

# The Way I Got My Dolls

*Petagaye Farr*

**BEFORE YOU READ:** Did you make your own toys when you were little? Describe how you did it.

## Mango Seed and Braided Grass Dolls

I grew up in Jamaica as one of seven children. My mother could not afford to buy dolls for us, so we used mango seeds for our dolls. We would cut our hair and glue it to the mango seeds so that we could comb our dolls' hair. That didn't go well for us; my mother got angry at us for cutting our hair. So my brother Marcel went to the slaughterhouse and cut some dead cow's hairs for us. He used warm blacktop tar from the road to glue the hair to the mango seeds.

Sometimes we went with our mother to the pond to wash our clothes. When we went there, my sister and I braided the tall grass into the shape of dolls to play with for the day. When it was time to leave, we would cry because we had to leave the braided grass dolls behind.

---

**My brother went to the slaughterhouse and cut some dead cow's hairs for us. He used warm blacktop tar from the road to glue the hair to the mango seeds.**

---

My siblings and I never got new things. Luckily, we had some cousins whose mother lived in America, and she would send them new clothes and toys. They gave us their old clothes whenever they got new ones, but they never gave us their old toys! Instead, they pretended that their old dolls died, and they planned a funeral service and invited us to attend. We went and sang songs and pretended to cry tears. They even made a fake coffin for the dolls and wrapped them in white cloth.



## A Funeral Service for Dolls

My brother Marcel offered to be the undertaker. He thought that if he was in charge of the burial, he would know where the dolls were buried. His plan was to go back after the funeral and dig up the dolls for my sister and me. But my cousins were ahead of him. They knew that Marcel was a slick boy. So my cousins insisted that they would bury the dolls themselves.

After the service my cousins all went inside, and we pretended that we were leaving. Marcel told us to hide in the bush and watch to see if our cousins came back outside to bury the dolls. He was right—they came outside and peeked around to make sure that we had left. Marcel whispered to

us to be quiet, especially me because I was famous for being a “cry baby.” I stayed silent, and we watched them bury their dolls in their grandmother’s banana field.

We had to wait in the bush until it got dark. I was crying because I was hungry and mosquitoes

**His plan was to go back after the funeral and dig up the dolls for my sister and me.**

were biting us. Marcel tried to comfort me. He said, “Everything is going to be OK. I promised to get those dolls for you, and that’s what I am going to do. I am tired of folks making fun of me every

time that I go to the slaughterhouse to get hairs off of dead cows, OK?”

### Bringing Them Back to Life

It finally got dark. Marcel said, “You all stay put. I will go alone.” I watched him crawl on his belly down the hill and into the banana field like he was a soldier going into battle. When he came back, he had six dolls stuffed under his shirt. He gave them to my sister and me and said, “Let’s go home. Marcel might be poor, but he is no fool!” So we took the dolls home and played with them and brought them back to life.

*Petagaye Farr is a student at Central Vermont Adult Basic Education in Morrisville, VT. She was born in Jamaica, and she became a United States citizen in 2016. She is a hardworking student with a beaming smile. Right now, she is working to reach her goal of getting a high school diploma.*

#### AFTER YOU READ:

1. Use context clues to define these words: slaughterhouse, siblings, undertaker, slick, and stay put. Try using them in sentences.
2. Re-tell the story in your own words. Use words and phrases to show sequencing, such as first, then, after that.
3. Write about your own experience with hand-me-downs in your family.

## Which Doll Would You Buy (or Make) for Your Child?

