

# How Willowbrook Boy Lost an Eye

By JOSH FRIEDMAN

The father of a 20-year-old resident of the Willowbrook State School for the Mentally Retarded testified today that in the 14 years his son has been at the institution he has lost an eye and five teeth, and suffered two head injuries.

"Stevie lost an eye four years ago," Ben Rosepka said of his son. "It took them weeks to even look at it when it was swollen, and then one day they called me and told me they were sorry but he had lost his eye."

Rosepka, who tearfully described his son's decline, was one of several Willowbrook parents testifying in Federal Court today in a class action suit being brought against Gov. Rockefeller, State Mental Hygiene Commissioner Alan Miller and several Willowbrook officials.

Other parents told of incidents of untreated burns, an ear bitten off, a finger mistakenly amputated and unreported beatings.

A supervising nurse at Willowbrook testified that conditions there were "deplorable."

"The cockroaches have taken over the building," said Inez Stevens, who has been at Willowbrook since February. "I found one in an oxygen tent and they pour out of the drawers in the

kitchen."

When shown a state personnel schedule giving the number of attendants and nurses in the building under his supervision, Miss Stevens said the real number of workers was half that claimed by the state.

The suit, being heard by Judge Orrin Judd in Brooklyn Federal Court, has been filed by several parents, as well as the New York Assn. for Retarded Children and the Willowbrook chapter of the Benevolent Society for Retarded Children.

They are represented by the Legal Aid Society and the New York Civil Liberties Union.

The parents are asking the court to order the state to improve conditions at the school.

Bruce Ennis, a New York Civil Liberties Union attorney representing some of the parents, said brutality incidents are "everyday occurrences."

"They tell us about a broken finger here, an ear bitten off there, lost eyes, a couple of deaths—things that are just routine at Willowbrook," he said.

Two young Willowbrook attendants were arrested earlier this month on charges of beating three young boys with broomsticks.

Ennis also charged that the Willowbrook administration is "rushing in clothes" to the

institution because of the attention expected to be focused there this week.

"One of our informants said he's never seen such hustle and bustle in all the time he's been there," said Ennis. "But it doesn't make any difference. It's like putting a Band-Aid on a 12-inch gash."

The suit, which was originally brought last March, was postponed by Judge Judd to give the state a chance to show improvements at Willowbrook.

But Jerry Gavin, a Benevolent Society director, said that few changes have been made there despite press attention over the past year.