



# SISTER MERCY'S FOUNDLING HOME FOR RAG CHILLUN

by Frannie Meshorer

Making rag dolls has been a passion of mine for many years. I once asked my Auntie Em if I had made dolls when I was a little girl. She smiled and replied, "You were always making 'little ones' out of 'big ones'. It didn't matter if it was fabric or paper or wood or any other material ... if you could cut it up and create something from it, your heart was happy!"

When I grew up and had two little girls of my own, I do believe my love for rag dolls was rekindled. I was the "momma" of the Crooked Tree Hollow Rag Doll Club of Maryland for ten years, and brought in many accomplished dollmakers to teach us techniques. I traveled to major cloth-doll workshops all over the country to take classes. I learned tips, techniques, ideas, and skills that are amazing ... but *always* my heart and hands returned to the lowly little nostalgic, childlike dolls of yesteryear. I do believe they remind me of my own gentle upbringing.

I was born and raised in Washington, D.C. ... a city girl ... but "country blood" flows through my veins! My family roots reach into the hills of Georgia and the deep forests of southern Virginia. My handsome honey-hunk husband Hank and I both retired from careers with the U.S. Department of Justice in Washington, D.C. We loved every moment of those chapters in our book of life ... but we know these "freedom years" in the hollers of central Kentucky is where our hearts belong.

Here are some sentimental, homely little tattered rag chillun in need of a momma. Every doll is handmade by Sister Frances Catherine Stevens (also known as Frannie Meshorer) in an old Green County, Kentucky, Civil War-era log cabin built in 1863.

As each 'rag chile' comes to life, she wanders down the hill to the orphanage. Sister Mercy (Momma Superior of the Foundling Home) sometimes hears a quiet little knock on the front door ... or now 'n then a poor little lost soul is found sittin' on the door stoop or wandering through the garden! The orphan-chile is brought in and lovingly given hot soup and homemade bread or cookies and milk as Sister Mercy talks

with her to find out her story. Oh yes, just as every person has a story, so does every rag chile! Each one has a name, and each has, as her heart's deepest desire, a wish to find a momma who will discover her and adopt her and take her home and love her.

You will, from time to time, find some of these dear little ones sitting patiently, perhaps having a tea party, reading a book, humming a little tune or just sitting about and wonderin' and dreamin' of their new home. When you meet them, pick them up ... hold them close to your heart ... look into their little eyes ... and see if you don't see a little of yourself reflected back!



## "AMAZING GRACE" MCGUNIGAL

Little rag doll

All torn and tattered ...

You were my friend

When it really mattered.



## JUBILATION & DECLARATION

These patriotic cuzins were hand-did from olde feedsacks, vintage buttons, stitches, and applique. Their hair is from an olde rag ball made from a “falling apart” rug. Their red, white, and blue dresses, underoos, and apron are from new fabric that has been “gently dyed” to give a time-weary look (as have their “old glory” flags).

## BERTHA & BEULAH

Upon arrival at the Foundling Home, the almost identical twin sisters started collectin' scraps from the sewin' classes that Sister Frances Catherine teaches each Tuesday morning to all the orphan chiles.

Despite the sadness of the "unfortunate stubborn mule incident" that done took their mam and pap on off to heaven (as they tell it), they have happy dispositions, and "worldly treasures don't got no hold on uz," sez Beulah to all the other young 'uns at the orphanage. Bertha sez she's the older of the two by one day—she was born on a Saturday night roun' midnight, and her sister come along 14 minutes later, jus' after the grandpappy clock in the hallway struck in the new day!

Both Bertha and Beulah bring with them armloads of "fancy goods" and button necklaces (they were seen with scissors in hand in the "missionary bag" a-cuttin' ever last button off'en ever last blouse!). The gurlz are made from an 1800's black coffin cover ... the fringe from the cover being their hair!



## FRANNIE

A quiet, gentle little soul who collects feathers ... she sez they are her "totem" and believes them to be "fairie wings." Frannie sez fairies are "memory keepers" who live in the hollow of an olde crooked tree ... they flit and flutter and fly all around you during the day (fairies are invisible to humans in the daylight) ... but ahhhh, yes, they collect your memories ... and someday, when you are grown and no longer believe in fairies ... they return to whisper these memories into your ear.

Stardust of silver,  
Moonbeams of gold,  
Spun by the fairie folk  
From stories oft' told.  
They live in the hollow  
Of an olde crooked tree,  
For the stardust of memories  
... Is magic, you see.



## SOPHIE JANE & SOFI JUNE

Both girls came to the orphanage 'bout the same time from down ta Green County, Kaintuck', where they was a x-ploshun in the olde 'underoo' factory where they mommas worked. They mommas is now sewin' up britches for the angels! They lived a'fur piece apart and had never met until the missionary ladies at the Ebenezer Hallelujah Amen Baptist Church gathered the chilluns up who lost their parents and put 'em all on a wagon headin' for Sister Mercy's place. Discoverin' they both had the same name—but spelt diff runt—they quickly became good friends. They are diff runt as midnight and noontime in their bringin' up and ways ... but it took 'em no time to figger out that true friendship don't have no fences!

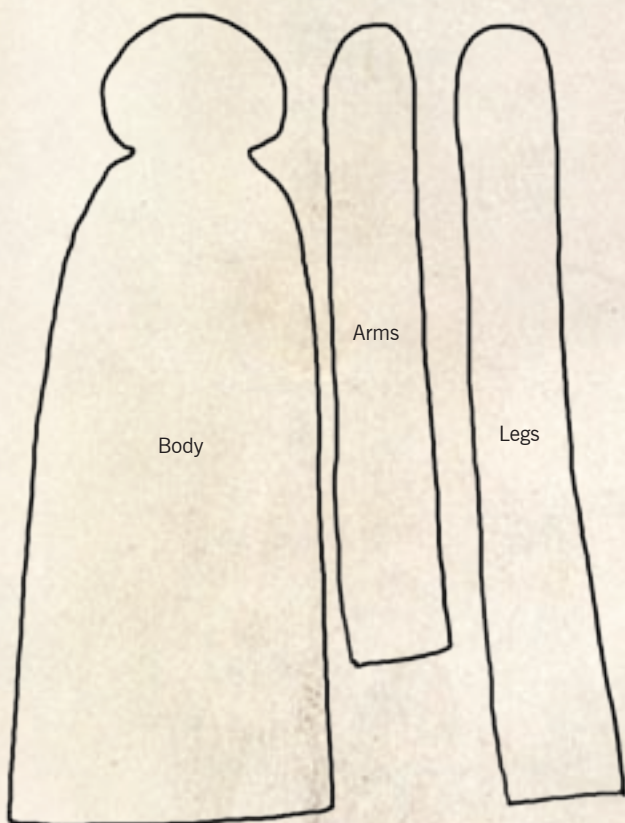
## IVY ROSE & IRIS WISTERIA

These sisters wear dresses the shade of a bluebonnet on a hillside. Sister Frances Catherine sewed these up from some olde curtains she found in the missionary box. Their little patchwork and yo-yo quilts were in a small trunk they brought with them to the Orphanage ... and belonged to their Great Grannie Gertie Grace.



# MAKING A RAG DOLL

## *Sister Mercy Style*



ENLARGE PATTERN TO THE SIZE OF DOLL YOU WANT

### YOU'LL NEED:

osnaburg (or muslin)  
tea bags  
large bowl  
fiber fill  
wool, yarn, or twine for hair  
fabric scraps for noses, hearts, etc.  
sewing machine and/or sewing needle  
thread  
scissors  
pins  
iron

1. Immerse fabric in hot water; add several tea bags. Soak until fabric is desired darkness. Rinse fabric, dry, and iron.
2. Using tea-dyed fabric, make doll body slightly larger than desired to compensate for the  $\frac{1}{4}$ " seam allowance used throughout. Cut two body pieces, four arms, and four legs.
2. Pin body pieces right sides together and stitch, leaving openings for arms and bottom of body open for turning and stuffing.
3. Stuff all pieces with fiberfill; insert raw edges of arms into body and hand stitch. Insert raw edges of legs into body opening; hand stitch closed.
4. Create nose and heart, if desired, from fabric scraps; hand-stitch. Embroider eyes and mouth if desired
5. For hair, hand stitch wool or desired material onto doll head.

Note: If you think you might like to make lots of dollies, there are TWO sewing tools that I find absolutely a pleasure to use.

#1: a set of TURNING TUBES (honestly, this cuts a 5- to 10-minute project into a 15-second wham-bam, WOW, that was fast, project!)

#2 is indispensable for dolly making: a STUFFING FORK. It can be frustrating trying to stuff little arms and legs without it! The large size is best all around.

Find both at: <http://shop.epbdolls.net>

### BE A DOLL ... MAKE ONE THAT LOOKS LIKE YOU!

The ultimate dolly is one that looks like you! It's also fun to gift someone a doll fashioned in their likeness. You can find doll supplies online to accomplish that, everything from mock turquoise Thelma and Louise glasses to Harry Potter-type glasses, even eye patches, and special needs equipment. The best way to accomplish your look-alike is through the color of hair and eyes that you choose. You can embroider a pair of glasses permanently on your face or bend some paper clips into glasses. If you have a tell-tale tattoo, embroider the same tattoo on your doll.