

## FOSTER GRANDPARENTS, WELCOME!

THE CREAM-COLORED house with turquoise trim where I was to interview Salme Kopperoinen looked inviting as I approached. Mrs. Barbara Foote, a social worker from the San Mateo County Department of Public Health, accompanied me to introduce the 39-year-old housewife who had found room in her home and heart to care for "my four elderly ladies," as she calls them, in addition to her husband and three small children.

The front-door chime was answered by a tall, beaming woman wearing a white nylon shirtdress and white shoes. A little boy, about 4, was right behind

her. "Please come in," she said, "and let me first show you the house."

Salme's accent betrayed her Finnish background, but her words were clear and her voice vibrant and friendly as she introduced three of her "elderly ladies" who were comfortably seated in the living room watching television. The eldest was 79, a lively, slim, little woman who said she was a widow with no children of her own, "but I raised my sister's three boys after she died. They come to see me to take me riding."

A metal walker was standing beside one of the chairs and a dark-haired woman, 72, also a widow, told us she

had suffered a stroke some months before and could no longer manage alone in her own home.

"Let me show you my room," said the third lady. She led us into her room which was right next to the living room. The first-floor room is one of two bedrooms used by the four elderly occupants; there is a bathroom in between. Both bedrooms open onto a patio at the rear of the house. "We spend more time outdoors most months than we do inside," said our guide.

Salme joined us again to conduct the tour through the rest of the house. She showed us the structural requirements that had to be met in order to get a license to provide home care for her elderly tenants.

"We had to place chromium bars in a wall in the ladies' bathroom, next to the tub, and another by the toilet, so they can hang on, if necessary. I am always near if they need more help; I usually help them out of the bathtub. Also, my husband built a ramp leading from the ladies' rooms to the patio to make walking safer and easier."

Fire Department regulations require each bedroom to have an outside exit. We walked down the ramp and onto the patio, which had a covered trellis, outdoor chairs and benches and two picnic tables. "We eat lots of our meals here," Salme said. "We can all be more relaxed, and it's easier with children."

We then went upstairs where the family has its own bedrooms and baths. A sewing machine stood in one of the rooms, piled high with bright fabrics.

I was quite surprised. "Do you have time to sew, even with three meals a day to prepare for eight people and the house to clean?"

"Oh, yes. The ladies tidy up their own rooms and make their beds, and I give the house a thorough cleaning once a week. I'm used to big families."

IN FINLAND, Salme grew up on a dairy farm, one of a family of 10 children—seven girls and three boys. (Salme's mother now has 24 grandchildren.) After she met and married Kysti, a mechanical engineer, life became an around-the-world jaunt. From Finland they went to Australia. It was there that they spent their first four years of married life and where their eldest child was born. Kysti's company then sent him to the United States—to a branch office had in Massachusetts.

"After two years," Salme said, "we found the weather there too cold and decided to come to California, where we'd heard engineers can always find good jobs."

Their wanderlust appeased, Salme and Kysti decided to settle down in California and buy their own home. The kind of a house in which they wanted to bring up their children turned out to be very expensive—at least \$32,000. This was more than even Kysti's good job could swing. Salme was determined that she was not going to work away from her home and let someone else raise her children.

The foster-care plan for the elderly seemed to be the ideal solution to Salme's problem. She figured that the enterprise would add a minimum of

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