

“AS I WRITE THIS, I AM CRYING”

Children's Letters to Iraq

SOPHIA IS AN IDEALISTIC 3RD GRADER. Late in the school year, she came to class visibly troubled by a letter she'd received from the White House. Overwhelmingly concerned about the war in Iraq, she had, on her own, written and mailed a letter to the President. Expecting answers to her questions about the war, she had received a generic reply with a photograph of the Commander in Chief. The enclosed letter suggested, “a trip to the library” and “to stay in school.” “Like I don't read?” Sophia asked. “I told him I was a good student.” The response Sophia received had not addressed her concerns and she vocalized her disappointment. She did not, she said, feel listened to. She then asked if I thought she should write back.

I didn't want to tell her that the President probably had not read her letter. I suggested instead she think about writing a letter that would go to the soldiers themselves rather than to Washington DC. Sophia asked if she could share with her classmates her letter (and its unacceptable reply) as well as this new plan to write directly to soldiers. I permitted her to voice her frustration and to lead a classroom discussion with her peers. To my surprise (keeping in mind that Sophia and her classmates are active 9-year-olds), the majority of my students voted to give up their recess in order to write letters. This writing was not a school assignment—it was a child-driven movement. Other students in other classes heard about the project and they, too, contributed letters. No adult instructed the children as to what they should feel or what they should say. Their writing prompt was simple: What would you like to say to the men and women fighting in Iraq? What follows is a sampling of letters written by 3rd and 5th graders.

Marnie Warren
Third Grade Teacher
Nettelhorst School
Chicago Public Schools

5/30/07

Dear Soldier,

Hello my name is Melissa. I am almost 9. I live with my mom and dad. I love to read and to draw. I am in 3 grade. I wear glasses, they are purple and I am very friendly. I read books about soldiers, they are very interesting. I hope you are Ok. I live in Chicago and is very windy. And I read that the soldiers pass through desserts and have so much scary stuff. But maybe you are so brave that you are not scared.

If you are scared or you are sad, think about your family and say in your mind: I will live. And you will live! I am sure that your family misses you very much! Oh thank you so much for your sacrifice, your life. I have so much fun especially in my school Nettelhorst. My birthday is in June 23. My best friend is Lorrie, she is so funny! My teacher is Mrs. Warren. I love school.

I wonder what your name is. Have you met any friends yet? I hope so. I have one cousin that is a soldier. He is very brave and he came back to his house safe and healthy. You know if soldiers die, they die in honor. But I hope that doesn't happen to you. Why did you want to fight? You are a great hero. Fight so you could see your family. Thanks for everything, I hope this letter cheers you up!

Sincerely,

Melissa

P.S. TAKE CARE

Dear Soldiers,

Thank you for saving our lives and for being willing to save my family. But now that you're away from your family, I bet you're lonely sometimes. If that was me, I would be feeling the same way without my family. But thank you for what you are doing. The care you possess is strong, brave, and powerful. But only remember we're always cheering for you.

What do you eat or drink? Do you ever brush your teeth? Do you ever take showers? How do you carry your own water?

My name is George my age is 9. I live in Chicago and in Chicago you might see lots of neighborhoods where there are lots of nice people. Thank you for putting your life on the line.

Sincerely,

George

Thank you.

P.S. And when I grow up I will be a complete ninja. I will be a legendary ninja, and I will not fail. I will protect all the people. Believe it.

May 30, 2007

Dear Soldiers,

Thank you, for sacrificing your life for me. Thank you for putting your life on the line for me. Is there anything you need? Like tooth paste, a warm blanket, a book, anything you can just tell me. Can you write before 8am-3pm? Hi my name is Julio but you can call me July. I am 8 years old. I live in Chicago, Illinois. My friends are Harrison, George, Joel, and Keaton. By the way, there are no such things as ninjas. In Chicago we all have fun.

I am grateful for you giving us the freedom we have in the United States of America (u.s.a) you must be very brave for fighting for us. You are my role model. You are a true America. Do you get a good night sleep? Do you miss your family? Can you write back?

Your friend,

Julio

Dear Soldiers,

May you please stay in your house with your family and not go to the Army because you could eat on plates and not on cans like they do in the Army. Do you live in a tent? Do you brush your teeth? I think this because if you live in a tent there are no sinks? If I was there I would want to help you if you needed something. What's all of your names? How old are you guys? I am 8 years old and my name is Anisa. I am a twin from my sister Amira. But we don't look alike. Is it hard to kill the bad people in the Army? Do you have any friends in the Army? If there is water, do you take a basket and get water in it and take your hands in it and drink? Thank you for saving us.

Here's what we do in school: Lang. Arts, writing, math, science, social studies, music, gym, Art, and dance.

I live in Chicago. I have a pool in the basement and there is an elevator. My building has 36 floors! Come to Chicago because it is very fun here.

Sincerely,

Anisa

May 25, 2007

Dear Soldiers,

I wonder if you like just lying down. You probably won't get to do that much! I am so inspired by you, and I just thank you for being a great soldier. I just want to let you know my name is Lorrie, I am in 3rd grade. I am from the city. Are you from a city?

I hope you enjoy my letter to you. I know that you are home sick. I go to Nettlehorst Elementary; also I am nine years old. How are you? You are great, I believe, you are a great soldier, or anything else you want to be. I also wonder if you have any children. Did you fight any other wars? Do you get to read any books? Are there a lot of soldiers there with you?

I like science, jump-rope, soccer, my best friends are Marie, Melissa, and Amy, and more, and I love to write, and draw. I also know how to belly dance!

P.S. I like to learn and be noisy! And eat apples! I bet you miss apples!

Sincerely,

Lorrie

Have a nice time... Or not!!!! Come home soon.

June 1, 2007

Dear Soldier,

We the students appreciate what you have done for our country. I hope you stay safe and live. Have you ever been in any danger? If you have I hope you're safe. What do you eat there and how does it taste? I hope it doesn't taste nasty. What is weather like out there? I hope it's not too cold or too hot. Are you ready to come home? Have you ever gotten scared before? If you have don't be because it goes away after a few minutes. Why did you become a soldier? I know some of my friend's brothers and sisters are in the army. I hope you stay safe.

Sincerely,

Eric

P.S. Please respond.

Dear Soldier,

First I just wanted to ask how long have you been in the war? Are you a marine or something dangerously tough? I don't mean to come at you with all these questions. But um do you ever get flashbacks of family members? Sorry if you don't know many. If you'd like we could be friends. How's the food? Do you have anything to do when you're not fighting? Do you really have to wear those really heavy boots and guns? Cool I just couldn't do it I'd fall flat on my face. I just wanna say we really appreciate what you're doing for us I mean putting your life in danger for all of us back home. We all just want you to come home so we can be a family again, we can be one.

Write back.

Sincerely,

Allayna

May 31, 2007

Dear Soldier,

I am a student of Nettelhorst school and am in the 5th grade living in Chicago, Illinois. I really appreciate your hard work in the army. If you are just a trainee, then good luck! I just want to ask you this one question, so that you're not just twiddling your thumbs when you've got nothing else to do. It gives you something to think about. Are you ready to go to war? Really think about it! May the Lord send his angels to protect you.

Sincerely,

Sophie

P.S. Please write back to my school. Please include your answer.

May 25, 2007

Dear Marines,

My name is Marie. I am in 3rd grade. I bet you don't know me. But I am someone who is worrying about you everyday. As I write this, I am crying. It makes me sad that we are having fun while you are suffering. I feel bad that you can't live a normal life like I do. Well, I want you to know that you have all my support.

I go to Nettelhorst Elementary. And I am 8 years old. Now I am going to be writing about myself, but I still want you to know that I wish you the best.

This paragraph is about me. I live in Chicago, IL and there is a school called Gale Academy. It is right across the street from my house. There's a lot of fighting there. I go to Nettelhorst because it's a more caring and safer place. It takes me about an hour, but that's okay because education is the more important thing. Anyway I have 2 sisters, 1 brother, and a mom with no dad. My sister's name is Robin, brother's name is Forrest. My sister, the oldest one, name is Rose. My birthday is June 29, 1998. So it is coming up! I am a very nice girl who loves caring for people all the time and being a helpful person. While I will be having fun all of my time this summer, I will be thinking about you. Here's some more things about me. I am mixed because my mom's mom is white and my mom's dad is black; so that's how and why I am mixed. My teacher says I'm beautiful!

I have some questions to ask. Did they pick you to be in the Army? Or was it your choice? Do you have a wife with children? Or do you have kids with no wife? Or are you single? Are you still in school? Or are you out of school? How old are you? Are you young or are you maybe 30-50? When is your birthday? Is it in June, like mine?

I have 5 fish, 1 dog, 1 rabbit, 2 pythons, 3 rats, now I have 6 fish. So that means that I have 12 pets total. So that's really it. It was nice talking to you, bye!!

Sincerely,

Marie

P.S. My dad died because he was killed. He was in the Army too. But that was years ago. Let God be with you forever. I hope you make it home safe! THANK YOU!!!!!!

To the Soldiers that Sacrifice their Lives to the War,

Thank you for sacrificing your lives to make us happy and safe but mostly thank you for making a peace happy country. I hope you will come back safe and don't die and give up fighting the enemies. I wish you guys can win the battle and my question is are you an American cause some soldiers are Mexicans and my other question is do you miss your family when your wounded do you take medicine and if your close to the enemies do you where something to blend in the background or just be quiet then throw high explosives, smokes, and grenades and my last question is who are you and who is the enemies are they France or Iraq what place are they on?

Hi, I'm Erick and I am the kid who wrote this letter. I'm born in Philippines and I am 9 years old, in 3rd grade, and at the future I am going to be a space Ranger so I have to train and train until I'm strong enough to battle and American soldiers are not going to be loser forever even if we are going to battle a big army group of Alien spaceship.

Sincerely,

Erick

May 24, 2007

Dear Soldiers and Marines,

Thank you for sacrificing your lives to save ours, thank you for defending us. We hope you come back safe. You risk your lives to save ours, to save America.

I'm 9 years old and I live in Chicago, Illinois and my school is Nettelhorst school. My life story is we had little money, dad and mom had an idea of going to America. Dad got in first. When it was mom's turn, she wasn't allowed but soon a miracle happened. The lights turned off. Suddenly she was agreed to go to America. I didn't see them for 2 years. Then, the Consul agreed we could go! I forgot to tell you I have a brother and sister.

Do you watch Cubs games? You have to watch them! They're so fun to watch! Do you brush your teeth? How do you survive without sleeping? It's unfair that we have fun in summer while you have misery. I wish I will have enough courage to defend America when I grow up. What's your name? Age? May God be with you. Godspeed!

From whom you protect,

J.B.

Dear Soldiers,

I appreciate you risking your life for our country. I know you will be leaving your family, I know you are going to be fighting for a year....or two! I just want you to know that all the misery is not for nothing. All of us will Remember you. I need to ask you some things. Do you get to write in a war journal? Do you brush your teeth ever? Last one, do you find strange any animals? My name is Keaton the third of my generation. I hope you can come back from Iraq. And back from that terrible war.

I remember that I saw a journal that a soldier wrote, here is what it said, It was a cold and brutal war. The Nazis were closing in. I was just a rookie. I just wish I was back home.

So there ya go.

My great grandpa was in World War 2. Oh, did I tell you my age? I'll tell you I am 9 yrs. old.

I have 1 more question for you: Were you drafted? I wonder this because it means you didn't get to choose.

Well, this is goodbye. Goodbye. Come here soon!

Sincerely,

Keaton

May 25, 2007

Dear Soldiers,

I hope you can come home soon. I thank you for protecting me and my home country. I wish you luck and I wish you health. I can't imagine how you must feel. I probably couldn't survive being away from my family for more than two days. I know where you are going and I know that the sand will be blowing around you, but I don't know how you feel or what you think, but I do hope you will be thinking of me, in Chicago cheering you on.

Have you been downtown Chicago and seen "The Bean"? It looks like a silver metal bean but it really is a sculpted rain cloud according to the artist. It is also a gigantic mirror! You can walk through it and all the walls are mirrors and you can see yourself in it. Downtown there's also these two big square things that have moving faces on them, that squirt water out of their mouths every once in a while! It is soooo much fun!! The kids can run play in the so called "spit"! Dr. Kurland my principal at Nettelhorst is one of the faces.

Have I introduced myself? My name is Sophia. I just turned 9. I have a friend in Iraq. I met him when I was at a friend's house. He was nice and I remember being really good friends with him, but I still think about him. He is in one of my lockets, which is a necklace that opens.

I also wrote to the President telling him that I didn't want the war because I don't want any one from either side of the war to die or to get hurt. I know my friend is there. That's where all his family is. The president wrote back by telling me to go to the library! Like I don't do that! So I said to myself, that writing to the soldiers is better because they probably actually listen. My message for the world is peace, for the soldiers to come home, and freedom.

I wonder if you ever make friends with the other soldiers. Do you? Do you make friends with the Iraqi people? Do you get to have good food? Do you have tooth brushes? What do you eat? Do you have books to read? What do you miss about your hometown? What is your name? Do you know a person named Matthew? Do you need anything that I could get you? If any of these questions hurt you, make you feel sad, or are just too nosy you don't have to answer them. If you can write back please do, if you can't it's okay because I know you are busy.

My family is my brother Isaac, my mom Kimberly, my dad Sean, and me. I have a very nice family! My pets are Bella the cat, Beastie the cat (Beastie was very, very times millions special), Measha the cat, Roxie the dog, Spooky the cat, Clark the rat, Kent the rat, and Cise the dog. Some of the guys are in heaven now! I play violin. I'm in book two. That means I finished the first book and now second book in violin. I'm also in chorus with my music teacher Mrs. Martin.

Don't forget me, I won't forget you!

Sophia

May 23, 2007

Dear marines,

Thank you for sacrificing your lives for us. To be a soldier I know that you have to work very hard. You have to give up a lot of things like your family, friends, your cozy beds, yummy home-cooked food, pet dogs, TV, and swimming pools, and your home town. It must be hard for you because you're so young. Young people are supposed to do school work or to be free, that's why I feel what you are doing is very hard. How do you carry everything? What do you eat there?

My name is Ginna. My age is 8. I live in the city of Chicago. In Chicago, it's so busy. When there's a Cubs baseball game, you don't want to go by there unless you have tickets. I live by the baseball field. In Chicago we go to the beach, go to the fun beautiful parks, Festivals like taste of Chicago. Have you ever had Chicago food? If not, you should have this great clue...come visit Chicago for a day!

How does it feel to leave your family? I would feel so scared because I have a great family like yours. I'm scared for you, but I know that you're brave and powerful. Hopefully you will be a great Marine!

Sincerely,

Ginna

May 30, 2007

Dear Soldiers,

I hope you can come home soon. I thank you for protecting me and my home country. I understand that it's really hot in the desert and I want you to know that I wish you good luck and I wish you to stay healthy.

I have a couple questions for you. Do you get to brush your teeth? What's your name? Do you get to take a shower? Is the language different? Did you fight in any other wars?

In Chicago I go with my mom, dad, and sister biking to the parks. I also go to Nettelhorst School.

When my dad was 20, he was a soldier too. My parents were born in Montenegro. When the males turn 18, 19, or 20 they have to go and be a soldier.

My name is Amira. I am 8 years old. I am turning 9 in July 20. I was born in July 20, 1998.

In school we do math, science, and social studies. Our subjects are recess, gym, music, dance, and art. My teacher Mrs. Warren is reading a novel to the class and the novel is called *Rare Beasts*. I enjoy the book *Rare Beasts* because it's really funny and it's a great book. The 2 characters are Edgar and Ellen and they are naughty, and they like to beat each other up. When Edgar and Ellen were playing hide and seek, Ellen jumped out and almost killed Edgar. Then they said, "I'm bored!" They have a pet called Pet.

Did I introduce my twin sister? My twin sister's name is Anisa. We are only 13 minutes apart. We never fight. When my sister types sometimes she makes up words. My sister and I have the same friends at school. My friend Sophia wrote to the President to tell him that she didn't want the war. I don't want the war too! I am scared, but I know you can do it!

Sincerely,

Amira

Dear Army,

Thank you for taking a risk, and making us happy. My name is Tito. I am 9 years old. My birthday date is September 15, what is yours? I live in Chicago, IL. I hope you are OK. In Chicago I wonder, Why they call it Navy Pear? I think I know how you feel, because I have a grandfather who was in the war. He survived but last year in 2006 he passed away by sickness. It was really sad.

If you need to have something like more food I will send it. What I'm saying is I'm here to cheer you on. I wonder if you will be with your family safe and sound. I hope you will write me back some day if you can. I wonder where you come from? I'm also wondering what is your name?

I was born in Chicago but I am from Mexico. I am still living in Chicago. I hope you survive, and return to your family.

Sincerely,

Tito

May 23, 2007

Dear Soldiers,

Thank you for helping me stay safe. I hope you come back soon. If you were right here, I would give you a big hug! And I know you are going to the HOT desert, but if I was there I would stand by you as you would for me. Oh and let me tell some stuff about me, my dad used to be a soldier too. He still has the uniform in the basement, I bet it has webs on it. I am 9 and I bet you are older than me. I live in Chicago I have a mom, dad, 1 brother, and 2 sisters.

That is enough about me. Bye!

Sincerely,

Jazzlynn

Dear Devil Dogs,

Thank you for putting your life on the line by going into a hot desert and leaving your family, for one or two years! Without seeing your families and sleeping in tents all in honor of the United States of America. My name is Joel and I hope you can come back to America and enjoy the Summer. I wanted to ask you 2 questions: what are your names and how do you live there?

Sincerely,

Joel

May 25, 2007

Dear Soldiers,

I know that you miss your family. I hope you can be glad for what you are doing and god is glad at you. My name is Nekou and I am nine years old. My birthday is April 26, 1998. I go to Nettelhorst School. I have brown eyes and brown skin. What is your name? What is your best basketball team? What is you best baseball team? I know how you feel because I had to leave home too, I miss my country too, and all your friends and family too.

Sincerely,

Nekou

June 1, 2007

Dear Soldier,

My name is Malik. I was wondering if you have been attacked, been in danger, or lost a part of your body. I hope you will be alright and that you get to see your family again. Do you have any friends that lost a body part or have died on the battle field? If so I hope they get to see their family, but if they died they will be watching over them in heaven.

Sincerely,

Malik

June 1, 2007

Dear Soldiers,

My name is Mark. What types of weapons do you use please tell me? And if possible send pictures. Have you ever been in any danger? We appreciate what you do for us and the innocent citizens of Iraq. Please write back thank you.

Sincerely,

Mark

June 1, 2007

Dear Soldier,

To start off this letter, could I ask you a couple of questions? First, have you ever been in an ambush & got hurt? If you got hurt I hope you'll get better. Next, what do you eat? Also I am very proud that you help innocent civilians that are in trouble due to car bombers and stuff. You must be very brave, why did you join the war? Do you play cards when you are not busy? I do!

Sincerely,

Victoria

June 1, 2007

Dear Soldier,

How are you doing? What have you seen? Have you been in a battle yet? Did you always want to be a soldier when you were little? Why did you become a soldier? What do you eat? How old are you? Do you have children? Are you afraid? I just wanted to ask a few questions.

Sincerely,

Michael

June 1, 2007

Dear Soldier,

We're proud of you for serving our country this way. Risking your life. Are you scared of dying? Have you ever been in danger of dying? Do you want to go home? What is your family like? Do you miss them? Of course you do. I would.

Your truly,

Tommie-Lee

P.S. Plzzz write me back.

P.S.S. You're awesome.

Today

Today my day was like any other day.
Today I say what I have to say.
Today I hang with who I want to hang.
Today everyone suddenly went away.
Today is the day I have to say thanks to all the soldiers
who might have passed away but also the ones who are
helping us and leading our way.
Thank you so much and have a good day.

By: Monica

Thank you for all that you have done I bet it must be scary but I know all of you
are brave and strong enough!!!!!!!

Dear Soldier,

Thank you for all the things you did for the country because if it was not for you will be died by now so thank you. And I hope you have a good life.

Your Friend,

Kafayat

Dear American Soldiers,

Be careful someone might double cross you even your commander! And you could kill your friend on the other side. Even your brain might mean to kill your commander so don't do that OK alright. If you are a commander be good be nice to your soldiers and be careful; some one might kill you.

Sincerely,

Raymond

Dear American Soldier,

Well, thank you for being brave. If you were drafted, well don't worry! My dad told me "Always think positive". My mom and dad are always giving me advice. So I want to pass it on to you. I'm giving you those tips because I have trust in you! I can't imagine you out in the field fighting for your country. You know whenever I'm scared to do something, I always say "I can". Stay cool OK? Oh yeah, I'm a Mexican 3rd grader.

Sincerely,

Diana

