

Grace Notes

"God's grace for everyday living

Action figure Easter

By: Debora M. Coty

"Now, walk Jesus down the path lined with palmetto fronds but be careful not to let him fall off Battlecat."

"Okay, but if G.I. Joe is playing Peter, can he camp behind the couch when he runs away after the rooster crows three times?"

"Mommy, can Skeletor be Pontius Pilate?"

"We don't have enough twist ties to hold both Ken dolls on the crosses beside Jesus on the shoebox of Calvary."

"Oh, no! The dog's chewing up Judas and the thirty pieces of tin foil!"

Bizarre as these comments sound, they were part of our Easter tradition as my children were growing up. In order to make the Easter story more real to them, we acted out the entire week proceeding Easter with dolls, beginning with Jesus' Palm Sunday entry into Jerusalem and ending with his glorious resurrection.

We had a "real" Jesus doll I'd purchased at a Christian bookstore, but the rest of the cast had to be assembled (with a lot of imagination) from the toy box. At the time, HeMan was in vogue, so he (and his trusty, green, tiger-steed, Battlecat), SheRa, and their evil adversary, Skeletor, had starring roles, along with the Barbie crew, army guys in full regalia, and even a few assorted Care Bears making their acting debuts.

On Good Friday, we'd set aside an hour to open up the big picture Bible and assemble our props, which included three crosses made of pencils rubber-banded together and stuck point down into a sturdy shoebox. The box also doubled as the tomb, so that when we completed the story up to the crucifixion, the crosses were removed, Jesus was wrapped carefully in Kleenex and

buried in the shoe-box cave with a round pillow rolled in front of the opening.

We placed the box by the fireplace and tip-toed reverently around it until Jesus sprang forth from the grave on Easter morning. My grown daughter still talks today about how exciting it was to awaken early and run into the living room to find the Kleenex grave clothes discarded in a pile and Jesus miraculously sitting atop the shoebox tomb in his purple robe, his feet crossed at the ankles and little plastic arms raised triumphantly in the air.

Corny, you may say. Perhaps, but the kids loved this symbolic ritual honoring our Lord Jesus and it served to imprint these most important events, crucial to our faith, in their minds forever.

"We will not hide these truths from our children but will tell the next generation about the glorious deeds of the lord. We will tell of his power and the mighty miracles he did...so each generation can set its hope anew on God" (Psalm 78:4,7a, NLT).

My friends, Gloria and John, created a family tradition of *Gospel Easter Eggs*. Each year, they'd assemble neighbor children and their own three daughters to tell the story of Jeremy, a handicapped boy who recognized the true meaning of Easter by an empty plastic Easter egg (representing Jesus' empty tomb). They filled plastic eggs for the children to hide with other mementos of Easter—flowers symbolizing new life, nails for Jesus' crucifixion, a dirty rag representing sins, thirty cents signifying the silver paid to Judas, etc. You get the idea, and so did the children. Many learned about God's son for the first time at this much anticipated annual event in their neighborhood.

Marianne and Sam wanted their children to respect the Jewish customs in which Jesus participated, so they established



a traditional family *Passover Dinner* (Sedar) held on Good Friday. Using books from the local Christian bookstore and Jews for Jesus, they performed the ancient ceremony, pointing out to the children symbolism of various facets of Christianity as well as Judaism.

Another Easter family tradition I've heard about are *Resurrection cookies*—hollow cookies that children help bake the day before Easter. The cookies are then sealed in the cooled oven overnight and opened the next morning to celebrate the miracle of the empty tomb.

"Only be careful, and watch yourselves closely so that you do not forget the things your eyes have seen or let them slip from your heart as long as you live. Teach them to your children and to their children after them" (Deut. 4:9, NIV).

Family traditions are an effective way to pass on the exciting truths of God's power and mighty miracles to our children, in a way they can understand, on their own level. And what better time to begin than during the holiest celebration of our faith—Easter?

Debbie's articles have appeared in dozens of magazines including *Discipleship Journal*, *MomSense*, and *Today's Christian Woman* and she has just completed her first book. Contact her at GraceNotes_1@earthlink.net for comments, commiserations, or speaking engagement requests. She's a member of the Christian Writer's Guild.