

## **Forgotten Child**

**by Lynn Calza**

I was born on July 4, 1969. After a few days in the hospital, I was placed in a foster home and, six weeks later, was adopted. For three years, I was an only child and thrived with my parents' devotion. In November 1972, a new adopted brother arrived. My parents may have prepared me somewhat for this event, but I have no recollection of that. I remember my smiling parents placing the new baby in my arms and hearing that he was my new brother. This sudden interruption in my centered life was to have a huge impact on my future. I started experiencing feelings of anger, and for the next 18 years I focused this anger at my brother. For the last four years, I have been trying to understand what went wrong.

A few years after my brother arrived, my mother got pregnant, and in May of 1976 my youngest sibling was born. For some reason, having this new brother was different - I had months to prepare, I was older, and I was excited to meet him. While my new brother was in his first years of life, my other brother was at an age where he needed a larger share of my parents' attention. The more attention he received, the more resentful I got, and as time went on it became apparent that he needed more than the normal parental supervision. From what I remember, it started when he began falling behind in his communication skills, and was sent to a speech therapist. I am sure there were other signs of a problem, but I did not notice them until I was 15 years old, and he was 12.

At this point, my youngest brother was becoming involved in sports and to this day excels in many. Being the youngest, I think that my parents spent a lot of time trying to make sure he would "fit in" and have a stable childhood. We did our share of playing, fighting, and otherwise interacting, but I think our nearly seven-year age difference held us somewhat apart. Only in the past few years have we started growing closer. Through the years, he has excelled in sports, achieved a high academic standing, and has developed a large and supportive peer group. Because of this, I often refer to him as the "good" child in our family. As far as I am aware, he has lived a "normal" childhood - that is, a small amount of rebellion (puberty), a decent share of attitude (adolescence), and friends that respect his desires without pressure.

When my middle brother was twelve, he started exhibiting negative behaviors. He was hanging around with a bad group of friends and getting into trouble at every turn. This path of destruction led to alcohol and drug abuse and trouble with the law. He has been in and out of many different adolescent facilities, such as homes for disruptive children, and juvenile

hall. Somehow, he managed to run away from just about everywhere he was placed. My parents tried everything from having no alcohol in the house to calling the police and having them take him away. At one point, he tore up the carpets in his room and painted satanic and white supremacist symbols on the floor, walls, ceiling and windows. He burned spots on the walls, floor and ceiling, and broke the windows numerous times by either climbing through, falling through (drunk), or punching them. He used his ground floor windows as an entrance and exit so that he could avoid confrontations with my parents; the same windows were used to smuggle friends and lovers in and out as well. He had constant verbal fights with my parents, and made many threats as well. As I am sure that you have guessed, I refer to him as the "bad" child in our family.

During this troubled period, my "bad" brother attempted suicide many times. He even stole my car and drove it off a cliff. He walked away from the accident and proceeded to rob a liquor store for a pack of cigarettes. Needless to say, he was in the crisis unit on many occasions as well. He had pulled a few vanishing acts (usually after he ran away from a home) but usually surfaced after a month or so. A few years ago he left for good. By that time, my parents had just about given up hope but still had not thrown him out. He maintained limited phone contact and sent a couple letters over the years as well. Today, he is living in San Francisco and only recently told my parents where he was. I think that he is finally starting to get help for his problems and is, hopefully, on the way to a productive and happy life.

Where I fit into this is sort of complicated. In my early childhood, I had been what I consider a "good" child. I never went through a phase where I was embarrassed with my parents, and I didn't withdraw into a secretive adolescence. I got fairly good grades, didn't get into much trouble, and got along with my teachers and friends. I was, however, a very "needy" child. I have always been someone who needs a lot of attention, and having my brothers take up so much of my parents time, I felt excluded. I became a "forgotten" child. My parents were focusing most of their negative attention on my "bad" brother and most of their positive attention on my "good" brother. I wasn't ignored or shoved in a corner, but the attention that was left over was not enough to meet my needs. I became even more resentful of the lost attention, and once again focused my anger on my "bad" brother. Over the years, I did some really mean things to him. I always tried to turn everyone against him and placed blame on

him whenever we were in trouble. I don't think I was ever very nice to him - tolerant sometimes, but never very nice. Somewhere deep inside, I knew that I loved him, but I have never liked him.

As my high school graduation drew near, I was more and more upset at the way things were going in my family. I couldn't wait to leave for college. I was mad at everyone all of the time, but the way I let it out was with silence. I withdrew from everyone and became even more of a "forgotten" child. I played the part of an invisible person, and I played it very well. I finally started to resent my parents for making me be the older, responsible child. I was almost 22 when I realized that I had never finished being a child.

My "bad" brother hit bottom when I was 21, and it wasn't until then that I realized what was going on. I finally saw that he hadn't been competing with me for attention, but rather that he had really serious problems. I found out a year ago that his birth mother had been so "strung out" on drugs she didn't even know she was pregnant (nor did she care) until it was too late to abort. Even then, she didn't stop with the drugs. I think that most of my brother's problems came from her

drugs, and looking back on his life almost proves it. I asked my mom once who had been her favorite child, if any, and she told me it had been him, which really surprised me. She explained that even though he was doing so many bad things, she could see that he was very intelligent and could get a lot out of life if he could learn how to use what he had. I think learning disabilities are prominent in children whose birth parents were drug abusers. I can see that my brother has always been an extremely smart person, but he has trouble training himself to access the information in his brain.

For the past four years, I have been dealing with forgiving myself for directing my anger at my brother and understanding that my parents did the very best that they could. Being such a "needy" person, I am also working on expressing my feelings rather than turning into a "forgotten" person again. I have even focused my future goals so I can help other children like myself, who were expected to be mature and responsible, while another sibling lashed out. No one means to leave us behind, but the impact can last a lifetime.

*Lynn Calza is an adoptee who has reunited with her birth family.*