

2018 Essay – Older Sisters

(This essay was never finished and never sent out. It is being included so her daughter, Reeanna, can read it)

In our Christmas cards, along with a newsletter, I usually include an essay. A short, sometimes humorous, telling of something I want to tell. This year, I am posting a series of “short stories” on Facebook about my sister, Reba Larson. Probably only family will read these, but, here is the first of several postings:

Birth Order Counts

Speak to anybody that has had three children, or, three siblings; whoever is born first gets a ration of attention. Everything the first child does is a “first” for the parents. First time to walk; first time to get potty-trained; first time to try out for little league or cheerleading. Everything No. 1 does is scrutinized, considered, debated, and then directed by their loving and caring parents: in detail; usually with a “parent-child” voice. No. 1s rarely get to make their own decisions. If they do make a decision, it requires parental consent (if the parents know about it.) It is even worse if No. 1 is a girl.

No. 2 gets a free ride. No. 1 has taught Mom and Dad how everything works so when No. 2 shows up, much less direction and detailed correction is done to No. 2. This is especially true if No. 1 was a girl and No. 2 is a boy.

No. 1, being the child of brilliant and self-assured parents, will usually revote against the parent-child thing. Talk to our No. 1; Patrick. (God bless him. He did a great job of managing us and didn't tell us to “stuff it”. I suspect, in part, because he was fairly independent, self-confident, and really self-directed.) If she was alive, you could talk to Reba, who was No. 1 in her birth order.

Reba was a classic “baby-boomer”. Born in 1949, after her parents had finally got away from WW2, got married, settled down in Des Moines, and did the post-war thing by having a baby. For four years she got the undivided attention of her loving parents until I showed up. Four years later, Coy showed up. Reba, Fred, Coy; each 4 years apart.

Four years between children means the siblings will have nothing in common. Sure they live in the same house with the same parents. They are light years apart on development. In our case, we did not attend schools or activities together. We only did family activities (vacations, birthday parties, church, opening Christmas presents) and never had common friends or interests.

Our parents were stereotypical “greatest generation” members. Depression formed, WW2 hardened, with beliefs and behaviors about the roles and relationships of man and wife and family out of “Leave it to Beaver” before that show was created. Dad was the boss and very “tell oriented”. Nobody argued with him. If his wife ever argued or corrected him, the kids never saw it. Mom stayed at home and did not work until Coy was in high school. Dad went to work every day as a salaryman. Never making any real income and us kids did not recognize we didn't have much because we had a house and a car and eventually even central air conditioning.

My point is; Reba still was the first for everything in a culture and family environment where the father was dominate and the mother played her role. Everything she did was done way, way, before Coy or I did it. Her parents, in large part her father, tried to control everything she did. I remember her as a sweet, fairly complaint girl up until she approached high school graduation. As she approached adulthood, she was ready to change, but her parents just seemed to think they had to continue to control everything she did. While they were letting me do about anything I wanted to, they were still trying to micro-manage Reba. She was the No. 1 girl-child that had to be protected and could do no right. I was the No.2 son who could do no wrong.

So, as predicted, rebellion brewed then surfaced about the time she graduated and started college. Tremendous verbal fights occurred over small, unimportant things. Big issues became even bigger fights. (Remember, our family did not fight, so, it was way outside my comfort zone to watch this occur.) Reba, being smart, eventually figured out that her parents would not change, so, she had to change. Even though this “No 1 has to be told how to do everything” relationship continued until both her parents died, Reba pretty much out-thought them. She would make her own decisions, implement them, and only tell her parents if required. What could they do? She became really good at fait accompli.

As things worked out, this “parent-child” relationship continued with her father until he died. Ironically, his last few years were spent in the firm belief that she still required his help, while she was really serving him in his old age after his wife died. What a loving daughter she proved to be.

Reba was Always Around When Fred Required Stitches

Back in the day, we did not call the act of some emergency room Doctor sewing your cut up as getting “sutures”. Nope, they were always “stitches”. Like, in my father saying, “I see a trail of blood on the sidewalk, did Freddie have to get stitches today?” This part of the essay is about the trials and tribulations that I went thru with my older sister, which seems to be easier to remember than the mundane, day-to-day stuff.

First, as I grew up with my sister, I was some sort of idiot that kept getting cut. Most of the time, Reba was there to witness/cause/participate in the accident and provide me loving first aid.

My first visit to the emergency room for stitches came when I was only about 3-4 years old. We had a long set of steps from our front yard down to the sidewalk at street level. I was at the top of those steps, on a tricycle, facing down the steps, when Reba decided to give me a push to watch me ride down them. I made all the way down but “crashed” when I got to the sidewalk at the bottom. Bounced my forehead off the concrete and split a cut open. For those of you unaccustomed to forehead cuts; they bleed profusely. Reba came down and tried to staunch the flow with the cuff of her shirt as she helped me up to the house and our mother. Phone call to father; quick trip to pick him up at work; then off the hospital emergency room for stitches by trike round 1.

A year or two later, I have the ability to ride a bike and really crash. Since we could not ride in the street, yet, I was basically a demon going up and down the sidewalk in front of our house. Mid-way, an elm tree had raised the sidewalk and we had a great ramp for jumping. At the north end of the sidewalk there was a curb that could also launch you in the air if you were going fast enough and pulled up on the handles. I crashed first at the curb and went over the front of the bike. I somehow

ended up cutting the forehead. I don't remember Reba being around at this accident scene since I think she was at school. Phone call to father; quick trip to pick him up at work; then off the hospital emergency room for stitches by bike round 2.

The few months later, the second time, it was the root that got me and another cut to the forehead as I went over the front of the bike. Reba was there to pick me up. This time, mom doesn't call father. Why bother him for what had become routine? Off the hospital emergency room for stitches by bike round 3.

Getting old, yet? Later, maybe the next year but maybe the same year, the root gets me again. Reba is once again around to pick me up. Off the hospital emergency room for stitches by bike round 4. Dad comes home, sees the blood drips along the sidewalk, and says ""I see a trail of blood on the sidewalk, did Freddie have to get stitches today?"

My bike had chromed, wire basket on the front handlebars. Reba told our father, "when Freddie went flying over his handlebars, his head got cut on that basket. Maybe, if you took it off, he would quit having to go to the hospital for stitches". Dad took the basket off, and even though I continued to wreck, no more stitches required. Who knows how many sutures my older sister saved me from? But, every time I rung my noggin against something, I would ask her "do I need stitches?" She would laugh and answer, "not this time."

Reba avoided being blamed for more stitches until I was a sophomore in high school and she was still living at home while she went to Grandview College.