



VIOLET KRIZEK of Jennings (above) evaluated a doll needing repairs. Mrs. Krizek makes or repairs all the dolls' bodies and their clothing by hand. She admired one of her projects (below, left) in a rocker that she also refinished.



Jennings woman collects, restores dolls

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As a child, Violet Krizek said, she never had a doll to call her own. In recent years, she's made up for that by restoring dozens of dolls from various stages of disrepair.

The dolls come to her from friends and family who know of her passion. The front room of the home in Jennings where she and her husband Kenny live is almost alive with life-like dolls Mrs. Krizek has lovingly restored.

Mrs. Krizek said her mother died when she was only 4. Her father remarried, to a woman who also had a daughter. From then on she had to share her dolls. One of their favorites was a boy doll they called "Timmy Dale," she recalled. After the girls grew up and began households of their own, she added, their childhood toys got lost in the shuffle.

About 15 years ago, two of Mrs. Krizek's sisters, Roberta Nitsche and DonnaJean Beneke, surprised her with a discovery: They had found Timmy Dale. Their step-mother had put the doll in a trunk for safekeeping but over the years, Timmy's "magic skin" had crumbled, an arm and leg had rotted off, his mohair wig was destroyed and, in general, he was a moldy mess. He was so smelly he had to be left in the garage.

An inquiry at a "doll hospital" in Omaha revealed the cost for restoration would be too great, but a staff member was kind enough to offer Mrs. Krizek advice on how to restore Timmy Dale so he could become a family keepsake.

Wearing a mask and gloves to reduce her exposure to the mold, Mrs. Krizek said, she began the painstaking process of restoring her childhood friend. She used wood filler to repair a hole in his head, made a new body, repaired the anchors for his eyes and found a beautiful brown curly wig for his hair. Her



A BLACK DOLL (above) pushing a baby carriage is one of Violet Krizek's favorite restorations. The three dolls (below, left) dressed in their "Sunday best" stand in a corner of Mrs. Krizek's front room.

step-mother advised cutting the hair to make the doll more masculine, she said, adding: "If I paid \$26 for a wig, we're not cutting it."

The hair was left long and that's when Timmy Dale underwent a major transformation. Now she's "Tammy Dale."

Since then, dozens of dolls have come through Mrs. Krizek's workshop. Some come needing only minor repair, while others arrive in pieces. Self-taught on all aspects of

doll restoration, Mrs. Krizek said she also taught herself to tat so she could add decorative trim to dolls' dresses. She makes her dolls clothes from fabric scraps, the shoes from pieces of upholstery fabric and the hair from purchased wigs.

Mrs. Krizek said she never counted how many dolls she has. She said many are packed away, but they are meant to be keepsakes that she will pass on to her grandchildren.

— Story and photos by Carolyn Plotts