

# IT WAS NO HOLIDAY FOR MOTHER

*FEW New Zealand mothers are likely to forget the summer of 1947-48, with first the entertainment and latterly the instruction of house-bound children. Here is the story, told by BEATRICE ASHTON, of one Wellington woman whose recollections of the Long Vacation are more turbulent than most.*

**N**EW ZEALAND housewives bear their burdens with distinct good humour, elastic endurance, and inexhaustible second wind. How else could they have survived this summer? The small fruit ripened and rotted in Christmas week; three times within a month the meat supply hung precariously, without refrigeration, for four days. And instead of long lazy days at the beach where the ardent standards of suburban house-keeping succumb to the encroaching sea and sand and sun, there were the children, home from school three weeks early. What was worse, they were to stay there for as long as the authorities should choose. No one questioned the necessity, but many women felt ill-used.

Here, the National Film Unit decided, was material for a film. It was produced by Margaret Thomson, a New Zealander who has come to the staff at Miramar after twelve years in England. In a short burlesque sequence the film foretold the worst that could happen. Young hooligans leapt from roof-tops with Mother's best umbrella clutched parachute-wise and eagerly set Dad's best socks to boil on wash-day. But the film was called *Keeping the Peace* and it was full of admirable suggestions for Mrs. New Zealand and her bored brood.

How did you react to that happy homily on holiday hobbies for house-bound children? Did you toy with the idea of turning the crisis into those creative channels and then shrink appalled at the thought of flour-paste ingrained deep in your living-room carpet, pitched battles on the front lawn, and a bucket brigade in the backyard?

**H**OWEVER you felt, you had nothing on Mrs. B. R. Findlay, of Totara Road, Miramar. That film was made in

her house, in her yard. Wondering idly what it feels like to be on location with the Film Unit and what it takes to attract their attention, I went to find out.

It was a wet unpleasant day when I inquired my way up Totara Road. Through the window of the house I saw a bed littered with some of the props. On such a day any woman whose children could perform such miracles of indoor occupation would be bound to be in! She was; and upholstering the kitchen chairs.

Doubtless to remove the suggestion that she was an ideal mother with ideal children she remarked at once that she was the last person in the world to amuse youngsters and that hers had but two ideas in wet weather—cricket in the hall and football in the hall. Somewhere between her modesty and the smooth face of the film there was an atmosphere of freedom, an enterprising flair of originality, and a definite sense of direction.

Take a roomy house in a large wilderness of a garden, set down there a man whose profession is teaching, whose wife accepts mess and confusion as the natural result of having three lusty youngsters and you have a perfect location for such a film. Even Mrs. Findlay thought so when she opened the door to the producer at ten o'clock in the morning, in the first week of the holidays. Nothing had seemed particularly remarkable about the children's play until that moment.



*"It wasn't much FUN, but we enjoyed it"*

National Film Unit photograph

But the trolley track racing down the slope by the vegetable garden looked to her like a photogenic find. ("Not educational enough!" said the Producer.) Perhaps the fort, burrowed tunnel-like along the boundary fence! ("Too shady," said the Producer.) What about the concrete at the back door where the children had splashed every summer away since before they reached the stage where suburbia demands that their nakedness be clothed. ("Possibly," said the Producer.) Or a Tarzan shot where they swing down perilously from a pine tree, across a breath-taking cliff-face and up again into the safety of a macrocarpa! ("Too dangerous," said the Producer.)

**I**T is the kind of garden that absorbs the children of the whole street and Mrs. Findlay called in one of her neighbours for more suggestions. Gradually

the thing took shape. The producer began to devise shots in the sunlight and out of the wet-weather experiences of those mothers, out of the outdoor fun of very ordinary children a rough sort of plan was made. However other New Zealand children were filling in their time the rest of that week. Totara Road had hold of an adventure. The news spread along the back fences, round the gangs and down the street. For three frantic days the whole neighbourhood trekked through that house, while the producer selected and directed and the camera wound ceaselessly. Somewhere in this indescribable confusion Mrs. Findlay made beds, cooked meals, played hostess and policeman.

To build the fort in the sunlight the children hacked and scythed a clearing,

*(continued on next page)*



MATERNAL PRIDE



DEFENDER



MODELLER

National Film Unit photographs

*"Totara Road had hold of an adventure"*