

It's your opinion

Friday, February 25, 1972

Theater could aid Willowbrook

In the past several weeks, I have watched the horrible goings on at Willowbrook State School. I have an idea that may help out the children of Willowbrook.

During the war, I was not drafted because of an ear ailment, and at that time worked at Willowbrook (which was known then as Halloran Hospital), in charge of sound in the wards and the auditorium. My thought is, if this auditorium is still available, why not have the amateur theatrical groups of Staten Island put on shows every weekend? The money derived from these shows could be turned over to Willowbrook to buy the children clothes or whatever needs that they may have.

I belong to the Our Lady Queen of Peace Church, New Drop, theatrical group. We put on a show once a year for our parish. Of course, our talents, our time, and costumes, etc., are all on a voluntary basis. I am sure that our group would be more than happy to put on a show on Saturday and Sunday toward this worthy cause.

The only way that this would ever work is through your efforts and concern of publicizing this letter in your paper.

THOMAS L. NIESI,

232 Locust Ave.,
New Dorp

SUNDAY February 27, 1972

Where have officials been?

As a lifelong resident of Staten Island (51 years), a father of three grown children, a concerned citizen and a crucified taxpayer, I direct the following two questions at all of our local elected officials — Murphy, Marchi, Amann, Russo, etc.

So you guys finally found the location of Willowbrook. That place must be in an isolated area. But you know, some people are very good at pinpointing locations. One that I can name is the late U.S. Senator from New York, Robert Kennedy. In 1965, seven years ago, gentlemen, he came to Staten Island during his campaign, stopped at a gas station, obtained a road map and found Willowbrook very easily. He then toured that place and soon after he denounced the conditions that existed then, on

television.

My first question is this — where the hell have you guys been for the past seven years?

...

A few years ago there was a scandal involving the moneys collected from parking meters, involving millions of dollars, as being stolen.

The question: Whatever was the final outcome of that investigation? How quickly, quietly and efficiently that was brushed under the rug. How about one of you guys lifting up that rug and seeing who is under there? Some bigwigs might get burned by this, but what is more important to you? A singed thief or an overburdened taxpayer?

Go to it, men. November is coming and you can rest assured that this election all of you will be judged by what you have done and not by what you claim you will do.

J. J. McLAUGHLIN,

39 Troy St.,
Great Kills

Wednesday, March 1, 1972

Prevention is best course

Your coverage of the problems of Willowbrook has prompted many citizens of this community to ask, "What can I do?" There have been many sorts of answers: Send toys, volunteer time, give money, write your legislators, decentralize the institution, and so forth. But I submit that the solutions proposed are lacking, because they are just that — solutions.

To me the tragedy of Willowbrook is not that there are too few dollars, or too few attendants or too few facilities, although this is indeed a sad

situation. Remedying this situation is absolutely necessary — but not sufficient. I submit that the real tragedy of Willowbrook is that there are so many people there in the first place. People that needn't be there at all, but who are there nonetheless, as victims of preventable mental retardation.

To me there is no good reason for things like rubella, PKU, Rh incompatibility, poor nutrition, syphilis, lead poisoning, drug abuse, or identifiable genetic defects such as Mongolism to damage so many lives. With proper preventative measures, including genetic counseling, prenatal and postnatal care, access to medical services and early diagnosis and treatment, the undesirable effects of such factors can be greatly reduced if not eliminated.

Yet too few people are concerned with prevention. The typical "crisis mentality" that has contributed to the deterioration of our society once again clouds our vision and limits our perspectives.

I would like to give you something to think about. Members of one in 10 families suffer from birth defects, many of which result in mental retardation. At the same time,

It's your opinion

The "baby boom babies" are entering their childbearing years. In the coming decade there will be twice as many people in the peak reproductive age categories as previously. Even if these individuals limit their childbearing to two children (which is unlikely) we'll add another 72 million persons to our population in the next 28 years. Services are overburdened now — what then? (Note that this point is applicable to more than just services to those with birth defects.)

Let me add another point. We are consuming (and polluting) at a fantastic rate. To support the life style to which many people have become accustomed means increased use of power, resources, fertilizers and pesticides, among other things. Meanwhile the early warning signals from our "lower" organism friends (birds, etc.) go unheeded. To me these early warning signals say, "don't count on maintaining that one in 10 ratio — you ain't seen nothing yet!"

So we must seek new alternatives. There are many ways a person can work towards prevention. One of the ways is to organize citizens' groups to lobby, support more research, community clinics, etc. There are many such groups in existence, so that there is plenty of work for everyone to do. One such group is called the March of Dimes, which is composed of people committed to the prevention, early diagnosis and treatment of birth defects.

I would like to point out to anyone who enjoys working with young people that this spring thousands of students are organizing to help the March of Dimes fight birth defects. They're having a Walkathon on April 16, and they need the community's support. If anyone wishes to help, even for a few hours, they can call the March of Dimes office, GI 7-1171.

But in any case the community must reorient its thinking to include prevention, before our problems become so unmanageable that there's no hope in finding any workable solutions to them.

NANCY F. RUSSO, Ph.D.,
Walkathon coordinator,
March of Dimes

56 Bay St.
St. George

Proper care

not costlier

In reading your editorial comment of Feb. 23 about "Training isn't cheap," I find it completely out of order. I do believe that whoever writes your editorials should also find the time to read other parts of your newspaper. There has been much written pro and con about our state "schools," (particularly Willowbrook) lately. As a parent of a child in Willowbrook, I object strongly against the inference of your editorial to the effect of change being more costly,

The Advance welcomes your opinion. However, letters will not be used without the signature and address of the writer. It also would be appreciated if letters were kept as short as possible.

and I do assume that you would wish these children to vegetate and hopefully die. My child is one who has vegetated for five years in Willowbrook. I need not go into the frustrations and futilities of running from doctor to doctor to doctor, now, but for the first time in 13 years I'm beginning to have some hope that there might be some help for her, rather than just

"vegetating."

The State of California has made drastic changes from institutionalized retardates to more progressive community oriented program with phenomenal success, and the cost for this change has been nominal. The cost of maintaining a more progressive and helpful system is one-third of what a "dark ages" system is in New York.

I would hope that your editorial staff take some time to check out facts before coming out with such rash statements like: "That, sir is going to cost money. Providing learning and skills is more expensive than just letting the retarded vegetate."

PHILIP PONTERIO,

20 Dore Ct.,
West Brighton

(Editor's note: State Sen. Dalwin J. Niles, to whom the editorial was addressed, has since announced that he will try to obtain \$14 million more from the state for staffing 500 beds now unoccupied in hospitals elsewhere in the city, for shifting patients out of Willowbrook into neighborhood centers.)