

## FALL 2001



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# Making memories in Geppetto's Workshop



STORY BY MARIDON DUNCANSON  
PHOTOS BY BOILY

David and Doris Powell have spent a lifetime guiding children academically, spiritually, musically and now, in their later years, through the wonderful word of play.

David spent his first career as an educator in Northern Ontario, retiring as Director of Education in 1985. His wife, Doris, also taught early in their marriage. She left her paying job to raise their five children and volunteer with youth, working with young women in C.G.I.T. and Explorers church groups and playing the piano for school concerts and music festivals.



After David's retirement they moved to Prince Edward Island with their youngest son, who was still in high school. It was here that David "fell" into the craft of puppet making. While he was recovering from a tumble off a ladder, he received a visit from a colleague and his young son. The boy spent several hours playing with a marionette that David had received while teaching in Cochrane, Ontario.

Inspired by that child's enthusiasm, David decided to try his hand at creating a marionette, himself. This was the beginning of the aptly named Geppetto's Workshop in 1988. The first creation was, appropriately, a Pinocchio with a nose that really grew.



David creates the marionettes and does all the woodworking and finishing. Doris designs the patterns and makes all the clothes for the puppets. She also creates the face patterns and hand paints the faces that require a delicate touch, such as the "Anne" marionette and the beautiful Rosamunda.

Little Bo and his sister, Little Boette, are endearing characters, as is the long-necked D. Duck. When children buy a duck, they are encouraged to give it a name. "There are a lot of "Quackers" out there," David says.

As well as the stringed marionettes, Geppetto's Workshop turns out simple wooden pull toys, tops and sock piggy banks.

All of the toys are handmade right on the premises. The puppets are made of a variety of woods, including birch, mahogany, pine and recycled hardwood flooring. The larger puppets are between 12 and 14 inches tall. The little ones are about seven inches.

David is always thinking about and developing new characters. "This year," he says, "I'm bound I'm going to have a dancing man or bust. I'm pretty close to prototype. Then it will be put together, bounced around and tried out by the grandkids."

While they don't put on puppet shows, they enjoy going around to schools to demonstrate how the marionettes operate. Says David, "Children start talking to them and then you know it's working. They take on little personalities of their own."

Visitors to the shop are also invited to try out the marionettes, encouraged by the sign that declares, "Welcome young at heart of all ages."

In their island home overlooking a beautiful valley, David and Doris have found a second career that enriches their lives. David says they are often asked, "Do you know how fortunate you are?" The answer is always yes. "We don't take it for granted," he says.

For the Powells, the marionettes are much more than toys. Says David, "When people ask what do you do, I often say, 'we make memories'."

**Geppetto's Workshop** is located in Founds Mills, P.E.I. on Route 238. They are open regular hours from early June to late September and by chance or appointment the rest of the year. Phone (902) 886-2339. They also do a brisk mail order business and a catalogue of their wares is available on the internet at [www.geppettosworkshop.ca](http://www.geppettosworkshop.ca)



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