

SEPTEMBER 19, 1965

It's Your Opinion

Willowbrook Defended

At the expense of the patients and the many, many devoted personnel, the politicians have shown no mercy in making Willowbrook State School their political football and vote-getting device. As a lay person of 10 years of service at the school I should like to share a very few of my personal experiences and observations.

Prior to becoming an employe at Willowbrook, I considered it cruel and heartless for a parent to commit his mentally defective child to an institution.

How soon my sheltered opinion took a complete about-face, and daily since that time I thank God for places like Willowbrook.

Some of the children would never be able to mingle in society due to their very severe mental handicaps. Undoubtedly these are the patients Sen. Kennedy referred to as "unclothed, sitting in their own excreta on wooden benches in an overcrowded room with no recreational facilities."

... The senator was fast to criticize but slow to recognize that if a patient is incapable of keeping his clothes on plus being incontinent, his I. Q. is undoubtedly so low he would not respond to any recreational facilities.

How little the public knows about a place like Willowbrook and is unaware of the many levels of retardation. Some of the children perform on a "near normal" level, and so on down the scale to the level of those before-mentioned. As a whole,

the many children I know at Willowbrook are happy children. They are no longer "oddities" in society, nor are they lonely, as each seeks out his own and vast friendships are formed. . .

My hat goes off, and my heart goes out to the many personnel who literally "knock themselves out" to extend themselves far beyond their job requirements to put sunshine into the lives of their charges whom they often tenderly refer to as "my children."

Little mention is ever made of the hard-working, ever-present Benevolent Society, the parents' group that provides so much in such abundance from the latest medical devices to television sets for individual wards to outside excursions, and dozens of "luxuries" in between. They provide the means to many niceties for all the children which the state budget allowance could never afford.

Nor did Mr. Kennedy see, or inquire about the many people in the community who serve as volunteers at Willowbrook. So many have been faithfully devoting their time and efforts for years. . .

No one minds constructive criticism of a situation which bears much improvement but how devastating to exaggerate the bad features and plant the seeds of fear and doubt in the minds of parents who aren't too familiar with the hospital system, to prejudice the public's thinking with terms like "snake pit," which actually Willowbrook is not and how wrong to cast a shadow of shame and neglect on the numerous individuals who make the most of the conditions that do exist and

shower their charges with a great deal of tender, loving care.
A. E.

My daughter has been a patient at Willowbrook four-and-a-half years, and her care, social and recreational has been excellent. I have never seen a dirty or ragged patient, never saw any filth and can say the children looked better than they probably looked at home and the building itself was far cleaner than most homes.

The staff members of the entire hospital are very badly overworked and underpaid but more dedicated people you'll never find anywhere.

There are many lovely things that can be published and shown at Willowbrook, done by the patients. It seems too bad that the public is only allowed to read what one man's feelings are about Willowbrook.

Most people ride past or around Willowbrook State School and say "tut, tut," but never reach a helping hand or see for themselves what there is there to see. . .

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