

## Doll Fanciers Allow Personal Tastes To Shape Their Collections



BY SUSAN USHER

We sleep with them, play "let's pretend" and whisper our innermost secrets to them. As adults we collect them, paying prices our grandmothers would never have imagined.

What are they? Dolls, of course. Simply representations of the human form, typically made of whatever supplies a culture has available—paper, wood, rope, satin, corn husks, clays and porcelain, even prunes and other dried fruits.

And they are much more, harboring bits of their maker, their past owners and a little extra.

From Betsy McCall to the Morton salt box girl, they win the hearts of both little girls and their mothers.

As Loretta Holz writes in *The How-To Book of International Dolls*, "There is something very potent and compelling about the images people make of themselves and their fellow human beings. (They) retain something of the personality of their maker—and yet they have a separate and distinct personality of their own."

Dolls are special. They stir memories of childhood, surround us with beauty and provide reliable companionship. Somehow, if there are dolls around, we don't feel quite alone.

While most people think of dolls as playthings, that's not all they're good for. In the past, and even today, they've had far more serious purposes.

In ancient times, dolls had religious significance. Primitive man in the Stone Age carved dolls as charms and fetishes or as ritual images and idols and used them in religious worship. Children couldn't touch these sacred idols.

In some cultures dolls also served as ancestor figures, set up in shrines, treated with great respect and honored with gifts.

Dolls have also been a part of strange customs and dark rites, as in voodoo, and are sometimes used as substitutes for human sacrifices.

In various cultures they've been used to ensure fertility; to insure the birth of a healthy child; to celebrate the harvest; to ensure next year's crop; and yes, even to beg for rain. They serve as souvenirs of places visited and spark interest in learning the cultures of other countries.

In modern times, dolls have been created to use in teaching CPR and to help abused children testify in the courtroom.

Since the 1920s, dolls have become popular as collectors' items. Collecting dolls is mainly an adult hobby, though children are often given, as present, dolls meant to be added to their collections.

Among collecting hobbies, dolls are rated second only to stamps.

What to collect? That's a matter of personal taste, says Naomi Thomas of River Bend Estates. "Buy whatever you like. There is no right or wrong type of doll to collect."

"Most collectors simply see a doll they like and purchase it for their collection," said Mrs. Thomas, one of a handful of local collectors whose dolls were displayed earlier this spring at a doll show and luncheon sponsored by Shallotte Presbyterian Church, where her husband William serves as interim pastor.

ASTRIDE HIS ROCKING HORSE, this Gum Drop Boy looks almost real.

She prefers cuddlesome, childlike dolls with winsome personalities. Her husband's favorite is "Sincerity," a homely schoolgirl with pigtails and eyeglasses created by doll artist Lee Taylor Middleton. Sincerity has her own old-fashioned school desk with apple.

Among her own favorites is an infant, "Baby Sulyn," displayed with her bottle and several toys in a bassinet. Sulyn is one of two dolls she owns that were created by well-known doll artist Julie Good-Kruger.

Another popular figure in her collection is a Gum Drop Boy figure by Boots Tyner that won the 1987 *Doll Magazine* Award of Excellence. In cap and coveralls this nearly lifesize tot sits astride a wooden rocking horse just his size.

For children who find the displays throughout her home just too tempting to resist, she keeps several dolls for touch and play, not just display.

You'll find dolls in nearly every room of Yvonne Lewis Bright's home in northern Brunswick County, some simple, others fancy, all adored.

The District 5 Board of Education member has a penchant for Madame Alexander dolls, but also has accumulated a number of clown dolls and others that have struck her fancy over the years. Her interest in collecting was sparked in part by a relative who gave her several antique dolls, but has blossomed on its own. Family members help add to her growing collection.

Dolls come in all shapes, sizes and price ranges and often appeal to a specific interest. They can be considered antique or modern, depending upon their age. Beyond that distinction they may fall into one—or more—other general categories, said Mrs. Thomas.

Play dolls include the dolls that talk, cry, wet and the like, such as Betsy-Wetsy.

Barbie, Ken and Ginny are examples of fashion dolls. Some are popular priced, others premium priced.

Collectible dolls often are fashioned of bisque or plastic, with elaborate costuming and special touches that may include real hair or unusual facial features and accessories.

Shirley Temple, Princess Diana and Little Bo-Peep are examples of celebrity dolls. These are typically storybook characters, royalty and film stars.

Doll artist dolls are typically signed by the artist and numbered. Many are limited editions.

Direct purchase dolls are produced by firms such as the Danbury Mint, Franklin Mint and Georgetown collection.

Ann Maree of Tall Pines Plantation says many of the dolls she has purchased over the years for her daughter, "Most of these are Sandy's," she said.

Her doll collection ranges from an infant named "Tabitha" to a limited edition issue of the girl with the umbrella and dog found on the Morton salt box.

Each, like "Whitney," has something special that drew Ann's attention. Whitney, looks almost real, clad in a high-necked gown and clutching a teddy bear. Her face, with a slightly plaintive look, is framed by long wavy hair caught on top with a bow on either side of her head. Her eyelashes are of genuine hair.

Ann's own favorite, "Martina," has an expressive face reminiscent of Mrs. Maree's daughter Sandy, accented by a thick satin bow that runs under her chin and through her long brunette hair. She was made in Germany.

"They're all just so beautiful," says Mrs. Maree of her collection of tiny friends. "I just enjoy them."



ANN MAREE says her favorite doll is "Martina," by German artist Hans Wilhelm, shown at left with an infant doll named "Tabitha." Long, wavy hair and real eyelashes distinguish the delicate features of "Whitney," (above). The artist only made 100 of these dolls.



NAOMI THOMAS tends to Baby Sulyn, one of two Good-Kruger dolls she owns. At her right is her husband's favorite, Sincerity, a homely schoolgirl.

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