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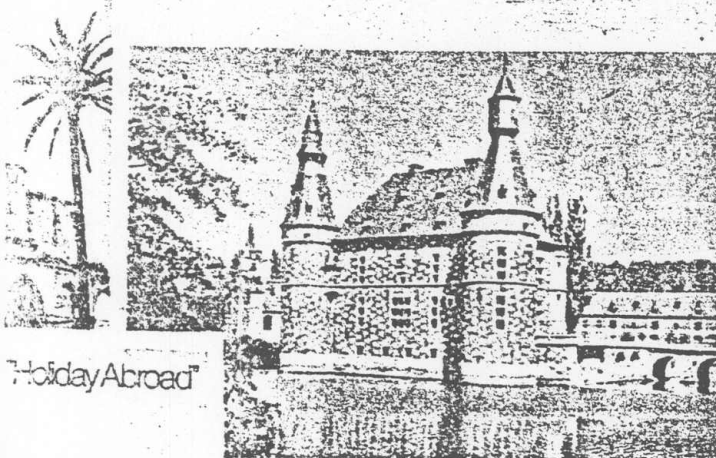
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Holiday Abroad

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development of personality and independence and have the effect of dooming the more salvageable to steadily deteriorating lifetimes in the institutional mode.

In March, 1972, as the Wyatt case was moving along, Bruce Ennis and Robert L. Feldt of the Legal Aid Society filed a challenge to the adequacy of care at one of the more infamous warehouses for the mentally retarded, Willowbrook State School on Staten Island. Over the years, Willowbrook has attracted its share of exposés, all shocking, all failing to effect permanent improvements in the crowded, dirty conditions or the haphazard handling of patients. After paying a visit to confirm for himself the testimony he had been hearing about inadequate food, more than adequate filth, neglect by the staff and downright cruelty, Judge Orrin G. Judd ordered Willowbrook to do better, particularly in providing medical care, hiring attendants and fixing the toilets. Although Judd reserved judgment for the time being on the argument that the retarded have a right to treatment, Ennis characterizes this April, 1973, ruling, with no intended play on words, as a sweeping decision. It was to check on its implementation that he paid an unannounced visit to Willowbrook last Thanksgiving Day.

Trailed by his wife, a young colleague from the Civil Liberties Union, and me, Ennis spent three hours doing spot checks—a ward for babies, all stick limbs and bedsores, blindness and deformity; one for disabled children, some molded into incredible yoga-like positions; one for young girls and adolescent boys, a few racing from wall to wall, many scarcely moving, others drifting about in their private worlds. Everywhere the TV was on—baton twirlers and marching bands, young America brimming with energy, bursting with health, going ignored in rooms where other young Americans lay on floors

on his last visit, four months before, there had been no toys in use. Ennis checked the toilets, which had been in bad disrepair his last time around. He flushed them one after the other, and they worked. In only one ward, with stopped-up drains and non-operating sinks, did he have to slosh through urine to do his inspecting. He looked into the rooms that had served for solitary confinements before the court order. Now, there is a notice on all the bulletin boards: SECLUSION, THE PLACING OF A RESIDENT ALONE IN A LOCKED ROOM, SHALL NOT BE USED.

The biggest change since Ennis's last visit was a reduction in numbers. The formerly packed dormitories now seemed almost spacious—although a ward for spastic children was still crowded enough so that in order to spoon medicine to a child in a crib, an attendant had to step over the head of another on a mat on the floor. The patient population at Willowbrook has dropped from over 5,000 to about 3,700 in a matter of months, with about 200 more people due to be moved soon to Kings Park State Hospital in Suffolk County; and the staff has been increased in an effort to meet the court-ordered ratio of one attendant on duty for every nine residents. (An F. B. I. check in November found that more than a third of the wards were still not down to the required ratio.) One supervisor told Ennis that attendants were being hired without real screening—"They're taking anything that walks"—and were bringing into Willowbrook alcoholism and drug addiction along with ordinary incompetence. This informant, who sought repeated assurances of confidentiality, was not impressed by the apparent upgrading—"The answer is to get rid of Willowbrook."

Ennis concurs. Still, he left the place that day ready to report to the court that it seemed to be complying pretty well with the orders regarding cleanliness and so