

Never too old to

Like many an adult, I have never really grown up. It is no surprise, then, that I went to see the doll and teddy bear museum in Santa Barbara while the rest of my family roamed the paths of the nearby Botanical Gardens.

I walked past the guard that greeted me inside the door--a human-sized warthog teddy bear in full security costume--with roller skates on his feet indicating that he can chase interlopers really really fast...

The creator-owner, Susan Quinian, welcomed me warmly and escorted me into the first of three large galleries where she has created settings for her over 3,000 historical and contemporary dolls, teddy bears and relat-

Up a Country Lane

Evelyn Birkby
Columnist



ed creatures. The first case holds a President Theodore Roosevelt bear that looked just as the President would have when he had his famous experience saving a baby cub from hunters. (This true event led to stuffed bears being known as Teddy Bears.)

Next came various ethnic groups that have contributed so



Evelyn Birkby and Susan Quinian stand in front of the display in Susan's museum of tiny sewing machines and related items, along with dolls who seem to be happily making miniature

SOCIETY

play with dolls and teddy bears

much to the rich cultural diversity of the area, including the first Native Americans to live in California.

Examples of book characters fill one of the galleries, and Susan's love of reading is evident everywhere. There are space toys, puppets, fairy dolls, dragons, and other mythical creatures, all shown in delightful original settings

"I've been to doll museums where the toys were lined up in neat stiff rows and it didn't appeal to me at all," Susan explained. "I wanted Snow White and the Seven Dwarf dolls to live in a little house in a woods. I wanted the fairies to have their own enchanted valley. I wanted Robin and his Merry Men to be in my idea of Sherwood Forest. I wanted all the creatures in my museum to be where they can play at night. When I open up in the morning, sometimes I swear they aren't where I left them the evening before."

About half way through viewing the exhibits, Susan asked if I'd like to stop for tea, and I happily agreed. As we sipped the refreshing drinks in her tea room, I enjoyed looking at the walls painted with teddy bear scenes and the ceiling filled with floating white bear shaped clouds.

I asked Susan how she got started collecting. "My interest began long ago at Christmastime when my sister gave me a doll. Then, at 35, all

librarian, I began seriously searching out special dolls, bears and related books. I attended doll shows, and began seriously adding to my treasures."

Before we returned to the galleries, Susan took me into an adjacent reading room she is preparing for visitors. It is spacious, bright, and friendly with overstuffed chairs, decorative lighting, and a welcoming fireplace.

Next to the reading room is Susan's library of over 10,000 books. It is the largest known collection of doll, teddy bear and related subjects. As you would expect from a former librarian, she has carefully cataloged each book and periodical and placed it in order on a shelf. The library is available for research.

As I returned to the galleries, Susan told me of the world of special artists who design and create delicate figures and costumes, some from real life and a multitude from the land of make believe. Her museum holds a number of these exquisite creations.

All too soon, son Craig and grandson Nick arrived at the door, scooted past the warthog guard, and asked if I was ready to leave.

Reluctantly I said good-bye to Susan and all her beautiful creatures as we made a pact that neither one of us would ever grow up.

XXXXXXXXXXXX



Susan Quinian, owner of the Santa Barbara Doll and Teddy Bear Museum, stands in front of a beautiful forest scene inhabited by dainty wee fairy dolls. Photo by Craig Birkby