

February 14, 1997

Memories of Penny Philanthropist Stir Gifts to Neediest

By DAVID M. HERSZENHORN

George C. Ginsberg, known as the Penny Philanthropist because of his charitable donations in small denominations, wanted to see The New York Times Neediest Cases Fund break the \$5 million mark. He had predicted that it would happen last year and when it did not, he simply started giving all over again.

"The enclosed \$5 bill shall be the catalyst to the 5 millions, so please put it to the '96-'97 campaign," he wrote in a letter to The New York Times just after the end of last year's drive. "I hope and pray that I will be around (now at 96 plus 5 mos). One can never tell, but I assure you that my family will carry on in my absence."

Mr. Ginsberg, a retired photographer who by his modest example spurred scores of people to give to the fund, died at 97 on Nov. 18, less than two weeks before the start of the fund's 85th annual appeal.

Now, with only two weeks to go in the campaign, there is slim hope that the generous donor's dying wish will come true. To date, the fund has recorded \$4,627,913.31. To reach \$5 million, it would have to record \$26,578 a day until the campaign closes at the end of the month.

The fund is still ahead of last year, when \$4,270,092.16 had been collected by this time. Its record of \$5,083,520.81 was set in 1992.

Mr. Ginsberg was right on the mark when he said his family would continue his charitable work. "Our late father, George Ginsberg, known as the 'Penny Philanthropist,' was a frequent contributor to the N.Y. Times Neediest Fund," wrote his daughters, Annette Lawrence and Bea Slater of Springfield, N.J. "His loving children thought the start of a new year would be the fitting time for us to continue his good work, and so, in his dear memory, please accept the enclosed check for your very worthy fund." They sent \$25 -- quite a lot when counted in pennies.

"We didn't think much about it," Ms. Lawrence, 72, said of her father's generosity. "He lived for 97 years so we got pretty used to him. He did a lot of wonderful things. I always knew everyone had to die, but I thought they might make an exception for him."

Mr. Ginsberg used a plain white envelope with "The Penny Philanthropy Fund" printed on the outside to hold his donations before he sent them. He called the envelope the "kitty" and recruited a crew of fund-raisers to help him fill it, including his three grandchildren and five great-grandchildren, who called him Papa George. Spare change or dollar bills found on the street would all go into the kitty.

His family members were not the only ones inspired by his generosity. Mr. Ginsberg urged donors to send whatever little they could. If every reader gave \$1, he said, the \$5 million would be easy to reach. "Don't be ashamed to send it," he wrote in one of his letters to the fund last year. "Those dollars add up."

Scores of people from around the country have sent modest contributions to the fund, saying Mr. Ginsberg's example emboldened them.

As Mr. Ginsberg showed last year, when his prediction of \$5 million did not come true, he would have wasted no time in reaching for the goal once again. "It's odd that I am writing this letter on the Ides of March," he wrote in his letter last March. "My predictions did not come true, but \$4,815.609.76 as of report 3-12-96 is not bad My personal contributions came to about \$60, not bad considering that about five years ago, all I gave was \$2."

And he recognized that while the Neediest Cases campaign officially runs from Thanksgiving until March, the need exists all year long. "While the campaign is over as far as the calendar date is concerned, the spreading of the hundreds of dollars by the N.Y. Times Fund has no calendar date," he wrote in his final letter.

"The hungry, the poor, the orphans, the jobless, the homeless continue to be helped with the funds donated . . . (same as I the PENNY PHILANTHROPIST do 365 days of the year not with hundreds but with a dollar or two, or three) which by the way is my secret to longevity."

HOW TO HELP

Checks payable to The New York Times Neediest Cases Fund should be sent to P.O. Box 5193, General Post Office, New York, N.Y. 10087, or any of these organizations:

BROOKLYN BUREAU OF COMMUNITY SERVICE
285 Schermerhorn Street, Brooklyn, N.Y. 11217.

CATHOLIC CHARITIES OF THE ARCHDIOCESE OF NEW YORK
1011 First Avenue, New York, N.Y. 10022.

CATHOLIC CHARITIES, DIOCESE OF BROOKLYN AND QUEENS
191 Joralemon Street, Brooklyn, N.Y. 11201.

CHILDREN'S AID SOCIETY
105 East 22d Street, New York, N.Y. 10010.

COMMUNITY SERVICE SOCIETY OF NEW YORK
105 East 22d Street, New York, N.Y. 10010.

FEDERATION OF PROTESTANT WELFARE AGENCIES
281 Park Avenue South, New York, N.Y. 10010.

UJA-FEDERATION OF NEW YORK
130 East 59th Street, Room 427, New York, N.Y. 10022.

No agents or solicitors are authorized to seek contributions for The New York Times Neediest Cases Fund.

The Times pays the fund's expenses, so all contributions go directly to the charities, which use them to provide services and cash assistance to the poor.

Contributions to the fund are deductible on Federal, state and city income taxes to the extent permitted by law.

To delay may mean to forget.

Previously recorded \$4,589,982.67

Recorded yesterday \$37,930.64

Total \$4,627,913.31

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