

Little Ones – More Than Just a Doll

~ Cordula Hetland

Imagine yourself listening...

The morning sun shines through the windows. We hear the birds singing their morning song. Nettle, my Little One, begins to tell her story—a story Fairy Mother has shared with her:

On a warm autumn day, when the sun was shining brightly and the leaves had turned golden like the sun itself, a very special Little One was born. His name was Goldenleave. He loved to play under the big old oak tree.

Year after year, he waited for the leaves to turn golden again on his birthday, and it brought joy to his heart. He loved watching the golden leaves gently fall to the ground, carried by the wind.

As Goldenleave grew up, it was soon time for him to leave Little Land and travel to the Land of the People. But before that, he had to prepare himself for the journey. He gathered strength, courage, wisdom, and love from all the beings who cared for him in Little Land and carried them with him when it was time to go.

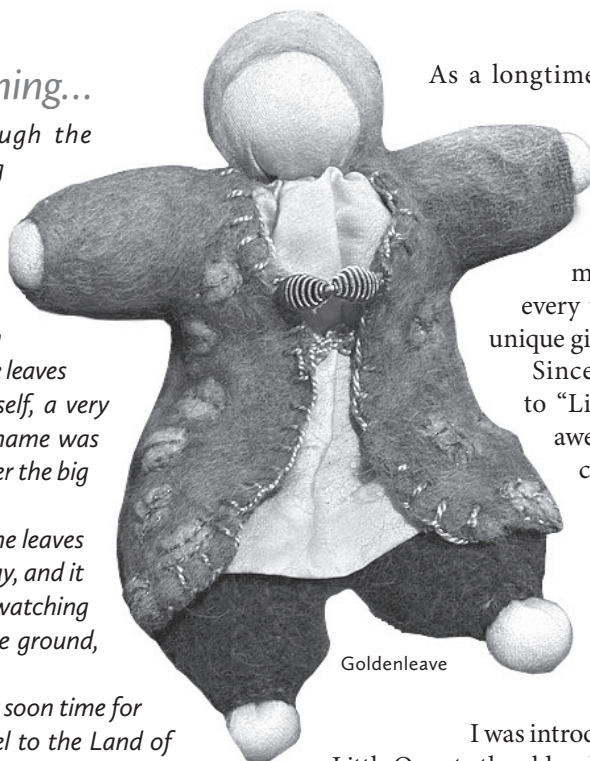
It was a long journey, but he finally arrived in the Land of the People. Exhausted and tired, he sat down under a beautiful tree. Suddenly, while dreaming, he heard a gentle voice calling to him... a voice he had never heard before. Was it the voice of the person he was going to meet soon in the Land of the People?

"I am waiting for you," he heard.

Excited, Goldenleave woke up and continued his journey. He came to a beautiful meadow, where he could hear children playing, singing, and dancing. He felt as if he had found his new home. He sat down in the tall green grass and watched quietly.

He was so deep in thought that he didn't notice a tall, beautiful boy had come close. When the boy saw him, he smiled, and when their eyes met, they both knew—it was the boy who had patiently waited for Goldenleave's arrival, whose voice had been heard in his dreams...

* * *



Goldenleave

As a longtime Waldorf kindergarten teacher, I'm always striving to create magical moments for the children in my care. There are so many ways to do this—and every teacher brings their own unique gifts.

Since I was first introduced to "Little Ones," I've been in awe of the deep connections children can form with a doll. We allow them to build this bond by encouraging their imagination to remain free and open. Every child connects in a deeply individual way.

I was introduced to the idea of gifting Little Ones to the older children in my classroom. I felt excited—but also a little anxious. For many weeks, I imagined myself creating them. Finally, I found my own way to bring them to life in the classroom.

Steps Before Making the Doll

Once I decided which student would receive a Little One, I began the process of imagining the child's nature—how they presented themselves in the classroom and at home—and what might support them in their journey ahead. This process brought me very close to each student in a deep and heartfelt way. It opened a gateway for me to receive an image of the doll—its name, colors, and other features. I learned to trust this process as an important tool. Sometimes I would ask a child or parent about favorite colors, flowers, trees, or other parts of nature to gather more concrete inspiration before starting the doll.

Finding the Right Material

Having a wide variety of old sweaters and fabrics makes the next step feel like a true adventure. I love pairing colors and shapes that complement the name



Sample of a pouch made by a child



A child holding her Little One



Fern resting in a bed made by children after arriving

I've chosen for the Little One. Every teacher will have their own way of creating the doll, and there are endless wonderful methods. What's most important is to use only natural materials—ideally soft ones. The dolls should be no more than 9–10 inches long so they can fit in a pouch to be carried around the neck.

Finding the Name

The name often emerges through the imagination process or while crafting. Sometimes it whispers itself quietly through the story.

Introducing the Little Ones to the Class

Children who are going to receive a Little One begin by making a pouch to carry it in. Before the first Little One arrives, it's important to build a welcoming atmosphere. You should have your own Little One begin sharing stories regularly—stories about Little Land and Fairy Mother caring for the Little Ones. Let your imagination soar freely. These precious circle times are ideal for sharing such tales.

When the first Little One is ready to travel to a child, let your own Little One share a story about how the new doll was prepared for the journey and how it received its name from Fairy Mother.

The Arrival

When the time is right, choose a special day and moment for the Little One to appear. This could happen during classroom free play, on a forest walk, or out at the playground. Involve the entire class in the discovery. Let the Little One whisper its name to your own doll first, so they can share it with the children—along with the story of how the name came to be.

Caring for the Little One

It's essential to have conversations with parents about the Little Ones. They play a key role in protecting and preserving the magic we're creating. I believe Little Ones should go home with the children. In my experience, this allows parents to be actively involved in the magic and deepen the connection between home and classroom.

What Do Little Ones Mean to Us and the Children?

Little Ones are so much more than dolls. For us as teachers, they represent a special pathway into the soul of the child. They change the nature of our connection, deepening our bond for years to come. They help keep us connected to the magical world of nature and the unseen world within.

When we create them, we are giving birth to something entirely new—something that brings transformation both to the maker and the child who receives it.

In today's world, more than ever, teachers are being called to protect the wonder and magic of childhood, to create safe and sacred spaces for the children in our care. Little Ones can help bring that magic into our classrooms, and I'm forever grateful for the profound effect they have on children and families alike.



Little Ones' farewell celebration before summer break

For the child, a Little One is a companion like no other—full of life and magic, a soulmate and friend who shares both joy and sorrow. The doll allows children to enter the world of imagination and wonder, and to remain there even as they transition into the grades. It becomes a bridge from Kindergarten to the world of school. It can also be a healer and a protector. Little Ones will be a part of children's lives for many years to come. ♦

Cordula Hetland *was born in Germany, where she first experienced the warmth and wonder of Waldorf early childhood education. After training and working as an early childhood educator for over a decade in Europe, she relocated to the United States, where she now teaches in the mixed-age kindergarten of Whidbey Island Waldorf School. One of her greatest joys has been bringing the "Little Ones" to life, an experience that extends beyond the classroom to touch the hearts of children and parents alike.*