

At auction, the ultimate soldier failed to meet its \$600,000 asking price. When none of the thirty or so people who were gathered at the Comic-Con International event, organized by Heritage Comics, bid the asking price for the original G.I. Joe prototype, the price was lowered to \$250,000. Still no raised hands or ear tugs or any other kind of a twitch that could be taken for a bid presented, so finally the eleven and a half inch action figure was returned to its owner and inventor, Don Levine. On his own, Mr. Levine managed to sell the item a few weeks later for \$200,000. Had G.I. Joe sold for at least \$250,000 it would have been the most expensive toy ever sold. What I couldn't understand was why G.I. Joe (prototype or not) was expected to sell for sixty times the highest price ever paid for a debut 1959 Barbie in the first place?

Everywhere I looked on the Internet, articles spoke about how G.I. Joe was invented and developed to “to do the same for boys as Barbie had done for girls.” What was that I wondered? Little did I know thirty-five years ago that my brother's action figure would one day become a collector's item. To me, G.I. Joe wasn't just a toy. He was an action hero. Being a soldier was a glorified job to have before the horrors of the Vietnam War were piped into our living rooms. G.I.s (short for government issues) were romantic, and sometimes, as when one died on the battlefield, tragic heroes. War had everything that hooked imaginations, both young and old: romance, tragedy, and chivalry. Being a soldier was the highest calling of patriotic duty. However, the Vietnam War changed all that. War was easy to romanticize when it wasn't being pumped into our living room, when we could like back to World War II and the Allied victory. The heroic soldier became a throwback. And war became simply a tragedy. But G.I. Joe survived the changes, with new models of government issued gear. My brother, obviously, never owned the original prototype (there's only one of those), but vintage—those greater than thirty-years-old by most standards—G.I. Joe action figures can sell for thousands. My brother didn't much care for toy soldiers. I, however, liked any toy that moved, talked, could be moved, or just simply inspired my imagination into action. I built entire lives for my brother toys: forts, towns, houses. I was never so inspired, though, to give G.I. Joe a family. Having a family seemed too constricting for an action figure. And why wouldn't I think that. After all, I had a father who roamed much of the time. In my mind, it was like he just parachuted into earth's atmosphere, which was realistic. Toys from the early to middle 1960's were often based on imagined, or reported, likenesses of extraterrestrials. Barbie was relatively tame by early 1960 standards. Barbie, stock number 850, was introduced by Mattel Toys as a “teenage fashion model”. It says so numerous times on the original packaging. Ruth Handler, a Mattel co-founder and the inventor of Barbie, said she got the idea for Barbie from watching her daughter, Barbara (yes, you're right), play with paper doll. The paper dolls her daughter played with were always older—at least teenagers, which to Handler implied that her daughter was imagining future roles. Maybe so. Handler has said that Barbie was developed to inspire to think about future roles. (Funny how the original packaging for Barbie has “Teenage Fashion Model” stenciled all over it.) But I realize one has to be careful to separate the marketing and advertising from the product idea, although the two often go together. Perhaps when Mattel did its marketing research it found that most girls

were not like Ruth Handler's daughter, that they did not play with older dolls to imagine future roles, except perhaps that of a fashion model, but instead simply because they were pretty. Had Barbie been developed with a career emphasis perhaps she would have been a role model, although not necessarily a hero. Heroes flirt with tragedy—not something Barbie does or even should do. It may not be a good idea to risk your life for a chance at heroism. Dead heroes are martyrs—not people to emulate, unless one desires death. Those articles should read that G.I. Joe was developed to do the job for Hasbro that Barbie did for Mattel. All of her action lay in the changing of her outfits. She came dressed in black and white striped jersey swimsuit number one. However, the “commuter” (#916) and the “gay parisienne” (#964) outfits, along with white shoes number one and sunglasses, were dress up choices. I never owned a Barbie. I was the kind of kid whose mother changed my clothes several times a day, for reasons I was unable to fathom at the time. Looking back, I now know that dirt was the primary reason, but at the time I didn't mind being dirty. Being dirty seemed a reasonable thing for an action figure to be. When G.I. Joe debuted in 1963, he had movable joints—elbows, knees, wrists, and feet, just like me. He could be made to pose behind bushes and little holes I dug for ditches. The early Barbie's could not. They were not developed with that trait until the 1970's. But why would Barbie need those traits to walk down a runway. Still, early enough for me to beg my parents for my first one. I didn't. Despite her new found flexibility, I did not want a doll that I could only look at. Unlike G.I. Joe, Barbie was a barometer of change. Fashion change that is. When Jackie Kennedy became the first lady, Barbie's outfits mimicked hers. In more recent years, has been outfitted by such celebrated fashion designers as Bob Mackie, Vera Wang, and Christian Dior. Barbie has been given sisters, friends, cousins, and even a boyfriend, Ken. G.I. Joe has remained independent. His clothes have changed to match the changing face of war. He has desert fatigues and more sophisticated weaponry. Barbie is a woman of the world, although maybe a little rich and spoiled, while G.I. Joe is a throwback to the days of the romanticized soldier. He has changed little (that implies integrity). He could be any modern war hero. The fact that he's still standing so to say, looks unscathed, and is equipped to fight wherever whenever—makes him a hero. Barbie is not a hero, but instead an icon. What G.I. Joe's marketing show is that advertisers can literally create heroes. G.I. Joe is not real. He is an action hero, not only because his occupation calls for him to flirt with tragedy, but because he has survived every war from World War II (he was based on a Holly invented WWII hero) to “Operation Iraqi Freedom”.

G.I. Joe even spawned G.I. Joe comic books. There are Barbie fashion comic books put out by Marvel (on the cover of Barbie Fashion #1, Barbie appears as a busty blonde) and Barbie and Ken published by Dell: “Travel along with Barbie and Ken!!! And share their adventures on a tour of Europe.” (August-October, 1962) Must be an action figure to get a comic book. G.I. Joe in adventures, as adventure team commander, stopping COBRA and their army of transforming robots, on his Harley-Davidson, with his rifle, goggles, boots, and hat.

Guys and Dolls
(1st Draft)

A prototype would cost more than any of a handful of surviving first year dolls. And that the point. They are both dolls, but the doll for boys carry a higher price tag than the one for girls does. (Somewhere you need to describe yourself as female-identified. Your sex is important to this piece.)