

Dolls So Lifelike That You Want To Talk With Them

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JENNERSTOWN (Somerset Co.) — When you walk into Patti's Doll Shoppe on Route 30, near the traffic light, you don't know who to talk to first — Toby, Poppy, Cinnamon Cookie, Sugar Cookie, Pumpkin, or one of the other adorable dolls looking at you. All you know is, you could hold a conversation with any of them.

They were all made by Patti Youngren, proprietor of Patti's Doll Shoppe, who began making porcelain dolls about two years ago. She opened the shop and studio at the end of last July. Besides making dolls herself, Patti teaches the art to pupils by holding classes at the same location.

Patti, who hails from the south, took some of her own lessons in Florida, then attended seminars at various other locations including New York. "The more people you take lessons from," she said, "the more you learn." That's because everybody does something different, she said. "It almost turned me off because the lessons were so expensive," she said. Her first les-

sons began at a local ceramic shop.

So one of her objectives is to provide classes that are reasonably priced, because making porcelain dolls is not only an art, it's a delightful accomplishment for the soul.

"You want your dolls to look like they're alive," said Patti, "like they could sit up and talk to you. That's very important to me," she said. Anyone who sees these dolls would testify that each face is certainly animated.

In all shapes, sizes, expressions and costumes, some of them are elegantly gowned and very sophisticated. Others, are ready for a pajama party, still others have such an impish expression, you want to demand an account of the mischief they've done.

Sitting with friends in the window display is Patti's first doll, Pumpkin; the cutest little rascal ever. She's perched in a small wooden wagon made by Patti's dad. You can tell that Pumpkin is ready to coast down a hill in her wagon with her side pony tails flying.



Behind Patti Youngren on shelves is porcelain greenware for porcelain dollmaking.

When you make a porcelain doll, you first pour a mold then let it dry for 24 hours before firing it to the appropriate level of heat. Then it is removed and the eye and nose holes are cut out of the head. Patti says this is probably the most important step. "Because of health reasons, I use the soft-fire method," she said, explaining that porcelain is glass that hardens and can be a real health hazard from dust if inhaled.

She says the Seeley Company, with whom she closely works, requires that everything be put in water for cleaning. The process, after the firings, continues with sanding and washing, mixing of paints and painting, to assembling the doll.

The dolls have lifelike eyes of glass and eyelashes. Their carefully styled hair is also real. Each is garbed in clothes that will compliment her (or his) personality. The seamstresses who sew the dolls' clothes must be meticulous in their work. Patti creates only top quality dolls.

The molds for these dolls have been created by sculptors. Each mold has a name like those mentioned earlier. Patti says that the doll, Cookie, if given red hair, is then Cinnamon Cookie. If she's a blond, then her name is Sugar Cookie.

One doll is called Angel Cheeks, not for her cute face, but rather for her cute bottom that you see when she's on her tummy.

"I love to make somebody happy," says Patti, who has learned to appreciate the life God has given her.

"This business, I've dedicated it



Patti Youngren's first attempt at making a porcelain doll resulted in "Pumpkin," pictured here.

to the Lord," she declares. "It's a clean, clean business and I love it."

Because of a muscle disease, Patti says she was told by medical authorities that she would be in a wheelchair by 1983. That hasn't happened and she is giving all the credit to God. She discovered, after moving north with her husband, Louis, that the difference in the air was giving her increased energy over the general tiredness she'd felt in the southern climates.

So by giving all respect to her body, Patti can work steadily. She doesn't push to the point of exhaustion, yet she has goals. Getting her dollmaking doctorate is one of them. Learning doll sculpting is another.

The ground level of the large building which includes their home, is so large that they are using only 700 of the available 2,500 square feet, for Patti's Doll Shoppe. However, Patti hopes to eventually host seminars in conjunction with the Seeley Company as expansion slowly continues.

An antique motif in the shop itself, finds Patti's desk coming from an old school house, and 1929 glass-fronted display cabinets rescued from an old drugstore in the town. Other smaller antiques were garnered from forays into antique shops and from sales, like the wooden baby cradle.

Doll clothes are hung on the wooden arms of racks where great-grandmother would once have hung her dish towels.

When asked about some of the doll furniture, — the tricycles and

wagons — Patti says with pride that these were made by her dad. And the large BeBe Bunnies sitting around the place were made by her mother.

Louis is the town mayor, but he just may be more excited about his wife's dollmaking success than she is. In fact, he is so supportive and interested that he will help with Patti's dollmaking classes, if needed, and has made a boy doll which is displayed in the shop.

Louis states adamantly that Patti is a talented artist. He says he has experience as a commercial artist and knows one when he sees one. It was he who urged Patti to turn her dollmaking hobby into a business in the first place.

Patti says that you put expression in the doll's face by the way you paint it, and her creations certainly have expression, so no doubt, her most avid fan is correct.

But take caution, doll collectors. Patti warns, "Some people put dolls in plastic bags and that's the worst thing they can do." Another recommendation from Patti is, "Keep the original box and wrapping paper and everything to make it (your doll) more valuable."

Patti holds classes on Monday, Tuesday, and Wednesday of each week, in the morning, afternoon and evening. Saturday class starts at 10:00 a.m. Thursday, the shop is open to the public and Friday it is closed. Patti can be reached by calling (814) 629-9093, or by writing to P.O. Box 122, Jennerstown, PA 15547.

Patti says that some of her



Patti Youngren, standing, owner of Patti's Doll Shoppe, observes as her dollmaking pupil Betty Rhoades trims a thatch of hair for a boy doll.



These dolls and many others were all made by Patti Youngren, pictured, owner of Patti's Doll Shoppe, Route 30, Jennerstown, Pa.