

Spirit Dolls



by
Robin Atkins

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Beady blessings!

Robin Atkins

www.robinatkins.com

Spirit Dolls

by Robin Atkins

Spirit dolls ~ sweet little bead embellished fabric dolls ~ are thought to bring love, joy, good health, and prosperity to their owners. You can hang one in your car, give one to a friend, celebrate an occasion, put one on your Christmas tree, send one as a "get well angel."

My first doll of this type was made for me by a dear friend in 1993, when I bought a brand new car. My friend told me the doll was a "New Car Protection Goddess." Ever since then, she's been doing her job, even though the sun faded and eventually disintegrated her fabric.



Dad's Doll

I was touched by this delightful and caring gift, and began making dolls in a similar shape for various friends and family: for my brother and his wife, a square dance doll made with fabric from one of their matching costumes, to celebrate their together dance of life; for my dad, a doll imbued with my wishes that he continue to write his memoirs; for the organizer of a folk arts camp in Hungary, a memory doll with miniature clay bowls, a scroll of music, and other ephemera gathered during the camp; for a dear friend with a serious illness, a healing doll with stone beads selected for their healing powers; and many others.

When you make a spirit doll, whether for yourself or as a gift, the idea is to be mindful, perhaps even prayerful, of her purpose as you hand sew her seams and embellish her with carefully chosen beads. Thus you are imbuing her with vitality and strength for her intended mission. Make spirit dolls for healing, guidance, protection, remembering, friendship and love, in support of art and creativity, and for holidays and celebrations.

Basic Doll Construction

Supplies You'll Need

- 2 pieces of fabric, one each for the front and back of the doll. They can be the same or different. Light or medium weight cotton works best, but you can use silks or other fabrics. Be aware that fabrics which fray easily can be "character building," because the seam allowances are quite small.
- An assortment of seed beads (all sizes, including 15s), bugle beads, and small accent beads.
- Any small charms, coins, fetishes, bells, feathers, buttons, lace, ribbons, etc. that fit your idea for your spirit doll.
- A bobbin of beading thread. I use Nymo, size D.
- Beading needle. I prefer short needles in size 11.
- Soft fluffy stuffing, polyester or cotton.
- Basic sewing supplies ~ scissors, pins, etc.
- A pencil with an eraser (used for turning and stuffing your doll).
- Tracing paper.

Begin by selecting one of the basic pattern variations on the next page. Copy the pattern using a copy machine or tracing paper. Place the right sides of the doll fabric together, pin the copy of the pattern on the fabric, and cut out both back and front at the same time. Take care to follow pattern lines closely. Remove the pattern, and with right sides of the fabric still facing each other, pin them together.

Use a single thread and a tiny running stitch to sew the doll front and back together with a seam allowance of approximately 1/8th inch. For the basic or angel-shaped doll, start at bottom right corner (A), and sew up around the doll's arm, head, other arm. Stop at the lower left corner (B), leaving the bottom edge free for stuffing. For the "goddess" shaped doll, leave an opening of about 2½ inches along one side for stuffing. Reinforce the tight curves

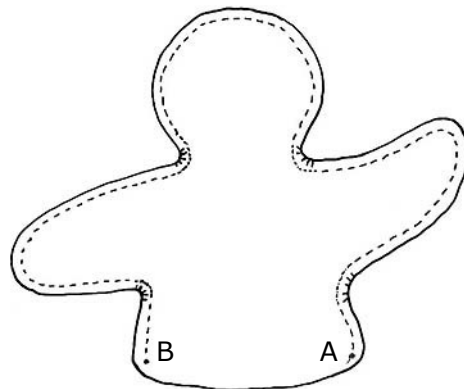
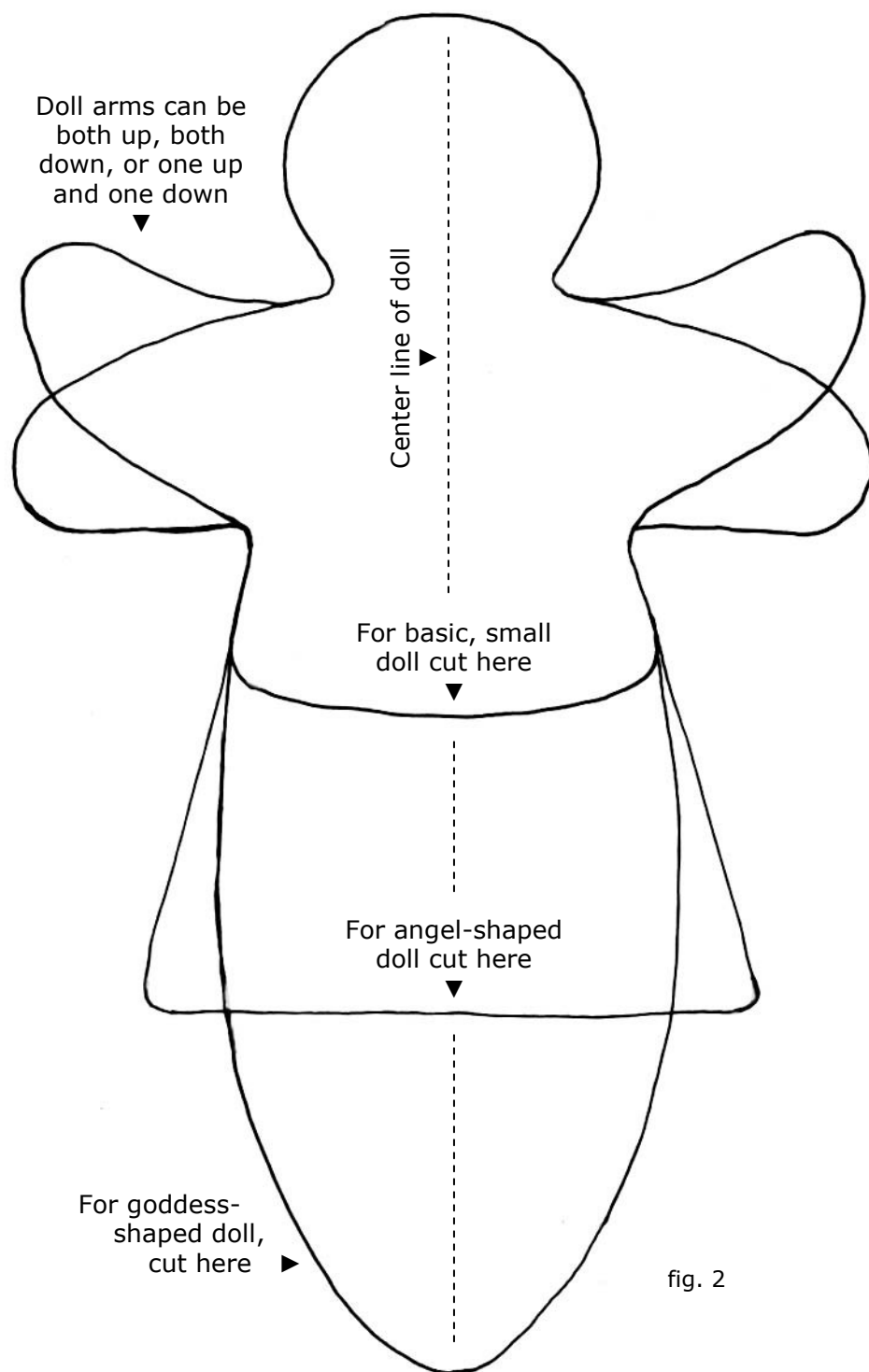


fig. 1



at the neck and underarms by back stitching. Carefully clip these four curves after stitching is complete (see fig. 1).

Starting at the head, turn doll right side out. I use the eraser end of a pencil for this. Work the head through the body. Reposition the pencil and gently work one of the arms through the body; then the other. Take your time with this so that you don't burst the seams.

Using one small pinch of stuffing at a time and the eraser end of the pencil, stuff the head first. Work enough stuffing into the neck so that it can support the weight of beaded hair. Then stuff each of the arms, followed by the body. The doll can be stuffed soft or firm, according to your preference. However, I find it easier to sew beads on the doll when it is stuffed fairly soft.

Using your finger, compress the body stuffing toward the head, and turn in the bottom edges of the fabric (side edges on goddess-shaped doll). Pin, and use small whip stitches to close the opening. These stitches won't show because they will be covered with beaded edge stitching or fringe.

Tips ~ Fabrics and Making the Doll's Body

- Mostly I position the doll pattern with the center line parallel or perpendicular to the selvage edge of the fabric. However, sometimes you might want to position the doll diagonally with her center line on the bias of the fabric. If you do, her neck will "pooch" out a bit. Give her a choker type necklace to bring her neck back into shape.
- While turning the doll right side out or stuffing her, if you accidentally poke through the seam, you can carefully finish stuffing her, and then whip stitch the seam closed. Beaded edging will cover your stitches.
- I like hand sewing these dolls (all part of the meditative process). But if you have a sewing machine, you can machine sew the seams. Draw the seam allowance on your traced/copied pattern, and cut out the pattern along the seam allowance line. Using a ball point pen or sharp pencil, draw around the pattern on the fabric. Sew on the drawn line. After sewing, cut out the doll, leaving about 1/8th inch seam allowance. Then turn and stuff her the same as hand-sewn dolls.
- Pre-pieced fabrics (see *Quilt Dolly*, page 15) make interesting dolls.
- Using thread embroidery techniques, you can embellish the doll fabric before you actually cut and sew her together.

Embellishing Your Doll

Now the fun begins! You will be adding a beaded edge stitch along your doll's seams, which will serve as both decoration and reinforcement for the seams. Embellishments such as hair, necklace, earrings, fringe, body adornments, and a loop for suspending your doll will follow.

Tips ~ Starting to Embellish

- When you've finished sewing your doll, you may notice imperfections, such as her head not being very rounded. This is normal; the beads will mask any problem areas.
- You don't have to plan your entire doll before you start! For example if you know what you want to do with her hair, do that first; then move on to the next thing that seems "right."



*Doll in Progress
(note uneven shape ~
this is normal)*

"Stitch Knots"

To bury the tails of your starting and ending knots, follow these steps. Use a single thread and make a knot at the end of the thread. Insert your needle about one inch from where you want to sew something on your doll, start an edge stitch, or add fringe. In the example to the right, assume you want to sew a bead at point B. Enter the fabric at point A, and exit about one inch away, at point B. Make a "stitch knot" at point B by taking a tiny stitch; then thread the needle through the loop of the stitch before pulling it tight. To finish, pull the knot at point A slightly away from the doll's body and snip it off. If you are making a fringe or loop that may bear some weight, make two "stitch knots"

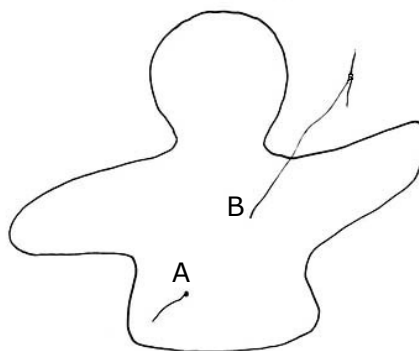


fig. 3

at point B. End your stitching in a similar way. Make a "stitch knot" (hidden under a bead or in a seam). From this knot, take a long stitch through the doll's body. Pull the thread slightly, and cut flush to the fabric at the end of the long stitch.

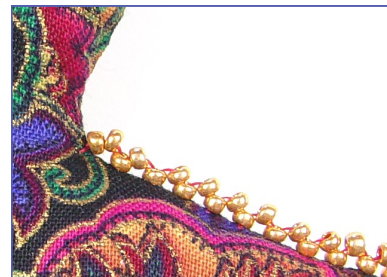
Now that you know how to begin and end your stitching, you're ready to start embellishing your doll. I generally begin with the picot edge stitch. Choose a color of seed beads (size 11 or 15) that looks nice with the fabrics on both sides of your doll. Begin at the neck, and work around the arm, the body, and the other arm, finishing at the neck. You can do the head too, but I generally don't, as I want some other look for the hair.

Using a single thread, start with a "stitch knot" at the neck. String on three beads. About one bead's width from the "stitch knot" sew across the seam, perpendicular to it, catching a tiny bit of both the front and back fabric. Pull the thread snug, and you will see that the three beads form a little point (picot). Without going through the fabric again, slip the needle next to the fabric through the third bead from the under side of it. Now add two more beads. Sew across the seam again about a bead's width away from the end of the first picot. Sew through the last bead from the under-side (closest to the fabric). Continue adding two more beads for the next picot, etc. (fig. 4).

When you run out of thread or finish the last picot, backstitch through the last picot and back into the fabric through the third from the last bead. Bring the needle to the surface under the picot and make a "stitch knot." Sew into the doll's body with a long stitch to the surface and snip the thread.



Fig. 4



Picot Edge Stitch

Tips ~ Picot Edge Stitch

- If the points flatten out, space your stitches closer together; if they bunch up and look like a wall, space them further apart.
- You may omit the picot edge stitch on the bottom of the doll if you intend to fringe all the way across the bottom.
- Try using a different color bead for the top bead of each picot.

Once you've finished edging your doll, she will begin to take on her true personality. I recommend that you just follow your own instincts about what to do next. Perhaps you have a special bead or button you'd like to sew on her body. Or, you may have an idea about her "jewelry" - a necklace or earrings. Or, maybe you are excited to do her hair.

The only technical consideration concerning what to do next involves the problem of getting your sewing thread tangled in fringe or beaded hair. That's why I often begin with the body embellishments, and save the fringe and hair for last. But if you're anxious to do her hair, go ahead. After making it, you can wrap it in a little piece of aluminum foil and scrunch it against her head, while you finish her other decorations.

Sewing beads on the doll body is easy. Just make a "stitch knot" where you wish to start, sew through the bead, and sew back into the doll fabric.

You can make a little line of seed beads, as shown to the right. In this case, the spiral is made by sewing small running stitches and picking up a bead on every stitch. The diagonal line is the same, except there is a repeating pattern of three beads on each stitch. The flowers are little "stacks" made by coming to the surface, sewing through the center of the flower bead, then through a seed bead, then back through the flower bead and into the fabric. Come to the surface where you want to place the next flower bead, and make another stack, etc.



Surface stitching

Using the same technique of making "stacks," you can give the appearance of a necklace all around the doll's neck. To sew on a bead, such as the heart shown on the right, make a "stitch knot" at one end of the bead hole. Then sew through the bead. Sew into the fabric at the other end of the bead and back out where you made the "stitch knot." Repeat the steps of sewing through the bead two or three more times, so that it is attached firmly. Then make another "stitch knot." Beads can be strung for a necklace, such as shown to the right. Make a "stitch knot" at the neck seam, string the beads, and make another "stitch knot" on the other side. Continue around the other side of the doll's neck if you wish.



Stacks make necklace



Strung necklace



Hair made with stacks

Let's talk about hair next! There are no limits here. My students constantly create new styles. Here are a few that show the basic methods; each has many variations.

Stacks ~ Make a "stitch knot" on the seam at one side of the doll's head. Sew through a large seed bead (size 6 or 5), through a small seed bead, back through the large bead, and into the fabric at the seam. Bring the needle back out where you want the next stack. Continue making stacks around the head. End with another "stitch knot."



Hair made with loops

Loops ~ Make a "stitch knot" on the seam at one side of the doll's head. Pick up 11 seed beads (use more beads for longer loops; less for shorter loops). Sew back into the fabric close to the "stitch knot," and bring the needle back out where you want the next loop. Continue making loops around the head. End with another "stitch knot." I generally make the loops longer on the sides of the head and shorter on top. Use a different color or size bead as the center bead in each loop for an interesting variation.



Hair made with picot edge stitch

Edge stitch ~ There are many variations of edge stitching useful for doll hair. Shown here is a type of picot edge stitch, similar to the one around the doll's body (pg. 6), only you begin with 5 beads for the first picot, and add 4 for each picot thereafter. Make a "stitch knot" on the seam at one side of the doll's head. Pick up 5 seed beads; stitch across the seam about 3 beads width away; stitch through the 5th bead from the underside. Add 4 more beads for the next picot, etc. To end, backstitch through the final picot and make another "stitch knot." As in the example to the left, use two colors of beads for an attractive variation.

Twisted fringe ~ Make a "stitch knot" on the seam at the center top of the doll's head. To make the "bangs," sew a 1/2 inch line of beads from the center toward the side, covering the seam. Repeat, making about four lines of beads to each side of center. Sew a couple of flower (or other) beads on each side at the ends of the lines. Change to double thread and make a "stitch knot" under the flower beads. String about 3" of size 15 beads, and push them up tight against the knot. Holding the double thread right at the end of the strung beads, twist the thread repeatedly in one direction. Continue holding the thread with one hand, and grasp the center of the strung beads. Double the lower half of the strung beads up against the top half. When you release your grasp on the center, it will twist. Make a "stitch knot" to secure the twist. Make 2-4 twisted fringes on each side.



fig. 5



Hair made with twisted fringe

Branch fringe ~ Make a "stitch knot" on the seam at the center top of the doll's head. Decide how long you want her hair to be, and string that length of size 11 or 15 seed beads. Skipping the last bead, sew back through a few of the strung beads. Snug the fringe tight, and string on a few beads for the first branch. Skipping the last bead of the branch, sew back through the branch and up the stem a short distance. Snug the fringe tight, and string on a few beads for the second branch. Repeat, adding branches all the way back to the top of the fringe. Note that you can make a very full fringe, by adding twigs to the branches (see middle branch in drawing above). When you have finished the fringe, make another "stitch knot" at the top of the doll's head. Then using a small whip stitch, couch the fringe along the seam from the top of the doll's head to about where her ear would be on one side. Repeat this whole process, making a second fringe, also from the top of her head, and whip stitch it to the other side.

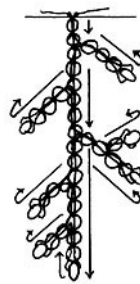


fig. 6



Hair made with branch fringe



Hair made with couching

Couching ~ Use a small whip stitch to couch feathers, ribbons, yarn, or decorative fibers to the doll's head. Make a "stitch knot" on the seam at one side of the doll's head. Lay a bundle of feathers or fibers along the seam. String about 5 beads on the needle and wrap it around the bundle on the diagonal. Sew into the fabric crossing the seam under the bundle. Repeat for as many wraps as it takes to hold the bundle in place. End with another "stitch knot."

Adding Fringe to Your Doll



Very simple fringe

In addition to adding movement, fringe really brings out the personality of your doll. There are as many fringe designs as there are people to make them. You may get some ideas from the examples shown here.

In general I like to make a "stitch knot" before and after each fringe. That way, if a fringe gets caught in something and the thread breaks, you won't lose all of the fringe.



Simple fringe

Simple fringe ~ Sometimes a single or double fringe from the bottom of the doll and from one or both of her arms is enough. Simple fringe embellishes without drawing attention away from the fabric and body adornments.



Full fringe

Full fringe ~ To the left is a doll by one of my students, who added fringe all across the bottom of the doll and along both arms. The effect is to make her arms almost wing-like. Notice that she used plain fabric, and the fringe is the major element of the doll's personality. The doll is stuffed quite firmly to support the weight of the fringe.

Tapered fringe ~ Tapered fringe can be totally patterned and symmetrical, or more random in design. In the top example to the right, the yellow seed beads form a symmetrical pattern, while the ending beads are random. Each fringe is sewn directly to the bottom edge of the doll, the knots hidden along the seam. In the lower example, there is no symmetry, except the repeating red beads of the outside fringes. The fringe on this doll is worked over the picot edge stitch, which goes all the way around the doll's body. To do this, start the fringe above the picot edge stitch on one side of the doll; make the fringe. But don't go all the way back up the stem of beads. Instead, split out about 6 beads from the top, string on 6 more beads, and sew into the other side of the doll to complete the fringe.

Fringe techniques ~ You've already seen two fringe techniques, which can be used for doll hair (fig. 5 & 6, page 9). Here are four more possibilities. For the most basic fringe (fig. 7), string a line of beads, which may include various sizes and shapes of beads, and a single ending bead. Skipping the ending bead, sew back through the stem, pull the fringe snug, and make a "stitch knot." To add a decorative diamond shaped ending to the fringe (fig. 8), string four ending beads and skip the last three on your way back up the stem. To add a leaf or drop at the end of the fringe (fig. 9), use size 15 beads for the ending. String the main stem of the fringe, add six size 15 beads, add the leaf/drop bead, add six more size 15 beads; then sew back through the stem to the top. To hang a ring bead at the end of the fringe (fig. 10), make a short stem, string 20 or more size 15 beads and add the ring; then sew back through the stem to the top. I'm especially fond of this fringe, because I love glass, metal and bone rings. It also works well as a way to make dangle earrings for your doll.



Tapered fringe



Tapered asymmetrical fringe

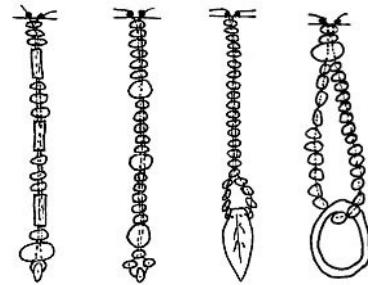


fig. 7 fig. 8 fig. 9 fig. 10

Making a Loop to Display Your Doll

You may decide you'd like to be able to display your doll by hanging her from something (a branch on your Christmas tree, your car mirror, a cupboard knob, etc.). If so, sew a loop of beads to the top center of her head. If you already made hair for her, part the beads slightly, so you can make space for the loop. Sew the loop with a double thread to support the weight of the doll. To start the loop, make a double "stitch knot;" repeat the double knot at the end. Below are two variations for beaded loops, but another possibility would be to make the loop with narrow ribbon or decorative fibers.



fig. 11

Closed loop ~ Use a double thread, and make a double "stitch knot" to begin the loop. String as many beads as needed for the length loop you want. I often use small accent beads to decorate the loop. Complete the loop by sewing across the seam at the top center of her head, and making another double "stitch knot" (fig. 11).

Loop with fastener ~ The closed loop limits where you can hang the doll. For example, if you want to put her on your car mirror, the loop would have to be very long to fit over the mirror, and the doll would hang too low. To solve this problem, make a fastening loop (fig. 12).



fig. 12

Begin as for the closed loop, but only string on half the total length of the loop. Add a disc bead (or use a small button). Add an ending bead, and sew back through the disc and the stem to the starting point. Snug, and make another "stitch knot." Begin the second half of the loop the same way, starting with another "stitch knot." String beads to a length about 3/4 of an inch shorter than the button side. This part is called the stem. Using size 15 seed beads, string on enough beads to fit comfortably around the button. Sew back through the stem, snug your work, and make the final double "stitch knot."

Here's a warning about tubular bugle beads. You can use them in loops and fringe, but be warned that their sharp ends easily cut the thread when the loop or fringe bends sharply. To lessen the problem, always bracket bugle beads with rounded seed beads on both ends.

Spirit Dolls for Celebrations & Holidays

Spirit dolls make perfect gifts for loved ones (even for yourself!) to celebrate special occasions and holidays. I made the doll below for my husband and me, with the thought that she will always remind us to enjoy each holiday season to the fullest possible extent. She reminds me of myself as a child.



Spirit of Christmas Doll

Spirit Dolls for Art & Creativity



Journal for Art

The doll on the right, as her name implies, holds the key to everything. With her magic wand and her totem frog earring, she's one powerful advocate for art and creativity. Her fabric, which is featured more on her other side, suggests that the whole universe (sun, moon and stars) supports a creative person.



Magic Happens & the Key to Everything!

I believe there's a powerful relationship between art and spirit, between creating things and feeling whole.

I make spirit dolls for my art friends and for myself, asking as I make each one for the muse to stay with us and for the discipline to keep creating even when we feel stuck. "Journal for Art" has a difficult job, because I tend to put journaling at a lower priority than I should.

"Quilt Dolly" actually has two purposes. A good friend in Europe sent me some cut ends from cotton fabrics she had pieced together for a border on one of her quilts. They seemed to be just the ticket for a spirit doll which would encourage me to get back to quilting, something I used to do quite a bit before I started beading 20 years ago.

Her other purpose is about sharing creativity with friends. She reminds me that collaborative art is challenging, fun and nearly always a good learning experience.



Quilt Dolly

Spirit Dolls for Remembering



Grandpa

My friend Carol Berry, her mother, and her grandmother - three generations of women - kept round the clock vigil during the days her grandfather's health was failing. While he went in and out of consciousness, they sat quietly by his side, thinking about him, praying for his comfort, and making spirit dolls. When he passed away, they gave dolls to all of his caregivers and other family members, so that they might always remember him. I feel very blessed to have one of their dolls.

The two spirit dolls below both bring back wonderful memories of teaching trips. Both incorporate fabrics and other objects found or given to me during these trips.



Hawaii



Alaska

Spirit Dolls for Friendship & Love

I've made countless spirit dolls for and about close friends and family. They are probably the sweetest and most meaningful gifts I have ever given.

I made the spirit doll to the right for my best and long time friend Liz. We both love rabbits. I wrote affirmations for her on the little scrolls in the pockets. Incidentally, I took the rabbit pattern from a child's sponge. Stencils also make good patterns. Below is one of a pair, twin spirit dolls, celebrating the friendship between my Hungarian bead sister and me. We each have one! "Angel of Love," below right, reminds me that love (loving others and being loved in return) is what matters most in this world.



Liz's Doll



Bead Sisters



Angel of Love

Spirit Dolls for Guidance & Healing



Full Recovery Companion

With a few additions by some of her close friends who were taking the spirit doll class from me, I made this doll for a friend who was about to start radiation treatments for breast cancer. Not only did she have to face the illness, but also the little town where she lived had no close treatment facility. She had to leave her home in Alaska and go to Washington state for three months of treatments.

The fabric, from a line called "Healing Garden," includes morning glory and periwinkle, both used in cancer research. I pieced the fabric before sewing the doll, because my friend is a quilter. The embellishments include garnets, which are thought to have great healing powers. The doll, of course, holds my prayers that she will soon recover fully, both physically and mentally.

I made this doll a few years back, when I was having a lot of trouble sleeping and many troubling dreams. As I hung her on my night light near my bed, and every night when I saw her there, I felt comforted. Having her near me, helped me to fall asleep more quickly, and soon the nightmares too went away.



Angel of Sweet Dreams



Grieving with Precious Tears

I grew up in a family where crying was not OK. I only saw my mother cry once or twice in my whole life, and very quickly she regained control. When my daddy died (when I was 5 years old), I remember my grandmother telling me not to cry, that he would hear me crying and be very sad. With this background, I sometimes show anger, when what I'm really feeling is grief and sadness. "Grieving with Precious Tears" is my guide; she helps me move toward accepting and expressing my emotions regarding loss and sadness; she reminds me that crying and tears are part of the healing process.

Spirit Dolls for Protection



Motorcycle Goddess

Protection was how it all started, back in 1993, when a friend made me a "New Car Protection Goddess." With similar intent, I made this spirit doll for my soon to be husband, Robert, to take on a week-long motorcycle ride. Her job, of course, was to keep him safe from all possible hazards of the road. Sewn in the inside of her leather vest is a hummingbird feather, symbolizing the amazing long flights of this tiny bird. Now she goes with both of us whenever we ride.

About Robin Atkins

I am a bead artist, who also enjoys related art forms such as doll making, quilting, collage, and book making. I've been fascinated by beads since the mid 1980's, making my living as an artist/teacher/writer since 1988. You can see more of my work, find many useful beading tips, and read about my other books on my website:

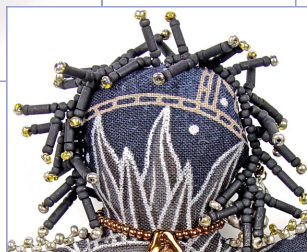
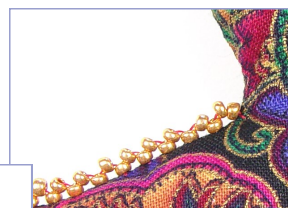
www.robinatkins.com

In addition to beads, I also dabble in photography and graphic design. I took all the pictures in this book, and designed the pages in MS Publisher. The pictures, drawings and text are copyrighted. Please contact me through my website if you wish to duplicate any of this material for any purpose.

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Spirit dolls are thought to bring love, joy, good health, and prosperity to their owners. Make these sweet little bead-embellished dolls to give to a friend, hang in your car, celebrate an occasion or memory, or send as a "get well angel."

This book includes 3 pattern variations, easy-to-follow instructions, detailed photos, drawings, and tips to design and create your own unique spirit dolls.



Spirit Dolls

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