

# Positive Feedback

## It's not make-believe for collectors of *Let's Pretend*

Once upon a time, when Pamela Koehler was a little girl growing up in Northern California, she literally wore out her turntable with a set of children's story albums that she still affectionately remembers acquiring, almost 35 years ago. "I used to beg my mother to buy them when I saw them at Sears," she said. Clear on the other side of the country, in Sutton, Mass., Lea Ann O'Neill has her own fond memories of the same albums. "I would sit in my bedroom, with the record player on, at my desk drawing pictures or just imagining the characters in the stories."

In the early 1970s, when cartoons were on Saturday morning only and Disney was on Sunday evening only, TeleGeneral's *Let's Pretend* albums allowed children to use their imagination via the family turntable. The series of 25 records were instant eye-catchers, with the colorful, original art of David Chestnutt gracing every cover. Each album features a number of voice actors and a kindly narrator, named Uncle Ted, who starts each album with an inviting, "Come one, come all, the big, the small, we're here for *Let's Pretend*." Albums included every popular children's story from "Aladdin And His Magic Lamp" to "Tinderbox," all told in a "radio drama" style, complete with sound effects and orchestrated music. As with all stories, the tale of these recordings goes back, "a long, long time ago..." to when most of the parents of these young fans weren't even born.

*Let's Pretend* actually started out titled as *The Adventures Of Helen And Mary*, in the late 1920s. It was later called *The Land Of Let's Pretend*, which evolved into its final shortened title in the early 1930s. Nila Mack, a successful Broadway actress, wrote, produced and directed the segment, which later became its own half-hour show, beginning in 1934. Adult as well as many child actors would re-enact her adaptations of classic fairy tales, with the help of "Uncle Bill," who hosted the programs. The theme music was a catchy jingle for Cream Of Wheat commercials ("Cream Of Wheat is so good to eat that we have to sing this song..."), which sponsored the show. *Let's Pretend* ended its successful run in 1954.

Some two decades later TeleGeneral Corporation brought back the concept of the series for a whole new audience of children, who were using bedroom record players instead of the living-room radio for entertainment.

"My favorites were 'The Twelve Dancing Princesses' and 'Douban The Physician,'" said Koehler, who has spent



Photos courtesy of Jim Knittle

several years and "a thousand dollars or more" tracking down every one of the albums (many of them still sealed) on eBay and other online auction sites. "I guess there is a tangible link to my childhood that is the driving force in collecting them — there are very few tangible items that usually survive!"

"It's funny; I don't even own a record player anymore," said O'Neill, who has spent hundreds of dollars finding the entire set on eBay. "It's a nostalgia thing for me. These stories are just nice kids stories that propel the imagination into a different world. Maybe with all the TV, video games and general technology I just feel that there's nothing left to the imagination anymore."

"Unfortunately, I have found that my daughters have not been as taken with them as I was," said Koehler. "I think the modern influence of computers and the constant access to instant entertainment like cartoons and iPods, has made them unable to enjoy them as I did. I mean, how can these stories compete with the graphic images and sounds of *Lord Of The Rings*, *Harry Potter* and *Star Wars*?"

Have you found a long-lost record from your youth on an online auction site? I'd love to hear about it. Contact me at [positivefeedback@isleofwrite.com](mailto:positivefeedback@isleofwrite.com)

— Lisa Wheeler