

## About This Book

It was a blustery December evening in 1958. Little Sarah Jean Linquist stood with her face pressed up against a large window at Marshall Field's department store in Chicago. Sarah, already an aspiring young artist, was swept away by a magical holiday scene created by some unknown designer. "I want to do that some day!" she exclaimed. That desire resurfaced decades later as this amazing book and as one of the ways Sarah dealt with a life-changing event.

In 2006, in the midst of a long career as a prolific painter and well-respected scenic artist, my beloved wife Sarah was diagnosed with late-stage ovarian cancer. As someone who courageously and delightfully made every situation her own, even ones that seemed adversarial, she did not let this new reality, as she called it, detract from her personal mission: to nurture our family, to spend time with loving friends, to create art, and to wear cool clothes.

In our home, we have often referred to life as the Great Mystery, and mysterious and grand was how Sarah looked at the world. She really wasn't trying to figure life out or even unravel it...she just wanted to dance with it.

Her first chemo treatments left her with peripheral neuropathy. Her hands and feet became numb, so much that she not only had some difficulty walking, but with her eyes closed she couldn't feel the difference between sand paper or silk, a real challenge for an artist who draws and paints.

To regain her fine motor skills Sarah began cutting up paper and assembling the pieces into shapes and objects. And then she remembered gazing into those Christmas windows at Marshall Field's. With this Aha! moment she began this wondrous book.

Sarah wrote a classic journey tale. Her story combines foolishness, bravery, loyalty, risk taking and the need to count on others to help you push through the unknown. To illustrate her story, Sarah created a series of 3-D sets, each a miniature landscape through which her characters journeyed. She constructed her Paper Land, Popcorn Land, Metal Land, Teddy Bear Land, Wood Land and Desolation Land using different materials and found objects. For her heroine she fashioned Dolly, a small wooden doll with wild red hair. She set her story within the context of her favorite time of year: Christmas.

Making landscapes became a wonderful adventure. Sarah was determined to find just the right pieces for her "Lands." She borrowed heavily from her own giant stash of "arty stuff" collected over many years; she also loved to cruise garage sales and auction web

sites. She invited family and friends to donate mini Teddy bears, stuffed crows, and small wooden doors or to help make a whole garden of cloth flowers. Sarah had so much fun explaining her story and giving tours of her evolving sets to the steady stream of visitors who passed through our house.

Sarah worked on her book project whenever she had time, even after two major surgeries and during four different chemo regimens. I figure she averaged four hours a day for four years. That's almost 6,000 hours devoted to her vision: a new Christmas classic that parents and grandparents would read to their children in the days leading up to Christmas.

Very sadly though, Sarah died in June, 2010, before she could finish her book.

Soon after her passing, ten family members and close friends, each one committed to Sarah's mantra of "Ain't Life Grand," agreed to complete Sarah's project and make her dream a reality. Working together for over a year, we have grown closer as friends, and as family. We have gained new insights into Sarah's extraordinary artwork and how she looked at the world she had created. And just as working on her book was a way for Sarah to find greater purpose in her life, to keep pushing forward, our efforts to complete her book have helped us all heal.

Sarah's book is part of her legacy to us all. She has given us amazing landscapes to journey through, a tale to help us to experience the magic of Christmas, and a memory of her hard work that empowers each of us to reach for something beyond our daily lives, to probe the Great Mystery even more deeply.

This book is a testament to Sarah's abilities as an artist, to her devotion as a wife, mother, sister, daughter and friend, and to her delightful spirit. I hope you have enjoyed reading and sharing this book as much as she loved creating it.

**Robert Fishbone**

*Sarah's husband*

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