

'Cabbage Patch' Dolls Born in Mount Joy

BY SALLY BAIR
Staff Correspondent

Cabbage Patch Kids are the hottest selling item in retail stores this Christmas season. In one of those strange twists of marketing (or because of shrewd tactics) the demand is far outstripping the supply, leaving hundreds of people wishing to own one of the little creatures.

There's a group of women in Mount Joy, Lancaster County, who are not waiting for the supply to catch up with demand, and have taken matters into their own hands so they will not have disappointed children at Christmas. Last Saturday, 25 of the loveable dolls were created in the fellowship hall of Calvary Bible Church which was turned into a temporary "birthing room" for the day.

The idea began with Phyllis Patton and Barbara Mowrer, both members of the church, who experimented with a commercial pattern to make their own dolls. When fellow church members saw the dolls, there were many who wished to make their own and the two asked the church board if they could hold a workshop. To their surprise, 25 women signed up and the birth process began.

For any readers who may just be returning from Outer Mongolia, the Cabbage Patch Kids are soft sculpture dolls with features which can best be described as homely. They are, to be kind, strange

looking, but beauty is in the eye of the beholder, and in this case are millions of "beholders" yearning to get their hands on one of these dolls.

The Coleco version features plastic faces which are individually molded according to a computer design to keep their uniqueness, and each comes with its own birth certificate, name and adoption papers.

What makes these dolls so desirable? Their unique features are so unusual they are cute, and as workshop participant Trudy Houck says, "They are like an old fashioned rag doll. They are huggable and bendable." Trudy went to the workshop because she has three daughters who would each like a doll!

Phyllis says she got interested in making the doll when Barbara called and suggested it. Barbara says, "I love dolls and I've always been intrigued by dolls. I bought the pattern books and figured I would get around to making them in about five years."

She couldn't wait, however, and began thinking of someone who could make dolls who would be interested in working together with her. Barbara is a talented craftsperson in her own right, but wanted the impetus of a working partner.

Phyllis had made her first doll eight years ago, beginning with the Holly Hobbie dolls with matching



These unique dolls are the hottest item on the shopping list this Christmas. Although in short supply, Phyllis Patton and Barbara Mower have worked from a commercial pattern to create their own unique dolls, very similar to the elusive "Cabbage Patch Kids" from Coleco.

children's dresses. Last year she made Annie, and then adapted her 36-inch pattern to make a Strawberry Shortcake doll. She also makes stuffed animals, and even now is making Care Bears, another animal in short supply this holiday season.

Although her two daughters had the Coleco Cabbage Patch doll, Phyllis was willing to try to make some. Working together, the two women cut out their dolls, assembled them and interpreted the pattern to create truly loveable dolls.

Phyllis admits that when she first saw the Cabbage Patch Kids she thought, "How gruesome." However, her mind has changed and she is clearly attached to the five she has produced and refers to them by name.

She makes it clear that while she enjoyed making them she is not producing any more before the holidays.

The hardest part of making the doll is sculpting the face, which is what gives each doll its uniqueness. It is done with a five-inch needle, and Phyllis says, "It took a while to get the hang of it." Barbara adds, "It is awkward. You must be careful or you'll pull the material." All the features are done with one long thread, so one



Phyllis, center, attracts some close observers as she goes through the steps necessary to make this doll come to "life."

false move also means you must begin again.

The features of the doll come to life as you pull the threads together and release them. Sculpting also adds the knees, elbows, fingers, toes and dimples, creating really lifelike features.

Phyllis said those who inquire about the doll represent a wide variety of ages. "Some want them for themselves and some want them for their children or grandchildren."

The sewing part comes easily for Phyllis who makes other crafts and markets them through Community Creations. She makes machine applique pictures, and gingerbread house tissue holders. She said she often gets ideas from magazines. "I try to think them through."

Indeed, Phyllis has become totally enthralled with the saga of the Cabbage Patch dolls and has

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On the left, is the Coleco Cabbage Patch Kid, the doll that is in such short supply. On the right, is one of the Calvary Baby Blossom's created by Phyllis Patton and Barbara Mower. The hand made version on the right is entirely sculpted and is truly one of a kind.



Willing hands make light work! Here Trudy Houck, left, Barbara Mower, center, and Pat Mumper cut legs, arms, gussets and other necessary parts from the special Ambrosio fabric which makes the dolls.

Homestead Notes