

MYRTLE & EARL McLAUGHLIN & SON LYNN

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Myrtle McLaughlin: Proud foster parent to 300 dolls

Staff Photo by Mary-Ann Thurber

Myrtle is the Doll Lady

By MARY-ANN THURBER
Herald-Tribune staff

Lovingly, with infinite care and patience, she attends to the needs of every new member of her vast family.

Those who are scratched are mended, those who are missing limbs will have them replaced; those who need clothes will have them made.

No one is too ugly or too old or too battered to become a member of this sanctuary.

Myrtle McLaughlin of Beranson is a foster-parent to over 300 dolls of every size, shape and description.

Walking into her home is like stepping back into your childhood. The often-heard cry at seeing her collection is "I had one of these when I was young!"

Cabbage Patch dolls, Hondie and Dagwood dolls, Beautiful Chrissy dolls, Mork and Mindy, Fonzie, Brooke Shields, Jimmy Osmond, Baby Joey from All in the Family, Michael Jackson — the list is endless.

Each one is a memory of a failed marketing idea or just a trend that is gone forever.

There are dolls that can roller-skate, dolls that can rock their own dolls, dolls that are anatomi-

cally correct and dolls that play music. There's also one that has a heart-beat when you squeeze it.

Clearing a place for herself to sit on the couch, McLaughlin moves one of the bigger dolls setting off a chorus of chatter from the wee creature.

She explains that she started collecting all of her grandchildren's dolls when they began to grow out of them.

"I thought I'd just like to have something to hand down to my great-grandchildren," says McLaughlin. "I think that's what started me; we never saved the toys we had when we were kids."

McLaughlin has one doll from her childhood, the proudest member of the collection at 50 years old.

The dolls may be for her eventual great-grandchildren but children are not allowed to play with them at will.

"I don't just give them to the kids, they'd just wreck them. When my sister's kids come to visit they're allowed to pick out one to play with."

McLaughlin is an unrepentant collector of many things, including old Avon bottles, but dolls definitely lead the pack.

"I can't walk by a broken doll without picking it up.

"It's funny," she smiles, "some dolls' faces really remind you of people. I once bought one because it looks like my nephew."

McLaughlin has something of a reputation as a doll doctor. She is frequently called upon to repair old playmates of friends and family and her work is skillfully done.

Even those dolls who can't be repaired are provided for — she's thinking of making a wheel chair for one that has no legs.

McLaughlin said she usually keeps the dolls packed away and was amazed to find out how many she had when she brought them out.

"I had no idea I had that many dolls, I found them hanging in bags and laying in boxes and trunks."

McLaughlin said she has no idea what she's going to do with all of her dolls but she is hoping that when she finally has some great-grandchildren they will want them.

It should be no secret that McLaughlin is attached to the dolls and will feel a sense of loss if she has to give some of them away.

"There would be a few it would hurt me to give away, after you make repairs on them and dress them they're kind of like your family."

Bezanson man lost in river

A Bezanson man, Gerald Lynn McLaughlin, 23, was drowned in the Wapiti River Sunday afternoon when the boat in which he was riding was swamped and overturned.

RCMP reported that the mishap occurred when the boat which was carrying Mr. McLaughlin and two companions, Dwight and Mervin Ford, also of Bezanson, ran out of gas and began to drift down stream.

It hit an ice-bridge of log, stalling the boat for a short period of time during which the men tried to refuel the gas motor. The current of the rising river was rough, tipping the boat slightly and filling it with some water. Suddenly it overturned.

Mr. McLaughlin and Dwight Ford were thrown into the river while Mervin Ford landed on the ice bridge.

As the current swept Mr. McLaughlin away, Mr. Ford tried to swim after him.

Mr. Ford swam through to the shoreline where he was joined by his companion.

The search for the body continued during the weekend as riverboats motored the waters, and men walked the shore. Dragging the river was impossible.

No sign yet of man's body

The weekend brought no success in finding the body of Gerald Lynn McLaughlin, 23-year-old son of Mr. and Mrs. Earl McLaughlin of Bezanson who drowned May 18, when the boat in which he was riding overturned in the Wapiti River, six miles south of Grande Prairie.

RCMP said today that the search continued during the last two days, with extra force since the river level had dropped some. Four to five men each rode five riverboats, while they travelled a distance of about 45 miles to the Smoky River highway bridge. Members of the Bezanson district also volunteered to assist the search.