

Wind-up Toys Keep Decatur Resident Young at Heart

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As a professional life coach for over 20 years, Debi Miller spends her days helping people learn to relax and work through stressful situations. As for herself, Miller discovered a creative way years ago to wind down from a stresses: The Decatur resident loves wind-up toys. Sitting on the floor, Miller spreads out her collection of more than 100 wind-up toys and lets them go.

“I have been collecting these toys for the last ten years,” said Miller, 50. “They make me laugh and give me joy when playing with them.”

Miller’s colorful collection of wind-up toys keeps her young at heart. A number of her larger toys are made of metal, while many of Miller’s favorites are small, plastics that can fit in the palm of her hand.

“Family and friends give them to me when they travel from all over the place,” she said. “I have a few that are from different countries like Australia and China.”

Miller said that the hunt for new toys is also a big part of her enjoyment in collecting. She finds toys on vacation trips, novelty stores and even local grocery stores. A small number of the toys that she collects are antique replicas that she either got as gifts or found at a toy store in Stone Mountain Park.

“This store sells older and unique toys like the kind you had when you were a kid,” she said. Her favorite antique replica is a duck on a tricycle with a spinner of his head.

“This one is so humorous because he looks like he is pedaling about 80 miles an hour,” Miller said.

Miller’s collection of wind-up toys doesn’t break her wallet because she pays about \$20 to \$40 for antique replicas and as little as \$3 for others.

“A lot of my toys were gifts. During the holidays, that is all that I ask for,” she said. “Sometimes, I get duplicates and just give the extra ones away.”

At least once a month, Miller winds up as many of the toys as possible just for fun. Sometimes, young visitors will play with her to help.

“I have a toy box for my friend’s kids that visit. They love to come and play with me,” said Miller.

Most of her wind-up toy collection are antique replicas and sturdy enough to play with. She has a ritual of playing with them at least once a month and needs four or five people to help her wind them all up. “These toys are fun to play with; they are not to sit up and look nice.”

One of Miller’s favorite wind-up toys is a little puppy that hops around doing a little spin then landing on its feet. Miller recently added another animal toy to her collection that she found at Kroger—a mother duck and her ducklings. The mother duckling, about two inches tall, has three baby ducks connected to her by a string. When you wind it up, the mother duck waddles with babies in tow.

Miller comes from a family of collectors. Her mother collects antique dolls; her brother collects knives and swords; and her sister-in-law collects German figurines. Miller says her mother sparked her interest in collecting.

“I found my first toy at a garage sale my mother was having at home in Illinois,” said Miller. “It was a little Mr. Potato Head and I loved it because it reminded me of my childhood.”