

The Story of the Family Dolls

The oldest doll in the family collection was Mama Goins' treasure that she kept in her closet. No one was allowed to play with it, as she explained it was a keepsake doll. Mama explained keepsake dolls are not to be played with.

Her doll has ceramic head, hands and feet.

The dress, slip and pants were hand made by her grandmother, including the lace trim. The body is leather, a soft beige kid, that is very fragile now.

Jane Turner Beauregard (or Bogart) Harmon, Mama Goins' paternal grandmother, was born February 3, 1826 and lived until March 1, 1910. She reared Mama and her two brothers after the death of their mother when Mama was 7 years old.

Mama Goin was born Laura Jane Harmon December 7, 1872 in Tennessee. She never forgave the Japanese for starting a war on her birthday in 1941.

Tennessee Iowa Chapman, Mamas' mother, was born January 17, 1846 and died in November of 1880. She was half Cherokee and Bouncer, the family historian, states she was killed in an Indian raid.

My mother told a colorful story of a prim Southern lady who would only ride side saddle and was thrown from her horse, caught her foot in the stirrup and was dragged to death.

But as a child, I recall how Mama Goin was always uncomfortable when the wind picked up.

I remember asking her why she didn't like the wind and she answered, "I always felt like the cold wind killed my mother. She caught a chill and died. The wind moaned around the house the day she died, then quit. It was as if it took her away."

Whatever the manner of her death, she died leaving two boys and her daughter, Laura, who became my Mama Goin.

The childrens' father, James William Harmon, and his parents came to North Texas along with other family members. The reconstruction post Civil War South drove many families from the east coast who came by covered wagon to Texas.

Mama Goins' doll is a style that became popular in the 1840s with the ceramic head with black hair parted in the middle. Similar molds are available today for the head, hands and feet.



Even at over a hundred years of age, Mamas' doll would be in better shape, but several years ago it was in a flood caused by bursting pipes that completely ruined my composition Shirley Temple doll.

Shirley melted, like the evil witch in the Wizard of Oz, and my mothers' doll had her kid body damaged. Happily mothers' doll had bisque head and hands that were not harmed.

My mama doll was not drowned by the flood, but had suffered some damage in 1935 when I forgot her and left her out overnight at Fredricksburg, Texas. Unfortunately, it rained that night. Her mohair hair died and I made her a bonnet for her head and bandages for her damaged legs.

When Molly was little, I made my mama doll a new outfit and used some of my hair tucked in the bonnet . She stayed like this for over forty years.

My doll and mothers' needed to go to the doll hospital. It took some looking, but Molly and I found the doll hospital at Old Spring, Texas, north of Houston. The delightful ladies there wear white MD coats and carefully examine their patients before giving a prognosis. When I heard them telling a worried little girl that she could send a card, but not to bring flowers to her doll while the doll was having surgery, I knew this was a good place.

Luckily, they had just purchased the contents of another doll hospital that contained three antique kid bodies, never used, the



same size as mothers' Floradora doll. So she was restored using antique parts.

I dressed her in white, as all young girls were dressed then, like mother and her classmates at the Aubrey school in 1910.

Mother is at the extreme right, front row, next to the brick wall.

Note the huge hairbows the girls wore.

In dressing the dolls I have tried to use materials from the same time period and copy styles.

At this time – 1910 – elastic was still not in common use.

Panties were of white linen, knee length, had a slit in the rear and were held together with a drawstring which tied in front.

I made a pair of these entirely by hand for mothers' doll.

Washing was a two day process that started with presoaking.

Items were boiled in a pot of homemade lye soap over an open fire early in the morning in the back yard. Water was drawn from the well and brought to rinse tubs. Each item was wrung out by hand as it went from first to second rinse water, white items went into a bluing tub, and starch, which was boiled on the wood stove, was carried out to the yard for starching items. Everything was then hung on clotheslines to dry. When dry, items were sprinkled, tightly folded and wrapped overnight for ironing the next day.

Ironing was done with at least three flatirons which were heated on the wood cooking stove. These cast iron flatirons were picked up with a potholder and used in rotation as they cooled rapidly.

When one began to cool, it was put back on the stove to reheat.

You learned to iron very rapidly, because the heat of the iron would scorch the garments otherwise and they had to be rewashed when this happened.

This process was a family chore that children helped with and learned to do early in life. I still have Mama Goins' small iron that her mother bought her to learn to help when she was five.

Children started to learn this skill by ironing handkerchiefs.

I had to learn this process and can tell you I deeply appreciate my washer and dryer as well as wash and wear clothes.

Sewing machines were available, and Mama Goin had a treadle one which she and her grandmother used to make family garments. There was no electricity in Aubrey at this time.

Every scrap of material was utilized. When garments wore out, buttons and trim were cut off for later use. Cleaning rags were cut from cotton at this point. This was long before the age of paper towels – or disposable sanitary napkins, or Kleenex, or paper towels. Even tiny parts of cloth were saved for the next quilting bee. Both mother and Mama Goin continued this practice till their

death and I still have the contents of their scrap boxes. I've also got fifty years of scraps of my own.

It is these things I am using to dress the keepsake dolls for the other girls and women of my family who are relatives of Jane Turner Harmon, Tennessee Chapman Harmon, Laura Harmon Goin, Lillian Goin McKinney, Billie McKinney McCauley and Molly McCauley Vernon.

Each recipient will receive a letter telling her what part of her dolls' clothing comes from which of the above women as well as a copy of this family doll history.

Mother's Floradora doll had no hair when I got her and is wearing a brown wig in this picture of Mother and Molly with their dolls. Mother told me her doll originally had blonde mohair curls, so that was what I had put on her after her surgery.

Molly is holding her very first doll, which was a Madam Alexander Ginny doll, and a pup mother brought her.



Mother and I bought many dolls for Molly when she was little, In fact we never really quit – Molly and I continue the tradition of adding to our collection. Over the years, it has become quite large and it is time to share.

Mothers' Floradora amused the ladies at the doll hospital because the bloom is faded on one cheek. They told me that happened from repeated kissing on the cheek. Bisque has baked on color and it takes much kissing to wear it down. They could tell mother had



loved her doll very much.

Floradora is dressed in white material from mothers' sewing basket. Her headgear is a bit of lace instead of the ornate bow worn by contemporary schoolgirls in order to keep dust from her mohair wig. She is on an open shelf.

The angel pin was a gift to me. Victorians were fond of angels and I know it would amuse mother to see her doll in a current fashion that was popular when she was a girl.

Mother had another doll that was called a penny doll, because that is what it cost. It is a tiny little thing, still in all its original clothing. Mother used it as a doll for Floradora.

This was an original idea at the time that is popular now. I enjoy looking at the dolls for sale in the stores who have dolls, tiny stuffed bears and toys of their own.

I put this little penny doll beside a small powder box of mothers that has a ballerina for a lid. Mother collected powder boxes, bud vases, books – I think she collected collections.



They are sitting on Floradoras' skirt. Though the little doll is tiny, she has the same type of ceramic head and hairdo that Mama Goins' doll has.

I do not have the same type keepsakes from my other grandmother, Olive Elkins McKinney, because when they lived in Colin County on a farm outside of McKinney, Texas, their home burned and was a total loss. They barely escaped with their lives, and lost everything they had. It was at this time they moved to Denton, Texas and opened a rooming and boarding house for girls on Chestnut Street. Grandad McKinney worked for the Normal School, which eventually grew into North Texas State University. We were living next door to Grandad and Grandmother McKinney when I got the Mama doll that traveled with mother and me as she gave canning demonstrations around the state.

I called the doll Mama, because that was what she said when you tilted her forward and back, and because I liked Mama Goin and her doll. She was the only grown person I knew who had a doll from their childhood and kept her safely.

I was mortified when I left Mama doll out in the rain and I kept her bandaged, tucked in a blanket and was careful that she never got wet again.



This picture of me was taken the year I left Mama doll in the rain. I had just been to the beauty shop and had my hated curls cut off. Years later, after Mama doll had been to the doll hospital for grafts and transplants (she even got a new voice box and said “Mama” once again) I started making her a new outfit. I worked very hard with some ecru silk, but she didn’t like it. Little girls will understand when I say my doll talked to me – so will big girls who haven’t lost the child within. Mama stood adamantly on the doll worktable and announced that the outfit I had worked for days on made her look fat. FAT.

Eventually I gave up and started on another dress. This time I made a pattern similar to a dress I had in the thirties. It was a cheerful little red dress. Did Mama doll like this one? No, it seems that the red dress was the wrong color for her complexion! I was beginning to feel like a saleslady in a boutique with a difficult customer.

Just because I went to the extra expense of having a human hair wig for her, she was becoming a prima donna.

I have had to be extremely careful washing these older pieces of cloth, and have done most of them by hand. One day I was sorting some of this older fabric, and Mama fell over in her excitement to let me know that the lavender velvet was perfect for her!

Furthermore, she wanted a hat like I made for Hollys' doll (Bouncers' granddaughter).

She gave me instructions as I went and has the oddest outfit, but she thinks she is quite lovely. The bits of lace are from different grandmothers and the flowers on her hat and the white ornament on the front of her underskirt are from Pat McKinney.

Washing and Ironing this old material and trim for the dolls has been a labor of love for me – and fun, I do believe I am several childhoods past the second, but a word of caution is in order about future cleaning of these old fabrics. They are NOT wash and wear. Should the dolly outfits get dusty in future, I would recommend cleaning with Dryel cleaner, or very carefully.

They will keep best under a dustproof bell, though commercial plastic doll covers do well.

Mollys' first doll and first Barbie are under plastic bells, as is Mamas' doll.

Mothers' Floradora and my Mama doll are on open shelves at the moment, but I will put them in a glass case as soon as I get it repaired.

These dolls are too old to be played with and are keepsake dolls only. I have plenty of Barbies that were made in 1966 that I intend to dress for little girls to play with. Their Moms will get the keepsake dolls. I consider it cruel and unusual punishment to give a child a toy and then forbid them to play with it.

The boys will get other keepsakes made from the old cloth.

Mama doll showing off her self-designed outfit.
The other dolls were irritated with her for awhile, but she is so happy they cannot stay angry with her.

Whatever childhood I am in, I'm having a great time dressing the dolls, and with the help of this bossy little doll I hope to get more of them done this year.



Billie McCauley

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