

Letters to Mrs. Roosevelt



During her first year in the White House, Mrs. Roosevelt received 300,000 pieces of mail from adults and children. She continued to receive hundreds of thousands of letters in the years that followed.

The First Lady had a secretary who was in charge of the mail. Her secretary would read the mail and either reply to it or send it to another department for action. She would also select about 50 letters a day for Mrs. Roosevelt to read. The First Lady would sometime dictate replies to those letters.

None of the children in this story received personal replies from Eleanor Roosevelt. She gave her support to them in a different way: by working to establish government programs for young people. The National Youth Administration (NYA) and the youth-oriented programs of the Works Progress Administration (WPA) are two examples.

#1:

Star Route One
Albertville, Ala.
January 1, 1936

Dear Mrs. Roosevelt,

For some time I have wished to be acquainted with you. Or merely to receive a letter from you. I have wished much to see you, but as I am a poor girl and have never been out of our state that will be impossible I guess.

Mrs. Roosevelt since I have been in high school I have been studying modern things and conveniences. I took your family for my study. I have found the study to be the most interesting subjects I could have found. In the study I, at all times know where you are, by reading all papers I find at school

and elsewhere. I find what you are doing. You may never had given this a thought, but to think over our daily lives there is a good story to it.

My life has been a story to me and most of the time a miserable one. When I was 7 years old my father left for a law school and never returned. This leaving my mother and 4 children. He left us a small farm, but it could not keep us up. For when we went back to mother's people the renters would not give us part. and we were still dependent. I have been shoved to pillow to post that I feel very relieved to get off to my self.

I am now 15 years old and in the 10th grade. I have always been smart but I never had a chance as all of us is so poor. I hope to complete my education, but I will have to quit school I guess if there is no clothes can be bought. (Don't think that we are on the relief.) Mother has been a faithful servent for us to keep us to gather. I don't see how she has made it.

Mrs Roosevelt, don't think I am just begging, but that is all you can call it I guess. There is no harm in asking I guess eather. Do you have any old clothes you have throwed back. You don't realize how honored I would feel to be wearing your clothes. I don't have a coat at all to wear. The clothes may be too large but I can cut them down so I can wear them. Not only clothes but old shoes, hats, hose, and under wear would be appreciated so much. I have three brothers that would appreciate any old clothes of your boys or husband. I wish you could see the part of North Alabama now. The trees, groves, and every thing is covered with ice and snow. It is a very pretty scene. But Oh, how cold it is here. People can hardly stay comfortable.

I will close now as it is about mail time. I hope to hear from you soon. (ans real soon)

Your friend,
M. I.

(15 year old female)

Reply to the letter:

January 4, 1936

My dear Miss I:

Mrs. Roosevelt asks me to acknowledge your letter and to express her regret that because of the great number of similar requests, she has found it impossible to comply with them, much as she would like to assist all those who appeal to her.

Assuring you of Mrs. Roosevelt's sympathy, I am

Very sincerely yours,
Malvina T. Scheider
Secretary to
Mrs. Roosevelt

#2:

Port Morris N.J.

March 20, 1934

My Dear Mrs. Roosevelt,

Do you realize that "Easter" is at hand? Do you realize how many hearts are broken on this account? Do you realize how hard its going to be for most people? Like me, for instance, I am a young girl of fifeteen and I need a coat, so bad I have no money, nor any means of getting any. My father has been out of work for two years.

My brother works on the C.W.A. but he is, or rather has been, insane in an asylum and has taken most of our money. My mother gets 'fits' when I ask her to buy me something new. Poor mother, I sypathize with her because it has been very hard on her, this depression, and having no money at all but debts piling up on us. I want to tell you something: We were once the richest people in our town but now, we are the lowest, considered, the worst people of Port Morris.

For Easter some friends of mine are thinking of getting new out-fits and I just have to listen to them. How I wish I could have a least a coat. That would cost about \$5.00 at least. I need a dress. I want one and it only cost \$.79 cents. Dear Eleanor how I wish I had this coat and dress for Easter I would be the happiest girl. I love you so much.

Please send me about \$6.00. I thank you so much.

A. C.

Port Morris, N.J

(15 year old female)

#3:

Old Saybrook, Conn.

July 27, 1938

Dear Mrs. Roosevelt:

I am a poor *colored* girl who thinks quite a lot of you and your family, and I know you have done a lot for my race and we appreciate it immensely.

Now I am going to ask you two personal favors which I hope you can do. The first is: *will you find my daddy a job* as caretaker and gardener on an estate or as a janitor of a club or theater? He can't find one and we can't afford to put an advertisement in the papers. He has sixteen years experience.

The second thing I want to ask you to do for me is a *big* favor but I do hope and pray you will do it. My situation is as follows: I am a girl who lives in this small town called Old Saybrook. I was born here and have lived here all of my life. In June of 1935, I was graduated from the Old Saybrook High School and in June of 1936, I was post graduated from the same high school. Now I desire to continue my education by studying "theology" at the "Moody Theological College" in Chicago. Upon graduation from Moody College I would like to become a foreign Missionary or professional choir singer or teacher.

I am ambitious and determined to succeed, and because I am determined to succeed and ambitious I am writing to ask you if *you will* and *could* please finance my expenses for me. You don't know what it would mean to me if you would do it for me. You see, I couldn't bring my self to ask just any body to do

this. I had to ask some one who has money and some one who is good and kind to *colored* people and does not *hate* them. You know as well as I do that a lot of the white people hate the colored people, so I couldn't ask just anybody like a white girl could. Therefore I was doomed until I thought if you. I hope you won't think I am bold in asking you to do this for me.

I would try to complete my course in about 2 1/2 years. There is no charge for tuition. But I must pay for my room and board which would be about seven (7) dollars a week. Then I must pay for incidentals etc. I figure that if you would allow me ten (10) dollars a week I could make my ends meet. We go to school from setember to the first week in August. Negros are not allowed to stay at the dormitories so I would have to room and boad outside. The superintendent said that he would find me a suitable place to stay. Then I would need about eight dollars (\$8) extra to have four of my teeth fixed before I can get my doctors certificate in and checked by Moody College.

I would like to go this fall in September so I wish you would let me hear from you right away. I have been out of school 2 years already and would not like to keep waiting. I tried to get a job but none of the people wanted me because I have no experience in house work. Now it is too late for me to get a job because August is here and it will soon be September. I don't feel smart enough to work my way through and keep up with my studies at the same time. Therefore, now that it's so late I am asking you for help. I want you to understand that I would be willing and glad to pay you back after I had been graduated and received a position. I would like to pay you so much at a time until I had it all paid up.

I *beg* and *implore* you please do not give my name to the newspapermen and please do not give them this letter to print. I would be very hurt and embarrassed; this is a personal matter between you and me. I do not want my name in the papers because I live in a small town and everyone knows me, and they would make fun of me, I know. So, once again I beg you do not let the newspapermen hear of this. *Thank you very much.*

Hoping you will get my daddy a job so that he can pay his bills and hoping that you will lend me the money for my schooling so that I may go in September, I am,

Yours affectionately,
W. B.

P.S.

I have tried to get a loaning concern to lend me the money, but they don't want to wait, until I have been graduated, for their money. I have been trying to get work or some means to get to Moody ever since I was graduated and because my future looked black I have come to you in desperation. I hope you will lend a hand to a poor colored girl who would appreciate it and I will endeavor to make myself worthy of your extented hand and kindness. You understand that I would like to pay it back and would like about ten (10) dollars a week and eight dollars extra in advance. I want to go in September. Once more I will beg you not to give my name and this letter to the newspapermen or any officials. Thanking you for what you will do for me, I remain

Yours respectfully,
W. B.

(black female, college-age)

#4:

Mason, Wisconsin
January 9, 1934

Dear Mrs. F. Roosevelt,

I suppose you'll be kind of surprised to hear from a poor little girl. I am ten years old. On Christmas eve I had wished for Santa Clause to come but my mama said the chimney was blocked & he couldn't come, so I had a poor Christmas. I was expecting Santa to bring me some things.

I lost my daddy when I was two years old.

I have read in the papers how good you are to the poor and thought maybe you can help me some. I will appreciate it all my life.

To-day we have started school from our Christmas vacation & all the children talk about how many presents Santa has brought them & I felt so bad cause I had nothing to say. I guess that is all. My address is

R#2, Box 7
Mason, Wisconsin

Yours truly,
M. A.

(10 year old female)

#5:

42-06 159 Street
Flushing, New York
Mar. 22, 1934

Dear Mrs. Roosevelt,

Please excuse the paper. I have never asked anybody for anything before and I feel kind of awkward writing this so please excuse any mistakes.

I am in the second term in Flushing High School and have managed to buy notebooks and pad so far. This being the spring term spring football is in session. This being my favorite sport I am trying out for the team. I managed to loan from a boy friend shoulder pad, helmet, and football pants but he didn't have any luck in securing a pair of football shoes. Practise started yesterday. I wore sneakers and had my ankle cut by a fellow with shoe's on. I came home last night and spoke to my parents about getting a pair of shoes.

I'm sure they would like me to have these but my father, who works three days a week makes only \$13.44 on the Long Island State Park Commission said we could not afford them.

I thought one of your sons may have an old pair of football shoes they do not use now. I wear size eight.

Please answer even if you can't do anything for me.

Thanking you in advance,

C. K.

(male, high school age)

Source: "Dear Mrs. Roosevelt" (<http://newdeal.feri.org/eleanor/index.htm>)