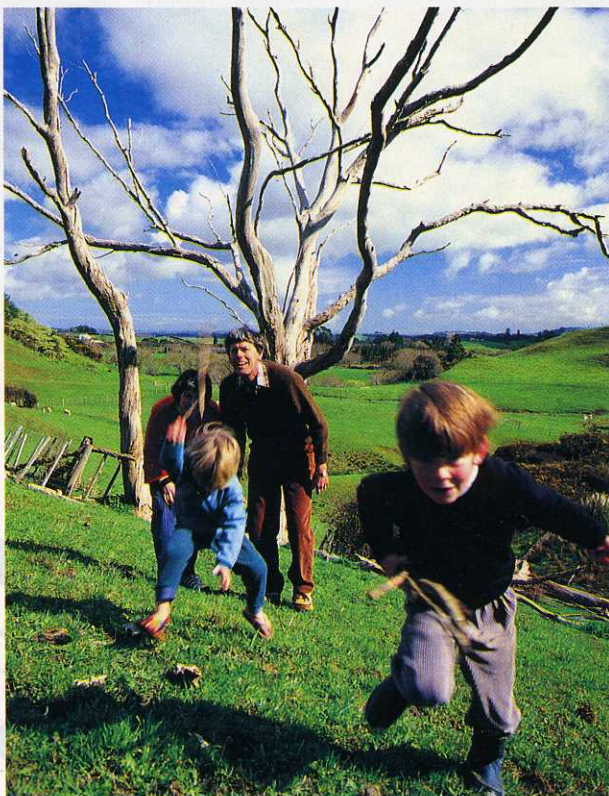


Would you choose not to immunise your child against polio? Or tetanus? Or whooping cough? Or meningitis?



GIVING IT HER BEST SHOT

Hilary Butler's children aren't immunised. She is a crusader you see. She thinks we don't actually need so much mass immunisation. She's prepared to say so, publicly, and to back her opinion with research. Some people are listening. Others think she's paranoid.

BY SIOUX BENNETT

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IN 1973, 19-year-old Hilary Butler had her first rubella shot, the vaccination now routinely given to New Zealand girls in Form One to prevent them catching rubella during any future pregnancy.

Within two weeks she developed very sore knees and elbows and "carpal tunnel syndrome", a condition causing pain and swelling around the thumbs. When she eventually consulted a doctor, Hilary was told "when you have a history of doing crazy things like gymnastics you can expect problems, things wear out", and until 1986 she accepted what she was told.

Seven years later, Hilary had a blood test to determine whether she had rubella antibodies.

"That was okay," Hilary recalls. "Then I got pregnant with Ian, our first son, and in the second month there were problems. I lost weight instead of gaining it, I thought I was going to die."

Last year, Hilary read her medical file from that time, which contained the results of blood tests done at the time. The results showed there was evidence she had had rubella.

Hilary was shocked, so shocked she decided to do some investigating herself to find out how someone could get rubella even when they had the antibodies.

She uncovered some research done in 1973 which showed 93% of people successfully vaccinated who have antibodies may later get rubella.

Shock turned to anger. Hilary went back to her doctor and asked for tests to find out just what had been wrong with her, and why she was still suffering aches and pains.

"He said he didn't really know what to test me for, but ran a few anyway and they did show up some immune system abnormalities."

Still dissatisfied, she bundled up her medical history and sent it off to a doctor in the United States, who replied stating Hilary had a classic case of "rubella vaccine syndrome, which may develop in 14 out of every 100 people vaccinated".

Hilary Butler was confused. Why hadn't she been told she wasn't necessarily protected from rubella and why hadn't she been told about this side effect syndrome, she demanded.

It wasn't the first time she'd questioned medical procedure — Ian's birth hadn't been the smoothest either.

"When you have your first child you tend to do what everyone says. You do what is deemed to be the right thing, go to hospital and do what you're told. I felt my delivery was mismanaged and the staff thought I was being stropy. I was just trying to protect Ian."

