

Willowbrook served retarded well

Regarding the serious problem of our so-called "neglected retarded" humans, I have just finished reading Jack Anderson's column in the June 6 Advance, and, after keeping quiet for many years, I wish to "blast!" What really did it is Mr. Anderson's comment in his fourth paragraph, "With proper care and training, most retarded people can become contributing members of society." This statement has infuriated me.

I worked at Willowbrook State School for over eight years. Some of those children I knew and cared for all of those years. I knew what it was like to try to feed them, to clean them, and excuse it, to wash their own soil out of their mouths when they tried to eat it. Those do-gooders who sued for better conditions! I wonder why they did not volunteer their time to help in Willowbrook. It is easy to criticize, but were any of them there? What has now happened is that these children are distributed amongst so-called family type environments, for what? For the state to pay some family money to house them? Who is going to visit those homes? If the children's own parents cannot take care of them, who dares to put those children in with strangers? My feelings are that, truthfully, if anyone of those do-gooders really cared, Willowbrook could have used those people.

Do you know what we cared for? Spastic, mindless, helpless humans. Right? Do you know those children were bathed, fed, if it took us over an hour, nails clipped, hair combed and cut, skin tended, doctors on call, cribs and beds scrubbed, immaculate wards. O.K. So you walk in and maybe some of the toddlers had soiled and it sure was on the floors. Nasty? We took it, and we bathed those little kids. Does anyone understand that a 10-year-old child, without even a reaction of a smile to anyone, was brought out to a parent on visiting day, and the dumb parent wanted to know when that child was going to go to school? There were a few of the folks who cared little for those humans, but

most of us took care of them as if they were our own. Is a family, for pay, who does not give one ounce of concern, going to help those poor things progress?

Nobody can ever believe the damage done to our retarded humans by closing up Willowbrook. Round the clock attendants, round the clock nurses, round the clock doctors on call. We watched those little ones, and as soon as possible we "potty" trained them. We taught them to eat, even though sometimes the bowls landed on some other little kid's head! We checked their every moment. The damage is done, but I would like to ask just this one question: You parents who brought your children to us undernourished, covered with head lice, vegetables. Why the devil didn't you at least volunteer part time to help if you thought your children were not cared for properly? The truth was, your kids were safer at Willowbrook, and cleaner, and trained better. The rest of it is that there are, unfortunately, some children and retarded adults, who will never be able to improve, and Willowbrook took care of them. Now that all the suing has gotten your children out of the care that was life saving for them, will you be responsible for them?

Institutions are never what we would like, but if parents cannot cope with the problem, how do they expect some stranger to handle it? I also took into my home adults from mental institutions for over six years, and I am here to tell you it would tax the patience of a saint, and I do care. I cared about those little kids that were with me at Willowbrook for eight years, and one smile was worth my effort. If it were up to me, I would reopen Willowbrook to all who need it, and I would make every parent volunteer to help with their own child!

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