

Lastborn

by Kevin John Phillips

Ten-year-old Big Sis rushes to the radio while we're eating supper. She's caught the first strains of her favorite song. While she runs to turn it up, Brother speaks.

"Dad is that rock and roll?"

"Not even close," I tell him, "that's called top forty, and that's the kind of music your big sister likes." I think for a minute, and announce, "You know, we all like different kinds of music. Lil' Sis here likes ballads, sweet songs, country music, Mom is into dance music — makes me throw up in my mouth a little bit just thinking about it - Big Sis loves that top forty, and I guess I'm an old metal head."

"What am I?" Brother asks with interest.

Lil' Sis, recalling the constant psychological torture she suffers at her brother's hands, puts down her fork and flatly states, "You're a knucklehead."

On this night she gets to chalk one up for the good guys, because even Brother laughs. Lil' Sis; an average and yet extraordinary kid who happens to be our lastborn.

Ah, to be the baby in the family. It's like the first of three cars through a yellow light, slipping into the right line at the bank, or cracking the seal on a new jar of jelly. Great stuff, but when they're shouted out to the world, prefaced by an excited, "Hey look at this..." there's nary a reaction. Everyone's already done it and long forgotten the special feeling attached.

Being the baby in a family forces a focused outlook on life. Not necessarily profound, not even wry, but a perspective that pushes for two things - recognition, and to be in on whatever is going on.

Whatever you do, don't shortchange the baby. They may not remember what you told them to do in the kitchen three minutes ago, but they can keep track of minute details in the comfort zone of their life, and do so like a mob accountant. When she was very little, it went something like this: ". . . and I will not eat green eggs and ham, Sam I am." (For the four millionth time.) And I will not eat them in a house, with a mouse, in a box, in a train . . . "

"HEY, YOU DIDN'T SAY 'WITH A FOX!'"

Sorry. Man.

She's officially an adult now, moved away from the "How come she gets?" and "When do I get?" phases but not yet from the house. Something is on the horizon and I eagerly look forward to whatever is next. Did that sound convincing?

"Lil' Sis," I holler from my chair the other day, "did you do those dishes?"

What she hears is, "Hey Cinderella, if you think anyone else is gonna do a shred of work while you still live here, you are plum loco...so get at them dishes, hear?"

She makes the most awful moaning sounds and shuffles off to the kitchen while muttering, "What did you guys do before I was born?"

Lived a horrid life, baby. Just horrid.

The last-born; onward they travel, carefully testing the packed-down ground in front of them and peeking around the well-worn

corners of life. We watch them with impatience much too often but only because we've forgotten the joy of new things. They laugh heartily when it's convenient and generate copious amounts of alligator tears when necessary. Or is it laugh when necessary and tears when convenient? The baby can live life tough as nails or sweet as Atlanta Coca-Cola. Probably a combination of the two - if necessary.

It is their way; it's what makes them unique. However they operate we should be thankful for them, if only to remind us of simple joys...and the importance of remembering all the words.

