

QSO TODAY AMATEUR RADIO PODCAST

with Eric Guth 4Z1UG

REMCO founders, history , trivia.

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Sunday, Jun 25 5:44 PM

Dear Eric,

As I heard you interview Jeff Murray, K1NSS, I thought you might find this interesting information that I found about REMCO, the company that made the radio toys that set many of us on our respective paths to Amateur Radio... The REMCO Crystal radio that my grandmother Hilda found in a surplus store in Cleveland, Ohio and gave me as a gift is what got it started for me.



(From The Toy Association, Inc.)

Isaac Heller, Prolific Toymaker and Co-Founder of Remco Industries, Dies at 88.

March 12, 2015 | The Toy Industry Association (TIA) and its members join in mourning the passing of Isaac Heller, a leading toymaker for the postwar generation and co-founder of Remco Industries, who died on March 7, 2015 at the age of 88.

Born on July 23, 1926 in Ellenville, NY to Russian Jewish immigrants, Heller spent his early childhood in the Catskills before moving to Brooklyn with his family at the age of 12. According to his obituary in the New York Times, he studied electrical engineering at Brooklyn Technical High School and then served in the U.S. Navy from 1944 to 1946, during which time he repaired radar equipment and built toys out of spare parts for his shipmates to send home to their kids.

After being discharged, Heller worked briefly as a toy designer before co-founding Remco Industries in 1949 with his cousin, Saul Robbins, in a New York City basement. The company, later based out of New Jersey, became a household name for its best-selling toys – including the Whirlybird helicopter, Mr. Kelly's Automatic Car Wash and the Barracuda atomic submarine – and for its TV commercial slogan: "Every boy wants a Remco toy." According to the Times, the phrase was later appended to include "...and so do girls" when the company began manufacturing dolls. In the 1960s, Remco also produced licensed products, including figures of the Beatles, the Monkees, The Munsters, and the "Star Trek" cast.

Heller left Remco in 1966 to develop industrial parks; he also became a well-known community philanthropist in New Jersey. The company filed for bankruptcy in 1971 and was acquired by Azrak-Hamway International in 1974. In 1997, Remco was acquired by Jakks Pacific.

Heller is survived by his wife, Helaine, four daughters, a brother and a sister, 10 grandchildren, and three great-grandchildren.



Obituary

Saul Robbins

Mr. Saul Robbins, 88, of Verona, N.J., died Sunday, June 13, 2010, at home. Services will be held Wednesday, June 16, at 9:30 a.m. in the Bernheim-Apter-Kreitzman Suburban Funeral Chapel, 68 Old Short Hills Rd., Livingston, N.J. Born in Brooklyn, Mr. Robbins lived in Linden, N.J., and then West Orange, N.J., before moving to Verona over 20 years ago. Prior to retiring in 1971, Mr. Robbins had co-founded the Remco Toy Company with his cousin, Isaac Heller, in Newark, N.J., back in 1949. The business was later located in Harrison, N.J. A graduate of Rutgers University in Newark, Mr. Robbins had served in the U.S. Army during World War II. He was a past president of the Toy Manufacturers Association of America and the YM-YWHA of Metrowest. He also had been a founder of the original Occupational Center in Orange and the Albert Einstein College of Medicine. He was the beloved husband of Ruth (nee Fern); the devoted father of Ralph and Dr. Marcia R. Wilf; the dear brother of Sylvia Gindin; the cherished grandfather of three and great-grandfather of five. Contributions may be made to your favorite charity.

Published in Star-Ledger on June 15, 2010

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Isaac Heller, Co-Founder of Remco and Toymaker to a Generation, Dies at 88

By MARGALIT FOX

MARCH 10, 2015

It was boyhood in a box, batteries not included.

There was the Whirlybird helicopter (“Fly them from battlefield to battlefield!”) and the Barracuda atomic submarine, the Johnny Reb cannon and the Dick Tracy wrist radio, the Screaming Mee Mee-e rifle and Mr. Kelly’s Automatic Car Wash — the literal stuff of youth for the postwar generation. All were made by Remco Industries, the company, begun in a New York City basement, that in the 1950s and ’60s was one of the country’s leading toy manufacturers.

Isaac Heller, who died Saturday at 88, founded Remco — later based in Newark and then in Harrison, N.J. — with a cousin, Saul Robbins, in 1949. A former Navy electronics technician, Mr. Heller got his start as a toymaker by buying up mountains of military surplus and transforming it into toys that could zoom, soar or otherwise move. (The name Remco stood for “remote control.”)

“Every boy wants a Remco toy,” the company’s omnipresent television commercials intoned in a voice that carried the epochal urgency of a newsreel. In later years, after Remco began offering dolls, the tag line “... and so do girls” was appended. But its ellipses were almost palpable, so closely was the company associated with the construction of midcentury masculinity in miniature.

Isaac Heller got his start as a toymaker by buying up mountains of military surplus and transforming them into toys.

HELLER INDUSTRIAL PARKS, INC

In the 1960s and afterward, Remco was also known for its licensed products, including action figures of the Beatles, complete with combable mop-tops; the Munsters; and “Star Trek” characters.

Isaac Heller, known as Ike, was born on July 23, 1926, in Ellenville, N.Y., at the foot of the Catskills, where his family owned a small farm. His parents, Morris Heller and the former Yetta Shapiro, Russian Jewish immigrants, had been settled there by the Jewish Agricultural (and Industrial Aid) Society, a social welfare agency. In the summer, to supplement their income, they rented out the children’s bedrooms to tourists; Ike and his siblings slept in the chicken coop.

When Ike was 12 the family moved to Brooklyn, where he studied electrical engineering at Brooklyn Technical High School. He later took night classes at Cooper Union in Manhattan.

From 1944 to 1946 he served in the Navy, where he repaired radar equipment along with almost anything else that came to hand. In idle moments, he built toys from spare electronics components for his shipmates to send home to their children.

After his discharge, Mr. Heller worked briefly as a toy designer before striking out on his own. As he well knew, warehouses all over New York were filled with military surplus going begging, and he visited each of them, buying up airmen's earphones. From these, working in the basement of his brother-in-law's upholstery shop, he built what became Remco's first product and remained one of its best known: toy walkie-talkies.

A Remco United States Navy commando known as Frogman.

The company's other toys included Mighty Mike motorized trucks, the Shark remote control racecar, the Mighty Matilda aircraft carrier and the Movieland Drive-In Theater, which came with cars, a parking lot and a small projector and screen.

Not every Remco product was an unqualified success. In 1964, the company's Lyndon B. Johnson and Barry Goldwater action figures proved something less than landslide best sellers.

In 1970, when Mr. Heller and his cousin were no longer involved with the company, opponents of air pollution picketed Alexander's department store in Manhattan over a Remco truck that was designed to emit real smoke through its exhaust pipe. (They were protesting the truck's apparent symbolism, not its actual environmental impact.)

Mr. Heller and Mr. Robbins sold Remco in 1966. Afterward, Mr. Heller was an industrial-park developer and philanthropist whose causes included his alma maters and the John Kenney Child Care Center, which he founded in Edison, N.J., in 1987.

Remco's military toys sold wildly, while its political action figures did not.

REMCO

Mr. Heller's death, at his home in Scotch Plains, N.J., was confirmed by his son-in-law Jack Romberg. Survivors include his wife, the former Helaine Hirsh, whom he married in 1953; four daughters, Audrey Romberg, Laurie Kaufman, Hollie Heller and Hillary Granfield; a brother, Paul; a sister, Mildred Galen; 10 grandchildren; and three great-grandchildren. Mr. Robbins died in 2010.

Remco, which filed for bankruptcy in 1971, closed its doors in 1974. The Remco brand is currently owned by Jakks Pacific, a California toy concern.

A measure of the extent of Mr. Heller's success as a toymaker can be found in a Dec. 15, 1960, article in The New York Times, which quotes an authority better versed in the toy trade than any other. Reported from a Gimbels department store in Valley Stream, on Long Island, it began:

"While the snow fell on Monday morning, paralyzing the city, an intrepid little boy climbed into Santa Claus's lap and piped, 'I want a Fighting Lady battleship by Remco.' "

The article continued: " 'Nobody asked me for a sled or for ice skates,' Santa sighed. 'These days it's all brand-name merchandise that they've seen advertised on TV.' "

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