

Claudia's Report

Forty-seven AE lovers attended this event coordinated by Andria Pinson from the AnnEstellesWorld yahoo group. A number of attendee's brought along some of their favorite AE's. Most were our Tenners (ten-inch dolls), but there were several of the 8" dolls and one of the 18". As tables filled, folks set out their travel AE's in the middle of the round tables.

Andria opened the gathering by graciously thanking Patsy Moyer, President of MDCC, for allowing us to include this thank-you event. She wanted to especially thank Virginia Ann Heyerdahl (board VP & Secretary) for her enthusiastic support of the Ann Estelle event.

A. Andria then led us in forming 'teams' to cheer for our favorite Tenner: AE, Sophie, Gracie, Georgia, and Michael. Robert (Tonner) judged AE the winner by number of team members and Georgia the winner for team enthusiasm. There was surprising (to me) support for Michael with a clear contingent loving our lad.

B. Next Andria asked a few AE trivia questions

1. How many AE dolls appeared in the catalogue but were not actually produced?
Answer: Four...three 18" and one 29". Robert shared how much he had wanted to make the 29" one and he sounded still disappointed that that had not worked out.
2. When were the bending joint Tenners introduced? Answer: In Fall 1995 with Michael and Fortune Teller
3. How many 8" Ann Estelle Dressed Dolls were released in the regular collections?
Answer: 7
4. How many dressed Michael's were produced? Answer: 7

C. We were then treated to an incredible, memorable video compiled, filmed and staged by Andria which began "In the beginning there was a paper doll....rightly named 'The Queen of Everything". Year by year we were treated to a quick view of all the different dressed and basic dolls produced by Robert. By the time we were into year three, Robert could be seen to wipe a tear or two. Andria's show ended with the last AE doll in a stop-motion animation of AE waving, celebrating and transforming into the ME drawing that accompanied the doll. The caption made the statement, "If there's anything more fun than being 10 years old, I'd like to know what it is!"

It was both an educational and a wonderful revisiting of our sweet girl's history and that of her friends.

D. Robert then took the floor and began to answer some of the questions submitted by the yahoo group for his consideration. He shared that by 1999 he was well enough established as a doll maker to begin producing two dolls that he had dreamed of doing for a long time. One was Tyler; the other Ann Estelle whom he knew from Mary Engelbreit's popular cards. Although the negotiation for licensing rights for AE began even before the production of Betsy McCall (who was inspired by the paper dolls that came in a Tonner family's subscription to the magazine), it was two years before the permission came.

When it did, the AE paper dolls in the ME Home Companion magazine became the inspirations for the Tonner dolls and outfits. Everyone wanted to be very careful that the doll would reflect Mary's vision for AE. So three sculpts were submitted with Mary giving careful suggestions. Her major requirement was that the doll be smiling just right!

As part of the licensing agreement, Mary had approval rights for the dolls, outfits and accessories that the Tonner Doll Company produced. The ones that made it into production had three requirements:

1. They needed to tickle Robert's fancy
2. They needed to be ones that could be converted from a detailed ME drawing into an actual fabric costume. This sometimes required not only finding a just-right fabric but also by actually printing or embroidering a design that would work if one could not be found.
3. The finished outfits needed to have a broad enough appeal that buyers would find them appealing.

Outfits which met these criteria were then sent to pattern makers with fabric swatches to be made up and submitted for Mary's final approval. Robert shared that he found working with ME to be a rich and pleasant experience and that translating the fantasies in Mary's drawings to doll clothing to be educational for him. His stamp on our beloved AE and Tanners are his sculpts and AE remains one of his personal favorites.

AE made her first appearance as we know her in 1999 at Toy Fair. The three most popular outfits over time have been: the Classic Sailor; Mother's Day; and May Day. Robert, like many of us has been a serious private AE collector and also like many of us has 'too many to count'. At present he keeps specially designed lighted cabinets in his own home to showcase about 25 of the Tanners at a time with their furniture. He clearly counts the furniture that Tonner Co produced for ME's Queen of Everything to use among his proud successes.

Although there was close contact and many conversations between the two artists, Robert first met Mary in person at an FAO signing where the line went around the block. He shared that Mary was surprised by our collector mindset.

There were over 100 different dolls produced over AE's ten year history. Robert was sorry to see collector's interest wane as other dolls caught their fancy and sales dropped.

But much as AE is among his personal favorites, she has to sell well enough that she can be profitable to the company.

As you can imagine among the other questions were some about might we see her again? Might we see her in a ball jointed form? Robert shared that in order to be profitable, a doll issue needs to sell a minimum of 300 dolls. When asked if he might consider doing a pre-subscription such as has been done for Cami and is now in process for Ms Revlon, he appeared to this writer to possibly be open to doing that at some time. So I have my fingers crossed, LOL.

He mentioned that the company was seriously considering using the 10" Linda/AE body again soon. Asked if the resulting doll would "play" well with the AE line, he was non plus, perhaps indicating that he himself really didn't know what the face sculpt would be yet.

A ball-jointed body, however, may be beyond what we can hope for unless life offers us a bonus gift regarding our AE. The molds cost in the 100,000's of dollars and so must promise a doll that will sell for many, many, many years.

One Yahoo AEWORLD person was chosen to receive the 10th anniversary birthday doll that Robert donated and one audience member was chosen for the other one.

Andria presented Robert with a mounted plaque officially thanking him for the fun and play his AE has brought us. And then encouraged us each to hug the ones we have and continue to let them bring us moments of joy and pleasure.

- Claudia Jarratt