August 25, 1964

Dear Martha:

I'm going to use the typewriter because somehow I can talk with you more freely than if I were writing in longhand. It is odd, but that is the way I am.

Your note was waiting for me in the accumulated mail when I got back from the west coast. You and Bob have been in my thoughts so constantly and with such understanding. When I wrote to you before, I had just heard and was inarticulate for I have suffered for you. Well do I know the inner struggle.

Even the sounds in the street are different. You go through the normal process of speaking with friends, of making the necessary decisions, of picking up the routine demands of daily living--all without meaning, somehow. You have become two persons---one on the surface and one underneath covering a suffering so deep that only those who have walked along the same path can in any way comprehend.

After Betty's death for both of us, life seemed without meaning---with periods of numbness and then agony---with unanswerable questions pressing for an answer---with no haven of calmness and acceptance. You simply do what has to be done, picking up your life and taking one day at a time without thinking ahead.

We went to Europe and there in the dim, silent interior of the Cathedral of St. Denis unknown parents spoke to us across the centuries from the depth of their personal grief.

It was a small, inconspicious little bronze plaque near the bottom of the altar. The late afternoon sun shining through the stained glass window formed a shaft of soft blue light which centered on the small plaque causing the inscription to stand out with arresting clarity. The words on that plaque have been engraved on my heart ever since and have been a real comfort. "For the years of our child's life, we thank Thee, O Lord". A great flood of thankfulness swept over us --- thankfulness for the six years we had had of Betty's life---for her laughter, her enthusiasm, her sweetness---for the funny things she had said and done---for the richness she had added to our lives. We both knew then that because we had had this priceless gift, even for such a short time, we had the obligation to do as much as possible for others. How rich we had been to have had her and she would be a part of our lives, an inspiration for the rest of our lives.

The inner battle to find purpose and meaning for life is a lonely one--- but of one thing I am certain---there is purpose and meaning and a challeng to meet each day as it comes---and I am certain there is Divine help and that there is immortality. I can't explain it with my mind, but I am absolutely certain in my heart.

An article I read several years ago has also helped me pick up my life when Odell went. It was written by Dorothy Thompson. She said that she had always thought of courage as a grim acceptance, but as she grew older she realized that the finest courage of all was the courage of happiness. That ingredient is needed so much in the world today and if we, who have been given it so generously through those we have loved

meet our obligation
and whose physical presence we have lost for awhile, ~~we will have~~
we can carry on their lives through ours for a better world--the immediate
world around us.

I said it is a struggle and it is. There are days when it is black for me, when I see no purpose in life, when I wonder why I have been left, when the loneliness is suffocating, when I want to reach out for others and yet seem to be closed in a tight room. Those are the days when I wash windows, scour the kitchen, bake cookies to take to sick friends, work until I fall into bed at night exhausted. By the next morning the calmness and thankfulness for all I have had returns and the sun shines.

With love,

Kim

Friday Morning

Dearest Martha:

I know, oh I know how you feel. The constant agony of separation is something which I struggle against always--the thought that it simply couldn't have happened to me---the constant question as to why---and for awhile the feeling that Betty's death was all my fault, if only I hadn't suggested that she go across the street to see Eleanor Richardson the accident would never have happened.

Odell waited until I was calmer and then, bless him, sat down and talke with me, a conversation I will never forget. He said that both of us lov Betty completely; that we had done everything humanly possible to protect her and yet give her freedom; that our decisions were made in the light of our great love and within the limitation of being human; that to keep on being obsessed by the feeling of guilt---if only I hadn't done that or if I had done this was one of the most destructive forces in life; that you not only destroyed your own life but the lives of those around you; that each one of us is left for some purpose and we had an obligation to fill that purpose with faith in the Divine power which does sustain. Above all, you and Bob wanted Timmy to have a normal, happy childhood. How much happiness he had and how much he gave to others! Believe me, the struggle is a hard one and I have found that the only thing which time does is to help you cover better and to be more aware of the inner feelings of others---that almost every one is facing some inner problem.

I alsofelt that loss of fear---that the worst which could happen has happened--I lost fear when Odell went completely. Goodness I am talking frankly with you, things I never have mentioned to any one before. When people say "Aren't you afraid to fly? " I reply "No" with no farther explanation.

As I said before you live two lives---the surface where you meet people, talk of everyday happenings, but part of you just isn't there. Yet it is awfully important to keep up this surface for it does gradually build a more or less protective veneer. That veneer at times cracks badly. Only a few days ago, this woman came up to me in the grocery store and in a chatty voice said "You are Mrs. Odell, aren't you? Oh, you are the one whose little girl was killed by a car right in front of your house." It was all I could do to talk on calmly for a few minutes, but when I got in the car I cried all the way home. I had to tell myself firmly that she was trying to be kind and simply had no idea how much her remarks hurt---that she had never experinced any break in her family and therefore did not sense the pain which you carried always.

Of course the "whys" haunt me. Why, why when both Betty and Odell had so much to give to the world--Betty at the beginning of her life and Odell right at the prime. Why should they have been taken and me left. Then my mind rushes on to the deep gratefulness that I had supreme happines as long as I did---that in one sense they will be with me always ---every minute of the day and night,---that having them and lovingly completely is worth all the pain of separation. If the pain is my part, and it is, then I will accept it and try to make each day count as much as is humanly possible.

It was a long time before I could read and know what I was reading. I would hold a book, read a page and have no idea what was in it. I knew that I had to do something with my hands---something physical. On dark days now, I wash woodwork, windows, clean out drawers and close my mind to any thinking. That was the reason that I went to Draughn's Business School and took typing for I could pratice by the hour ---going through the mechanical motions which was a help.

We do see through a glass darkly now, but Heaven seems much closer and w e are given the strength to fight through the valleys.

My sister, her husband and son were here until Wednesday of this week. They were on their way to put him in Davidson and then Mary Lou and Ed. went on to have a week's vacation at the Chalet in Little Switzerland. That is the loveliest inn, located in a spot where you can see the whole range of the Blue Ridge Mountains from your bedroom window. Mountains do something for me in their majesty and silence. "I look unto the hills, from whence cometh my help". Last summer I took my eighty five year old Uncle up there for a vacation. He is such a darling with the most wonderful philosophy of life that it is a blessing to be around him. He retired as pastor of a church in Charlotte when he was seventy two. At that time he was sure that he would not be asked to fill various pupilts due to his age. The amazing thing is that he has preached every Sunday since except for two which he spent with me. When I look at him in the pulpit, with that beautiful white hair, sparkling eyes and a face with shows all the character and courage and happiness of living, a lump comes in my throat and tears to my eyes. What a blessing he has been to such a host of people in all the vicissitudes of life. You can just feel in the congregation how he is surrounded by love. To me he is a real inspiration and you come away feeling that life is good and that God is an ever present scource of power.

Lovingly,

Kitty

My typing still has much to be desired