

June 21, 1999

Dear Mary Ellen,

Thanks for talking with me last week, and trying to get me in the kitchen! I'm including the initial letter I wrote to Noa Meyer for background, but the basic idea is this: I want to draw something having to do with breakfast, and with the administration. If I could draw the cafeteria in the Old Executive Office Building - a cook making pancakes or squeezing orange juice for instance - that would be great. I wouldn't be taking photos, and it would take fifteen minutes. It would be pretty painless, the drawings (given my accuracy) wouldn't look anything like what I was drawing, but for the children who would eventually read the book, it would be fun I think.

Would you like to have breakfast?

Thanks for anything.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'El.' or 'Eli.', written in a cursive, stylized font.

Elisha Cooper
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March 31, 1999

Dear Noa Meyer,

I have a strange request. I'm a children's book writer, and wanted to visit the White House kitchen.

I know Julia Moffett, and got your name through her a year ago when I sent copies of another sketchbook as gifts.

I'm writing a children's book about the capital. It will look like the two enclosed books: watercolors, light observations. It will follow the workings of the capital for a day. There will be drawings of representatives at podiums, pages with messages, Supreme Court justices in robes, that little train that runs from the congressional offices to the capital.

What I have in mind for the White House is this: drawings of White House cooks preparing a meal, preferably breakfast. Since much of the legislative process starts at the White House, I thought it would fit to have drawings of the kitchen getting the day started, brewing coffee, setting government in motion with a meal. Maybe I'm reading too much into the idea. Mostly, I just think it would be fun! Something that, if I were a kid, I'd want to see.

I wouldn't be using anybody's name, and, as you can tell from my books, I don't think I'd be using anybody's likeness! All I would need would be an hour of access to sketch and observe.

(an annoying self-referring aside: my last children's book, "Ballpark," was one of the New York Times best ten children's books of 1998). Ultimately, my aim is to make government seem accessible for children. Make it less big and distant. Let them see it as something possible, something that can be good and interesting.

Anyway, thanks for hearing me on this. I seem to remember that you worked with the First Lady, but any help or advice you could give me would be great.

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