

Kristy Barngrover
March 8, 2010
Dr. Glover

Mini Project 4: Historical Connections

Dear Lydia,

My name is Rosa Gregory, my family and I live a few streets down from you in Granville. I apologize for contacting you so abruptly since we have not been properly introduced but I am contacting you because a neighbor of mine told me that you have a feebleminded son. My youngest daughter is also feebleminded and I was hoping I could get some advice from you.

My daughter, Tillie, is only 10 years old and so far the fact that she is feebleminded has not been significant in our lives. When I grew up, village idiots were simply another person in the community. Of course children would tease them but overall they were not hassles in day to day life. Some could do simple work while others stayed at home and helped their mother's keep house. I assumed that I would just be able to keep Tillie at home with me and teach her to do simple house chores.

However, recently, some of my neighbors and people at church have been suggesting to me that I send her to a specialized facility for idiots. My son, Charles, says that the other children sometimes tease her when they see her in our yard but overall I find that she lives a quiet, simple life. I don't think I could send her to a specialized facility. I fear that she will be isolated and become immoral. Although others tell me it is a burden to keep her, I enjoy having control over her care. She attends Church with our family and I watch over her to make sure she has a good, moral soul.

I hear that your son is older, yet still lives with you. Did you not ever consider taking him to a specialized facility? Do the difficulties of having a feeble-minded child increase with their age? Thank you for your advice. I apologize for asking such private questions but I fear for my daughter's future. I suppose I am looking for a companion in this challenging task of raising a feeble-minded child.

Sincerely,

Rosa Gregory

Dear Rosa,

I am glad that you contacted me. I mostly keep to myself so I did not even know about your family or that your daughter was feeble-minded. I live with my step-son, Noble, and ever since my husband died I have been his only caretaker. Noble has been apart of my life since I met my late husband. My husband had never wanted to put Noble in a specialized facility so he had always stayed with the family. When I married my husband I promised that along with keeping house, I would be Noble's primary caretaker. When he was younger, Noble could do simple work as a laborer. However now that he is older, he tires too easily and becomes upset when he has work to do. So now he is unemployed but helps me around the house with simple chores, and he also keeps me company.

Although Noble is teased by both children and adults, I believe he is also protected by our community. He is a moral and simple boy in a man's body. Noble is not insane and he is incredibly gentle. Our neighbors do not fear him and do not wish for

Noble to be sent away. Noble has a sweet heart and although he is empty headed, he is obedient and helpful.

However, I do know that times have changed. It appears that there has become an increased worry about the moral frailty of the feebleminded. It is good that you take Tillie to Church because she could be vulnerable to the trickery of others or the evils of the world. I would never allow Noble to go into town by himself because I fear he would get lost or meet an immoral person. I am thankful to live in Granville rather than a city which would overwhelm Noble and make his condition worse.

Aim for a simple life for Tillie. She can help your family in the house doing basic chores. I have found that although Noble is simple, he has been a nice companion as I've grown old.

Would you and Tillie like to come by for tea sometime? I would be happy to share more of my experiences with you. There are so few feebleminded folks in Granville therefore I do believe it is important we discuss this matter.

Sincerely,

Lydia

Bibliography

Trent, James W. Jr. 1994. "Inventing the Feeble Mind: A History of Mental Retardation in the United States." Los Angeles, CA: University of California Press.