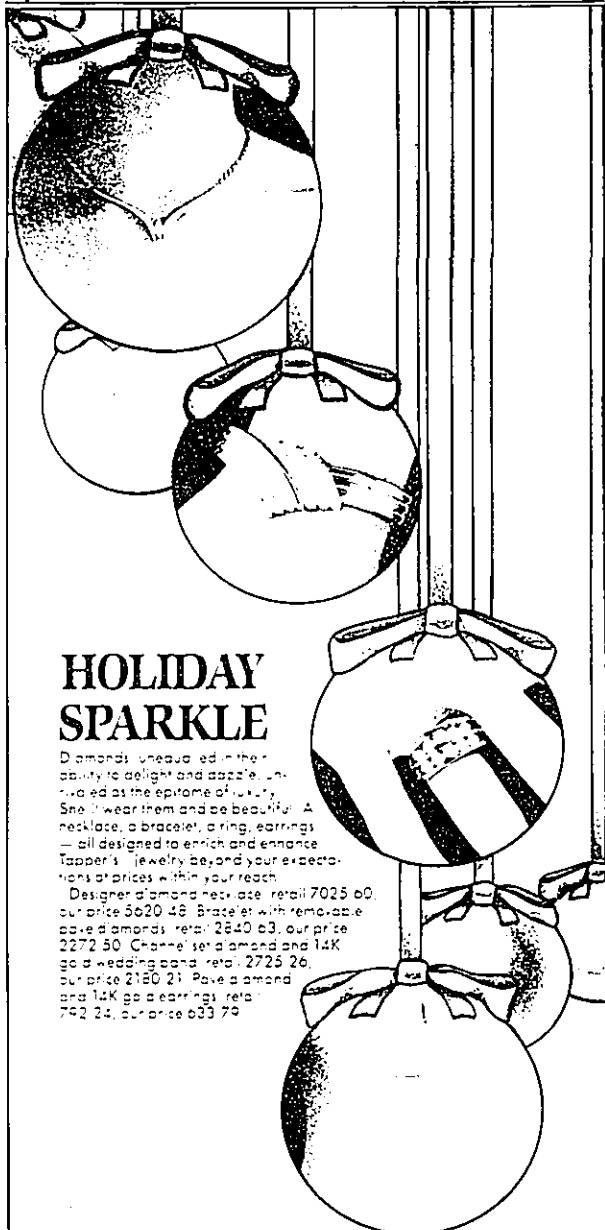




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Toying around with gift ideas

By Louise Okrutsky
special writer

IF STORYTELLING teddy bears, cute, ugly dolls and yet another trivia game don't put you and yours in a playful mood, then it's time to get back to the basics of fun.

After several winters of lining up in the cold for the hot new toys, traditional play things are making their reappearance. Whether you belong to the apres-ski set or the children's concert crowd, this winter is shaping up as a time to go back to simple, mostly battery-free pleasures.

You'll have plenty of company, too. "People are turning back to more traditional toys," confirms Donna Hansen, a department manager for the Doll Hospital, Berkley. "Last year, we had Teddy Ruxpin and the year before that, there were the Cabbage Patch Kids, of course. But I haven't heard of any fads this year myself."

This year, Teddy Ruxpin's joined on the shelves by his best buddy, Grubby. An eight-legged creature with arms and antennae, Grubby speaks only when he's hooked up with Teddy. Together, when activated by a cassette, the duo tell stories. Their tales include "The Day Teddy Met Grubby" and "Grubby's Romance."

Grubby's creators, TM Worlds of Wonder Inc. have even presumed to put words into the mouth of one of the nursery set's most established story tellers, Mother Goose. Add four C bat-

teries to the old rhymster herself and Mother Goose will play her cassette of such perennials as "Goldilocks and the Three Bears" and "The Ugly Duckling".

BUT JUST WHEN it seems the world was made to run on rechargeable batteries, slightly simpler pleasures surface. Teddy bears, plain, old-fashioned, non-talking teddies remain to warm the heart and hearth.

For collectors there's Audrey Hepburn, dressed to the hilt to attend the races at Ascot. Stief, the venerable German toy firm, has issued limited edition replicas of the mama and baby bears it marketed in 1956. There are sweater bears, bridal bears and Heart to Heart bears. Hug the latter and you can hear it thumping its little heart out, providing you've installed the required nine-volt battery.

Crowley's department store even has introduced a line of its own bears, the Cub Club, a collection of four furry companions.

It's a bull market for bears but dolls aren't exactly languishing on the shelves. The long lines may have receded for Cabbage Patch Dolls but their manufacturer, Coleco has managed to find a few new twists. Cabbage Patchers now come suited up for outer space and the Detroit Tigers. They have hands that can hold objects and hair that can be combed.

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ROB REED/staff photographer

Children's PJs now bear the resemblance of the bears in their lives. Boys 2-piece PJs are \$34; one-piece infants are \$28. The bears are included. At Loretta Lorion in Bloomfield Plaza.