



kort's korner

Boys Who Play with Dolls

©2000 by Jason Michael. Originally published in "Between the Lines"

ONE OF MY MOST VIVID CHILDHOOD memories is of riding in the backseat of our family car, on the way to the circus—and crying. I was crying because I realized that our little circus outing was causing me to miss the

Sonny and Cher Show. And in my little gay mind, an evening watching the sensational Cher was far more fun than checking out a herd of elephants.

I can admit this. I feel no shame.

Runner up to the circus story is another Cher memory. It involved a 12-inch plastic replica of the diva, with real hair and lusciously long eyelashes. I wanted a Cher doll and my mother refused to buy me one. She didn't think it was appropriate for little boys to play with girlie toys. So I got Sonny instead. And with all respect for the deceased, who the hell wanted Sonny. Not even Cher.

But I moved on. I contented myself with Batman action figures and occasional trips to my neighbor Heidi's basement, where an incredible assortment of dolls hid in the corner. She never wanted to play with Barbies, though. She was more an outside kind of girl and leaned more toward sports and stuff. And

nobody seemed to mind when she played boy games.

"I think gay men are more injured about not being able to play with opposite-gendered toys because there's not even an acceptable time frame," said Royal Oak-based psychotherapist Joe Kort. "At least girls are allowed to be tomboys."

Tomboys are cute. Sissy boys are not. I'm a living witness to the pain of that reality.

But according to Kort, I'm not alone. He talks about the stigma of boys who play with dolls and the unsettled issues they sometimes carry. And he, too, is a witness. But more than a witness, he's now a collector of all those vintage dolls he couldn't have while growing up.

"I probably have 20, and to my partner's horror it's growing," says Kort. "I have the Captain and Tenille. I have Donny and Marie, Sonny and Cher, Diana Ross, Michael Jackson. I don't play with them, but it's symbolic. It represents my childhood.

Kort began collecting the dolls after stumbling upon a Cher doll a few years ago in a used toy store.

"I have to admit I was embarrassed to tell the clerk I wanted it," admitted Kort. "But I thought, 'I'm not going to go through what I did as a little boy. I'm going to get this,' and the clerk was fine with it and it sort of gave me permission to just go crazy."

The purchase allowed Kort to revisit a painful childhood experience and put a Band-Aid on it, to give himself something he had been denied for years. It was cathartic. And it was healthy.

While parents often refuse to allow their little boys to play with dolls for fear they'll make them gay, we know, of course, that Barbie has nothing to do with that genetic disposition. Studies have shown, however, that a desire to play with the 'ol gal might be an early sign of a boy's already determined sexual orientation. Robert Green, in his book *The Sissy Boy Syndrome: The Development of Male Homosexuality*, found that little boys who played with dolls were, in fact, more likely to grow up gay.

"It doesn't mean that it makes you gay," said Kort. "It just means it's a positive indicator."

continued

Joe Kort
AND ASSOCIATES

www.joekort.com | joekort@joekort.com | 248.399.7317
Individual, Couples, and Group Therapy | Workshops | Lectures

kort's korner No. 39

©2005

Homosexuality and Pedophilia, continued

With this knowledge in hand, Kort decided to display a few of his favorite dolls on a shelf in his office. He discovered that they often connected him to his clients in a special way.

“When people come in here and see my Cher doll they remember the same think I do,” said Kort, “when it came out, wanting it and not being able to ask, not feeling comfortable. And the memory is vivid.”

Kort and countless others are now keeping ebay.com and similar online auction services in business. Every day Cher dolls and Diana Ross dolls and Dolly Parton dolls are selling to collectors with screen names like mrfashionminded and supremeeddie.

And in addition to the vintage doll market, gay men across the country are apparently empowering themselves to relive a little of their childhood and get into the act. Gay and lesbian bookstores everywhere are selling an assortment of dolls - everything from the buff and anatomically enhanced Billy, Carlos and Tyson dolls, to the new favorites, the Trailer Trash and Drag Queen lines. And somehow, it just all seems right. It wasn't wrong for us to want to play with dolls then, so why should it be wrong for us to want them now? After all, in the words on one ebay vendor with a gorgeous little Diana Ross doll on the market, “you are never too old to have a good childhood.”