



Dolls or Trucks?

When Harvard president Larry Summers offered his opinions as to why there is a paucity of women in science, he commented that innate differences between the sexes were manifest in his daughters who preferred dolls over trucks: “While I would prefer to believe otherwise, I guess my experience with my two-and-a-half year old twin daughters who were not given dolls and who were given trucks, and found themselves saying to each other, ‘look, daddy truck is carrying the baby truck’, tells me something.”

WICB Committee members conducted our own internal survey of childhood preferences. Here is a glimpse of how we spent our childhood. Our un-scientific but robust conclusion is that the common denominator is diversity. As it should be.

Elizabeth Blackburn:

Dolls for me—never a truck. In my family I am somewhat notorious for the time when I once (at about two-years-old) screamed for a doll for hours that was on top of a closet until my desperate mother finally gave in and fetched it down to me.

Susan Forsburg: While I definitely had both dolls and trucks, mostly I remember reading anything I could lay my hands on, and roaming: packing a lunch in a rucksack and wandering all over Tilden Park in the Berkeley Hills, watching birds and deer and trying to figure out the game trails and the patterns there. And learning how to listen while out there. I always felt abused that I never had a chemistry set.

Ursula Goodenough: Dolls and stuffed animals, never a truck. Weekly library trips, making countless papier-mâché puppets and giving puppet shows to my (usually disinterested) brother, huge stamp collection, cats and tropical fish, card and board games, fashioning “clubhouses” in every conceivable location, ice skating and bike riding, playing tag and hide-and-seek way into warm summer evenings.

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Caroline Kane: I remember dolls, trains, invisible people, no trucks but a peddle car, plastic jet plane models (oh, the glue!), many ball games, stuffed animals. I actually had only one chemistry set, when I was about ten, but I lived in the country and collected many many types of cool bugs.

Elizabeth Marincola: I don’t think I ever had either dolls or trucks. My mother wasn’t really into toys. But I do remember babysitting the sons of some academic neighbors who were determinedly egalitarian and peace-loving, owned no TV, ate and fed their children only natural foods, wanted their boys to be androgynous. So you can imagine, no toy guns. When I gave

Benjamin a bath, he used to grab the bar of soap and point it at his baby brother and yell, “Bang-bang, I shot you!”

Manuela Martins-Green:

I grew up in a small town in Angola—no commercial dolls (but mommy-sewn or paper dolls), no toy trucks (but a bike and a wooden wheelbarrow), no library (but listened to lots of story-telling on the radio), no chocolate!! I spent most of

my time riding my bike, pushing my younger sister and brother in the wheelbarrow, swinging, roller skating, and most of all watching the mechanic at my Dad’s shop fix the real trucks—as a result I became the fix-it-all for the family.

Sandra Masur: I had building blocks and crayons—neither trucks nor dolls. Weekly trips to the local library taking out the maximum number of books. Reading the family’s encyclopedia. And when I was growing up in the Bronx, just north of where Albert Einstein College of Medicine is now, there were swamps where you could collect some really neat amphibia.

Lynne Quarmby: Dolls, mud pies, and bugs. Most of my memories are of forts in the woods, but one strong memory indicates that the dolls

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were important: when my Barbie lost a shoe I was so upset that adults were recruited to help me search the entire half-mile route to school. (Yes, the tiny shoe was found).

Randy Schekman: I did not have any dolls; I probably did have trucks (although I really don't remember). My most vivid memory was of being given an Army outfit for my birthday that I absolutely hated!

Jean Schwarzbauer: I grew up on a farm so I played mostly with trucks, tractors, and Lincoln Logs, but had lots of stuffed animals on my bed.

Vivian Siegel: A brief period with Barbie since all my friends had them, but I found it boring. My memories are of the goose and duck we had on the balcony of our small Los Angeles apartment, math games, roller skates, bicycles, and lots and lots of trips to the library.

Pam Silver: I had a brief encounter with Barbie, but most of my time was spent outdoors in the beautiful California sun in our swim-

ming pool or playing with my imaginary friend and collecting insects. Also, my father taught me to play the game of GO at a very early age and together we spent hours building model trains. I also recall assembling the Visible Man and Woman and V8 Engine, and reading the encyclopedia.

Zena Werb: I never had dolls. I remember one amorphous stuffed animal, but mostly it was kittens and puppies and kids (goats) and horses and worms and books. Always books and Newton's laws. My first memory of a program on TV was Martha Graham dancing, floating in a long black dress with a circle for a skirt on Saturday morning on public television from Buffalo. Not bad for a farm girl. No trucks but I did get to drive the tractor when I was eight. I finally got to drive a truck as a summer job after finishing high school, delivering meat to Toronto. ■

—Ursula Goodenough

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