

After Five Sons And No Daughters, Alta Finds A Way To Have Her Girls

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Since she has five sons and no daughters, Alta Nolt had to find a way to have some girls around the house. Now those girls are vying for her constant time and attention.

Mute evidence of the girls' residency is the clothing and paraphernalia that takes up a whole room in the Nolt's farmhouse. The monogram "AG" is stitched on many sizes of sweatshirts and sweaters.

"I always say that the AG stands for Alta's Girls," Alta quipped. In reality the initials stand for American Girl. Those with daughters know that the terminology American Girl opens a whole new world pertaining to dolls with extensive wardrobes, furniture, and accessories.

For Alta, the popularity of the American Girl has opened a whole new opportunity for her sewing and business skills. What started out as sewing a few doll items has ballooned into a more than full-time job and a soon-to-be opened store.

To give some idea of the magnitude of the demand for the doll's clothing, Alta sold 1,200 hood jackets this past Christmas season. That's only one style of the many she offers. In addition, she sold thousands of dresses and items such as glasses, bibs, doll dishes, shoes and other accessories plus wooden wardrobes, chairs, rockers, benches, and other doll furniture.

Although Alta and her husband John concurred that operating a stand in the Park City Mall in Lancaster during the Christmas season might be profitable, the sales results were "mind boggling" according to Alta. "I didn't have enough inventory to meet the demand."

When the Nolts set up their Park City stand, they decided to allow customers to charge with several major credit cards.

"It was well worth the investment. We estimated our sales were almost half credit cards," she said.

Although the majority of clothing and items are for American Girls, Alta's inventory isn't limited to that. She offers several different sizes of doll clothing and will fill custom orders.

"But I won't measure and make up patterns for children. I sew. I'm not a seamstress," Alta said.

Neither does Alta sell the dolls. She displays the dolls to model the outfits in order that customers can envision how the clothing will fit. Nor does she duplicate the clothing that appears in the American Girl catalogs. Instead she has her own line in the style that the era portrays. Some designs are from patterns that she purchased, some are smaller versions of baby patterns, and some are her own originals.

The only items that she sells that are strictly American Girl items are the stationery and the pins.

One of her big success stories are the matching dresses she made for dolls and their owners. The colorful outfits also had matching scrunchies for the hair of the girl and doll.

"They were so popular, I'm going to concentrate on making matching Easter outfits for dolls and girls," Alta said.

Alta no longer makes all the clothing and items that she sells. Instead, she buys the finished items from other young mothers working at home.

"That way they do what they can and they aren't my employees. I pay them piecemeal," she said. "Some sewers are better on certain items. Most of them have one style that they do whenever they can fit it in."

While many women have home sewing businesses, the magnitude of Alta's business far exceeds the average. She attributes the growth to the fact that both she and her husband are adventuresome and not afraid to take risks. "I don't know what it's like to be normal," she said.

The Nolts farm 72-acres between Lititz and Manheim, where they finish steers and raise tobacco. John works full time as a carpenter. Since their sons, Glenn, 14; Galen, 12; Kenneth, 11; John Carl, 9; and Jay Paul, 7, are in school, it is primarily Alta's responsibility to strip tobacco.

"The two months before Christmas, dolls were my priority, but now it's time to strip tobacco so we can take it to the auction," Alta said.

After two months of manning the stand at Park City six days a week, Alta said that she looked forward to stripping tobacco alone.

Her stripping schedule is synchronized with her mothering responsibilities. After breakfast and chauffeuring her sons to school, Alta is in the barn between 9 a.m. and 2:30 p.m. stripping tobacco by herself. Then she picks up the boys from school. After supper, they spend a few hours stripping as a family.

During the summer season, the Nolts have a small roadside stand with produce that the boys raise and baked goods made by Alta's sister.

"I guess you could say that we're the kind of people who always do more than we can handle," Alta said as she scurried back and forth between mixing up a batch of homemade lasagna and setting up a book display, which is another project that she and her husband operate. The book project is called U-Select Computer Services in which personalized children's books are printed and compiled into hardcover books.

Alta also does the required bookkeeping for the businesses.

"I guess the dolls are my creative outlet since I have all boys," Alta said. "But I don't want my sewing to interfere with my mothering. And I want it to be a sideline, not a full-time job."

For that reason, she looks forward to having a shop where she will sew in-between waiting on customers.

"Then when I'm home, I'm being a mother," she said.

She usually gets up around 5:30 a.m. and sews before the boys awaken. When they do, she stops sewing, but will return to it when they are in school if she doesn't have tobacco to strip. After the boys are in bed, it is not unusual for Alta to sew until midnight.

All aspects of the business hold their own reward for Alta, who said, "I really enjoy sewing and interacting with the customers. It's really rewarding to see how happy the girls are with the clothing. But the dolls are just as popular with the mothers and grandmothers as with the girls."

Again and again Alta hears compliments on the quality and price of her doll clothing.

"What you buy elsewhere, you throw in the washer and pick out

the pieces," she is told.

From Feb. 27 through March 31, Alta will set up another display at Park City in the Sears Mall. They are open six days a week and closed Sundays.

For information on the opening of their Foxshire Mall store or to be

placed on their mailing list, write to the Nolts at 520 W. Lexington Rd., Lititz, PA 17543 or call (717) 665-6499.



Neighbor Tammy McLaughlin models one of the matching outfits that Alta makes for dolls and girls.



During the Christmas season 1,200 hood jackets, which is only one of the many styles offered, were sold.



What started as sewing a few doll clothes has ballooned into a thriving business with a soon-to-be opened mall store.



The Nolts offer everything a little girl dreams for her dolls. Furniture, clothing galore, and accessories such as glasses, bibs, dishes, shoes, and much more are part of the Nolt's inventory.