

A Dad's Love for an Invalid Child

This is the history of the dollhouse as we know it up to the year 2015
as told by Sheila Hewitt

Lova Cline was born in 1902. The only child of George and Mary Cline, she was an invalid from birth, unable to even sit on her own. The only joy in her life was a dollhouse built for her by her father who was a carpenter.

George Cline was not just a carpenter, but as he insisted, a bridge carpenter. He built the dollhouse that was a labor of love and heartache. Although the house is roomy and exquisitely fashioned it has no entrance, only large windows. Little Lova was able to only look at it from her chair or bed, but it was the only thing that brought luster to her eyes. He must have known Lova would not live to enjoy the house long, yet he worked many days and nights on its construction.

The dollhouse is 5 feet long and weighs 400 pounds. The roof is gabled and the weatherboards are popular with a lot of scroll work, which is now covered. All the original furniture in the house was built by her dad, which consisted of three chairs, a love-seat all with cushions, a vase of flowers set on an end table adorned with a lace doily, a crib with a small doll, and some toys laid around the room. The dining room consisted of a table covered with a lace table cloth, a vase of flowers in the center, and two chairs with a doll in one. All of the dolls in the house were Lova's, put there by her mother along with dishes and lace curtains for the windows.

Lova died in 1908 at the age of six, and her dollhouse was placed at the site of her grave in the west end of the cemetery. It remained there until 1945 when her mother, Mary Cline, passed away. After the death of his wife, George Cline suggested the dollhouse be destroyed.

By the time George suggested that the dollhouse be destroyed it was already an Arlington Legend. Blount Sharp, the Sexton of the cemetery, talked Mr. Cline out of demolishing the dollhouse. The caretaker moved the dollhouse and Lova's remains to their present location, next to Lova's mother. Blount

Sharp put the dollhouse on a new foundation and painted the outside. His wife replaced the rug and lace curtains which time and mice had ruined.

George Cline died in 1946, one year after his wife, and was buried beside her and little Lova. His will designated Lova Ward-Wooten to serve as caretaker of the dollhouse. Lova Ward-Wooten had been named after Cline's daughter. Lova's parents were close friends of the Clines and related by marriage. The Clines would often bring Lova Ward-Wooten gifts when she was small.

The years went by and the dollhouse stood much as it always had except for the once a year cleaning that Lova would do. Grown-ups and children alike would go over and peak in to see what was inside. Then in 1973, an article about the dollhouse and its antique furnishings appeared in the Trader Magazine. Then shortly after that, thieves broke into the dollhouse and stole all of the original furniture and dolls, which are still missing.

The dollhouse did not stand ravished for long. The Posey Township 4-H Club replaced the curtains and rug. Nick and Ivanna Pike of Arlington offered their assistance in restoring the house to its former condition. Mrs. Pike made three new China dolls to take the place of those stolen. The original dolls and furniture could not be duplicated because no photographs of them were ever taken. The new dolls were authentic reproductions of antiques. Not long after the dolls were placed in the house, one was stolen. The two that were left were a tiny doll in a baby bed and another doll, which appeared to be a sister or mother, watching over the baby. Nike Pike welded together a doll buggy from coat hangers and scrap metal, copying a picture out of an old catalog. Percy Turner, who died in 1975, built new furniture for the dollhouse. Chairs set around a little table set with dishes and silverware as if ready for dinner that never came. A small oil lamp kept an eternal vigil in the bay windows.

In the year 1979, another article was written with a picture of the dollhouse and not long after that vandals struck again. Carl Hutchinson, who was caretaker of the cemetery at the time, and Lova decided the outside of the dollhouse needed to be restored. He removed the house and took it to Tweedy Lumber Company in Carthage. They reworked all the windows,

covered the roof with metal, the sides with aluminum, and caulked the cracks. The dollhouse looked brand new. Carl also had a large foundation built and had the dollhouse bolted down when it was finished. These steps were taken to help against vandalism.

Lova asked me, her daughter Sheila Wooten-Hewitt, if I would help replace the furniture. Some friends and I decided to make the furniture out of cardboard making the furniture of no value. We covered the furniture with upholstery materials. The dining room chairs were covered in beige and the table made of cardboard had a lace table cloth. The chairs and sofa were all covered with materials and had cushions placed in them. End tables were covered and then a hole punched in them for pencils to be placed to be used as lamps and Downy lids for shades. A bed was made out of sponge and then covered with material and little hand made pillows. A lot of time and effort was taken to make these pieces just so there would be something in the dollhouse. I made lace curtains, Kathy Schuck donated a piece of carpet to replace the one stolen, and Joan Williams donated little flower vases to sit on the windowsills. Everything was then gathered up by Lova, me and my husband, Dean, and the furniture and curtains were placed in the dollhouse. At this time there were no dolls but Susie Hewitt, my daughter, had a little china doll and she wanted to put it in the house. That doll is still there today. This furniture was left alone, to no one's surprise.

On memorial day in 1999, I, Dean and my sister, Aleta, refurnished the dollhouse with purchased miniature doll furniture and new lace curtains that were once again made by me. This furniture was really too small and did not simulate the time period that the dollhouse was built.

Lova's dollhouse was also cause for a song that was written in 2001 titled "Lova's Doll House with God's Love." A gentleman in Greenfield, Indiana, wrote it. Our little house is filled with God's love, for over the years it has caused joy for so many. To be working on the little house and have people ask me the story or to see little one's faces light up when they see the dollhouse gives me so much joy.

In June of 1999, Lova Ward-Wooten passed away. She asked me to become

the caretaker of the dollhouse. People from everywhere stop to see the little monument that made Lova's short life a little happier. Many people over the years have told the story of the dollhouse in our cemetery. It is more than just a story of a father's love for his only daughter. It is also the story of a community's affections for a little girl they never knew and how these feelings have rescued a sentimental memorial. In April of 2002, I once again made furniture, but this time out of Popsicle sticks which I covered with material and is more to the size of the original furniture. That is the furniture that is in the dollhouse today. In June of 2014, Tim Hill asked if I would care if he put a new metal roof on the dollhouse. I said I did not mind and he surprised me and did the work on a Friday and Saturday. Troy Warrick had the materials and Troy, Bill Fox, Robert Schauck and Tim Hill worked and put on the new roof. After Troy left, Bill, Robert and Tim painted the dollhouse. I went to thank the boys and asked why they did all of this and they said the dollhouse is a part of the community and they wanted to contribute from the community. The love that George felt for his daughter will live on through the dollhouse and all that visit the dollhouse can feel that love.

I found a doll dressed in clothes of the era the dollhouse was originally built and in May of 2015 the doll was place inside the dollhouse. I will keep up on the dollhouse as long as I am able and my granddaughters, Jessica and Logan Hewitt will, I hope, someday take over caring for the house as I have. Enjoy our little house and remember it is with God's love we have it to remember.

By Sheila Hewitt
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