

A friend you can't see is a friend indeed

My four-year-old son, Ben, has a new friend. His name is So-So. We all like him very much. He's imaginary. No, excuse me, he's INVISIBLE, not imaginary. I've been corrected a million times. I should have that straight. So-So is a ghost and he became my son's friend shortly after Halloween when Ben came downstairs and asked for breakfast for the both of them.

"Can you introduce me first to your—~~imaginary~~ invisible friend?" I asked, as I prepared Ben's oatmeal. "This is So-So, he loves oatmeal, just like me," he said as he pulled up a chair for him. I let So-So know right away that I'm the kind of mom who indulges her son's creative side. "Hello, So-So," I said as I bent down to shake his ghost hand, "I'm Mommy. Would you like some oatmeal?" Ben assured me he did.

Hmmm, invisible friend = invisible oatmeal. That was my thinking at least.

"There 'ya go So-So," I said as I set down a fresh bowl of pretend oatmeal. "Mommy! He wants real oatmeal!" Ben protested. "He's REAL!" So fine, I made So-So some oatmeal. Ben secretly ate out of both bowls, then declared they were both full and they headed upstairs to play in Ben's closet. (That's where ghosts like to play best.)

"I wonder how long I'm going to have to keep this up?" I thought to myself as I polished off the remaining oatmeal from the bowls. So-So went to school with Ben, to church, to the potty. They even slept together. "Give So-So a kiss good-night Mommy," Ben urges me. And every morning, two bowls of oatmeal. (Good thing I like oatmeal.)

Then one morning Ben pulled up two chairs, one for So-So and one for Knock-Knock— his brother! Okay, I like to "nourish my

son's creative side" (yada yada yada) just as much as any other mom, but three oatmeals? I think not.

"They can share," I said, and after much negotiation we all—all four of us—agreed: two oatmeals split into three bowls.

Kissing all three goodnight on Thanksgiving, Ben let me know that So-So and Knock-Knock's dog Coco was here to stay awhile. Yep! Extra dog food bowl! And their sister, TuTu, came as well. "When I asked how long the gang was going to stay, he said until he goes back to school. After that, it will just be So-So again.

So I packed up Knock-Knock, Coco, and TuTu on Sunday night and they were off to...wherever invisible ghosts and their dogs go. On Monday morning I pried my sleepy kids out of bed for school (after a week's vacation), and it turns out, So-So was far too tired to get up for breakfast.

Sitting at the breakfast table Ben had his favorite skeleton toy sitting in the chair next to him. "Skeleton, would you like some oatmeal?" I asked, I think, very hospitably. "MOMMY!" Ben screeched and rolled his eyes, "He's not real!"

Argh! Silly me!

Written for my blog at The Orange County Register: "Mommy's mind is not a toy."