , without bitterness or envy , and accept it . " Cook reads these passages as veiled references to LeHand 's role in Franklin 's life , and Eleanor 's acceptance of that role .

= = = Other relationships = = =

LeHand had a brief romance with Eleanor 's bodyguard (and rumored love) Earl Miller in 1931 . Miller later told biographer Joseph Lash that he had begun the affair out of respect for Eleanor , feeling that she was hurt by LeHand 's relationship with Franklin . LeHand quickly became attached to Miller , but broke off the affair after discovering that he was also seeing another White House worker .

In 1933 , LeHand became engaged to the diplomat William Christian Bullitt , Jr . , then the U.S. ambassador to Russia . FDR 's son James later described this as " the one real romance " of her life . However , the engagement ended after LeHand visited him in Moscow and reportedly discovered him having an affair . Later in life , a friend asked LeHand if she regretted not having married , to which LeHand replied , " Absolutely not ... How could anyone ever come up to FDR ? "

FDR aide and confidant Harry Hopkins briefly courted LeHand in 1939 , following the death of his second wife , Barbara . Goodwin states while the pair were close , and their friendship sparked Washington gossip , but nothing appears to have come of it : " Missy had probably cut it short , as she had cut short every other relationship in her life that might subordinate her great love for FDR . "

= = Illness , death , and memorials = =

In June 1941 , LeHand , who had suffered rheumatic fever as a child and was somewhat frail , collapsed at a White House dinner party and two weeks later suffered a major stroke that left her partially paralyzed with little speech function . A factor that may have led to her illness was stress stemming from fears that the exiled Princess Märtha of Sweden , a Washington @-@ area resident during World War II , had replaced her as FDR 's favorite companion , occupying the seat next to him that had long been LeHand 's in automobile rides . FDR paid LeHand 's medical bills and made provisions in his will for her care . During the 1941 Christmas season , LeHand , now an invalid , attempted suicide . In early 1942 , she spent some weeks in her old room at the White House , but quickly deteriorated due to her frustrations at not being able to help . After an incident in which she tried to set herself on fire , it was agreed that LeHand would return to her sister 's home in Somerville , Massachusetts , and she departed from Washington on May 16 , 1942 .

FDR rewrote his will to leave half of the income from his estate (which was eventually probated at more than \$ 3 million) for LeHand 's care , and half to Eleanor . The will stated that upon LeHand 's death the income would go to Eleanor , with the principal eventually divided equally among his children . As LeHand died before FDR , her half reverted to Eleanor .

An assistant of LeHand 's , Grace Tully , took over as Roosevelt 's secretary , but was never a companion for Roosevelt in the same way as LeHand had been . During LeHand 's brief return to the White House after her stroke , to help her feel included , Tully brought letters and State Department correspondence for her to read .

When LeHand died on July 31 , 1944 , the president issued a statement :

Memories of more than a score of years of devoted service enhance the sense of personal loss which Miss LeHand 's passing brings . Faithful and painstaking , with charm of manner inspired by tact and kindness of heart , she was utterly selfless in her devotion to duty . Hers was a quiet efficiency , which made her a real genius in getting things done . Her memory will ever be held in affectionate remembrance and appreciation , not only by all the members of our family but by the wide circle of those whose duties brought them into contact with her .

Eleanor Roosevelt attended LeHand 's funeral in Cambridge , Massachusetts , over which Bishop (later Cardinal) Richard Cushing presided . Other mourners included Associate Supreme Court Justice Felix Frankfurter and former ambassador Joseph P. Kennedy . In her will , LeHand left the furniture in her White House apartment to Grace Tully and the First Couple .

= = = SS Marguerite LeHand = = =

In March 1945 , the United States Maritime Commission christened an 18 @, @ 000 ton C3 cargo vessel , the SS Marguerite LeHand , in Pascagoula , Mississippi . As LeHand was leaving on her maiden voyage , she struck the U.S. Coast Guard lighthouse tender Magnolia amidships , sinking it and killing one Coast Guardsman .

= = = Representations in television and film = = =

LeHand was a character in the 1958 Broadway play Sunrise at Campobello and its 1960 film adaptation , in which she was played by Jean Hagen . The productions portray FDR 's initial struggles with polio after his 1921 diagnosis , and his decision to continue his political career .

Priscilla Pointer played the role of LeHand in the 1977 ABC television production Eleanor and Franklin : The White House Years . In the 2012 movie Hyde Park on Hudson , which portrays the visit of British monarchs George VI and Queen Consort Elizabeth to FDR 's estate at Hyde Park , LeHand is played by Elizabeth Marvel .

LeHand 's work and friendship with Franklin Roosevelt is chronicled in the 2014 documentary film The Roosevelts , directed by Ken Burns .