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DOCUMENT NO. AND TYPE	SUBJECT/TITLE	DATE	RESTRICTION
001. letter	From: Allan I. Bergman, United Cerebral Palsy Association; To: Beverly Rainforth and Amy Goldman; Re: Alba Somoza's C.S.E. [partial] (1 page)	6/4/93	b(6)

COLLECTION:
Clinton Presidential Records
First Lady's Office
Liz Bowyer
OA/Box Number: 3989

FOLDER TITLE:
HRC Background File, Somoza, Mary

2014-0483-S
sb449

RESTRICTION CODES

Presidential Records Act - [44 U.S.C. 2204(a)]

P1 National Security Classified Information [(a)(1) of the PRA]
P2 Relating to the appointment to Federal office [(a)(2) of the PRA]
P3 Release would violate a Federal statute [(a)(3) of the PRA]
P4 Release would disclose trade secrets or confidential commercial or financial information [(a)(4) of the PRA]
P5 Release would disclose confidential advice between the President and his advisors, or between such advisors [a)(5) of the PRA]
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PRM. Personal record misfile defined in accordance with 44 U.S.C. 2201(3).
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Freedom of Information Act - [5 U.S.C. 552(b)]

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1993 HRC Background Files

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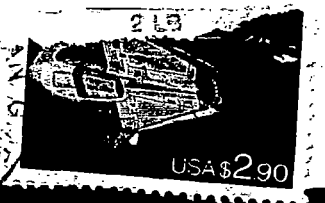

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WE DELIVER

With Clinton as ally, girl can join sister in school

By TOULA VLAHOU
Special to The Herald

NEW YORK — Maybe he hasn't kept some other promises, but as far as Anastasia Somoza is concerned, President Clinton kept his word to her.

The disabled 9-year-old says that with the president's help, her twin sister, Alba, will attend regular school classes next fall and no longer be in a special education class because of cerebral palsy.

"I just thought it was going to happen and it did," said Anastasia, a relative of Nicaragua's Somoza dynasty. "I would say [to Clinton], 'Thank you for helping get Alba into regular class and helping my mom, and I am very happy that it happened.' "

Anastasia captured the nation's attention in February during a televised question-and-answer session with children in the White House when she unexpectedly asked Clinton to help transfer Alba to a regular class.

"She uses computers to speak and I would like her to be in a regular classroom just like me," she told Clinton, who said his staff would look into her request.

Her plea earned her fame as an inspiring young advocate and focused attention on the issue of "mainstreaming" disabled kids in regular classrooms.

Anastasia and Alba have cerebral palsy and spend much of their time in wheelchairs. Alba's disabilities are more severe. She cannot speak, is less mobile than Anastasia and uses a computer with a chin switch to communicate. Her IQ, however, matches her sister's.

> *'She uses computers to speak and I would like her to be in a regular classroom just like me.'*
>
> **ANASTASIA SOMOZA,** in her request to Clinton

Last week, after a 3½-month review, school officials decided Alba could move to regular classes with support services that will include equipment and several professionals, from therapists to experts, who will adapt the class curriculum to special computers.

Alba will attend third grade and Anastasia fourth grade. School officials could not say how much it will cost to provide the services.

The family believes coaxing from the White House resulted in their victory. School officials deny it.

"We did what was the right educational decision," said Andrew Lachman, spokesman for Community School District 2, which oversees the twins' public school in Manhattan.

Lachman said 37 other children receive similar services.

During the review period, the twins' parents, Gerardo and Mary Somoza, found hope in the occasional telephone call from the White House. And then earlier this month a handwritten letter addressed to Anastasia arrived from the president.

"I have spoken to some people about your sister's school situation. I hope we can help," Clinton wrote. Anastasia had received two previous letters from Clinton's secretary.

In their cramped Manhattan apartment, where shelves are stocked with clothes and books, the twins require much of their parents' attention and energy. Even the most mundane activity, such as watching television, requires preparation. A floor mat is spread out, pillows are stacked around the mat, seats are assigned and Alba in carefully placed in the center so she can watch TV without straining her back or neck.

The Somozas have two other children, Oliver, 10, and Gabriella, 6, who are both healthy.

TOULA VLAHOU

SUCCESS: Anastasia Somoza's sister, Alba, will join her in regular classes next school year. Anastasia here is pictured with her mom, Mary, and Alba with her dad, Gerardo.

Family ties

Gerardo, a celebrity photographer, is the nephew of former Nicaraguan ruler Gen. Anastasio Somoza, who fled the country in 1979 during a civil war.

Gerardo, who emigrated in 1967, is estranged from his mother and siblings, including a brother who lives in Miami. The family, he said, fought over the distribution of the family estate. He said he was disinherited when he was refused his share of the money.

The reason, he suspects, is because he married Irish-born Mary.

"They thought she was a gold digger," he said.

But Mary Somoza says the family managed without the Somoza money, even though there were times when it was desperately needed.

She hopes her daughters' victory will help other disabled children.

"I feel truly elated that they have taken this step. . . . The next step is that it happens for all children with disabilities who are now segregated. They must give it to all children with disabilities because it is their legal right."

The misunderstood Pat Nixon behind the image

The Hon.Governor Mario Cuomo,
The Executive Office,
Albany,
New York

Mary Somoza,
452 West 57th Street, #2E
New York,
N.Y. 10019
(212) 307-9010

August 31st 1993

Dear Governor Cuomo,

I am writing to you to request your support on an issue that is of vital importance to parents of children with disabilities in the State of New York. I am sure you are well aware that we have the worst reputation in the United States statistically, for including children with disabilities in general education classes in the public school system.

In February of this year, my daughter Anastasia was one of forty children invited to the White House to participate in a nationally televised program "Answering Childrens Questions". Anastasias question to President Clinton was "why her twin sister Alba, who is just as bright as she is but cannot talk, could not be in a regular class - just like her".

The White House did intervene via the U.S. Secretary of Education and we obtained legal documentation for Alba to enter a general education class in September. However, there the fairy tale ends. The New York City Board of Education is systematically trying to sabotage our recent victory. (See enclosed copies)

Parents in this state, and particularly those of children with disabilities are thoroughly demoralized with the public school system. Their power is awesome, and they answer to no-one. Something drastic needs to be done by our State legislature to take away this power.

Inclusion is a movement that is being successfully implemented all over the country. With the signing of the Americans with Disabilities Act disabled adults and children can no longer be discriminated against in the workplace, and most importantly, for the future, in the schools. I urge you to make public your support for the inclusion of all children with disabilities into the mainstream of general education in New York State.

It has been a pleasure to serve on your State Advisory Boards at OMRDD and Early Intervention over the past few years.
I look forward to hearing from you,

Sincerely,

Mary Somoza

THE CITY OF NEW YORK
OFFICE OF THE MAYOR
NEW YORK, N.Y. 10007

July 20, 1993

Mrs. Mary Somoza
452 West 57th Street
New York, New York 10019

Dear Mrs. Somoza:

Congratulations on your recently won victory with the Board of Education. Your perseverance and determination to obtain an integrated, mainstream education for your daughters Anastasia and Alba is nothing short of precedent setting. You have provided a model for all parents who want the very best education for their children.

I have fond memories of meeting you and your daughter Anastasia at the 1991 Special Olympics reception at Gracie Mansion, and seeing you again with your son Oliver at the 1992 St. Patrick's Day breakfast at the Mansion. I have valued your efforts and participation both on my Borough President's Disability Advisory Committee and my Office for People with Disabilities Advisory Committee.

On behalf of eight million New Yorkers, please accept my best wishes for continued success.

Sincerely,

David N. Dinkins
MAYOR

The Hon. Mayor David Dinkins,
City Hall,
New York City

Mary Somoza,
452 West 57th ST,
Apt. 2E
New York, N.Y. 10019

August 28th 1993

Dear Mayor Dinkins,

It was with deep appreciation I received your letter of support regarding our recent victory with the Board of Education. Your kind remarks at the August 10th reception at Gracie Mansion were very encouraging to me and my family.

However, as you will see by the enclosed letters, we are still encountering opposition to the successful integration of our children. As you well know, many in the schools leadership roles place more importance in politics then in the education of New York City's children.

New York State has for years flagrantly violated federal laws in segregating students with disabilities. Even though we have the law on our side, as far as school authorities are concerned, it makes little difference to them, they do as they please regardless. With the signing of ADA in 1990 and the education (federal) laws now in place, we can no longer tolerate this discrimination in our schools.

President Clinton recently proved his committment to Inclusion to this family in particular, and families around the country who are following my case. I urge you, as our Mayor, to take a comparable position in favor of inclusion.

I wish you the best of luck in the up-coming elections and once again send you my kindest regards,

Sincerely,

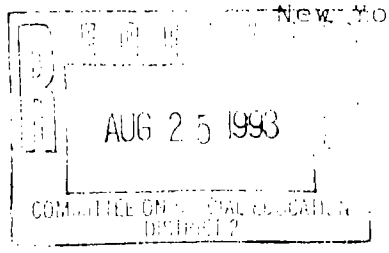
Mary Somoza

Mary Somoza

c.c. The White House - President Clinton

Mr. Jack Colombo, Chairperson,
Committee on Special Education,
330 West 18th Street,
New York, N.Y. 10011

Mary Somoza,
452 West 57th Street, #2E
New York, N.Y. 10019



August 21st 1993

Dear Mr. Colombo,

I received the copies of Alba and Anastasia Somoza's IEP's on August 20th. Considering our review meeting took place on June 11th that was quite a long period of time so I would appreciate your co-operation in assisting me with my following requests.

I have sent copies of the IEP to my consultants who will assist me in making any changes we feel appropriate for the children. I estimate having their input by the end of this week. I would like to make an appointment with the CSE team to go over the IEP BEFORE the start of school. I would also like to know (as accorded in the review meeting) my childrens class placements, name of teacher, class size and if the teacher has any experience with disabled children. Before school starts I would like to meet briefly with those teachers so I may give them some information which will assist them, particularly with Alba, in the transition period. As the school principal has decided not to allow the reccommendations of the review team to be implemented (allow Alba to be held back one year so she can transition into a regular grade class with a teacher who knows her, children who know her and therefore give her a chance to catch up on the academic skills she lost while in a segrated class) I anticipat resistance to the successful outcome of this process for my daughter. It is my understanding that District 2 is backing the Principals decision, maybe you could clarify that for me in writing.

In a brief overview of the IEP's I noticed there was no equipment list for Anastasia, no mention of the Standers with which I provided you precriptions three months ago, and no mention of the evaluation for the motorized wheelchairs accorded for both girls for school. I will hand deliver you prescriptions for motorized wheelchairs to-morrow. (August 24th).

I would appreciate an immediate reply to this letter so we may accomplish these requests before the start of the school year.

Sincerely,

Mary Somoza

c.c. Judith Heuman - Washington
Dr. Beverly Rainforth
Ms. Amy Goldman
Mr. Alan Bergman

Mr. Jack Colombo,
Chairperson,
Committee on Special Education,
330 West 18th Street,
New York, N.Y.10011

Mary Somoza,
452 West 57th STreet, #2E
New York, N.Y. 10019
(212) 307-9010

August 26th 1993

Dear Mr. Colombo,

Thank you for meeting with me yesterday morning and giving me the evaluation forms for my childrens motorized wheelchairs for use in school.

However, I must admit I was extremely disappointed to hear that the Principal of my childrens school, Ms. Anna Switzer, has told you she is refusing to allow me to meet with my childrens designated teachers before the start of school as well as the other requests I made to you in my letter of August 21st. You told me her reasoning was that she would concede nothing that "other parents" of regular education children were entitled to. I would be grateful if you could clarify for me if it is a ruling in the New York City Board of Education for parents not to be told their childs class placement and name of teacher before the first day of school.

Whether this be a fact or not, it is vital that Ms. Switzer be made aware that this is not "regular situation". These are two quadreplegic youngsters, one of whom is non-verbal and using highly sofisticated technology to communicate. Explaining the nature of their disability to their non-disabled peers is a pedagogically sound practice and used throughout this country in transitioning disabled children into general education. It will be of the utmost benefit to my children, their classmates and the teacher for me to be able to meet with the teacher prior to the commencement of classes to give them some background information and answer any questions they might have.

I requested a face to face meeting with the Principal several months ago and she said it would not be beneficial until after my childrens reviews had taken place. That occurred on June 11th and I again called from your office yesterday to make the same request. I do hope this can be resolved before the start of school on September 9th so I can look forward to a non-traumatic entry into regular grades for both of my children.

Yours sincerely,

Mary Somoza Mary Somoza

c.c. Kim Tiley - Washington - Judith Huemann - Ass.Sec.Special E
Dr. Frances Berko NYS Advocate for the Disabled
Allan Bergman - Ellen Gallagher-Holmes
Commissioner Elin Howe - Commissioner Anne Emerman,
Amy Goldman - Mr. Anthony Alvarado District Superintendant
Dr. Beverly Rainforth

Ms. Kim Tiley,
Room 197 - OEOB,
Washington, D.C.

Mary Somoza,
452 West 57th Street, #2E
New York, N.Y. 10019

August 31st 1993

Dear Ms. Tiley,

I wish I could be writing this letter to you with good news about the up-coming entry of my daughter Alba into a general education class here in New York City.

As you can see by the enclosed letters, while technically they are allowing my twin daughters to be integrated into a general education class, the school principal is still doing all she can to sabotage the successful outcome of this process. It is my sincere feeling that the District Superintendant, Anthony Alvarado is backing her in this decision. If New York City school authorities are going to fight every parent who wants their child integrated into the public school general education system, I am afraid we remain in the position of being the worst State in America for including disabled youngsters in mainstream education.

Unless the Federal and State government take action to curb the overt abuse of power by these school officials, education in general and the rights of disabled children will continue on a downward spiral. Parents in New York State are completely demoralized with the public school system. While publicly espousing the need for parent involvement in the schools, when parents do take an interest in the improvement of the system, we are treated like trouble-makers and outsiders.

I would ask you to relate this information to President Clinton. I am also requesting that the President exercise his leadership and authority through the U.S. Dept. of Education to assist us in assuring that both Alba and Anastasia receive their rightful inclusive education with all the neccessary and appropriate related services and support.

I am looking forward to hearing from you and hope you had a pleasant summer.

Sincerely,

Mary Somoza

c.c. Allan Bergman - Director of Governmental Activities - United Cerebral Palsy - Washington

452 West 57th Street, #2E
New York,
N.y.10019

June 5th 1993

Dear Mr. Bergman,

Yesterday morning an engineer drove from Albany (4 hours) to go to my childrens school to check equipment that had been ordered for them from the Board of Education. I sent notes in both childrens bags that he would be coming just to make sure it had been mounted properly.

He got to the school, signed in, went to the classroom and introduced himself to the teacher of Anastasia. She requested that he let the principal, Anna Switzer, know he was there. When he introduced himself to the principal, she told him he could not go to the childrens classroom. He explained that he only needed to look at the mounting to make sure it would not collapse on any of the children and it would take 5 minutes in each classroom. He said he would do it at lunch-time when the children were in the yard. She still refused to allow him to do it. He called me at home and I contacted Advocates for Children. After telephones back and forth with Pheobe Redmond (the counsel to the Chancellor) and the district superintendant Mr. Alvarado, they would only concede to allow him in after 3 o'clock. The man had been at the school since 9 a.m. and had other work in New Jersey, he could not wait around until the end of the day.

People go in and out of the school at will and this only occurred because it is with my children. The principal of this school is intent on making our lives as difficult as possible. Do they not think about the children? I really do not understand anymore. I also discovered that they are bringing my children down and putting them on the bus at 2.15 p.m. when school does not finish until 3 p.m. I have told them on multiple occasions that my children cannot be pulled out of class that early. Yesterday I caught them "in the act" as I went to the school at 2.45 p.m. and my girls had already left. It takes 20 minutes to tie down both wheelchairs, load up their equipment and secure their computers.

We had Anastasias review on June 2nd. It did not go well. They had invited the counsel to the Chancellor, Pheobe Redmond, and I was really amazed at their lack of knowledge on inclusion. It was obvious to me that it is not being implemented at all in New York City. Because they do not know what inclusion means and have not studied the models, we were both speaking different languages. They were unwilling to allow Anastasia to go to gym with her class - "in case she gets hit with a ball, or knocked out of her wheelchair". When I pointed out that any kid could

get hit with a ball, and at recess time in the schoolyard she could also get knocked out of her chair, they suggested that I was not "concerned for my childs safety". They also refused to compromise on physical therapy pull-outs. I offered to let them do it early in the morning before class, after class or at home. They said no to all three.

Then we spoke about a computer consultant to train aides and teachers in the use of the sofisticated technology, adapting the curriculum to Anastasias physical limitations through appropriate software choices and use in the classroom. They agreed to provide this service, but refused to use the person that (through a private grant) we have been using for both of my children for the past four years. The Board of Education has been unable to provide this service to my children in the past, and are aware that I have been paying a private person to do it. They did not have the name of a person, and insist on choosing their own person. The grave problem here is that this technology is so new and sofisticated, my childrens different needs so complicated that continuety is of vital importance in the choice of a person. The problem we have faced over the years has been the amazing turnover of people working for the Board of Education. If every year they bring in someone new to do this job, the person is starting from zero and must learn the technology and how it works with the child. By the time they are proficient, school ends and we will get someone new and start all over again. The bottom line is that the NYC BOE will only do what they are obliged to by law, but with NO REGARD for outcomes and how it is affecting the children. They are not willing to adapt their present system to fit the needs of the children.

I really feel that unless this whole system is reorganized from scratch, there is little hope for inclusion to become a reality in New York City. They are still living in the dark ages, and they also have a total disregard for Federal law.

I will be going to Albas review on June 8th however after what happened on June 2nd with Anastasia I am not very optimistic. I have requested an impartial hearing for Anastasia.

I will let you know what happens on Tuesday,

Sincerely,

Mary Somoza

Mary Somoza

c.c. Mr. Richard Riley, U.S. SEcretary of Education

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UNITED CEREBRAL PALSY ASSOCIATIONS

GOVERNMENTAL ACTIVITIES DEPARTMENT

MEMORANDUM

TO: BEVERLY RAINFORTH AND AMY GOLDMAN

FROM: ALLAN I. BERGMAN

RE: ALBA SOMOZA'S C.S.E.

DATE: JUNE 4, 1993

Thank you both very much for agreeing to support the Somoza family in their quest for Alba's inclusion in regular education with her age peers and with appropriate supports and "related services". United Cerebral Palsy Associations Inc., has had a relationship with the Somoza family for nearly five years and is totally committed to doing "whatever it takes" for both Alba and her sister, Anastasia, to lead "regular lives", including in their public education provided by the New York City Schools. Their mother, Mary Somoza, is a leading advocate in New York State and beyond for total inclusion for all children as well as for family support and health care reform. It may

(b)(6)

001

As we discussed, I am enclosing a packet of information on Alba as well as some correspondence which will give you a flavor for the posture of the New York City Schools. The School administration brought the legal counsel to the chancellor of the district to Anastasia's C.S.E. last week. The status of Alba's and Anastasia's educational services is being monitored by the White House and the Department of Education as a result of Anastasia's participation on President Clinton's T.V. hour with children on February 20th. In this regard, I am enclosing some of the newspaper clips that appeared after the television program.

Alba's C.S.E. is scheduled for Tuesday June 8th at 9:00 A.M. at Intermediate School 70, 330 West 18th Street, Room 220, New York City. I would encourage each of you to call Mary Somoza at (212) 307-9010 to work out the details of your pre-meetings. Mary has indicated that she would like both of you to have dinner with her and her family on Monday evening. The address is 452 West 57th Street, #2E, New York 10019. In case the two of you would like to converse beforehand, I am listing your respective phone numbers:

Beverly Rainforth	Amy Goldman
(w) (607)777-2727	(w) (215) 204-3862
(h) (607)723-7269	(h) (609) 424-2847

Thank you again for making yourselves available to provide your expertise and support to the Somoza family. I look forward to hearing from you after the Tuesday meeting.

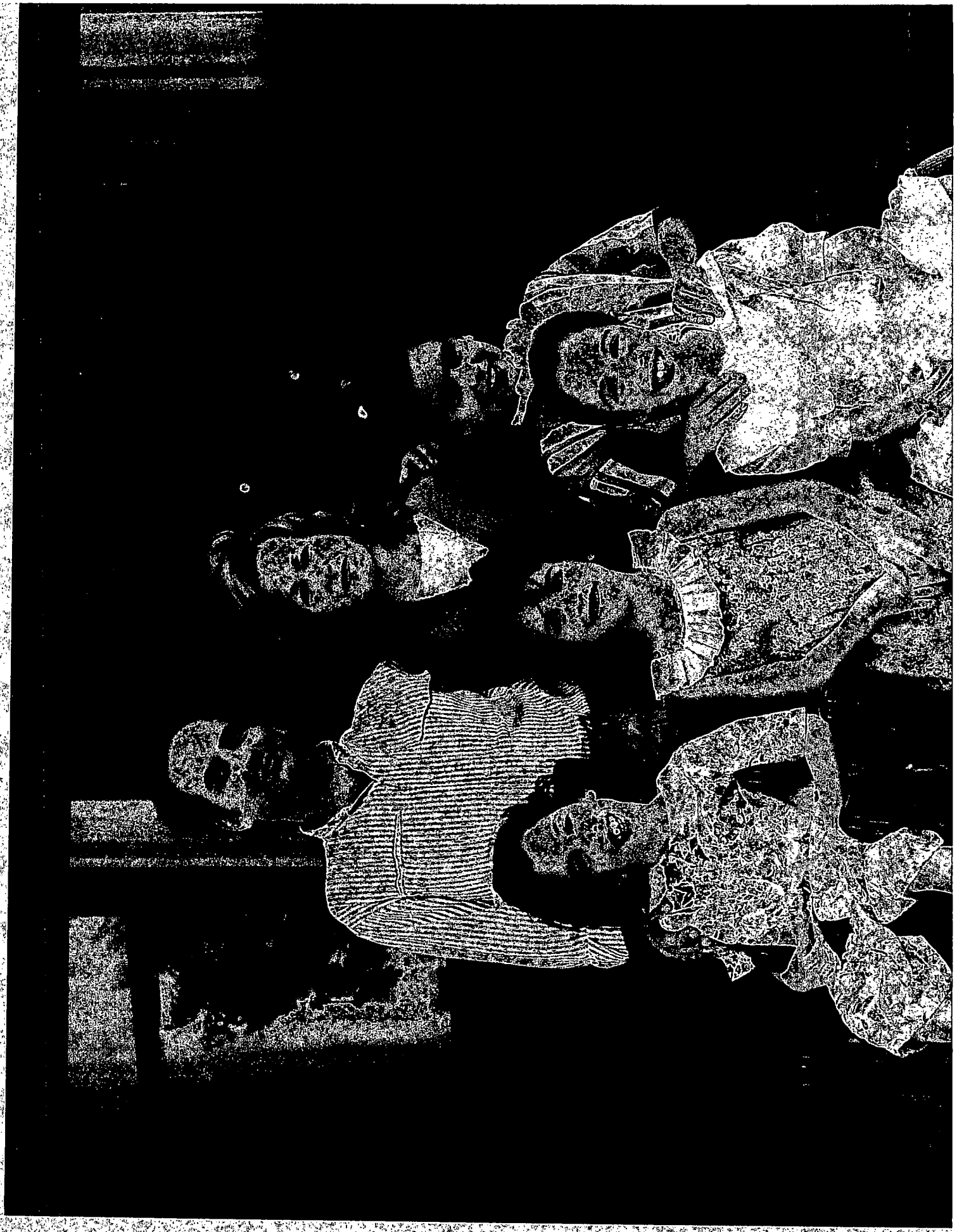
Enclosures

Pre-view done 5th Sept 1993

N.Y. TIMES

DAILY NEWS SUNDAY MAGAZINE, September 5, 1993

Oh, Carole



FAMILY PORTRAIT: Gerardo and Mary Somoza with their children: (l. to r.) Alba, Gabriela, Oliver and Anastasia.

PHOTO BY JOYCE RAVID

ALL IN THE FAMILY

A tale of love and courageous struggle on behalf of disabled twins

By Joanna Molloy

One recent night in the West Side walkup of the Somoza family, 9-year-old twins Alba and Anastasia are preoccupied with an important task: Anastasia is giving her teddy bear a physical, and she discovers a twist in its leg. "Look, Mom," she says to Mary Somoza. "The teddy is disabled!"

Alba smiles and looks anew at her own stuffed rabbit. The girls were born with cerebral palsy, stilling their ability to walk, and in Alba's more severe case, her ability to talk and use her hands.

But she can speak through a voice machine, and asked how she will celebrate when she enters the third grade with nondisabled pupils at Public School 234 in Manhattan this week, the girl in the wheelchair with the brown eyes and big smile says, "I want to go shopping."

In February, in a nationally televised "town meeting" for children to question President Clinton, Anastasia, instead of talking about the environment or

can make a disabled kid miss a lot of class time. And she insisted on support staff, like specialists who translate curriculum into lessons that disabled kids can understand. "Mary," says Ellen Gallagher Holmes, a lawyer at Advocates for Children, "is probably the most radical person they've dealt with."

"Radical?" responds Somoza, surprised at the characterization. "I'm just a go-getter when it comes to getting things my children need. Maybe I have rubbed people the wrong way, but when it comes to my children's rights, I'm just someone who won't back down. And I found that with just a little more effort, I could maybe change things a bit for others as well."

Mary, 45, came here 13 years ago from the tough Kimmage section of Dublin, worlds away from her husband, whose father, Anastasio, and grandfather, Luis, were presidents of Nicaragua. His family — one of the wealthiest in Latin America — owned cattle

By Joanna Molloy

One recent night in the West Side walkup of the Somoza family, 9-year-old twins Alba and Anastasia are preoccupied with an important task: Anastasia is giving her teddy bear a physical, and she discovers a twist in its leg. "Look, Mom," she says to Mary Somoza. "The teddy is disabled!"

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But she can speak through a voice machine, and asked how she will celebrate when she enters the third grade with nondisabled pupils at Public School 234 in Manhattan this week, the girl in the wheelchair with the brown eyes and big smile says, "I want to go shopping."

In February, in a nationally televised "town meeting" for children to question President Clinton, Anastasia, instead of talking about the environment or world peace, asked the President to help get Alba out of special education. "...The principal thinks that she can't do it because she can't use her hands and she can't speak," Anastasia, from her wheelchair, told Clinton. "But she uses computers to speak and I would like her in a regular class, just like me."

Anastasia's plea was the public climax of a years-long struggle undertaken by the Somozas, a family who, when confronted by inequalities in the school system that they would not abide in their home, sought to change them. Now, Alba's presence in her new classroom could have momentous implications for thousands of school kids in New York and elsewhere.

From the beginning, three years ago, Mary Somoza didn't like what she saw in Alba's special-ed program after Anastasia was allowed to enter a regular class. "Both girls have a 132 IQ" — well above average — and understand English and Spanish, she says in exasperated tones. This year, she says, Alba's "teacher was nice enough, but she had 12 children with 12 different types of disabilities. She was sending home 'cat-bat-sat' for homework. That's when I started to flip out. Alba was falling way behind."

A petite blond sparkler whose clothes sag because she has lost 15 pounds doing battle, Mary has an Irish lilt that has disarmed many a bureaucrat and lashed others. After Alba's first year in special ed, Mary and her husband, Gerardo Somoza, a freelance celebrity photographer, began to challenge the school district's decision. "We didn't even know we had the right to, at first," she says.

ALL EARS: Disney's Mickey Mouse introduces himself to a very attentive Somoza clan.

But once the Somozas discovered they did, the school district found itself up against a formidable adversary. She would track down some of the country's best-known experts on cerebral palsy and bring them to its tiniest subcommittee meetings. She demanded there be "no pullouts" — that her children not be removed from academic lessons for the rehabilitation work that can make a disabled kid miss a lot of class time. And she insisted on support staff, like specialists who translate curriculum into lessons that disabled kids can understand. "Mary," says Ellen Gallagher Holmes, a lawyer at Advocates for Children, "is probably the most radical person they've dealt with."

"Radical?" responds Somoza, surprised at the characterization. "I'm just a go-getter when it comes to getting things my children need. Maybe I have rubbed people the wrong way, but when it comes to my children's rights, I'm just someone who won't back down. And I found that with just a little more effort, I could maybe change things a bit for others as well."

Mary, 45, came here 13 years ago from the tough Kimmage section of Dublin, worlds away from her husband, whose father, Anastasio, and grandfather, Luis, were presidents of Nicaragua. His family — one of the wealthiest in Latin America — owned cattle farms, plantations, and sugar mills all over the country.

"I grew up in luxury, and because it was Nicaragua it was a kind of rough luxury, but it was beautiful," says Gerardo, sitting at the family's large table in a roomy but chaotic kitchen. Laundry hangs on a foldout rack, and an accordion security gate on the fire escape has been opened on this stifling day. The family lives on the second floor of an old brownstone near 10th Ave. in which the twins' wheelchairs barely clear the narrow hallway walls. There's no elevator, and the doorbells don't work, but the family has managed to brighten up what would otherwise be a dark, cramped railroad flat. Gerardo's photographs of the family line the walls next to stern military portraits of his ancestors.

"We had purebred Andalusian and Arabian horses on one of our farms," Gerardo continues, as their eldest child, Oliver, 10, climbs on Gerardo's lap to listen. "We lived in a mansion that filled a square block in Managua.

"My grandfather had this one farm out on the beach that was blocked off by a huge cliff that went out into the ocean. There were mango trees all around, and when the tide would go out we would go out clam-hunting with machetes. That was paradise. It was called Monte Le Mar. Today, the Sandinistas use it for a hotel."

Gerardo, 37, was disinherited by his family when he broke with them politically in 1976 and left for New York. Three years later, the left-wing Sandinistas took

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PHOTO BY GERARDO SOMOZA

All In The Family
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over Nicaragua, and the Somozas fled into exile, to Houston and Miami. His estranged mother, Isabel, who Gerardo says expected him to marry a social-register type, wasn't too happy with his choice of a bride.

"I think the family wanted him to marry Princess Caroline, which I wasn't," says Mary, who met Gerardo in New York by way of a mutual friend. "We clicked. Within 10 days of meeting, he asked me to marry him."

Gerardo, whose earliest memory is of the official photographer who would take the presidential family portrait, ekes out a living in the competitive world of paparazzi. The family has no health insurance other than Medicare, and not all medical costs are covered. When things got particularly desperate, Gerardo contacted his mother and brothers and asked for help with the twins' medical bills. They refused, Mary says.

It is a testament to the couple's strength of will that after having Oliver and the twins, they planned their fourth child, Gabriela, now 6. "There was an imbalance, with two disabled girls on one

Christy Brown, the Irish writer afflicted with cerebral palsy in "My Left Foot."

Still, there are strains. The twins have each had two major operations, and receive constant physical therapy to keep their muscles malleable and to prevent the dislocation cerebral palsy sometimes causes. The physical effort of feeding, bathing and dressing the quadriplegic twins and their siblings in time for school requires Mary to be up at 4:15 a.m. while Gerardo, home from night shoots usually an hour or so before, sleeps.

SIBLING LOVE: Alba and Anastasia are included in family fun.

The complexity of even the most ordinary routines quickly becomes evident as Mary and a state-provided home health aide meet the school bus one afternoon. First they must carry Anastasia, then Alba, up the brownstone's marble steps, and then up two flights of stairs. They then repeat the trip, carrying the girls' motorized wheelchairs.

"It would be a lie if I told you it's been roses since the beginning," says Gerardo of the couple's marriage. "We collide at times, and we've had arguments in front of the children. They'll come over to me and say, 'she's right,' or to her

stranger. When an emotional President Clinton told Anastasia and the world, "I think your sister should be given a chance," he apparently meant what he said.

"Our office has had a regular dialogue with Mary, with the White House and with Education Secretary Dick Riley," reports Allan Bergman, director of state and federal relations for United Cerebral Palsy. "His office was asked by the President to stay on top of this situation."

A White House aide has checked in periodically with the family, and Anastasia recently received a letter from President Clinton in which he wrote, "I have asked some people to look into your sister's school situation. I hope we can help."

Though others feel the watchful eyes of Washington, School District 2 spokesman Andrew Lachman insists that in the district's decision to transfer Alba, "There was no direct or indirect contact from the White House or the Dept. of Education."

Somoza eyes that answer as warily as anything else she is told by the schools. "The school district just did not want to do this inclusion," she says, using another term for the full-time "mainstreaming" of kids with disabilities into regular classes. "They don't believe in it, and because of the bottom line. "You get twice as much money per kid in a special education class, the way the state funding formula is written," she says. "Each district gets about $18,000 per special-education kid, $30,000 in some places, and about $7,000 for a kid in a regular class." The city spent $2.2 billion on its 129,000 special-ed children last year.

"You see the resources required to help those two little girls," says School Board spokesman Bob Terte. "Multiply that by one-hundred-something-thousand and it becomes part of a major budget issue. The problem is that when kids are moved out of special ed, the district loses the funding to provide the special services they need to enable them to stay alive in the mainstream."

Holmes complains, "New York has been last in the country when it comes to including children with disabilities," adding that the state has failed to comply with federal guidelines on the issue.

"In Massachusetts, 59% of disabled children are now in regular classes. In Michigan it's 46%. Vermont is a model state, with 81.5%. But in New York, only 7% of all children with disabilities are fully included. And parents in New York are asking, why should my child have to be labeled, segregated and stigmatized?"

Upon her election, new School Board president Carol Gresser said the board had to "take a hard look" at special ed to see if it wasn't just "a hopeless track."

Mary Somoza, who has just been appointed by Gov. Cuomo to be a state advocate for disabled infants and toddlers, hopes her daughter's case will encourage other parents to fight for inclusion on their children's behalf. And she's still doing battle for her twins: this time, to get Anastasia into gym class.

When the wisdom of such a move is gingerly questioned, Mary blasts back: "She can participate. Maybe the kids are

SIBLING LOVE: Alba and Anastasia are included in family fun.

ticularly desperate, Gerardo contacted his mother and brothers and asked for help with the twins' medical bills. They refused, Mary says.

It is a testament to the couple's strength of will that after having Oliver and the twins, they planned their fourth child, Gabriela, now 6. "There was an imbalance, with two disabled girls on one end and an able boy on the other," Mary says. "We were scared and we knew it would be a lot of work, but this way, Oliver and Gabriela can play together, and their sisters can participate in their way."

As if on cue, Gabriela's small voice is heard counting to 30. Oliver scrambles through the apartment to the twins' room, where books and toys vie for shelf space, and dives behind a bed. Gabriela runs in and finds him immediately, and he tears over to Alba, setting off a giggle-fest as he pretends to throttle her. "Did you tell? Did you tell her where I was hiding? You did, didn't you?" he teases.

The equal treatment the Somozas accord and demand of all their children underlies their philosophy of how they should be treated at school. The evidence is in Gerardo's photographs: the twins in Communion dresses with Gabriela and Oliver in Sunday best; Anastasia out of the wheelchair, being held by Oliver as they dance together; again with Oliver, in a swimming pool; the twins at camp, and again, tellingly, with actor Daniel Day-Lewis shortly after his performance as Gerardo, home from night shoots usually an hour or so before, sleeps.

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But both parents bring up countless stories of friends, neighbors and even strangers who have helped them along the way. "I was alone here one night — Gerardo was working — and I got a telephone call from this woman," Mary recalls. "She said, 'I'm from such-and-such collection agency. Do you know you have all these bills and you owe money to all these doctors?'"

"I burst into tears on the phone," says Mary. "Here I am talking on the phone at 10 o'clock at night with a perfect stranger. I poured my heart out to her. I was in such a state. In half an hour, the woman was crying with me. She saw the ages of the children on the record, she saw all the operations they have had.

"She said, 'Well, you know what? In these stupid collection agencies sometimes files have a habit of falling off of people's desks into the garbage and they're never heard from again.' We never did."

But even more dramatic was the help that came from another powerful

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Somoza eyes that answer as warily as anything else she is told by the schools. "The school district just did not want to do this inclusion," she says, using another term for the full-time "mainstreaming" of kids with disabilities into regular classes. "They don't believe in it, and they don't want it to work."

The way inclusion can work, says Somoza and other activists, is by having additional teachers assigned to regular classrooms. These so-called "consultant" teachers would act as translators and guides for kids with special needs, using sign language, for example, in the case of a deaf child. The consultant teacher would be available to help other students as well, they argue.

But some parents of able children wonder if the increased presence of the disabled and their aides in their kids' classrooms might not weigh down the learning process. And beyond that point, the cost of these teachers is at issue.

"There is evidence to indicate that the consultant-teacher system might cost as much, but in some cases may definitely cost less," says Holmes, the children's advocate. "And the presence of a second teacher in a classroom serves to bolster the overall quality of education for all its students."

Holmes surmises that New York has been reluctant to move toward inclusion

"In Massachusetts, 59% of disabled children are now in regular classes. In Michigan it's 46%. Vermont is a model state, with 81.5%. But in New York, only 7% of all children with disabilities are fully included. And parents in New York are asking, why should my child have to be labeled, segregated and stigmatized?"

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When the wisdom of such a move is gingerly questioned, Mary blasts back: "She can participate. Maybe the kids are playing volleyball and they toss the ball to her every so often. Or she can cheer them on. Not everyone in gym class is Michael Jordan. There's the fat kid and the kid with thick glasses. The kids'll work out a way to include her.

"The important thing is socialization. So that one day when they're grownups and they go out into the work force, people who work alongside them need not be fearful. People are only fearful now because disabled children are hidden away all the time. They soon see they're human beings. They have hearts. People are great. Our kids go on play dates and the kids are great and the parents are great. It's the system that gets in the way."

Spoken like a true radical. "Everybody thinks I'm strong," Somoza says. "But at the end of the day, I'm just a mom. Sometimes I feel sorry for myself and wonder why we have to do it alone. But then they do something else to my kids. That's when I get going again." ■

(Joanna Molloy is a Daily News staff writer.)

PHOTOCOPY PRESERVATION

PHOTOS BY GERARDO SOMOZA

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Irish Set for U.S. '94

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A Profile in Courage

An Irish woman and her family were catapulted into the national spotlight earlier this year after a meeting on national TV with President Clinton. Dubliner Mary Somoza has fought for the rights of her handicapped kids since the day they were born, and she recently told her extraordinary story to DEBBIE McGOLDRICK.

MARY Somoza's long-running battle against the New York City Board of Education on behalf of her two handicapped daughters was never a matter of some aggressive woman fighting purely for what she wants.

Mary Somoza's war has been waged with the law of the land firmly planted on her side. She's even got a couple of people named Bill and Hillary Clinton to back her up.

Anastasia Somoza, Mary's 9-year-old daughter, was a big hit on a nationally televised children's forum earlier this year with President Clinton. She was the child in the wheelchair, deep brown eyes hopefully gazing into Clinton's face, asking why her twin sister Alba couldn't be in the same school class as she.

The President, like the rest of us watching, was completely captivated at the sight of the little girl, afflicted with cerebral palsy, sticking up for her sister. Anastasia Somoza became an instant media sensation, and her mother Mary was well on her way to achieving what matters most to her — equal rights for handicapped children.

"I was so proud of Anastasia," said the tenacious, never-say-die Mary. "And I've been doing interviews ever since to get a message across to other families — it's their right to make sure that their kids get into regular schools with all the proper supports. If our kids are segregated, how are they ever going to get along in society when they grow up?"

******

MARY Somoza's last name and her British accent hide the fact that she was born in Kimmage, Dublin, and lived there for the first seven years of her life.

"Oh, I'm Irish through and through. I'm very proud of that," she says. "My children are just as much Irish as they are Latin, even though they don't look it!"

Mary and her family moved to England when she was seven. When she was older she moved to Madrid, lived there for several years and worked at a variety of jobs, including a stint at the Irish Embassy. In 1981 she traveled to New York for a holiday where she met the man she was going to marry.

He did, and he's been estranged from his mother and her fortune ever since.

Giving new meaning to the term whirlwind courtship, Mary and Gerardo Somoza met on the 10th of October, and were married on the 11th of November.

Her husband is a direct descendant of the notorious Somoza family of Nicaragua. His grandfather was the dictator Anastasio, who was gunned down by rebel forces, but any mention of the Somozas makes Mary's Irish blood boil.

She explains her husband's history — he's been in America since he was 12 and had nothing to do with his family's politics or policies — and then puts it very succinctly why she wants to downplay the Somoza connection.

"In all the years that we've been married and all the tough times we've been through with the girls, we've never touched a penny of the Somoza millions," she says. "We've struggled more than anyone else — we've been evicted from apartments, owed money to doctors, have no insurance — but we've always managed on our own. That's why I was upset when the press started mentioning the Somozas."

Gerardo Somoza received a large inheritance from his father, which he signed over to his mother to take care of. When he told his mother that he planned on marrying Mary she voiced her resistance and threatened to disinherit him if he followed through with the wedding.

"When the twins were born Gerardo asked her if she would help with the medical bills," Mary recalls. "He told her not to give us any money; that she could pay the doctors direct. She refused."

Mary and Gerardo, who works as a freelance photographer, have four children. Oliver, 10, is the eldest. Anastasia and Alba are 9, and Gabriella is 6.

Anastasia meets President Clinton.

The twins were born with cerebral palsy, but Alba was particularly affected because she was in the womb for nine minutes without oxygen. Alba can't speak, and is much more delicate and frail than Anastasia. Still, her brain is completely unaffected, and both girls are enjoying life to the full thanks to their mother's dogged determination.

Mary Somoza with her kids Alba and Anastasia.

Mary Somoza is an unpaid adviser on handicapped issues on the New York state and city levels. "It's funny — here I am still walking around with my Irish passport and I'm advising mayors and governors!" she laughs.

"I was named as an adviser because I became so savvy in the system and became so aware of all the inadequacies in dealing with the handicapped," says Mary. "New York is so bad in enforcing the laws. I used to write reports to everyone, telling them what was wrong and how it could be fixed. I think the governor and the mayor said we better bring this one on board because we don't want to have her against us!"

The problems Mary has had with the New York City Board of Education center around the schooling arrangements for her daughters. Anastasia is in a regular third grade class, but has always had a hard time keeping up because she's never been given the proper supports — required for handicapped children by law — such as special computers and a consultant teacher to help her adapt to the classroom. In other words, she's been more or less left out in the cold to fend for herself.

Alba's had the same problems in her special education class, but because the girl is so bright Mary wants her in a regular general education class just like any other 9-year-old. The powers that be at the Board of Education have resisted Mary every step of the way.

There's a pretty logical reason for Mary's fight against the board. "How are our kids ever going to get along with each other if they're kept apart? They all have to grow up together. Children are not fearful of other kids as long as they know the story. If we segregate them there's just going to be problems in the long run."

Just listening to Mary Somoza describe a typical day in the family apartment on the West Side of Manhattan would make one exhausted. Mary gets up at 5 a.m. to prepare breakfasts for her four kids. The twins "require complete and total care," she says. It takes her half an hour to dress each one, and both of them also have to be fed.

"After the kids get off to school this place looks like an atom bomb hit," she says of her second floor walkup.

The rest of the day is spent doing normal chores — cleaning, shopping and four loads of laundry. "The girls drool and sometimes get messy so I change them twice a day. I always want my girls to look pretty," Mary says.

In the middle of all the activity Mary also finds the time to keep up her battle with the Board of Ed on behalf of her daughters. After the kids go to bed at 8:00, she spends the rest of the evening catching up on phone calls and writing those reports that prompted the city and state to name her as a special adviser. She gets to bed at midnight or after.

The apartment that the Somozas live in doesn't have an elevator, which means that Mary Somoza has developed quite a few muscles carrying wheelchairs up and down two flights of stairs a few times each day.

"The pace definitely wears me down sometimes," she says. "But I'm a tough Irish woman. I keep going."

******

ANASTASIA'S meeting with President Clinton came about because of her mother's advocacy. Each year Mary sends Christmas card pictures of her kids to various people working for the city and state "to let them see what my life and my kids are like," she says. "I show up at these meetings all dressed up, but they really don't know what my life is like when I'm at home."

In looking for children to participate in the forum with the President at the White House, ABC TV called a New York state official seeking an articulate handicapped child who wouldn't be afraid to speak on live television. With a mother like Mary, the state official figured Anastasia would be the perfect fit.

Sure enough, ABC interviewed Anastasia and were impressed enough to want her for the show, hosted by Peter Jennings. But, as it turns out, Mary had to fight for that privilege too because a producer figured that it would be easier to select a handicapped child living in the Washington area.

"ABC told me that at the last minute and I told them I had already told my daughter she would be going to meet the President. I

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said, 'You don't want me to disappoint a young girl in a wheelchair, do you?'" The network instantly relented.

On the eve of the broadcast, Anastasia asked her mom about what she should talk to the President about. "I told her that she'd be speaking for handicapped kids just like her all over the country and that she should ask about issues that affect her. She wanted to know if it would be okay to ask about wars and the environment, and I told her to say whatever she wanted, as those issues affected her just as they would anyone else."

But when it came down to it, Anastasia surprised her mother by talking to the President about her twin sister. That came about simply enough. "For six

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Courage

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months previous I had been talking to the school principal on the phone about getting Alba into a regular class. I was screaming and yelling at her and saying I was going to sue her.

"Of course," she says with a smile, "Anastasia could hear everything, and the next thing I know she's talking to the President about it!"

Mary also got her chance to meet with both Clintons after the broadcast, and gives top marks to both. "Hillary is wonderful and so knowledgeable. I told her not to forget about us when she was drawing up her health care proposals. And I can't say enough about the President. They've both been wonderful."

* * * * * *

MARY and her two daughters have had good news come their way recently, certainly due in part to the Clinton Administration's intervention.

Next year Anastasia will begin fourth grade in a regular class with a full variety of supports, including a special tutor and computer equipment. And Alba will also be put into a regular third grade class with a similar round of supports.

Mary Somoza couldn't be more pleased, but she intends to keep fighting and keep advocating.

"We've been lucky, but what all parents must remember is that I've done nothing special. I've just stuck up for the rights of my children, and they must remember to do the same."

Health, responded this way: "Our housing is not subject to the fair share philosophy. I can't walk away from good, affordable housing." Freidmutter defined the proposed residence as "housing", not a "facility", and she claims that the real conflict arises out of discrimination rather than the issue of fair share.

Does such a characterization ignore the real issues? Active members of the coalition have been stung by accusations of prejudice, but those I spoke with voiced a genuine concern, both about the problems besetting the homeless and other dependent populations, and about their own fears regarding the neighborhood's deterioration.

The coalition, in its position paper, calls for a moratorium on any additional social services facilities in their neighborhood. Cindy Freidmutter insists, "OMH's housing is not saturating the Upper West Side. I can't speak for the other city agencies." But that's part of the problem — the city's social services are not coordinated. As a result, the

EDUCATION

ANASTASIA GETS HER WISH: A Victory For Inclusion

By Catherine Hausman

We have written frequently in these pages about the Somoza twins, Anastasia and Alba, both of whom are disabled and use wheelchairs, and Anastasia's plea to President Clinton that her twin sister, who uses a computer to communicate, be allowed to join her in a general education classroom at her school, PS 234 in Tribeca. President Clinton said that he could do nothing as President but suggested she ask the principal of the school to help. Nothing changed.

A few weeks ago Alba was up for her yearly meeting before the committee for Special Education (CSE), at which they decide what her Individual Education Plan for the following year will be. Alba's mother, Mary Somoza, a formidable advocate for her daughter's rights, came prepared for battle. To her great relief, the committee agreed to comply with State and Federal law which states that children with disabilities are entitled to a free and appropriate education "in the least restrictive environment", with the necessary supports. Although Anastasia and Alba will not actually be in the same classroom (Anastasia is going ahead to 4th grade in September, while Alba will be in a 3rd grade classroom), Alba will finally be in a general education classroom with other children who are not disabled. (Alba has a best friend from her old classroom and the hope is that he will be able to move with her). The Board of Education will continue to provide a para-professional and a communications specialist to assist Alba in the use of her computer which allows her to "speak" and do her work. In addition, there will be a consultant teacher available to support the head teacher.

Ellen Gallagher-Holmes, an attorney at Advocates For Children here in the city, says this is a significant breakthrough: "We're dealing with a state and city that have routinely denied children with disabilities membership in general education classrooms. Previously, they have been unwilling to use consultant teacher services in a systematic way to enable this to happen.

"Alba is a child with severe difficulties who was granted placement with the extra supports and services she needs — a very important precedent. How can a school deny any other child the opportunity to be in a general education classroom since they have essentially acknowledged that this is what the State and Federal law requires them to do?

"In short," says Gallagher-Holmes, "moving the services with the child is ultimately more cost-effective, because you enrich the general education classroom." Alba will no longer be pulled out in the middle of a social studies or math lesson to have physical or speech therapy; she will be able to participate more fully in the academic and social life of the classroom.

What convinced the powers that be to change their mind? Certainly the media blitz had an effect, but Gallagher-Holmes believes it was because they just didn't know how to use the consultant teacher model — "they didn't know how to write it up." And thirdly, if they went before an impartial hearing officer, they knew that they would probably lose. "If you look at the language of the law (PI-142, the Children with Disabilities Act) and think about the intent, this is what Congress wanted — children should be in the least restricted (and least segregated) environment possible."

Advocates for Children expects to see more cases come before the CSE challenging the city to implement the consultant teacher model. Gradually, New York City's special education system, the most segregated in the nation, will conform to the law and provide a better education — and a more hopeful future for children with disabilities. Anastasia and Alba Somoza will have been some of its earliest pioneers. ■

Mr. Jack Colombo,
Chairperson,
Committee on Special Education,
330 WEst 18th STreet,
New York,
N.Y. 10010

Mary Somoza,
452 WEst 57th sTreet, 2E
New York,
N.Y.10019

September 2nd 1993

Dear Mr. Colombo,

As per my telephone call to your office to-day I am confirming September 13th 1993 at 9 a.m. as the date for the IEP review meeting.

I would be grateful if you could let me know at your earliest convenience if your Inclusion team (all the persons who will be working with Alba and Anastasia - consultant teachers, therapists, general ed teachers etc.,) will be meeting to come up with an implementation plan. If so, I would like to be part of that group when they meet.

I would also like to know if anything has been worked out about adapting the curriculum for each individual child. I have still not received a copy of the curriculum which I requested at our June 11th meeting, and I really would like to receive that as soon as possible.

I have also not heard anything about the request I made by telephone to have a meeting with the Principal, Ms. Switzer at P.S. 234 before the start of school.

I look forward to hearing from you at your earliest convenience so you can clarify all of the above mentioned information.

Sincerely,

Mary Somoza

Mary Somoza

c.c. Advocates for Children

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Advancing the independence of people with disabilities

Word from Washington

Rep. Major R. Owens (NY) testified at a House hearing on the telecommunications infrastructure: *"Our future electronic village must contain no barriers; the frontier of the tele-community must be open to every American; we must ensure that no gateway is closed to any user based on color, sex, race, religion or disability."*

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Family Support NEWSLETTER

DDPC

VOL. 1, NO. 3 SUMMER, 1993

DDPC FOCUSES ON FAMILY SUPPORT

During the past few months, the ew York State Developmental isabilities Planning Council DPC) has sponsored a series of ctivities on the topic of Family Support.

Now that the Family Support egislation has been passed, the ask of implementing the intent of hat law still needs to be addressed.

Considerable progress has been nade toward this implementation, ince the law was passed in August 992. Commissioner Howe and her taff are to be commended for their fforts to actively involve parents in e planning of family supports and developing more effective ways provide assistance to families.

Family Support Councils have now been established at all 21 DDSOs

The Commissioner's Family Support Advisory Council, now known s the Consumer Council, has een expanded to include repreentatives from each DDSO Family upport Council. Family Support ouncils have now been established t all 21 DDSOs, and are in the rocess of identifying the needs of milies in their regions, developing riorities for funding family suports, and reviewing and awarding rants to meet identified needs.

On April 20 and 21, 1993, the DPC, in cooperation with the Office of Mental Retardation/ Developmental Disabilities (OMRDD), sponsored a two-day seminar in Albany on the role of these Family Support Councils. Attending the seminar were the Directors and Family Support Coordinators of each DDSO, and a parent member of their Council.

This seminar was a direct result of the need identified eariler this year by the Commissioner's Council to provide information and assistance to the local Councils to help them become more effective in carrying out their role.

On May 21 and 22, 1993, the DDPC cosponsored the North East Family Support Conference held in Albany in cooperation with the Human Services Research Institute in Cambridge, Massachusetts. Parents and professionals from six states met to hear national "experts" in the field discuss issues relating to the provision of family supports. Several of the "graduates" of the DDPC's training projects attended and also served as presenters.

On June 4, 1993, a Family Support Seminar was sponsored by the DDPC for parent members of the Family Support Councils of the five boroughs of New York City. Approximately 70 individuals participated in that meeting which was held at Manhattan Developmental Services Office on Morton Street.

The meeting was held in response to a concern voiced by a parent from New York City that so many conferences were held in Albany and not accessible to many parents in the city.

Information from the Albany conferences was shared, and discussions held on the Family Support legislation, the provision of family supports and the role of the Family Support Councils.

The DDPC and OMRDD are in the process of planning a series of regional training programs for the local councils to be held in the Fall 1993.

GET INVOLVED...

We urge you to become involved in your local Council.

Call the Family Support Coordinator at your DDSO for more information.

IN THIS ISSUE:

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- Anastasia Somoza is honored by DDPC
- My Life and My Dreams by Tyeisha Rochester
- One person can make a difference
- VESID seeks your help
- A letter from a partner
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DDPC honors Anastasia Somoza for Jr. Achievement

At its annual meeting, the DDPC :o presented a Junior Achieve-:nt Award to Anastasia Somoza representing New York State on e national TV show of the meeting children with President Clinton in ›ruary, 1993. Anastasia captured ›e hearts of the nation when she ;ked President Clinton to help her ›in sister, Alba, become included › a regular class in September.

Both nine-year-old girls have Cerebral Palsy, and Anastasia has ›een doing well in a regular third grade, but her sister was denied inclusion because of her more severe disabilities.

Anastasia's advocacy for inclusion will benefit children and families all over the country.

Anastasia gets her wish

As a result of Anastasia's TV appearance, ***we are pleased to inform you that on June 8, 1993, the school did agree to have Alba be included in a regular grade next semester.***

Alba will be receiving the following support services: two hours per day of consultant teacher services; 10 hours a week of a special education teacher providing direct or indirect services; participation in a regular physical education program; an evaluation for a motorized wheelchair; a computer for use in the home and a 12-month program. All supports and therapies will be provided in the regular classroom.

> ***". . . it's for all children with disabilities. I hope other parents will read about this and ask."*** ***Mary Somoza***

This situation demonstrates that children with disabilities cannot be denied placement in a regular classroom if they can be educated there through the use of needed supports.

"This wasn't just for Anastasia and Alba, it's for all children with disabilities," said Mary Somoza, the girls' mother, as she spoke of her battles with the bureaucracy.

"I hope other parents will read about this and ask."

Allan Bergman of the National United Cerebral Palsy Association stated: "We're part of the way home. The school district has recognized that Alba has the right to take her place among her peers. This needs to be the precedent now, for other kids' parents to request inclusion."

Letters to the President

The following is a copy of the letter Mary Somoza wrote to President Clinton:

June 11, 1993

Dear President Clinton:

Words cannot express my gratitude for your interest in my child's school situation. I think the decision of the New York City Board of Education to allow Alba in a regular education class in September, with full supports, is definitely a step in the right direction.

As you know we have a long way to go in New York. Your interest has sent a message to parents like myself that you are the true President of Inclusion. I do not think that anyone who has witnessed that wonderful moment with you and Anastasia could have doubted that you would not do your best to help her. And you most certainly did!

As a mother, I thank you from the bottom of my heart and as a parent advocate I look forward to the day when *all* children with disabilities are included in the schools alongside their non-disabled peers. With the support you have shown, and hopefully will continue to show, that dream could become a reality.

God Bless You!

Sincerely,

Mary Somoza

The following is a copy of the letter written by Anastasia on he computer:

June 12, 199:

Dear Mr. President:

My mom went to a meeting o Tuesday and they told her Alba, m twin sister, can go to a regular clas in September. We are both very very happy. I would really like t thank you because you said yo would try to help and you did.

My whole family is very proud o what you did. I see you on TV a lo and it reminds me of when I met you

I got an award yesterday as young advocate of the year. It's fo helping people with disabilities, bu I think you should have got it. I thin you are a great president and I wi vote for you when I grow up.

Lots and Lots of Luv,
Anastasia

3rd Anniversary fo signing of ADA

July 25th marked the third an niversary of the signing of th Americans with Disabilities Act The day was remembered wit marches and rallies.

In New York City, participant marched from 42nd Street an Madison Avenue to Madiso Square Park at 26th Street, be ween Madison and Fifth Avenue.

Guests included Clevelan Robinson, Justin Dart, and Jud Heumann. The day was capped b performances by the Nationa Theather & Onyx Theater of th Deaf, Streetsingers, and Johnn Crescendo, with M.C. Henr Holden.