



DISPLAY: Daughter Betty Higgs shows off her late mother, Marie Prideaux's, enormous doll collection at their home in Numurkah.

Picture: GARY MEDLICOTT, The Age

Oh, you beautiful doll

It's Barbie's 50th birthday and she's having a party at Bendigo Art Gallery. **SARAH HARRIS** reports.

GUYS and dolls? "I know," Jason Boyle sighs, "a lot of people are stunned when I say I collect dolls. If my sons have friends over they warn them not to say anything about dad's dolls, but if my daughter has friends over I have to fight them for my Barbies."

The married father-of-four might not fit the mould of a doll collector, but that hasn't stopped him falling victim of stereotype.

"When I was 12 my father threw all my Barbies away. He said boys shouldn't have dolls," he recalls.

"Many years later he apologised to me for doing that. He understood my passion for fashion and antiques in the end."

Jason's love of dolls began when he was very small; he knocked his front teeth out in a fall and was given a Shirley Temple doll to placate him en route to hospital.

Today he has a collection of 3000 antique and collectible dolls.

"After Dad threw out my



PASSION: Jason Boyle, pictured with daughter Maelaani, is an avid collector of dolls.

dolls it just spurred me on," he laughs.

"I started to recollect all the dolls I had including my first Barbie who looked like Susan Dey out of *The Partridge Family*.

"It took me 20 years to find another just like her.

"She is now part of a huge collection of Barbies.

"I do have a lot of them that are mint in a box, but I also like to find dolls I can

restore and that have a bit of a history.

"I love the different fashions dolls wore because they are such an encapsulation of the different eras.

"I have a real passion for dolls from the '60s and '70s."

As a member of the Fashion and Celebrity Doll Collectors group, he is far from alone.

"It is amazing the different people who do collect and have a lifelong interest," Jason says.

"A lot of all the top fashion designers like Galliano, Gaultier actually started making clothes on their sister's Barbies.

"Then there are other people like John Wayne who collected Kachina dolls carved from cottonwood by Hopi Indians to represent the spirits."

Jason's own collection contains some culturally important dolls including a Door of Hope Mission doll.

The dolls created by destitute and abandoned girls rescued by Shanghai missionaries provide a record of life-in-miniature in China before the cultural revolution and are highly prized by antique collectors.

"My wife picked it up from a shop where they knew nothing about it

because she thought I might like it," Jason reveals.

"I nearly passed out when she gave it to me. She didn't pay very much for it and it is actually valued at \$US2000."

Jason's sentimental favourite, though, remains Barbie, particularly the vintage Steffi-faced model with dark hair and a closed mouth.

"I don't like blonde barbies with big eyes and great big smiles — they freak me out," he confesses.

From guys with dolls to a Melbourne-based entertainer who has appeared in productions of *Guys and Dolls*, the ever-popular Rhonda Burchmore is another major Barbie fan.

"I have always loved dolls. As a kid I used to have make-believe concerts with my dolls," she told *The Advertiser* from Brisbane where she is presently appearing in *Eurobeat — Almost Eurovision* with Glynn Nicholas.

"I still have one doll from my childhood which was one of those walking, talking dolls the height of a two-