

# Big Changes Come in Little Packages

Story and photo by Nora B. May

**H**aving your first child is — to put it mildly — a learning experience. Our friends with children all had the exact same thing to say to us, and they all said it looking very seriously straight into our faces, "It'll change your life."

Well, if you've had children, you know it certainly did. What is extremely important when you're having your second child is to remember just that: things are not the same as when you had your first — and you are not the same either.

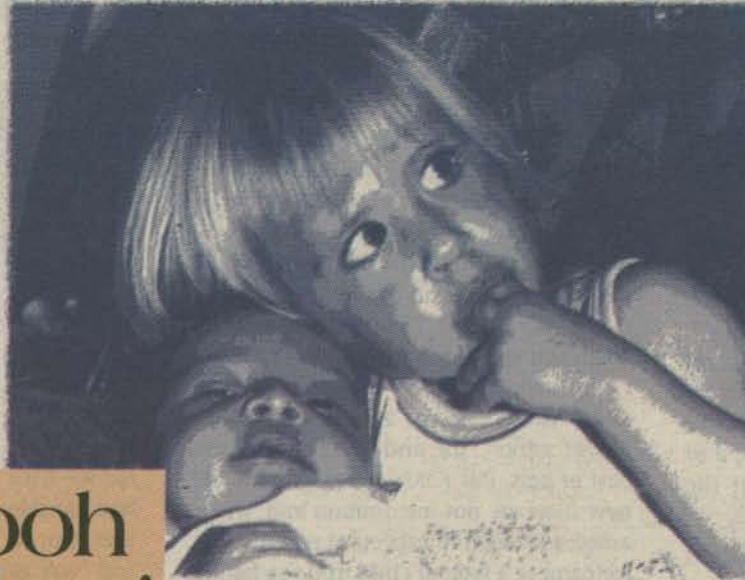
Irene Shere, the director of the Early Childhood Consultation Center in Silver Spring, Maryland, says simply, "Each child is born into a different family." Not only has your relationship to each other changed, so have your finances and other key factors affecting family life. You often have different houses and different jobs by the time your second or third child arrives.

As parents you've changed as well. You now have experience at this parenting business. "Parents are more flexible with the second child. They have such high

expectations for the first child. Their expectations for the second child are more realistic and they're not feeling as anxious," Shere advises.

In her workshops on sibling relationships, Shere also stresses the importance of birth order. It is important to remember that your first child (your *only* child until now) has enjoyed a special place in the family and your undivided attention, and he or she will be significantly impacted by this new "intruder." She also cautions that your own position or birth order — and the associated pain and pleasure you experienced growing up in your family with brothers or sisters — will affect how you react to each of your own children.

Ongoing squabbles, hidden emotions, manipulative behaviors, and acting up are



Ooooh  
Baby!

all part of sibling relationships. Knowing the traits associated with birth order will give you some insights into what may be causing them and help you avoid some common mistakes. Seymour Reit's book, *Sibling Rivalry*, provides an excellent summary.

What can you do to help your children get along better with each other? Polly Greenberg, author of *What Do I Do When My Children Don't Get Along?*, has a set of guidelines that include the following:

*Set a positive example yourself.* Give compliments versus criticism and encourage your children to help each other.

*Make sure that you specifically state the rules of behavior in your home*, especially those concerning siblings' treatment of each other. Don't assume that children know and understand them.

*Remember that each child is a unique individual* and needs to be treated as such. Sharing is fine, but each child should have the right to *not* share a new or precious toy.

*Likewise with friends.* Each sibling should be able to play alone with his or her friends. Just make sure that the other siblings have an acceptable alternative activity.

*And just as each child should have time alone with you — every day — he or she also needs time alone without you, and without siblings.* If you've managed to have time alone to yourself to unwind, you'll understand. And if you haven't... well, then you really know how important and special it is. ■