

MAKING IT HAPPEN

Creating Success and Abundance



SPECIAL
COLLECTOR'S
EDITION



DISPLAY UNTIL 07/05

HOW I DID IT

DESIGNING DOLLS

Growing up in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania, Barbara El Wilson spent hours playing with dolls. And her passion for Raggedy Ann dolls remained. Today the Washington, D.C., resident is the owner of Sugarfoots, a home-based company that specializes in one-of-a-kind rag dolls, clothing and quilts. What makes Sugarfoots dolls unique is their complexion—cocoa, ginger and cinnamon—and the colorful pinafores, pantaloons and overalls each handmade doll wears. El Wilson, 42, also created a specialty line that celebrates Caribbean and Asian cultures.

DOLLS ON THE GO: "Ten years ago, on a visit to West Africa, I saw women carrying their wares in large baskets. Once home I started carrying my dolls everywhere, even on the subway."

MARKET-BOUND: "By 1998 I was taking orders from New York's FAO Schwarz, the California African-American Museum store, the Smithsonian Museum Shop in Washington, D.C., and countless specialty stores in St. Thomas and St. John in the U.S. Virgin Islands. To keep the dolls on store shelves, I had to relinquish personally making each doll, which takes up to four and a half hours, and contract some of the work out."

BRANCHING OUT: "In 1999 I created Sugarfoots Theatre Workshop to introduce youngsters to the art of storytelling. And last September, I created the Sugarfoots series of children's books. Sugarfoots dolls make the grumpiest people smile, and for me, that's the best part of it all."

To order, visit sugarfoots.com or call (800) 354-2909. —SHERRI A. MCGEE



work & wealth

54 ESSENCE APRIL 2002

BARBARA EL WILSON

When she was a child, Barbara El Wilson's father nicknamed her Sugarfoot, a term of endearment frequently used by folks in the South. Her mother told her that Sugarfoots were lovable dolls created in a southern village. The joy Barbara felt while playing with her rag dolls remained with her through adulthood, and she began making dolls as a hobby. In 1992, this Washington, D.C.-based entrepreneur turned her hobby into Sugarfoots—a unique line of handmade dolls that have cocoa, ginger and cinnamon complexions and wear colorful pinafores, pantaloons and overalls.

A CUT ABOVE

"These are not like your average rag dolls. They come in the brightest, most vibrant colors. Every culture is represented by the bright colors, and I want the dolls to show that. I want them to have a crossover feel."

MARKETING 101

"Ten years ago, on a visit to West Africa, I saw women carrying their wares in large baskets. Once I got home, I started carrying my dolls everywhere, even on the subway. I used to put the dolls in a big basket and pass out flyers. I sold a lot of dolls that way, but I can remember having calluses on my hands from the basket. Now everything is basically through mail order."

GROWING PAINS

"By 1998 I was taking orders from New York's FAO Schwarz, the California African-American Museum store, the Smithsonian Museum Shop in Washington, D.C., and countless specialty stores in the U.S. Virgin Islands. To keep the dolls on store shelves, I had to relinquish mak-

ing each doll personally, which takes up to four and a half hours. So now I contract some of the work out."

BUILDING MOMENTUM

"I can feel it picking up steam. Somebody came up to me in Washington's Eastern Market and said, 'Hey, you're the Sugarfoots lady.' I'm starting to get that all the time."

BRANCHING OUT

"In 1999 I created Sugarfoots Theatre Workshop to introduce youngsters to the art of storytelling. And in September 2001, I created the Sugarfoots series of children's books. My dolls make the grumpiest people smile, and for me, that's the best part of all."

MAKING IT HAPPEN

"Find the most creative means possible to get your product out. Face-to-face eye contact with people allowed me to gain exposure for my dolls. No matter how good your product is, if no one knows about it, it's just a great product."