

The mall store was crowded. Various dolls stood out of their boxes and others hid inside theirs either against a wall or along the narrow aisles. Each doll had a “come pick me up” look as the multitude of mothers and grandmothers pointed out the different hair tone and eye color to a little girl standing at their side..or not standing at their side.

Shopping in the American Doll, Co store with a five to eight year old girl is like trying to corral a puppy at a training session on good behavior. The dolls, of course, were out of reach for these young girls. Dirty hands would do harm to smiley doll faces with or without freckles. “Do you like this one,” says mom to an empty space where her daughter once stood. Said daughter had spotted a patch of stuffed puppies; standing still awaiting the grasp of any tiny hands it could cajole into cuddling it. “I want this puppy,” says the daughter to her mom across the aisle. “It has a bone in its mouth.” The pink jewel leash, of course, is an extra cost.

Losing a daughter in a store can be disconcerting. Employees guarding the exit and greeting the newcomer customers are busy smiling at the adults. Little legs can escape without notice. That is what grandmothers are for, though. They are needed to keep an eye on the granddaughter with or without freckles. Losing a mother can become worse, though.

Little girls were darting here and there, usually away from mom and grandma. Mostly, the young (doll owners to be) were enticed by the little accessories. Campout items and playhouse furniture were placed on low shelving. Tiny fingers fiddled with make believe cookies, doll size high heels, purses to match.

“Do you like this doll?” asks a mother . “She has your color hair, but her eyes are brown,” she adds.”Let’s look for one with blue eyes.”

Buying a doll to match as close as possible to the real doll in the family seems to be the goal of the store. And, of course a variety of changeable clothing is available for another price.

Most mothers and grandmothers, it seemed, wanted their own doll to take home and dress up. The little girls wanted the tiny, reachable and handy accessories.

For years now, perhaps since the 1950’s when women started finding careers available to them, little girls have left playing “house” with baby dolls go to the wayside. Undressed baby dolls can be found lying on the floors of bedrooms. “Go play with your dolls” suggests a grandmother when the cousins get together. “I don’t play with baby dolls,” says the four-year-old. “I don’t play with baby dolls, either,” says the seven-year-old. Each modern little lady heads downstairs to play an electronic game with the boy cousins.

Would they play with the grown-up doll? Perhaps, the dolls would gain attention only after the girls tired of the more modern moves. Earning points by wiping out an intruder beats the never-ending task of diapering baby dolls. There are no points earned with each doll feeding, either.

Lana Russ

