

“...‘Keep them in Willowbrook,’ says a woman. ‘Why tear down a neighborhood?’...”



care.” His colleague Dr. Elaine Miller notes that about 15 percent of the Willowbrook class may be hepatitis B carriers. “It’s a serious disease,” she says, “but the risk of their transmitting it is really minimal—they’re certainly not going to transmit it on the street. It requires prolonged intimate contact.”

“I guess if you got spit on over and over again, of course it’s possible,” adds Bakal, “but what he’s saying is extremely exaggerated.” Which King concedes is also true of his 565 broken bones.

More surprising than King’s inflated ravings, however, is the blatant enjoyment of the otherwise, one would assume, rational people who feed off his distorted remarks. “These retarded kids shouldn’t be made scapegoats,” states Dr. Bakal. “They shouldn’t have to suffer for someone else’s cause.”

An outraged Murray Schneps feels this is exactly what could happen. “King made an open physical threat against the residents of Willowbrook,” he recalls. “He didn’t like the attitude of the parents, so at a meeting of the Review Panel he began using the children as hostages [pointing out that they were dependent upon the care of union members]. I said, ‘Felton, are you really threatening the residents? Are you really doing that?’—fully expecting him to back down like anyone else would when confronted. But he said that was exactly what he was saying. Now if King wants to

threaten the parents, let him do that. They can defend themselves. But to get to them through their children is stupid and irresponsible.” King flatly denies Schneps’s statement, saying: “I have never stood up in a meeting and used the residents as hostages to save employee jobs.” Schneps feels the threat of institutional irresponsibility makes emptying the barracks all the more urgent. But not everyone agrees.

“Keep them in Willowbrook,” urges Olga Kudlak, “that’s the proper place for them. . . . Why tear down a nice neighborhood like this?” Olga’s “nice” neighborhood is in Jackson Heights, Queens. The people she is referring to are her new neighbors at 33-32 89th Street. It is a neat brick Tudor house unassumingly nestled into a block of the same. It is unique only in that eight mentally retarded persons call it home—the first one they’ve had in many years. One of the residents, Rochelle Grant, remembers her last home as “Building 23.” “It was a bad place,” she recalls. “They would call me a fat Jew, but I wouldn’t listen. Sometimes they would throw shoes at me and hurt, but I wouldn’t bother.” Rochelle smiles with the knowledge that this is all behind her. She doesn’t realize that Jackson Heights is battling to get her out of her new home.

Joel Levy, director of the Young Adult Institute, which runs the home, demands that the mentally retarded be