

Ruth Handler, creator of the Barbie doll, dies at 85

LOS ANGELES (AP) — Ruth Handler, who created Barbie, the world's most popular doll and an American icon that helped shape girls' dreams while infuriating feminists, has died. She was 85.

Handler, who also co-founded the Mattel toy company, died at Century City Hospital Saturday morning of complications from colon surgery she underwent three months ago, said Elliot Handler, her husband.

Since Handler's creation, named for her daughter Barbara, was introduced in 1959 it has become a touchstone of cultural politics.

The impossibly well-endowed doll — her original figure would be about 39-18-33 if she were human — has drawn the ire of feminists, inspired artists and intrigued academics around the world. Barbie even was placed in the official "America's Time Capsule" buried in 1976.

The original blue-eyed, blonde fashion model has morphed over the decades into a variety of ethnic looks and has had many careers, from astro-

naut to veterinarian.

More than 1 billion have been sold in 150 countries.

"My whole philosophy of Barbie was that through the doll, the little girl could be anything she wanted to be," Handler wrote in a 1994 autobiography. "Barbie always represented the fact that a woman has choices."

With the new doll, girls could play out their dreams of adolescence and beyond. Barbie, after all, could go to the prom, get married, or even travel to the moon.

"Over and over I've had it said to me by women," Handler told The Associated Press in 1994. "She was much more than a doll for them. She was part of them." Handler kept a gold-plated Barbie in her Century City high-rise.

Barbie's birth came at a time when the usual doll was a baby. Handler decided to create a more mature plaything — with breasts, as she once put it — after noticing that her daughter liked to play with paper cutout dolls of teenagers and career women.

Mattel's male ad executives

were unimpressed with the but several years later she got the doll into production.

Her concept was modeled on a sexy German precursors Lilli, based on a comic strip. Barbie was more than a doll.

The 11 1/2-inch-tall doll was a fresh-faced Midwesterner with a ponytail and a black and white striped swimsuit.

Barbie debuted at the American Toy Fair in New York City in 1959. She was an instant hit and in the first year 350,000 dolls were sold at \$3 each.

Barbie went on to make a fortune for Mattel, which has not only versions of the doll but an expanding number of outfits and accessories.

Later dolls were named after Ken, named for Handler's boy friend, her little sister, Skipper, and pals Midge and Christie. Later dolls were named after Handler's grandchildren. Handler was born in New York City in 1917. She moved to Southern California at 19, later marrying her school boyfriend and working in industrial design.

Russians protest Catholic power

MOSCOW (AP) — About 1,500 people gathered in downtown Moscow Sunday to protest the rising profile of the Roman Catholic Church in Russia.

Similar rallies took place in 25 other Russian cities, the news agency Interfax reported.

The rallies underlined rising tensions over the dominant Russian Orthodox Church's contention that the Vatican is poaching on its traditional territory. The Orthodox Church was especially angered by the Vatican's decision this year to upgrade four apostolic administrations in Russia to full dioceses.

At the Moscow rally, on Slavianskaya Square, protesters held posters that read "Vatican Out." The rally was organized by the Union of Orthodox Citizens and the Party of Russia.

In April, the bishop of one of the dozen Polish citizen Jerzy Mazur, was denied entry into Russia. Another foreign priest, Italian Stefano Caprio, who has parishes in Russia had his visa removed while leaving the country and has been refused a new one to re-enter. The Russian Orthodox Church has denied comment on either incident.

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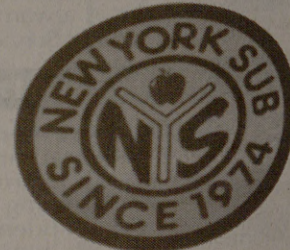
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