



The Barbie Chronicles: A Living Doll Turns Forty

Yona Zeldis McDonough (Editor)

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The Barbie Chronicles: A Living Doll Turns Forty Yona Zeldis McDonough (Editor) **A THOROUGHLY GROWN-UP LOOK AT A TWENTIETH-CENTURY MUSE OF OUTSTANDING PROPORTIONS**

To some she's a collectible, to others she's trash. In *The Barbie Chronicles*, twenty-three writers join together to scrutinize Barbie's forty years of hateful, lovely disastrous, glorious influence on us all. No other tiny shoulders have ever, had to carry the weight of such affection and derision and no other book has ever paid this notorious little place of plastic her due. Whether you adore her or abhor her, *The Barbie Chronicles* will have you looking at her in ways you never imagined.

The Barbie Chronicles: A Living Doll Turns Forty Details

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Marnie says

I love Barbie, so this book looked like fun. Instead it's a book of feminist & intellectual rants about what Barbie symbolizes & means to our culture. Some of the stories were good & gave me things to think about, but most of them the authors were taking Barbie way too seriously. They need to lighten up. Little girls love Barbie because she's glamorous & lets them practice being grown up in a safe way, & I personally think Barbie is a great role model for girls. She's wholesome, she comes in every color & nationality, & she shows girls they can be both pretty & smart, you don't have to choose one over the other. I can't wait to have a little girl to buy Barbies for & play with her & relive that part of my childhood.

Erin says

As with most books of essays, this was a mixed bag - some were enjoyable, some were dry and some seemed liked they would never end. The book jacket makes the reader aware that there will be a fair amount of anti-Barbie sentiment, and it's definitely present (though not pervasive). However, as the editor notes in her own essay, it's fine to buy Barbie, just don't buy *into* her. And, generally, I think the second part is a problem that adults have or see versus the girls (and it's nearly always girls) who play with Barbies.

I was a huge Barbie fanatic myself, and I think that I was savvy enough that I never confused Barbie's life with what I wanted mine to be. I never wanted Barbie's clothes - they were generally hideous and Bob Mackie tacky. I never envied Barbie's proportions - breasts came soon enough, and no one I knew ever made much of a big deal about them one way or another.

What I find most interesting about Barbies (and this isn't really covered in the book at all) is the very different ways in which girls play with them. For example, I never liked to play Barbies with my friends; Barbie was a solo activity for me. And I didn't dress and undress my Barbies, generally I found a favorite outfit for them and they wore the same thing all the time. And my Barbies and Kens definitely weren't sex manics - ugh (although I was of the "Ken bump" age - apparently Ken doesn't have a bump anymore, but, instead has molded plastic underpants. Wow!) What I DID do with them is probably most telling - I would use all my old Easter baskets and create lavish, detailed Rose Parade floats for my Barbies to ride. I would create elaborate high school social structures for them (I was in elementary school at the time) which relied more on paper lists than the dolls themselves (which Barbies were friends? which Barbies were on the basketball team?). I would create huge shopping malls which covered my entire bedroom floor, and I would use all my accessories as merchandise and I spent a great deal of time on advertising and prices (Daddy would love this if he knew - his own little budding capitalist). I digress, but I'm guessing that each little girl who loved Barbies loved them in her own way (maybe one was all about the Barbie/Ken sex....which would be tough through the plastic jockeys, or maybe another mothered her Barbies), and that way would tell us far more about what she was to become than any dismissive "Barbie is anti-feminist" slogan. (And if any armchair psychologist want to interpret the above to tell me what sort of adult I should have turned out to be, I'm all ears!)

However at least one of the essayist touched upon a fact that, even as a child, I found quite troubling about Barbie. Where were all the older people? And where were the babies? One author mentions the "Happy

Family" dolls, and notes that the set had both grandparents and babies. I had those too, and all of the dolls - Barbies, Happy Family, Charlie's Angels, my Cher doll, Darcy, all lived happily in my Erin-village together (even then Cher was an older, cougar-like woman....I think it was the long, claw-like nails and false eyelashes she had).

Anyway, worth reading if you're a fan, but many of you have probably read many of these arguments before.

Nari says

<http://thenovelworld.com/2010/05/17/t...>

Marissa says

Another one of the first feminist books I read. As you might expect I read all the third wave stuff first and am only going deeper into second wave these days. Third wave was a fantastic guide for me as a preteen in a way that I don't think second wave could have reached me yet. These essays are funny, relatable meditations on this cultural icon of femininity.

Beeb3 says

40 is the new 10!! What did I do with my matching Chanel bag and pumps?

Jennifer says

This book has been sitting on my shelf for about ten years. I bought it as a teenager and read it in my late twenties. I liked this book, it was insightful and funny. It made me wish I could remember how I played with my own Barbies as a kid and made me wonder just how much they shaped my own life.

Laura Ostermeyer says

It is a mixed bag from Barbie lovers to Barbie haters. Some of the essays are pretty amusing.

Guðrún Katrín says

Some people may think that the essayists who contributed to this book were taking Barbie too seriously - after all, she's just a toy. As someone who's devoted much of her time studying feminism and misogyny in popular culture, I disagree. Barbie does affect us in different ways, some of us more than others, and this needs to be acknowledged.

The Barbie Chronicles offers a variety of opinions of Barbie and the phenomenon surrounding her, and it's that variety that makes this book so good. The contributors have all been influenced by Barbie but in different ways and to different degrees. While a book by a single author on Barbie might offer great insight into one of the ways Barbie can be perceived, the only way to get a comprehensive picture of the little plastic doll's effects on our society - and indeed, our society's effects on the little plastic doll - is to look at it from many different angles. And sure, not all the essays are fantastic, but they all bring something to the table and together, make up a truly fascinating whole.

Bo Abeille says

I'm really into reading Barbie books this year. For some reason my rinky dink local library is full of fun Barbie books. This book was good, it's a collection of essays by various woman authors. I didn't care for the negativity directed towards Barbie in most of the essays though. If it's a birthday tribute, maybe it could have been a bit more Barbie positive. I still like to read about different women's reactions to Barbie, so it made for an interested read.
