August 24, 1946

My dear Miss Polivanov:

I am very much interested in your article, and of course, if you wish to dedicate it to my husband’s memory, I shall be very glad to have you do so.

I hope you will be successful in having your story published.

Very sincerely yours,
Dear Mrs. Roosevelt,

Last December you kindly gave my story concerning the assistance of disabled veterans to Colonel H.A. Frisk, the Chief of the Convalescent Training Division and forwarded me his reply, in which he suggested that this story be sent to one of the Occupational Therapy Magazines.

I followed his advice and am mailing the article to you.

My story is dedicated to the memory of the late President who will always be an inspiration to all of those who have physical handicaps to overcome.

Yours sincerely,
Mazda Boivano
By Magda Polivanov

Not long ago, I was privileged to visit a military hospital near New York. Arrested by a pair of innocent blue eyes, I paused beside one of the cots. Its occupant was smiling at the pretty nurse, who bent over him. Both his legs were gone.

"I'm going home to Me, as soon as my new legs are fitted," he explained cheerfully.

"And where is home?" I asked.

"Texas. My Pop's a farmer. Back country. We got a twenty mile drive to the nearest railroad depot, lady."

I could see it was giving him pleasure to describe what he was looking forward to.

After I left, I couldn't shake off the memory of this boy: nor of his blue eyes, hollowed out by unnatural strain, and yet, just now, lit up with anticipation.

His home-coming ... I thought of the first few weeks of happiness ... the relaxation in familiar surroundings, the blessed peace after months of strangeness, danger, shock, pain ... the warmth, the affection, the praise of friends and neighbors. He would be enclosed in love and admiration: and nature herself would smile kindly, touching the trees and fields he knew so well with a soft and healing magic. But when life resumed its routine and people's thoughts necessarily turned elsewhere, would come - what? Hours of loneliness, while the kitchen clock ticked away the languid summer days; hours of forced
idleness, while other men toiled honorably in the fields, exercising muscle and brain at work and at play, and lived the normal round of existence from which he - the returned hero - was forever excluded.

I realized that tens of thousands, like him, are beginning to come home now. In this boy's blue eyes I saw the soul of tens of thousands of other youngsters, similarly handicapped, the problem of their future unresolved, a question-mark they dare not face.

Much, very much is done to help and encourage these victims of war, the maimed, the deafened, the blinded. Thus. But hospitalization, no matter how expert - pensions - artificial limbs - Seeing Eye dogs - all these material aids (generously dispensed as they are) are powerless to solve the dilemma in which these boys are caught. There is an inner problem, a psychological adjustment. These men must be assisted and freed inwardly, as well as outwardly.

What permanent good will a pension do my blue-eyed friend, if he has no field of action, no vital hope; no chance to create, to exercise choice, to assert and express himself? Let us not cast him, or those like him, into a Veteran's Home, to hobble about aimlessly for the next fifty years, to be well fed, well tended - - and forgotten.

When a man's spirit has suffered and when hope has almost vanished, no amount of material care can save him, unless it be accompanied by something that will cultivate and encourage
The initiative and action. Indeed, kind care, love and comfort, by themselves, may rather tend to depress and rob the soul of life. To understand this, we must ponder, a moment, on the basic values and character of life.

It is not first of all an option on the doing of things, action and accomplishment? And, in the more moral sense, an option on serving one's fellow men? Hence, it is obvious that by providing the wounded with care and comfort, rather than giving them the opportunity to serve, we do but rob them of their birthright. It is important to really understand this matter; we must grasp the one great fact, that life is and must be dynamic; that if or when it ceases to be so, it vanishes...

A creature who is just waited on and cared for by servants or doctors or what-not (be he a veteran or merely an idle person) is not really alive, even though he may walk and talk and consume much food and drink.

I was, once, in almost the same condition as that lad from Texas; my body broken by Bolshevik bayonets; my life despaired of. How have I survived the shock of the Russian Revolution? I ask myself this question. It has not been altogether easy to do so. There have been times when friends and doctors gave up hoping for me; but I, myself, never did. Since I have managed to survive, a mere or less whole person, my experiences may be worth recording here, if only because they provide a clue to those factors which can build a real recovery.
To begin with, the will to survive, hope and faith are the true foundations of any recovery. Why did my hope and faith persist? The answer to these and other questions may be found, I think, in the type of upbringing I received. My father was a soldier whose way of living never departed from the simplicity of soldier fare; whose junior officers and enlisted men were always around him, even on his country estates. He was always content to share any hardships or vicissitudes to which his men were exposed; his thought was always for their well-being; and, in spite of being wealthy and born to a life of ease, his whole philosophy was turned toward service and useful work. As his child (and adoring him) I was greatly influenced by his ideas. It was his principle to put his children on their own responsibility. We were taught to take care of our horses and everything we possessed. We were only given the wherewithal to fulfill our ambitions, provided we made full use of the opportunity. We had to know how to do everything for ourselves. Although there were plenty of servants, we did not become dependent upon them. We were taught to treat them with courtesy; to be rude to a servant was an unpardonable crime.

The other major influence on my childhood was the example of my grandmother. My grandmother's life centered around the children, the servants and the village — these three were, always, in her just and forgiving heart. She was gay and witty, as she was wise. No one feared to confess to her their worst offense. I had never met a person free from prejudice and condemnation. She was in perfect health at the age of ninety. But, one day, she said
good-bye; she asked to be buried in her favorite spot, in the
park, with a comfortable bench as her monument; and she said if
anyone of us should be in trouble, he or she should come and sit
there and meditate - and her spirit would try to help us. Then,
very quietly, she went off to sleep.

On the day of her funeral, the world was covered with
snow; we children were dressed in white, the servants and peasants
in their gaily colored feast-day costumes. The procession was in
no sense sad; the priest said a few prayers, the peasants sang
their favorite songs; there was more a feeling of rejoicing than
the pompous gloom associated with many a funeral. Her gay spirit
and loving heart survived and continued to rule the country-side.
This noble woman gave us, all, a life to emulate and a course to follow.

With this background, I had an advantage over many others
who were fated to suffer the change from wealth to Bolshevism. In
some respects, my background resembled that of the average citizen,
reared in plainer circumstances, because my real heritage was the
ideal of faith and service, imparted by my father and my grandmother.
Later on, when all else had been swept away and even my physical
well-being impaired for years, there still remained these precious
concepts which shone as cherished stars.

There was, also, the memory of my last meeting with my father,
the vision of his tall figure and his sad face and of the words of
wisdom that he uttered. While my father was under arrest in our
house, waiting to be taken to the Revolutionary Tribunal, my sister
and I were placed in our laundry-woman's house, at the other end of
St. Petersburg. When I came to see him, my old nurse took me, by the
back stairs, to his bedroom. In the right-hand corner of the room,
stood an iconostas with icons for each child. The little lamps were lit in front of it, their flames mingling with the glow of the winter sunset. My father stood there, in full uniform, waiting for me. Our meeting was stoic, rather than emotional. With his hand on my shoulder, he said: "We have not much time. I have given the order that every surviving member of the family shall try to reach our place in the Caucasus. It is too late to go by way of Sweden. I have notified our English friends; they will send a ship to the Caucasus to help you escape." Then, suddenly, he stopped talking; he took a turn about the room. "You know that your two brothers have just been killed," he resumed, "I don't know what has happened to your mother; the last I heard of her she was at our Novgorov estate." For the first time, I saw a lost expression on his face and he said: "Take care of your sister." Then he walked to the iconostas and took down two small silver icons. One was St. Mary Magdalen (my patron saint). "I had planned to leave you more than this," he said, "but as you see, everything is gone. ... He made a gesture — "Even the emperor, — Russia is drenched in blood. But remember," he added, looking deeply into my eyes, "something nobody can ever take away from you — this principle. — Never look backward, always go forward — and never hate!"

He then blessed me with my Icon, saying the Lord's Prayer. "This is your real inheritance," he added. "No revolution — no one can take it away from you. And now when you leave this room, don't look backward. Don't look back at this window. I shall be there, watching you. But, remember, don't turn around; you must always look forward."
At this moment, the door opened and a Red soldier motioned me to go. My father did not kiss me good-bye. We shook hands; and, for the first time, a new and greater force, a sense of responsibility surged up in me. There were no tears. I knew that in order to help my father, I must not cry. Once outdoors, there was a great temptation for me to look back. But I remembered my father's words: and, unlike Lot's wife, I obeyed. I gazed straight ahead, as I struggled down the street. I touched the granite wall of our house and, in my imagination, I felt it crumble. I proceeded forward... and almost stumbled on the frozen corpses in the snow. I touched other walls; passing by the Winter Palace, it, too, seemed to crumble under my touch. I moved in a dream; but, all the time I knew my father was watching me and that I must always go forward.

Before long, other trials came. It was to be my turn to suffer violence at the hands of infuriated madmen. My back was pierced by seven bayonets, my legs both cut to the bone and I was left in a prison to die. Waiting for the outcome of my fate, I heard my brave peasant nurse arguing with the Bolshevik Guard trying to persuade them to let me go, because I had no chance to survive and she would be able, she said, to give me a Christian burial.

Lying there, in an agony of pain – really I did not care what kind of funeral I was going to have, Christian, Mohamadan or Jewish – all I wanted was to divert myself from suffering. I made an effort to look around; and noticed
that the frost had made a design on the glass of the window opposite me, through which a beam of sunshine 
sparkling with millions of lights and colors. With a great effort I forced myself to study the intricate geometrical 
pattern. It was strange that, at this moment, I could find myself able to forget even for a minute, my physical suffering 
and my sinister surroundings. It is then, I realized that, in spite of emotional turmoil and bodily pain, I could survive - as long as I could keep my attention off myself and bend my thoughts on something entirely outside my circumstances.

It is then that I became aware there exists such a thing as CONTROL OF THE MIND; this proved useful later on.

After I left prison, I was given my first medical help and would joined by my sister, receiving care again in our laundry woman's basement.

While enduring the hardships of the next eighteen months - the long trek east through Russia - the endless days and nights (often with no shelter or food) there was not much time to feel the throb of unhealed wounds, or to worry and mourn about one's fate. I was not alone. There was my sister to look after - the very thought of this helped me to bear everything, and kept me going. Although she was two years older than myself, she was very sensitive to her crude surroundings, while I had always been of tougher fibre. I knew that if anything should happen to me, she would not be able to survive. The responsibility of bringing her to safety,
kept me balanced. We had a goal in view — that of reaching our place in the Caucasus, where we were to be rescued by our English friends.

We spent a year and a half wandering from one place to another, through Russia and part of Asia, in our effort to escape. We had very little money; and begged our way most of the time. Through the kindness of many people, we were aided almost everywhere, and often miraculously by-passed the Reds. When things became desperate, we begged and even resorted to stealing; but always continued forward, holding the memory of that last farewell with my father. The trials and tragedy of our Odyssey were tempered and sweetened, more than once, by the touching kindness and generosity of all sorts of people.

I also learned many a worthwhile lesson. Once, in mid-winter, in Siberia, with no money left, we found ourselves unable to proceed any further. My sister and I had concealed a few jewels about our persons; I offered a peasant, a big diamond ring, in exchange for a sack of frozen potatoes. He was not interested; and so I thought perhaps he would like something more valuable; and produced a string of pink pearls. To my astonishment, he was annoyed and said to us: "What am I going to do with these stones? I cannot eat them!" This taught me something of what real values are.

From day to day, facing all kinds of hardships, we did indeed achieve a sounder sense of reality. This I now consider my true fortune — a currency which I may
use safely throughout the world - and never fear bankruptcy!

After almost two years of wandering, my sister and I arrived at our destination. We found the place in great disorder. We learned later from the people who were living and working on our tobacco plantations, that our place was periodically occupied by three different armies, Red, White and Green - and by bandits besides! We were quite exhausted and happy to be able to rest for a while, anxiously awaiting the boat which was to come and fetch us. After a few weeks, my sister succumbed to an epidemic of influenza, then sweeping the neighborhood. There was no medicine around and no doctors; and she died within 24 hours.

By a strange coincidence, the very day of my sister's burial, a British destroyer arrived to rescue us. After I was taken aboard, every thought left me, as though a white curtain were drawn in front of me; I became completely indifferent to my surroundings, even finding my own name was strange to me. When I arrived in England, the struggle and danger from without were ended. I was placed in the utmost comfort, surrounded by the best doctors and nurses. But it is then, that I found my spirit sinking. I was sick with the sense of loss - my family, my friends, my Country gone forever; I was overwhelmed by a feeling of strangeness and insecurity. I felt as if I had been taken from one planet and placed on another. With photographic clearness, all the events of the past stood before me, and my mind became semi-clouded to everyday life. I read on the faces around me that there was not much hope for me; I knew,
myself, that this was true. I struggled with all my power to
divert my attention from myself - and failed. There was some-
thing lacking,

had

I have two nurses. One of them was very conscientious
and greatly believed in regimentation. She would follow, with
military precision, everything prescribed by the doctor;
but it seemed unimportant to her to use her judgment on the
individual in her care, nor was she at any moment, aware of
the inner feelings of her patient. She was a good, honest
nurse. She treated me as if I were a little child; and I am
sure if I had been left entirely in her hands, I would now
be dead.

My other nurse was Scotch. Her name was Miss Camp-
bell. Her approach to nursing was quite different. She be-
lieved in the free expression of the individual. She never
forced or regimented me into things which I did not like.
She used her power of observation. It was she who post-
poned the amputation of my leg; she who, finally, argued the
great surgeon into not doing it. I remember her saying to
him, with her Scotch accent: "Why, sir, if Magda has been us-
ing her leg, and walking for two years, with open, inflamed
wounds - and is still alive - surely a few weeks more will
not make much difference. But she can't grow a new leg." She
often asked me questions and showed a real interest in
me and in Russia.

It was then, I told her that Russia was very dif-
ferent from the rest of Europe: how few factories we had there;
and that, in my country, it was more expensive to buy machine made
things than hand-made ones; that production of hand-made articles was a normal necessity of life there; and how I had learned, in my childhood, to carve, model and paint.

One day, Miss Campbell arrived with clay and a set of tools, and said it would be good for me to occupy myself; she added that her grandmother, in Scotland, couldn't move either - but was weaving one of the best tweeds in the country. Having been accustomed to using my hands in childhood, it occurred to me, as the last resort left, that as long as I had the capacity to use my hands and eyes, I should do so. In the beginning it was a great effort for me to concentrate on my work, but I stuck to it, diligently.

In a short time, I noticed the difference. While I worked with my hands, I found my mind was at rest - focussed and also diverted. It was an important and encouraging moment, when I noticed that the better my work was in artistic quality, the greater became the improvement in my health. With each week, it became much easier and took less effort to keep my attention on what I was doing. Gradually, my faculties became better coordinated, and normal health began to return to both body and soul.

Little by little, I became more ambitious; and while still lying in bed, I began to prepare for my future, by filling out an application for an examination by the Royal Academy. In nine month's time, while still walking with the help of a crutch, I passed my examination at the Royal Academy and settled on a career as an artist-designer; I
determined that my health and my work should both steadily improve and that I would, in the end achieve my independence. It took thirteen years practice to get well—through dieting, exercising my wounded legs, and, above all, through constant practical work with my hands.

This, then, was my readjustment to life, the road by which I returned to the perfect health which I now enjoy. We don't know our potential abilities until we give ourselves a real trial.

After coming to America, I developed a little hand-craft business; hand-block printing of fabrics, and the making of dresses, costumes, screens, and so forth. My designs and models were regularly purchased by a number of the best shops in this country, from coast to coast; also by movie stars, by Mrs. Franklin D. Roosevelt and by many others. I have had to temporarily discontinue this business, because of war regulations, cutting off dyes and other basic materials.

I found, while conducting this enterprise, that hand-made and decorated articles are appreciated everywhere; that customers are interested and plentiful and willing to pay good prices for such things. And out of my experience, I know it to be a fact that a well organized shop or exchange, dealing in hand decorated fabrics or china, or in hand made furniture, can be made to succeed on a strictly business basis, with no extraneous or added appeal.

It is for this reason that I would suggest that a handcraft industry, composed of veterans should be established here.
This should be a door opened to all men returning from service, whether disabled or not. I believe Government sponsored and supported handcraft schools should be started, as soon as possible; that the best instructors available should be engaged; and the best physicians available should co-operate, in an advisory capacity. I think sales-centers for the output of these schools should be set up in every community of a few thousand inhabitants. I think that in country districts, these shops or markets should also handle farm produce, vegetables and livestock, raised by veterans.

I also believe that after they have been taught a craft at Government expense, these veterans should become self-supporting, living on the proceeds of their handiwork. I feel some of them should enter into the management of the shops where their work is for sale; and that, in time, the shops should develop into co-operative business concerns, able to function and to make a sound profit - with no further necessity for the Government subsidy which may possibly be needed to first get them up.

The success of the program I have outlined hangs on two factors:

1 - Maintaining high standards in instruction in the school.

2 - Striving for real quality in every branch of production.

Can one imagine not patronizing these Veterans' Craftshops, where household goods, furniture, costumes, jewelry and fabrics - made of good material, designed with originality and executed with an artist's loving care, would be for sale at reasonable prices? Such shops or exchanges in your town
or in a neighboring one, simply could not fail. More - they would subtly transform our culture. A new sense of values would develop among us - a feeling for the unique character of handmade things as against the uniformity of factory produced goods.

The psychotherapeutic benefit of such a scheme is beyond argument. Disabled men will no longer be earmarked as useless and incompetent; they will become productive and contented members of the community. Boys returned from the war will not be herded into sweatshops, and bent over menial and unimaginative jobs. No. After graduation from the special schools I have suggested, they can and should work at home, or in small groups - in towns or on farms, on ranches or in mountain villages, all over this country. The boys will no longer be casualties, but assets - their point of view transformed by the opportunity to use inborn originality; their nerves quieted by the exercise of ever improving skill; their minds stimulated by the interchange of ideas and designs, which should be promoted by one or several veterans' craft magazines; their ambitions encouraged by frequent exhibitions, to which prize winners should be given free transportation; a sense of achievement and success building up their morale, and permanently assuring their self respect.

Can we women do anything more important for these men of ours, than to stand behind the promotion of such a plan? Let us petition Congress for it, if necessary. Then, when the plan has been carried out, we must patronize the veterans' craft shops and influence others to do so; we must keep these enterprises alive and colorful, a vivid part of the national life - centers of joyful creation and symbols of the human spirit eternally triumphant over difficulty and disaster.