

Nonnie – My Brother, My Friend, My Coach

My brother was known by many names: John; Johnny; Simpie; Mr. Simpson; Daddy; and Grandpa John. To me however, my dear, big brother was always Nonnie, and to him, I was always Nudie.

My Brother -- Nonnie entered this world four whole years before I did, so of course, I immediately appreciated the fact he was knowledgeable and wise in all things. From the very beginning, we were close, and one day when I was about five, he explained why. He said, *Nudie we are close and will always be close because you were made from one of my ribs!* Well, that certainly got my attention! Continuing, he explained what happened. *One day, when I was about three, I was playing in the sandbox. Suddenly, I felt a rib just leave my body. First I was kind of surprised, but then I realized that I was going to get a little sister. Sure enough, you were born a few months later!* As he told me this whopper, he put both hands on his chest. Then he put them together, raised them high in the air, and then released them as if he were freeing a bird.

My Friend -- Nonnie ushered me through the complexities of childhood relationships such as teaching me how to pretend to "like" crawdads. In our home town, San Angelo, Texas, little boys liked to catch crawdads (often called crawfish in other localities) with bacon tied to a string. They would bring their prizes home in buckets. The next day, they would return the crawdads to the pond and try to catch new ones. While catching the wiggly, ugly crustaceans was great entertainment for the neighborhood boys, including Nonnie, the activity did not bring nearly the excitement and pleasure to them as did chasing the girls while waving their crawdads around. Predictably, the terrified girls would scream and run. Nonnie, ever my friend, looked out for me. He gave me great advice. He said, *The next time the guys start to wave a crawdad around, DON'T act scared. Just look at it and ask questions. The only reason, the boys do it is to scare the girls. If you do not act scared, they will leave you alone.* The next day I tried it, and it worked! From that day on, the boys did not try to scare me. I told my friends, but they never took my advice.

My Coach -- Nonnie urged me to take on tough challenges - such as learning to walk, which he did twice!

-- The first time was quite normal. I was 14 months old. Amazing as it may seem, I remember the incident, clearly. My mother was shopping, and my grandmother, Nonnie, and I were in the kitchen. I was in my walker, by the refrigerator, when Nonnie asked me to come across the floor to him. I did, but I remember wondering why. When my walker and I arrived, Grandmother and Nonnie were excited and clapped their hands. Then Grandmother picked me up and took me back to where I started. This time she stood me up with my back next to the refrigerator.

Nonnie again asked me to come over. I was puzzled but decided I would go even though I was without my walker. That time when I arrived, the two of them clapped and cheered even louder than they had before! Soon, my mother returned so I had to repeat my performance. That time we all cheered. I wish I could remember showing my big trick to my dad and granddad, but alas, I can't. The second time was definitely not normal. When I was two and a half, Polio came to San Angelo. Our town had the highest number of cases per capita in the nation (124 which was 30 times greater than the national average). Nonnie caught it at school, but fortunately, had a light case with a quick recovery. I caught it from Nonnie, and unfortunately, had a severe case with a slow recovery. Six-year-old Nonnie did his best to make me get better. The hospital would not let him come inside the hospital to visit, but he still found a way. I could watch him through my window running around outside; clowning to make me laugh.

The doctors told my parents that I would not survive, but I did. I know that family love, Nonnie's antics, and excellent medical care pulled me through. So I survived, but I couldn't walk. The doctors said I never would, but **Coach** Nonnie disagreed. He kept telling me that he knew I could. I do not remember how we did it, but we worked in secret. Finally, the big day arrived. On Thanksgiving, a year and a half after the virus had attacked me, we were ready to spring our surprise. After our big Thanksgiving feast, Nonnie asked our dad to take me and my wheel chair out to the front yard so I could watch him play. After a while, Nonnie went back inside to get our parents and visiting grandparents. He instructed Granddaddy to bring his camera.

Once everyone was ready, I stood up, and Nonnie and I shouted, **Taa - Daa!** Then I took a few steps! Once again Nonnie had proved himself to be a Brother, a Friend, and a Coach.

— Susan (Susie) M. Floyd

