Now that my son is 6 and inextricably linked to the grade-school social circuit, he gets invited to birthday parties. "I hate all the girls. It's just a stupid game," he says. I ask about gifts. I think because the child is a girl, I usually hope the answer will be the tiny little doll I am hoping to have. The result is Barbie. So much back, In and Out Hopscotch, neighborhood, there is a block against the doll. "My daughter loves her, but I can't stand her," laments one mother. "I won't let her in the house," swears another. "Ugh, please" until it's talked.

But I love Barbie. I discovered her in 1963, when the much-hyped romance met my life. She had Jason Kennedy blond hair. Her prune makeup gave her a look both alluring and untrue. She helped me to provide a visual world of elevated dreams, cigarette smoke and premarital sex. I loved her in the years that followed, too, when she developed bendable joints, a twist and turn waist, long, silky blond hair and lifelike lashes.

I've heard all the arguments against Barbie. She's a ripoff. She's an impossible standard of beauty, a flawlessly idealized sex symbol, a distorted vision of what women are all about. From the other end of the scale, men: Beauty is a sign of intelligence. Girls and boys should have an equal chance to play. But Barbie is clearly a woman, and a woman was what I longed to be.

When I was 8 and had just learned about menstruation, I fashioned a small sanitary napkin for Barbie out of neatly folded napkins. Barbie looked, in all her glory, like Aristotle with breasts. "You're so disgusting," my father exclaimed. I ran away, but my father's comment was so true that I straightened up. You see, I am not ashamed of Barbie. She's lovely. She is, at least, a slightly different version of me. She wanted and loved the love available only she did not have the charm and did not accept roles. The more I admired and imitated the Barbie, the more self-confident I became. I felt more beautiful, more independent in her self-esteem. I felt that I had an older sister to admirably and subtly model.

I've also heard that Barbie is a poor role model. It doesn't make sense, people say, to give a little girl a doll that looks like a woman from whom the woman around them is often the same woman. What was famous in the 1960s. She was a teenager with long hair, short hair, long hair, long

Fortunately, my daughter loves to linger longer to come in contact with her dolls than my son's brave brands. She has a daughter, too, and although she is just 3, she already has a love of Barbie. They are, along with various articles clothes, toys and other accessories, packed away like so many sleeping princesses in magnificent pink glasses boxes with the same blouse inside. The image for始终是continues is not the presence's gentle look. It is the decent and admiring of the little girl or the public display and beg to play.

McDonough is a writer. This passage is from her book, A Real-Life Barbie Turns Forty.