

# TIMESHIP *for kids*

SPECIAL EDITION

## VIRGINIA LEE BURTON (1909 – 1968)

Have you read the Caldecott Medal winning book *The Little House*? Did you know that the author and illustrator Virginia Lee Burton lived right here on Cape Ann? We recently celebrated the 100th anniversary of Virginia Lee Burton's birth. Let us take the opportunity to learn more about her life and legacy in this special *Timeship* edition.

Virginia Lee Burton was more than just an award winning children's book author and illustrator. She was a little girl who loved being read to by her father. She was an entertaining sister who enjoyed dancing and playing with her siblings. She was a meticulous student

who excelled in art at a young age. She was a loyal daughter who sacrificed a dream to help her father. She was a thorough sketch artist who worked long hours capturing the latest performances. She was a devoted wife who nurtured her husband and home. She was a caring mother who taught her sons how to work hard and play hard. She was a welcoming friend who knew how to make merry. She was an enthusiastic teacher who shared her talents with her neighbors. She was a renaissance woman. She was a woman before her time. Her stories embraced themes still relevant today, like determination, adaptation and modernization. She made beautiful pieces of artwork that could be used every day. She was Virginia Lee Burton the author and illustrator. She was Virginia Lee Demetrios the Folly Cove Designer. She was Virginia Lee, the friend we all wish we had. She was remarkable and inspirational. She taught her design students three rules: **Do it! Don't Copy! Don't Give Up!** Read on to learn how her art and actions were governed by these very same rules.



*The Little House* by Virginia Lee Burton.  
Collection of the Cape Ann Museum

Virginia Lee Burton talking with  
Gloucester children August 1964.  
Collection of the Cape Ann Museum.



Virginia Lee Burton Archives,  
Cape Ann Museum



# Do it!

**Do it!** Don't just think about it, do it! Don't just watch others, do it! Don't just sit there, do it! Don't let life pass you by, do it! This rule was perhaps most important. Jinnee was a doer and encouraged all those around her to "do" also.

Jinnee was born in Newton Centre, Massachusetts, to very intelligent, creative and ambitious parents. Her mother was a poet and musician. Her father was an engineer and adventurer. She and her two siblings spent a lot of time dancing and reading beautifully decorated books that her father gave them.

What song do you think this woman is singing?



Virginia Lee Burton Archives, Cape Ann Museum.

When Jinnee was in high school, her family moved to California where she continued to nurture her love for the visual and performing arts. Her parents separated during this time, and though Jinnee had to move in with a foster family while she finished high school, she continued to succeed. Her whole life, Jinnee dealt with whatever came her way and conquered it. For instance, after high school when she was about to join a dancing troupe with her sister, she put that entire career aside because her father needed her help. He had broken his leg and could not take care of himself, so she moved back home to Massachusetts. She didn't sacrifice all of her dreams though, she got a job doing something she loved just as much as dancing: drawing!

She worked for the *Boston Transcript* as a sketcher at art events like theater performances. To the left is a sketch she did for the *Boston Transcript*. She signed her artwork VLeeB during this time.

## Did you know?

Jinnee worked as a lifeguard, swim instructor and art counselor at a YMCA summer camp!

The decision to help her Dad led her to meet her husband George Demetrios. He was her instructor at the Boston Museum School where she was enrolled in a Saturday morning art class. It must have been love at first sight. She married George and they eventually moved to Gloucester and the artistic Folly Cove neighborhood. They bought a beautiful home where they could raise their two little boys Aristides and Michael. As the years passed her life became more full. Art and culture surrounded them. She was the English wife of a Greek immigrant in a Finnish neighborhood. She raised sheep and chickens as well as two boys. She grew and canned fruits and vegetables. She did the regular house chores. She was a teacher to her neighbors in design and was a leader of the Folly Cove Designers. Despite all of this she made time for fun, for dancing and singing. Most importantly she nurtured her own writing and artistic outlets. She truly was a doer!

Jinnee often sketched her sons, Aris and Mike. What is Mike doing in this picture?



Virginia Lee Burton Archives. Cape Ann Museum.



Virginia Lee Burton Archives, Cape Ann Museum

Web Adventure

[www.virginialeeburtonthefilm.com/](http://www.virginialeeburtonthefilm.com/)

Learn about the biographical movie *Virginia Lee Burton: A Sense of Place*. Then, check it out at your local library or purchase a copy in the Museum gift shop.

Virginia Lee Burton at work. Collection of the Cape Ann Museum.



# Don't Copy!

When Virginia Lee Burton and George Demetrios moved to Cape Ann it had long been a destination for artists. In fact, George had studied sculpture there and would eventually teach a summer class in life drawing in his Folly Cove studio. This is where we see the next rule that she gave her students: **Don't Copy!** George taught his students to draw from life, Jinnee did too!

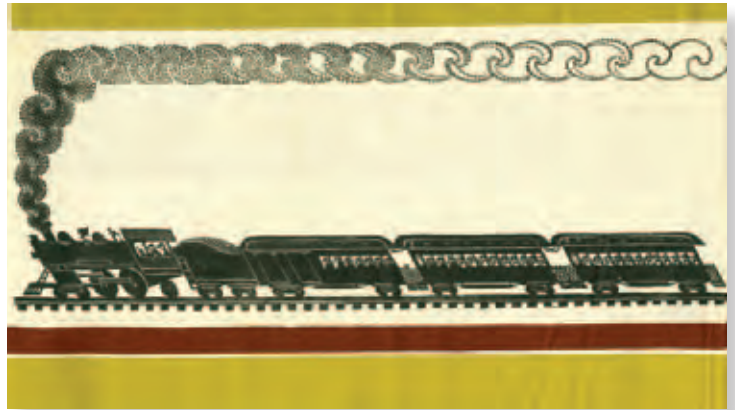
When her two boys were young Jinnee would take them to places around Cape Ann to sketch what she saw. For instance, when she was working on *Mike Mulligan and his Steam Shovel* (1939), she went to see the new Gloucester High School being built. The sketches she completed of steam shovels hard at work digging the new high school's cellar were used for Mary Anne. For her first published book that she both wrote and illustrated, a local train was the model. When Aris was 5 years old, she took him to the Rockport Station to



see the steam engine from the Boston and Maine line. Her target audience was there for each step! Once the drawings and writing were done she would practice reading the books to her boys. If they showed interest and stayed awake for the entire story, every night for a month, she knew it was ready for the publisher.

Virginia Lee Burton Archives,  
Cape Ann Museum

Not only did Jinnee use her sketches of the Rockport train for her book *Choo Choo* (1937), they also became a print design, one of the many she made as a member of the Folly Cove Designers.



*Choo Choo, Virginia Lee Demetrios*

## Learn more about

Jinnee's other books and their real life inspiration:

**The Little House** (1942) went through a similar move as Jinnee's own house in Folly Cove, which she moved back from the road and into a field of daisies.

For **Katy and the Big Snow** (1943) Jinnee took the train to Boston during a snow storm and sketched the plows and snowy streets. The city of Gloucester was the model for Katy's Geopolis.

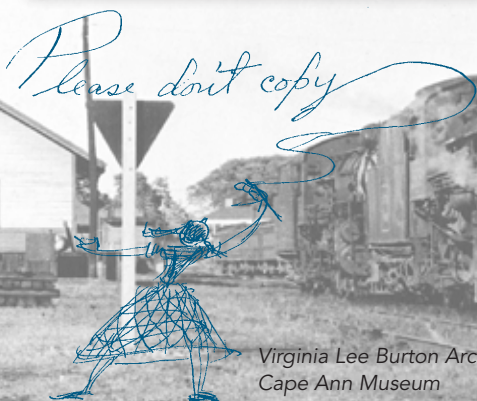
For **Song of Robin Hood** (1947) Jinnee dressed her teenage boys as archers and had them shoot bows and arrows in the back yard.

For **Maybelle the Cable Car** (1952) Jinnee spent a lot of time in San Francisco, the home of the cable car.

For **Life Story** (1962) Jinnee spent days at the American Museum of Natural History in New York sketching the animals in the exhibits and, in fact, told her own life story on the last 20 pages.

## Did you know?

Onomatopoeia refers to words that make noise. *Choo Choo* has many examples of this. Next time you read the book find the following examples of onomatopoeia: Ding Dong! Clangety Clack! Whooooosh!



Virginia Lee Burton Archives,  
Cape Ann Museum

Boston and Maine Railroad Engine at Rockport Depot. Collection of the Cape Ann Museum

## Web Adventure

<http://www.picturebookart.org/Burton/> Visit the Eric Carle Museum of Picture Book Art to learn about the 2009 exhibition about Virginia Lee Burton. Make sure you read the catalogue by Virginia Lee Burton scholar Barbara Elleman to learn more about Jinnee's children's books.

# Don't Give Up!

You can do it if you don't give up! Jinnee told her students that design was hard work but it could be fun, too. It might take a long time and there is never an end to the learning. The more you know the greater the vistas ahead. What a great life lesson!

Nobody would ever have imagined the outcome of the arrangement made when neighbors Aino Clarke and Virginia Lee Burton decided to exchange violin lessons for art lessons. This neighborhood exchange grew into weekly lessons for multiple students, a group that became known as the Folly Cove Designers. The women and men would meet weekly from autumn to spring to learn about design. They would pick one subject, study it deeply, and practice drawing it in different sizes, tones, and patterns. By springtime, each student had their own unique design, carved on a linoleum block, and printed on fabric. These designs would be displayed in the Folly Cove Designers barn during the summer months. Customers could view the designs and place orders. Each designer would execute their

own orders. Design was hard work, but they all had fun. The group prospered, attracting international recognition. Popular department stores of the day carried their designs. When Jinnee died in 1968, the Folly Cove Designers decided to cease operations. They fulfilled their final orders and donated their sample books, prints and remnants to the Cape Ann Museum. People from all over the world visit the Museum to see the designs.

This is the diploma that each designer would receive once their first design was chosen by a jury of their peers. It shows the entire design process from start to finish.



Folly Cove Designer, Virginia Lee Demetrios

## Take a Closer Look



What is going on in this design?  
What do you see that makes you say that? What advice would Jinnee give this woman?

Reducing, Virginia Lee Demetrios.  
Collection of the Cape Ann Museum

Jinnee showing two young designers how to apply ink on a linoleum block.  
Collection of the Cape Ann Museum

DON'T GIVE UP!

Virginia Lee Burton Archives,  
Cape Ann Museum





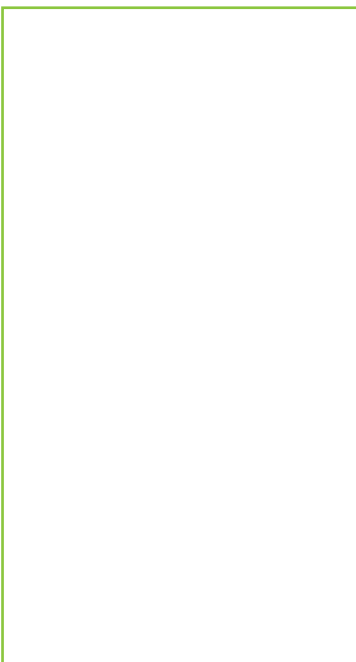
# Design and How Activities

Near the end of her life, Virginia Lee Burton was writing a book on design. She toiled over it, trying to make the perfect instruction manual, but never quite finished it. A lot of her theories were based on her weekly lessons with the Folly Cove Designers. She named it *Design and How*. Let's use her tips and art examples to guide us through a design lesson. Don't forget the rules: Do it! Don't Copy!! Don't Give Up!!!

## I. Pick your subject

It is your own choice... BUT it must be taken or drawn directly from life. Since Jinnee's students were allowed only ONE subject for the whole course, it is important to choose something you like, which is available for study.

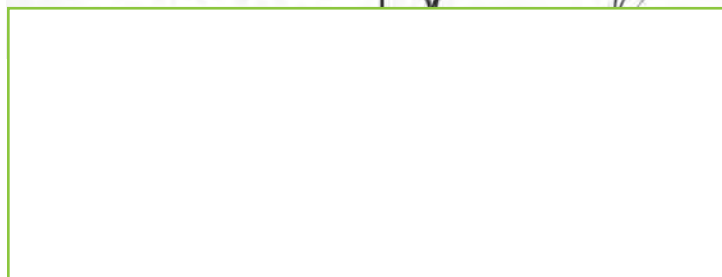
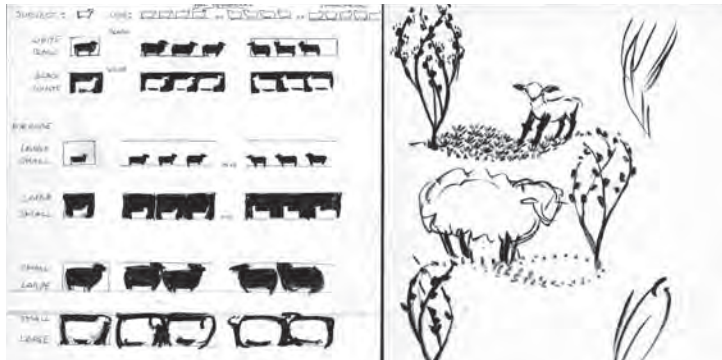
Look around your room, what do you see that you'd be happy drawing for the next 6 months, in all shapes and sizes and tones? Maybe it is something outside? You choose! Using a pencil, draw your subject in the space below.



Virginia Lee Burton and her subject. Collection of Cape Ann Museum.

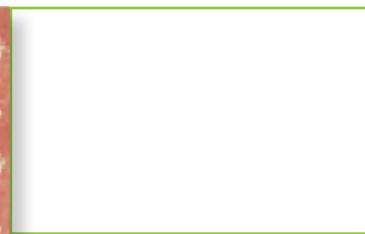
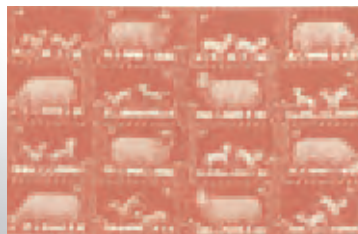
## II. Pick your medium

Let's use black pen and plain white paper. Practice drawing your subject in different sizes and different tones (black, white or grey) in the space below. See how Jinnee did it here, using sheep as her subject.



## III. Create your design

Jinnee completed two designs with sheep as her main subject: *Spring Lambs I* and *Spring Lambs II*, pictured here. In the photo below, can you recognize the print on Jinnee's dress? What article of clothing would you make with your design? Draw it here.



Jinnee discussing designs with the jury. Collection of the Cape Ann Museum.

# Visit the Cape Ann Museum

## Archives

View historic photographs of the Folly Cove Designers, including this one of their shop.



Collection of the Cape Ann Museum

View historic photographs of Cape Ann, including this one of Gloucester High School being built. What do you think? Does Mary Anne look like her real life subject?



Collection of the Cape Ann Museum

## Folly Cove Auditorium

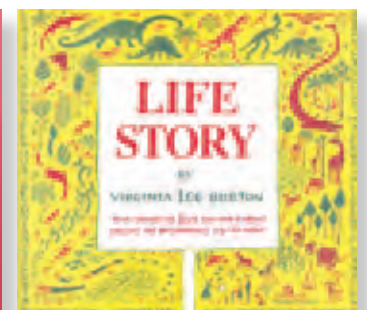
See the permanent exhibit of the Folly Cove Designers, set up to replicate the original textile displays.



Collection of the Cape Ann Museum

## Education Room

Sit on one of the comfortable bean bags and read one of Jinnee's books, like *Mike Mulligan and his Steam Shovel* or *Life Story* the last book she wrote. Pay attention to the last pages where you can see paintings of Jinnee's very own life story!



## CAPE ANN MUSEUM

ART HISTORY CULTURE

**Address:** 27 Pleasant Street, Gloucester, Massachusetts

**Telephone:** (978) 283-0455, Fax: (978) 283-4141

**Hours:** The Cape Ann Museum is open Tuesday through Saturday, 10:00 am to 5:00 pm. Sundays, 1:00 pm to 4:00 pm. The Museum is closed on Mondays, major holidays, and during the month of February.

The second Saturday of every month is Family Free Day. For up-to-date information on exhibitions, special events, and public programs contact Museum Educator Courtney Richardson at 978-283-0455 ext. 12 or email [courtneyrichardson@capeannmuseum.org](mailto:courtneyrichardson@capeannmuseum.org)

[www.capeannmuseum.org](http://www.capeannmuseum.org)