

*Harrowing Decision For Parents*

# Agreed To Send Their Child Away For Good

(Sunday Tribune Reporter)

**WHAT** would you do if you discovered one of your children was a Mongol? (a child who never grows up mentally). Would you keep him at home because he is your child and you love him? Would you be afraid he would adversely affect your other normal children? Or would you send him to a Government institution? (Statistics show that every one child born in about 4,000 is a mongol.)

These questions had recently to be faced by a Durban couple. Yesterday I learned a little of what they went through before reaching a decision to send their second-born child away for good.

Mrs X told me: "It was six months before we began to notice there was something wrong with Robin. He did not react like other babies and certainly not like his older sister when she was that age. We thought he was blind and deaf, but a trip to an eye specialist ruled that out.

"As he grew we saw how different he was from other children but we refused to believe he was going to stay like that. Some doctors could not face up to telling us he was a Mongol. When one did, the blow was shattering.

"He was a lovable kid, full of smiles, unselfish and perpetually happy. He stood on his second birthday, but did not take his first steps for another nine months. At five his vocabulary only consisted of 20 words.

### SEVEN YEARS

"Specialists told us he would never reach a mental age above seven years. When this really sank in I was afraid to face people in case they said something. I refused to go out socially. Now I realise how silly this was. But I am sure any mother, who has had such a child will understand how I felt.

"Then there was my eight-year-old daughter. Her school friends used to sometimes tease her and say, 'Oh, your brother is bats.' Probably it was only in fun, but when she told me about it I was hurt deep down.

"When a doctor suggested we had another child we were frightened. After a normal child was born my husband used to stare at him when he was asleep, night after night, until he was satisfied all was well.

"When Robin's brother reached



MISS HELGA ANDREEN, one of the voluntary teachers at the Steiner School.

"When Robin's brother reached two years we realised we would have to do something. They were inseparable and we knew the younger boy was not progressing as he should.

### DREADED TIME

"The dreaded time had arrived. For the sake of our other two children, Robin would have to go.

"But where to send him? We were not keen on a Government institution, which in any case had a long waiting list. Then we heard that a man, Mr. Staudigel, had come out from Scotland to start a Rudolf Steiner School at Hermanus in the Cape.

"Rudolf Steiner schools are established all over the world and cater only for such mentally backward children as Robin.

"Mr. Staudigel, who is only 29, had a struggle to establish his school. A committee had been formed at Hermanus after interest had been aroused by Mr. and Mrs. Redman. A farm house and 30 acres was bought and Mr. Staudigel took on six children. He ran the school for 18 months with only one helper. There was no light, no water and no bridge over the river.

"All work at the school is done voluntarily and neither Mr. Staudigel nor his helpers is paid.

"We finally managed to get Robin into the school after a long wait. There are now 120 on the waiting list. On the first day he was left there Robin continually asked for his daddy, but he soon settled down happily.

### A HOLIDAY

"He is coming home for a holiday. If we find it upsets him or his brother and sister, it will be the last time. As his mother, I am dying to see him and would like him home for good. But I realise he must go back, for the care he gets at Hermanus is even a greater care than he could ever get at home."

Inspired by the story of this Durban couple, a local fund-raising committee has been formed. The school must expand to cope with the long waiting list. The committee feels there are many mothers who need help. A street collection has been arranged for August 22.

Members of the Durban committee are: Mr. A. T. van der Poel, the Chief Magistrate, Mr. John McIntyre, former Town Clerk, Dr. A. S. van Coller, Dr. I. Gordon, Mr. C. V. Nicholson, Mr. C. W. Bennett and Mr. D. W. McLean.