

FEATURE

Family's future begins with ride on 'blue bus'

Ever since my son Bobby was 2 years old and singing along to "The Wheels on the Bus," he has awaited the day when he would ride the school bus. So it was with great excitement that he ran out the door on his first day of kindergarten and joined all the other youngsters at the corner bus stop.

Although the school buses are yellow, each one has a cutout picture of a bus in a different color which is placed in the front window so the kids can easily identify their bus route. Bobby was on the blue bus. As requested by his school, he also had his name, address and bus color pinned to his shirt.

Bobby jumped on the bus with such enthusiasm and confidence that he was gone before we had time to capture his smile with the cameras we brought to make sure we wouldn't miss this important milestone.

"Did he get a seat? Is he okay?" I asked my husband.

As the bus pulled away, I caught a blurred image of his face. It was all happening too quickly for me to understand the enormity of this moment in Bobby's life and in mine. He seemed so happy about every aspect of going to school that I held back my own tears.

The return trip was another story. As he stood at the top step of the bus, he caught sight of me and began to cry, "I looked out the bus window and I didn't see you there and I thought you forgot about me Why weren't you on the other side of the road?"

I hugged him and began crying as the day's emotion caught up with me as well.

"Oh Bobby, I'm sorry," I told him. "We were asked to wait on the other side of the road because the construction people were doing road work. I was confused about where to go just like you."

"Well, you were only confused about one thing," he answered. "But I was confused about everything today!"

He cried even harder than before as he explained, "At school, I couldn't find my blue bus. The patrol boy left me and started talking to someone else. I didn't know what bus to get on and I didn't see anyone that I knew. I couldn't stop crying because I thought I would never be able to find my way home. And there were so many kids. And these people kept yelling out, 'White bus over here. Red bus over here. Green bus come over this way.' And then they yelled, 'ESS Elementary, Takoma Park School,' and then I think they yelled out all the countries of the world."

"But you found the blue bus," I said trying to reassure him and me.

"Well that's because I found Will. He's going to be a patrol boy because he's 8. And their job is to help the younger kids. And I said 'Will, I can't find my bus and I'm scared.' So Will brought me over to my bus."

As we sat by the side of the road and talked about his first day of school, I was happy and relieved to discover that except for his search for the elusive blue bus, he had a wonderful time during his first day of kindergarten. He then began a lively discussion about how much he liked his teacher and the three new friends he made.

After I put Bobby to bed that night, I realized that he has begun a journey that involves much more than a bus ride. It marks a new adventure for my husband and me, too. Today was the first of many days when Bobby will ride off confident and carefree as he begins a new stage in his life. It was also a reminder that there are sure to be other days when he'll struggle to find his way in a world that at times seems confusing and overwhelming. As adults, we too have our days when we feel



BY EILEEN MARX

family matters

excited and hopeful about opportunities and challenges. We also have our share of days when we're frightened and vulnerable. We still know how good it feels to find a friend extending a smile and a helping hand.

That evening, for the first time in months, Bobby woke up with a terrible dream. He couldn't find his bus. I read him the letter I had written to his teacher to let him know we would make sure he got on the bus with no trouble. A tear that felt like the size of a school bus slid down my cheek and splashed on to his arm.

"Oh Mom," he said.

I held him until he fell asleep.

The following day I couldn't stop thinking about Bobby. I took my friend Chris' advice and prayed for him whenever my own fear and worry settled in. It was my only way of being connected with him, and it brought me peace.

That afternoon, Bobby's sister, Teresa, and I met him at the bus stop. From his smile, I knew that all had gone well.

As we walked home he said, "The hardest thing in school is staying inside the tape that the teacher puts down. If you go outside the tape she could accidentally step on you when she's reading a story. The worst part about school is that sometimes you have to lie down after lunch even if you're not tired. But the best thing about going to school is walking up the black steps onto the blue bus and sitting next to my new friend Patrick."

Marx lives in Laurenceville, N.J., with her husband and two children.



Greg Francis

Fits to a 'tie'

Marilyn Eaves checks the fit of a new school uniform on her daughter, Jessica, 9, while Ben Grabski, 5, considers his appearance decked out in a tie. The two children were shopping with their families at Attie's Young Fashions, Brighton, Aug. 22 as they were getting ready to attend St. Michael's School, Penn Yan.

Weak plots dog two cat tales

NEW YORK (CNS) — The following are home videocassette reviews from the U.S. Catholic Conference Office for Film and Broadcasting. Each videocassette is available on VHS format. Theatrical movies on video have a USCC classification and Motion Picture Association of America rating.

That Darn Cat

Convinced her cat has found a clue to the whereabouts of a kidnapping victim, a teen (Christina Ricci) enlists the help of an FBI agent (Doug E. Doug) in solving the crime by following the frisky feline around town. Director Bob Spiers' shoddy remake of the 1965 comedy overdoes the resulting mayhem and chaos in a mistaken attempt at humor. Frequent slapstick violence. The USCC classification is A-II — adults and adolescents. The MPAA rating is PG — parental guidance suggested.

Cats Don't Dance

Animated feature in which a young hep cat (voiced by Scott Bakula) from Kokomo, Ind., comes to 1930s Hollywood to sing and dance his way to movie stardom but can only get a job as an animal extra until proving he and his friends are top talents. The colorful animation is lost in the threadbare story of an unknown's break into show biz, with most of the humor directed at the era's movie stars and studio moguls, but the result offers little to charm the imagination of young viewers. The USCC classification is A-I — general patronage. The MPAA rating is G — general audiences.



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