



## Suggested Reading: Barbie

*Compiled by Leslie Goddard, Ph.D.*

Robin Gerber. *Barbie and Ruth: The Story of the World's Most Famous Doll and the Woman Who Created Her* (2010). A biography of Ruth Handler, specifically exploring her creation of Barbie and the subsequent impact on Mattel. My top pick

Ruth Handler, with Jacqueline Shannon. *Dream Doll: The Ruth Handler Story* (1994). Ruth Handler's autobiography. Hard to find, but worth seeking out for die-hard fans. Very readable and great for understanding the history of Barbie

M.G. Lord. *Forever Barbie: The Unauthorized Biography of a Real Doll* (1994). An academic cultural history of what Barbie has meant. Dense but fascinating and full of insights

Carol Spencer. *Dressing Barbie: A Celebration of the Clothes That Made America's Favorite Doll and the Incredible Woman Behind Them* (2023). A memoir by one of Barbie's long-term clothing designers, and a great look back at some of Barbie's most iconic fashions

Tanya Lee Stone. *The Good the Bad and the Barbie* (2010). Written for readers aged 12-15, but fascinating for any age. Full of interviews exploring what Barbie has meant to many fans

“My whole philosophy of Barbie was that through the doll, the little girl could be anything she wanted to be. Barbie always represented the fact that a woman has choices.”

– *Ruth Handler*



## Timeline

- 1916 Ruth Mosco born in Denver, CO. Marries Elliot Handler in 1938
- 1945 Handlers found Mattel with partner Harold Matson
- 1959 Barbie introduced at New York Toy Fair. First Barbie TV commercial airs during *Mickey Mouse Club*
- 1961 Ken, Barbie’s boyfriend, introduced in response to consumer requests
- 1968 Christie, one of the first black dolls, debuts as a friend of Barbie
- 1971 Malibu Barbie introduced
- 1975 Ruth Handler resigns as president of Mattel
- 1980 First black and Hispanic dolls named Barbie debut (previous diverse dolls were friends of Barbie)
- 1992 Totally Hair Barbie (which has outsold every other Barbie) debuts
- 2002 Ruth Handler dies, aged 85. Elliot Handler dies 9 years later at the age of 95
- 2016 Mattel introduces three new body types for Barbie (classic, petite, tall, curvy)
- 2023 The movie *Barbie*, directed by Greta Gerwig, becomes the highest grossing film of 2023



**Leslie Goddard**

Historian

[www.lesliegoddard.info](http://www.lesliegoddard.info) | L-Goddard@att.net