



Todd Heisler / Staff photographer

Randy Struthers has been collecting "Wizard of Oz" memorabilia since he was 5 years old, after he saw the movie for the first time. Struthers says he's probably watched the film a thousand times since then.

By Robert Baker
SUN CORRESPONDENT

It has been 60 years since Dorothy first led moviegoers down that magical yellow brick road in search of Oz.

Today, Randy Struthers, 16, and a Lincoln-Way High School junior, still follows the path toward the Wizard that he learned to love as a child by collecting Oz memorabilia.

"I've probably watched the movie a thousand times since I was 5 years old," Struthers said. It was also about the same time he bought his first six Wizard of Oz dolls depicting Dorothy, the cowardly Lion in search of courage, the Tinman seeking a heart, the frightened Scarecrow looking for a brain, the Wicked Witch of the West, and Glinda, the Good Witch.

"And don't forget Toto, too," Struthers said as he held up a miniature doll of Dorothy's little dog from his collection. "I had \$20 back then, and I begged my uncle for the other \$40 so I could buy all the dolls."

FOR THE LOVE OF OZ

The collection has now grown to include a 1970 Oz board game, tin containers, cups, T-shirts, Franklin Mint collectibles, plates, hanging ornaments, bells, porcelain statuettes and a group of books and photos totaling a sizable investment for a high school kid.

As for his favorite collectible, Struthers pointed to a replica of Dorothy's ruby slippers. The purchase was made over the Internet for \$250, but Struthers was disappointed in the final product, which had red sequins glued on instead of sewn on as in the original shoes. He now intends to make his own pair of "ruby slippers" if he can find just the right shoes.

Struthers disagrees with some Oz enthusiasts, saying there were only four pair of original ruby slippers used in the movie instead of seven pair. One of those pairs is in the Smithsonian Institute.

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Lincoln-Way student's 'Wizard of Oz' fascination takes him 'Over the Rainbow'

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Struthers even went so far as to track down and contact the owners of those four pairs of shoes. A few just brushed him off or didn't respond, but one man, Anthony Landini, responded and has now become somewhat of a pen pal.

Landini bought the shoes for \$165,000 at a Christy's auction from a woman who had won the pair 48 years earlier in a studio promotion for the movie. Landini sent Struthers a color photo of the size 5

ruby slippers now displayed under glass at Disney World in Florida.

"I go to DisneyWorld/MGM several times a year, so maybe we can meet there sometime and I can arrange for you to hold them," Landini wrote to the young fan. It was exactly what Struthers wanted to hear.

Struthers explained his fascination with the shoes by quoting from "The Ruby Slippers of Oz."

"They're the containers that carry us down the road of life," Struthers recited.

As for favorite characters in the movie, Dorothy ranks as number one because of her bravery said

Struthers. The same idol-worship didn't apply to Dorothy in real life as Judy Garland.

"I couldn't believe the way she lived and died with the drugs and alcohol and I think what the studio did to her was horrible," Struthers said. "But it didn't change Oz for me."

Due to the number of times Struthers has seen the movie, he can even recite the Wizard of Oz script virtually verbatim right down to Dorothy's closing line: "Auntie Em, there's no place like home."

Perhaps "Somewhere Over the Rainbow" Randy Struthers will also be granted his wish to touch or even own a pair of those ruby slippers.