

Letter from Illinois

February 1936

Mr. and Mrs. Roosevelt
Wash., D.C.

Dear Mr. President:

I'm a boy of 12 years. I want to tell you about my family. My father hasn't worked for 5 months. He went plenty times to relief, he filled out application. They won't give us anything. I don't know why. Please you do something. We haven't paid 4 months rent. Everyday the landlord rings the door bell, we don't open the door for him. We are afraid that will be put out, been put out before, and don't want to happen again. We haven't paid the gas bill, and the electric bill, haven't paid grocery bill for 3 months. My brother goes to Lane Tech. High School. he's eighteen years old, hasn't gone to school for 2 weeks because he got no carfare. I have a sister she's twenty years, she can't find work. My father he staying home. All the time he's crying because he can't find work. I told him why are you crying daddy, and daddy said why shouldn't I cry when there is nothing in the house. I feel sorry for him. That night I couldn't sleep. The next morning I wrote this letter to you in my room. Were American citizens and were born in Chicago, Ill. and I don't know why they don't help us Please answer right away because we need it. will starve Thank you.

God bless you.

[Anonymous]
Chicago, Ill.

From *Down and Out in the Great Depression: Letters from the Forgotten Man* by Robert S. McElvaine.
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Letter from North Dakota

Dickinson, N.D.
October 30, 1933

Dear Mr. Hopkins:

I just wound up my first day's work in North Dakota. I must say there was nothing particularly joyous about it.

This afternoon . . . I drove . . . to a shabby little country church, standing bleakly alone in the center of a vast tawny prairie land.

Grouped about the entrance to the church were a dozen or more men in shabby denim, shivering in the biting wind that swept across the plain.

Farmers, these, "hailed out" last summer, their crops destroyed by two hail storms that came within three weeks of each other in June and July, now applying for relief.

Most of them a few years ago were considered well-to-do. They have land—lots of land. Most of them have 640 acres or so. You think of a farmer with 640 acres as being rich. These fellows are "land poor." A 640-acre farm at \$10 an acre—which is what land is worth hereabouts these days—means only \$6,400 worth of land. Most of them have a lot of stock, 30 or 40 head of cattle, 12 or 16 horses, some sheep and hogs. Their stock, thin and rangy, is trying to find a few mouthfuls of food on land so bare that the winds pick up the top soil and blow it about like sand. Their cows have gone dry for lack of food. Their hens are not laying. Much of their livestock will die this winter. And their livestock and their land are in most cases mortgaged up to the very limit. They are all way behind on their taxes, of course. Some of them five years! . . .

It doesn't take much, they say, to keep this stock alive. One man said he lost seven milch [milk] cows last winter, and that \$15 worth of feed would have kept them alive.

Lorena Hickok

Letter from Ohio

Cleveland, Ohio
November 10, 1940

Dear Mrs. Roosevelt:

I am a boy of 17, I quit school 2 years ago in order to find a job. Since my dad died 3 years ago we haven't been able to do so good. We stretched his insurance money so far as it would go, but now we have to face it.

We are behind 2 months in our rent and the 3rd falling due this Wednesday, the 13th. We pay \$15 a month for 4 rooms. There are 5 of us, mother, 3 boys and myself. I really wouldn't be writing this, but I can't see ourselves evicted from our house. We've got till Wednesday to get either all or at least half of our rent paid up. It would be all right if it was only me because I could take care of myself one way or another. My mother can't get work because she just recovered from tuberculosis and must rest. I am afraid that if nothing comes up I will turn to crime as a means of getting financial help.

My little brothers are shoeshiners. They go out at night and shine shoes. They go mostly in beer gardens. Their little money even helps. You might say, why don't we go on relief, well you just can't convince my mother on that. She said she would rather starve than get relief.

I am working as a grocery store clerk at \$8.00 a week. We could get along on this in summer but not in winter on account of the coal problem.

I was wondering that maybe you could loan us about \$35.00 or more, we could get on our feet again and once again hold up our heads. We will greatly appreciate this second start in life with all of our hearts.

Will you please be so kind as to answer this letter in some way . . .

Thanks Ever So Much
V. B. F.

P.S. Please, again I say, try to answer this letter before Wednesday somehow. I'll be praying every night for your loan. I'll give you \$1.00 a month with interest until it is all paid up.

P.S. The reason I marked it personal is that I was afraid it might be thrown out by your secretaries before you even read it.

From *Dear Mrs. Roosevelt: Letters from Children of the Great Depression* by Robert Cohen.
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Letter from New Jersey

Verona, N.J.
November 10, 1938

Dear Mrs. Roosevelt;

I am a young girl nineteen (19) years old, I have had a lot of sickness in my younger day which delayed my schooling. I am finishing High school in February. Dad has been out of work since last June. We lost our house in Newark . . . which we had for almost twenty (20) years. Unable to find any houses in Newark, we moved to Verona. I have an older brother who is the only one working, and he makes only \$15 a week, which is just about enough to keep up the rent. There are six (6) children in the family, a sister and brother in Vocational schools and a younger one in grammar school. We have little to eat . . .

My eyes have been bad . . . and now I need my glasses changed I don't have the money and it is very difficult for me to continue my studies. We have had no money to buy clothing and use only what people gave us.

Graduation is very expensive because there are so many things to get and pay for. Could you loan me twenty-five dollars so I can graduate. I am trying to get a job after school, but I need my extra time for studies, and the only work I can get is day work . . . After graduation I will try and get a job, for I have but one ambition, to be a nurse. I will save and send you back your money then I will help my family, and if I can save a little maby by September, I will have enough for my entrance fee, into some Hospital. It is very embarrassing not to be able to dress like the other girls, and not have money for my class dress . . .

Having no one else to turn to I am asking you, can't you help us or tell us something to do. I will be waiting to hear from you and please keep this personal between the two of us.

Yours very truly,
[Anonymous]

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Lyrics About the Dust Bowl (Texas)

Dust Bowl Refugee

I'm a dust bowl refugee,
Just a dust bowl refugee.
From that dust bowl to the peach bowl,
Now the peaches is killing me.

'Cross the mountain to the sea,
Come the wife and kids and me.
It's a hot old dusty highway
For a dust bowl refugee.

Hard, it's always been that way,
Here today and on our way
Down that mountain, 'cross the desert,
Just a dust bowl refugee.

We are ramblers so they say,
We are only here today.
Then we travel with the seasons,
We're the dust bowl refugees.

From the southland and the droughtland,
Come the wife and kids and me.
And this old world is a hard world
For a dust bowl refugee.

Yes we ramble and we roam,
And the highway, that's our home.
It's a never-ending highway
For a dust bowl refugee.

Yes we wander and we work
In your crops and in your fruit.
Like the whirlwinds on the desert,
That's the dust bowl refugees.

I'm a dust bowl refugee,
I'm a dust bowl refugee.
And I wonder will I always
Be a dust bowl refugee.

—Woody Guthrie

Letter from Pennsylvania

Muncy, Pa.
April 3, 1936

The President of the United States
White House
Washington, D.C.

Your Excellency:

On March the seventeenth and eighteenth, our little borough of Muncy, Pennsylvania was flooded, the largest flood ever recorded in our town, and over three hundred families forced to flee their homes. I must say it was a terrible sight to see the water coming into the homes and being powerless to stop it. Being only able to move and save what we could.

Our borough is small but we were fortunate in having two organizations that done very fine work. The Keystone Hook and Ladder Company (a volunteer fire company), moved families and furniture from the flooded area, rescued livestock and did night patrol service to prevent looting.

The American Legion, Roland Ritter Post 268 furnished food and hot coffee to rescue workers and flood victims immediately. They arranged with our churches to provide emergency sleeping quarters and established regular meals for flooded families . . .

Thru the efforts of the American Legion, Roland Ritter Post 268 and The Keystone Hook and Ladder Company, no lives were lost, no disorder occurred, and epidemic of disease was prevented. For such a fine service to our community, I feel certain nothing could be more appreciated and honored than a letter of commendation [praise] from The President of the United States . . .

Hoping that you will grant me such a kind and appropriate favor, I am

Sincerely yours
Clark B. Kahler

Letter from Oregon

July 25, 1939

Mr. and Mrs. Franklin D. Roosevelt
The White House
Washington, D.C.

Dear Sir and Madam:—

Hardly expect this to reach you personally but I simply have to write to some one about the hopelessness of our trying to earn an honest living.

We are a family of four, one boy to enter high school this fall, the other boy in junior-high. We've been married sixteen years, happily, in spite of the terrific struggle trying to make both ends meet.

Our problem is the same as hundreds, more likely thousands of others. We started out with doctor and hospital bills the first few years of our married life and are still trying to pay them off. We make a fair living wage but can't live even comfortably on it as most of it goes to pay these old bills, all drawing interest now. We have tried to get on a cash basis but then the creditors press us. No matter how we try the future hasn't a sign of a rose tint. Is there a solution? . . .

We don't ask for charity or relief, but just help to get on our feet and free of debt.

Isn't there aid of some sort for the honest people, trying to get along? How can people be happy, contented and good Americans when every cent is needed for old accounts? I personally know dozens of families, struggling just as we are. What is to become of us? We can't save for a rainy day because every cent is needed for bills.

We want to educate our boys but we can't even be sure we can manage high school. We've tried to get a loan at the bank, enough for all bills, not more than \$500, then we'd only have to pay interest on one account and could easily pay interest on one account and could make monthly payments on one account. The banker advised bankruptcy, said we didn't have a chance other wise. They are justly owed bills and we want to pay them if possible . . .

You are both doing a wonderful job but I'm hoping you can give us a bit of advice too.

Very sincerely
Mrs. Ivan G. Martin
Foster, Oregon

From the book *Dear Mrs. Roosevelt: Letters to Eleanor Roosevelt Through Depression and War* by Cathy D. Knepper.
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Letter from Georgia

Brunswick, Ga.,
Aug. 4, 1934

Dear Mrs Roosevelt,

Having the highest respect for you as "First Lady of the Land" and feeling that you have much interest in and deepest sympathy for suffering humanity, I am appealing to you on the behalf of the aged people of my race and community who are in need of care and attention.

I am a colored girl nineteen (19) years of age and a high school graduate. My main source of pleasure lies in caring for helpless people and especially the aged.

There are unfortunately in my community many people who are old and unable to care for themselves properly, and it is for those people I am seeking aid.

I am quite sure those in charge of this work are doing their duties yet the physical conditions of these people will not allow them to care for themselves properly.

My one hope is to have an institution established for the purpose of caring for the aged, one in which they might be able to enjoy real comfort, well-prepared meals which are so essential to health, happiness and peace, as well as are comfortable surroundings.

I feel as though they deserve consideration along this line in as much as their lives have been for the most part, lives of hard work and sacrifice; and perhaps most of them have never actually known real pleasure, and being deeply indebted to them for their many sacrifices, I feel it my duty to appeal for aid on their behalf . . .

I am not asking you for a personal donation, but am humbly begging that you consider my plans and aid me in securing funds for carrying them out . . .

Please help me, I beg of you in my effort to aid these unfortunates. And may I, please except a reply?

Sincerely Yours,
H. E. G.

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