
DON'T SAY "CAN'T" —YOU CAN



It's never too late to set out to achieve a goal. Museum owner, Marlene Ruth, proves this to be true at age 83. She credits Mother Teresa for walking her through the opening of Ruth's Dolls just two years ago and she now has a goal to make a name for her museum. "Do what you want to do in life and don't say 'can't,'" Ruth says, echoing the sentiments from her late husband.

After her husband passed away, Ruth was contemplating what she wanted to do with her life. "I don't want to be a caretaker anymore. I want to take care of dolls," she concluded. There were 4,000 dolls in her collection at the time—75 of which she made herself. But after taking in many donations since, she's lost count of how many dolls she actually has.

What started as a childhood collection has now turned into an eclectic display of dolls for the public. The dolls are as diverse as the people who come to visit. Ranging in ethnicities and temperaments, Ruth's Dolls depict something of the human race. They just don't give you any trouble, Ruth points out, despite the common opinion that dolls are creepy.

"They don't talk, they don't give you any trouble and that's why I love them so much," Ruth said. She even has a room dedicated to just clowns, which some visitors refuse to go in.

Ruth also sees a lot of resistance from men, who just don't find a particular interest in dolls. But it's not unusual for them to not only be surprised, but impressed by the collection once they go in. She even had one man apologize for his reluctance and leave a nice donation after his visit.

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“The dolls are real life as far as I’m concerned.” Ruth explained that they connect us to history and to memories. She loves it when someone spots the doll from their childhood during a tour. It gives visitors a chance to go back in time and these are stories they will go home and talk about. “It makes me feel good to have people come in and enjoy the collection,” she said.

Since buying the building for her museum, Ruth has experienced something new: a budget. “I know what it is to have a hard time paying a bill,” she said, reflecting on the times she never had to think twice about making a purchase. “I’m learning a lesson as I go,” she said. Marlene laughs despite the new hardship, explaining that she will put things back on the shelf after looking at the price tag.

But “it doesn’t cost to be happy,” she points out. “You’re happy because you want to be,” Ruth said sharing her belief that people should do things to make their life better.

Don’t let ‘can’t’ stop you from achieving what you want in life. That’s the message Ruth wants to share with people and she’s certainly lived up to her own advice. She never got an education, but she managed to open and run her own restaurant and catering business, spent some time working in medical offices, and now, her museum. “The dolls are it,” she said. “I know you’re not going to meet anybody as crazy as me but at least I’m happy, right?”

Ruth says she has lived a full life, but “I’m still going and I still have all my energy,” she said. And she is using her energy to put her museum on the map, with confidence that she will make it happen. “If I leave this earth tomorrow, this will go on,” she said. “I am going to make it famous.”

Plan Your Visit

Ruth’s Dolls is located in quaint Pollock Pines, Calif. When you plan your visit to the museum, be ready for a surprise. It’s the most common reaction, from visitors; they are shocked by the sheer size of the collection.

And when you visit, be sure to pin your hometown on her map. Ruth takes pride in this feature which records visitors from as far away as Turkey, Iran, the Philippines, China and Russia.

Ruth is currently building a website. To book a tour, you can simply call the museum at 530-903-3360. Operating hours are Wednesday through Sunday from 11 a.m. until 4 p.m.

The museum operates strictly through donations. Ruth doesn’t buy or sell, but her collection does continue to grow as it is common for visitors to return to the museum with a donation.

On May 27, Ruth’s Dolls will celebrate its two-year anniversary.

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