After arriving at the University of Washington, I engrossed myself so much into my studies that a reflection about my relationship with my siblings has become as necessary as it is eye-opening. As it turns out, not seeing your siblings every day after a 12-year unchanging routine does, in fact, contribute to feelings of homesickness and familial love. It was only through a combination of a year away from my siblings, a book that also explores sibling dynamics in both a similar and not so similar way, and a well fortunate timed English class that has led me to answer the question: Who are my siblings to me?

Well, obviously they are my brother and sister! Case closed.

A group of kids sitting at a table with food on plates

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(Seattle, 06/21/2022)

“Although siblings are ubiquitous in the lives of children and adolescents, the characteristics of their relationships and roles vary considerably across time and place, with corresponding implications for the nature and power of sibling influences on youth and family” (McHale, 11). As it turns out, my siblings are not just families, but also (and possibly unfortunately) a major influence on my life. Seeing someone grow up alongside you, not just a friend you met a while back but someone who was once 0 years old does in fact bring you into a closer relationship that cannot be replicated by anyone else. And just as there is “power of sibling influence”, having someone grow up alongside you meant that a parent no longer had to deal with just your antics, but also “half” the time they spent with you, “half” the supervision they impose on you, and “half” the opportunity for your tastes and preferences to shine (for two siblings like me, I got even “less” at a “third”). And thus, once we realized that our loving brother and sister were a competitor in our environment who had an influence on you, the nature of sibling politics was born, as would be explored as how middle school me saw the whole ordeal.

To win sibling politics, you had to have the most influence, especially if the influence collides with that of your opponent: the Sinister Icky Blasphemous Lamentable Irking Nefarious Goblin (S.I.B.L.I.N.G. for short). Name calling is an easy way to begin, my sister reportedly has called my brother the “big rat” and I “bigger rat” (Silvia, Personal Communication, 6/1), my brother resorting to “dumbo-head” (Emil, Personal Communication, 2018), and I above giving my S.I.B.L.I.N.G.s such derogatory names. In the novel, such predicaments are avoided by not having a clash between the siblings, either because they do not fight or because those fights were not worthy of being mentioned in their archive, and such “He would be Swift Feather, his father immediately suggests.” (114) The father deciding the name meant that the name would hold respect, as it came from a trusted authoritative figure, and sounded important and cool such as how the Children viewed the Apache’s, unlike my scenario where S.I.B.L.I.N.G.s decided our new names. However, “children who engage in more destructive types of conflict also, may be learning that disengagement, nonresolution, or manipulative strategies are normal” (Rinaldi, 14), and, from my experiences, my siblings sometimes resorted to name-calling and other forms of bullying outside of our sibling politics, and getting ourselves in trouble either in school or with our parents. Swift Feather and Memphis used and called each other respectable names, such as “Ground Control” and “Major Tom” (334), implying that they will learn that respectable names are normal, and, as Rinaldi finds, find “warmth” in their sibling relationship.

The best type of influence to inflict on your opponent was misery, and the best way to inflict misery was a loss of privacy. Thus, as our trio had found out, the best place to enact sibling politics was during travel. The journey to the destination meant cramped seating, body to body of three unstable children right next to each other, it became a fight for personal space as we would each flex our body outwards each claiming that we resided in our seats while denouncing our neighbor. As my father put it, “You all were unbearable!” (Dad, personal communication, 6/1) to listen to hours of tirades between me and my siblings. Thus, the novel gave a form of confused relief, as the story never really showed conflict between Swift Feather and Memphis, and the parents only found annoyance through the constant questioning, not by being caught in a crossfire of loud exchanges. “They occupy the entire space in the back of the car, spread out” (11), which read as envy as they did not have other people fighting for their space. The journey ends with the destination, where the unfortunate catalyst lies of “not enough beds for every sibling, so they were forced to sleep in the same bed as S.I.B.L.I.N.G.s”. In the novel, this brought up the some of the only protest from the kids as “we complained that we had to share a bed” (219). While their complaints solely came from the parent’s decisions, me and my siblings’ complaints came from our continued invasion of privacy. Much of the night was loud with “Move your feet! Stop Snoring! Shut Up” (Me, Emil, Silvia, Personal Communication, 2019). Perhaps such politics occur because “’The sibling rivalry model’ focuses on the jealousy of children toward their younger siblings.” (Felson, 1) Perhaps a constant need for attention, or the fact that our neighbor seemed to get more of our parents’ attention than us, caused fights.

The most important debate in sibling politics for me was music, who decided what to listen to during car rides or dinner time. This led to stare downs, fight over controls, and when the parents finally decided to moderate, a test to see who can come up with the longest song that they enjoy that they know the other sibling would not enjoy. In our family, I tried to play progressive metal, my brother would try to play indie and alternative rock, and my sister would try to play pop. In contrast with the *Lost Children Archive* family, they were able to decide on audio books and songs such as “Space Oddity”, causing the siblings to exclaim “More louder! the girl shouts, loving the spell this song casts. Play it again! the boy says after the song finishes” (219). The only time such unification came upon my family was when our dad would get bored of our bickering, announce that he is the music dictator, and loads up an hour of Bulgarian Folk Music.

But sibling politics became much less fun when my siblings learned the best strategy: if they worked together against me and shared common goals, then they would always win. And thus, there came a form of alienation between us, as they would play together and not feel the need to include me, they would always have bargaining power against my parents as two is greater than one, and they could have more elaborate schemes to act against me. It no longer felt like we were siblings, but more of true enemies that needed to be avoided. I became much more reclused into my room, growing closer to outside activities and friends. As Davies puts “It has demonstrated that young people can make sense of who they are in relation to how are similar or different to their siblings” (Davies 14). Swift Feather and Memphis build their identity (at least in the story) through shared experiences and games and understanding, with Swift Feather constantly saying, “but I knew what you really meant was…” (278). But while their relationships and identities came from similarity, mine came from differences, as the perceived alienation meant that I tried harder to be a better friend, and to be a more active person in my academic life and extra-curriculars. It was only through this separation that I and my siblings took a break and time from each other (at least as much as we can away from travel and family dinners). When middle school me matured to high school me, I felt happy as I had found a stable and good life outside of my home and outside of my siblings, and as my siblings matured, they also no longer found the need to hold grudges against me either.

Despite what sounded like chaos, my parents still reassured us that they loved us and **heavily encouraged** me and my siblings to say we loved each other as well. Despite repeated tirades between us, there never felt a moment where we feared that some sort of invisible bond between us would tear. Contrasted with the novel, where Lucky Arrow comments “Despite our efforts to keep it all firmly together, there has always been an anxiety around each one’s place in the family” (14). Somehow, despite the peaceful nature between the family members portrayed in the novel, their invisible bond breaks. Perhaps it was because in the story, the divide is initiated and carried on by the parents, as foreshadowed in “they each got their own bed in their room” (219), whereas in my experience, the only divide came from us siblings.

According to my parents my siblings “Used to look up to you as a role model, then came some kind of dark age where they ganged up on you and you couldn’t be in the same room as them, but now you guys seem tolerable of each other “(Mom, personal communication, 6/2). I do not remember ever being seen as a role model, at least there was no archive of it. The last passage in *Lost Children Archive* did bring a sense of jealousy with it, as Swift Feather says, “I’m recording for you, Memphis,” (334), I never received or remember giving such lovely anecdotes to my siblings to inspire them. What many other classmates have shared in their discussion as a tear-jerking ending felt kind of dull to me, like it was a sort of fiction. I never remember being a role model, so how could I relate to this? It felt like I could not expand upon my own memories, so when other classmates were asked how they would change the ending, Ivana Gomez-Duran says, “I would like to add the part where boy and girl tell their parents about their encounter with the four lost children.” In what I assume is a way to inspire hope or a more satisfying ending to the story. But as someone who has not only had siblings but also S.I.B.L.I.N.G.s, I half-expected for one of the children to die by the end of the novel, and it’s what I would have changed of the ending in order for the story to be more depressing and tear-inducing for me. Apparently, as my mom has observed, I have returned to being a form of a role model again, so the rewrite for the ending I view is necessary is not so much as a dark fantasy anymore, but more of a way to show that at one point I did lose the relationship with my siblings, and having them back again meant that another loss would be the end of me emotionally.

My brother now has become some form of an “intellectual,” constantly asking smart and thought-provoking questions during dinner time to impress me and my parents that at some point it becomes annoying to hear him ask and answer himself all the time. As an example, he was talking about “the ethics of immigration and how to deal with them” (Emil, personal communication, 5/31), in response I showed them some photos from *Lost Children Archive:*  
A plane on the ground behind a chain link fence

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Normally, when thinking about this book, I usually was using it to relate to myself and my relations to my siblings, but using it to discuss the horrors of immigration and deportations helped show me (and my family at the dinner table) that by being together we were lucky, compared to many other unfortunate souls that the novel and the above photo describes. But the topic of intellectual conversations stuck with me, as it’s how the mother has always acted during her narration: “The question is, when, in the future, we dig into our intimate archive, replay our family tape, will it amount to a story?” (34), and the conversing and asking questions is something the boy/girl always did: “I asked Mama questions, and she answered” (195). Even now, I must deal with answers such intellectualism as I write this.

As I have went to college, I am now more isolated from my siblings than ever before, and yet, I somehow have become closer to them as any moment that we can get together becomes more valuable. Gone are the days of fighting in favor of loving each other. Pictured are some chat logs that appear every weekend:

A screenshot of a phone

AI-generated content may be incorrect.A screenshot of a phone

AI-generated content may be incorrect.

(Do not worry, after every message I invite them to a game). If these are the messages quickly sent over text when we are right next to each other, then imagine how many more conversations and interactions we have when we are face to face. It has come to the point where I sometimes turn in assignments late just to spend more time with them (Sorry!). But this adds another layer of emotion to the ending of the novel, as when Swift Feather and Memphis grow up and no longer see each other, “This is the last recording I’m making for you, Memphis” (334), but when I leave, I can grow closer with my own siblings and share many messages with them.

Now, as I look back upon the adventures of the novel and the adventures of my memories with my siblings, I cannot help but ask, who has it better? Me or Swift Feather? Swift Feather gets a happy ending, even if it is bittersweet, as he and Memphis got to spend about 4 years together where everyone was happy together and they did not fight. Even when they go on an adventure through the desert, every conflict had its resolution, and there was no lasting impact that separated the children (except for the parent’s divorce). When they are forced to move away from each other, the brother can inspire her sister with words of hope: “You might feel lost one day, but you have to remember that you’re not, because you and I will find each other again” (336). Whereas for me, I felt like I had lost too much time, too many adventures, to fights and quarrels that do not matter anymore. I feel like I had only reunited with my siblings too late into college where I cannot see them as much. Swift Feather and Memphis “will find each other again”, but I will have to grow up and be an adult now, how much time do I really have with my siblings? I become stressed especially during this class, as when my classmates speak about their experiences with their own siblings, it’s portrayed as always positive and something that I do not think I can effectively achieve. One example, from discussion posts include Alivia Cooper’s response on the “Assembling Materials for Bricolage”, how can I achieve something as perfect as this?  
A white background with black text

AI-generated content may be incorrect.

Who are my siblings to me? The most important people in my life, as every action they took, every word they spoke, every snide remark and every “I love you” helped contribute me and pushed me onto the path that made me become me, even if every small action only had a small impact. Many technical attributes can be said as Brody says: “older siblings become better teachers” (Brody, 1) which relates to how I have grown to be a tutor for my siblings. But even then, there has been some negative impact, as Lucky Arrow says, “Older siblings don’t listen” (129). By combining the good and the bad, you get something human, something that can learn and from everything, and something that seeks to be important and influential to the people that were just as important and influential to them.

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