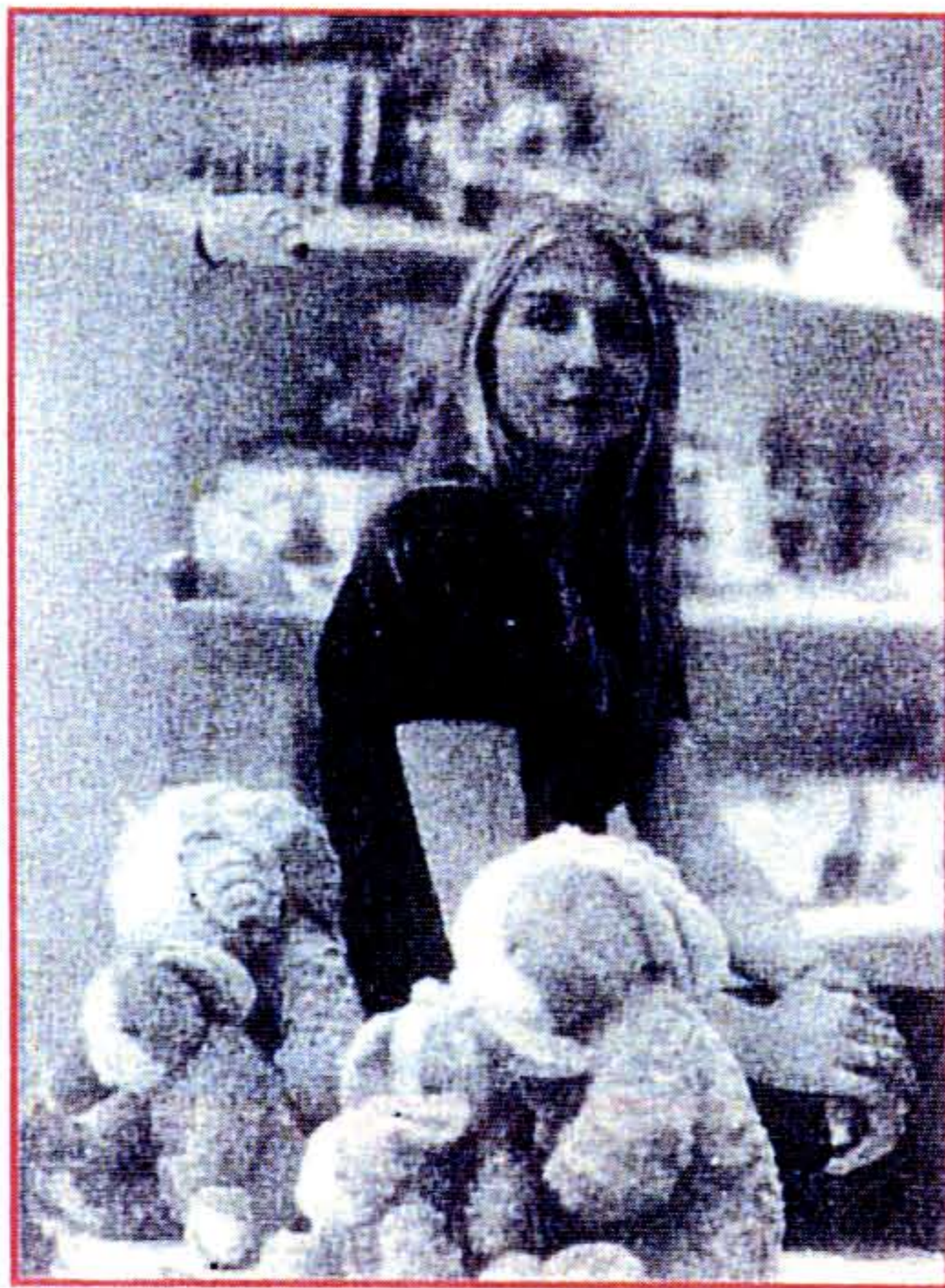


New Kid On The Block

Game(s), Set(s), Rudman!

By Fredricka R. Maister



Diana Rudman toys with a new career at DiDi's

From the moment you walk through the door, you sense that **DiDi's Childrens Boutique** is not your conventional kids' toy store. First of all, the architectural design of its two-room space is ultra-modern, bright and airy with a layout that can easily accommodate strollers. Not to mention the uncluttered displays of merchandise, all of which make for a stress-free shopping experience for busy parents.

This Upper East Side newcomer, which opened its doors in December 2003, specializes in European-made, traditional wooden toys that are both educational and fun, as well as classic children's clothing with an emphasis on natural fabrics. "You won't find your typical Power Rangers or Barbie dolls in here," says owner Diana Rudman, who lives in

Manhattan with her husband and four children (two are under 8 years of age).

Rudman, a native of Bulgaria and former professional tennis player who traveled throughout Europe at a young age and always brought back wooden toys and trinkets, says that she was inspired to create DiDi's because she did not have much of a childhood. "I started at a very early age with professional sports and was always occupied with exercising so I never really had the time to play with the toys that I loved," she explains.

As a mom in search of developmentally appropriate toys for her children, Rudman also discovered that New York did not have a small specialty boutique that offered the old-fashioned, long-lasting, non-electronic educational toys that help stimulate a child's imagination. "A lot of the electronic toys pretty much do everything for the child. I think it is important for kids to be able to play with a toy over and over again in different ways. Learning is an active process," Rudman says.

If asked about any given toy in her carefully chosen inventory, Rudman will enthusiastically expound upon its educational benefits. She explains that her expertise has evolved from her experience teaching children tennis and motivating them to learn, as well as her own research and consultations with professionals regarding the various child development stages. Having kids has also helped, she adds. "We pretty much test every toy that comes through the store."

Here are some highlights, to name a few, of what's "in store" for you at DiDi's:

- Building blocks for pre-schoolers based on the learning system developed by Friedrich Froebel, the German educator who founded the first kindergarten.
- Caterpillar Game, a classic wooden European toy for 1 1/2 to 4-year-olds to foster hand-eye coordination.
- Band in a Box, 10 instruments for a child's first band.
- Master Builder Block System by HABA for children 7 years and up to build different structures, such as the U.S. Capitol, the Leaning Tower of Pisa, or the Pyramids.
- One-of-a-kind tutus for young ballerinas designed and made by Rudman and her mother.

DiDi's Childrens Boutique, located at 1196 Madison Avenue between 87th and 88th Streets, is open Monday-Saturday, 10am-6pm, and Sundays, 11am-5pm. Phone: (212) 860-4001. Some of the toys are available at www.didis.net.

And on Wednesday, June 2, 9:30-10:30am, DiDi's hosts a free event for parents: 'What Your Child Needs To Know To Get Into New York's Prestigious Private Schools'. Early childhood educator Lori Lippmann will discuss the most educationally appropriate toys for each stage of development.