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Letter to Eleanor Roosevelt Asking for Baby Clothes (1935)

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Commentary on Letter to Eleanor Roosevelt Asking for Baby Clothes

During the Great Depression women had such faith in First Lady Eleanor Roosevelt that one woman wrote to her asking for a list of baby clothes and diapers. She painfully urged Mrs. Roosevelt to send these items privately, for "I would rather no one knew about it."

After 1933, women in the workforce benefited from Eleanor and Franklin D. Roosevelt's political alliance with the unions. Also, the Roosevelt Administration's New Deal introduced social security and unemployment insurance to the nation for the first time. Eleanor Roosevelt, who had felt like an "outsider" ever since she was a little girl, had great sympathy for minorities, the unemployed, and "new" women who were attempting to forge careers in the professions against stiff discrimination. (This group suffered setbacks during the Depression, although women working in white-collar office and sales jobs, and occupations in the emerging service economy were more likely to hold onto their jobs.) The First Lady also convinced her husband to add more women to his administration.

Woman's Letter To Eleanor Roosevelt Asking for Baby Clothes

Troy, N.Y. Jan. 2, 1935.

Dear Mrs. Roosevelt,

About a month ago I wrote you asking if you would buy some baby clothes for me with the understanding that I was to repay you as soon as my husband got enough work. Several weeks later I received a reply to apply to a Welfare Association so I might receive the aid I needed. Do you remember?

Please Mrs. Roosevelt, I do not want charity, only a chance from someone who will trust me until we can get enough money to repay the amount spent for the things I need. As a proof that I really am sincere. I am sending you two of my dearest possessions to keep as security, a ring my husband gave me before we were married, and a ring my mother used to wear. Perhaps the actual value of them is not high, but they are worth a lot to me. If you will consider buying the baby clothes, please keep them (rings) until I send you the money you spent. It is very hard to face bearing a baby we cannot afford to have, and the fact that it is due to arrive soon, and still there is no money for the hospital or clothing, does not make it any easier. I Have decided to stay home, keeping my 7 year old daughter from school to help with the smaller children when my husband has work. The oldest little girl is sick now, and has never been strong, so I would not depend on her. The 7 year old one is a good willing little worker and somehow we must manage—but without charity.

If you still feel you cannot trust me, it is alright and I can only say I do not blame you, but if you decide my word is worth anything with so small a security, here is a list of what I will need—but I will need it very soon.

2 shirts, silk and wool, size 2
3 pr. stockings, silk and wool, 4 1/2 or 4
3 straight flannel bands
2 slips—outing flannel
2 muslim dresses
1 sweater
1 wool bonnet
2 pr. wool booties
2 doz. diapers 30 x 30—or 27 x 27

1 large blanket (baby) about 45(inches) or 50(inches)
3 outing flannel nightgowns

If you will get these for me I would rather no one knew about it. I promise to repay the cost of the layette as soon as possible. We will all be very grateful to you, and I will be more than happy.

Sincerely yours, Mrs. H. E. C.

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