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Entertainment ~ Family ~ Home ~ Health

'Cartoon guru'

Don't tell 'Steve B.' that you can't draw. For years, the Bristol illustrator has been showing patients at Hasbro Children's Hospital and students throughout the state how creating their own cartoons is just a few letters away.



PHOTOS BY RICHARD W. DIONNE JR.

Nicholas St. Pierre, 10, shows the electric eel (at bottom) which resident cartoonist Steve Brosnihan (right) taught him how to draw at Hasbro Children's Hospital in Providence last week. Steve's original is at the top.

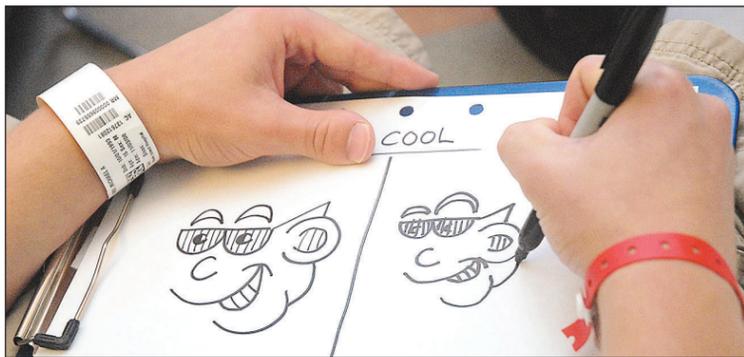
BY JIM MCGAW

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Nicholas St. Pierre, a quiet 10-year-old with an infectious smile and a Beatlesque mop of red hair, has been in this hospital bed for over a month. A bad knee infection, which spread into his bloodstream and penetrated his bones, was what landed him here at Hasbro Children's Hospital in Providence.

"It was really touch and go," says Nick's mom, Joy-Ann Markarian. "The first day in the hospital, he was really scared."

What 10-year-old with IV tubes sticking into his arm wouldn't be? At the moment, though, Nick isn't worrying about his health or grumbling about the boredom of



Michael Nero, 15, does a good job copying Steve Brosnihan's "Be Cool" kid at Hasbro Children's Hospital last week. Michael was there for an annual "tune-up" for his cystic fibrosis.

hospital life. He's got more important things to focus on.

There's an electric eel that needs to be drawn.

"I always mess up," says Nick as

he hands the sketch pad back to "Steve B." — Bristol cartoonist Steve Brosnihan — who's sitting at the edge of the bed, marker in hand. Nick's not happy with the

way he drew the eel's mouth, but Steve's not buying it.

"No, you know what? You just added something," Steve says, noting that Nick's eel is a little more ferocious looking than his own. "You know, next time I draw this thing, I'm going with more of a moray eel look myself."

After putting their markers down, the pair jokes about a trick pen — resembling a syringe — that Nick's brother had brought to the hospital for Halloween. Nick apparently had some fun with the nursing staff, pretending that a syringe was stuck in his arm.

Steve, Hasbro's resident cartoonist, eggs Nick on to keep going with the gag, but with a twist provided by a giant plastic fly pro-

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ALONG THE WATERFRONT

Puma second to South Africa

Read says Bristol-built boat is a speedster

In a driving rain, Ken Read steered *il mostro* into port at Cape Town, South Africa last week, wrapping up a second place finish in the Volvo Ocean Race's 6,500 nautical mile first leg.

Team Puma has 13 points, one behind race leader *Ericsson 4* and two ahead of *Green Dragon* in the eight-boat fleet.



Bruce BURDETT

"The best team won," he told the press, but

"We have more in the locker room. This race was close but soon we'll be up to speed and have our day.

Mr. Read sailed as a boy out of the Barrington Yacht Club and went to Providence Country Day School in East Providence. The 60-footer he and his team are sailing was built at Goetz Custom Boats in Bristol.

Their boat is fast, he said.

"This yacht has a few more gears. *Ericsson* raced like a team that has had two years' preparation, and absolute credit to them, they did a superb job. But a year and half ago there was no such thing as PUMA Ocean Racing — our learning curve was so steep in this leg — and soon we will feel as comfortable pushing hard as they do, and then we'll reach their speeds.

"We had more speed in this boat ... There would have been no point busting the boat for an extra point at this stage. A breakdown could have been a catastrophe, race over. As it is, we have taken second, learnt a whole heap about the boat and have next to no damage to report.

"In good time we will be ready to push the boat and then, I believe, we will be able to match speed with anyone in any condition ... I know we'll learn quickly how to use this boat to its max and then we'll be there. We do not intend to finish second all the way round ... We are in Cape

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Gaming: 'Bioshock' revolutionary in combining art, entertainment. Page 5

Food & Dining: Enjoy the many medicinal benefits of horseradish. Page 6

STEVE B.: Local cartoonist's bedside visits bring smiles to young hospital patients

From Page 1

duced from his "magic bag" of art materials. "Don't give up. If it doesn't get one nurse, it will get another nurse," he says.

Ms. Markarian beams while watching her son joke with the 47-year-old man who was thrust into Nick's life under bad circumstances.

"He really looks forward to Steve's visits. Steve's made his day every time he's seen him," Ms. Markarian says, adding that the cartoonist remembers small details about each patient he visits. "It makes them feel important."

Steve visits with six or seven patients every Tuesday and Thursday night, teaching them how to draw using his own "Cartoona-gram" method, which he recently fashioned into his first instruction book (see related story). Cartoona-grams can be taught to anyone who knows the alphabet, as they're based on letters of the alphabet and linked to a key word or phrase, says Steve, who also teaches drawing in schools throughout Rhode Island.

The idea for the method started percolating not long after Steve started volunteering at the hospital in 1991.

"I found that a lot of the kids were very uncomfortable in listening to directions like, 'Make a line that looks like that,'" says Steve. "To take the pressure off, I'd say, 'Make a C, an S, an O. And the kid would say, 'Yeah, I'll make a letter.' I realized maybe this was the right way to do it. Don't use abstract terms; use what you know and make letters."

The patients he currently works with range in age from "4 to late 20s" and they're here for any number of ailments, including asthma, cancer and cystic fibrosis (CF).

The nursing staff often guides him to patients who are under long-term care. "So if there's a newly diagnosed cancer patient, that's a good connection for me to make



PHOTOS BY RICHARD W. DIONNE JR.

Fifteen-year-old Michael Nero gets some pointers on how to draw the "Be Cool" kid from Steve Brosnihan (marker in hand) at Hasbro Children's Hospital last week. Michael's drawing is at right. "It's really cool that he can draw that well," says Michael's mom, Linda Nero.

because the kid's going to be there a lot and they can count on seeing someone every Tuesday or Thursday night," says Steve. "There are CF patients I've known since they were 12 and they're close to 30 now."

Sometimes, the nurses will ask him to sit with a child who needs immediate attention — a scared kid who's having an acute asthma attack, for example. "Just by distracting them with what I do, it can be helpful to the nursing staff," says Steve.

Paula Most, the arts coordinator for Lifespan, says Steve's presence is a welcome diversion for patients, and most kids connect right away to cartooning. "He can certainly engage a child and in a hospital

setting, it gets them thinking about things other than their medical condition. It helps normalize the situation for the children," she says.

The fact that Steve usually makes his rounds at night is a bonus, as there are no structured programs for patients after 5:30 p.m. "Steve has filled a real gap in the long evenings when the children would normally be glued to the television set," says Ms. Most.

Nurses were good role models

When Steve first started volunteering at the hospital at age 29, he wasn't sure if he'd be able to handle the often emotionally draining task of working with sick children. He gained some confidence the first time he witnessed a traumatic injury and was able to conduct himself professionally.

"A tougher thing was the first experience with a patient who passed away after I'd gotten to know him a little bit," says Steve, who on a few occasions has been summoned by parents to the room of a dying child in hopes of provoking one more smile or to at least lessen some of the fear.

Steve says he's learned a great deal from the nurses and other staff members at Hasbro, whom he credits with doing far more to bring comfort to the younger patients. "They strike this great balance of being invested and exceptionally caring, and still capable of moving from a tragic experience right to the next room and being upbeat and 100 percent there for the next patient," he says.

People often get the wrong idea about his hospital work, he says, noting that that success stories far outnumber the tragedies. "It's not sad. It's incredibly inspirational to see what these kids can overcome," says Steve. "The privilege is immense."

Legendary skier inspired many

A few years after he started working with sick children, Steve met someone who was a source of great inspiration not only to himself but to millions of others. While volunteering at a camp for children with cancer, Steve tried to get fellow Dartmouth College alum Diana Golden, who had lost a leg to cancer at age 12, to come make an appearance.

Diana was a legendary disabled athlete who won an Olympic gold medal in giant slalom at the 1988 Calgary Games, which featured disabled skiing as a demonstration



Steve Brosnihan jokes with 10-year-old Nicholas St. Pierre last week at Hasbro Children's Hospital. Nick had been in the hospital for over a month with a bad infection. "Steve's made his day every time he's seen him," says Nick's mom, Joy-Ann Markarian.

sport. She won numerous world and United States championships between 1986 and 1990 and was posthumously inducted into the U.S. Olympic Hall of Fame in 2006.

Diana wasn't able to make it to the camp, but she and Steve bumped into each other at a Halloween ball in Newport in 1996. They married the following year while Diana continued chemotherapy for breast cancer, which she developed as an adult. She passed away in August 2001 at the age of 38, but remains a constant source of inspiration for cancer survivors worldwide.

Four years later, Steve started volunteering at another camp for children with life-threatening illnesses, Paul Newman's Hole in the Wall Gang Camp in Ashford, Conn, started up by actor Paul Newman, who died in September. Steve teaches drawing there one day a week all summer.

"This year they started calling me 'The Cartoon Guru,' which I think is pretty cool," he says.

Steve remarried two years ago and he and his wife, Susan, are expecting their first child in April. Steve hopes his experience working with children will give him a leg up in the fatherhood department. However, he's quick to point out that no one knows how to be a parent until they've become one.

"I know there are mysteries yet to be discovered," he says with a laugh.

Grateful for support

Although Steve started as a hospital volunteer with the Child Life Department through the advocacy of the late B.J. Seabury, his work is now falling under Lifespan's Healing Arts program. Within a short

time after beginning as a volunteer he was offered modest funding to maintain his hospital visits, first from the hospital itself and then through VSA Arts Rhode Island. Recently his visits have received further support through a grant from the Harmon Family Foundation.

Steve's grateful for the support, since it allows him to continue seeing familiar faces like 15-year-old Michael Nero, who's at Hasbro for an annual "tune-up" for his cystic fibrosis. Every year since he was 4, Michael's been coming to the hospital for two-week stays, during which he gets antibiotic IVs and other treatments to clear out his lungs.

Steve's been working with Michael for the past seven years and has attended many CF fundraisers, so the two have formed a close bond, says Linda Nero, Michael's mom.

"I always know when Steve's been in, because the next morning there are drawings everywhere," says Ms. Nero, noting that Steve's been known to pop by Michael's room at 10 p.m. or later. "It's very cool that Steve has come in for all these years and these guys look forward to it a lot. It gets pretty darn boring sitting in here."

Today, Steve's showing Michael how to draw the "Be Cool" kid — a hipster with shades, spiked hair and a curved, skinny neck. Michael says he doesn't have much time to draw on his own as he's a sophomore in high school and there's too much homework.

But you'd never know that after seeing his drawing, which is a near replicate of his teacher's original.

"It's really cool that he can draw that well," says Ms. Nero.

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If you can draw letters, you can draw cartoons

BY JIM MCGAW

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About a month ago Steve Brosnihan used “guerilla tactics” to teach a patient of about 12 how to draw at Hasbro Children’s Hospital.

“There was this boy and his mother was there in the room,” he recalled. “I said I’m a cartoonist and the mother immediately said, ‘Not this one; my other one — he’s the artist. This one can’t draw.’ She was adamant.”

When mom stepped out of the room, Steve made his move. He asked the boy if he could draw something on his white board, which every room has.

“I drew a fish and he said, ‘Wow, that’s cool.’ I said, ‘You think that’s cool? You could do this.’ Give me five minutes and I can teach you how to draw this,” said Steve, who was whispering because he didn’t want to openly challenge the mother’s opinion.

Quietly, the two drew a fish within a matter of minutes. The boy was eager for more. “We did two drawings and I said to him, ‘When you get a chance, show these to your brother and tell him that you could teach him how to draw them. And show them to your mom before you go to bed,’” says Steve.

Later that week, Steve saw the boy and his mom again. “As soon as I walked in, she looked at me and said, ‘So what are we going to draw tonight?’”

Steve’s method, which he calls Cartoonagrams, is simple. Students use letters of the alphabet that are arranged in a key word or phrase to create cartoons. If you can draw a letter, maintains Steve, you can draw a cartoon.

“My favorite subject is the kid who doesn’t think he can draw,” said Steve. “It gives kids a chance to believe in themselves in a way that makes them think they can do something they may have even been told they can’t do.”

At the same time, students who use his method are learning about language as well, he says. For example, they’ll draw a sun using the word “obvious,” which can mean “clear.”

“So on a clear day, we see sunshine. Now the kid knows what obvious means,” said Steve, adding that his method can be applied to many different school subjects.

He proved that two years ago when he arrived at a Lincoln high school that had received a grant for him to teach cartooning — only to be told that the unit had to be switched to Shakespeare’s “Romeo and Juliet.”



PHOTOS BY RICHARD W. DIONNE JR.

In his home studio, Steve Brosnihan demonstrates his Cartoonagram method — based on letters of the alphabet — as he draws a fish that loves music (below).

Luckily, Steve already loved Shakespeare and started applying his characters — he teaches about 130 so far — to the play. “Montague’s talking about the clouds that (Romeo’s) sighs are creating. So I said, ‘You know those clouds that Romeo was building? Let’s draw one.’”

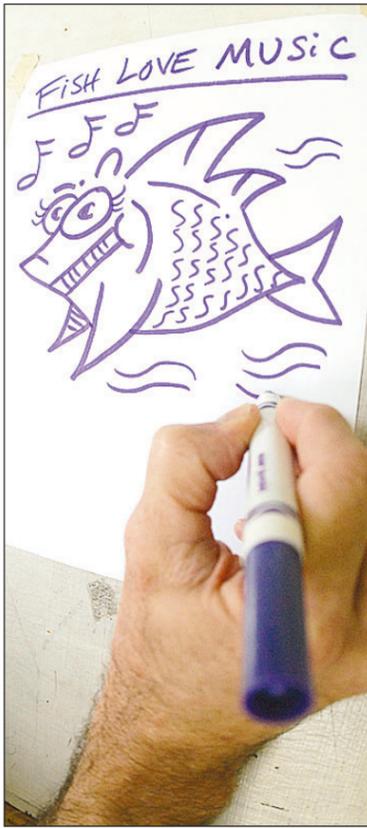
Steve, who also illustrates for the Providence Phoenix and has a line of “Rhode Island ... can be puzzling” T-shirts, posters and other print works to supplement his teaching income, first started thinking about a book based on his Cartoonagrams in the late 90s.

“After a while I had enough of them where kids started asking, ‘Hey, do you have a book?’”

‘Call me Paul’

The book was jump-started last year when a famous acquaintance took interest while Steve was teaching cartooning to children with life-threatening illnesses at Paul Newman’s Hole in the Wall Gang Camp in Ashton, Conn. Mr. Newman was a frequent presence at the camp, says Steve.

“You’d be in the dining hall with



your tray and somebody would bump into you. You’d look back and it would be him. He’d just roll

up on you and say, ‘Catch any good fish today?’”

One day at the camp, Steve was summoned to meet someone privately. It was the Oscar winner-turned-philanthropist himself, who had gotten wind of the book.

“Hello, Mr. Newman ...” Steve began.

“Paul,” interrupted the star of “Hud,” “The Sting” and countless other Hollywood classics. “I heard you were working on a book. I like the sound of it. I think it would be great for kids and I’d like to help you publish it.”

Steve worked quickly on a prototype with his college friend and editor, Richard Goldman, and he had it in Mr. Newman’s hands within a month. The camp leader liked what he saw and sent it to his agents. Unfortunately, after a year of waiting, the right publisher could not be found, Steve said.

“By then, Mr. Newman’s voice had gone out of the project,” said Steve, who decided to publish the book himself.

The book came out last month and currently is being sold at A Novel Idea Booksellers in Bristol and at Barrington Books (Steve will be at the latter store for a

demonstration and signing on Saturday, Nov. 22, at 11 a.m.). It will also be available for purchase at www.cartoonagrams.com.

A portion of the proceeds from sales will be donated to The Tomorrow Fund for Children with Cancer, one of several causes that is near and dear to Steve. Another is organ and tissue donation; all of his published work carries the message: “Be an organ donor.”

Steve says he’s proud to finally get the book out, and likes to think that one of his original inspirations whom he used to correspond with — Theodor Seuss Geisel, aka Dr. Seuss — would be proud as well.

A couple of months before he passed away in 1991, Mr. Geisel sent him a note that Steve treasures to this day. In typical Seussian language, it wished Steve “more upwardses and onwardses” for the next 60 years.

That sounds pretty good to Steve.

“I don’t ever not want to do this.”

For more about Steve B. and his work, visit www.stevebcartoons.com.

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