

ANNE STEYER

# Barbie's fate is up to the child.

Forget the Barney brouhaha, Barbie's coming to town. And she's getting "all dolled up" to meet me.

Barbie is appearing—in person—at Lincoln's new Target store, 56th Street and Highway 2, Saturday. Target's advertisements for this landmark event say, "Meet a woman who's a real doll."

You got that right, baby, we're talking about Barbie here.

The idea of meeting Barbie, the childhood actor of all my dreams, is enticing.

Because I couldn't wait to find out more about America's sweetheart, I called Mattel.

Lisa McKendall, manager of marketing communications for Mattel, said the visit was part of a national "Real Kids Star with Barbie" contest. She said it would be an opportunity for kids to meet Barbie and win a chance to star in a commercial with her.

I'm too old to participate.

I asked how Mattel could possibly find someone to personify Barbie and I found out a ghastly truth: There's more than one Barbie in America.

McKendall said Mattel selected Barbies — ooh, the plural is painful — who project a wholesome, positive and enthusiastic attitude and who enjoy children.

But her "likeness" to the toy Barbie ends there.

They don't select her for her impossible measurements, and none of the Barbies have little tiny feet that can barely keep hold of the high-heeled, slip-on sandals.

I myself struggled to keep Barbie's feet in her shoes during my many years in Barbiedom.

It was an odd phenomena at my house. I was the most hyperactive child — except when I had a book in my hands or my Barbie kingdom all over my bedroom floor.

When I got Barbie-busy, it was impossible for my mom to walk through my bedroom without putting her adult feet in peril. I didn't have the Barbie townhouse or anything like that, but what I had was so much better.



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My parents had purchased a World Book Encyclopedia set that came with a special set of Childcraft Books. Volume Nine was my treasure chest of "make and do." It had pages of doll decorating tips, such as how to make doll furniture with old thread spools, cardboard and cloth scraps, and how to make homes for my Barbie land.

My Barbie kingdom was decked out, not from department store accessories, but ones I made myself.

I loved my Barbie kingdom. My mom found an old Barbie doll at a garage sale. She wasn't blonde and blue-eyed — I already had one of those, the one with a diamond ring with matching earrings — but she had hair the color of sun-kissed wheat and eyes of brown. I named her Honey, half for her hair and half for the character out of my Trixie Belden mystery stories.

I also had the Wonder Woman "fashion doll" and that crazy two-toned doll. Flip the top of her head one way, she's blond, the other, she's brunette.

My Wonder Woman doll married my brother's G.I. Joe doll, and they took off in Joe's yellow helicopter with the golden Buddha filled with rubies. When they came back, Joe stayed home and took care of the Treehouse Gang kids and Wonder Woman went back to her work at the military base by day, crime-busting at night. Joe retired.

Barbie didn't have much to do with men, partly because of my lack of male dolls, but also because she had better things to do. She boogied to Led Zeppelin and the Eagles while I listened to the old KFMQ — that was before they turned traitor to country.

She worked at various jobs, but once my mom picked up the Barbie airplane at yet another garage sale, Barbie became a pilot and clocked in a lot of air time.

Even when I received a male doll that had a full set of shining armor, I never let my Barbie be whisked off by a knight. He only put that on to go to work, otherwise he was hanging with the Sunshine Family and spending time with Barbie when she was in town.

Unlike last year's talking Barbie, my Barbie never thought math was hard, and she never thought shopping was all that much fun. Of course, that might be because I didn't have any stores for her to shop in and she was too busy conquering the world to do algebra, but in retrospect, I'd like to think it was my inherent feminism already taking hold.

I don't think Barbie is the bane of feminism. Last year's Barbie-que — the Barbie-burning after Mattel's release of the talking doll — was funny, but I don't know if the statement was altogether necessary.

Yeah, her measurements are ridiculous, but that never made me think I was inadequate for being over 5-foot-5 and 105 pounds, and having less than a C-cup bra. And I never thought math was hard or clothes shopping was the only fun activity for females.

I never conformed my self-image or goals to their limitations. My Barbies reflected my aspirations — it wasn't the other way around.

Steyer is a senior English and history major, a Daily Nebraskan arts and entertainment senior reporter and a columnist.

MATT ZIMMERMAN

# Soldier token of political games

A new strain of Gulf War Syndrome reared its ugly head this past week, once again proving that seriously dealing with any kind of military activity is not among the strong suits of the American public.

In the midst of the escalating conflict between master strategist/clan leader Mohamed Farrah Aidid and U.N. forces, which has already seen the deaths of dozens of peace-keeping personnel and hundreds of Somalis, American attention was deeply fixed on the fate of captured helicopter pilot Michael Durant. Keeping matters well in perspective, we responded in the only way we knew how. As the saying goes, when the going gets tough, the tough put up yellow ribbons.

Apparently, the theory behind the yellow ribbons is they let the troops know that we here at home are pulling for them. All well and good, I suppose, but for many of us, the lingering image of yellow ribbons that the Gulf War left us with is that supporting the troops also means checking your criticisms at the door. Argue before the troops are in the field, they said, but shut up once they are out there. A great moral lesson had been learned in Vietnam, we were told, and that was that we must, no matter what we thought of the motives behind the conflict, support our boys.

Funny what a little thing like a change in the administration makes us forget. The true partisan nature of foreign affairs is becoming more and more apparent as the weeks drag by. History's supposed lessons are quickly being discarded as the traditionally hawkish Republican representatives line up against the president without the slightest appearance of having wrestled with any moral demons. Haven't they heard that it isn't patriotic to criticize military operations?

Patriotism and morality are put on a back burner when we aren't able to



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drop those neat smart bombs down exhaust ports. Who can blame them, though, when the Somalia operation has stumbled as badly as it has? Congress hates putting up with failed military policies as much as the public does. Everyone likes a winner, so no one really wants to put their principles on the line for something like this.

We have the uncanny ability to make the best out of bad situations, though. And for some odd reason, captured U.S. servicemen seem to lift our spirits when we're feeling a little down on our international luck. I've heard no one admit it, but by the most conservative of estimates, everyone knows that CBS's movie of the week, "Terror in the Desert: The Michael Durant Story" will be out by at least Easter. I'm rooting for Tom Cruise to play the lead role and for Wesley Snipes to play Gen. Aidid. Watch for it. It should at least be up to par with the David Koresh movie.

Conveniently forgotten, of course, are the millions of Somalis who are merely a few short weeks away from returning to the disastrous, inhuman conditions we supposedly went there to correct. Also forgotten are the images of the dead American helicopter pilots being dragged through the streets of Mogadishu. But I guess that's the point. It leaves you with a sick feeling in your stomach, though, when you think of public policy being dictated

by aesthetics.

I have a great deal of sympathy for Durant and his family. Seeing a loved one taken prisoner by enemy forces has got to be one of the most difficult situations imaginable. What is disconcerting, however, is the knee-jerk reaction of the American public. We jump up and down and wave flags and throw our support behind things before we have a chance to think about what's going on.

Thousands of people have been waiting at every stop of Durant's trip back home. How many people were waiting for the coffins of his fellow helicopter pilots when they arrived back home? Who knows the name of even one of them? Does surviving an attack makes you a hero? Does being killed in one do the same?

The sympathy I feel for Durant is not so much for the injuries he has received as for how he has become a pawn of the political games that are being played out over Somalia. He symbolizes American courage, he symbolizes the weakness of our position. He symbolizes American resolve, he symbolizes the failure of Clinton's foreign policy decisions. Pardon me if I don't go out and tie up a ribbon, but something about this just rubs me the wrong way.

Zimmerman is a Junior English major and Daily Nebraskan columnist.

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