

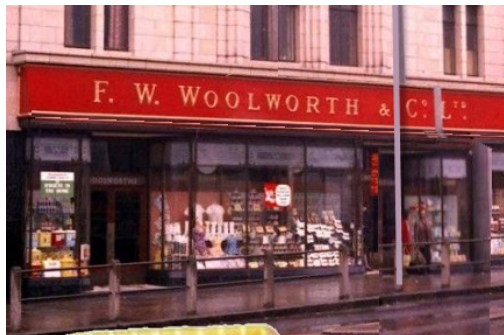
Ponytail Dolls

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Posted 2026 July 17

Of all the toys my sister and I played with as little kids, these little 5" ponytail dolls are among the most memorable, maybe because we bought them for ourselves.

For a few years when we were really young, it was a ritual: on the last school day of the year (known locally as "Grading Day"), my dad would give us each a dollar, and we'd walk downtown to Woolworth's to find a treasure or two. I'm guessing we were six and seven, and we didn't often have money of our own, so this kick-off to summer was a huge treat.



Almost inevitably we'd end up buying one of these Ponytail dolls, which we'd play with all summer until we literally wore them out.



Ponytail dolls came in various sizes, from 5" tall to just over 9" tall. Our Woolworth's didn't carry the full range of sizes; the ones we bought were 5" tall. These weren't a high-end item; instead, they were a dime store fare, imported from Japan in massive quantities after the Second World War.

For the paltry 19 cents or so that they cost, the dolls were actually pretty cool. They had moveable arms and legs, and "rooted saran hair" that you could actually brush. The hair – typically a reddish-brown colour – was tied in a ponytail. The dolls were bald underneath, so you couldn't really style the hair, but still. Apparently these dolls came in a blonde version too, though I don't recall ever seeing them at our Woolworth's.

It's possible that there were different companies making similar dolls, because there were other variations too. For instance, some came with bare feet, while some of the larger sizes seem to have had actual removable shoes. The ones we bought usually had little red shoes and socks painted on. (I have one tiny one in my collection that has painted-on high heels. She's now a Christmas tree ornament.)

Some had additional little accessories, like a tiny hair curler and a comb, or a baby's bottle. Apparently some of them even came with a bathtub (!). Most often, though, the package contained only the little doll, dressed for modesty in a tiny pair of panties. We had to improvise their outfits ourselves.



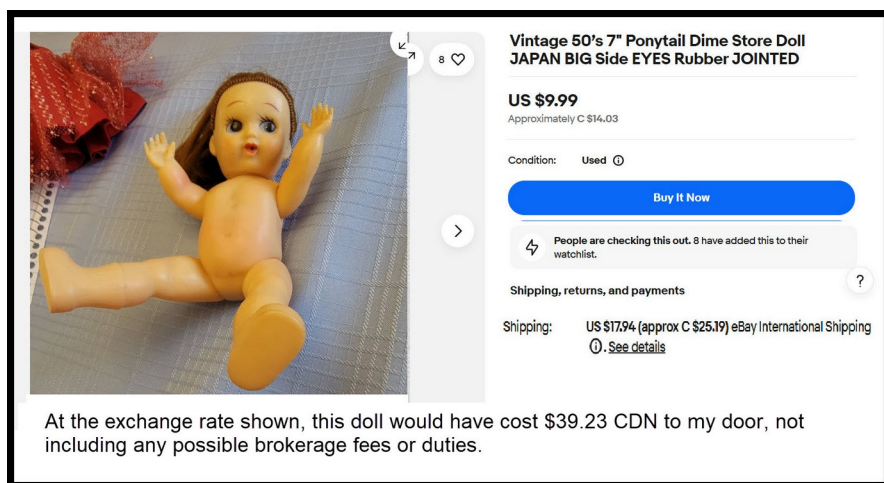
Some years ago I decided I'd like to gift my sister with a ponytail doll, just for nostalgia's sake . . . if there were any left to be had. I wasn't too terribly optimistic about finding one for her, because if truth be told, these dolls were rather cheaply made, and the joints were often weak. By the end of a summer's play, the legs or arms were falling off and couldn't be re-attached because the flanges that held them on had torn free. I wasn't sure I would ever find an intact Ponytail, but I kept on looking anyway.

Then one day in an antique market, after years of searching, at long last I saw her: an actual Ponytail doll, dressed in a homemade outfit.

She was larger than the ones we used to play with – about 9" tall – but she was the genuine article, and she was the first and only one I'd seen in years of looking. I thought the \$15 price a mite high, but I happily paid it.



Turns out it was a bit of a bargain after all: this one that I found on ebay at the time would have cost nearly \$40 to get it to my door.



At the exchange rate shown, this doll would have cost \$39.23 CDN to my door, not including any possible brokerage fees or duties.



Not so terribly long after I found the one for my sister, my doll-collecting friend found a 5" Ponytail in a lot of dolls she purchased. She wasn't interested in keeping it, and knowing of my quest, she gifted the little tyke to me.

My Ponytail doll is just the size we used to buy back in the olden days. She looks a bit of a ragamuffin, wearing a scrap of gingham fashioned into a makeshift dress, but she's still got her curler. And I finally had my own Ponytail doll, after all those years.

Apparently where one Ponytail gathers, others will follow. I'd gotten into the habit of looking, and eventually I found another of the 9" Ponytails. She is still dressed in what I take to be her original party dress, and with removeable socks and shoes. (The little ones didn't come with dresses, but apparently some of the larger ones did).

I was tickled to have found her, considering how long it took me to find the first one that I gifted to my sister, and how rare they've become. Any that are still around would be at least 60 years old now.

But wait – there's more.



Pinkie was followed by another large sized Ponytail, this one with the painted shoes and socks I recall so well. She's dressed in a hand-crocheted purple dress that someone made for her.

She is by far the most robust of the Ponytails that I've found, and I speculate that the larger dolls were more solidly made than the tiny ones my sister and I use to purchase; certainly there seem to be more of them still extant. Finding this doll brought my collection – if that's what it was – up to four, plus The one I'd gifted to my sister. Seems like that should be enough, right?

Well. While browsing one day in my *least* favourite thrift store, I spotted a bag containing five Pony-tails. To my surprise, all of them were small, 6"

size or under, including the one that was destined for my Christmas tree. I had not expected to find even *one* more small Ponytail, doll, because I had figured that most of the little ones, with their thinner plastic limbs, had worn out long ago, the same way as ours did after a summer of play. This latest acquisition brought the group to nine. Okay, so now *that* should be enough . . . but then, you never know.



When I walked into one of our regular thrifting places yesterday, what caught my eye but two more lovely 9" Ponytails, both of them dressed in adorable knitted sweaters. (For modesty's sake I whipped them up some panties before taking their photo.)

Maybe I overpaid for them at \$5 apiece, but they are in such lovely condition, and I have one more sister who might like to have one. Maybe one of these girls will be making her way there come Christmas. Now I think I have enough Ponytails. I can't imagine finding any more.



It's been fun searching out – and finding – these dolls that my sister and I remember so fondly. The Ponytails were long over when my youngest sisters were little kids, so to them, without the colouring of nostalgia, these are just ugly old dolls. But to us, they are and ever will be infused with the magic of those childhood summers, when we walked down to Woolworth's together, dollars clutched in our hands, and chose them for ourselves.

