



NATURAL TOYS AND BABY CARE

**Sidewalk Sale**  
**June 20<sup>th</sup>-21<sup>st</sup>**

251 Snelling Avenue South, St. Paul, Minnesota 651-695-5559 www.peapods.com May, 2008

## A note from Millie

Ten years ago, our daughter was two, the internet was still a toddler, Clinton (Bill) was president, and Peapods was one of maybe a half dozen websites selling baby slings on the information superhighway.

At the time, bins full of Over the Shoulder Baby Holders were taking over our living room. Something had to be done. We thought of renting office space, but decided instead to open a store.

So we found a tiny spot in the low-rent stretch of Grand Avenue and moved in. We were open only three days a week and closed during Abby's nap time. It seemed like a fairly small, contained venture.

Looking back, I realize that we never set out to create what Peapods has become—it just kind of happened. We never thought that it could support our family or make a difference in so many people's lives.

Today, Peapods feels to us almost like a child, with its own destiny, challenges and accomplishments. As it's grown from toddler to tween, we like to believe that it's still true to its roots—offering down to earth, sustainable, practical and fun stuff that's good for babies, kids, and the planet. It sometimes stumbles, too, with the occasional computer meltdown or disappointing product. Hopefully, we're learning from our mistakes.



All along, Peapods has been a very personal journey for us—we really pour our hearts and souls into it. If we'd felt differently, we might have opened a half dozen Peapods stores by now. But we never wanted that. The truth is, this one store is a singular expression of who we are—we could never copy it without diluting its spirit. We believe that if it's special to us, it'll be special to you.

And so, we thank you for all of your support these past ten years, which has made everything possible.

*Peace and best wishes, Millie*

## Win Fabulous Prizes from BabyLegs!



BabyLegs is having a contest and we're playing along! From June 1 through July 15, look for winning tickets inside specially marked packages of BabyLegs for your chance to win.

Grand Prize is a trip to Seattle, Washington. Runners-up will win prizes from Moby Wrap, See Kai Run, Belle Baby Carriers and of course BabyLegs. So, look for Sew Golden packages of BabyLegs in our store. Visit [www.babylegs.net](http://www.babylegs.net) for more info and complete contest rules.



# Green Toys: The Next Tickle Me Elmo?

When we visited Toy Fair in New York this past winter, we couldn't help but notice that the toy industry was going green. Or at least trying to.

We saw organic cotton stuffed animals made in China that looked exactly like happy meal treats. We saw big toy companies coming out with oatmeal-colored "organic" versions of their regular lines. Some products were authentically green, some were just greenwash.

One of the problems for the toy industry in general is how to define what green is. It's definitely a problem we've struggled with over time. Is a wood toy made in China green? Is an expensive teddy bear that's made from soy-based synthetics green? How about a locally made plastic toy? When we evaluate a toy, we ask four questions to determine whether we should add it to our store.

**1. Play Value.** The most fundamental measure of an object is its functionality. For toys, this is called play value, which can be described as the enjoyment a child will get from a toy divided by the cost of the toy. A boring or poorly made toy, even if it's made from the most environmentally-friendly materials, isn't worth buying and couldn't really be called green. Play value takes quality, fun, and price into account. Our wooden unit blocks from BEKA, for example, have extremely high play value because they last forever and can be as entertaining for a 12 year old as they are for a 6 month old.

**2. Country of Origin.** Where a toy is made is important to us. Toys made in the US, Canada, or Europe are subject to higher environmental and labor standards than toys made in China. Also, a locally-made toy consumes a lot less energy getting here than a toy made in China or Europe. Fair Trade toys will also score high on this measure.

## Two of our Greenest



*The aptly-named Green Toys is a new company that makes toys in the USA from recycled milk jugs. Truly innovators, they've also been experimenting with bioplastic, but haven't figured that out yet. We carry their tea set, cooking set, and sand toys.*



*Made in Wisconsin from 50 % recycled paper, our cardboard blocks from Smart Monkey Toys are green, sturdy, and fun.*

**3. Materials.** Obviously, organic cotton, wood and bamboo are greener materials than plastics. But wood from a well-managed forest or recycled rubberwood is greener than clearcut softwood. Even bamboo, which has been promoted for its low-impact qualities, can be problematic when new plantations replace woodlands. Toys made from recycled materials also score high here, especially since it helps kids appreciate a closed loop (so that's where the milk jug goes!).

**4. Packaging.** For some toys, packaging uses more materials than the toy itself. Many of our toys have no packaging or use recyclable paper or cardboard. We avoid those plastic blister packs and (urgh!) packages that you need a wire cutters to open.

Not every one of our toys score high on all four of these criteria, but we expect them all to pass at least two. Hopefully we'll find a bunch more toys that score high on all four as the toy industry shifts toward green.

# Celebrate Independents Week July 1-7

The first week of July is Independents Week, an opportunity to think outside the big box and seek out unique and locally-owned stores. We think you'll find better service, better products, and more fun when you buy local.

Some of our neighbors worthy of a visit are Costal Seafoods, The Red Balloon



childrens' bookstore, Izzy's Ice Cream, St. Paul Corner Drug, Mississippi Market, Amore Coffee and Wet Paint Art Supplies—all members of the Metro Independent Business Alliance, which seeks to promote locally-owned businesses.

Visit [BuyLocalMN.org](http://BuyLocalMN.org) for more independent businesses in your neighborhood.

## Toymaker Spotlight: Whittle Shortline

Consider, for a moment, the category of anthropomorphized machinery. A category of toys loved dearly by millions of children. Trains with faces.

The most famous example, of course, is Thomas, who offers the following life lessons:

1. Do not leave the tracks.
2. Do your best to please the boss and
3. Respect your place in the social hierarchy.

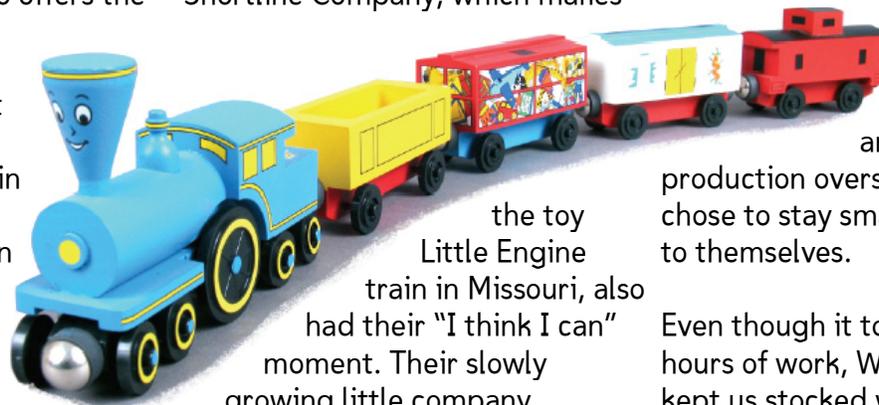
Created in the 1940's in England, Thomas's worldview made sense, even if it wasn't very empowering.

And Thomas' problems last year with lead paint from its Chinese factory weren't too healthy, either.

In contrast, we offer the Little Engine that Could, whose origins predate Thomas and are distinctly American. The Little Engine refuses to be daunted by a

challenging mountain and talks herself over it, saying, "I think I can, I think I can..." A very American message of self-actualization.

This past year, the Whittle Shortline Company, which makes



the toy Little Engine train in Missouri, also had their "I think I can" moment. Their slowly growing little company suddenly took off as parents sought out toy trains that weren't made in China. Their sales shot up and they were even approached by a Chinese company looking to outsource its production back to the US.

Like us, Whittle Shortline is just a small family business run by folks who enjoy what they do. They

began a little over ten years ago when Mike Whitworth's wife got him a power saw as a gift, hoping he'd install some crown molding. Instead, he started making trains. Soon, the whole family was working on the railroad.

Whittle Shortline could have cashed in and outsourced production overseas, but they chose to stay small and stay true to themselves.

Even though it took some long hours of work, Whittle Shortline kept us stocked with toys through the entire holiday season. We thought they could!

We continue to stock a great selection of Whittle Shortline trains, including non-smiling Burlington Northern, Great Northern Railway, and Rock Island Line styles. All made in the USA, and totally compatible with Thomas, Brio and Plan train sets.

# Bringing it all Back Home

A hundred years ago, living in the city meant something very different than it does today. People kept horses instead of cars and streetcars rumbled down all the major thoroughfares. Farms nearby grew most of the city's vegetables and lots of people kept a small flock of chickens in their yards. In fact, in our Midway neighborhood, they used to have chicken races in Newell Park.

Now, as we anticipate the reinstallation of light rail on University Avenue, a lot of us are also bringing back the chickens. We thought we'd adopt some hens, too.

This is actually our second effort raising chickens. Last year, we participated through Abby and Riley's 4H club with a program to raise chicks for the U of M model organic farm. We raised our chicks for eight weeks and now they lay eggs for the folks at the St. Paul campus.

This year, we've taken the plunge and adopted six chickens for keeps. Right now, they're about three weeks old and still living in our bath tub. In a couple

of weeks, we'll move them to a hutch outside. We've got a Buff and a Blue Cochin (they're feathery feet make them look a little like hobbits), a Buff Orpington (she's big), an Americuna, a Partridge Chantecler, and a Cuckoo Maran (she's a bit odd).



Abby with Cinnamon enjoying a beautiful May day.

The thing about chickens is that they're a lot more interesting than you might think. When you first get them, they're just tiny ball of fluff that cheep a lot. Soon, though, each bird develops its own personality. One likes to root around in the dirt, another is an escape artist, and a third is the boss.

Being vegetarians, our birds may well have long and pampered lives if we can protect them from the raccoons, hawks, and even foxes we've got here by the railway in the Midway.

We hope our chickens will help us reconnect our family with where our food comes from. More like St. Paul might have been a hundred years ago. Omelets from eggs, eggs from birds with names.

## Toot! Toot! (That was our own horn)

Well, we know all the "Best of" issues that magazines do this time of year are pretty arbitrary and not the best way to measure our success. Winning popularity contests is not what we're about.



Then again, a little praise feels good. We really liked what City Pages wrote about us this year

when they chose us again as the Twin Cities' best baby store.

They said, "do yourself a favor and find a place that cares more about your baby than its bottom line. Peapods is one of those places."

Thank you, City Pages. That was really nice.

www.peapods.com/blog

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and Millie.

musing and brain fires from Dan

ramblings and anecdotes and

Yep—over a year's worth of

appreciate our blog.

the corner, then you might also

reading this upside down bit in

newsletter and you're even

If you've gotten this far into our

**More Ramblings Online**

# Bum Genius: One Smart Cloth Diaper

Bum Genius is a great cloth diapering system which we sometimes have available for sale.

Er...let's try that again.

Bum Genius is a one-size-fits-all pocket diaper that's really popular and we should have more next week.

Um, that didn't sound too good either...

OK, the truth is, we are trying hard to keep Bum Genius diapers in stock. The folks that run Bum Genius are really nice and very smart, but they've been, well, overwhelmed this year as more and more people have figured out how great their diapers are. They've been adding capacity,

but they can't quite seem to catch up.

We



keep ordering in larger and larger amounts, but we also can't seem to keep them in stock. So what's developed for us is this

kind of wave effect where a large order comes in, we call everyone that was waiting for them, they buy them, and then we run out again and begin taking names to call when the next batch comes in. It's like the North Atlantic tide.

We are working to make our supply act more like the Mississippi, with a regular and ample supply of Bum Genius at most times. We hope we'll get there soon.

Thanks for your patience if you've had to wait for us to work this out. And, if you haven't tried Bum Genius, stop in sometime and we'll show you how nifty they are!

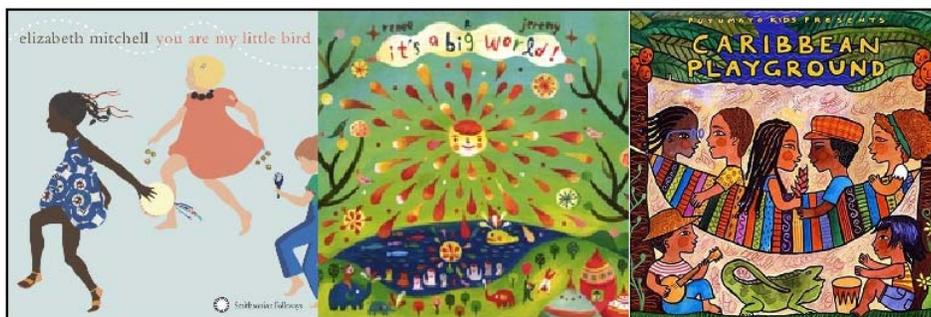
## Three Little Three Little Birds

Bob Marley had the idea that joy expressed through music could unite people and diminish differences. Seventeen years after his death, it still seems to be working.

It's hard to imagine any song that'll fill a day with sunshine like Marley's *Three Little Birds*. What better message can there be for a child than "Don't worry about a thing, because every little thing's gonna be all right"?

Elizabeth Mitchell, one of our longtime favorite kids musicians, offers a wonderful selection of songs on her most recent album, *You are My Little Bird*. Her *Three Little Birds* is quirky and bright, with her kids providing a background chorus. It feels like that hour on a sunny Saturday morning when your kids first get up and run outside to play.

Later in the day, when you feel like dancing, try the New Orleans version by Keith Frank and the Soileau Zydeco Band on *Caribbean Playground* by Putumayo.



It's jazzy and gritty with a taste of tabasco—perfect for a Saturday evening when it's time to burn off that last bit of energy before bed.

And, when it's time to wind down, give Renee and Jeremy's *It's a Big World* a spin. It's an album of sophisticated lullabies for older kids. Their version of *Three Little Birds* is rich with its sparse production (no harps or violins here) and its sweet and slow honeyed notes. The perfect close to a busy day when everything is all right. Because three little birds said so.

# 8th Annual Sidewalk Sale!

After our busiest year ever, we've accumulated so much sale merchandise in our basement that we've begun influencing the tides on Lake Como! So, out of concern for the city's ducks and geese, all of our closeouts, misfits, repairs, returns, and mistakes have got to go—all at discounts from 25-75% off. This is the real thing and it only happens once a year!



## June 20th and 21st 10am to 6pm

The fine print: Because our sidewalk sale is a busy event next to a busy street, we recommend (but do not require) shopping without small children. Our sale will take place rain or shine. Sidewalk sale purchases are final—no returns or exchanges. We are unable to giftwrap sidewalk sale purchases. Also, just a reminder that we are not able to accept personal checks. No fair arriving early!



### Our 10 Year Anniversary

Yep, that's right! We're ten years old. If Peapods was a kid, we'd be in third grade and growing molars. Look inside for a small measure of reminiscing and lots of updates about what's up around here.

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