

Woman credits father for gift of inventiveness



Because she's never marketed her creations, Lucy Moore shies away from calling herself an inventor.

"I don't know if I'm the person you should be talking to," the Lincoln Inventors Association member says,

settling into an antique-looking chair in her living room.

"My father is the real inventor."

She leans over and picks a thin piece of wood off the floor. It's covered with green, red and purple marker doodles.

"This is one of his inventions," she says. "A reading board. Really, a reading/writing board. I use it all the time."

She takes a book from a nearby table and places it on the board in her lap to demonstrate how it's used.

Her father, she explains, is always inventing, keeps a "dream journal and diary," and carves owls out of pieces of wood he finds on walks.

Seven of her father's owl sculptures preside over Moore's living room from atop the fireplace mantle. Moore picks one of them up and sniffs it. It's pine, she says.

"Picking out the different kinds of wood is part of the experience for him. He likes to explore."

In 1976, Moore said, her father gave her a book called "Makers of Modern Thought." She hurries off to the basement to find it.

"I'll recognize it by the color," she says. It's bright red-orange.

The inscription from her father reads, "This will help you appreciate how our culture came to now — I'm sure these people had help; they are representative."

Moore credits her father's influence as one reason for her "inventive notions."

"I was fortunate enough to have grown up in a family that valued art, music — all the arts — and adventure and exploration," she explains. "And so I grew up . . . reading biographies and how-to books and understanding that everything that we have is either a byproduct of nature or it's something that people have created."

Moore explains this philosophy with a "For instance — the freeway, the interstate."

Pretend you're driving to Omaha on Interstate 80, she says, and suddenly you start to think about the road you're riding on and what an incredible travelway it is.

"My grandparents probably saw the freeway, but not my great-grandparents . . . So what will you and I just see that our grandchildren will take for granted."

The soon-to-be 38-year-old looks toward the future for ideas for inventions.

But the invention she says holds the most promise is a little embarrassing to talk about.

"Litmus paper underwear," she calls it.

In the future, she explains, planet

Earth will have to deal with growing overpopulation, but most methods of birth control now are inadequate.

One method, called natural family planning, involves a way to detect when a woman is fertile, Moore says, which is about 24 hours out of the monthly menstrual cycle. But because sperm can live for about 72 hours, she says, the time scale for becoming pregnant involves 72 hours on either side of the woman's 24-hour fertility period.

So, Moore wants to make women's underwear that would change color during that time period to indicate when it's possible for a woman to get pregnant.

"That would be just about no-fail birth control," she says. "But if that seems too silly, let's see what else we can do."

When overpopulation becomes a big problem, she says, issues such as family structure, abortion rights and gay and lesbian rights will be just as important as birth control.

"What could somebody think of to deal with this?"

Moore rests her chin in her hand and her gray-blue eyes turn to the wall. Wind chimes from the patio make the only sound.

Finally, Moore admits she doesn't know how to go about creating litmus paper underwear, but she's sure someone could do it.

"Ideas like that are pretty intriguing. I wish I could make them happen."

For now, Moore says, she mostly uses her inventive notions around the house and in her artwork.

Having two children and a big house provides plenty of opportunity for invention, Moore says, even if those inventions are something as simple as a new homemade soup.

This week she's been thinking about what to do with all the newspapers she has stacked up from a new subscription.

"What could every house do with newspapers that everyone's not doing now?" she wonders. "I can't throw them in the soup."

She picks up a brightly painted globe from an end table.

"This is one of my favorite pieces of art in this house," she says. It's made of newspaper, paper maché by her two sons. "There's one good reuse of newspaper."

Suddenly, a smile works its way across Moore's cheeks and the subject changes.

"Here's something intriguing," she says. "Think about men's ties . . . Women's fashion has changed a lot, but men have always worn ties."

Women's fashion is the one area Moore says most of her inventive notions come from.

"About ten to fifteen years ago, I looked in my closet, and I saw that there wasn't a single pair of shoes other than my loafers, tennis shoes and ballet shoes that were comfortable."

But that's changed, she says, because women invented shoes that are more comfortable.

Moore wants to revolutionize handbags.

"I don't use handbags anymore. I use waist bags," she says. A waist bag is a pouch to carry things that is attached to a belt, she explains.



Photo by Jana Pedersen

Lucy Moore and her paper doll.

Moore says she doesn't like handbags because they're too cumbersome. Wearing a waist bag frees up her hands, she says.

"Except it always looks like I'm about to go hiking."

When Moore and her husband were going out to dinner last week, she says, she was forced to use a handbag because the waist bag looked awkward.

So now she will pursue an idea she's thought of before — sewing waist bags out of silk to be worn on dressier occasions.

Another of Moore's apparel inventions she calls a "wrist biter."

When she used to jog during winter, she says, an area of skin between her coat cuffs and gloves was exposed, so she wanted to find a way to cover that skin.

She borrowed an idea from her ballet class — leg warmers — and adapted that in a smaller version by cutting the toes out of a pair of long socks. Since then, she has knit a few pairs of wrist biters.

Hospitals and nursing homes would be good markets for biters, she says, pulling a pair up to her elbows, because they keep arms warm but are much easier to put on than a sweater.

But adapting socks for a new use is really just inventive thinking, she says.

"Many people have the capability to be inventors. All we have to do is learn to think creatively with the materials at hand."

In her artwork, Moore says, she likes to see how to work through accidents.

One of her favorite painting tools is a cherry wood chopstick made by her uncle.

"It has accidents and I have to deal with them which can be pretty exciting," she says, holding up the chopstick. Her name is carved into the large end.

The other chopstick had a flower on it, she says. But she gave it to an old roommate.

A couple of the cherry wood chopstick paintings are self-portraits, she says, laying them across the floor.

One is in blue ink on a vertical strip of paper. She takes her glasses off because she isn't wearing them in the picture.

"Does it look like me? . . . My mother doesn't like them. She thinks I should be smiling."

The other self-portrait she's working on is a print for an art class at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln. She calls it a "paper doll" and says it's an example of how she uses invention in her artwork.

The original print was too dark and gloomy and had a large scarf wrapped around the head, she says. She didn't like the big scarf, so she chopped it off.

"I just cut it out of the picture," she says. "Like if the litmus underwear were too noisy and scratchy, we'd try something else."

She plans to use flowered paper in the shape of a smaller scarf and different colored backgrounds to "chirp up" the paper doll even more.

"That's the artistic process," she explains, drawing circles with lines connecting them on a piece of paper. "One idea leads to another . . . Sometimes it takes a while before you bump into or hit upon what takes you to the next step. But don't throw out a dumb idea. It may get you where you want."

She uses the pen to highlight parts of her illustration. The first circle is the original idea, she explains, which leads to a second, bad idea, which leads to a third, better idea, which leads to a fourth idea that's also bad. But that sends the inventor back to the second idea, and from there comes the finished product, on which she draws a star.

"I think that I look at the world in an inventive way and think about our idea, and from there comes the finished product, on which she draws a star."

"I think that I look at the world in an inventive way and think about our species as a species capable of creating environments and tools. I guess it would be tools and environments because the tools come first."

Tools, like the cherry wood chopstick.

"Good tools are important. They make all the difference in life . . . Too much baggage is too much baggage. It's better to have a few good tools."

And using these tools to create new things is invention, she decides.

"Yeah, I guess I am an inventor," she says. "And maybe I'll pursue these ideas now, the more promising ones."

— Jana Pedersen
Senior Editor