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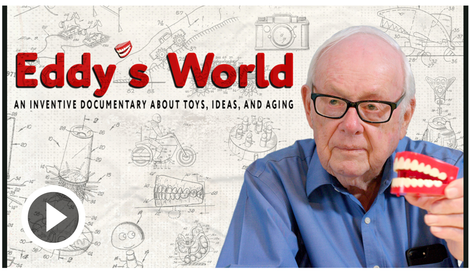

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AARP members can watch 'Eddy's World' through May 18, 2022. Video run time is 28 minutes.

'Eddy's World' Documentary Introduces Inventor Behind America's Best-Known Toys

Film features toymaker Eddy Goldfarb, who created Yakity-Yak Talking Teeth, the Bubble Gun and more

by Matt Alderton, **AARP Members Only Access**, February 17, 2022

Eddy Goldfarb did not grow up in a playful world. Born in Chicago in 1921, the son of Jewish immigrants came of age during the Great Depression and World War II. From an epoch so beset by hardship, however, something quite the opposite was hatched: a prolific toymaker who dedicated his life to amusement.

"I made toys in spite of the times, not because of them," says Eddy, who celebrated his 100th birthday in September 2021.

His inventions have included more than 800 toys and games, including Yakity-Yak Talking Teeth, the iconic chattering mouths that you're just as likely to find on movie screens as you are in novelty shops; the Bubble Gun, which spawned an entire industry of bubble-making toys; the Vac-U-Form, which allowed kids to make plastic molds of objects in a miniature vacuum former; Stomper 4x4s, battery-operated toy cars with all-wheel drive; and KerPlunk, the classic game whose object is keeping marbles afloat in a tube atop a precarious latticework of sticks.

Decades after their invention, these and other Goldfarb creations continue to delight kids and adults alike. Which is why Eddy's daughter Lyn Goldfarb decided to paint a celluloid portrait of her father in *Eddy's World*, a documentary short about toys, ideas and aging.

"I've been a documentary filmmaker for my whole career, always looking for interesting stories and interesting people. I'm almost embarrassed to say that I never looked inward to my own family," Lyn says. "But as my dad got older, I realized I needed to document his story."

What began as a personal project quickly became a professional one, according to Lyn, who released *Eddy's World* in 2020 — the first year of the COVID-19 pandemic.

"It's far more than a family story," continues Lyn, who says Eddy's entrepreneurship, imagination and eternal youth are a rainbow in otherwise gray skies. "It's a fun film, but it strikes a chord. I think it's a story people need during these difficult times."

To capture something of that story, AARP Members Only Access asked Eddy firsthand about his life, his work and his perpetual youth.

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Did you grow up with a lot of toys?

No, I really didn't have a lot of toys. I remember two toys only. I remember a metal truck, which was great, and I remember a very exciting toy: an Erector Set. It was a No. 4 — the first one with an electric motor. It was a wonderful toy.

How does someone who doesn't grow up with a lot of toys come to be a toy inventor?

My father brought home an inventor for dinner once. I have no idea what he invented or if he was ever successful, but I learned what the word meant, and I knew that's what I wanted to be.

After trying to invent a lot of stuff all through high school, I finally joined the Navy when the war started. I was on a submarine during the war, and the last year of the war, I realized that the war in Europe was over. I remember making up my mind exactly what I was going to do. I wanted to major in physics, but I wanted to do the practical end. I wanted to invent things. I realized after a lot of reading that I had better specialize in one industry and learn something about it. And since I had no money to back me up, I chose toys. I thought that would be the easiest to get into.

You invented your first three toys as a sailor aboard the USS *Batfish*. Shortly thereafter you invented what is probably your most famous toy: the Yakity-Yak Talking Teeth. How did it come to be?

I saw an ad in the newspaper for a "tooth garage." It was a round container with a cover that you could put your false teeth in and put on the table beside your bed or in the bathroom. Being very young, I thought false teeth were very funny. So I decided to invent something with false teeth. That's how I got the idea.

Although most inventors receive royalties for their inventions, you sold the Talking Teeth outright to novelty maker H. Fishlove & Co. Is that right?

We sold it for $2,500. I had a partner who knew [H. Fishlove owner] Irving Fishlove, and he represented me. He gave me $900 as my share, and that's the last time I ever sold an item outright. I knew what royalties were, and I knew that's what I should have, but we thought $2,500 was pretty good back then. Chicago was very cold, and I used that money to buy an overcoat.

The Talking Teeth is your most iconic invention, but what's your favorite?

I loved doing games because I knew that brought the family together. If you had a good game and it sold a million copies in its first or second year, you knew that a million families were getting together, or a million gangs of kids. And maybe over and over again. That made me feel good.

Some of the items that I really enjoyed were the Bubble Gun, which started an industry — many companies started making bubble guns for kids, and all sorts of motorized bubble blowers — and the Vac-U-Form with Mattel, which was a very successful item because you could make little toys yourself by vacuuming plastic.

Because they've shaped so many children, your toys also have shaped our larger culture. What do you make of your impact?

As I said, I was a physics major. I thought I would get back to that when I made enough money. But I realized that toys are educational items for kids. It's part of their growing-up experience and can have a huge, positive impact on them in so many ways. And so I realized how important toys are.

After all this time, you're still inventing new toys. What keeps you

disposition than a lot of people, and I think that's part of my secret.

***Eddy's World* (2020)**

Starring: Eddy Goldfarb

Directed by: Lyn Goldfarb

Produced by: Lyn Goldfarb, Jannat Gargi and Daniel Zimbaldi

Runtime: 28 minutes

Rated: NR

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