



Peter C. Cook

*In addition to this refrigerator, Ellen Wilno of Hamilton recently bought a metal stove, to which her growing collection of magnets will soon cling.*

## Metal Attraction

The fine art of collecting magnets

**T**HE reasons for why we collect things are many. Some say it's the desire for a sense of permanence or control. Perhaps it's nostalgic longing. However, unlike other addictions, like overeating or drinking, collecting brings no lasting harm. Maybe some raised eyebrows. But no harm. Ask Ellen Wilno of Hamilton. She knows.

"I've always had a nutty house, all this crazy stuff around," she says, as she sweeps her hand in the direction of her 1,000-plus collection of refrigerator magnets, cups, dolls, angels, Hess trucks and fire-truck memorabilia. It is a magnificent sight, all surfaces of a suburban New Jersey kitchen brilliantly lacquered with photos, figurines, sayings and miniature appliances.

Two things in life interest Ellen and her husband, a popular, now-retired football coach at a local high school: generosity to other people and sports. In the 30 years that Ellen has been amassing her giant collection of refrigerator magnets, she has given away half again as many to admirers, or to people she thinks the magnet fits better than she.

"I give them to kids who come here, or anybody. I'll give them ones I've made, but I won't give the ones that are gifts to me," she says. "If they think enough of me to bring me something, well, it goes on my refrigerator."

Ellen concentrates lots of energy on her collection of baseball, football, hockey and basketball magnets. However, only those teams in season are displayed on Ellen's refrigerator; as each team wins or loses, she rearranges the magnet collection to reflect the changed status. "Once a week, you know, if they win or lose, I have to sit down and change their ratings on the refrigerator."

As a companion collection, Helen also has many Cabbage Patch Dolls. "I dress them, I have them in hockey clothes, then I have them in football clothes," she says.

How can anyone keep track of such a large collection? Ellen says she remembers where many of them came from, especially if they were gifts. "Here is a magnet of a cab from New York City," she says fondly. "When we went there with Maureen, we had to take a cab because

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it rained, and she found this for me.”

Pulling another one off the side of the fridge, she smiled with a happy memory. “My son went to Boston with the hockey team and he brought me back this magnet that says ‘Merry Christmas From Boston.’”

There is some order to her magnet collection, although it may look random to the outsider. “I’ve got all the states in one area, the fire department in another area,” she explains. “Whenever we traveled around, I would al-

ways get a few magnets from places like Florida or Hawaii. Now, whenever anyone goes anyplace, I get a magnet from there, and I add it.”

Helen says her husband thinks she is nutty. He has gotten used to it, though. She says there are worse things she could be doing. “Every now and then, he’ll knock one down, and I know he must think: ‘If she didn’t have so many of those magnets ...’ But, so far, he hasn’t said anything.” ●

— *Deborah A. Kaple*