

# Love In Every Little Step

How My Grandmother's Peaceful Haunting Evoked More Than Just Miniature Memories

by Sonya Elliott, Seattle, Washington



Past NAME member Phyllis Stockner (Honey) with her granddaughter Sonya Elliott.

Little did I know what I was in for, and I'm not talking about the spirited flight that I thought would end my life right then and there as I descended into the small airport in Missoula, Montana, I'm talking about the entire experience of visiting the town I once called home, and how bit by bit, every step of the way, my grandma was by my side. Her peaceful haunting started in Seattle, before I began my journey to see her miniature house that was on display in the Historical Museum at Fort Missoula. I had been packing for my trip when I looked into my back yard and was surprised to see five soft pink roses (my grandma's favorite) staring back at me. It was winter in the Pacific Northwest, not the season for roses, so I

grabbed scissors, dared the pouring rain in my pajamas, snagged all five roses, dove back into the house, arranged them in a glass jar and cried. Not a painful cry, just gentle tears of remembrance, of missing my grandma, my Honey (Phyllis Stockner).

My mom's mom was smart, creative, loving and quite strong willed. All traits that I'd like to think I inherited, though it's only the later that I'm certain of. I'm strong-willed (my husband prefers the term stubborn) and I like it. It's a trait that has helped me make my way through life and the trait that put me to the task of finding a home for Honey's miniature mansion. Honey had gifted me, her only granddaughter, the house, a Victorian miniature-home that she designed, built and furnished to replicate a Queen-Anne style mansion. I don't collect or make miniatures, but I do appreciate art, beauty and dedication and to me her miniature house represents all of these, so after her death I was determined to find a place to share it with others. I contacted the Historical Museum at Fort Missoula and they welcomed her artwork with open arms.

As a young child I had watched her slowly bring this creation to life, starting with a farm house kit, she gathered



Five pink roses sit on the table.

extra wood pieces to expand and craft her vision, adding new rooms, bending boards to build, and rebuild, the perfect curved stair case of her dreams, placing hardwood floors board by board to the interior and adding shingles one by one to the exterior. And when she had finished her mini-mansion she designed and constructed furniture to fill every room. Sanding, staining and painting every piece by hand. During this fifteen year period, there were times when I would be by her side holding a wooden leg tight to a table top while the glue dried or I would cut a piece of fabric to a petite size before she pulled it tight across a small seat cushion to make a chair or used it to sew tiny comforters and pillows.

She made all of her pieces concise, one inch to one foot miniature standards. I grew up looking for mini things to give Honey as gifts. Things that she might not be able to make herself, and this was not an easy task as she was a talented craftsman and she was picky about keeping her house true to scale. She even painted several of the paintings that she used as art in the house, sculpted bowls from clay and made miniature dolls. Her dolls were their own work of art. She would fire clay



Phyllis Stockner's 1" scale Pennypacker Mansion, a Victorian miniature home that she built to replicate a Queen-Anne style home in Montana. It is currently on display at the Historical Museum at Fort Missoula.

— Continued on next page

# Love In Every Little Step

— Continued from page 22

arms, legs and heads, hand paint the faces, sew delicate dresses and bring all the pieces together to make delicate figurines. Still our family man-



aged to add to her collection at times with pots and pans and art from different countries. And all of it came together to create an awe-inspiring work of art.

She was talented in so many ways, and looking back, I suppose that's why she loved working with miniatures. Building a mini-mansion gave her the opportunity to work in many mediums, to craft in many ways, and do it all in a small space. This is another way in which I relate to my Honey, I'm that way too. I like variety in the things that I craft and create. I've written a book, taken old high school bleacher boards and crafted them into wood floors in our house, designed a t-shirt line and make greeting cards. I'd like to think that I inherited this eclectic tendency from Honey, but at the very least I was influenced by the way that she lived her life.

Honey's love of crafting culminated

from years of artisanship. She designed innovative advertisements for she and my grandpa's business that turned heads of the editors at the New Yorker, for Christmas she hand painted cards and made her stockings, she designed her own clothes and altered clothes and jewelry to her liking, she was creative and unafraid. I remember her crafting of miniature things the most because their crafting started when I was young. I remember making all types of little things with Honey. Small oval rocks painted into converse tennis shoes, miniature landscapes built on driftwood and sent out onto the still waters of Flathead Lake each 4th of July and dozens of pint-sized dolls. She kept me, and all of her grandchildren crafting, and it was during this crafting that Honey cemented her love of miniatures.

Not only did she love them, she



*A miniature painting by Phyllis Stockner.*



*A spinning wheel sits in front of the fire place.*

had the talent and patience to work on tiny delicate objects. As a young girl I remember sitting by her side at her kitchen table where she kept a huge round magnifying glass hooked to the table with a vice grip. She would gather her wood and fabrics or her clay or her paints and dive in with skilled focus. And though she worked feverishly, she never forgot about us grandkids who had our own mini projects going on right by her side. I still have painted rock tennis shoes and artwork from those days. With her crafting, she spread her love of her miniatures and love of life.

Making detailed artwork is not an easy task but to do it in a petite style is near impossible. Almost as impossible as the fact that the Bed & Breakfast where I was staying in Missoula happened to not only be across the street from my grandparent's old house, but when I crawled into bed my first night in Missoula, I looked on the bedside table and there was a rose covered box just like Honey's. Three months earlier, my family had met in Missoula and gone through her belongings after she'd passed away. Amongst her things there had been a burnished leather and metal lunch style box, detailed with delicate roses. We had dispersed Honey's possessions between family members and what was left went to the YWCA in Missoula. Had her box ended up in a thrift store? Had the B&B host gone shopping there and been drawn to it?

— Continued on next page



## Love In Every Little Step

— Continued from page 23

Or had Honey bought the box at Target, or Walmart, like a million other people? Did it matter? The sight of it brought me to tears.

Honey was there with me and though I could tell that this quick trip to Montana was going to be difficult, it would be good for me. It was hard knowing that memories might come rushing back and I might have to keep myself from crying in public, but I have some history with this, I lost my fiancé in an accident over twenty-five years ago, so I know that as difficult as it can be, diving into grief and one's past, is worth remembering all the details about the person you love, even if it brings on tears and sadness, because if you do it enough, it brings more good memories, as well as contentment and joy.

When I woke up the next morning, snow was blowing in. I walked to a nearby café for a breakfast sandwich and a latte. I left deep footprints in the snow as I strolled back to the B&B. I couldn't stop smiling. I gathered my camera from my room and on my way to the car ran into the owner of the B&B. I asked her about the rose box, she had bought it a few months earlier at the YWCA's Secret Seconds store. It was Honey's. My heart felt light as I drove to the museum.

On the ride I thought about the day that my brother and dad and I had brought Honey's miniature house to the museum's curator. We had gotten there early and since the museum was closed we waited. Outside chatting under the leafless trees were three women in their 60's.



*The pink attic bedroom with a diary on the bed.*

They hollered over, "The museum isn't open today." Then they smiled, "We found out the hard way." I thanked them and explained that I was meeting the curator because the museum was going to be putting my grandmother's miniature house on display.

They glanced to one another. "Do you think we could take a look?"

"Sure." My heart lifted. It had been a long day sorting through my grandparent's things.

The women gathered around the back of the van. They oohed and aahed and asked if they could take pictures. My shoulders relaxed and a softness fell across my lips. A museum had been the right decision. Having Honey's house in a place where people would enjoy it felt good. In this place it would be loved and appreciated by many.

Now I was visiting the museum on a Thursday. It was a quiet day. Had I been able to make the Holiday Opening or been there during a class fieldtrip, I may have gotten to see more people



*A brick fireplace warms the room.*

admiring her work, but a Thursday was perfect because being one of just a few people in the museum at the time, it allowed me to savor the moment, to take a million pictures and shed a few tears. Tears of sadness for my loss, but also tears of joy for that fact that not only was Honey's house in a place where it would be cherished but that Honey had found a way to be there with me, and to remind me that she, as well as all the people who I have loved who have died, are always with me, following me, guiding me, every little step of the way.

*Sonya Elliott is an author, fashion model, mom and basketball fanatic. Learn more about her at [sonyaelliott.com](http://sonyaelliott.com)*



*Kitchen.*



*Beautiful furniture fill every room.*