

Living Doll

by Laird Darren Gallagher

Well, when we first started this "In the Down Time" run of articles, I never thought it would grow to what it is or see some of the things that have popped up out of the woodwork. And this is certainly no exception. Before we go any further, I want you to have a good look at these photos, go on, look. What if I told you that these were dolls? Pretty crazy stuff eh. When Warrant Officer John Prince told us of his wife Ellen, and her hobby, we thought we'd take a closer look, and here is what we found.

So Ellen before we get into this, tell us about your husband.

My husband John now works as an Electronics Instructor with the Electrical Services Wing at Bandiana. It's nice to finally have him at home.

For the last two years John has lived and worked Sydney. Our children are at an age where we didn't want to disturb their schooling so we decided to opt for member with dependant separated (MWDS). It wasn't easy by any stretch but it was just another experience in our military life.

He is also the new Social member for the ALSM. This is a very involved role but one that he appears to enjoy immensely. On top of that he also takes our Son to Cubs on Monday nights, where he is also going to become a Leader,



Baby in kit form

as he did for our daughters. On Thursday nights he takes our eldest daughter to Army Cadets and then on Sunday he spends the entire day with our other daughter at Navy Cadets.

That must keep him pretty busy, but I can see from these pictures that you must have your hands full. These pictures are simply astonishing to the point where I'm not sure where to start. How did you get into this kind of thing?



Completed version

Thank you for that and yes you are correct, I certainly have my hands full. I think I thrive on organised chaos these days (laughs)

It was simply my love of craft that lead into this latest 'addiction'. I love babies and children and this is just another way of something

that represents my loves in this world I guess. It all started from my mother sending me some information on miniature babies created out of fondant icing, about 3 years ago. From there one search simply lead into another until I heard all about Reborning through Ebay. I remember seeing these beautiful dolls and they just took my breath away. Given I was ready for another challenge in crafting I just took it from there.

Is it expensive? How many have you made?

It has been a long and expensive teething process over the last two years but after almost 40 dolls I am fully addicted. I am now at the point of looking at

the idea of teaching others this wonderful art form. Of course it's not an art form that appeals to everyone. In fact I have had some abusive feedback at times telling me that I must be sick in the head etc. But I take no notice of that sort of thing because it is after all simply another form of art and handicraft.



In another outfit

I'm very proud of John and his commitment to the Corps and his Uniform. I'm a very proud Defence Spouse and try to make his life between his Military and Civilian family as supportive as possible. Let's face it, in today's economic climate we could be doing a lot worse. Military life is not an easy life with growing children and all the disturbances, but it is a good and secure life. I guess it really just started with my passion for craft and always searching for a new challenge. It keeps my interest up. It's just another art form.

Do many people engage in this hobby?

Reborning, or Newborning, although it has been around for a little while now, is really just starting to hit its stride I think. People are only just beginning to refine their work to the stage where you take a plain piece of moulded vinyl and turn it into what looks like a living breathing baby. I have already created

While in Sydney John did a couple of deployments overseas to Iraq and Afghanistan, this is what inspired little Oscar's outfit in his photographs. I like to incorporate our military life into my crafts as a bit of a

another addict in my best friend. She now not only creates beautiful babies but also hand makes all the clothes for them as well.

It is such a fun and creative art form that you just never get bored. Every baby is totally different and you just never know exactly what you are creating until the end.

How do you actually do it? What do you start with?

There are two ways of creating these wonderful babies. One is called 'Reborning', this was the first on the scene. This is when you take a suitable vinyl baby doll and strip it right back so that it is completely a blank canvas. The other way is known as 'Newborning' which is when you buy a vinyl kit consisting of the head, arms and legs.

Once I have my kit I then start working. I have special paints called Genesis Heat Set Paints. I start by first creating 'veins' all over the baby, wherever is appropriate, depending on the age I'm wanting to achieve. From there I work in very thin layers and just gradually build up the paint until it has the appearance of real skintones. Each and every step is baked onto the vinyl. These paints are absolutely wonderful. Once they are set they are permanent. They have been specially created for the reborn market. They never fade, peel, chip or crack. They, in fact, work with the vinyl and remain the same for many, many years.

Once I have a skintone I am happy with I seal it all with a special Heat Set Matte Varnish. This prevents the 'baby' getting an unnatural shine to it over the years. It also gives the skin a texture which is just another part of their realism.

After all the painting is finished I will work on the hair. For this process I sit with magnifying glasses and a bright light. The hair is in fact premium quality Angora Goat Mohair. It has the closest look and feel to natural baby hair.

All in all these babies can take anywhere from 80 to over 200 hours to create from start to finish. It all comes down to details and what I am trying to achieve.

Is there much trial and error?

Thankfully, although time consuming and expensive, I have not had a great deal of error happen. There really is nothing that cannot be undone if a mistake is made. The paint can be stripped and the hair can be pulled out right up until it is sealed in place.

I have a regular customer in the USA and she is very fussy and particular about her babies. It is nothing for her to have me changing the blushing or the hairstyle of a babe 3 or 4 times.

It must have freaked John out a bit to come home from a deployment and see a new baby :) Is the process you use the same as the ones used by movie makers?

(Laughs) Well, it's not the most common of things to come home to. He is used to my craft addictions I think so he probably expected something like this to come along. It does get people curious though when they ring and you say you just have to get a baby out of the oven (laughs).

Many reborners are now being contracted by movie companies in the USA and UK to create babies for movie props. They are so realistic in their colouring, weight and hair that you really do think they are real babies. Until you notice that they're not breathing (laughs)

IN THE DOWNGRADE

defence

family matters

Online EXTRA!

Well there you have it folks - another weird and wonderful past-time unlocked for all to see. Certainly if you are involved in something that you would like us to take a look at, get in touch and let us know, because knowing is half the battle.

Cheers for now.