



COMMONWEALTH OF PENNSYLVANIA  
DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC WELFARE  
POLK STATE SCHOOL AND HOSPITAL  
POLK, PENNSYLVANIA  
16342

PLEASE ADDRESS ALL  
LETTERS REGARDING PATIENTS  
TO THE SUPERINTENDENT

JAMES H. McCLELLAND, JR., M.D.  
SUPERINTENDENT

April 16, 1973

Received in  
SECRETARY'S OFFICE  
APR 19 1973  
DEPT. OF PUBLIC WELFARE  
Ref. to \_\_\_\_\_

Mrs. Philip Elkin, Chairman  
Residential Services Committee  
School Lane House, Apt. A-416  
Wissahickon Ave, & School House Lane  
Philadelphia, Pa. 19144

Dear Mrs. Elkin

I have just received your intercommunication memo entitled "A Visit to Polk State School and Hospital", dated March 27, 1973. The quality of the zerox copy, which I received, gave me my first indication of the type of report that I was about to read. It is, without a doubt, the most vicious attack that I have witnessed on an institution and its employees and particularly its Superintendent. Since you, yourself, have removed the kid gloves from this discussion, I will continue in the same vein.

It's obvious from the beginning remarks that you make that you are mistrustful of this institution. You challenge Dr. McClelland's trustfulness in regard to knowing beforehand of your visit. In the fourth paragraph of your report, you wondered if the single rooms were used as a reward or for spying on the girls. I think a report, such as you made, should confine itself to observations and not your own psychological hang ups. Your constant innuendos betray not so much the inadequacies of this institution as they do your own. On the second page, under the title of "Food Services", I find it incongruous that you mentioned that the girls who were eating did not try to talk to you. This is a difficult project, to talk while you are eating, especially, when no one stops to talk to you. Your concern for the welfare of the retarded was nowhere in evidence on the day of your visitation. Instead, there was an attempt to avoid any conversation with the residents, especially, those with severe physical handicaps. You questioned dining room attendants as to the service that they were offering, "to help, to watch, to keep order?" Since you raise a question, permit me to respond. Yes, the employees were there to help. They are there to watch. They are there to keep order. That is their job.

Under the title of "Sunnyside", you, again through innuendo, cast aspersions about the treatment of the residents in this building. You say "some had scratches or bruises". Yet, in the same cottage you raised the question about "large wooden enclosures of wooden slats placed close together and about 5 feet high". As we explained to you at that time, these enclosures were used to confine disturbed residents, instead of placing them in a strait jacket for restraint; it was felt that it is more humane to allow them freedom of movement and at the same time protect other residents from the bruises and scratches that you have called attention to. These enclosures were designed by Dr. Sidney Kaplan many years ago so that the restraining jackets would not have to be used.

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April 16, 1973

Again, in the same building, you say that "the residents did better, especially when Dr. McClelland asked them questions". Yet you mention that there are 400 severely and profoundly retarded men live in this building. Yes, they do have difficulty answering questions, responding to the inquiries of strangers.

Again, you mention that you had "caught them off-guard". I think that sentence betrays your whole attitude towards this institution. You had come to condemn and to criticize; you had not come to observe. You mention that you had been brought in the back doors of the buildings. If you had been brought in the front door, you would have criticized that this was an attempt to alert the building to your presence. If you had come in a side door, you would of said we were trying to avoid showing you the real institution. Take your choice.

Under the heading of "Meadowside", you continue in the same vein. "When we returned after visiting this building, everything was ship-shape, you betcha!" This is normal for any household to have dirty dishes after a meal and then to clean those dishes afterwards. I cannot understand the mentality that tries to see duplicity in action such as this. You say "I am ashamed I didn't say anything". I am glad to discover that there are periods of silence in the course of your days, but you undid this when you said that you were "in shock". Perhaps this accounts for the report that you have sent out about this institution. In the incident of the cheerful room at Meadowside, I called to your attention during that particular tour, that you had misquoted Dr. McClelland, saying that he had said that he didn't care that the residents were over-crowded. I reminded you, at that time, that his statement was that at that mental age and in dealing with the profoundly retarded, that they were the ones who did not care about the overcrowded conditions. The word overcrowded has been used of this institution for many decades. It is like the weather. Everyone talks about it. Current criticisms of institutions seem to be aimed, primarily, at standards of architecture rather than standards of care.

The venom of your attack on this school and in particular on Dr. McClelland is very obvious. I am at a loss to understand the motivation for this. I fail to understand how someone of your limited knowledge and experience with the retarded can place herself on a pedestal to judge the work of a man who has dedicated 32 years of his life to meeting the needs and desires of these people. I feel that no further comment on this obviously biased report which has been disseminated by you and the officers of PARC is necessary. The inadequacies of your ability, the venomous tone, hostility, and subjectiveness make it impossible to seek any meaningful dialogue with you. I find it impossible to believe that you are concerned with the needs and desires of the retarded. I can only pray: "Father forgive them for they know not what they do."

With best wishes for a happy Easter, I am

Sincerely yours,

*John A. Kirk*  
Father John A. Kirk  
Catholic Chaplain

JAK/pls

cc: Mrs. Helene Wohlgenuth ✓  
Mr. Taylor  
Mr. Peter P. Polloni  
Mrs. Harry P. Clapp