

If there's anything good that comes from having a big family, it's that I have the perfect icebreaker for those "introduce yourself to the class" moments. "Hi, I'm Keegan, and I have nine siblings" is my go-to statement right before I hurriedly sit down. Of course, I'm undervaluing my clan. A good icebreaker isn't the *only* valuable thing that comes from a family my size. Growing up smack in the middle of four brothers and five sisters—ranging from ages 11 to 28—has made me who I am.

As a kid, family road trips in our oversized blue 12-passenger van—lovingly dubbed "the Kipkemobile"—included counting off to ensure everyone's attendance. I'd exclaim "six!" when it was my turn, and was luckily never left behind (this can't be said for everyone—it's possible we once left my nine-year-old brother at a rest stop in Arizona). As number six of ten, I think of myself as a bridge that spans between the generations. I'm able to slink off with the little kids when it comes to big chores and tough decisions, but I'm still privy to older kid activities and secrets. I love being uniquely in the middle!

My ascent from baby brother to big brother was so gradual that I barely even noticed it until I reached the top. I'm no longer the youngest or even the middle child. Instead, I'm in a transitional stage of my life: leader of the so-called "Young-But-Cools" (aptly renamed the "Young Butts" by the oldies), but also a fledgling adult. Sure, I hang out with twelve-year-olds daily, but I must face the fact that soon I'll leave the nest and find my own way. It's mind-boggling to me that my older siblings have done this and now have careers, apartments, and spouses. Luckily, though, they've blessed me with an abundance of knowledge, making my inevitable journey from child to adult more manageable. Not only have they told me useful things ("Keegan, if you get Mrs. Smith for English, switch out immediately!"), but they've also fostered huge amounts of growth. Thanksgiving basketball tournaments have taught me

competitiveness and toughness. Loud family dinners built my confidence to speak up and argue. My brother's gridiron success led me to join the football team, and my sister's obsession with *Harry Potter* cultivated my own love for reading. I know how to do my laundry and cook my own food because if I didn't, no one else would. This independence may have had a negative effect on my hygiene as a child (is not brushing your teeth for a year bad?), but I'm beyond that now.

My older siblings have taught me plenty, but what about the four Young Butts? I gained a lot of responsibility among these crazy gremlins after my sister's departure to college two years ago. As chore wrangler and chief babysitter, I put up with bonafide attacks on my sanity, enduring inane commentary and unceasing commitment from my siblings to annoy those around them. In the end, though, they respect me and me, them. I understand how much they look to me as a role model; any subtle action of mine will often be mirrored in them. What I've learned as ringleader even translates over to experiences with friends: known as "responsible Keegan," I'm often the de facto adult, selected to talk on the phone or get the waiter's attention. Being the top dog at home has definitely taught me a lot.

I'm excited for things my future holds, like getting the matching tattoo (designed by yours truly) that all my older siblings have, and attending college. I'll be without family for the first time ever, but I'm prepared to strike off and show who I am even without them. No matter what happens in my future, though, I know I'll always have two things: the unwavering support of my nine siblings and, of course, the perfect icebreaker.