

# ABOUT SIBLING RIVALRY

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Like most siblings my brother Jim and I periodically had our differences while growing up. I don't know if it began when he kept knocking over my building blocks or when I pushed his stroller into a clump of sticker bushes, but as we became adults I thought we had put our issues behind us. So it was a surprise to me when in our 50's Jim began to refer to me as an "old dude." I became even more concerned when I learned he had described me as a "numbers freak" to a group of mutual friends. "Freak?" What had I done to deserve this? I knew that there was but one thing to do. That was to call our mother and ask her how to resolve our issues. And there was one tool I thought I could use to get Mom's full attention—that being to use our childhood names as I presented my case.

"Mom," I began. "This is little Hammy Morgan. Little Jamie Hud keeps calling me names!"

"Well, what names did he call you?" Mom asked.

"HE CALLED ME AN OLD DUDE!"

At that point Mom tried to comfort yet bring a degree of reality to the situation. "Son, you know you are older than your brother and that you always will be older than he is. There really isn't anything that we can do about that."

"I guess you're right," I said. "But you know what else he called me?"

"What was that?"

"HE CALLED ME A NUMBERS FREAK! AND HE DID IT EXACTLY THREE TIMES!"

Mom was now more concerned than before. "Don't you think you are getting a bit anal about this?"

"Well, it's just not fair!" I answered. "I don't know what to do!"

Mom sat quietly and began to draw on her years of experience as to a possible solution. After a short time she spoke and offered me the following plan of action:

"Call him one back!"

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During the last year of our mother's life she was told by her doctor that she was no longer capable of living by herself. So with the help of his life's companion Annie my brother Jim provided round the clock care for Mom. He managed her medications, prepared her meals, served as the contact person with medical personnel, and throughout gave of himself to her out of love. So regardless of whatever names Jim chooses to call me in the future, it is now time to call him names back just as our mother had instructed me. Names such as "caring." Names such as "compassionate." Names such as "honorable." And it was Jim who gave our mother the ultimate validation when he made comment on the four open heart surgeries she had survived. He told her in front of a large group gathered to celebrate her 80<sup>th</sup> birthday "the doctors may say Mom has a bad heart, but we all know she has a perfect heart."

As the holidays approach I would like to offer some things each of you might want to put on your wish list. To start with, mothers (and fathers) who have perfect hearts. Siblings who we can call names such as caring, compassionate, and honorable. Friends who enrich our lives simply by their presence. And finally, a sense of meaning and fulfillment in all aspects of your life. May all of these gifts be yours for the taking. The best to you and yours this holiday season (and beyond).

Sam Denny