

Simply SIBLINGS

By Richard M. Romney
Church Magazines

When Rebecca B. was 15, she was happy for her sister Elizabeth, 19, who was leaving on a mission. But Rebecca was feeling pretty sorry for herself. The family had just dropped Elizabeth off at the Missionary Training Center in Provo, Utah, USA. Rebecca felt like she was losing not only her sister but also her best friend.



We're talking about sisters so close that even though their parents' home had a separate room for each of them, they still shared a room—because they preferred it that way. Rebecca and Elizabeth knew that by sticking together, they could weather the storms of life. Most of the time they were like flowers and sunshine, bright and happy. They were always talking, always together. And now Elizabeth would be far away.

Rebecca remembers thinking as the family drove away from the MTC, "Who will be my best friend now?"

A New Best Friend

"Not long after Elizabeth left," Rebecca says, "we had a family home evening where Mom asked: 'How can you create a relationship with your siblings that will last throughout eternity?' That night, I decided that while Elizabeth was gone, Matthew [13 at the time] was going to be my new best friend."

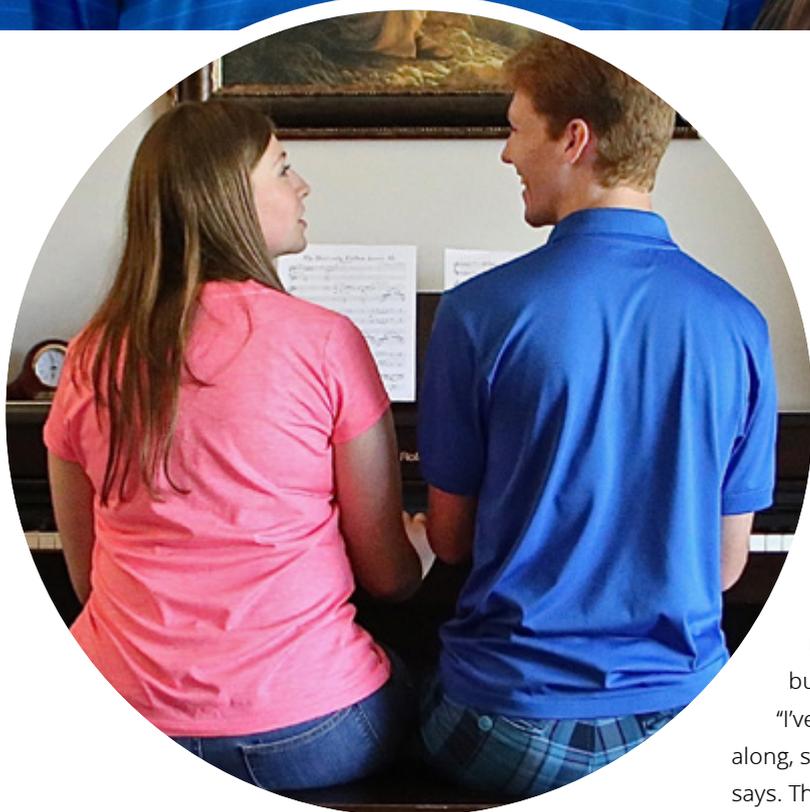
PHOTOGRAPHS BY RICHARD M. ROMNEY

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*Can brothers and sisters be best friends?
For Matt and Rebecca, the answer is—
absolutely and eternally—yes.*

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"She reached out to me," Matthew recalls. "We just started doing more and more things together."

"Part of it was just talking—on the way to school, during school, after school," Rebecca says. "We talked about what kind of day we were having, about whatever was going on."

They created what they call a safe relationship: "We're not mean and we don't hurt each other," Matthew says.

"That means we can talk about the good, the bad, the pretty, and the ugly," Rebecca adds. "We have the same kind of relationship with our parents—we talk to them about everything. We're open and candid, and that builds trust."

"I've grown up with two sisters who pretty much always got along, so it was easy for me to follow their example," Matthew says. Their friendship continued into high school. They rode to



school together, said hi in the hallways, went to each other’s activities, introduced each other to friends, and talked about little things that don’t matter much. But sometimes they talked long and deep about things that really do, like how to recognize answers to prayer.

Support and Fun

But it was more than just talking that helped Rebecca and Matthew become closer as siblings. A big part of their friendship is about supporting each other and having fun together. For example:

- *Rebecca likes to jog. Matthew rides a unicycle.* So they work out together anyway. Rebecca runs as Matthew pedals beside her.
- *Matthew loves Ultimate, a non-contact sport played with a flying plastic disc.* So Rebecca helps Matthew practice at home. “If you can catch my throws, you can catch anything!” she says.
- *Rebecca loves music and ballroom dancing.* Actually, Matthew loves music, too, and they often sing and play piano together. But ballroom dancing? More on that later.
- *Matthew loves hiking.* “So he goes hiking with Dad,” Rebecca says. “You don’t have to do everything together all the time. I go along sometimes, but they hike much faster than I do.”

When You’re Annoyed

Of course, they don’t always agree. Occasionally they argue or feelings get hurt, but they’ve learned ways to work through it.

“Sometimes you need to talk to each other and work it out, and sometimes you need to go to your parents,” Rebecca says. “But when I’m with my friends, I don’t talk negatively about my parents or my siblings. When friends tell me, ‘I admire how close you guys are,’ I know it’s not because we’re perfect; it’s because we’re loyal to each other.”

“When siblings annoy you,” says Matthew, “don’t sweat the small stuff, and don’t sweat the big stuff, either. Talk to each other with kindness, and get the feeling of love back into your family as quickly as you can. It’s more fun to be happy.”

“Remember,” Rebecca says, “friends come and go. But your relationships with your family are eternal, so those are relationships you should be motivated to keep working on.”



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No Need to Be Identical

"You don't have to have the same likes and dislikes," Rebecca says, "But when I go to Matthew's Ultimate games, I know enough to say, 'Wow, that was really cool how you caught that.' And when I'm sewing quilts, he knows enough to say, 'Wow, that's a really hard block that you made.' You support them in what they're interested in."

Remember the ballroom dancing mentioned above? That's where Matthew may have set the gold standard for sibling support. Not only did he practice ballroom dancing at home with Rebecca, he also learned a routine so that he could perform with another girl on a song Rebecca choreographed. When the ballroom dance club needed an extra member, Matthew joined. Now Rebecca relies on him when she tests routines: "I ask him if it will work or not, and together we figure it out."

Not long ago, members of the club staged a workshop for the youth in Rebecca's and Matthew's ward. Rebecca took charge and got everyone involved. "And Matthew got to dance with all the girls!" Rebecca teases. Matthew just grins.



Good Things or Push-Ups

As you talk to Rebecca and Matthew, it becomes apparent that they are *always* cheering each other on. Rebecca explains: "If I ever say anything negative about myself, Matthew will say, 'Three good things about yourself or 10 push-ups!' And he'll wait until I say good things. It means a lot that he helps me see the positive in myself."

And Rebecca reciprocates. "Everybody loves Matthew," she says. "My job is to ward off all his fans!"

Together or Apart

About a year and a half ago, Elizabeth returned from her mission. She was soon back in college, living away from home again. But now she's getting a new roommate, a freshman who just graduated from high school—Rebecca. They'll be sharing a room again, just like they did at home.

And who will be Matthew's best friend now?

"He's going to have two best friends," Rebecca says. "Mom and Dad." **NE**

"Strengthen your relationships with your brothers and sisters. They can become your closest friends. Support them in their interests, and help them with challenges they may be facing."

For the Strength of Youth (2011), 15.





7 TIPS FOR SIBLING SUCCESS

Want to create your own sibling support system? When you begin to try and make changes in your family, know that it takes time and patience to create a stronger relationship with siblings and parents. Don't give up, just keep trying. Here are some suggestions from Rebecca and Matthew:

1. **Create a safe environment.** "Listen. When you listen to each other with love, you feel more able to talk to each other honestly and openly."
2. **Talk to each other, and to your parents, too.** "We have discussions a lot—while we're making dinner, cleaning the house, or just sitting down. Having discussions with each other has made our family close."
3. **Be each other's allies.** "Don't speak evil of yourself or your siblings. Speak all the good you can."
4. **Learn to laugh.** "Laugh with each other and at yourself, but don't say or do things to hurt each other."
5. **Rely on additional support.** "If you're having trouble getting along, reach out to adults who can help, like parents, Church leaders, or school administrators."
6. **Attend each other's events.** "Be there to cheer them on. And do things together at home too. We discovered we love to do crossword puzzles as a family."
7. **Strengthen your spiritual side.** "Read scriptures, sing hymns, pray, and go to church together. Feed each other spiritually."

SIBLING MATCHUP



Three pairs of siblings volunteered to be in this photo. Guess which ones are siblings and match their letters.

- A _____
- B _____
- C _____
- D _____
- E _____
- F _____

Answers on page 45.

Read more from and about siblings at newera.ChurchofJesusChrist.org. Tell us about you and your siblings at newera@ChurchofJesusChrist.org.