



Mike Bock
all toys were good



Elaine Larkins
still has her favorite



Janice Morrow
doted on Betsy Wetsy



Kathy Nept
toy oven inspired her



Sue Nelson
has real baby doll now



Jim Nelson
diddled early robot

Toying with memories

Shoppers recall favorite — and least favorite — toys



Joseph Karuvich
no toys in Depression



Shirley Singer
baby-doll fancier



Elaine Greene
liked Barbie's predecessor

By Richard Lech
staff writer

SANTA CLAUS always aims to please, but sometimes he really outdoes himself.

Most adults can remember one special toy they unwrapped as a kid on Christmas morning, a toy that ended up being their favorite of all.

Old St. Nick has been known to miscalculate too, though. Some toys just never do work out and might better have been left in the jolly elf's bag.

Shoppers at Livonia Mall, Westland Center and Livonia's Wonderland Shopping Center recently were asked to recall their favorite — and least favorite — toys of Christmases past.

AMONG WOMEN shoppers, dolls usually were the favorites.

"I'm 62 years old, and I'd still love to have a doll," Shirley Singer of Westland said.

The doll fanciers, though, seemed to be divided into two camps: the baby-doll faction and the Barbie-doll fans. Neither side appeared ready to give any quarter to the other.

Singer said she always has liked cuddly, cute baby dolls. Her favorite was her Dy-dee doll, one of the first dolls that wet itself just like a real infant. The doll lasted long enough for her to give it to her son when he was a toddler — and it still wasn't potty trained.

But Singer said Barbie dolls and Cabbage Patch dolls have shored aside the traditional baby dolls on the shelves of toy stores. The Cabbage Patch Kids, in particular, leave her cold.

"I don't like anything ugly, and they're ugly," she said.

Elaine Larkins of Dearborn Heights had a baby doll in its own webbed carriage. The Depression-era doll was one of the first ones to have a lifelike face, arms and legs, she said. The doll has long since lost its hair, but not its tease on a doll's life.

"I still have it, but where it is, I don't know," she said. "It's probably up in the attic."

JANICE MORROW of Livonia, now an employee of Livonia Mall, wheeled her Betsy Wetsy everywhere in its bug-

gy when she was a kid. Betsy's surname spelled out her chief attribute.

"Well, it wet, and that was fun to change it," Morrow said. "I didn't know what it would be like in real life."

Sue Nelson of Westland said baby dolls were her favorite too.

"I always had them. Now I've got my own baby doll," said Nelson as she held her 5-month-old daughter, Kristie.

Elaine Kamen of Livonia liked her tall, life-sized doll with the long blond hair, although she has "no idea what ever happened to that doll."

Her daughter Lyndsey, 5, loves her Cabbage Patch dolls Alberta Melissa and Spring Christiane.

Kamen's other daughter, Kristin, 13, is past the doll age, but she fondly recalls her Barbie. She had all the little accessories that went with Barbie — a pool, kitchen, little horses — everything, that is, but a Ken to keep Barbie company.

Unlike her mom, Kristin never did like playing with baby dolls.

"They were a failure," Elaine Kamen said. "Every year I'd buy her one, some doll she could feed and change the diaper, and she didn't like it."

SUE TAYLOR of Novi took an aggressive dislike to one unfortunate baby doll named Drowsy.

"I hated her," Taylor said. "I beat her up. My grandma was upset that I didn't like it."

Where is poor Drowsy now?

"Doll heaven, I guess," Taylor said with a laugh.

Elaine Greene of Grand Blanc, who grew up in Redford, liked her makeup doll, a high-fashion doll that predated Barbie.

"I still have it," she said. "It's bigger than a Barbie, and smaller than a Cabbage Patch."

SANDY HANANIA of Livonia, a student at Frost liked her Barbie doll. But she never was keen on dolling herself up with toy makeup kits.

"Makeup kits were the worst," she said, "because they're messy and gaudy."

Barbara Kogut of Canton loved her Pollyanna, a 24-inch doll modeled after the character played by Hayley Mills in

the Walt Disney movie of the same name. Kogut said she kept that doll until she got married.

She was much less enthusiastic about the toy oven she got one Christmas.

"The food tasted like clay. People would say, 'Oh, she's baking again!'"

On the other hand, Kathy Nept of Farmington Hills really liked her toy oven. In fact, she figures it inspired her to love baking as a grownup.

"Oh, definitely," she said. "I make bread, pies and cookies."

FOR MEN shoppers, favorite toys were usually vehicles of some sort — ships, trains and cars.

Sue Nelson's husband, Jim, recalls being thrilled by his plastic battleship, *Waltzing Matilda*. The ship ran on batteries and shot little cannonballs, but the best thing about it was it was big.

Yet its size also was its only drawback.

"It didn't go into the bathtub," he said.

Nelson has less-than-fond memories, though, of an early robot called Mr. Machine.

"I remember this walking robot and it had all these gears, and you could never take it apart. Once you took it apart you could never get it back together."

Retiree Earl Rundel of Detroit has warm memories of the Lionel electric train he got when he was 8 years old. He recalled that the train didn't do anything special.

"It was just special to me. It was an old-fashioned train. It's long gone, but I had it a good many years."

Madonna College student Ward Supernols also liked his Lionel train, which made noise and smoke. His buddy Mike Beck, a student at the University of Michigan-Dearborn, enjoyed his little Matchbox cars.

They both had trouble thinking of a toy they didn't like.

"I can't think of a worst toy because the only thing that was bad was when my mom bought clothes," Beck said.

JOSEPH KARUVICH of Inkster and his wife, Gertrude, couldn't remember a favorite toy because they just didn't get toys on Christmas morning during the Depression.

"There'd always be something, though," Karuvich said. "There'd be filled Polish candies. And we'd get stockings or a pair of gloves."

Instead of having toys given to them, the kids back then would make their own, Karuvich said. A two-by-two board, an orange crate and some old

roller skates would make a scooter. Or the kids would play "dock on the rock" by stacking up a bunch of Pet Milk cans and trying to knock them over with another can.

Elaine Larkins also was a Depression baby and was never jaded about any of the toys she got.



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Earl Rundel
train was special



Dolls of all sorts are big favorites of the Kamens of Livonia. Mom, Elaine (right) liked her tall doll with long blond hair, daughter Lyndsey (middle) loves her Cabbage Patch dolls, and daughter Kristin fondly recalls her Barbie.



Staff photos
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