

## **TOY Story: The Faceless Canadian**

Ms Koval and her students stood looking at a display case in Canada's Museum of Civilization in Gatineau.

"Miss, Miss-look! This doll has no face!"

There sat a doll (lialka) with no features.

A doll with no face. No expression. Nothing.

Instead, there was a cross (khrest) of tightly knit multicoloured threads wrapped around her head. She looked soft and her clothes were made of scraps of fabrics.

The doll sat in a whimsical exhibit of many, many different toys from across Canada.

There were wooden horses, carts, and games. And lots of dolls.

There were dolls of every shape and colour, with fake eyelashes who blink their eyes and say 'mama', made from plastic, wood, porcelain, terracotta, jade and cloth.

But that featureless one intrigued the teacher and her students.

For Ms Koval in particular, it stirred something in her – something from a long time ago.

Over a few moments, the memory came together – faintly at first, but then clearly as if it were yesterday: She remembered an old woman cuddling a small child singing a soothing lullaby (kolyskova) in a beautiful language from far away. And in the child's arms was a doll much like the very one in front of her here at the Museum.

The memory vanished as quickly as it appeared.

“Miss, Miss” a student called out.

Peering into the case, he pointed to a small sign.

“Motanka, Poltava, Ukraine , Gift by Unknown Donor, travelling on ship *Andania*, arriving in Quebec from Ukraine on July 3, 1927”, he read loudly.

“Miss, Miss, what does it all mean?”

And so the teacher explained that Poltava was a city in Ukraine, and how the waves of Ukrainian immigration arrived in Canada to look for better life, bringing their lives in small suitcases.

On her walk home from school, Ms Koval continued to think about her flashback and decided to call her elderly mother.

“Mama, I had this dream about a doll with no face....”.

When she was finished recounting her memory, there was a long silence.

“You are remembering your Baba (Grandmother),” Ms. Koval’s mother finally said. “She took care of you while I was ill. And you are the child, holding the doll that Baba had made especially for you.

She continued: “You were an anxious and restless child. The only time I remember you being calm was when Baba rocked you and you in turn cradled “Lyalya” (doll) in your arms”.

The next day, during class, Ms Koval talked with her students about what they learned at the toy exhibit.

Divided into small groups, the students searched the Internet to find the origins of the many toys they saw at the Museum of Civilization.

Rozalia and Luke had taken a particular interest in the featureless doll, which the children had started calling “FunnyFace”. Where did their research take them?

They discovered that this doll has very ancient roots, and that its pattern has survived to the present day in Central Ukraine. They even found modern artists in Poltava who make these dolls in the ancient style.

Rozalia and Luke were surprised to find out that “FunnyFace” was actually a very special item. It represented the ancient figure of Protectress (Berehynia).

In the prehistoric times, people believed that Berehynia could bring comfort and shield the child from any misfortune (neshchastya). In ancient times, the doll wasn't a toy at all; it was a talisman (oberih).

Rozalia and Luke shared their research with Ms Koval and the other children. But one big question remained unanswered for them all: Why was the doll faceless? Why no expression, not even eyes, or a mouth?

They were far too curious to let this go. And Ms. Koval had an idea: She suggested e-mailing the Ukrainian artists. Surely they would know!

Within days, the children had their response. An artist from (Poltava) wrote to them saying that it was because nobody knew what Berehynya looked like. So she could be anybody to anyone. The artist also said he was thrilled by the interest the Canadian children had shown in this ancient craft. In fact, he promised to send them a doll for their class and encouraged the children to make Berehynya their own.

"Hey, that sounds pretty neat," chimed Luke.

"If you give it to Pi Cheng, the doll will be Chinese. If Carlos gets it - she will become Spanish. But if Borys gets her, she will be Ukrainian! 'FunnyFace' helps everyone! She is truly Canadian!"

A week went by when two packages arrived at school wrapped almost identically with brown paper and tied with a string. When Ms. Koval carried them in to the classroom, all eyes were on them, wide with curiosity.

Children gathered around Ms Koval's desk, watching her carefully open the first package.

Slowly, with care, she took out the treasure that had been sent by their artist friend in Ukraine.

It was a beautiful "FunnyFace". "Made in Poltava, Ukraine, 2011", read Rozalia. "She is amazing!"

But what was in the second package? As carefully as she did with the first, Ms. Koval untied the twine and pulled back the brown paper. And she could hardly believe what she saw: Lying there was a tattered old "FunnyFace", the one she had loved and cradled in her own Baba's arms.

As she choked back her tears, Ms. Koval explained: "It's from my mother in Manitoba. It is my own 'FunnyFace' made for me a long time ago by my Baba. She remembered the ancient pattern when she came from Ukraine in 1899 – the same pattern that the artists are still using in Ukraine today."

"I had no idea my mother had kept it for me all these years..." And Ms. Koval's voice trailed off with her memory. She picked up the doll, held it to her face, smelled her own childhood, and felt the comfort that this "FunnyFace" had brought her in her Baba's arms.

"Children!" She snapped back to the present. "These dolls are a treasure for us today – just as they were for the children in ancient Ukraine when they were their talismans. Just as they were for the immigrant children who held them tightly on their voyages to unknown land across the ocean. Just as it was for me when my mother was sick."

She didn't have to finish her thought, because Luke eagerly jumped in: "And just as it can be for the many people who need that same comfort today!"

Ms Koval looked at her class of excited children and asked. "Could we perhaps share the comfort of FunnyFace with others? Who do you think needs a lot of it these days?"

“Little kids!” “Sick people!” “Children in Afghanistan!” she was bombarded with answers.

Rozalia jumped up and said “Look - we now know how to make ‘FunnyFace’ dolls! Why don’t we make a whole set and find a way to share them in our school and around the world with those who need them most?”

Ms Koval smiled and pulled out a sheet of paper. “Who will bring white broadcloth? Cotton wool? Ribbon for the faces? Fabric? ...”