

The
Birth
Order
Book

Why You Are
the Way You Are

Dr. Kevin
Leman



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To protect the privacy of those who have shared their stories
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To my firstborn, lovable, perfectionist Holly.
Your sense of fair play, creativity, love for God, and sensitivity to others make me proud to be your dad. I love you very much.

With special recognition to:

My firstborn sister, Sally,
with apologies for awakening you on at least one occasion by dangling a juicy night crawler under your nose. You are a very special sister.

Dr. John E. Leman Jr. (Jack),
my secondborn older brother and hero, whom I faithfully followed on more than one propitious childhood occasion when you tried to lose me in the woods. Thanks, Jack, for threatening to beat the tar out of the neighborhood bully for me.

May and John Leman,
my sweet mom and dad, who can now rest in peace, knowing they did a great job of raising three pretty good kids who loved them deeply.

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Guess the Birth Order

Firstborn or only child, middle child, or lastborn/baby of the family? Venture a guess, then check page 327 to see if your answers match.

1. My sister was a charming show-off—make that a con artist who got away with everything—when we were growing up. Now she’s the top salesperson in her company and highly successful.
2. I’d rather read people than books. I like solving problems and am comfortable being surrounded by people.
3. My brother Al was nicknamed “Albert Einstein” because he was so good in math and science. He’s an engineer now and a conscientious perfectionist.
4. I don’t know how my husband does it. His workshop is an absolute mess, but whenever he wants to find something, he knows exactly which pile it’s in.
5. My friend is a bit of a maverick. She has a lot of friends but values her independence. She’s a good mediator in arguments. She’s about as opposite from her sister as you can get.
6. I get along better with older people than I do my peers. Some people think I’m stuck-up or self-centered. But in actuality, I’m not.

Introduction

Maybe Abel Did Have It Coming

Have you ever wondered why your sister or your brother is so different from you? After all, you grew up in the same family, yet you act so differently and see things so differently. You often view the same childhood experiences through completely different lenses and have opposite responses. How can that be?

Do you wonder why you continue to butt heads with a certain son or daughter of yours—but with the other children it's smooth sailing? Or why you can't quite see eye to eye with your boss or a certain co-worker?

Do you wonder why you feel compelled to act a certain way—like you've been programmed? Why you pick the friends you do? Why you're attracted to a certain type of person to marry (and who's really best for you)? Why you always find yourself being the one to mediate between two warring parties at work? Why you struggle day to day with never being good enough?

All of the answers to these questions have everything to do with birth order. Think of your family as a tree. Your

mom and dad (or mom or dad, if you're from a single-parent family) form the trunk of the tree. The children in the family are the branches. Have you ever seen a tree where all the branches are growing in the exact same direction? The same is true with children. One of the best predictions in life is that whatever the firstborn in a family is, the secondborn in the family will go in a different (and oftentimes opposite) direction.

Do you wonder why you feel compelled to act a certain way—like you've been programmed?

Think of the story of good ol' Cain and Abel, way back in time—the firstborn and secondborn brothers who got sibling rivalry off to a vicious start. If any brothers could be different, those two were. One

was a gardener, work-with-the-earth type. The other was a shepherd, animal-lover type. To say there was jealousy when one was treated “better” than the other is a vast understatement. And you know where all that led. . . . That's why, when I first presented the idea of this book to my publisher, I wanted to call it *Abel Had It Coming*. But the editors and the movers and shakers (all firstborns or only children, by the way) shook their heads and won out against this lastborn of the family. So now, voilà! We have the descriptive and exciting title *The Birth Order Book*.

For over thirty-five years as a psychologist, I've studied birth order and the role it plays in making you the person you were growing up—and the person you are today.

Many psychologists believe that birth order has to do with only the ordinal position (the order in which you and your siblings were born) in the family. But if it were that simple, why would you need a book on it? After all, if you can do any math at all, it would be easy to figure out if you were a firstborn, middleborn, or lastborn.

Here's the rub. What if you're a middleborn but you act like a firstborn? Or what if you're a firstborn but you act more like a middleborn? Or what about if you are fourth in a

group of seven siblings, spread thirteen years apart? Or what if you are the only boy in a family of three girls? The only girl in a family of four boys? What if the firstborn has mental or physical challenges? What is your birth order then?

With more than three decades of seeing the truth played out in the lives of the families I counsel, I am convinced that birth order isn't as simple as most "experts" try to make it. To my knowledge, I'm the only psychologist who takes into consideration all the variables, including the functional position (which I'll explain in this book).

So no, birth order isn't simple, but it is easy to figure out with the information you'll read in this book. And once you figure out your

Once you figure out your birth order, as well as the birth orders of those you love, you'll be way ahead of everyone else in the game of life.

birth order, as well as the birth orders of those you love, you'll be way ahead of everyone else in the game of life. By the time you've finished reading *The Birth Order Book*, you'll understand yourself better, your loved ones better, your friends better, and your co-workers and boss better, and you'll be able to navigate relationships in all arenas of life much more easily.

If you're a parent, I'll reveal the secrets of how you can best parent your firstborn, middleborn, and lastborn, and why treating everyone "equally" isn't the best *modus operandi*.

If you're married (or thinking about walking that flower-strewn aisle), I'll give you some tips about which birth order combinations make for the smoothest-flowing marriages (and why), and what you can do to make your relationship thrive—no matter your birth order—if you're already married.

If you're in the business world (part-time, full-time, at home, away from home) or you do volunteer work, community service, etc., you'll learn how to use your natural birth order to the best of your abilities, while also getting along with and encouraging your co-workers.

If you're a firstborn or an only child, you'll learn why you're so driven to do everything (and do it well), and what you can do about it before you drive yourself crazy or exhaust yourself. You'll also learn why books are some of your best friends.

If you're a middleborn, you'll find out why you always find yourself in the role of mediator, why you're on a different path than your firstborn sibling, and how you can keep yourself from being squeezed in the middle. We also might shed some light on that rebellious streak you know is hidden deep in your heart.

If you're a lastborn like me, you'll learn why you need some firstborns in your life (like my wife, Sande, and my assistant, Debbie, who help keep everything straight for this fun-loving baby of the family). And you'll also find out why sometimes you need to walk just a bit more softly around the older ones in the family, cut them a little more slack, and ease up on the pressure they're feeling to be the perfect role model.

Want to get inside the thoughts and feelings of the ones you love? Figure out why you do what you do?

Hmm, I wonder what would have happened if Abel had taken that quieter, backseat approach and not irritated big brother Cain by outdoing his efforts. Ever think that maybe, in Cain's mind, Abel did have it coming?

Want to get inside the thoughts and feelings of the ones you love?

Figure out why you do what you do? This fun, entertaining, informative book will show you how. I can't count the times I've heard readers say, "Dr. Leman, this book has changed my life. And it has changed how I see life too."

So what are you waiting for?

1

Birth Order

Does It Really Make Sense?

I can't count the times I've been asked that very question as I've counseled individuals and families and crisscrossed the talk-show circuit over the past thirty-five years. My first response usually runs along the lines of "Does a bear go potty in the woods?"

Yes, birth order makes sense. After all, how else can three or four or even eight little cubs be so different, yet come from the very same den? Birth order is simple, but it's not simplistic. There are standard birth order rules, and there are also exceptions to the standard birth order rules (both of which we'll also talk about in this book). However, the exceptions are explainable when you understand how birth order works. Even the exceptions develop because of when you were born into your family. I call it your "branch on the family tree," and that branch has had a great deal to do with why you are the way you are today.

Why should you care about birth order? Birth order can give you some important clues about your personality; your relationship with friends, co-workers, and loved ones; the kind of job you have; and how you handle problem solving.

Birth order is really the science of understanding your place in the family line. Were you born first? Second? Third? Or even farther down that line? Wherever you landed, it has affected your life in countless ways.

Which Traits Fit You Best?

Which of the following sets of personality traits fits you the best? You don't have to meet all the criteria in a certain list of traits. Just pick the list that has the most items that seem to describe you and your way of operating in life.

- A. perfectionist, reliable, conscientious, a list maker, well organized, hard driving, a natural leader, critical, serious, scholarly, logical, doesn't like surprises, a techie
- B. mediator, compromising, diplomatic, avoids conflict, independent, loyal to peers, has many friends, a maverick, secretive, used to not having attention
- C. manipulative, charming, blames others, attention seeker, tenacious, people person, natural salesperson, precocious, engaging, affectionate, loves surprises
- D. little adult by age seven, very thorough, deliberate, high achiever, self-motivated, fearful, cautious, voracious reader, black-and-white thinker, talks in extremes, can't bear to fail, has very high expectations for self, more comfortable with people who are older or younger

If you noted that this test seemed rather easy because A, B, and C listed traits of the oldest right on down to the youngest in the family, you're right.

If you picked A, it's a very good bet you're a firstborn in your family.

If you chose B, chances are you are a middleborn child (secondborn of three children, or possibly thirdborn of four).

If C seemed to relate best to who you are, it's likely you are the baby in the family and are not at all happy that this book has no pictures. (Just kidding—I like to have a little extra fun with lastborns because I'm one myself. More on that later.)

But what about D? It describes the only child, and I threw it in because in recent years I have been getting more and more questions from only children because families in general are having fewer children. These only children (also known as “lonely onlies”) know they are firstborns but want to know how they are different from people who have siblings. Well, one way they are different is that the only child is a super or extreme version of a firstborn. They have many of the same characteristics of firstborns, but in many ways they're in a class by themselves. More on that in chapter 7.

*Not all characteristics
fit every person in
that birth order.*

Notice that regarding each major birth order, I always qualify the characteristics by saying “good bet” or “chances are.” Not all characteristics fit every person in that birth order. In fact, a firstborn may have baby characteristics, a lastborn can sometimes act like a firstborn in certain areas, and middle children may seem to be firstborns. I've seen onlies who you would swear were youngest children. There are reasons for these inconsistencies, which I'll explain as we go along.

Who's Who?

Birth order continues to be revealing when you look at who is in what occupation. For example, statistics show that firstborns often fill positions of high authority or achievement. *Who's Who in America* or *American Men and Women in Science* both contain a high percentage of firstborns. You

will also find them well represented among Rhodes scholars and university professors.

Although we'll get more fully into this in the following chapters, I define a firstborn as:

1. The first child born in a family. (However, a firstborn child may not always play a firstborn role, due to the variables we'll discuss.)
2. The first child of that gender born in the family (the first son or the first daughter, even if there are other children before him or her).
3. A child whose next closest same-sex sibling is five or more years older than him or her.

As for presidents and pastors, you guessed it: a great number of them are firstborns. The way I define a firstborn, 28 out of 44 US presidents (64 percent) have been firstborns or functional (play the role of) firstborns. In fact, 8 of the 11 who ran for president in the 2008 election were firstborn sons or a firstborn daughter in their families.

Firstborns and Only Children

Reliable and conscientious, they tend to be list makers and black-and-white thinkers. They have a keen sense of right and wrong and believe there is a right way to do things. They are natural leaders and achievement oriented.

Only children take those characteristics a step further. Books are their best friends. They act mature beyond their years—they are little adults by age 7 or 8. They work independently. And they can't understand why kids in other families fight.

A number of our presidents were born later in their families. In some cases they were born last, but in all cases they were the firstborn *males* in the family. That tells me they had excellent chances of developing firstborn traits and *functioning* as firstborns, which undoubtedly helped them be effective in their role of president and leader. (For a complete list, see "US Presidents and Their Birth Order," page 329.)

Of course, some US presidents have been middle children, and a few have been lastborns, including

Ronald Reagan, the actor who made good in Washington. The big three of birth order—firstborn, middle child, and baby—was vividly represented during the 1992 presidential campaign when incumbent George Bush, Bill Clinton, and Ross Perot squared off in a televised debate. Clinton, the firstborn, was suave, confident, and loaded with answers, and projected strong leadership abilities. Bush, the middle child, used a mediatory negotiating style, even while in debate. Perot, the lastborn, was an outrageous baby and then some—hard-hitting, outspoken, asking lots of embarrassing questions of his opponents, and often having the audience in stitches.

In the 2008 US presidential election, the final four contenders for the biggest job in the world were an only child (Barack Obama—see page 331 for why he’s considered an only child), a firstborn daughter (Hillary Clinton), and two firstborn sons (Mike Huckabee and John McCain). There truly is something unique about firstborns, the leaders of the pack.

And politicians aren’t the only ones. Once when I was speaking to a group of fifty pastors, I commented in passing, “Pastors, you know, are predominantly firstborns.” When they looked skeptical, I decided to poll the entire group to see if I was right. Forty-three out of the fifty were firstborn sons or only children.

Research bears out that firstborns are more highly motivated to achieve than laterborns. A much greater proportion

Middleborns

They’re the hardest to pin down of all the birth orders, but they’ll be the opposite of the child above them in the family. If the firstborn is very conventional, the second will be unconventional. Middle children walk to the beat of a different drummer. They are competitive, loyal, and big on friendships.

Being the middle child means living in a sort of anonymous haziness. But that’s not all bad. If a middle child is anonymous, he can get away with occasional laziness and indifference. He’s not pushed as hard or expected to accomplish quite as much as the one who came before him. The drawback is that without being pushed, he may never fulfill his potential. The middle child of the family is often the negotiator who tries to keep the peace.

of firstborns wind up in professions such as science, medicine, or law. You also find them in greater numbers among accountants, bookkeepers, executive secretaries, engineers, and computer specialists. And, oh yes, of the first twenty-three American astronauts sent into outer space, twenty-one were firstborns and the other two were only children. All seven astronauts in the original Mercury program were firstborns.¹ Even Christa McAuliffe, the teacher who died in the ill-fated *Challenger* space shuttle crash in 1986, was a firstborn who had four siblings.

In addition, a recent study announced on CNN that “Firstborns’ IQs tend to be higher than those of their younger siblings.”² Why? No one was quite sure, but speculations were that the firstborns benefited from receiving more of their

Lastborns

These social, outgoing creatures have never met a stranger. They are uncomplicated, spontaneous, humorous, and high on people skills. To them, life’s a party. They’re most likely to get away with murder and least likely to be punished. They often retain their pet name.

But there’s also a flip side to being the youngest. Although they’re the little star in the family constellation, it’s no fun being the smallest, because it means they spend a lot of their time wearing hand-me-downs that are ragged, incredibly out of style, or too big. Being the youngest also means that they get picked on from time to time and maybe get called an unflattering nickname.

parents’ undivided attention for a while before siblings came along; the older child is given more responsibility and thus becomes more responsible, which builds brainpower; and the older child carries the parents’ dreams, so he seeks to do more and go farther than his siblings.

The point is, more often than not you’ll find firstborns in professions that take precision, strong powers of concentration, and dogged mental discipline.³ When I served as assistant dean of students at the University of Arizona while also earning a doctorate, I always enjoyed testing the birth order theories I was learning. Once I asked a faculty member of the College of Architecture if he had ever noticed where the college’s faculty members came from as far

as birth order was concerned. He gave me a blank stare and muttered, “Kevin, I really have to run.”

Half a year later he stopped me on campus and said, “Do you remember that crazy question you asked me about the birth order of our architectural faculty? Well, I finally decided to take an informal poll. It turns out almost every one of our faculty is either a firstborn or the only child in the family.” My friend was quite impressed.

I was gratified to know that a basic birth order principle had proven out again. People who like structure and order tend to enter professions that are exacting. Architecture is one of those professions.

Research bears out that firstborns are more highly motivated to achieve than laterborns.

How Birth Order Plays Out in Hollywood

At the other end of the birth order scale, you’ll find a lot of laterborns who are comedians. Babies of the family who are known and loved by millions of movie and TV fans include Eddie Murphy, Martin Short, Ellen DeGeneres, Whoopi Goldberg, Jay Leno, Stephen Colbert, Steve Carell, Jon Stewart, Billy Crystal, Danny DeVito, Drew Carey, Jim Carrey, Steve Martin, and Chevy Chase. Other babies of the family who kept us in stitches include the late comics John Candy and Charlie Chaplin.

It should be noted, however, that not all comics are pure lastborns. While Steve Martin is the baby of his family, he has an older sister, which makes him the firstborn son. Bill Cosby, one of the great comedians of all time, is a firstborn. He holds a doctorate degree and is a perfectionist. He gave all of his children names beginning with “E”—to remind them to always seek excellence.

Other firstborn entertainers and actors include Harrison Ford, Matthew Perry, Jennifer Aniston, Angelina Jolie, Brad

Pitt, Chuck Norris, Sylvester Stallone, Reese Witherspoon, and Ben Affleck.

Only children who are well known for their dramatic, and sometimes comedic, roles include Robert DeNiro, Laurence Fishburne, Anthony Hopkins, James Earl Jones, Tommy Lee Jones, William Shatner, and Robin Williams.

Newscasters and talk-show hosts on television are often firstborns and only children. While on a tour of thirty-one cities, I did a little survey and learned that out of ninety-two talk-show hosts, only five were not firstborns or onlies. Just a few of the more well-known firstborn talk-show personalities are Oprah Winfrey (who was also nominated for an Academy Award in her first movie, *The Color Purple*); Bill O'Reilly; Charles Gibson (the youngest in his family, but trust me, he functions more as a firstborn—more about that later); Geraldo Rivera; and the spokesman for excellence in broadcasting himself, Rush Limbaugh.

The Leman Tribe

In many families the three birth order positions—firstborn, middleborn, and lastborn—are played out in more or less classic style. The family I grew up in is a good example. Let me introduce you to them. My parents, John and May Leman, had three children:

Sally—firstborn

John Jr. (Jack)—middle child (firstborn son), born three years later

Kevin (Cub)—baby of the family, born five years after Jack

Sally, eight years my senior, is a classic firstborn who lives in a small town in western New York. Because we have our own summer place on a lake nearby, we all get to drop in at

her immaculate home from time to time every summer vacation. The first thing we notice when we come through Sally's front door is the clear vinyl runner leading to every room in the house. We get the message: *thou shalt not walk on the blue carpet except when absolutely necessary.*

To say Sally is neat as a pin doesn't quite begin to tell the story. I suspect that from time to time she irons her welcome mat! Perhaps you use those garbage bags that have drawstrings? Sally does too, and she ties bows on hers. I've even caught her straightening up the brochures in a bank lobby while she awaited her turn. (No kidding.)

In short, whatever Sally does, she does it classy and she does it right. All her life she has been confident, creative, artistic, scholarly, and well liked. She was a cheerleader in high school and a National Honor Society type. She became a home economics teacher and a preschool director, and she's even written two books.⁴

No one in the Leman clan can forget the time we all went camping high in the Sierra Nevadas. After a terrific day in the great out-of-doors, we were all ready to hop into our sleeping bags. Because at eight or nine thousand feet it gets rather nippy at night, even in the summer, most of us planned to sleep in our clothes. Not Sally. When she came out of her tent to say good night, she was attired in her usual classy nightie. She couldn't figure out why that was so funny to the rest of us. That's Sally. Why not add a little class to the campsite too?

But being perfect at what you do can have its drawbacks as well. Sally has butterflies at least two days before giving a small dinner party. Bigger dinner parties cause butterflies for a week or ten days. Naturally everything must be color coordinated: the napkins match the napkin holders, which match the decor of the formal dining room, which match . . . well, you get the idea. I'm convinced that if my sister had the opportunity, she'd put newspaper under the cuckoo clock—just in case.

Once when I was the keynote speaker at a conference and Sally was doing a workshop at the same conference, we had breakfast together at 9:05.

“So, Kevin,” she said, “what are you speaking about?”

I sipped my coffee casually. “I haven’t decided yet.”

She gasped. “What do you mean? You must know what you’re speaking about. You’re going to be speaking in 55 minutes!”

“Well, I’ll look at the people and then I’ll decide.”

She winced. “You’re making my stomach turn.”

If you’re a firstborn, you can identify with my big sister right now, because there’s not a firstborn on earth who gets up and wings it.

Firstborns are prepared, organized, and ready to get things done. But if you’re a baby? You’re saying, “Way to go, Dr. Leman. Just roll with the punches.”

So first in our family was Sally, the perfectionist.

Born second in our family was my brother, Jack. Typical of a lot of middle children, his precise personality traits are a bit more difficult to pin down. But secondborn children are known for going in exactly the opposite direction from the firstborn in the family. Typically the middle child is a mediator and a negotiator who avoids conflict. He can be a real paradox—independent but extremely loyal to his peer group. He can be a maverick with many friends. He is usually the one to leave home first; he finds his real companionship outside the family circle because he often feels left out of things at home.

In Jack’s case, he didn’t go in a completely opposite direction from Sally. He also turned out to be extremely conscientious, serious, and scholarly. But since all of these traits are ones belonging to firstborns, what happened to Jack? Well, he was a functional firstborn—the firstborn *male* in the Leman family. (More about this in chapter 8.)

I’m convinced that if my sister had the opportunity, she’d put newspaper under the cuckoo clock.

One classic middle child trait that Jack possessed was to be a trailblazer who was willing to move far away from family roots in upper New York State. Sally followed the classic firstborn trait of staying with tradition and still lives just a few miles from where we all grew up. But if Jack hadn't made the major independent breakthrough of traveling all the way to Tucson to do his graduate work at the University of Arizona, neither my parents nor I would have ended up living there. As it was, my parents followed Jack to Tucson. I came along as well and have lived in Tucson ever since, for more than forty-five years.

Secondborn children are known for going in exactly the opposite direction from the firstborn in the family.

And then there was little Kevin, who came along five years after Jack. My birth order rule of thumb says that when there is a five- to six-year gap between children, the next child starts a “new family,” and you can make an educated guess that he or she will be a firstborn personality type in some ways. When there is a gap of seven to ten years (or more), the next child falls into the “quasi-only child” category because there are so many years between him or her and the sibling above.⁵

Keep in mind, however, that these rules of thumb are subject to how the child is parented plus other influences that occur within the family constellation. In my case, for example, the rule of thumb went out the window for one good reason. My brother took all the heat, because my parents expected a lot more from him than from his baby brother. Jack's given name was John E. Leman Junior. He was to be the medical doctor my father had always wanted to be but couldn't because he was very poor and only finished eighth grade. Dad projected onto Jack

When there is a five- to six-year gap between children, the next child starts a “new family.”

his own dreams of a fine profession and his own fears of not being somebody. With that kind of pressure on him, you can see why Jack took on many firstborn traits. While he didn't end up a surgeon or an anesthesiologist, he did become an extremely conscientious PhD in clinical psychology with his own private practice.

As for me, I was nicknamed "Little Cub," and the handle stuck. But instead of being ignored and left to myself, as many lastborns are, I became the family mascot who was always getting into something.

Babies of the family are very perceptive, and I learned very early that I had two superstars ahead of me.

Babies of the family are very perceptive, and I learned very early that I had two superstars ahead of me. I quickly decided there wasn't a whole lot I could do by way of achievement to gain attention. My only real accomplishment from preschool up through high school was

playing on the baseball team—that is, when I was eligible, usually the first six weeks of the spring semester before grades came out. (That tells you right off the bat a bit about my academic records in school.) Jack, a star quarterback, never bothered with baseball. In western New York, high school football was the major sport, while baseball was for hardy types willing to put up with freezing to death before small crowds in spring weather that often included late snowstorms.

But Little Cub wasn't going to be left out. What I lacked in achievement I made up for in mischievousness. I became a manipulative, charming, engaging, and sometimes devilish little show-off. At age eight, while trying to lead a cheer for my sister's high school team, I found my true calling in life. I learned that entertainers get attention. So entertain I did, especially for my classmates all through grade school and high school. I gained incredible skill at driving teachers a little crazy. I know they heaved a sigh of relief when Kevin Leman graduated at last.

It All Comes Back to That Family Tree

As you look back on your growing-up years, you too can probably come up with a cast of characters similar to the Leman kids: the good students, the athletes, the performers, the attention getters, and the ones who are hard to pigeon-hole. After all my years of researching, studying, and helping families like yours, I am sure of only a few things:

1. *There is no greater influence during your growing-up years than your family.* Yes, I know about all the time you spend in school, Little League, Brownies, and music lessons. But all those things are just a drop in the bucket compared to what goes on at home. During those early years, your parents and siblings (if any) make an indelible psychological imprint, affecting your personality. And that family influence tends to persist through the years and across the miles as you grow up and move away.⁶
2. *The most intimate relationships in life are with your family*—the one you grew up in and the one you make for yourself through marriage. But the family you grew up in has the inside track. If you're married, think about how long you've been married. Now think about how long you've known your siblings. Some of you have known your siblings all your lives. Like it or not, you are tied to your siblings with bonds stronger than even the marriage bonds that tie you to your mate. And you have known your parent(s) all your life as well.

Living in a family, then, is a unique and distinctive experience. The intimate relationships that develop in the family can be found nowhere else on earth.⁷ And these relationships are created in great part by your order of birth.

3. *The relationship between you and your parents is fluid, dynamic, and all-important.* Every time a child is born, the entire family environment changes. How parents in-

teract with each child as he or she enters the family circle determines in great part that child's final destiny.

I mentioned earlier that my father, a very hardworking man, never had the opportunity to go beyond eighth grade. That lack of schooling was something he always regretted. He wanted very much for at least one of his sons to be a medical doctor. I don't think he was partial to doctors because of any visions of saving the world from disease and death. He just knew that

Every time a child is born, the entire family environment changes. How parents interact with each child as he or she enters the family circle determines in great part that child's final destiny.

doctors were well educated and well paid, and he wanted his children to have a better, easier life than he had. So the importance of education became a major value that my father communicated to all of his children—even to bear cub Kevin, who didn't show as much promise (or interest) as the older children.

Did my dad's values and speeches about education sink in? Well, the results tell their own story. Sister Sally got As all her life, right up through a master's program. Brother Jack is a clinical psycholo-

gist, and somehow bear cub Kevin wound up a psychologist too. Sally and Jack were no great surprise. They had it right from the start. But how did Kevin, the clown prince, get a doctor's degree? One answer is, "With a great deal of difficulty!" For now, let's leave it in the minor-miracle category. My high school teachers might even label it a *major* miracle. In fact, I know they would.

Use Birth Order to Your Advantage

As you read this book and learn more about why you are the way you are, you'll find practical ways to use your particular

birth order to your advantage in personal relationships and even in the business world.

How does your branch fit on your family's tree? All of us sprout in our own unique direction and make our own unique contributions. But as you begin to understand birth order and how it influences you, you can improve your relationships in every arena of life. You'll even get some clues about the kind of jobs you enjoy (and the ones you don't), and why. You'll also discover how to get along better with bosses and co-workers—whether in business or community service.

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When you think about it, isn't everything in life about relationships? If you walked onto a car lot and no salesman greeted you with a smile, how would you buy a car, and how would he make a sale? Business is all about relationships.

And what about relationships with friends or acquaintances? Isn't it interesting that, in making friends, birds of a feather do flock together? You identify with friends of the same birth order. If you don't believe me, just do a poll of your friends and see what their birth orders are. For example, every summer we spend time in western New York State, where I grew up. My wife, my sister, and the wife of my lifelong friend Moonhead—all firstborns—love to go together to yard sales, antique shops, and arts and crafts shows. They enjoy passionately pursuing the same kinds of treasures. (I call them "expensive junk"—out of their hearing, of course.)

Is it true that people who are very much alike get along best in marriage? No, most often marriage partners who are too alike don't get along well because they're always treading on each other's territory. (It's why you don't often see two tax accountants married to each other.) Couples who are different from each other and work to understand and appreciate

those differences are the ones who get along best. Good ol' variety is the spice of life.

As the people I've counseled better understand birth order, they've been able to turn their lives around. For example, Jan finally understood why her husband, John, was always so picky. And John gained insight into Jan's "little girl" ways that were driving him more bonkers by the day. Birth order also helps Mom and Dad get a handle on why 10-year-old Fletcher can go through life oblivious to his open fly and C+ average while his 13-year-old sister has straight As—and a good start on an ulcer.

*Good ol' variety is
the spice of life.*

Guessing Who's Firstborn

Wherever I go, I make it a fun hobby to guess the birth order of waitresses, cab drivers, or the people who attend the marriage and parenting seminars I conduct around the country.

For example, during a seminar I take a quick look around and spot ten people I believe are firstborn or only children. For this first spot-check, I go just by physical appearance. The folks I pick look like they've stepped off the cover of *Glamour* magazine or out of an ad for Brooks Brothers suits. They're easy to spot because every hair is in place and they are color coordinated from head to toe. Right there in front of everyone I go out on a limb and guess that each person I select is a firstborn or only child. I usually hit nine out of ten—and often ten out of ten.

This "prediction" starts a nervous rustling in the crowd, who begins to think I'm doing some sort of parlor trick (or that I'm a fugitive from a psychic hotline). Then I begin to explain.

The typical firstborn is usually easy to recognize. They're almost always neatly dressed and well groomed. The last-borns? They're the ones still hanging around talking by the

punch bowl at the back of the room, and they haven't even realized I've started to speak yet. The middle children are the hardest of all to identify, because they've learned to negotiate that middle ground so successfully that the lines of who they are can become blurred, depending on which other birth orders they're spending time with.

When I finish explaining, I can see the “aha” on the seminar attendees' faces, because they've recognized themselves—and the truth about birth order—in my statements.

Sometimes I also do a birth order demonstration at my seminars. While in Phoenix recently, I picked a man out of the audience. In eight minutes I easily identified his birth order as well as that of his wife by asking only a few questions. When I asked him to describe himself, he said he was a loner and a reader and he appreciated order in his life. (Are you getting any clues yet?) Then I asked him to describe his mother. When he said she was *very* loving, *very* concerned about him, *very* intuitive, and a *very* good mom, I knew I had a firstborn on my hands.

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My next question was whether or not he had married his opposite birth order (which supposedly guarantees more happiness) or whether he had possibly “married his mother.” Oh yes, I had his mother pegged as a perfectionist, because she had been *very* loving and concerned about him. It was my guess that his wife was also very loving but had a critical eye a mile wide and was as powerful as they come. So I went out on a limb a bit and speculated that his wife was quite protective and a perfectionist, that there was a right way to approach her, and that she probably liked to handle things herself. “My guess is, when you're driving, she's quick to criticize you,” I said.

“Worse than that,” he said. “She doesn’t let me drive.”

“Oh, *you’re* the guy!” I said. “I saw you go by the other day. You were in the back, buckled into your car seat.”

Just then his wife, who was sitting back in the audience, clapped her hand over her mouth and said very loudly, “Oh my gosh, I’m just like my mother!” No doubt she is. With birth order in families, what goes around comes around. Can you see it in your family too?

I Batted .500 on *The Today Show*

What about spotting babies of the family? They are often easy to identify. For example, while being interviewed by Katie Couric, former cohost of *The Today Show*, I told her that she was a baby in her family, probably with two older brothers and two older sisters.

It turned out I was one brother off, but Katie’s mouth still dropped open and she sort of stuttered, “Well, yes. But how did you know?”

I quickly explained that while she was beautifully dressed and perfectly groomed, her perky, affectionate nature gave her away. As she worked with Bryant Gumbel, she often touched him or grabbed his arm—her very engaging nature came across loud and clear. Off camera Katie let me know she didn’t like being called “perky” very much, but she had to admit I was right. The whole birth order concept still struck her as rather mysterious. I could tell that the staff who had been filming the interview enjoyed it too—they were chuckling.

When Roles Are Reversed

Sometimes extenuating circumstances tweak the natural birth order sequence. The result is that a laterborn child may act like a firstborn, or a firstborn can seem to have characteristics

that are inconsistent with the way firstborns are “supposed” to act.

Everyone was certain that Alan—a capable, bright firstborn—would fly high in the broadcasting world. Just three years below him was a younger brother, Luke. Interestingly, both ended up in broadcasting, but Luke was the one who stole the limelight.

Now why was that? You see, sometimes a lastborn inherits the firstborn role by default due to . . .

But wait, I’m getting ahead of myself. All that is coming up next.

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