

A New Baby
By Kathryn Cubalo

I suppose that my brother Sonny and I had been told that a new baby was on the way, but we either didn't remember or the news didn't impress us very much. My mother told me many years later that she had told us early on about her pregnancy, but her parents were quite shocked that she would talk about it to children, so she took their advice and didn't say any more.¹

I was four, going on five, and Sonny was six and we were sleeping in our little bedroom that night of September 26, 1937. We were living in the John Beck house, which had four small rooms but was quite cozy – an improvement from the drafty county-line house. Sonny and I slept in the smallest bedroom; he on a cot and I in the metal crib with the side down.

We woke up to some meowing sounds. A few nights before there had been some cats fighting outside which had disturbed our household. Our mother and Aunt Helen had shooed them away and laughed about it the next day. I started talking to Sonny. "Do you think it is maybe those cats again?" I asked him. "I don't know," he said, "maybe." We talked some more. In any case, the adults in the house heard us and came in and got us out of bed. Someone was carrying me. It might have been Dr. Miller. Someone else brought over this bundle for me to see. Just at that moment, the baby let out a howl and I felt myself start with surprise. So I saw my new sister, Helen (Honey)², soon after she was born. It was not a cat!

Later my mother told me that the doctor and nurse, Francis Miller and Pearl Henderson, had heard us talking and wanted us to see our reaction to this new arrival. I think my grandmother was there and my Aunt Helen. Our father was sailing on a lake freighter and didn't see his new daughter for two weeks.

I don't remember very much about Honey's baby days, but as soon as she started creeping, she began to get into my dolls and toys. To my mind she was quite a nuisance so I don't think I liked her very much. Maybe I was jealous of the attention she got. My thoughts at the time were confused. I didn't understand why people at church and in the community made such a fuss over her and wanted to carry her around. I didn't see her "cuteness." She didn't even have curly hair.

Sometime the next summer before I started school, my mother decided I could go to visit my cousin Nellie Mae in Dearborn. My Uncle Art (Unk) was driving there to pick up a furnace and this was the opportunity for me to go along. I suppose the arrangements had been made in advance with my Aunt Katy. I think the plan was for a stay of a few days, but there was a delay because of the furnace and I was there for about two weeks. Maybe my mother got some rest as the baby and I didn't seem to be getting on very well.

Nellie was two years younger, so sometimes we played together and sometimes things didn't go so well. One time she hit me and I told Aunt Katy. Nellie got a spanking and then I felt very guilty for telling. Sometimes I played by myself and I taught myself to roller-skate with Nellie's skates. We had no sidewalks at home, so it was a great opportunity.

When I arrived home, everyone was glad to see me and Honey was standing up in her long white nightie, just learning to walk. I was surprised by my feelings at that moment. She was smiling at me and I felt a strange surge of affection. Maybe it wasn't so bad to have a baby sister.

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¹ ED: She told me, the baby in question, that Grandma had not approved of her having a third baby that was planned. Grandma felt that two children, a girl and boy, were enough. When Mother pointed out that Grandma had six children, she said that they hadn't known "what to do."

² Helen's name was chosen by our father, who wanted her called Helen Isabel for Mother's sister and Mother. Aunt Helen didn't think she would like calling a baby her name, so nicknamed the baby "Honey Bunch" for the *Honey Bunch* series of children's books on the day she was born. To her relief, the "Bunch" was soon dropped.