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# MIZZOU

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## Alumni Profile

### Monkey business

Letitia Walker didn't realize she was starting a sock monkey enterprise when she gave one of the collectibles to Whitney Shroyer for Valentine's Day 1997. "We were getting married that October," says Walker, "so I decided to find as many sock monkeys as I could to give to Whitney as our wedding gift. And there was no looking back."

sock monkey

Whitney Shroyer, left, and Letitia Walker share an affinity for, and their house with, sock monkeys.

Shroyer, BA, BA '93, and Walker, MA '95, met in a British Romanticism course at MU. "Ours was a downtown courtship for sure," Shroyer says. Walker worked at Ron's Country Boy (now Lucy's Corner Café), while Shroyer ran Whizz Records (now Happy Time Media) and spun records at Shattered on the side.

The couple relocated to Asheville, N.C., with their growing sock monkey collection in 1998. Today, they own more than 200 monkeys, and their home — affectionately dubbed "[The Red Heel Monkey Shelter](#)" — provides the setting for their book *Sock Monkey Dreams* (Viking Studio, 2006).




*Sock Monkey Dreams* tells the stories of the Red Heel Monkey Shelter society, which includes characters such as reporter Benny Hathaway, talk-show host Happy George, has-been actress Baby Jane, and No. 1 Redheel Emily, the monkey who started everything in 1997.

At first glance, the book appears to be collection of children's stories. But a closer read — or an exploration of the sock monkey videos Shroyer and Walker have published on [YouTube](#) — reveals why their fan base also includes adults.

"It's the post-modern Winnie the Pooh," Walker explains. "When we're telling these stories, it really is our filtering of what we see in the world around us, our impressions of culture, our sense of commentary. I hope they're entertaining, but that they also say something about the America that has existed in the 70 years since sock monkeys first came on the scene."

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