

RETURN TO THE DOLLHOUSE



**A project by Kensington
Neighbourhood House**

A 2018 project by Kensington Neighbourhood House

Funded by City of Melbourne



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MELBOURNE**

Introduction

The dolls from 1983 that are on permanent display at the House were the inspiration for *Return to the Dollhouse* project. They provide a focal point and a conversation starter for many newcomers to the House.

Over the years I've had the pleasure of meeting and getting to know some of the doll makers and hearing stories of others. The "half witch/half angel" doll is a previous Manager, Caroline Fuller. The one with the blue pleated cape is a Turkish lady who had a large family and saw herself as Super Woman.

Maryanne Mifsud, one of the original doll makers, was very helpful in filling in some of the blanks about the original project. She'd even kept the original invite from the opening. Sadly many of the others were no longer contactable.

The intent of this year's project was the same as it was 25 years ago – a celebration of who we are. This time around we've added the story telling and photography so that in 25 years' time our stories will still be told.

I've really enjoyed getting to know this year's doll makers, so much so that I ended up joining in and making my own doll half way through the project. The words that come to mind when describing those sessions are belonging, respect, friendship and community.

Freedom of expression was actively encouraged by our teacher, Louise Leong, who supported our many wild and fanciful ideas. Only on the odd occasion did she rein us in and suggest an alternative.

The finished dolls are amazing and all bear an uncanny resemblance to their maker, some visually others in personality.

Thank you to everyone involved in this project; Louise Leong, Richard Wahl (photographer), the doll makers and the City of Melbourne who provided the funding. It's been a lot of fun and such a great project to be a part of.

Carolyn Webster
Project Co-ordinator

Akhila Nagaraja

Akhila was born in India but moved to Australia at age 1 with her parents and older brother. They immigrated to Australia on the advice of her father's mentor who said Australia would provide greater opportunities for the young family. The family lived in Sydney for a year before moving to Canberra where Akhila spent most of her childhood and early adult life.

During her childhood, Canberra was not a very diverse city and at the school Akhila attended, she was one of a handful of students from an immigrant family, which unfortunately led to a lot of schoolyard racism. As an adult she worked for the Federal Government in Canberra, before she and her partner decided it was time for a change. They both wanted to try their hand at the private sector which is what brought her to Melbourne in 2016.

Akhila was attracted to Melbourne because of the opportunities and lifestyle, however when it came to choosing where to live, it was like putting a pin in the map. "I asked friends to suggest suburbs, but no one really knew." Her only requirement was to be close to the CBD to experience all the city had to offer. After a weekend in Melbourne house hunting, she found a small one bedroom flat in Kensington and thought – this is it!

Not long after moving to Kensington, a work colleague came across a cooking workshop at the Kensington Neighbourhood House and suggested she should attend. This then led to volunteering at the House, first in the homework program and then as an English tutor.

Most weeks, for the last year, Akhila has been meeting with her Ethiopian born student Obsitu. They spend an hour together each week working on improving Obsitu's English language skills. "I've made really good friends through the Neighbourhood House, which is great, because it's difficult to make friends in a big city. I went to the Kensington Women's Dinner this year, which is where I heard about this doll project.

Akhila's doll represents the diverse community that she has come to love in Melbourne. Using Google Translate she's written words on her doll that depict community such as; unity, friendship, home, respect and culture. In all she's used 30 different languages, all of which are spoken in Melbourne, including her own native Kannada. Akhila's interest in knitting and crafts came from her grandmother, who was an avid knitter and left Akhila with various knitted pieces and blankets. Akhila has remembered her grandmother by knitting her doll a pair of Mary Janes.



Carolyn Webster

Carolyn didn't plan on making a doll. As Manager of Kensington Neighbourhood House, she thought she would be an observer from the sidelines, supporting other people to tell their stories. But as the weeks went on and the dolls emerged from thread and memory, she became drawn into the group and was soon sitting and stitching her own story.

"This doll shows who I am. From bottom to top."

Doc Martins, with their iconic yellow stitching, adorn the feet - "I've worn them nearly all my life". Then there are tiny Scottish Terriers roaming the bottom layer of her skirt - a nod to Carolyn's 'crazy dog lady' tendencies and her current Scotty dogs, Rory and Polly.

A ruffle of black velvet reveals hidden skulls and a not-so-secret love of all things gothic. Nick Cave anyone?

Carolyn's strong connection to this country and her appreciation of its landscape in all its forms is represented by a layer of vibrant red and orange dot print. As well as feeling "very Australian", Carolyn also has a strong sense of place at a local neighbourhood level. This sense of belonging is illustrated by a final layer of fabric showing an interlinked network of dots and lines indicating her many community connections.

The soft hand knitted jumper shows off a craft Carolyn has practiced since childhood and now uses to create her own individual garments.

Stitched into her doll's jumper there is a heart with beads spelling out C.O.M.M.U.N.I.T.Y. This is central to her life. Having grown up in Glen Waverley, Carolyn moved to Kensington twenty years ago and has no plans to ever leave. Her two children have grown up here, she spent five years running the Kensington Flemington News and has worked for the past 14 years to make Kensington Neighbourhood House a thriving community hub.

"I love it here. I love all that it offers – the diversity, the sense of community, living on the street and saying hi to all the neighbours. I belong here and would never want to live anywhere else."

And the boxing gloves? Well, actually there is no symbolism there at all. "I just really love boxing! It's such a great tension release."



Ivy Lai

Ivy came to Australia from Hong Kong over 10 years ago. She was following her youngest brother, who'd previously moved to Australia to study. Her mother had instructed her to "go and look after him".

Arriving in Australia, not knowing anyone apart from her brother and cousin, she was reluctant to go out. "I always stayed in my bedroom."

Gradually through her studies she met a few other students who were also from Hong Kong and through them even more people. Exploring Melbourne became easier with friends and even easier when her sister Jenny later moved to Australia.

When Ivy discovered the Kensington Neighbourhood House, one of the first things she did was join the Walking Group. She also went to an exercise class at the pool with a group from the House. She loved the fact that she could walk here and that everyone was friendly.

Over the years Ivy has been a regular face at the House. She completed her Certificate III in Children's Services here and subsequently found work in childcare and after school care.

When Ivy heard about the doll making project she was keen to join. Her sister Jenny came with her to the first couple of classes before deciding not to continue so tasked Ivy with completing her doll for her.

Ivy has found doll making relaxing and calm. "It helps balance your life. The community spirit in the class is also nice."



Jacqueline van Heerden

Jacqui moved to Australia from South Africa as a 19 year old with \$100, one suitcase and the address of her mother's bridesmaid in Forest Hill. At the time apartheid was still policy in South Africa so she came in search of a country that could offer more opportunities.

Two weeks after arriving she found work in the marketing/public relations industry and never looked back. It was the 1980s, the IT industry was booming and there was lots of money around.

Jacqui moved jobs as opportunities arose and wound up working for Sensis (producers of the Yellow Pages, etc). Her role involved working with small businesses. A light bulb moment led her to create a television show *Bread*. Screened by Network 10 for three series it told the stories of small businesses. This segued into her next role as Executive Producer of a children's television series *Teenie Weenie Greenies*. "We were trying to connect kids back to nature."

In a moment of 'enlightenment' she stepped out of the corporate world to focus on being a mother to five children and put her energy towards healing the environment. She studied permaculture. "It changed my life." Permaculture took her on a journey which included; teaching others, buying a farm in New South Wales, buying land in Bali and working with young offenders in prison.

Jacqui travelled to Senegal to work with farmers to share techniques on how to work with existing resources to increase the fertility of their degraded land. "The Senegal project is one of the things I'm most proud of. It really moved me and showed me the power of individuals. We had 150 people squashed into a half finished school house in 38° wanting to learn."

Today Jacqui is focusing on 'repairing' the city environment and creating spaces of beauty and wellbeing – first her house, then the Kensington neighbourhood. She's founded Transition Town Kensington and has played a leading role in many local food growing and environmental initiatives such as the Food Forest.

The inspiration for Jacqui's doll is her ancestry and their movement; her English, French and Dutch ancestors moving to South Africa and she herself moving to Australia and the fact that she feels more connected to Africa than she does Australia. She misses her family in South Africa but is grateful for the opportunities that she has had in Australia.



Lisa Cullen

Lisa came to Australia ten years ago on a holiday with her husband and young daughter. Five weeks after returning home to Scotland they decided Australia was where they wanted to live. "The lifestyle was fantastic and I could see it was a future for my daughter."

The only way she could come to Australia was as a student so she enrolled in a Diploma of Hairdressing and Salon Management. After two years of full-time study she completed the course then decided she never wanted to work in the hairdressing industry. "I hated it!" She now works full-time as an insurance broker.

Lisa still has the burr of a Scottish accent but has no desire to return to Scotland other than to visit. She became a permanent resident last year. "I love that Melbourne has seasons", she says of her now permanent home.

One look at Lisa's doll and you can see that it celebrates her Scottish heritage. Decked out in plaid with fiery red head, she's a wee bonny lass of a doll.

Lisa loves a challenge, meeting new people and keeping busy. When her friend Melina suggested she join her in the doll making class she was up for the challenge. "I love to see something and say I could make that." In fact Lisa was one, if not the first, to finish her doll.



Louise Leong

Louise grew up in Blackwood in the Wombat State Forest north-west of Melbourne. Louise and her siblings were the fourth generation of her family to be raised in their family home. Her maternal grandparents lived there during her childhood and her parents still live there to this day. "I feel really connected to Blackwood. It's part of our history. I am surrounded by my family there, from old photos, to street names, to the next generation who are playing with the same toys my grandmother, my mother and I all played with."

Louise's grandmother was a tailoress and her mother a keen quilter and knitter. This meant their house was a treasure trove of wonderful fabric and crafting materials. Her grandmother would despair though as her mother cut fabric into tiny pieces to make quilts. Both taught Louise how to sew. Instead of making clothes or quilts though Louise turned her sewing skills to doll making. In all she estimates she's made over 20 dolls. "The majority I still have. Occasionally I give them away."

Louise left the family home and moved to North Melbourne to study at Melbourne University where she graduated with a Masters of Education. She now teaches secondary students English and French and the family home is in Kensington with her husband and two children.

With a teaching profession and a passion for doll making, Louise was the perfect person to lead the doll making component of this project. Initially she was unsure whether she'd be able to teach others how to make dolls as a lot of her own doll making has been self-taught. As the weeks went by Louise's self-belief grew. "I like how affirmed I am now, and that I know what I'm doing. I love how I've given everyone something that they didn't have beforehand."

"I love the different people I've gotten to meet and how unique everyone's dolls are. I feel like I belong."

Louise has taken pieces of fabric from each of the doll makers to create her doll's patchwork coat.



Marina Perkovich

Marina was born in Croatia and migrated to Australia as a 6 year old. Before coming to Australia she lived with her grandparents whilst her father went abroad searching for work and a better life. He worked as a miner in Ceylon before moving to Australia. It was only once he was in Australia and had managed to put a deposit down on a house that her grandparents agreed she could join him.

After a brief stint in Mount Gambier the family settled in Footscray, or “Footslavia” as Marina said it was known at the time. In the 1970s Footscray was home to a lot of Poles, Russians and Croats. The local shops catered for this market. Marina fondly remembers “the beautiful Croatian cake shop that my father took me to every Saturday.”

Marina has always been interested in fashion. “When I lived with my grandparents I was always dressed formally. This was the cultural climate in my family.” Dressing up then extended to modelling for fashion schools whilst at university. Her appreciation of fashion and well-made clothing now spans four wardrobes.

Marina worked as a social worker with people coming out of prison. It was this work that first brought her to Kensington in the 1990s. “I love Kensington because it was a welcoming place for people of all backgrounds.” Despite some fond memories of those days, the work was stressful and confronting. Her own personal safety was often compromised.

Today Marina divides her time between following her creative and artistic pursuits, volunteering at Heidi and being a carer for her ageing parents and aunt. She attends classes at the Neighbourhood House and has her own studio where she makes ceramics. She is always immaculately dressed.

Marina decided to make her doll in the spirit of the 1980s. It shares the same tattoos and sense of style as its maker.



Melina Caccetta

Melina has spent her whole life in Kensington. Her parents were born in Sicily but Melina has never had any strong connection with their home country. Growing up she attended Holy Rosary Primary School and then St Aloysius College.

Melina's doll celebrates her childhood love of being in the garden. Her childhood home in Bayswater Road had a huge garden. "My job would be to feed the chooks and rabbits and collect the eggs."

Like a lot of Italians her parents' garden was wall to wall fruit and vegetables. "It was great being able to help yourself to fresh strawberries whilst in the garden."

"I loved climbing trees and being in the garden. There used to be horses next door. I would sit in the fig tree in the morning and see their heads staring at me from over the fence."

Melina still lives on the same block that she did as a child and has never wanted to live anywhere else. "I love the people, love how everyone cares, love the kindness, love the dogs ... there's so much!"

Looking at her doll she says, "I can't believe that I made it. It was a beautiful process".

Melina embodies the spirit of Kensington and the Neighbourhood House. She's friendly, warm and inclusive of everyone.



Rebecca Dove

Bec loves doing craft, particularly sewing and crochet so she jumped at the chance to be part of this project. As a mother of three young children it provided her with the perfect opportunity to get two hours of uninterrupted crafting done each week.

Bec's doll is a collage of different bits of her crafting life. She crocheted the scarf out of wool from her first ever knitting project. The dress is made from fabric gleaned from her Nan's stash along with bits of felt from a jumper she bought at the op-shop and subsequently felted. She likes re-purposing and re-using where she can.

"I've rediscovered some of my rusty crafting skills, and have enjoyed having a go and remembering how to do things."

Bec has lived in 3031 for the last seven years and has no regrets about her move to "the west". "I love the inner city and living on the street." The high density living provides endless opportunities to speak to neighbours. "I walk out of the house and can speak to three people just in the time it takes me to put the bins out".

Bec's willingness to chat to her neighbours certainly extended to her fellow doll makers. The classroom always had a great energy with lots of chatter and laughter. Bec's laugh was never too far away.



Rohana Norgate

Rohana moved to Australia from New Zealand just over 11 years ago searching for new opportunities. For her it felt “like moving interstate”. She now has family here as well, as one by one they’ve all moved from New Zealand.

It was work that first bought Rohana to Kensington. Two days a week she is in the hydrotherapy centre at Advanced Vet Care in Robertson Street helping dogs with their rehabilitation. The remainder of her working week is spent at a studio in Brunswick where she works as a Jeweller.

Five years ago Rohana moved to Kensington to live. “It’s the longest I’ve lived anywhere.”

Rohana first stepped into the Kensington Neighbourhood House to learn ukulele. “I was quite new to Kensington and it was really fun.” She’s also done Spanish classes at the House.

Rohana threw herself into doll making when the project started and made several dolls before her “final one”. Her artistic skills as a Jeweller and attention to detail are evident in her doll’s face and body.

Rohana’s first ideas of how her doll would look changed as her own life changed. She fell pregnant early on in the project so added a baby belly “to reflect who I am today.”

Rohana and her husband Chris are about to move to Geelong soon to start the next chapter of their lives. “I’m sad to be leaving Kensington though.” Good luck with the move Rohana!



Sasha Leong

Sasha was born in Malaysia where she was raised in a very creative household. There was always music in the house, her mother being a music teacher and her father has a good collection of vinyls.

Not surprisingly Sasha now works in the arts as the Dance Development Officer at Ausdance Victoria, the peak body for dance in Australia. She is also an independent cross-disciplinary performing artist, with a strong focus in dance and movement. She enjoys discovering, learning and sharing the history and traditions of diverse cultures through dance.

Sasha was attracted to the doll making project as some 18 months ago she started a project around “discovering my identity, my cultural heritage” (being brought up as a Malaysian and English-educated). Often people would ask her “Where are you from?”, which invariably would be followed up by another question, “What is actually your background?”. She knows that her ancestors migrated from China to Malaysia, but does not know when. Currently, she is learning more about Chinese culture and her own Chinese heritage.

Sasha’s doll represents her identity as a Malaysian and her Chinese heritage. The doll wears an outfit inspired by the **kebaya** in **Peranakan** style, fused with the slit of a **cheongsam** on its bottom half.

Sasha enjoyed the creative side of the project and reacquainting herself with sewing, a skill she’d originally learnt in school. She’s now added embroidery and machine sewing to her repertoire.

Since moving to Kensington in 2015, Sasha has been actively involved in the community. She has assisted the Boomerang Bag makers and is part of the Flem Ken Festival of Arts and Ideas’ planning team.

Notes:

Kebaya – A traditional blouse-dress combination originated from the court of the Javanese Majapahit Kingdom, traditionally worn by women in Malaysia.

Peranakan – Since early 16th century, some migrants who travelled from their home country to Malaya began to adopt the local culture and inter-married with the locals. The root word for Peranakan comes from the Malay and Indonesian word ‘anak’ (child), referring to locally born descendants. It is a blend of two cultures where the people are ethnic Chinese but their culture and language are predominantly Malay-influenced.

Cheongsam – A traditional one-piece Chinese dress for women



Stephanie Johnston

Stephanie was raised in a European family in Traralgon, Gippsland. She discovered that her mother was adopted and was of Aboriginal descent. She questioned herself, "What does this make me?" Stephanie's desire to understand who she is was the inspiration for her doll.

Her doll's brown feet are a reference to her aboriginal heritage and walkabout. "When I was growing up I liked to go wandering in the state forest. I'd lose track of time, lost in my thoughts." The doll's brown head represents her ancestry, spirituality and storytelling.

Her white body represents her European upbringing. The shaping of the knees is a reference to operations she's had on her feet. The clothing, is about her personality "I feel I am a free spirit."

"I really enjoy working with my hands so have enjoyed the whole doll making process. I thought it was a really cool idea replicating the project from 25 years ago."

As an adult Stephanie struggled to find work in Traralgon so spent four years commuting to Melbourne for work before finally deciding it was time to move. Her original plan was to live in Kensington for a few years and then buy a farm.

"Kensington is so welcoming. It has a homely feel. I've met so many wonderful people here." The plans for a farm life are now on hold. "I'm happy to stay here."



Susan Charalambidis

Susan is Australian born with Greek heritage. Her parents were born in Greece after her grandparents moved there as refugees from Anatolia, which is part of modern-day Turkey. "I still have strong connections to Greece. All my first cousins, uncles and aunts live there."

"My Greek heritage was front and centre in my childhood. We adopted a lot of "uncles and aunts" from distant cousins and built a very strong Greek community. There was Greek school, Greek dancing, Greek parties, etc. The community was very sharing and caring. If someone needed, say, a ladder, the community would oblige."

Susan's first venture inside the Kensington Neighbourhood House was with her two-year-old son Leo. Leo attended the morning childcare service for three years.

"My first impressions of KNH was that it was a warm, progressive childcare centre and I absolutely loved all the play options it offered, including the great big shady tree with a sandpit under it."

The next time she came back it was as a doll maker. "I thought it would be a good way to learn more skills and make something sculptural. Sewing is fairly 2D so it is good to tackle a 3D project."

Susan didn't have any hard and fast ideas about how she wanted her doll to look. "The process has guided my doll. I've also learnt from the other women." She's enjoyed learning new skills along the way as well. "It's humbling how long it takes."

Susan's doll has been inspired by a butterfly. "I wanted it to have some sort of super power," she says in reference to its wings.



Yue Xiu (Jamima) Wu

Jamima Yue Xiu Wu moved from Shanghai, China to Melbourne with her family, accompanied by her maternal grandparents, when she was 9. Her uncles had first arrived in Melbourne to study and then sought asylum, after the Tiananmen Square massacre.

Settling in Newport she attended Spotswood Primary School. "I couldn't speak any English and I was the only non-Caucasian person at the school. I was very lucky though. I was welcomed and looked after by my classmates and one family in particular *adopted* me into their home. They were so lovely and included me in everything. I remember going to their house every Monday, playing with their pets, having sleepovers and they even took me camping over the summer holidays."

Jamima has been back to Shanghai several times to visit her father and his side of the family. With each visit she found the city totally unrecognisable and disorientating. "Every childhood home and building has been demolished to make way for something new."

Jamima first came to Kensington as a 16 year old looking for part-time work. She found work on Macaulay Road in a café called Kitch which has since made way for a succession of other cafes. At the time she thought Kensington looked like such a charming suburb admiring all the beautiful ornate homes on Bellair Street as she took the train to her café job each week.

She and her husband Malachi were living in North Melbourne when their landlords decided to sell their cozy one bedroom house. It was a miracle that they managed to get their finances together and attend their first auction 2 weeks after the birth of their son Kingston. And luck would have it that they found themselves to become owners of a little Kensington townhouse. "I think we will be here forever."

Jamima has become a marriage celebrant 'Celebrant Jam' since having her child and hopes to be able to connect and service the local community.

From the outset Jamima decided that she wanted to make two identical dolls; one to stay at the Neighbourhood House and "a doll in tandem for my second baby". Her doll has "stayed true to the female form".





Beyond the Dolls' House

Beyond The Dolls' House took place 25 years ago in 1983.

With funding from the City of Melbourne and Arts Victoria, the House brought in artist Jennifer McCarthy to work with different groups on a textile project. 24 dolls were made. Each depicted the maker's own cultural background with 15 different nationalities represented in all.

Maryanne Mifsud was one of the women involved in the original project. 25 years ago she was a regular at the Kensington Neighbourhood House.

Maryanne remembers the first step in the project was getting their photos taken. The photos were then enlarged. She was so excited that she sent a copy of her enlarged photo to relatives back home in Malta. She laughs and says "they wanted to know why I would want such a bit photograph of myself"!

She also remembers going to Lincraft to try and find some embroidery thread that matched the colour of her skin. Maryanne spent hours and hours embroidering the face of her doll with the thread.

Maryanne's husband Carmello also had a part to play in the project – he made the wooden tree on which the dolls still hang to this day.

Largely the dolls have stood the test of time. Aside from the odd floppy neck, frayed hem or loose curl they are still an impressive sight. The attention to detail and the hours and hours their makers would have spent embroidering the faces and bodies is truly remarkable.

Our 2018 dolls are very much looking forward to joining their elders on the tree to swap stories.

Fanny Lazarides

Fanny was born in Athens, Greece in 1924. She moved to Australia in 1947 to marry Kyriakos Lazarides. Initially they lived in Ascot Vale before buying a house in Kensington in 1949. They moved into that house on Christmas Day where they raised two daughters who still live in Kensington today.

For more than 20 years Fanny was a regular at the Kensington Neighbourhood House where she took part in the many of the social and craft activities on offer. She enjoyed meeting and interacting with people from various cultures and made many friends. The Wednesday social group outings and the yearly camping trips in January provided her with opportunities to see more of Victoria.

Fanny loved trying a number of different crafts including painting, mosaics, decoupage, candle making and decorating photo frames and mirrors. She especially enjoyed being a part of the *Beyond The Dolls' House* project and was very proud of her doll.

Fanny attached a small Greek flag on the back of her doll's neck as a reminder of her beloved homeland and the family she left behind. She loved butterflies so she added these on to her doll to make it colourful.

Fanny passed away in December 2017.



Hue Kien Huynh

Hue was born in Vietnam and moved to Australia in 1987. She settled in Kensington and began attending English classes at the Neighbourhood House.

Hue jumped at the opportunity to be part of the ***Beyond the Dollhouse*** project in 1993. She had just given birth to her third daughter so was at home and had time to sew. As a dressmaker she already had the skills. "It was not difficult to me".

Hue's doll celebrates her cultural heritage. It is dressed in a traditional Vietnamese dress known as an *ao dai* so reflects her cultural heritage. *Ao* translates as "shirt" and *dai* means "long".

Hue is now a grandmother with two grandsons and in recent years has returned to the Neighbourhood House. She joined the English Conversation class to practice speaking and is now a member of the Elderly Vietnamese Social Group. She enjoys the friendship this group brings. "I join this group because it's fun and I can talk with people. I like doing activities with the group."



Maryanne Mifsud

Maryanne moved to Australia from Malta with her husband of two years Carmello and their one year old son Mark in 1973. They lived in Brunswick before moving to Kensington in the early 1980s. They were a family of four with their second son Ruben.

At first Maryanne was unsure about the Neighbourhood House. "Caroline (the Manager at the time) had green hair!" By the time 1993 rolled around Maryanne was hooked. "I loved it, I would have come Saturdays and Sundays if it was open".

A keen sewer and crafter, Maryanne tried her hand at most things. Using the left over fabric from her dolls skirt she made a handbag.

On her dolls' skirt is the Maltese cross, a symbol of her cultural heritage. "It reminds me of my country. I come here, I choose this place, I'm very happy here."

Today Maryanne is a proud grandmother. She still lives in Kensington.



Lily Noronha



Tommassa Patti



Joy Fraser



The Future Doll House ... 2043



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