Sisters

"Dear Kathy! Chance made us sisters, hearts made us friends." This quote is at the center of a collage of photographs — covering our twenty-something years — that now hangs in my office. My sister, Susie, made it for me as a wedding present. It probably cost very little to make (she is a starving college student, after all), but it means more to me than any of the more "traditional" wedding presents my husband and I received from family and friends last June. Whenever I look at the collage, it reminds me of my sister and what a true friend she is.

Susie and I weren't always close friends. Far from it, in fact. We shared a room for nearly fifteen years when we were younger, and at the time I thought I couldn't have asked for a worse roommate. She was always around! If we argued and I wanted to go to my room to be alone, she'd follow me right in. If I told her to go away, she'd say right back, 'It's my room, too! And I can be here if I want to.' I'd consult my mother and she usually agreed with Susie. I suppose being three years younger has its benefits.

When we were kids, she'd 'borrow' my dolls without asking. (And no toy was safe in her hands.) When we got older, Susie quit borrowing my toys and started borrowing my clothes. That was the final straw. I couldn't take it anymore. I begged my parents to let me have a room of my own — preferably one with a lock on the door. The answer was always a resounding "no." "Please?!" I'd beg. My parents would just shake their heads. They didn't agree with each other on much, but for some reason they had a united front on this issue.

To crown it all, she had this habit of doing everything I did. Choirs, rock bands, sports teams, dance studios: There was no place where I was safe. "She looks up to you," my mom would say. I didn't care. I just wanted a piece of my life that didn't involve my little sister. When I complained to my mother, she'd just smile and say, "One day you'll want her around." Sure.

It's strange how mothers have this habit of being right about everything. When I was sixteen and my sister was thirteen, we went through a series of life-changing events together that would forever change our relationship. First, my parents announced that they were divorcing. My dad packed up and moved to an apartment in New Hampshire — more than a half hour drive away from our cozy house in Massachusetts. He bought me my first car and I often went with Susie to his place when we missed him a lot. During those trips we started discussing our troubles and making plans about how to reunite the family again. But a year later, our father met his future second wife and moved again; this time to Indiana. This meant we could only see him once or twice a year, as opposed to once every few weeks. That was hard.

Yet those few months changed my relationship with my sister forever. We started having more heart-to-heart talks as opposed to silly fights. Over time, she became my most cherished friend. It's not uncommon for us to have three-hour-long telephone conversations about everything or about nothing — just laughing over memories from childhood or high school.

She's the only person who's been through all of the tough stuff that I've been through, and the only person who truly understands me. Susie and I have shared so much. She's been my roommate, my friend, and my partner in crime. We've done plays together, gone to amusement parks, sang, and taken long road trips together. We've laughed until our sides hurt, and wiped away each others' tears.

Even though distance separates us now, we're closer than ever. Sisters share a special bond. They've seen all of your most embarrassing moments. They know your deepest, darkest secrets. Most importantly, they love you unconditionally. I'm lucky to be able to say that my little sister is my best friend. I only wish everyone could be so fortunate.

When did the relationship between Susie and Kathy start to change?

1. When they moved to a new house.
2. After their father married the second time.
3. After their parents divorced.
4. When Kathy's father bought her a car.