

ROBYN EWING

TWO LITTLE GIRLS IN BLUEⁱ

Two little girls in blue, lad, two little girls in blue ...

In the late fifties and early sixties when we were young children our family lived very modestly. My mother's household budget was ten pounds a week and, even in those days, it didn't stretch far. To help with clothing expenses my mother learned to sew at an evening class at the local high school and subsequently made all our clothes. She would often buy a whole bolt of material to ensure the best price possible. From an early age then, first my middle sister and I, and then with the addition of my baby sister, the three of us would all wear the same homemade outfits. Same style, same material. My mother even had a go at making hats (with less success).



Figure 3. Some discontent about homemade hats!

Lots of our jumpers were also hand-knitted until the advent of the knitting machine. Mum also made all our ballet costumes including both short and long tutus.

Looking back I really admire my mother's skill and the investment of time she made sewing well into the night to make sure we were well dressed. One memory

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that particularly stands out for me is my mother making two identical blue velvet dresses for my sister Janelle and I when we were around five and seven.

These dresses must have taken my mother some time. She invested lots of time and energy in covering the buttons in blue velvet to match the dress and there was piping around the waist and a white collar edged with lace. Initially I loved that dress, especially the feel of the velvet against my skin. It felt very special, even luxurious to wear it for very best. To this day velvet is one of my favourite fabrics.

We wore these dresses on special occasions and to Sunday School. Interestingly, whenever people of my parents' generation would see us dressed in them they would start to sing the song: *Two little girls in blue* (see the full version in attachment 1). We didn't know the song and at first I thought the song began: *Two little girls in blue land*. To begin with, it was fine to be a novelty and when I did hear the whole song I was intrigued by the sad story that the lyrics related:

*Two little girls in blue, lad, two little girls in blue
They were sisters, we were brothers and learned to
love the two.
Now one little girl in blue, lad, she stole your father's
heart,
Became your mother, I married the other
But now we have drifted apart.*

That was usually all that they sang. In time we both tired of this reaction. I guess the novelty wore off.

My mother continued to make us matching dresses for some years. As the oldest, I must confess that I soon tired of and later resented wearing the same as my sisters – not only the same material but the same dress design!! Saving on patterns too I guess. One year we went to a televised children's party and were singled out because we had shift dresses with a pink background decorated with poodles in a raised white fabric. While adults would delight at three girls dressed the same, it came to trigger intense embarrassment for me.

By the time I turned twelve, wearing the same clothes as my seven and ten year old siblings made me quite angry.

But when I objected I was told that I should be grateful, that it saved a lot of money and that we looked cute into the bargain. To look cute was not what a twelve year old wanted to hear!

Did it make us closer as sisters – or, as in the song, did it cause us to drift apart? I believe it did contribute to me seeking more distance from my sisters. It wasn't that I didn't love them, but I didn't want to be part of a trio.

In hindsight, while I deeply appreciate my mother's efforts to ensure that we were well dressed despite her tight budget, these memories most certainly contributed to my desire to be as independent as soon as I could. I wanted to earn enough money from an early age so that I could choose and buy my own clothes. I know that I caused my mother some hurt by this reaction. I'm not sure that she ever

really understood. Such memories also influenced the way I thought about clothes for my own daughters as they grew older.

I have many other memories of the fashions through which we defined ourselves. I have vivid memories of ...

Hot pants
Mini skirts
Maxi skirts

But my memory of two little girls in blue is the clearest.

Fifty years on I still enjoy choosing clothes. They are an important part of who I am – I think they are probably an indulgence for me because now I am too old to be swayed by current fashion, etc. I love soft fabrics (including velvet) and colour and texture. I love finding something that is a little different and that is a reflection of who I am. Clothes can be an art form, an expression of who we are.

More importantly, I think this memory of two little girls in blue has made me aware of the importance of valuing every child as an individual!

Two Little Girls in Blue

An old man gazed on a photograph,
in the locket he'd worn for years;
His nephew then asked him the reason why
that picture had cost him tears.
"Come listen," he said, "I will tell you, my lad,
A story that's strange but true;
Your Father and I, at the school one day, met two little girls in blue."

*Two little girls in blue, lad, two little girls in blue,
They were sisters, we were brothers,
and learned to love the two;
And one little girl in blue, lad,
who won your Father's heart, became your Mother,
I married the other, but now we have drifted apart.*

"That picture is one of those girls," he said,
"And to me she once was a wife,
I thought her unfaithful, we quarreled, lad,
And we parted that night for life.
My fancy of jealousy wronged a heart,
A heart that was good and true,
For two better girls never lived than they,
those two little girls in blue."

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They were sisters, we were brothers,*

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and learned to love the two;

*And one little girl in blue, lad,
who won your Father's heart, became your Mother,
I married the other, but now we have drifted apart.*



Figure 4. 'Two little girls in blue' plus one.

NOTE

- ⁱ *Two Little Girls in Blue* is a musical theatre work composed by Paul Lannin and Vincent Youmans, with lyrics by Ira Gershwin (under the pseudonym "Arthur Francis") [1] and a libretto by Fred Jackson. The musical premiered at the George M. Cohan's Theatre on Broadway on May 3, 1921. The song itself is attributed to Charles Graham (1893). Accessed from: <http://lyricsplayground.com/alpha/songs/t/twolittlegirlsinsblue.shtml>. A recording is available at: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yn36MHFnptc>