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Washington Spastic Children's Society

P. O. BOX NO. 1821
SEATTLE 11, WASHINGTON
November 6, 1946

Wash. Spastic Children's Society
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Mrs. Franklin D. Roosevelt
Hyde Park
New York

Dear Mrs. Roosevelt:

I was interested to read in the Seattle Post-Intelligencer for Monday, November 4, your comprehensive article in behalf of those afflicted with cerebral palsy.

I have read a number of your articles dealing with this subject in recent months, but I am not sure that I saw all of them. I am wondering if you could send me copies of your column in which you have dealt with this subject.

I am chairman of the publicity committee for the Washington Spastic Children's Society and in that capacity I am the editor of our news bulletin. I would like to know if we might have permission to quote from your article of November 4.

We are a state-wide organization of approximately eleven hundred members. Our membership is made up mainly of parents of spastic children, but we have a number of professional people in our organization throughout the state. Dr. H. J. Wyckoff, an orthopedic surgeon prominent here in the Northwest, is our medical adviser. We have a number of prominent physical therapists in our organization.

We plan to introduce a bill in our next legislature, which meets in Olympia this coming January. If the proposed legislation is passed, we will have in the state of Washington one of the most comprehensive programs for the treatment and education of individuals afflicted with cerebral palsy of any state in the nation. If you could be of any help to us in support of our legislative program, we should be most happy to hear from you.

I myself am a spastic who has overcome his handicap to a great extent. I am enclosing an editorial which was published in the Seattle Post-Intelligencer on May 11 of this year.

Sincerely,

Atley O. Nelson, Jr.

Atley O. Nelson, Jr.
Chairman of Publicity Committee

AON:HLT
Encl.

Spastic Paralysis Victims

By Atley O. Nelson Jr.

Director, Washington Spastic Children's Society

A YEAR AGO this month the Washington Spastic Children's Society was started in Seattle. On May 25 it will hold its first state-wide convention at the New Washington Hotel.

During its year of existence the society has organized local units in Spokane, Everett, Bremerton, Aberdeen, Yakima and Vancouver. It has already done much to bring about the time when those afflicted with cerebral palsy (more commonly known as spastic paralysis) can receive the training and education that will enable them to take their places in the world.

Perhaps I am more conscious of the absolute need of help for these people, because I am a spastic myself. It happens that I have been able to overcome my handicap to a large extent.

As I consider my past experiences it becomes clear that it was the intelligent decisions of my mother as to what was best for me that contributed most to the improvement in my condition during childhood.

During most of my younger years no one understood what was wrong with me, and most people believed I should be content to live a "rocking chair" existence. But not my mother!

Until I was 15 years old we lived in Boulder, Colo. Boulder is located so you can be right in the mountains after a 15 or 20-minute walk. From early spring until late summer our family spent much time in the mountains. I was allowed to climb over the rocks and get around as best I could.

A large part of my boyhood was spent on my uncle's farm and I was allowed to do anything I wanted to in the way of roughing it. I was expected to do as much for myself as I could. There were many tasks, such as gathering eggs, that I had as my chores. I feel it was this rugged life in the mountains and on the farm that did a lot to teach me to control my muscles.

I was not allowed to go to school until I was nine years old. Even then the public schools would not take me. However, by this time I had become so demanding in my desire to go to school that my mother had to do something. After some persuasion the sister superior of a private Catholic school consented to take me on a two-month trial. The result was I attended that school through the sixth grade (in five years).

Then my family moved to Aberdeen, Wash. My mother decided I was ready to attend public school. She took me to see Mr. Everett Shimmala, principal of the Aberdeen Junior High School. He encouraged me to enter as a regular student and I completed my high school education in Aberdeen public schools. Then I attended the Grays Harbor Junior College for two years before entering the University of Colorado, where I received my B. A. degree with a major in sociology

1933.

Since my graduation from college I have been quite successful in many ways. For two years I was employed by the state department of fisheries as a research biologist. I left my state job to take a position with the Boeing Aircraft Company in the inspection department. I have been at Boeing's for almost four years.

Whatever success I have had I feel I owe a great deal to the many people who have given me a chance to prove what I could do. The first job I had was in a furniture store while I was still in high school. The fact that there was a man who had enough faith that I could be a successful errand boy will always remain one of my pleasant memories.

During my second year at the Grays Harbor Junior College I had charge of the college book store, and I made more money for the store than anyone in previous years. I shall always be grateful to Dr. Lewis Tidball, who was the dean of the junior college, for that opportunity.

While it is true I have been able to overcome most of my handicaps I am sure much of my improvement would have come sooner, and perhaps it would have been complete, if the present methods of treating cerebral palsy had been known when I was a child. I refer to the kind of treatment given in the class now being conducted in the Warren Ave. School.

It is known cerebral palsy is caused by an injury to the area of the brain that controls motor-muscular activity. The condition may be very slight or it may affect all the muscle groups of the body.

It has been found a coordinated program of physiotherapy, academic education and speech training is the most efficient method of treating persons thus afflicted. It has also been found this method of treatment is most effective when started with pre-school age children.

It has been my pleasure to be active in the program of the Washington Spastic Children's Society for eight months. One of the society's main projects is to work for state legislation that will set up the necessary schools for the estimated 2,000 to 2,500 children afflicted with cerebral palsy in this state.

Education of these children should be our first consideration because it is known at least 70 per cent have normal to above-normal intelligence.

In our program of public education on this subject it is most important to stress the intelligence of spastics. Because of the difficulty spastics have in expressing themselves, they are often mistaken for feeble-minded individuals.

In recent months I have come to know a number of persons afflicted with cerebral palsy. Many are about my own age (32). If they had had the many advantages and opportunities that I have had they would be as well off as I am. I intend to do all I can to help the spastic children now growing up to be given the same chance that I was.