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Joyride III

By Keith Forrest



When most couples talk about an accidental child, they use some sort of euphemism. "He was a surprise," one parent told me about his son. My wife Kris and I have a surprise child too.

But ours is a little different. Elijah didn't materialize because our birth control malfunctioned. We were trying to have another kid. We just had a different gender in mind. We already had two boys at the time and we were trying for a girl before we shut down the baby-making enterprise for good.

What we didn't know was the two-for-one special going on that month. We could have a daughter, but it was part of a package deal. We had been waiting for a girl all along, and with Madeline we finally had one. Elijah was her twin.

We already had two sons. We knew what that was, or so we thought. And then came Elijah, the accidental child, and he was different. He came into this world needing to have a magnetic personality. From the moment he was born, Elijah had to carve out a space for himself between his two older brothers and that vaunted sister.



But he was ready for his fortuitous entrée from the beginning. Elijah has an earthy quality to him that is different from the others. He's crunchy. He's granola. His wispy blond locks are the perfect accompaniment for a pair of overalls. And he has always understood empathy. He seemed to get humanity right away. He always seemed to be asking others, "How are you doing?"

Elijah laughed earlier than all our other kids. Before he could sit up, he got funny. He seemed to relish everything about humor. It just fit his personality. There is a mirth that seems to bubble just below the surface. He is more than good-natured. There is something fundamentally jovial about him.

He navigates the space among his three siblings with delight. Elijah almost seems grateful for his status as the surprise child. It's built into his identity. He's thankful — just for being here.

With three other kids in our home, that is a surprise.

(Keith Forrest is an assistant professor of communication at Atlantic Cape Community College. His late mother Libby Demp Forrest Moore wrote the Joyride column for this newspaper for 20 years.)