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Recommended Citation

Nelsen, Anna (2019) "Blanket Forts and Bike Trips," *The Mall*: Vol. 3 , Article 24.
Available at: <https://digitalcommons.butler.edu/the-mall/vol3/iss1/24>

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Blanket Forts and Bike Trips

Anna Nelsen

I anxiously sat in the car in a large, half-filled parking lot next to the football stadium awaiting her arrival. She was twenty minutes late—what was taking so long? I grew nervous as girls ran past the car, silently hoping that she wouldn't see me, and trying to avoid making eye contact with anyone. The sun was on the brink of beginning to set and I was growing ever-more anxious as girls slowly started to walk out to their cars. I finally spotted her from my parked car about two hundred meters away. She walked around for a few seconds, searching for the car and appearing slightly confused—the car was not in its' usual spot. We finally made eye contact and her face lit up when she saw me. I heard her yell “Anna!!!” excitedly. “Kayla!!!!” I screamed her name excitedly as I swiftly hopped out of the car and sprinted to her. We met in a warm embrace and laughed in disbelief as she questioned what I was doing there. I explained that I had had a dentist appointment earlier that day that she had forgotten about and that our mom and I had planned to surprise her. My heart overflowed with joy as she told me that this was the highlight of her week. As we got in the car and pulled out of the parking lot, a small knot formed in my throat as she softly proclaimed that this surprise made her heart happy and that it made her want to cry.

Sisters are much more than sisters. Sisters are surprises and warm hugs. Sisters are blanket forts and nature clubs. Sisters are cringey dance videos and iconic movie makers. Sisters are stuffed animal camps and art clubs. Sisters are Hogwarts students and H2O binge-watchers. Sisters are crack-of-dawn royal wedding watch parties and late-night conversations. Sisters are secret-keepers and storytellers. Sisters are running buddies and spontaneous bike, hammock, and picnic trip-takers. Sisters are haunted house creators, game makers, and “store owners.” Sisters are never-ending inside jokes like “I guess it's better than a dishwasher.” Sisters are laughing doubled over on the floor and late-night impromptu dance parties. Sisters are carpool karaoke singers and intense ERS players. Sisters are clothes-stealers. Sisters are always right. Sisters are fights. But more importantly, sisters are the anchors that keep you tethered down in this crazy game of life. Sisters are the comfort in the pain, the love in our veins. Sisters are support systems and best friends. Sisters are always there for you and pick you up when you fall down...after they finish laughing. Sisters are the glue that holds your life together. Sisters are sisters, and no one can take their place.

Venus and Serena Williams. Jenna and Barbara Bush. Mary-Kate, Ashley, and Elizabeth Olsen. Jessica and Ashlee Simpson. Anna and Kayla Nelsen. The commonality between all these names?—they’re all iconic sister duos (and trios). You don’t recognize the last two names? Well, that’s because they’re my sister and I. I mean, I think we’re pretty iconic. We go together like peanut butter and jelly or mac and cheese. Sisters are a gift from God, and I can’t imagine life without one. From our nature clubs and blanket forts to our long conversations and hammock trips, Kayla is my other half, the peanut butter to my jelly; I would feel lost without her. The beautiful thing about sisters is that you may grow older, but you’ll never grow apart. Now that I’m in college, the importance of our relationship as sisters is finally coming to full fruition. I’ve always felt a special bond with my sister. Between living my last year at home and transitioning into college this fall, the necessity of that bond has been made even clearer and has strengthened our relationship greatly.

The soft fuzz of the cream-colored blanket overtook me as I carried a handful of blankets down the hallway. Kayla brought her share of blankets and we began constructing our masterpiece—the infamous blanket fort. As we draped the first blanket over the couch and railing of our staircase, we realized the precarious piece of architecture we were about to attempt to execute. “Ok if I hold this one here and tie it down, then you put the other one overlapping on top and we’ll just have to hope they don’t fall,” Kayla declared. I pulled the blanket as tight as I could and tied it to a spindle on the railing. Kayla did the same and we stepped back to inspect our creation. “Hmm...” we said in unison. “I think it’s missing something...” Kayla chimed in. “Yeah I think so too, I just can’t put my finger on what it is.” “A door!” we shouted out with joy as we had just cracked the case of the century.

Together we placed the final blanket over top the other two and draped it over the gaping hole in the front. Now it was perfect! Inside, we placed large couch cushions and pillows, complete with a DVD player—there’s no doubt that we weren’t living in style in our new creation. We lifted the door and crawled inside, the space just sizable for the two of us. We peered down through the openings between the spindles of the railing and saw our mom walking around the living room—this was the perfect spot to “spy on our parents!” She looked in our direction and smiled as she heard our giggling echoing through the front entryway. “What are you girls up to up there?” she questioned. We spent hours up in that fort watching movies, reading books, and doing whatever else we pleased, sharing plenty of laughs along the way. This was now the swankiest place in town and was exclusive to Kayla and I. Little did we know that this is where we’d make some of our most vivid memories. At night, we’d add makeshift lighting to it so we could continue our shenanigans long into the night. Eventually, that fort had to come down, but we would rebuild it often, and always found ways to continue our adventures together.

There was always something magical about those blanket forts. During all those late nights in the fort, time stood still. We were young and carefree and didn't have a single worry in the world. It was amazing how long a few blankets piled on top of each other could capture our attention. In our exclusive blanket forts, Kayla and I shared some of our most memorable moments, whether it was laughing uncontrollably at the littlest thing or spying on our parents from the confines of its' walls.

I hopped on my bike quickly as Kayla was getting impatient and had already left. She was probably about two hundred meters in front of me the whole time. I grew ever-more annoyed at her as she refused to wait the thirty seconds that it would've taken her to wait for me. When she arrived at the park, she questioned where I had been. My anger grew as she seemed annoyed at me for being slow, but she was the one who hadn't waited for me. I said something that I can't remember and then decided to just ride home instead of joining her for our planned picnic. I recall texting her because I was so frustrated with her, but she wasn't responding, which made me even more mad. I told her several things that I regret—none of them were true, but I was just too angry to be rational during this conversation. I remember her text popping up on my screen as she was apologizing for “not being a good sister,” semi-passive-aggressively, which I understood because what I had said was out of line. My heart sunk when I saw her response and I realized how wrong that I was, instantly causing me to regret everything that I had just texted her. I apologized a million times, but she didn't seem to accept it. When she got back from her solo picnic, I was laying in my hammock out in the backyard. I remember laying there with a lump in throat staring up at the tree above my head thinking about how mean I had just been. I was disappointed in myself for being that harsh and it deeply saddened me thinking about it. After arriving home, she finally came out to the backyard and we talked it out. I told her how sorry that I was, and she said that she knew I didn't mean any of that and that it was okay for me to feel that way. A few tears escaped the corners of my eyes when all of her love poured out and comforted me greatly.

It was in that moment that it became clearer to me how lucky I was to have a sister like her. I still think about that day and am disappointed in myself for ever saying what I said to her that day. However, no matter what I do wrong or how badly I mess up, she still loves me just the same.

Unconditional love is the only way to describe the relationship between two sisters. While we may fight sometimes, we love each other deeply and have learned to forgive ungrudgingly. The importance and strength of our relationship has been reaffirmed since my transition to college. I have realized how much she looks up to me as an older sister and how much she values my advice and how much she loves having me around. Since moving to college, our relationship has only strengthened, and it has

been an influential step in our relationship.

The week before I went to college, Kayla went back to school (she's a junior in high school). A few days before leaving, my mom and I were doing some last minute shopping at Target since I had put it off as long as I could because the thought of going to college scared me to death. As we drove home, my mom told me that Kayla had been crying a few days after she got home from school. She was feeling really lonely and missed having me at school with her. It broke my heart to hear how sad she was preparing for me to leave. A knot formed in my throat and I fought back tears as I thought about the transition myself and reflected on all of our wonderful memories together. I realized that this was the last time that I would be living at home long-term and that this chapter of my life was coming to a close. While the transition for me was easier than I had expected, it was a really hard transition for Kayla and my parents. It took them awhile to get used to my empty bedroom, the silence at the dinner table as my spot at the table was left barren, and the absence of my random stories and countless jokes.

While the days of blanket forts and bike trips may be over, the days of surprise visits and unconditional love never will be. Closing the door on one part of my life has allowed me to open a new door and begin a stronger relationship with Kayla rooted in our crazy childhood memories and rollercoaster of conflicts and emotions. Just like stars, I know that even though I won't always see her, I know that she's always there. There for me after a hard test. There for me when I'm up to my shoulders drowning in homework. There for me when I'm homesick or having a bad day. There for me in my proudest moments and my weakest ones. And for that I'm forever grateful. So what I'll say to you now, Kayla, is:

Dear Kayla,

I know I don't always say it, but you're my best friend and I love you so much; I can't imagine life without you! Thank you for being the best sister I could ever ask for and thank you for blessing my life with all of your funny stories and weird dances. But most of all, thank you for your endless support and unconditional love. Thank you for being you and your crazy unique self! It is because of you and our blanket forts and bike trips that I am able to now reflect on our relationship and begin to strengthen it even more as we head into the next chapter of our lives, our college years and beyond. I can't wait for many more adventures with you!

Love,
Anna