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By: Samantha Reany

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Sisterhood (Nonfiction Winner)

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By: Samantha Reany

I am a very proud, much older sister. On August 10, 2004 and September 28, 2005, I learned what it was like to have such a title: Big Sister. I had been an only child for my first thirteen years of life, and thought then that I didn't want it any other way. On August 10, 2004, Miss Alexis was born. She came into this world after giving our mother troubles for over twenty four hours. I had never before seen such a beautiful baby. Nor had I held anything so tiny, or had the opportunity to snuggle and kiss something so precious. Then just thirteen months later, Miss Michelle came into the picture. She didn't give mom much lenience, either, and ended up coming out by a C-Section. As soon as she came home wrapped up in her own little blanket, all scrunched up and red, I smothered her with kisses. When I had the chance, I held both small, beautiful babies in my arms- One in each, and knew then my years of being a teen were over; along with the love and affection being given solely to me. And quite frankly, I cared less. Being an older sister has changed my life and made me appreciate things so much more, as well as teach me things I need to know for when I have my own child.

Never-ever had I appreciated time. I just took advantage of it, not thinking of the days when I'd be old and wrinkly. Time is so valuable, and I didn't know it until the countless hours of sleep lost when they would cry to be fed, and possibly changed, at the odd times of 2, 3, 4, 5am. I remember groaning in bed, tossing and turning, trying to drown it out just to get some rest! And during the day, when trying to enjoy friends' company, I would be interrupted with a, "Sam, could you please hold the baby?" or a "I'm going to take a nap, I need you to watch the girls." In the beginning I thought I could hang out with friends whenever. I had all the time in the world, I didn't need to worry about the girls holding me back. But for the next five years, I learned to value every second spent with a friend alone. A moment spent out, without having to push a stroller and get quizzical looks of, "She seems a bit young, doesn't she?" were fabulous, like catching a breath after being underwater for too long.

I learned how to change a diaper without scrunching my nose up in disgust, how to count to three in Chinese (thanks to Kai Lan), and how to know the difference between a "feed me" cry and an "I'm sleepy" whine. I learned how to be a sister, along with how to be a sorta-kinda mother. Our mother was busy working all day, and our dad... He's a whole different story. I was in charge of cradling, feeding and changing while our mother was gone, and then I became assistant manager around 7pm, Mondays-Fridays. I didn't mind it much. It prepared me for the days of when I do become a mother, which now, I feel somewhat prepared for. After the diaper days, I learned that you should never acknowledge a toddler when they bump into a table or get "hit" by their sibling. The more you coddle, the more they cry, and the more frustrated you will become. After a while, you learn which boo-boo's need kisses, and which "owwies" can do without. I also learned that in toddlerhood, they get too big for your lap. No matter how hard they try to curl up in your arms, their legs end up dangling over your elbow a bit, and soon your arms become weary. But that doesn't mean you put them down- It means you snuggle them more, because before you know it they'll be throwing their graduation cap in the air. My sisters are only six and seven and I can't hold onto them without their toes touching my knees. It's a tad hard holding a little one that isn't so little anymore.

I have watched my two precious girls grow up. They have become more beautiful since the day they were born, which I didn't think was possible. I have come to realize, lately, that buying a shotgun and sitting on the front porch waiting for their dates to arrive doesn't sound like a bad idea. It's not even a funny saying to me anymore, it's the truth. My girls only have ten more years to go before they have to worry about the opposite sex- (See, there's the sister in me, assuming they'll wait until 16, 17, 18 to notice that there are boys who are really cute, and that there are boys who have cooties)- which may sound like a long time, but the last seven years to me have felt like a movie that was over in 126 minutes. When you watch young ones grow up, you just want to contain them to a plastic bubble. I know that I want to keep my sisters away from all the harm and stink of this world we live on, but I know they'll rebel just like I did, and I don't want to hear the words "I hate you." I have learned that I want to be the one they confide in, the one they ask for advice, the one who wipes the mascara off their cheek after a breakup they believe they'll never get over. I want to be their role model.

In the end, sisterhood may sound like motherhood, but that's because it's almost exactly the same. Not mentioned before, our mother passed away on June 15, 2008. They currently live with one of our family members, who can support them greatly, who I can trust to do all the things I may not be able to from so many miles away. She'll know first about a lost tooth, a birthday invitation, or a perfect attendance award. She may not cry for me, but when she calls and tells me of all of their triumphs, I will cry for myself. Not all tears are bad. I have also learned that by letting them go, I'm not really letting them go. They love me all the same, and I love them even more than I did yesterday. They have helped me realize tons of things I had never realized before, what to appreciate, and more than anything, how to love.