

Retarded Girl Strangled by Safety Strap

"I don't see how this could happen, but I can't jump to any conclusions. They didn't tell me anything yet except that it was an accident and I would get a full report today."

Mrs. Ethel Meckler of the Bronx spoke guardedly this morning about the death by strangulation of her 12-year-old daughter yesterday afternoon in Willowbrook State School.

"I was told not to say anything," Mrs. Meckler said.

Her daughter, Renee, severely retarded, and physically handicapped was killed, police say, when she was choked by a restraining device used to keep her from falling from a chair.

According to Dr. Jack Hammond, school director, the girl, a resident of Willowbrook since 1955, was subject to epileptic seizures and was unable to sit without being strapped into the chair.

The grand jury presently is investigating the deaths of a 10-year-old mentally retarded boy in May and of a 42-year-old man in February, both residents of the institution.

They were severely scalded while taking showers.

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THE GIRL was found shortly after 3:30 p.m. by an attendant, Miss Charlene Ellam, on the patio of one of the new buildings at the rear of the state school complex.

Authorities said another attendant, who had been looking after a group of children on the patio, stepped into an adjoining room moments before Miss Ellam came out on the patio.

The child was seated in a wooden lawn chair with the restrainer about her body when last seen by an attendant before her death, police say.

She apparently slipped through the arm of the chair causing the restraining device — somewhat like a seat belt — to work up around her neck.

Another death in the school within the past year occurred last August when an older patient strangled a 15-year-old boy.

50 Receive Diplomas at State School

Thirty boys and twenty girls were presented diplomas at commencement exercises yesterday at Willowbrook State School's academic school.

The class was presented by Dr. Jack Hammond, director of the school, and the address to the graduates was given by Civil Court Judge Jerome O. Ellis.

Rabbi Philip Goldberg, chaplain at Willowbrook, gave the invocation. The benediction was given by the Rev. James J. Malley, also chaplain at the school.

Awards were presented to class members by Mrs. Berdie Gordon, member of the Benevolent Society for Retarded Children. The diplomas were distributed by Mrs. Mary C. Ellis, secretary of the Board of Visitors.