



What are the toy makers thinking?

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It only happens once every so many years that find myself in the toy department of a large store, in fact, it is several years since it happened so there is no surprise that I was a bit set back by some the toys that are now on the market and by the size of the inventory and displays these things must be popular. With grand daughters, I have not been in the boys area, but no doubt, it might be just as shocking as what found in the little girls area.





While my wife was searching for other things, I stood there transfixed looking at three or more series of dolls that appeared to be based on something related to horror television shows.

in the mid 60s, I decided that perhaps I should leave the education field and I took a job as assistant manager at a Regina toy store on Hamilton street. It turned out, not to be a long career as I stuck with it from the beginning of September until a day or two before Christmas. The hottest selling toy that Christmas of 1966 was a girl's toy, an adult looking action figure about a foot tall made by Mattel. The figure was just that, a long legged, long haired doll with an impossible body shape, called "Barbie".

One day in November, a fine lady I had known from my first year of college came in and was shopping for something for her creative, imaginative little girl, Darka. I pointed out the Barbies, each in their cellophane faced boxes and the lady looked at me in scorn, knowing I had just spent my last two years as a teacher and she seriously and sensibly rebuked me. Not just for



suggesting a Barbie, but also as a teacher, I should know better, not only that, she pointed out the obvious, that I did not belong working in a toy store.

As parents and grand parents we know that children are extra ordinarily vulnerable and susceptible to suggestion. Television, something almost every child today spends hours soaking in the content of so-called "children's channels. Our world today has gone much further with electronic media than anything ever experienced before. There are human like little horses that act like junior high prima donnas not only television, but on the iPhone, iPod and iPad, ready to be viewed hour after hour from services like Netflix. A whole universe of content from something called "teletubbies" to remarkable humans and animals alike.

Child development psychologists have been warning parents for years about the amount of time they use their television and now electronic media devices, to occupy the time of their children. They point out that because animated content plays to the lowest common denominator, children develop a short attention span, quickly becoming bored with things that do not move at a five second action sequence.

These issues have been clinically tested and found to be harmful, but what I was seeing is something quite different. Like the possible distorted view Barbie conveys, what would be the effect of subculture elements like "goth", zombies, teen witches and the the glamourisation of piercing, tattoos and the adoption of anti-social costuming and behaviour.



I am uncomfortable with having written that paragraph above, because I shudder at the thought of being part of the anti literature bible thumpers and social alarmists who feel **Harry Potter** books should be banned and our libraries purged of any material shedding some light on the occult and other pagan rituals. In most cases, those who are for book burning, are themselves cult members and every bit as dangerous to society as the things they condemn. So you see, I have a problem.

I just can't ignore how uncomfortable I felt looking at these frightening toys. Are they, or are they not a threat?

Well the answer and consolation came the next evening as I chatted online using **FaceTime** with my daughter-in-law and mother of two of my grand daughters. I told her how disturbed I was seeing these toys and she echoed my concern, then she pointed out that Aurora, who is an eight year old in grade three and is in a grade three/four mixed class, has noticed that these counter-culture toys are very popular with her classmates, but she can't stand



them and tells her friends what she thinks of the gross figures with their equally gross costumes.

You see, if you want to understand the world, talk to an eight year old and they will, if they trust you, explain things to you and yes indeed, things are going to be okay.