

## A Father's Guide to Barbie

There are things in life that are both inevitable, and unavoidable. Death, for instance. Taxes. Running out of toilet paper. Beer going flat when you leave it out too long. Drinking that beer anyway.

And, if you have a daughter... Barbie dolls.

I have two daughters, so I'm fated to get a double dose of Barbie in my life. And like most dads, when I first encountered Barbie dolls, I had no idea what to make of them. After 7 years, though, I like to think of myself as an expert.

Christmas is coming – as happens every year, there will be some dads who will be encountering Barbie for the first time. Allow me to share some of my great wisdom with you.

## A Brief History

The first Barbie doll was designed in 1956 by Ruth Handler. She shared her ideas with her husband, Elliott, a founder of the Mattel toy company, and the first Barbie dolls rolled off the line in 1959. (Thanks for nothing, Elliott. What the hell were you thinking, you backstabbing bastard?)

The doll was a huge hit, and has grown in popularity ever since. Today, \$1.9 BILLION worth of Barbie products are sold annually. Mattel estimates that 3 Barbie Dolls are sold every second, with most of them apparently ending up at my house.

## Appearance

For comparison purposes, I'll be stacking Barbie up against a toy that most men will be familiar with: G. I. Joes (NOTE: NOT dolls. Action figures.)



The Basic Barbie Doll: Your Basic Barbie comes in a long, thin box. She's 1:6 scale, so she's about a foot tall. She will have 5 points of articulation: hips, shoulders, and neck. She has no elbow joints, not moveable waist, and she has no real knee joint, although her leg will click into 3 different positions. Her FEET are molded at an angle to look normal in high heel shoes. Due to her lack of articulation and the design of her feet, your basic Barbie doll is not capable of STANDING. She has to be held, leaned against something, or you need to use some kind of stand, or she falls right over. Her hands are not designed to grip anything – they come molded into a permanent flat position, like she's eternally ready to "high-five" someone. She has realistic hair, if by realistic you mean so fine that it breaks whenever you try and come it and often comes out in handfuls. She comes in a simple outfit that can be changed with optional, separately available outfits, and she costs around \$10. There's more expensive packages that come with more intricate outfits as well as various accessories, all of which she cannot hold.

The Basic G.I. Joe Action Figure: Your Joe is 3 ¾ inches tall. He used to be 12 inches tall like Barbie, but ceded that size to Barbie in a long and well publicized breakup in the 70s. He comes in a blister pack, his clothes are part of his molding and cannot be changed, and he comes with a gun, backpack, and maybe some equipment for \$5. He's articulated at the knees, hips, waist, shoulders, elbows, wrist, and neck. His right hand is molded into a grip, and his left into a sort of supporting flat shape, so he can hold a gun, sword, axe, shovel, pool cue, or a spatula and make it look normal. All those points of articulation mean that he can not only stand, but can be posed in various positions and stay there without falling down.



Left: Joes show off their various poses.

Right: Barbies lay there. That's pretty much all they do.

### **Accessories:**

The basic Barbie comes with just the clothes on her back, like an immigrant from a third world country seeking asylum in our great Nation. Your average Joe comes with a gun, backpack, and all kinds of weapons, like... well, like the kind of guy that would drive an immigrant from a third world country to seek asylum in our great Nation. But both have a whole world of possibilities that can open for them.

Barbie: Optional accessories for a Barbie doll include not just additional outfits (of which there are hundreds of thousands), but also doctors kits (none of which she can hold), teaching kits (none of which she can hold), dishes (none of which she can hold), etc., etc, allowing you to dress up and accessorize your Barbie as any one of thousands of modern professionals who can only wear high heels and are physically incapable of standing on their own. She also has dozens of vehicles including several corvettes, a minivan, a boat, a rocket ship, and a motorcycle, but due to her lack of articulation, she cannot be posed in any of them in any position that looks remotely normal. In fact, many of my daughter's Barbie toys came with **DISCLAIMERS ON THE BOX** that indicate the dolls and/or vehicles inside **COULD NOT BE PUT IN THE POSITIONS SHOWN IN THE PICTURE ON THE BOX**. Which leads me to ask the questions: So what dolls WERE capable of being put in those positions to TAKE those pictures, and why isn't Mattel selling THOSE? Thanks again for nothing, Elliott. You bastard.

G. I. Joe: Optional accessories for Joe are somewhat more limited in scope. There's tanks with guns, helicopters with guns, motorcycles with guns, planes with guns, and... uh... hanggliders... with guns. You may notice a theme here. If your Greenpeace member friend invites you to his son's surprise birthday party, you might want to buy him a skateboard or something instead. Just a thought. So Joe's options are sort of limited. But at the very least Joe can actually SIT in his tank, RIDE on his motorcycle, or... uh... HANG from his hanglider.



Left: Steeler in his MOBAT tank.

Right: Barbie and friend in her corvette. Let's see you grip that steering wheel, Barbie! Can't do it? Didn't THINK so. Thanks for nothing, Elliot. You bastard.

## Ken

No discussion of Barbie would be complete without mentioning her erstwhile lover, Ken. Becca had been playing with Barbies for about a year when we noticed that, like ALL of Becca's toys, had a tendency to GET MARRIED. Not that there's anything wrong with that, but we thought it might be nice for Barbie to have some options. So we sought out a Ken doll.

This was harder than we thought. While our local toy store had aisle after aisle of Barbie dolls, Ken is apparently far more scarce. At the time, the only one for sale was "Cool

Date Ken”, who came in a Bermuda shorts, a surfing shirt, and had a skateboard. Cool Date, indeed, but Barbie already had SEVERAL wedding dresses and Ken couldn’t show up dressed like THAT. And while there were 50,000 different outfits for Barbie, the only Ken outfits we could find were a one piece diving outfit and a thong. Eventually we ended up buying a tux for the man on Ebay.

Basic Doll: Ken’s the same size as Barbie, only a bit bigger. He’s got quite the physique, so apparently Ken works out. A lot. He also has plastic, molded hair like the G.I. Joe dolls. Later, a tragic accident nearly severed Ken’s head, and left it hanging by a flap of skin as if he’d made the mistake of dating O. J. Simpson’s ex wife. We couldn’t leave it like that, so we bought Becca a new Ken and were surprised to find that there are TWO different styles of hair for him. There’s the old, molded hair Ken, and the new, way too much gel Ken.



Left: Molded Hair Ken. Trivia: A young Ronald Reagan served as the model for this doll! Hence the distinctive haircut, guaranteed to sweep the ladies off their feet as well as bring communism to its knees.

Right: Ken with more realistic hair. Geez, Ken, leave some gel for the rest of us!

And there you have it, new dads. That’s Barbie for you. I suggest you get used to it- you’ll be seeing a lot of her laying around your house for the next few years.

Thanks, Elliott. You bastard.