

# Miscellany Antiques

## Restoring Childhood Memories One Doll at a Time

By Katharine Leppert

**While vintage and antique dolls** are normally viewed with a collector's shrewd eye, Lana and Neal Fisk prefer to look at them in another light — as cherished memories and irreplaceable pieces of childhood. Preserving these memories are what Miscellany Antiques, Lana and Neal's antique store and doll restoration shop, is all about.

Lana Fisk's doll repair business began with the preservation of her own family's memories. After inheriting an old, damaged doll from her grandmother, Lana decided to have the doll repaired. However, when the doll was returned to her, she found the damage was still visible. Dissatisfied with the work, Lana decided to teach herself to repair dolls and return them to as close to original condition as possible.

Seven years later, Lana has a thriving doll-repair business to attest to her determination. Her store displays are packed with dolls for sale — some of which she restored — as well as many pieces of doll clothing and shoes.

Tucked out of sight is her workshop, where Lana specializes in repairing and restoring composition dolls, which were made in the 1930s-50s. She also works on hard plastic, vinyl and cloth dolls, along with stuffed animals. Lana can even repair the voice boxes in vintage talking dolls, which she cites as "probably the most difficult plastic dolls to work on."

Lana's dedication to quality work, which inspired her to learn the trade in the first place, dictates her business policies.

"My rule of thumb is, whatever doll it is doesn't leave the store until I'm happy with it," Lana said.

### Taking Matters into Her Own Hands

Faced with the difficulty of finding repair products, particularly good repair products, Lana developed her own.

Neal's chemistry background enabled him to make suggestions on the ingredients and amounts that went into the products, but even with that expertise, it took about two years and a lot of trial and error to develop the products. Lana's line of doll repair products includes craze repair, a product that fills in the fine cracks that often develop over time on the surface of composition; filler, for repairing breaks and holes; paint, in a variety of flesh colors; and doll cleaning solution, a gentle cleaner that will eliminate soil without removing a doll's flesh-colored paint, lip rouge, blush or other painted features.



Lana Fisk brings dolls back to life, one repair at a time.

"I had to have something to repair the dolls with," Lana explained. "[My products] help me fix dolls that other people would just throw away. [I] bring them back to life."

Lana now sells the complete line in her store and on eBay.

### Going Big

While Lana had been operating her business from home for several years, it was only two-and-a-half years ago when she and her husband opened Miscellany Antiques in Denver. Between Lana's dolls and Neal's militaria, it's clear that the store, with its large stock of miscellaneous treasures, was aptly named.

Lana also participates in many regional doll shows and sales, where she displays before-and-after pictures of her work, along with repaired dolls. She also holds doll repair classes at some of these shows and the classes always fill up.

Despite the success of her business, Lana recently closed the Denver store, with plans to re-open this summer in Russell, Kan.

"The Denver market is pretty deflated," Lana said. Some people don't mind paying the prices, and other people just don't want to pay the prices for the dolls."

Lana decided to move the business due partly to the Denver economy, and partly to the need for more space to accommodate the dolls, militaria and the doll repair business.

*Continued on Page 74*

## PROFILE • MISCELLANY ANTIQUES

*Continued from Page 114*

### Preserving Memories

The business tagline, "Preserving your childhood memories," is no coincidence. Most of Lana's customers want to restore dolls that have sentimental significance. Being able to restore people's treasures is one of Lana's favorite parts of the job.

In one of Lana's most heartwarming stories, two sisters purchased the first doll Lana sold in the store as a birthday present for their mother, who had severe Alzheimer's disease. The doll was identical to one the mother had as a girl.

"They came back later and told me their mother holds on to the doll all the time," Lana said. "She's so attached to it."



The repairing process begins on one of Lana Fisk dolls. Owners are amazed at how the final product turns out.

Lana also has many stories about miraculous repairs to dolls that the owners feared were beyond repair. One doll was brought in with its head in three pieces. Although the repairs took four-and-a-half-months, Lana pieced the doll's head back together, filled a large hole in its head that involved re-creating the ear and hair, repainted the doll and dressed

it in appropriate clothing. When the owner picked up her childhood toy, she was unable to tell the damage.

"It just warms your heart to know that you're able to provide this for somebody," Lana said.

*Katharine Leppert is a freelance writer from Littleton, Colo.*