

Preston, Jack
1947

July 3, 1947

My dear Mr. Preston:

I read your play through. I am not a critic and really have no idea how this would be on the stage. The speeches seem to me pretty long in spots.

I have been very much opposed to having my husband acted by any one. The only thing I have seen with any pleasure is a documentary film on which my son worked with some young men. It is a collection of news-reels taken when my husband was alive. That I can see has a point and conveys a story. Acting still seems to me very difficult to take because it does not seem to me possible to act someone who is still so much in people's consciousness and still so real to them that an actor would find it difficult to create the illusion of reality.

Very sincerely yours,

Hollywood 46 Calif. June 24, 1947.

Dear Mrs. Roosevelt:

The Kiwanis Club of this city approached me two weeks ago with the request that I write a short play, to be presented on a Pan-American variety show they are going to offer, as a benefit for spastic children and other physically and mentally deficient children in this area.

It happened that at this meeting where the request was made, Capt. Jack Young was present. You may remember him as the actor who played FDR in "Mission to Moscow" and "Yankee Doodle Dandy."

Possibly because of his presence, and because also I had just been reading two or three books about our late President, an idea occurred to me before I left the meeting. The enclosed manuscript, FIVE MILLION SONS, is the result. I send it to you not for any such thing as an "official approval", but as a courtesy due you and your family.

I am a stage and motion picture writer, but, doubtless with you, regret the inadequacy of most of the things done around FDR. No writer could ever capture him, anymore than one could bottle up a high frequency wave out of the pulsating ether. It seems to me the nearest approach to his personality would be in an expression of great love and understanding. Something like that, in a modest way, has been attempted here. The cause is a great one, and I trust you will have no objection to our employing this little "love story" between FDR and his millions of sons, to help the kids. Should you be able to say anything at all in favor of it, that of course would be a great service to us.

I'm sending you also copy of ASSEMBLY CALL, a play I wrote about my only son a few weeks after he "took off" from us in a bomber crash during the war. This play (in an 8th ptg.) seems likely to be first done in Germany, in the German language, under auspices of a colonel with OMGUS. Hundreds of people all over the world have written to me about it, but I always feel that "Tim" came nearer writing it than I did. . . It's wonderful that we soon get to realize they are much luckier than ourselves, free, inexpressibly happy, and able to do their job without such constant obstruction and frustration as we must face here.

If you wish you may keep the enclosed MS. The Captain, a Canadian by birth, does seem able to awaken people's memory to the FDR they knew, probably because he is in reality a similar type of individual, with the same motives in life, though gifted with less power and brilliance. I too was born across the line: it is a theory of mine that no American born here can really, fully appreciate the privilege of citizenship here in the U.S.A.

With the best of wishes for your happiness and continued usefulness in a world that needs you,

1146 1/2 N. Vista St.

Sincerely,

Jack Preston

Campobello Island
New Brunswick, Canada
July 30, 1947

My dear Mr. Preston:

Both of your letters were forwarded to me here where I am spending a month.

I will send your letter and a copy of the play to Mr. George Bye who is my literary agent. He may be able to find someone who is interested. However, I can not do so until I get back to Hyde Park on August 15th.

If Mr. Bye is successful, I should appreciate any contribution you cared to make, and would like it sent to the Wiltwyck School. This is a small charity in which I am deeply interested. Boys between the ages of seven and twelve who get into the courts of New York City, are sent there instead of to reform schools. The city pays for their board and lodging, but they all need psychiatric care and medical care, which makes

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it necessary to raise a fairly large budget every year. Because of the economic conditions, most of these boys are colored, although there are a few white boys.

I will either write you what I hear from Mr. Bya, or he will write to you direct.

Very cordially yours,

FACE PRESIDENT

Van Nuys, Calif. July 14/47

Dear Mrs. Roosevelt:

Since writing to you yesterday re "Assembly Call" I received your note about the short play "Five Million Sons."

I understand how you feel and have withdrawn the script. It will not be produced on the stage as planned.

An idea centering around our great and beloved "FDR", however, is tormenting me so much I may write to you about it later.

Thank you so much for your courtesy.

Sincerely
Jack Preston

5455 Hazelton Ave Van Nuys, Cal.

Preston

Van Nuys, Calif. July 10, 1945.

Eleanor Roosevelt,
Hyde Park,
N. Y.

Dear Mrs. Roosevelt:

Although I'm in the habit of "catching" your column and have in fact often been on the point of sitting down to dash off something resembling a fan-letter about it, the issue of July 8th almost escaped me, as a member of my immediate family was critically ill that day. However, the following day many friends who had seen what you said about "Assembly Call" phoned to tell us we were traveling in distinguished company and should know what was going on.

Lois (my wife) and I just don't know how to thank you, not only for that glorious tribute, but for the expression of such understanding as it shows of our chief desire and objective: to give the youth of this difficult generation a little of the help they so badly need. Unfortunately we have found that a great many parents who lost their sons (and daughters) in the war, have become embittered to a point where any interest in other children sounds almost fantastic to them. Nevertheless we keep on trying to reach them and sometimes have the satisfaction of scoring a hit.

ASSEMBLY CALL was published on the West Coast by a publisher (with no eastern distribution at all) who looked upon it solely as a business proposition. He grabbed it quickly, and, with the casualty lists piling up, we were so anxious for the play to reach other smitten parents, we gave him the go-signal without trying for eastern publication. We have often wished that the message which came along so naturally and powerfully could reach a wider public and in a "non-profit" way. (We have always reinvested all royalties in books and given them away to ones who needed them most). Probably it isn't too late yet. Perhaps you know or are associated with some great charity that could benefit from the royalties that might accrue from the book's re-publication in the east, a house or society which could give it wide distribution? In such an event it would make Mrs. Preston and myself happy indeed to sign over all the royalties to such a charity - one, perhaps, that concerns itself with young people. The copyright belongs to Lois, and the contract with the original publisher (who sold 7 edns.) having expired, we are free to do with the play as we wish.

- Eleanor Roosevelt, 1 -

Lead letter to J.B. with copy of play & copy of receipt for 100 copies of Assembly Call

See Mrs. Preston's letter

If reprinted, I think perhaps it should be put out with a different Foreword. I know a charming and generous-hearted lady who could write a humdinger. . . Things happened exactly as related and set down in that "zero hour" when you just have to believe in "miracles"; but I've found the "confession" there a bit startling to most people; sets them to wondering "if he's a Spiritualist!" etc. As a matter of fact we have no church affiliations whatever - probably should have. If any "divine message" (to quote Mary Pickford) in this world was ever completely non-denominational, Tim's Play is. There certainly is some 'scientific' explanation for it, but after long consideration I've come to the conclusion it doesn't really matter much just what that explanation is. Let everybody devise his own - we all seem to be 'on our own' in this universe anyway. At least eight church organizations have "baptized" the play as their very own. More power to them and God bless them: as far as I'm concerned it's "all theirs". But we have found that it's the young people who get the greatest impact from it - and you got that too, instinctively. So the suggestion in this letter may possibly be just the next step in the play's extraordinary history thus far.

As a very slight token of our gratitude I'm sending you some more copies, inscribed, and would be immensely flattered if you would add your own Jane Henry in passing them along to friends. When we get back to our "ranchito" Tuesday, I'll send half a dozen or so more. Enclosed is a brochure gotten together some time ago by the publisher, who didn't even take the trouble to set it up in type. (Us authors, always griping about publishers, aren't we?)

Again thanks, and our love goes along with it, not only to yourself but to the whole D(emocratic) family.

Sincerely,

Jack Weston

PS. If you had time to answer that recent letter of mine enclosing the one-act FDR play, the letter may be at Van Nuys, and I'll of course write again if it is.

*Written from
Gardena, Calif*

"El Ranchito Carlos",
5455 Hazeltine Ave.
Van Nuys, Calif.

Noted People Say This

about

" A S S E M B L Y C A L L " GI 50

(A Play by Jack Preston)

. . . .

STEWART EDWARD WHITE.- "I read it a second time and I am enormously impressed. It is a wonderful piece of work, a true inspiration, a great thing. I am sure it is going to be seen by millions...."

HON. CLARE BOOTH LUCE.- "I read your play, wept over it, passed it on to a friend who had lost his son....felt that it could not fail to comfort him. How little I knew this very comfort would be needed so badly by me a few days later! . . You have helped many people. God bless you. 'Tim' must be proud!"

MARY PICKFORD.- "I am happier than I can say that the public will now have the opportunity to share in the message which I really believe was divinely given to you. I know it will play to vast audiences everywhere; it will assuage the grief of many heart-broken parents, wives and sweethearts. I am only grateful that it has been vouchsafed to you."

RUPERT HUGHES.- "I read it with intense interest. It is very beautiful and touching, and the tears it compels are somehow made radiant and cleansing by the poetry of the message.... Hoping for this powerful play all the success it deserves...."

JESSE L. LASKY.- (Motion Picture Executive). "Beyond doubt it is an inspired play which should create a profound impression on audiences everywhere."

JULIUS WEINBERGER: (Former Chief of Research, RCA).- ". . . A thrilling experience; held me spellbound from beginning to end... unforgettable scenes. . . It would be a great experience to see it produced on the stage or screen."

DR. EDGAR WHITE BURRILL: (Ex-Prof. of Lit. & Drama, Columbia & Northwestern Universities).- "The best, most inspired, most uplifting of all the literature on the subject. It is accepted at once by all varieties of people and belief. It must be widely heard!"

ROWLAND V. LEE: (Motion Picture Producer & Director).- "I keep it beside my pillow and read some of it every night before going to sleep...."

GUY BATES POST: (Famous actor).- "A modern classic. Not only an inspiring universal 'message' but a perfectly written and constructed drama, no word of which must ever be changed."

LEE SHUBERT: (Theatrical Producer).- "A very fine document....a beautiful message...."

WILLIAM R. NEVILLE: (U. S. Army Chaplain).- "It seems to me it is above and beyond all religions."

HENRY DUFFY: (Stage & Film Producer).- "The theatre vitally needs plays like 'Assembly Call.' When they are made available to us and have reached stage and screen we will discover that they have brought more people into the theatre - a bigger and more eager audience. . . But this is not only a play with power and lift - it is one also to enjoy, immensely."

MRS. EDWARD G. ROBINSON: "The first time I read it I cried myself to sleep. The second time I didn't cry. The third time I wanted to laugh, for I realized it had made me wonderfully happy and unafraid."

JOHN S. KNIGHT: (Newspaper Publisher).- "Thank you so much. I can assure you it was helpful to both of us at this trying time."

SID GRAUMAN: (Noted Showman).- "I have seen cathedrals, shrines and charity trust-funds established by men of wealth in memory of a lost loved-one. But I have never known so fine a monument to be erected by a father to his beloved son, as Jack Preston has built in the writing of 'Assembly Call', a truly great play."

THEODORE DU BOIS: (Editor).- "'Assembly Call' affected me more than any play, or I think any book, I ever read."

OLGA S. GREENLAW: (Author; woman member of the "Flying Tigers"); "It fills me so full I can not find words. It tells me that all those boys of the 'Tigers' are still around, and very, very close."

WALTER R. CARLE: (Radio & Publicity Man).- "I just never read a play like this before. Of one thing I'm sure: it will never leave me."

RALPH SHANNON: (Iowa Publisher).- "Our own Flyer seemed to come back to us, and stay with us, after we read 'Assembly Call'. . . I hope it will be our privilege sometime to see this great, reassuring play on the stage or motion-picture screen."

LILLIAN GISH: "Thank you for this charming play. Its pure faith comes through every line. It must be a great comfort to you, and I think to 'Tim' also, God bless him. May its success be lasting!"

POLLY CHASE: (Victorian Stage Star).- "It has been a great privilege to read this wonderful book. Its message will be a great comfort and help to the public, a message of love and faith - what more could anyone want or need?"

FR. EDWARD MATTHEWS: (Liberal-Catholic Divine).- "An inspiration of love, a purifying experience...a great glimpse of the life-adjointing...."

LORD DOWDING: (Former head of the RAF).- "I am sure that, with such a play, the stage is one of the means by which knowledge may be spread and consolation brought to the bereaved."

ROY WILLIAM NEILL: (Irish Film & Legitimate Producer).- "One of the greatest plays I have ever read. It contains a wonderful message - one that will undoubtedly bring comfort and happiness to many. Properly produced and cast it can not help but win instant success."

EDITH ELLIS: (Playwright, "White Collars" etc.).- "May it soon blaze upon the stage and its radiance glow season after season, bringing comfort and hope to tormented humanity!"

EMMA DUNN: (Stage & Screen Actress).- "In the 40 years that I have been in the theatre and in films, I have read many fine plays. I have never read a greater one than 'Assembly Call.' It is one that demands presentation."

ROBERT MILTON: (International Stage Director).- "So sensitive, so beautifully conceived and constructed, no director must ever lay a hand on it - except to interpret it, if he can."

DORIS KENYON: (Concert Singer & Actress).- "I have just had a thrilling experience: I have read 'Assembly Call' for a second time! I am convinced it will be one of the greatest 'hits' the theatre and pictures have ever known."

FRANK SCULLY: (Novelist & Columnist).- "I have no doubt at all that the play will be a three-way success, and I thank the publisher for the privilege of having read it in print before it became something which everybody was talking about. 'Assembly Call' is a great play."

MRS. JAMES OLIVER CURWOOD: "I was deeply moved. . . Surely 'Assembly Call' has brought one of the most beautiful messages of hope and comfort to the anguished hearts of a bereaved world."

DREW PEARSON; (Washington Columnist).- "This play is the sort of thing that brings us closer to deserving what our young men did for us."

DON BLANDING; (Poet & Publicist).- "'Assembly Call' is a splendid healing message, especially for all whose hearts are invested in those winged youths of ours...."

REV. RALPH EDWARD BAILEY; (Shakespearean Author): "....Lyrical in our praise of it. It is indeed a thing of beauty...and your 'Tim', God bless him, is the resurrection and the life!"

CORPORAL BILL SUMMERS; (From the Italian Front).- "I passed the book, 'Assembly Call', around to the boys and everyone that read it was overjoyed with a new realization. If you know the author would you kindly tell him for us that it is a wonderful revelation. My thanks and my buddies' thanks to him...."

EMMA GRIFFITHS; (Clubwoman).- "... I only wish I could find words to tell you. I felt proud of the audience that it appreciated the reading so much. Topped any evening the Club ever had...."

DOROTHY DEAN SHELDON; (University of California).- "Very stirring and timely."

MAE NORTON; (Book Reviewer & Club. Executive).- "After reading it I feel refreshed, washed up, purified of all possible grief over the Thereness of those who have gone...."

MYRA CASTERLINE SMITH; (Lecturer).- "I am unable to tell you how much I enjoyed 'Tim's Play'. After I finished reading it I felt I had always known 'Jim', 'Kathleen' and 'Tim'....so wonderful that you could give it to the world...."

SUSAN KIMMELL; (Radio Book Reviewer).- "The quiet certainty of the play's point of view; the perfectly normal, natural interpretation of so-called 'death' and of the life to come, can scarcely fail to rob death of its horror for countless of grieving people."

BERNICE CORNELL; (Author & Screen Writer).- "I am very grateful for the play. It brought quick tears from the beginning. It had the quality of evoking sorrow without bitterness - the catharsis the Greeks recognized as essential to greatness in art...."

FLORENCE PIERCE REED; (Playwright).- "A great 'take-off' into 'Death'.... stark 'Death' glorified with a passion that is fervent and sincere.... has the most priceless possession of any play - undercurrent. 'Assembly Call' has that quality in every scene. The director who gets the play is privileged and should stand in awe of his job...."

Preston

Campobello Island
New Brunswick, Canada
August 10, 1947

Dear Mr. Preston:

I have just read your play and think it very moving. However, I still wish that it could be just a voice and not an apparition and that if possible in the speeches, that the voice making these could be the real speeches which have been made at different times so you would be using recordings which were made when my husband was alive.

I may be mistaken in my feelings and whatever you feel, you are of course entirely entitled to do.

Mr. Kennedy whom two of my sons agreed to help, is planning to tell the story of Freedom from Fear and he feels there must be dramatization of my husband,

He tells me there is great opposition in the movie industry to anything which is favorable to my husband's ideals and that he is meeting with a great deal of opposition. I wonder if you will not that this exists, unless some one thinks that it can be made adverse to the cause for which you would really be attempting to produce your play,

You know, as well as I do, that whatever you want to do, legally you can do it. You understand that I could not endorse any play. I have only agreed with Mr. Kennedy to help him get the facts by getting access to people who knew my husband. That is not, however, necessary for you. Mr. Kennedy is not making a life of my husband but using him incidental to the theme, Freedom from Fear.

I have not sent your play to Mr. Bye as yet, but shall do so when I get home on the 13th. You are very generous in your offer to help Wiltwyck and I am deeply appreciative.

Very sincerely yours,

PRESTON

Preston, J

Van Nuys, Calif. August 5, 1947.

Dear Mrs. Roosevelt:

Yours from Campobello just received. Forgive me for invading your vacation land, but I thought perhaps something of the imagination, and the heart, affecting the man who made that remote harbor famous might be more appropriately, and I trust more welcomed, read there than anywhere else in the world.

First, re Mr. Bye. If he finds a publisher or society interested in re-issuing ASSEMBLY CALL, I will gladly donate all the proceeds from it to the Wiltwyck School; also authorize any theatre group or other organization working for them to do any productions of it on the stage; furthermore, set aside a share of legitimate stage and motion picture proceeds (when play is produced and filmed) for benefit of that school. It sounds like a wonderful cause - I've been waiting for just such an opportunity with "Timmy's Play."

Just as I was certainly in some strange manner actuated to write that play, so have I been to write another - this one about our beloved "FDR". This, like the other, came along so swiftly I could hardly put it down. I'm sending you the first copy typed. It does not presume to either characterize or reincarnate him, but merely to reflect him, his heart and soul, and an infinitesimal fraction of his wisdom and sense of humor. It seems to me the only way that anything should be done about him. The films are planning several things. They will try to bring him back here bodily, biographically and realistically, and that cannot be done.

John Ford actor.

The thought of this play has been tormenting me for months. Finally I put it down hastily and it seemed so moving to Lois (Mrs. P.) I thought I'd try it out on a group of people. Some picture people were there and got all excited: one press agent, without my permission, went out and gave out a story to the trade papers. I sent you a clipping with a note a few days ago. Already the word has gotten around town, and heaven only knows how many stories we'll see in print. But I want you to know I have signed no contracts with anyone. Several producers are already after it, one or two of them complaining about its "spirituality" and declaring it has to be "torn to pieces" etc. (the usual Hollywood and N. Y. "business", to which I've learned to pay no attention whatever).

It may indeed be that here is something FDR himself would approve of - you would know that. I'm not a Spiritualist, so I can (to you) make it indicative instead of subjunctive - because I know as I live that they are aware, and very much aware, of everything that goes on here, affecting themselves, their work, and their loved-ones. If I have really captured a reflection of his spirit (little credit to me personally really) it might very well be that this would prove a force in aiding America at this time. 1948 will be brutal: signs already in the (Republican) skies. If we have managed to project, as on a far distant screen, and recorded on an ether wave, the

faintest image of that loving smile and remotest sound of that unforgettable voice, we may have done something to remind the millions (who, in a way, remember, but still lose the clarity of the image) of the necessity of keeping him always among us.

Being a Protestant I, like all Protestants, see much imperfection in the Catholic Church. But someone back there somewhere in that great organization discovered that the average man or woman has to have a medium between himself and his ideal. So they give them medals, beads, etc. and they do the work - a trip to Latin America emphasizes how thoroughly.

I thought if I could, behind a scrim, with all the art and care of a first-class production, just bring a reflection of the inner FDR before the public in this critical year, it might be doing something he wants done. Such an image could only come through love - the magic conductor.

Well can I realize how you feel about impersonations of that great man. This would really not be an "impersonation" at all - the last half of the 2nd Act takes care of that. When "John Graham" appears an audience knows "Tommy's" former commander-in-chief is only an image in his brain. The actor (who, as I wrote previously is fantastically like FDR in appearance, size, voice, etc.) would be kept very shadowy, yet vivid as that unreality - materializing, when he does (in Act 2) not as FDR but as "John Graham". Yet the impression of again having heard a fireside chat from their beloved leader would be irresistibly strong in an audience, and in this present moment might indeed help the people's cause. Also, I believe the presentation of him in this manner would make it practically impossible for stage or film producers to put him then on a lower plane - they would either have to measure up to the highest conception of him or leave him entirely alone. By "highest conception" of course I am paying no tribute to the work done, which is probably as yet very imperfect, but to the conception, which is one strangely unfamiliar to the theatre and screen of today - the Christian. If ever there was a true Christian, in everything he ever did, it was FDR. If that is brought home to the world, in a worldly place like the theatre, I think the result might very well be dynamic.

This is a terrible thing to do to you on vacation, and I beg your forgiveness, but I beg you also to read the play and write to me about it. Anything you say will be held in the strictest confidence, naturally. I think you will know when you've read it that I have had only one motive in writing it: to try to help bring that unity which we must have in America quickly, if we are to continue as a happy and great nation. "They" must have needed him pretty badly to take him away from us at this critical time! But, anyway, we know he's happy, and that helps a lot. My sincere affection goes along with this letter and play, and blessings on your family ~~of whom~~ of whom we are proud and will be prouder in the years ahead.

5455 Hazeltine Ave.
Van Nuys, Calif.
"El Ranchito Carlos."

Sincerely,

Jack Preston

FRESTON

JK

Van Nuys, Calif. August 10, '47.

Dear Mrs. Roosevelt:

After air-mailing letter and script to you at Campobello I began to wonder if it might not pass you on your way back. If it did, please wire collect and I will send a second MS to New York. Just in case - here's a carbon of the letter.

One thing I might have stressed a little, but neglected to, was Captain Young. Even though we staged him in a completely visionary manner (behind a scrim) you would still want to feel that he could project a reasonable likeness even unassisted by stage art - that he should be that "good." I can only say in this connection that the motion picture presentations of him have really been a distortion - the camera misses it. When one meets and talks to him in real life the likeness is fantastic. People everywhere stop him on the street, in cafes, etc. I'm sure that, handled with great restraint, he would bring the illusion through with great sincerity and effect, almost even satisfying the one person in the world we could never hope to satisfy and would never try to.

Since writing to you, two key men have seen the script - a prominent director (N. Y. Civic) and an equally prominent "Dogan" Democrat. The "Dogan" said: "Tremendous. It brought 'him' to me so vividly I cried.... This play would be an inestimable aid next year, because it is not 'political'!" The director said: "If only I can be permitted to do this play!"

I just wanted you to know too that, if-and-when, I will set aside a percentage of my royalties (stage, screen et al) to the Wiltwyck kids, and all publication royalties, should it appear, as it will of course, as a book. I'm sure also that I can persuade the producer to follow suit on his end of it. Should it prove the stage and screen success anticipated it could very well prove a great boon to the school, which would make us all happier than any public praise or patronage could ever do.

The press keeps picking up new stories about the play, from that first unauthorized blurb (see NYTimes); but (again if-and-when) the authorized publicity starts it will be stringently supervised as far as it is humanly possible to do that where the name of "Roosevelt" is involved! Martin Mooney*, whom, above all others in the business, I would want to father it, is a high-minded person; knew FDR and loved him - was received by him in more than 100 interviews ("Leo Mahoney" of the play); he was selected by FDR to pass the news out to the other boys and FDR once told him: "Martin, I like you, because you have courage. I decided years ago that courage was the most important thing a man can have!"

Anxiously awaiting some word from you. In the meantime, "vaya con Dios!"

5455 Hazeltine Ave.

Sincerely,

Jack Preston

* See Amer. Weekly writes up by Mooney by
Heart himself (God help us) next week.

Copy (Copy)

Van Nuys, Calif. Aug. 5, 1947.

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(Mrs. Roosevelt - continued)

faintest image of that loving smile and remotest sound of that unforgettable voice, we may have done something to remind the millions (who, in a vague way remember, but still lose the clarity of the image) of the necessity of keeping him always among us.

Being a Protestant I, like all Protestants, see much imperfection in the Catholic Church. But someone back there somewhere in that great organization discovered that the average man or woman has to have a medium between himself and his ideal. So they give them medals, beads, etc. and they do the work - a trip to Latin America emphasizes how thoroughly.

I thought if I could, behind a screen, with all the art and care of a first-class production, just bring a reflection of the inner FDR before the public in this critical year, it might be doing something he wants done. Such an image could only come through love - the magic conductor.

Well can I realize how you feel about impersonations of that great man. But this would really not be an "impersonation" at all - the last half of the 2nd Act takes care of that. When John Graham appears, an audience KNOWS Tommy's former Commander-in-chief is only an image in his brain. The actor (who, as I wrote previously is fantastically like FDR in appearance, size, voice, etc.) would be kept very shadowy, yet vivid as that unreality - materializing, when he does (in Act 2) NOT as FDR but as John Graham". Yet the impression of again having heard a first-hand chat from their beloved leader would be irresistibly strong in an audience, and in this present moment might indeed help the Democratic cause. Also, I believe the presentation of him in this manner would make it practically impossible for stage or film producers to put him then on a lower plane - they would either have to measure up to the highest conception of him or leave him entirely alone. By "highest conception" of course I am paying no tribute to the work done, which is probably as yet very imperfect, but to the Christian concept; for if ever there was a true Christian, in everything he ever did, it was FDR. If that is brought home to the world, in a worldly place like the theatre, the result might very well prove dynamic.

This is a terrible thing to do to you on Vacation, and I beg your forgiveness, but I beg you also to read the play and write to me about it. Naturally anything you say will be held in the strictest confidence. I think you will know when you've read it that I have had only one motive in writing it: to try to help bring that unity which we must have in America quickly, if we are to continue as a happy and great nation. . . . They must have needed him pretty badly to take him away from us at this critical time! But, anyway, we know he's happy, and that helps a lot. My sincere affection goes along with this letter and play, and blessings on your family and name, of whom we are proud and will be prouder still in the years ahead.

Sincerely,

5455 Baseltine Avenue,
FEL Ranehito Carlos,
Van Nuys, Calif.

Preston, J

August 25, 1947

My dear Mr. Preston:

I sent a copy of "Assembly Call" to Mr. George Bye of 535 Fifth Avenue, but I have had no word from him and I do not know whether he feels anything can be done with it or not.

Perhaps it would be wise for you to talk to Mr. J. Richard Kennedy,
1601 Riverside Drive
Burbank, California

who is also going to produce a play on the theme of Freedom from Fear in which he feels he must have somebody impersonate my husband. I have had long talks with him and he thoroughly understands that I do not like his idea and I do not like the idea as described in your coming play.

I told Mr. Kennedy, as I told you, but probably I have been a little more definite with him, as to why I have objections and what I dislike and he can tell you and perhaps tell you some of the difficulties which it may be wise for you to know.

I realize perfectly that I can not prevent my husband being acted on the stage but I think it is only fair that you should know that I have definite objections and will probably never go to see any play in which someone plays the part of my husband.

Very sincerely yours,

Van Nuys, Calif. August 17, 1947.

Dear Mrs. Roosevelt:

How does one thank anybody for a letter like yours from Montebello?
Probably best by showing a little gratitude in the production of the play itself!

First of all, I am so happy (my associates too) that you suggested using actual excerpts from his own speeches. This natural device occurred to me when the play first began to take shape, but I was afraid it might seem to you like an encroachment. Now to have you come forward with it - well, needless to say it will be done, and done as faithfully and effectively as is dramatically possible.

What you say about Hollywood's attitude (and the "retired" part of California, probably) is not news to me, and is one chief reason why I wanted to write "The Bridge" in the first place. It gives me great satisfaction to attempt to bring to the public on the stage (and later the screen) at this critical time, a sincere and truthful reflection of a man they love and always will love, but who has been and will continue to be thoroughly unwelcome to conniving politicians, un-American pressure-groups, and all naturally-selfish individuals. I'd want "FDR" to know that I've done it out of the great affection and respect I have in my heart for him, to do my part in helping along with the project he began, and is, I'm certain, still active in, from "where he sits"!

It isn't of much use merely to try to penetrate people's craniums: you have to get deeper inside than that. This is the reason why I wrote the play in a spirit of friendship and get-together, rather than as a hard-hitting drama that would be like a blow on the head. That is why I kept it, also, somewhat in the realm of fantasy, the domain of the miraculous, of the dream, for as Shakespeare said it is dreams that "fashion" us in our "little lives".

You have given me one generous "loophole" (your second paragraph) which the necessities of the theatre compel me to scamper through - suppose we say like an ungrateful rat. American audiences are becoming more and more restless - the movies have just about ruined them for straight, serious drama. You have to give them something a bit spiced up, startling (see my last letter to NY). From the first moment, in Act I, that they hear of Tommy "talking" to his commander-in-chief, they will be on the edge of their seats, waiting to witness this phenomenon - and the law of the theatre says you cannot disappoint them. But I assure you, you will not only not object to the way we do it, but will actually approve of it when you see how it comes off. In the last half of the play "FDR" will be, as you have so naturally wished, only a voice; but in Act I and a scene in Act II, we are compelled to give the spectators a shadowy image - as yet we don't know just how long sustained - something visual, to hold that general audience in its seats. If we gave them only "Graham" they would feel cheated; what they want is something at least dimly visualized, of the "guide, philosopher and friend," himself - so that they may imagine him leaving the theatre walking beside them, whispering in their ears, and giving them still a little of the reassurance that used to flow from that smile and that chuckle, into every home in the country.

- Mrs. Roosevelt - two -

You may be sure we are not taking for granted any such impossibility as your "endorsement" of the play. It is enough for us to know that your heart is with us in attempting to do what we are. As I said in a previous letter, we will stringently supervise the publicity, as well as the production itself, and keep it on the highest possible level.

a "discovery" of Tommy's

As always happens with a play, particularly after the producer and director come on the scene, changes have to be made. In addition to weaving in "FDR's" actual phraseology - and partially because of this - the structure of Act III especially has changed considerably; but you'll like it better. Here will come the strongest and most pointed of those verbatim utterances, and here also there will be an upturn of mood, in place of the rather "sad" ending I had before. The boys pointed out that, for a 1947-8 American audience, the other ending is too subtle - people aren't sufficiently aware of the nonexistence of "death" to really accept it. They would go out of the theatre a bit let down and sobby. I have gotten around that by handling Tommy's baby differently, for one thing - she is now normal and doesn't die. Also in other ways. Act III now brings in a new character, who is a kind of symbol (with very little actually to do, but we have to see him) - a "Judge Williams", who seems likely, as the play ends on a bright, hopeful note, to pick up the sceptre where it was so suddenly laid down, and carry on with the great adventure FDR began.

These same merciless lads insisted that I keep all "speeches" down to a minimum, and, through characters like "Jimmy", get more humor wherever possible. Otherwise the play will tally closely with the first script, copy of which you have. If you want to take the trouble to read the "revise" you shall certainly have that too. The "feel" and intent of the play will be in no wise altered.

We will not impose on you with periodical "reports" on our progress, unless you request it. I'm sure you will not be disappointed in the final result; and it is, of course, our private little delusion (our own "hallucination") that you will perhaps accept seats for yourself and party of friends the night we open in N. Y. after a few weeks' warmup on the road.

I presume I will be hearing from you again soon re ASSEMBLY CALL, and will then write....but not a time-consuming epistle like this. I hope "Tim's Play" will work out (and "The Bridge" too, later) as a real benefit to the Wiltwyck 'citizenitos'.

Again expressing our gratitude, and, if I may, our admiration for your wonderful, selfless attitude toward the project, I remain

5455 Hazeltine Ave.
"El Ranchito Carlos".

Sincerely,

Jack Preston

P.S. I've heard you like the Latins, as they do you, so am sending copy of a humorous biography I wrote around "Senor Plummer", Hollywood's very first male citizen, (in 1942). As I kept the author strictly out of it (one reason for the illfitting nom-de-plume Don Eugenio pinned on me) and gave the inimitable subject carta blanca, it may amuse you on a rainy night (something we don't have here in Southern California!!!!)