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An Aide Says Mrs. Nixon 'Really Cares' About Mail

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WASHINGTON, Feb. 14 — Statesmen want to visit the First Family in San Clemente, Calif.; charitable organizations want a memento from the White House to sell at a bazaar; children scribble crayon notes saying, "We love you, Mrs. Nixon," and elderly people with feeble hands write to ask for the First Lady's help to get more Social Security.

Requests such as these, along with letters of praise and criticism, pour into the White House, addressed to Mrs. Nixon, at a rate that averages 3,000 letters a week. She answers them all, according to her correspondence director, Mrs. Gwen King. Mrs. Nixon devotes four or five hours daily to her mail, Mrs. King said.

After rising early and eating a light breakfast, Mrs. Nixon sits down at her desk in her small blue and yellow office and reads about 200 letters a day.

"At first I couldn't believe it was true," said Mrs. King, who directs Mrs. Nixon's correspondence staff of eight. "But I know she reads them all, because she catches the slightest little thing we might miss."

Yellow Slip Attached

After the correspondence staff opens each letter and drafts a reply for Mrs. Nixon, a little yellow slip is attached to the papers for Mrs. Nixon's comments.

A letter from one boy who had mentioned his rock collection came back from Mrs. Nixon with a little yellow note saying, "You can collect some pebbles" from the White House walk, Mrs. King recalled.

"If we miss a request for a picture, the yellow message will read, "Pls encl RN & PN"—Mrs. Nixon's shorthand for a color picture of her and the President—Mrs. King continued.

Not satisfied with a reply to an elderly woman, an Italian immigrant who wanted to become a United States citizen before she died, Mrs. Nixon returned the letter to her staff with a request that they try to do something for the woman.

The staff quickly found out that the woman, who could not read or write, had been in the country long enough to have the Federal literacy requirement waived.

"Nearly every letter receives a reply," Mrs. King said. "We only get a few kooky letters." She added:

"So many of the letters ask for help that the First Lady can't give. Often we will use a standard letter to thank people for writing and tell them their letter has been forwarded, with Mrs. Nixon's reply, to the Social Security office, the Department of Health, Education and Welfare, or whatever agency of the Government can help them."

Mrs. King asserts that Mrs. Nixon reads and signs almost every letter. "She would go right through the roof" if the staff asked her to let someone else sign her letters, Mrs. King said of Mrs. Nixon. "She absolutely refuses."

"The great bulk of the mail comes from people who want to express friendship," Mrs. King said. But she added that Mrs. Nixon also answered critical mail.

"We were bombarded with indignant letters after the Harvard Lampoon printed a picture of Henry Kissinger in the nude," Mrs. King recalled. "I had to write and explain it was just a spoof."

Along with spending hours signing her name to thank-you notes from people who want to give the First Lady book markers, poems and calendars, Mrs. Nixon also tries to grant requests for souvenirs from the White House.

Hundreds of photographs, birthday and anniversary cards, and recipes—eight "family favorites" are printed on White House stationery to meet the demand—go out each week with the First Lady's signature.

"She really cares about her mail," Mrs. King said.