

GREENWICH TIME  
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# I guess that's why they call it "Blues Clues"

Recently I experienced a foreshadowing of things to come, mingled with a poignant reminder of "le temps perdu." It was not the taste of madeleines that conjured up memories of the past; it was heartbroken tears of my five year-old daughter, as she experienced her first feelings of unrequited loss over a man.

It didn't compare to the mild irritation she expressed when Robbie, her "boyfriend" since nursery school, had a play date with another girl (the two-timing scoundrel) and played only with his new date at recess, ignoring Amie entirely. No, that merely put her cute little button nose slightly out of joint.

What we had last night was a case of full-fledged misery; noisy sobs punctuated by wailing the name of her beloved. And who, you might rightly ask, is the vile creature that provoked this storm of longing? Well, he is a geeky-looking guy with little sartorial imagination, always seen in a two-tone green striped shirt and chinos. Those of you with kids in the preschool set will probably know to whom I refer - Steve, the erstwhile host of "Blues Clues", who had his goodbye party on Nickelodeon so he could leave "to go to college."

Amie begged to be allowed to stay up and watch this special episode, where Steve bid us adieu and we met his replacement host, "little brother" Joe. From her viewing of the extensive teasers, Amie'd already ascertained that Joe was "cute." So far, so good, until the show ended and I tucked her in.

"Will Steve come back now?" she asked.

You'd think that after all this time (coming up to nine years now) as a parent, I'd have cottoned on to the things that might upset my kids, and learned the value of a white lie. But I'd been fooled by Amie's apparent sophistication. She'd loftily informed me recently that Winnie the Pooh is "for babies."

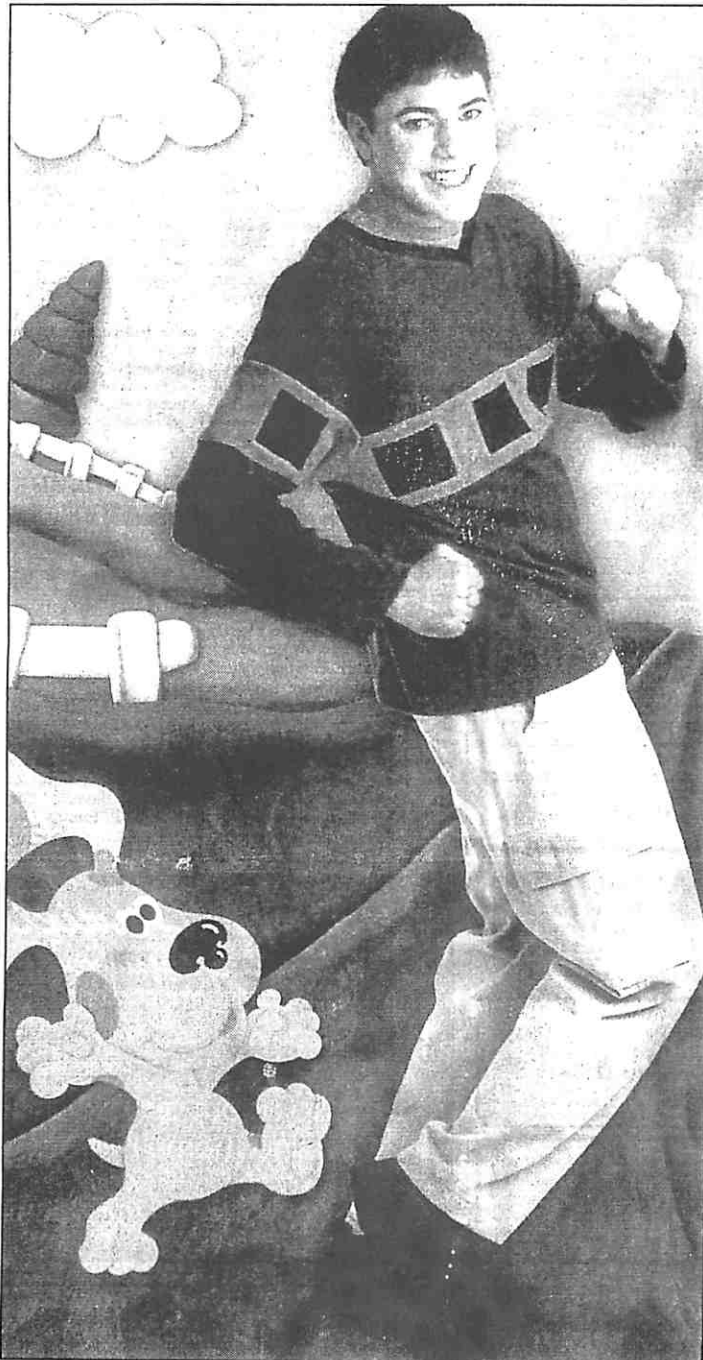
"I like Winnie the Pooh," I protested, "and I'm not a baby."

She was not convinced of the validity of my argument. The logic of a kindergartener who needs to be as cool and grown up as the next kid by far outweighs the protests of her mother.

So making the foolish assumption that "Blues Clues" was on the same level of coolness (or lack thereof) as "Winnie the Pooh," I told the truth.

"Well actually, I think this was his last show. Remember he said that he was going to be sleeping at college now?"

The minute the words were out of my mouth I realized I'd made a terrible mistake. Her lower lip emerged and trembled, a



AP photo/Nickelodeon  
Actor Donovan Patton, above, has replaced Steve Burns as the star of Nickelodeon's "Blues Clues." But, he hasn't replaced Steve in the heart of one young fan of the show.

sure precursor to floods of tears.

"But I want Steeve!" she wailed.

I can understand the sentiment. I've always had a thing for Steve. I think it's because his half-cute, half-nerdy looks remind me of some of my ex-boyfriends. Despite being an artsy type, I've always had an inexplicable proclivity for geeky engineering guys, a perfect example of the "opposites attract" dynamic.

After watching Steve and Joe side by side, my heart remains true to Steve. Joe is just too, well, "cute." His perky perfection doesn't appeal to my admittedly off-center taste.

While my daughter sobbed into her pillow, I could relate to her sense of loss. Her tears resonated, as I thought of the long line of boys who'd left me heartbroken, or so it seemed at the time. I remember that feeling of tear-sodden despair all too well.

As I gave her a cuddle, kissed her wet cheek and muttered I was sure Steve would come back to visit from "college", I had a sudden, disturbing glimpse of my future as the mother of a teenage daughter.

Because this will happen again. And how will I deal with it when she's too old to want a hug and I can't "kiss it better"? Of greater concern, will she even confide in me ten years from now, when she is fifteen, not five? I remember all too well the antagonism I had for my mother when I was a teenager, even if I now worship the ground she walks on.

Watching my daughter sleep, I realized that all I can do is teach her resilience, so that when Joe or any future Joe's leave to go to "college," she may cry, but she'll have the wherewithal to pick up and move on.

I'll tell her how important it is to have a few good girlfriends, the kind that who'll empathize with her woes but refuse to let her wallow in them. Because even when she marries Steve or Joe, chances are he won't understand her quite as well as her girlfriends. Sure he'll love her. But whether it's because men really do come from another planet, or perhaps because it just feels that way sometimes, she'll find she treasures her girlfriends more than ever.

And I hope, when she needs a womanly shoulder to cry on, she'll remember that I'm here. In the meantime, I'm struggling to think of a tactful answer to today's question: "Mummy, How long is college?"

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BY SARAH LITTMAN

