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Public Opinion on Postcards

Sheryl Oring Finds New Way to Share America's Thoughts With President

By Peter Jennings

ABCNEWS.com

Sept. 3, 2004— As the Republican National Convention descended upon New York City this week, Sheryl Oring set up shop in a public square, armed with her typewriter.

Sheryl Oring started typing out postcards and sending them to the president because "I wanted to give people across the country a way to express themselves." ABCNEWS.com

Oring launched a project called "I Wish to Say," which allows passers-by to write a postcard to President Bush. She provides the card and even the stamp.

"The idea for 'I Wish to Say' partly came from the feeling that I wanted to give people across the country a way to express themselves," Oring said. "This is giving them an opportunity in a really different way to speak their mind."

Oring dons 1950s-style attire and uses an antique typewriter to set a mood.

"There is something about the typewriter that really draws people in," she said. "It also is a symbolic reminder of a different era when people took the time to write letters and people slowed down and listened to each other. Maybe it was even a time when letters to the White House had a better chance of reaching the president."

Wrote one person: "I voted for Nixon twice, I voted for Reagan twice, I voted for your father. You and your administration deeply trouble, anger and outrage me."

"I am a Christian not voting for you," wrote another.

Still another's postcard began: "Here are our terms for your surrender."

Worldly Background

Oring grew up in North Dakota, attended college in Colorado, moved to California to pursue journalism, and then left for Germany to study art theory.

She got the idea for the project after many Europeans told her that all Americans think alike.

"Because I had lived in so many parts of the country, I thought this couldn't possibly be true," she said. "This project is demonstrating to the world how diverse America really is."

She once took dictation while visiting a Navajo reservation in Arizona. Someone sent a card to the president saying that the tribe needed electricity.

In California, a woman wrote to the president about health care.

"If I were president," she wrote, "I would give every American the same health-care coverage that you and every member of the House and Senate get."

In Brooklyn last weekend, a little girl asked Oring to write a note about the war.

"Dear Mr. President, bring my uncle home," she wrote. "My aunt needs him."

Will Bush Read the Postcards?

Oring plans to take her project across the country at least through the election. She supports herself working as an archivist at a New York architectural firm, and eventually she hopes to write a book.

"I just see the power of it and the way people are transformed by this really simple act," she said. "And it feels like I can't really stop."

But will the president ever read them?

The White House correspondence office told ABC News that any letter "represents a private exchange between the public and the president" and they would not discuss it.

Oring, however, remains hopeful.

"I do think the more that I do, the better chance there is that the President will actually read them. I think the White House may take note at hundreds and hundreds of hand-typewritten postcards landing in their mailbox. Maybe," she said, smiling. ■