



## Second in Command

Today is a 'Birthday Sunday' here at Story A Week headquarters. As long-time readers know, whenever one of my family members has a birthday falling on a Sunday, they get to sit in the spotlight. And it's a 'first timer' this week - grandson Andrei is four today.

His older brother Alex has made any number of appearances in these stories, particularly in the time just following his birth, but I think this may be the first time that I have mentioned Andrei. I think that is the cross that many 'second' children have to bear - they don't get the kind of dedicated attention that a first child invariably receives. I am sure that if you looked through my family photo albums, there would be many more snaps of my first daughter than of her younger sister.

Daughter Himi now has two boys (roughly two years apart), and this is the opposite of my own experience, having two daughters (although they are also two years apart, within a couple of weeks). I am sometimes asked whether or not I have any regrets at not having had a son. Living as we do in an age where leaving a 'dynasty' (or family property) is of no consequence, I can answer honestly that I have always been perfectly content with both of my children being girls.

And when I hear the stories - both from my mother about her time with two little boys, and from Himi about her two 'wild ones' - it begins to seem as though I certainly had the more stress-free time. My two certainly had their arguments, but these for the most part ended either in sulks, or hugs. But when I watched Andrei and Alex 'playing' together during my last visit over there some months ago, I was astonished at the level of violence between them.

And I use that word 'violence' with no hesitation; they pushed, smacked and pummeled each other relentlessly, not infrequently causing plenty of collateral damage around the house as they did so. And the result? Half the time it was giggles and retaliation, the other half of the time, tears and retaliation.

I suppose that what I was watching was simply the normal course of events for two young primates growing up together. I suppose this 'play' is to some extent a kind of rehearsal for later life outside the home. You have to learn when to push back, when to punch back, and when to shrug it off and ignore it. They'll use these lessons when they are dealing with the other boys in the kindergarten, school, and playground environments.

The stories my mother tells about my own childhood days very much leave the impression that my brother was quite the rough-tough challenger, and that I was the opposite - quiet and completely non-aggressive.

This early display of general passivity on my part I suppose goes quite some way towards explaining (at least partially) why I have found work that involves sitting in a room all by myself every day!

So should I look forward to the day far in the future when grandson Andrei comes here to work as an apprentice? Well, going by what I see of his character so far, it's pretty clear that this kind of work is not something that he will be showing much interest in! In fact, given the kind of social interaction he is practicing so vigorously at present, I suspect the only way he might ever have an interest in my business is as a corporate raider - buy it, strip off the assets, and toss the rest aside!

(All in fun Andrei, OK? And I'm sure that by the time your birthday *next* falls on a Sunday - in 2017 - you and I will have spent enough time together to have got to know each other just a little bit better than we do at this stage!)

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