

attention!!

When my mother announced she was expecting the baby that would eventually be me, I'm told that family members and friends greeted the surprise with congratulatory smiles and raised eyebrows.

I am my parents' sixth child. That, in itself, is not cause for raised eyebrows. Rohsners, like rabbits, are a prolific bunch. The surprising part of it was that my parents hadn't had a kid in 10 years. And Mom was 43.

By bringing me into the world when they were, at best, approaching middle age, my parents set up an unusual situation. My oldest sister was taking her finals during her junior year in college when I was born. I don't remember the birth of my first nephew because I was still a baby myself.

I've heard that my parents' baby shower, like their timing, was not typical. My mother was tired of the polite tea-and-cake showers. My father, not my mother, was the guest of honor, and he gave a speech on the virtues of family planning. All my parents' friends came. It was an all-out party.

Throughout my life, I've been called "caboose," "bonus child," "the little surprise," and a variety of other terms of endearment that refer to my position in the family scheme (or lack of scheme, as it may be).

As a result of the three-generation gap between myself and my parents, now in their late '60s, I grew up in a slightly different environment from that of most of my 21-year-old peers.

My parents, who had been through the ballet lesson/softball practice rigamarole enough times couldn't — and wouldn't — change their lifestyles the way they had upon the arrival of my five brothers and sisters. As a consequence, I was toted through old-homes tours and antique stores and other various forms of retirement-age entertainment. My lifestyle adapted to theirs, not vice versa.

I'm not the worse for wear, though. I've never learned to appreciate Barbie dolls, but I can spot an authentic turn-of-the-century oak rocker from 200 yards. And I have a special fondness of "elevator music" that my peers can't understand. It must stem from the Saturday nights I spent watching "The Lawrence Welk Show" with Mom and Dad.

And there are other advantages, too. My parents have lived through a lot of history, and the knowledge they've accrued over the years has al-

lowed them to loosen the reins when it comes to child-rearing. They knew American society wouldn't collapse if they allowed me to stay out late.

As veteran parents, they've discovered that children, on the whole, are trustworthy and more responsible than they're given credit for. They've practiced their philosophy on me. While my brothers and sisters had to wait until they reached some predetermined age to go on dates and to drive, I got those privileges as soon as I asked for them.

I think I have a different perspective on recent history than most people my age, too. My father still tells war stories about his days as a pilot in The Big One. Both my parents grew up during the Great Depression. They can (and frequently do) point out factual errors in my history books, which has gotten me into some fascinating discussions with my young whippersnapper history profs.

Although it seems the difference in our ages would drive a wedge between us, oddly enough, it hasn't. In fact, it's caused some fun moments for both of us.

When I'm shopping with my mother, for example, sales clerks frequently remark that they don't see too many grandmother-granddaughter pairs and isn't it nice that we are so close and my, I'm lucky to have such a youthful-looking grandmother. Most of the time, my mom and I exchange sly smiles and reply in unison, "Yes!"

After we walk away, we giggle about the whole event. We've found that to be easier than explaining, "No, this is not my grandmother, this is my mother, and yes, I am a 'late-in-life' baby."

In one way, I think I've been partially responsible for giving my parents a youthful perspective on life. When other people my parents' age were slowing down and starting to feel less productive, my parents were attending PTA meetings and band performances.

Of course, there are some negative aspects to having older parents. I was surrounded by adults from the time I was born, so the transition to the world of kindergarten was a tough one. I never knew so many other kids existed.

And recently, my parents' mortality has hit home. I realize they may not be around for the birth of their last grandchildren. The annoying little problems of advancing years have started to creep up on them.

But the advantages for all



This week's attention!! photo was taken by Jay Stevens, a junior journalism major.

parties involved greatly outweigh the disadvantages. We recently discovered that the 40-odd years between us don't really matter.

My mom gave me a poster of my biggest celebrity heartthrob. It just so happens that the man who now adorns my dorm room wall is the same one she swooned over when she was my age.

I guess real classics like Clark Gable and family ties can span even four decades.

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Editor's Note: This attention!! page will be used each week as a forum for you, our readers. We encourage you to submit any original work that would be suitable for publication in At Ease.

Pictures should be black-and-white shots that are unique either in content, angle or technique. Columns, essays or poems should be no longer than 500 words, and should relate to an unusual experience, a new perspective on a common experience, or just about anything else you want to share with our readers. Please don't send us your gripes, complaints, or sermons on heavy-duty issues — send those to the Battalion's Opinion Page.

Don't forget to put your name and phone number on anything you send us. Then just drop it off at the Battalion, Room 216 of the Reed McDonald Building. Be sure to specify that it is for At Ease.