

## Bedtime Stories

*by Donna Bishop*

Hurry, get ready for bed. It's time for Mother to read another chapter of the adventures of Marcella and her playroom full of dolls. Marcella is a fortunate little girl with all kinds of dolls, stuffed animals, play dishes, a tea set and even a wooden horse. She has all the furniture to play house. Marcella loves all her toys. All day she makes up imaginary games and activities, changes their clothes, feeds them crackers and sugar water (that would be tea) and tucks each one into their bed or neatly puts them on the shelf before closing the playroom for the evening.

Do you have any idea what toys do when the house is quiet and the family is sleeping? They come alive! They walk and talk and think! They laugh and sometimes cry but most of all they just have a wonderful time being together. Marcella's playroom is the home of wonderful friends like Raggedy Ann and Raggedy Andy, Beloved Belindy, the Camel with the Wrinkled Knees, the French doll, the Indian Chief, and many more. The stories center around two rag dolls with identical faces, one dressed as a girl in a floral dress with a white pinafore and pantaloons, the other dressed as a boy with blue pants, striped shirt and a sailor cap. Both dolls have red yarn hair and shoe button eyes. Raggedy Ann has a very special red heart stitched on her chest that says "I love you." These dolls and the books are the creation of the American writer and artist Johnny Gruelle, who patented Raggedy Ann in 1915 and released his first book and the doll together in 1918. The marketing concept was a huge success. This series of books and the dolls are still being sold ninety-seven years after they were first created. The Gruelle idea was that books for children should contain nothing to cause fright, suggest fear, glorify mischief, excuse malice or condone cruelty. These standards contributed to Raggedy Ann's delay till 2002 in being inducted in the National Toy Hall of Fame. She paved the way for Raggedy Andy being added in 2007.

Raggedy Ann was my early female role model. She was kind, loving and compassionate. She was the natural leader of all the other toys. The dolls and animals had many adventures outside the playroom but Raggedy Ann always got them back into their places before dawn. It would not do for Marcella to find anything or anyone out of their place. I learned from her to have fun, take reasonable risks but always be responsible for my actions. She cared for others and taught me to do the same.

These lessons of my early childhood have served me well. Four of these cherished books still sit on my shelf. They are tattered, worn and contain my name misspelled in the large print of a preschooler. The books contain timeless wisdom for those who choose to read.