

The Imprint of a Sibling

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When thinking of a topic for this paper I thought of values that stood out to me. I used to think independence was the most important value in my life; I now realize that it is not. I thrive by being around my family; they are the most important people in my life. When I decided I wanted to use family as my value it was because of recent life changing events that have happened to my family over the past year.

When my cousin passed away, it really made me think about my relationship with my brother and how much we had taken each other for granted in the past. My brother and I have decided that we are going to appreciate each other more than we have in the past because we did not realize how quickly our lives can change in one day. I found a TED Talk by Jeffery Kluger (201), and he stated, “some of the most important people in your lives: your brothers and sister” With that being said, having siblings is definitely better than being an only child because we grow with our siblings, we have a connection with them that we do not have with anyone else, and they are there through every point in our lives.

Background

Over the past year my family and I have become very close. My mom and I are basically attached at the hip; she is my absolute best friend. Being at school makes me think about all the times I took being at home with her every day for granted. Being a little more than an hour away from home makes me feel like I am missing out on so much at home. I used to dream of going away to school, but now that the time is here, I wish it wasn't. It is hard to focus on schoolwork when so much has happened at home and I cannot be there with my parents. When my parents call me at school, especially my dad, I tend to get nervous that something bad has happened at home.

About a year ago our lives took a turn for the worse when my grandfather passed away. My grandfather lived for his family; he loved spending time with us every day. My grandfather watched me when I was a baby, and we have had a special bond that no one could break. I would see him multiple times a week just to hang out with him, help him around his house, or have him over to my house for dinner. I have always enjoyed spending my time with him. He would pick up my cousin Holly and me after preschool and take us back to his house for hours. He was a very healthy person, so when he passed it was very shocking for my family. It broke me when he passed away; he was the first person that I was really close to that I lost. I credit my success in school to my grandpa because he was my role model; he worked so hard in high school and college. I wanted to follow right in his footsteps and so far, I have. I was a part of National Honor Society and Key Club for my grandpa because he was a part of both of those when he was in high school and college. This year I was inducted into the National Society of Leadership and Success. It hurt me that my grandpa could not come to the ceremony and watch. I joined because I knew he would have wanted me to.

When he passed, I was so confused and did not understand why he had to go away. When my cousin and uncle passed away in February, I now knew that God took my grandpa because he needed someone to be in heaven for my cousin, Troy, when he got there. I have not usually turned to God, but once my grandpa fell and got seriously injured, I turned to him. I have not stopped turning to him since the day my grandpa passed away. I think it has helped me, but now that Troy and Ike passed and Karen is hurt, I feel like God has not been listening. Once my family lost my uncle and cousin, we decided that we needed to have good relationships with each other and especially be there for my Aunt Karen and my cousin Andrew, who had just lost their husband, dad, brother, and son.

Lately, I have been spending extra time with my Aunt Karen. We mostly just hang out and watch TV, but I know it helps her by having people around. I love spending time with Karen, but sometimes it is hard for me to be with her. Her wounds have almost completely healed, but there is some permanent damage. It is hard for me to see my family hurt. I also have been helping her with her new puppy, Thor. He will be her service dog when she goes back to work. It is cool to see how smart he already is during his training. I wished I had my grandpa here to be with us when my family went through this, but I know it would have hurt him more than it hurt us. He is someone I always went to for comfort, but this time I wanted to be the person people went to for their comfort. I spent all the days with my grandma because she needed me.

Now that Troy has passed away, I feel all sorts of regret for not reaching out more or hanging out with him more. Troy and I were very close in age. He passed when he was only twenty-one years old, and we are middle grandchildren. I always loved Troy; he had the biggest heart and loved everyone. He was a senior this year at SUNY College of Environmental Science and Forestry. He was going to be the first grandchild to graduate from college with a four-year degree. This past weekend I went to his graduation, and it was hard to see his mom and brother cross the stage for him. I could tell it was hard for my cousin to walk the stage in honor of his brother. It was sad, but it was also nice that SUNY ESF had a dedication for my cousin. It was something I would not have missed for the world. This moment just made me more confident in my argument that siblings are the most important people in our lives.

Siblings as Friends

While doing my research, I found this quote that I think explains how I feel about this topic. I do not think that this topic needs a bunch of evidence backing it up. "These questions seemed important to us. They became more so when we realized that we could not find the

answers in the literature” (Ross,1982, p.225). I agree with this because while doing research, I found information that backed me up, but I feel my personal stories were more important.

When growing up I always had a best friend, someone who could never leave me, my big brother, Nick. My brother and I argued quite a bit, but still day after day we would play outside after school or play the Game Cube together. I looked up to my big brother more than anyone when I was growing up. I thought he was the coolest kid ever.

Only children miss out on not having siblings. They miss out on all the fun parts, although I think my brother would argue the opposite and say I was just the annoying little sister. The bond my brother and I have today is worth every petty argument we had when we were younger. One of my favorite memories with my brother is Easter morning running around our house looking for Easter eggs together, or even Christmas morning when we would run downstairs together, all things that would not have been as fun without my brother by my side. When doing my research, I found this quote and it really stuck out to me, “There may be no relationship that affects us more profoundly, that’s closer, finer, harder, sweeter, happier, sadder, more filled with joy or fraught with woe than the relationship we have with our brothers and sisters” (Kluger, 2011). This quote seemed important to me because it is all true; my brother and I used to argue, but when he would get really hurt, it would affect me a lot. I found this quote while doing my research and it truly explains siblings and the bond we have with each other: “how the connections between sisters and brothers have formed, and how they feel about them, and how they remember the injuries, the moments of solace, the disappointments and the terrors” (Banks, 1992, p.139). I liked this because I can remember the pain my brother felt during his injuries or loss. It has stayed with me for years, and it is something I will never forget.

I know that my cousin Andrew has so much regret about his relationship with his brother, I know he is going through a sad part in their relationship. Seeing my brother get hurt while playing a sport made me extremely upset, I have no idea how hard it is for my cousin Andrew to go through more than just one loss. While doing this research it has only made me feel stronger about this argument. My dad's relationship with his siblings has gotten better this past year but went downhill when my grandpa passed away. It made me sad that my dad was not close to his brother and sisters. I can also tell that it bothers my grandma that it took an event like my cousin passing away for my aunts, uncle, and my dad to come together. It bothers my dad that he doesn't have a great relationship with his siblings because he is the oldest and his dad passed away. I know that he is trying his best to fix their relationship and it is complicated. I have learned from my parents' relationship with their siblings. I have always wanted a closer relationship with my brother.

I feel that after going through this traumatic experience I could talk to someone about it, maybe even a therapist. I would not feel comfortable going alone. I found a study that said therapists find it helpful for siblings to attend together. "It has been shown that siblings have a significant effect on the development of each other's identity" (Lewis,1990, n.p.). This quote explains how I feel; my brother and I are similar. If I had a different sibling growing up, I know that I would be a totally different person. I credit some of my success to my brother. I want to make him proud, just as much as I want to make my parents proud. I know he would help me explain how I felt about the situation without pressuring me. It would be very comforting to have him there for me during therapy.

In their research, Candice Feiring and Michael Lewis (1980) noted that there are noticeable behavior differences in the first-born child after the birth of a sibling. One of the

interesting behavioral changes is the development of sleep disturbances. I did not know that happened to children. But something I think makes that statement true is that my brother would have to hit his head on his crib to go to sleep at night and has done that since I was born. He did it all the way through grade school, but I think he has finally stopped. Also in their research, it shows the effects parents have on the children in different aspects. I agree with this because I can definitely see part of my personality I get from my dad, but other parts I get from my mom.

Strengthening Relationships

I have watched my dad's siblings come together during times of sadness, but I have also watched the sadness tear their relationship apart, which has only made me want to make my relationship stronger with my brother. I miss how close we were with my aunts and uncles. I have heard through stories how close my dad and his siblings were; their parents got divorced when my dad was nine years old, so it was more important than ever for them to be there for each other. Once they grew up and got married, they would not talk as much as they used to. The bonds they had seemed to fade and have never really been the same.

During my research I found an article on loneliness that related to my dad's relationship with his brother and sisters. "The parent-child bond, in particular, establishes an orientation to others that determines not only the child's ability to develop relationships but the quality of those relationships as well" (Ponzetti, 1997, p.103). From the divorce, my dad and his siblings did not get the best idea of how to form a relationship when their parents were always arguing. My dad and his siblings have tried to change that and seem to have a little bit. I feel I know how to create a positive relationship because my parents are always showing me how to.

Now that I am older, I have seen the cracks in relationships I used to think were perfect. Since my grandpa has passed, I feel that my dad has been lonely. I have too, but I miss the

relationships my dad had before his dad passed away. In the same chapter I found a definition that I really liked. “Loneliness is the perception that current relationships are not as an individual desires” (Ponzetti, 1997, p.104). I understood this on a personal level because when my grandpa passed away, I shut everyone out and felt lonely. The only person I would really talk to was my brother; he understood how close my grandpa and I were. My brother can comfort me more than anyone else in my family. He will talk to me if I want to or just sit in silence with me. I do not think I could ever truly be completely lonely with my brother by my side.

Another source I found that backs my claim up is by Karen Lewis (1990). This journal article discussed how bringing siblings to therapy together can be very beneficial. I liked this quote from the article: “More than all the other schools of therapy, family therapy recognizes the importance of the sibling relationship” (Lewis, 1990, p.39). I liked this because it shows that having a sibling during therapy is important for all different types of counseling. It would be helpful for younger kids that have been through something traumatic to have someone they are comfortable with there while they share their feelings on it. Trauma can affect children and make them not want to talk. Having someone there that has also gone through it could make them want to talk. The only time I would truly be comfortable talking about what happened to my family would be with someone like my brother by my side.

Sibling Rivalry

Along with the positive side of bonding with siblings there are also negatives, such as rivalry and favoritism. My brother always claims that I am the favorite, and I claim that my mom favors my brother. This is just one example of our petty little arguments, although it is never an argument about my dad, though I have my dad wrapped around my finger, but I appreciate everything he does.

Although one could argue that one can marry someone who will grow up with them, I feel that's not enough time. By the time people get married, they tend to be somewhere between their twenties and thirties, and usually by that age, they are mostly grown. While doing research I found this interesting: Feiring and Lewis (1980) discussed the effects parents have on children in different aspects, for example, what the child finds most important and the way they collaborate with others. Feiring and Lewis (1980) also discuss another interesting bit of research that the first-born children tend to be less intelligent with the presence of a young sibling. Additionally, the first-born loses their sense of being the only child, who has a direct effect on their social behaviors. I find this interesting because I always thought the older sibling would have been smarter due to all the attention the first child gets as a baby, although it makes sense that a child would not get as much attention as a newborn baby even though they both need equal attention at both ages.

Another piece of research I found interesting was that mothers and fathers cause more stress and cause the child to have poor self-confidence and feel uneasy about their work (Wiguna, 2022). I also think this could cause the child to never feel like they are good enough for their parents. I never felt that I was not enough for my parents, but I also had a brother, and we both have the same amount of stress caused from our parents just different reasons.

I watched my cousin Anthony change once his brother was born. Anthony used to be a spoiled child with no care about how he acted or treated anyone. He has grown up in a completely different environment, without a sibling or a mother that was very maternal. He has now grown up, but that changed once his baby brother was born. Once Austin was born, Anthony seemed to mellow. I love the way Anthony became a role model for Austin and has

grown to be the best big brother he could. It is now much easier to get along with and spend time with Anthony because he has learned how not to treat us rudely.

Having such a big family filled with many cousins has given us all the chance to grow up with each other. I wish we had taken better advantage of it when we could have. Having so many cousins has made me feel like I have had ten siblings at some points. When we were younger, we would always be together at some family function or another. When someone we love passes away it always makes us think, "I wish I did this differently."

While doing my research I found an article that explains that the birth rate for mothers of all backgrounds is dropping. Kearney (2022) explained that mothers everywhere are not having as many kids. It does not matter where they are, their age or race. I find this to contradict my argument because this is not giving children the option to have a sibling and built-in best friend. I have found through my cousins and friends that do not have siblings that they wished they did. My friend Marissa explained to me that she felt behind by not having a sibling. She felt that she did not know how to make friends or act around a group of people when she was younger. She explained that when she got to school, she did not know how to share when she made it to kindergarten. This only made my argument stronger. By not giving kids a sibling, they could be more shy and awkward around other kids because they have not been properly socialized.

I found this quote in this article that I liked. "The child gets used to having everything done, managed, and taken care of by their parents" (Wiguna, 2022, n.p.). This causes kids to grow up to be spoiled rotten by their parents. This is going to be a problem because no one is going to take care of a person like that forever. They will need to grow up eventually. Especially when someone goes to college, they are completely on their own. Something I never had to do was share a room, but some people grew up having to share a room. Without a sibling one

never knows how to share a space. My brother and I never shared a room but would have to share areas that are not that big, like the back seat of a car or our swing set. Without siblings, parents are setting their child up to not know how to share with the other kids at school. The child will have a harder time at school making friends.

More is Better

This topic has only become more important to me because every time I turn around, I feel like something else has happened to my family. Not only is having siblings important to me, but having a strong family behind me is something I will forever cherish. My grandma has always told me that family is everything, and after these last couple years, I have realized that she is completely correct. My bond with not only my brother but the bond I had with my grandfather before he passed is something I would not change for the world. Bonding between my parents and me is also something that I would never take for granted. Bonding between all people is important; there is just something different about bonding with your siblings. Between this year and last year, my family has been through so much loss. I would really like to see more families having multiple children because I do not know how I would have made it through these events without my brother by my side. I feel strongly that siblings will be the only people that are there for all points in someone's life. They connect on a level that no one else can, and they are people that will be there to grow up with.

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