

A doll's journey, from Barbie to ... American Boy?

By JENNIFER COSTLEY

By 1986, Barbie had been the doll of choice for little girls all over America for more than 25 years. Barbie's creator, Ruth Handler, created the doll when she noticed her young daughter preferred to give her toys adult roles when she played with them. Part of Barbie's success was due to the fact that up until her invention dolls typically depicted little girls. It didn't exactly stretch the imagination when play options were limited to give your dolly a bottle or change your dolly's diaper. Handler, however, flipped the script when she introduced the first Barbie doll whose body was meant to emulate the American teenage girl; aptly, Barbie's first career was "teenage fashion model."

Barbie has come along way since her fashion model days. Although the doll still draws sharp criticism for glorifying an unrealistic body image, it's hard to deny the positive impact Barbie has had on young girls career aspirations. In the past 68 years Barbie has held 130 careers ranging from model to astronaut to first female president. Although Barbie has served as a positive role model for young women, the company has yet to achieve the same goal with young men. Sure, there are male Barbie dolls but up until this point they have primarily served as accessories.

In 1986, a new series of dolls hit the toy scene. The American Girl Company chose to go an alternate route than Barbie, featuring dolls modeled after nine-year-old girls from prominent time periods in American history. The first three dolls — Samantha, Molly and Kirsten — represented the life and experiences of young girls living

through World War Two, the Revolutionary War, and the Progressive Era. American Girl has since expanded to feature dolls from a growing variety of time periods. Each doll comes with a book introducing the new character and is followed up by several additional titles. Whereas Barbie helps to teach young girls what they can grow to be, American Girl aims to show young women what they can achieve in the here and now, while simultaneously teaching them about the experience of young Americans. American Girl has tackled the plight of immigrants, Native Americans, those surrounded by and affected by slavery, and much more.

Recently, American Girl has shifted their focus from solely creating historical fiction dolls. Now, American Girl releases an annual doll-of-the-year with her own unique story that is easily relatable to nine-year-old girls today. The girl-of-the-year stories have focused on bullying, achieving your goals, overcoming obstacles such as stuttering and embracing individuality.

Although the company has grown by leaps and bounds both in sales and content since its origin, 2017 will serve as a pioneering year for American Girl. A male American Girl doll, who plays a central role in the newest girl-of-the-year storyline, will finally be available for purchase.

Logan Everette, a young drummer growing up in Tennessee, will run doll buyers the standard \$115;



Photo credit: Jennifer Costley

Kennedy Alvarado (left) plays with the new Logan doll and her sister Lydia helps American Girl Cecile toast a marshmallow in the library's National Parks room.

he was the result of years of requests from parents and children alike. Girls have long wanted a boy to round out their collection and boys have long sought a doll that reflects them. The company has yet to say whether or not more boy dolls will be released or whether boys will begin to play a larger role in the company's historical fiction line. Either way, Logan marks a transition in which girls are no longer seen as the only consumers of dolls.

Several years ago a New York library began circulating an American Girl Doll as part of their collection. Borrowers of the doll would spend a week with her and return her with a letter about their time together. Inspired by this idea, the

Pendleton Public Library sought American Girl donations for its own collection. Since 2014, Pendleton has acquired six historical fiction American Girl dolls. Each one was donated by either a generous individual or an organization here in town. The dolls can be checked out for a week at a time and have been hugely popular.

When Logan Everette was announced this past February, the library felt a strong responsibility to add Logan to its growing collection of non-traditional check-outs. Often the circulation desk receives requests for male dolls, a request the library had not been able to fill in the past. In addition to receiving requests for a boy they often encounter young boys who wish to

check out a doll but are too shy to ask for a girl doll. Now that Logan has arrived (courtesy of another generous donor) it is the library's hope that both boys and girls alike will feel comfortable checking him out.

Are you wondering how Barbie is holding up with all these changes to toy consumers' expectations? I'd say she's doing pretty well. After all, Mattel purchased American Girl in 1998 and is responsible for the addition of the contemporary doll line including our new friend, Logan Everette.

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