A Doll Collection Speaks For Brotherhood

By JOAN MONAHAN
Staff Writer

Probably one of the oldest toys in the history of mankind is the doll. Since the days of the cave man and down through the years little girls have been "mothering" creations of bone, corn husks, brooms, clothespins, kidskin, china, and plastic. There are dolls for everyday play, and for collectors' shelves, for their beauty as for their age. Of all the doll collections hereabout, one grouping is particularly outstanding for its worthwhile purpose. "Dolls for Democracy is the title given to the array of dolls currently residing with the "doll lady", Mrs. Bernhard Bresky of 103 No. Glenwood Road in Fanwood.

These dolls are highly detailed, very realistic portrait figurines of many famous people from different periods of history. The miniature "people" about eight inches high, include such notables as Jane Addams, resplendent in the silks and lace of her era; Juliette Low, founder of Girl Scouts, in her traditional olive green girl scout uniform and hat; George Washington Carver, the famed scientist who made scientific history, bearing a tiny test tube; Denny Kaye in a carefully tailored suit of today; Abe Lincoln, of course in his black suit, with a paisley shawl about his shoulders; Mahatma Gandhi, garbed in his white robes and complete with tiny wire spectacles. The dolls, made on order from a couple in Missouri, would be unworthy if only their detail and perfection were a consideration. However, this is only the beginning of their story.

Five of them are owned by the Westfield Chapter of B'nai B'rith of which Mrs. Bresky is a member. They are not a part of the group of 25 figurines owned by the 30 chapters of the Northern New Jersey Council of B'nai B'rith. Borrowed back and forth from chapter to chapter, the dolls tour the area bringing a message of education for democracy to youngers from second to sixth grades. The dolls have been carefully selected to represent every race, color, creed, and family background from the proverbial rag to riches. A pamphlet on the subject of Dolls for Democracy, published by B'nai B'rith, aptly explains the thinking behind the program.

"There are several purposes behind the Dolls for Democracy program. One is to prove to children that fame and success in life do not depend upon race, religion, where the family originated, or money. Another is to show that all races, religions, social classes and nations have produced brilliant people with great souls. A third purpose is to inspire children with the idea that they, too, may become what they dream of becoming, if they try hard enough. And a fourth purpose is to show that there are many roads up many kinds of success pyramid - science, music, sports, literature, politics, social service...".

Mrs. Bresky presents her program for any interested group in four towns (Westfield, Scotch Plains, Fanwood, Mountainside). Many local Brownies and Girl Scout troops have heard it - and last year it was given to second graders in some of the local schools. Boys, too, have found the program of interest and several Cub packs in town have recognized her Jackie Robinson, Tom Dooley, and Jack Kennedy. The program director of Washington Rock Girl Scout Council has recently requested a presentation for all scouts in the Council, and the B'nai B'rith chapter is busy planning an open town meeting for all interested people.

In an average program geared for young children, Mrs. Bresky usually plans to emphasize perhaps four or five of the dolls. She'll usually tuck in one or two extras for display at the end of her program. Most often, a set of portrait figurines will include a Protestant, a Catholic, a Jew, and a Negro. After asking the children to identify the dolls, she gives a short biography of the accomplishments of each. In most cases, she includes dolls familiar to the children, but she always adds one doll who is perhaps not as well known, such as Anne Frank, Jonas Salk, or Emma Lazarus, who is responsible for the inspiring inscription on the Statue of Liberty. In the question and answer period which follows the short sketch, the youngsters first point out the differences between the dolls. They always note the obvious - man versus lady, old versus young, old-fashioned versus modern garb, and black versus white skin. Of course there are differences, states Mrs. Bresky, but now what is ALIKE about all these dolls? She has never been disappointed when she asks this question. As young as her audience is, someone always replies that all have given service to mankind. This, and only this, makes the many hours spent on the program well worthwhile for Mrs. Bresky. All she asks is that her listeners learn "to develop respect for individuals of all races, colors, and creeds."

In the accompanying brochure, given to a classroom teacher, Scout leader, or youth-group head, B'nai B'rith suggests several programs to supplement the presentation. The children can carry their democracy lesson further - by discussions of the types of people needed for work in our town, our nation, our world; by interviewing members of racial and religious groups to determine their "Ideal" people; by composing stories about noteworthy doll people; through art work, field trips, films and recordings.

Mrs. Bresky's days are filled to capacity - with "Dolls" as one of her major time-consuming efforts. Mother of 12-year old Carol, a sixth grader at Muir School and 17-year old Iris of Scotch Plains Senior High, she also will serve as next year's PTA president at the Park Junior High. In addition, she donates many hours as a V.S. representative at Lyons Hospital, and is a past president of her B'nai B'rith chapter. While she could undoubtedly use six extra voices and 12 extra hands for her doll work alone, she finds it a most absorbing undertaking and is satisfied if she reaches only one child. She feels that "children educate children."

There are a vast number of ways in which the principles of our Declaration of Independence can be taught to our children - through parents, history books, social studies, church sermons, literature, and scouting activities. "Dolls for Democracy" is only one more step in the teaching program, but what a light-hearted, enlightening, and appealing approach to democracy in action! If the world were only inhabited with dedicated, unprejudiced, hardworking people such as Mrs. Bresky, perhaps the lessons to be learned from the lives of Helen Keller, Eleanor Roosevelt, Florence Nightingale, St. Francis of Assisi, and Chaim Weitzmann might be truly a part of everyday living!