

The Tale of Godzilla Boy

Written by KIERA LANNI | PHOTOGRAPHY EDITOR
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With a purposeful grimace and a terrible sound, a 4-year-old boy fashions his hands into claws and jumps up and down. The young boy has nothing but an old *Godzilla* t-shirt on and Spaghetti sauce dripping from the corners of his mouth. He watches gleefully as Godzilla rampages through the streets of Tokyo, knocking over buildings and stepping on innocent civilians. The boy mimics Godzilla's walk and suddenly lets out a ferocious roar that would put Godzilla himself to shame.

This little boy is now 25, yet still has a child-like obsession with the King of the Monsters. My brother, Ian, has loved *Godzilla* for as long as I have known. Before I could even walk, I knew who Godzilla was thanks to him.

Our mother, Bonnie, said, "At first he was afraid of them and he wouldn't watch it with me. He would watch it in another room, stand there and just look. Then, he would get closer, and closer, and closer until he was right next to me."

As Ian grew older, his obsession with *Godzilla* grew to gargantuan proportions just like the beast that fascinated him. "He had me tell him everything about *Godzilla*," Bonnie said, "then, he wanted a toy. Then, he got an 8-pack of all the big monsters. That led to more, and more, and more."

Ian would play his old *Godzilla* VHS tapes over and over until the images of monsters fighting was embedded into our whole family's brains. Ian, who has special needs, has always responded to science fiction and action on television and video games. "He liked every time the monsters would fight and destroy. Godzilla's roar and fire hooked him," said Bonnie.

"It's not fire, it's radiation," Ian snidely corrected her.

Ian said he took a liking to Godzilla because of how he looks. "I like Godzilla because of the

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roar, the spikes, and the details,” he explained. For Ian, the more details, the better. Ian also feels it’s not the monsters’ fault they are violent. He said, “It’s their nature. It’s the way they are. [Did] you know ‘Kaiju’ means ‘strange beast’ in Japanese?” “Kaiju” is the term used to describe the other monsters in *Godzilla*.

Besides owning mostly every *Godzilla* movie ever made, Ian proudly owns movie soundtracks, clothing, a Godzilla mask, and his most prized-possession, his *Godzilla* action figure collection.

“They’re my kiddies!” Ian exclaimed while holding out his arms and taking in his collection.

According to the article, “Collectors and Collecting: A Social Psychological Perspective,” by McIntosh and Schmeichel, Unity Marketing identified four major types of collectors; passionate collectors, inquisitive collectors, the hobbyist, and expressive collectors. Ian falls under the expressive collectors. People in this category are described as those “who collect as a statement of who they are. These types suggest some overt motivations for collecting: profit, the emotional thrill of acquisition (intense but short-lived positive affect), pleasure (mild but consistent positive affect), and self-expression or aggrandizement.”

Ian collects *Godzilla* figures because he loves the feeling of adding a new monster to his collection, and he sees it as self-expression. He also loves to show it off to his friends.

Godzilla is a part of Ian’s self-expression. Ian’s best friend, Richard Juchniewicz, 25, said that Ian’s nickname is “Godzilla Boy.” When he thinks of Godzilla, he thinks of Ian, much like anyone who knows Ian would do.

Their teacher in high school, Jim Burns, used to let Ian bring in his *Godzilla* figures to share with other students. Burns said, “If we went on a trip to a toy store he would head directly to the *Godzilla* display and explain each figure. He would also find and sometimes purchase *Godzilla* comics. Back at school he would share with the other students. This is where the “Godzilla Boy” reference came from.”

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Ian's collection includes all monsters that have appeared in the *Godzilla* franchise. "Ian got so many [monsters] that I had to make bookcases and shelves just so they could fit in their room," Bonnie said. His collection started off on his dresser. Then, he got a bookshelf. Then, he got a few shelves, and another bookcase. The walls even have hand-painted

Godzilla

illustrations (courtesy of our mom), along with

Godzilla

posters. Just about every corner of his room is covered in these monsters. Excuse me, I mean Kaiju.

What enticed Ian to start his own collection was seeing the collections of other fans online. Over the years, he has collected about 300 Kaijus. Ian took out his notebook, which catalogues his whole collection, to prove it to me. Our mother said that over the years, we have spent about \$5,000 on *Godzilla* figures. Bonnie believes his collection is worth upwards of \$10,000. She said, "It's definitely worth more because they've gone up in value. Just the Orochi [a 8-headed dragon] alone was \$70, and that was a lot of money at that time. I saw it for \$300 online."

Ian finds most of his collection on sites like eBay. Before online shopping, our parents had to search various comic book stores around New York City and local toy stores to find the *Godzillas*. "I had to order them directly from Japan because they didn't have things like Amazon back then," Bonnie said.

Now, it is relatively simple to find *Godzillas* online, but it is hard to find the exact one Ian wants since collectors hurriedly buy them to either add to their own collection or to resell them. Some monsters have more value than others. Right now, Ian has his eye on "kingsaurus," a Kaiju that appears in the *Ultraman* series.

Dr. Jamie Goodwin, a specialist professor of psychology at the University, said collections are a way to create a person's own structure or community. She said, "What I have seen the most clinically is that collections are a combination of nostalgia and a need to approach something in the world in a concrete, logical, methodical, and organized way. To build, arrange, organize and classify is tremendously satisfying, and when the rest of the world feels chaotic, this type of structure can feel very calming."

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Although Ian's collection might be monstrous, it is always organized and pristine. Ian warned, "You have to ask my permission first. I like them to be in the proper spot." There have been many times where my siblings would move Godzilla's tail to see if Ian would notice. When you hear his loud footsteps coming down the hall, you knew he noticed.

One of Ian's skills is the ability to retain a vast amount of information and trivia about subjects he enjoys, *Godzilla* being one of them. Ian knows every monster in his collection like the back of his hand. If you point to any *Godzilla*, he'll tell you the movie it is from and what year it represents. "That's 2014. That's not part of the movie franchise, that one is 1968. '75. '64 and that's '65. That's 2001, that's the red-eyed version," Ian responded as I pointed to different *Godzillas*. They might look the same, but not to Ian.

Bonnie feels Ian's knowledge on his interests, such as *Godzilla*, is his gift. She said, "I think every person with a special need has something special in them, that you call a savant almost, this is his."

That little boy who lit up at the mention of *Godzilla* now sits on his bed adorned with *Godzilla* pillows and bedsheets, and just smiles. He may no longer roar and breath fire like he did in his younger days, but he is still a "Godzilla Boy." The *Godzilla* Boy.

PHOTOS COURTESY of Kiera Lanni

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