

she had played in Gruelle's yet-to-be-published first Raggedy Ann book.

Some of these accounts tell of Gruelle having taken a leave of absence from the *New York Herald* around the time of Marcella's death. When he finally returned to his studio, the accounts claim, friends and family spotted a small rag doll with a painted-on smile perched up on his shelf. To help assuage his overwhelming grief, Gruelle had supposedly begun writing down and illustrating the Raggedy Ann tales he had spun during the many nighttime vigils at his ailing daughter's bedside. Most of these accounts contend that Marcella's faded doll and the memory of his beloved daughter are what inspired Johnny Gruelle to write about Raggedy Ann.

Another account maintains that Gruelle's Raggedy Ann tales had first appeared as early as 1908 as illustrated poems in Johnny's bound artist book, which he would lend on occasion to friends and colleagues to read to their children. Later, following Marcella's death, Gruelle supposedly changed the verses to prose.

Each of these accounts is difficult to verify, equally difficult to dispute. Each contains elements of fact. Gruelle did take a leave of absence from the *Herald*, although it may not have been precipitated by Marcella's death. And, he had been at work for some time on the concept, and most likely the draft, for some stories about Raggedy Ann.

In *Raggedy Andy Stories* (1920) Gruelle introduced a rag doll brother-companion for Raggedy Ann.



In 1918 Gruelle submitted a manuscript featuring Raggedy Ann to the P. F. Volland Company, the company that had already published Gruelle's *My Very Own Fairy Stories* and for whom Gruelle had provided several sets of commissioned illustrations for other books.

In the fall of 1918 the first edition of Gruelle's *Raggedy Ann Stories* rolled off the presses at the P. F. Volland Company. The ninety-four-page book's cover featured front and back views of Raggedy Ann and contained Gruelle's now-famous introduction: his own legend of how Raggedy Ann—the doll—and the Raggedy Ann stories came to be.

Longtime Gruelle associate Howard Cox later recalled the book's success: "It no sooner reached the retail counters, than re-orders began to pour in and for the rest of the year every printer in Chicago with an idle press was printing *Raggedy Ann Stories*."

Around the time that Johnny Gruelle had patented his Raggedy Ann doll, he had also applied for a trademark for the name "Raggedy Ann." With high hopes for a marketable item, female members of the Gruelle family had gone to work in a Norwalk, Connecticut, loft. Under Johnny's careful direction, they cut and fabricated and finished dozens of handmade Raggedy Ann dolls to sell.

Some say that these original dolls possessed real candy hearts. While many collectors today doubt that story (no Raggedy Ann doll can be found that actually contains one), Johnny's son, Worth Gruelle (who would have been four or five at the time), distinctly remembers the candy hearts being lovingly sewn into the chest of each doll.

"It was my job to go downstairs to the candy store to buy the hearts," Worth recalls. "If the old man storekeeper was there, he'd let me pick through the hearts to find only the ones that said 'I Love You.' If his wife was there, it was a different story. She'd make me buy a whole pound, but I didn't care. I'd go back upstairs, pick out the 'I Love You's' and like a typical kid, I'd gobble up the rest."

Various journalistic accounts have claimed that some of these family-made dolls were later used as store display items to accompany *Raggedy Ann Stories*, when it was first sold in 1918. Supposedly, customers began clamoring to buy the dolls too, in such quantities that it would have been difficult for the Gruelle family to supply them. This may have been so, demand eventually outweighing the production abilities of the family. Far more likely, however, was that the Volland Company and Johnny Gruelle already had a merchandising scheme in mind. What can be documented is that, around the time *Raggedy Ann Stories* was published, Johnny Gruelle authorized the P. F. Volland Company to begin manufacturing and selling, under its own label, a commercial, mass-produced Raggedy Ann doll.

In 1919—a year after publishing *Raggedy Ann Stories*—P. F. Volland published Gruelle's *Friendly Fairies*,