

A Look Inside Nixon's Mail

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Laguna Hills Leisure World, Orange county

A little boy sent former President Nixon a container of nickels and dimes — \$1.85 in all:

"I've been in a hospital, and I know how hard it was to find change to call my mama," he wrote the hospitalized Mr. Nixon.

"Maybe this will help you when you want to call home."

A woman from the Haight-Ashbury sent the former President a lightweight wool coverlet for his injured leg. The handmade monair was dyed brown with natural fruit juices.

"I'm not a Republican," the woman wrote, "but I don't want anything to hurt your leg."

An envelope containing a \$10 bill, \$3 in food stamps and a letter telling Mr. Nixon how much the writer loved and admired him came from a black woman in Mississippi.

"That kind of letter is set aside so Mrs. Nixon can send a reply," said Kathleen Bryant, a volunteer who has gone to the Nixon residence

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in nearby San Clemente three times a week for the past six months helping read and answer the mail.

Her chore is just one of the tasks assigned to the 50 to 60 unpaid helpers who regularly drive from the Leisure World retirement community and other developments in the area to work in quarters previously occupied by prominent members of the Nixon staff.

About half the volunteers spend their days building an enormous index of Nixon supporters, filling in the names and return addresses of well-wishers on 3x5 index cards that are added each day to an alphabetized file.

"I have about four or five girls typing and up to 20 printing names and address-

said. "Then I met him and realized he had been protecting his employees. I don't know many bosses who would go that far to shield their employees, but he's that kind of a man."

Many of the volunteers have never seen the Nixons, but Mrs. Bryant does her work in the office formerly assigned to General Alexander Haig when he was Mr. Nixon's chief of staff.

es on the cards," said Mrs. Bryant's husband Edwin, a retired Hollywood film editor.

Bryant said he was told the cards were being accumulated so that some day the Nixons could send "thank you" notes to everybody who offered good wishes.

Meanwhile letters go out to those who send cash or other gifts.

"Mrs. Nixon acknowledges every contribution — whether it is blood, money, cheese, pears, potatoes, religious medals, Steuben glass or a gift from the dime store," Mrs. Bryant said.

"I write 300 to 350 letters a day on my typewriter, and Mrs. Nixon signs them that night. Sometimes she substitutes a hand-written message.

"She will never send out a letter without a zip code, and she will never sign a letter addressed to 'Ms.'"

Lois Norman, who is married to a retired engineer and who lives in a nearby subdivision, has joined the volunteer group.

"Some of the letters are so beautiful you just want to cry over them," Mrs. Norman said. "President Nixon sees some of them, but if he could read them all, they would do him more good than all the pills he's taken."

"Most of them come from small towns," said Melba Terry, a former air line stewardess who roomed with Mrs. Bryant in New York after World War II. She is married to a high school football coach, and like the other volunteers gathered for an interview in Leisure World is a strikingly handsome woman.

The volunteers recalled some of the letters they had seen.

She and her husband have at least a glance of the Nixons and often exchange some words of greetings nearly every day they go to San Clemente.

"We were among the first people he faced after he said good-by to the staff in Washington," Mrs. Bryant said. "He seemed surprised

"The letters from children come looking the way kids' letters do, with hearts drawn on them or X's for kisses or soldiers," Mrs. Bryant said.

"A boy had drawn a picture of a soldier on a letter that came the other day. He wrote, 'Some day I'm going to be a soldier and fight for America.'"

Occasionally the mail turns up a taunt.

"Well, congratulations, Mr. and Mrs. Nixon," one critic wrote. "With a little more misfortune you'll get down to Social Security and see how we live."

But most critics of the former President are not moved to write their views. The vast majority of those who write — perhaps 99

per cent, the volunteers estimated — are moved by friendship or compassion.

"You'd think half the people in the United States have had phlebitis," Mrs. Terry said. "Someone sent a 167-page letter, starting from the time he (the writer) was born and telling how someone in the family was cured of phlebitis."

One man mails Mr. Nixon a pair of support hose once a month so he can move about more comfortably.

A woman — apparently elderly, to judge from her handwriting — wrote a "Dear Pat" letter offering advice on how to take care of an invalid.

"Dress him properly," she wrote. "Nothing like a new suit to pick a man up — but no plaids, please."

The other day a woman from Munich sent three \$1 bills and said, "It's all the American money I have. Use it any way you need it."

Other Germans have sent marks, confident that the Nixons could get them changed into dollars easily enough. There have been rubles from Russia, too, and local currency from India, Italy and other countries.

Like all the money, the rubles and lire have been sent to Rabbi Baruch Korff, who is attempting to raise about a million dollars to pay legal and other expenses.

On the other hand, the \$3 worth of food stamps sent by the woman from Mississippi was returned to her with thanks.

Most of the wide range of gifts, from skiing hats and neckties to hand-crocheted napkins and bathroom towels and two lace doilies received recently from "a friend from Montreal" go to institutions.

Bibles and religious medals are forwarded to appropriate religious institutions.

"He has been getting a lot of medals of St. Jude," said Mrs. Bryant. St. Jude is the patron saint of the impossible.

Cranberries from Massachusetts were strung up on the Christmas tree in the area where the volunteers work. During the holiday season the volunteers supplemented their brown bag lunches with apples, oranges, fruit cake ("We were up to here in fruit cake"), fudge and other delicacies sent by well-wishers.

The signs of affection lifted the volunteers' spirits.

"I knew he hadn't killed anybody, stolen any money or done anything that hasn't been done in politics for years," said Phyllis Valdez, granddaughter of a San Francisco Bay ferryboat captain and a former member of the education department faculty at UCLA.

"I was pleased to see so many people who reacted as they did."

Chiquita Williams, widow of a Standard Oil official, said she learned she was not alone in continuing to support the former President.

"I was beginning to think there was something wrong with me, but now I see that other people hold him in the same esteem and, yes, reverence," she said. "The Democrats are paranoid. They're going to have to answer for their hatred some day."

Not everyone entered the project with the same enthusiasm as Mrs. Valdez and Mrs. Williams. Mrs. Bryant, for example, agreed to help out for an afternoon last fall, thinking it would be a short-term project.

"I wanted to help Mr. Nixon—I wasn't so gung ho about him," Mrs. Bryant

but pleased to see us. I said, 'You look great, Mr. President.'"

Those in the group who have seen the Nixons regularly say the former President seems to keep improving in appearance and in physical well-being.

But they are a little concerned about Mrs. Nixon. They think she looks tired.