

A SPECIAL DELIVERY

I In February 1914, five-year-old Charlotte May Pierstorff from Grangeville, Idaho was sent by mail to her grandparents who lived 73 miles away. Before the journey she was weighed, like a parcel, and then rode in the train's mail car with a stamp on her coat. As odd as this may sound, Charlotte's parents had no problem sending their daughter by mail. They figured that it was cheaper to use the US Postal Service than purchase an expensive train ticket. Moreover, Charlotte wasn't alone. A railway postal worker kept her company, and he made sure that she had a pleasant journey. →

10 **II** Charlotte's adventure was by no means an isolated incident. The first known case happened in January, 1913 – days after the Postal Service had announced that they were expanding their services and accepting parcels over four pounds (1.8 kilograms). “The child was still a baby,” says historian Trevor Lewis. “His parents paid 15 cents on
15 stamps to ship their eight-month-old son to his grandmother's, and then handed him over to the mailman.” Luckily, it was a short journey and the boy arrived safely at his grandmother's. “But nonetheless,” adds Lewis, “If someone did something like that today, they would be charged with negligence¹ or worse still, child abuse².”

20 **III** Clearly safety standards were pretty low in those days but still, how did parents get away with this rather controversial practice? According to Lewis, regulations about what could and couldn't be sent by mail were a bit unclear in those days. “Technically speaking, these parents weren't breaking the law,” Lewis claims. “The regulations were
25 a matter of interpretation. In some towns, the postmasters understood that people could ship their children around the country, whereas in other towns, this practice seemed totally unacceptable.”

IV Over the years, stories about parents sending their children by mail continued to appear in the press from time to time. These children usually
30 traveled short distances to see their relatives, but six-year-old Edna Neff from Pensacola, Florida broke all records. She was sent by mail to her father in Virginia, who lived 720 miles (1158 km) away. In 1914, this practice was finally put to an end, when Postmaster General Albert S. Burleson realized that the regulations needed to be explained
35 in a more precise manner. And so, it finally became clear to everyone that children could no longer be sent by mail as “special deliveries”.

V While shipping children by mail may seem careless or even cruel, Lewis believes that we should not pass judgement too quickly. “Things were different in those days,” he explains. “The US was still largely a
40 rural nation and the standard of living was low. Postal workers were essential to the community. People trusted them with their lives – and their babies for that matter,” Lewis concludes with a smile. So, maybe we should see this episode of the Postal Service in a more positive light. After all, in those days, contact with the outside world was limited, and
45 the mailman was like a lifeline, connecting friends and family who lived far away.

¹ negligence / הזנחה / إهمال

² child abuse / התעללות בילדים / إساءة معاملة الأطفال

B Answer the questions about the article.

1. From paragraph I, we can understand (–).
 - (i) why Charlotte’s parents sent her through the mail
 - (ii) how long the journey took
 - (iii) how much a train ticket cost
 - (iv) when people started sending their children through the mail

Questions often rephrase the information in the text. Check which words in the text give the information in the question.

2. According to paragraph I, Charlotte wasn’t alone on the train’s mail car. Write the words from the text that indicate this.

ANSWER:

3. What do we understand from paragraph II?

PUT A ✓ BY THE TWO CORRECT ANSWERS.

- (i) In the past, sending children through the mail was not uncommon.
- (ii) People still send their children through the mail today.
- (iii) In 1913, Trevor Lewis was charged with negligence.
- (iv) Today, sending children through the mail is unacceptable.
- (v) The Postal Service stopped parcel delivery services in 1913.
- (vi) Charlotte’s adventure was unique.

4. COMPLETE THE SENTENCE.

According to paragraph III, some postmasters allowed

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5. According to paragraph III, (–).

- (i) all postmasters had the same ideas about the rules regarding parcels
- (ii) parents knew that it was illegal to send their children by mail
- (iii) it was unclear what people could send by mail
- (iv) people could only send parcels by mail

6. According to paragraph IV, six-year-old Edna Neff from Pensacola, Florida “broke all records”. Why?

ANSWER:

7. What do we learn about Postmaster General Burleson in paragraph IV?

COMPLETE THE SENTENCE.

He understood that the regulations had to be

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8. According to paragraph V, why were postal workers so important to the community? Give ONE reason.

ANSWER: