

It's your opinion

Tuesday, March 21, 1972

Mother answers critic's letter

The woman who penned the following letter signed her name but conveniently neglected to include her address. I hope you will afford me the opportunity of answering her through your column. Her letter:

Dear Madam: Before anyone goes any further we need a few laws changed. Children are their parents' responsibility — all these millions of our money aren't needed. Make the parents financially responsible.

"The present system of just dumping your 'headache' over at Willowbrook and walking away scot-free is, morally wrong. Hundreds of those parents can pay and go to Willowbrook certain days a week to feed, clothe and care for their own flesh and blood. Why not? This 'everything for free' is crazy. Taking them out on Sunday for a hamburger — big deal. Investigate. They go to movies — ball games — hair dressers and sit all night before the color TV. These are poor people? It's 'Welfare' all over again — grab all you can — free. Staten Island needs sewers, schools and more. Let's be realistic. Take care of your own.

MARION KERR"

My answer:

Letters such as yours bear witness to the ignorance on the part of many concerning the retarded and their parents. You have attempted to present all parents of institutionalized patients as irresponsible freeloaders, completely devoid of any interest whatsoever in their unfortunate offspring. We cannot deny that a very small percentage of parents fit your description, but to imply that all or even most simply don't care and want only to walk away and enjoy the luxuries of life is a gross injustice.

The vast majority of parents are very concerned about their children, as evidenced by the large numbers trying to change present inadequate methods of

caring for the mentally retarded. These are the very mothers and fathers you try to label "irresponsible and uncaring." If they are given the opportunity to enter the wards to help care for their own, I'm sure many will run to help and not turn their backs, as you apparently believe. The ability to pay for a patient's care is based on each family's income, and that goes for the rich, the poor and those in between.

You are so right in stating that schools and sewers are sorely needed on the Island, but don't blame the retarded and their parents for the absence of these facilities. Blast the builders whose indiscriminate methods create but fail to correct flooding conditions and the problems that go with them. As for our overcrowded schools and the lack of new ones, look to your elected representatives. Vent your anger on those who truly deserve it.

You are the one calling the retarded "headaches," not their parents, who love them dearly. You are a very misinformed citizen and I strongly urge you to check your information before spouting off about a subject you obviously know nothing about.

MRS. FRED R. MAGRI,

733 Liberty Ave.,
Dongan Hills

Thursday, April 13, 1972

Army discharge employment bar

I was recently discharged from the Army as undesirable. I received this discharge because I saw what I had to do as morally wrong, and would not participate.

Before and since my departure from the Army, I made my mind up to dedicate myself to helping people. So when I read about the situation at Willowbrook State School, I went to apply for a position as an attendant. The position I applied for was turned down, even though I passed the required exams. It was because of my discharge.

I know I'm not the only one who is considered a criminal to the state, because I didn't participate in military activities. If I am a criminal then what about the state? Aren't they much more criminal. Look at the situation at Willowbrook.

The cruel treatment of patients, appalling conditions of the building, insufficient care for the patients, and the list goes on and on.

I don't know how many other people were refused work because of discharges or past records. But I do know that I speak for a lot of people, when I say that just like the situation at Willowbrook it is also criminal not letting a man have an equal chance to earn a livelihood.

I hope the state will realize that people with past differences with military and civil authority are capable of performing a meaningful life just like anyone else.

GREGORY CHARLES,

168 Brabant St.,
Mariners Harbor

Retarded need community help

As one of the mothers interviewed by Jane Kurtin for the series on retarded children at home, I have been amazed at the response from other parents. We do need help. These children are neither educable or trainable, although some of the mothers have worked miracles through long hours of home therapy. The children range from extremely hyperactive to immobile, are accident prone, have seizures, are not toilet trained, have to be fed and medicated, cannot speak or communicate intelligibly.

We know our children almost as well as ourselves, yet when they cry, how can we tell where the pain is? Stomach, ear, teeth or headache? Where is a doctor with the skill or patience to care for them, or the dentist? What babysitter is trained to care for a child with seizures, or change dirty diapers on a

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14-year-old? Grandma may be walking, but is no longer able to manage a child bigger and stronger than she.

Who will take the normal sibs to the movies or ball game or on trips to the city or any place that is fun? Daddy is busy working and we are tired of asking friends and relatives to help. They seldom volunteer.

We are not ashamed to take our children out but cannot. They can knock over shelves of cans with one wave of the hand. My child walked out of a store holding grandma's hand but also carrying a pocketbook whisked off a counter in the other hand.

The Board of Education has no classes suitable, nor has Staten Island Aid whom I consulted years ago and who were most kind and thoughtful.

We mothers have a 24-hour, no time off, no vacation job. Many sleepless nights spent with children who can't sleep. When my child had to be in the hospital, I was told that I or my husband must be with her at all times. That was a long week.

The community offers no help for the children. Whatever therapy they receive is done by the mothers and a few faithful volunteers. There is no relief for the mothers for social life, recreation or illness.

Since the strike at Willowbrook I have been struck by the idea that if mothers who kept their children home were subsidized with the pay of only one attendant, there would be fewer children in state institutions. We could then afford special equipment, the services of therapists or the relief of a trained helper once in a while.

Any positive suggestions will be appreciated. Connecticut has day care in an institution which will also keep the child full time during emergencies or vacations. New York has Willowbrook or nothing. A family with a handicapped child is a handicapped family. Even though the parents and brothers and sisters love these children

and learn compassion and caring from them, there are

many times when resentment is understandably the reaction.

A family can be knit closer together or torn completely apart by a handicapped child but usually it is a mixture and the burden of holding things together generally rests on the wife and mother.

We do need help.
"JOAN DAWSON,"
New-Dorp, D.N.Y.