

GENERAL NEWS

Business is a pleasure for Hummelstown woman

Mary Jane Thompson
Capital Times Staff

As customers enter Fox's doll hospital in Hummelstown, dolls of all shapes and sizes surround them. A sign reading "Dr. Mary Fox - Admitting Desk" is propped on the desk. Behind it, sits "Doctor" Mary Fox, a 75-year-old woman with soft grey hair wearing a doctor's white coat.

Fox has six part-time helpers. The second floor of the hospital houses the "operating" room, which resembles Santa's workshop. Doll parts are hanging everywhere. Here, Fox and her helpers cut out patterns and sew new

dresses for the dolls, resculpt a cracked face or damaged head with clay, and replace missing hair. Sometimes they spray paint the hair on. They may even replace the hair with real human hair donated by the owner of the doll. In addition to dolls, they restuff stuffed animals.

Fox enjoys her work. She calls herself a "jack of all trades." She learned what she knows from hands-on experience and from working in a dress factory. "I am not an expert in any one thing, but," she says, "I do have a gift for cutting out any size doll dress without using a pattern."

"It all began accidentally, about 40 to

50 years ago," she recalls. A friend of hers admired a doll in a magazine. Fox decided to surprise her friend by recreating the doll for her. When Fox presented the doll to her, everyone raved. She started getting requests from all over.

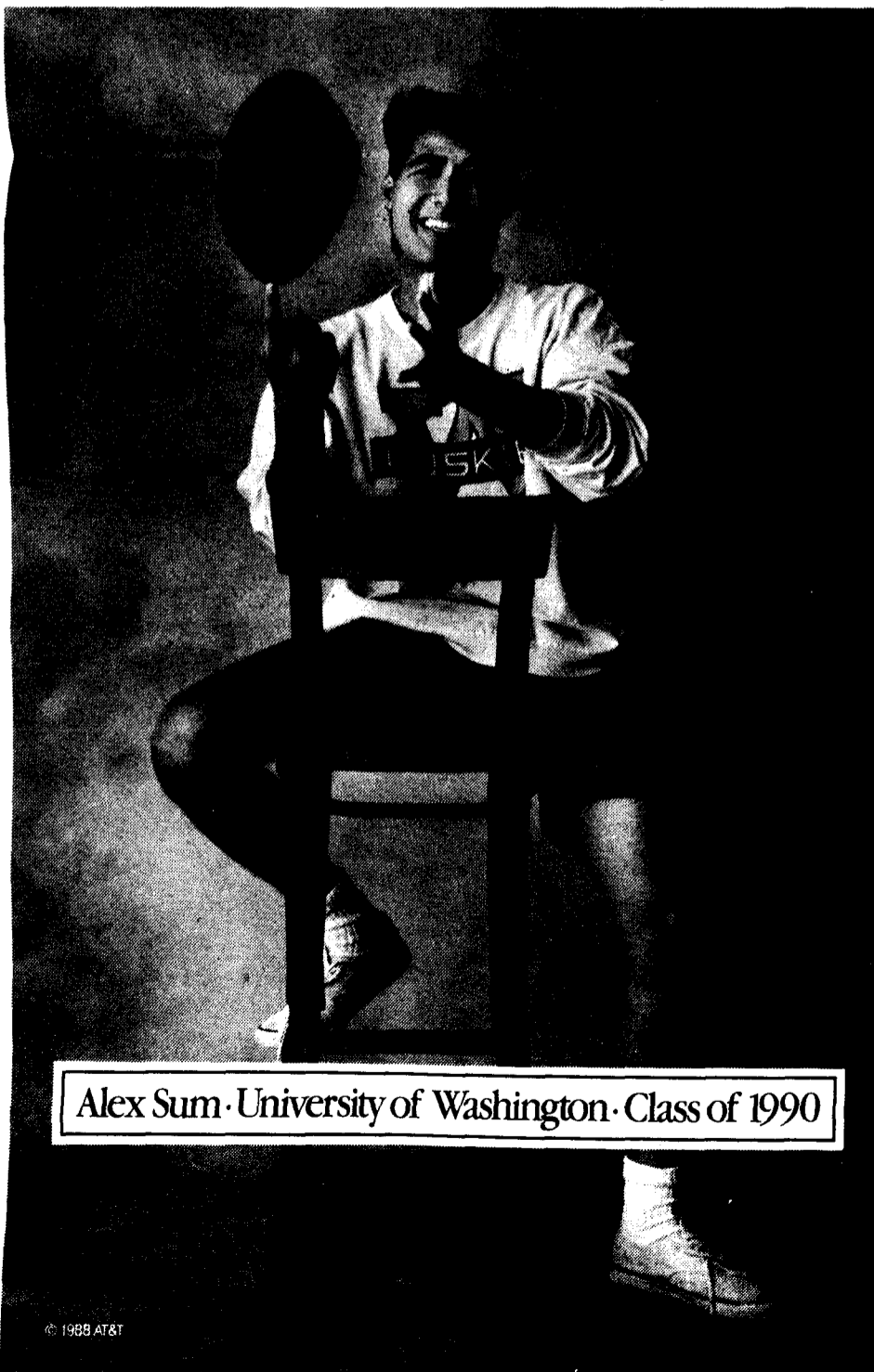
One day, a woman brought her about 400 dolls to repair. "Where am I going to put them all?" She thought. Her husband helped her by restringing the dolls. Restringing is done by attaching the limbs and head to the body using string. "I worked til four in the morning some nights" she says. "The people kept coming, bringing me dolls that could not part with."

"Most of my customers are not children," Fox declares. Most of the dolls she "admits" to the hospital are family heirlooms. "It is very sentimental to them," she says. "They can't give them up no matter how ragged they are." When one customer seemed anxious to receive her repaired doll, her friend asked, "she's like one of the family, right?"

Fox also sells dolls ranging from a Betsy Ross doll to a Shirley Temple doll. "All the dolls I have come from private homes, I only like to buy from people I know," she says.

Mary Fox belongs to the Harrisburg Doll Club and has a collection of her own dolls. "I've always regarded my business as a hobby," she says.

"I wasn't rubbing it in—I just wanted Eddie to know the score of last night's game."



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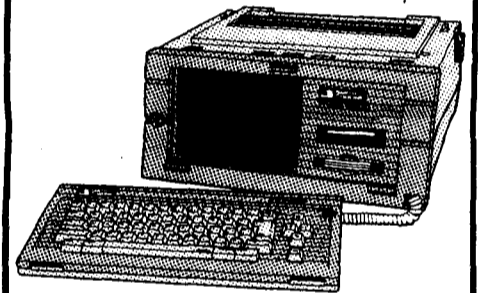
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