

Problem child



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

Growing up with a younger sister doesn't leave a lot of pleasant memories at all. Maybe a lot of excruciatingly funny ones, amusing ones, horrific ones but nothing pleasant at the least. Well, even if a trip down memory lane won't be a lot of fun for me, but for academic reasons and for the sake of education, here's a few moments of my life living with what I call a 'problem child' — though my father would beg otherwise. When she was around three years old, my sister found a really clever way of getting attention that even I, her older, obviously more intelligent brother would never have thought of. It all started when my sister and I were in the back seat and my parents were in front. They were talking about something I couldn't remember, completely ignoring us in the back. Then out of nowhere, my sister vomited. Blech. Bits of her post-masticated, pre-digested lunch ended up on the seat covers and unfortunately, me. Then my parents' attention shifted from each other to my puke covered sister. Ah, the pity. Now with all the positive reinforcement of attention being showered upon her, a light bulb must've lit up in her head: if I vomit, they would all notice me. Since that incident, she has been vomiting more frequently than a normal toddler should. When I was playing with my toys and she was coloring some pictures in her coloring book, she suddenly vomited and just like magic, our maid's attention was on her. When my parents were having visitors over and they were all in the living room, she suddenly vomited again and just like magic, our parents excused themselves from our visitors and came to her aid. After a while, my mother noticed that she wasn't really sick. It's just that whenever everybody fails to notice her, she would stick a finger or two down her throat to trigger the gag reflex and vomit. She must have gotten through insight that whenever she touches the back of her throat she would vomit — then couple that with a positive

reinforcement in the form of attention, you have an instant way of getting your parents' attention. Ingenious! But I would've preferred if she just whined. Then there came a day when she sat on the garden and ate my mother's flowers (we still have a "Kodak moment" of that incident). I think she thought that santan flowers taste just like the candy flowers found on top of birthday and wedding cakes so she tried eating them. But when I tried to give her a bundle of those tiny red flowers, she refused "Yoko, parang malunggay!" Thanks to a negative reinforcement of bad tasting flowers, she never touched them again saving my mother's garden and herself from the odd taste. But of course, that didn't last very long. When her playmates taught her that when one pulls on a thin string-like thing at the bottom of a santan flower's stem a clear, sweet, nectar-like liquid will come out at the end, she started picking the flowers again. Good Lord, save Mama's garden. When she was five, my mother caught her stealing. She stole two one peso coins from my mother's purse. Busted! Oh well, spanking is our family's way of punishment and there's a certain amount for each misdemeanour. I got thirty when I lost my bike. She got one when she took out our goldfish from the fishbowl to show off to her playmates. If you break a vase or any ornament in the living room, number of broken pieces equals number of spankings. But since she stole two pesos, she got two lashes from my father's belt (I was sniggering in the other room). And after that, she never stole from my mother again. But that didn't stop her from stealing from my piggybank. So she got another one from doing that. In those days, The Belt is The Law. So whenever she is misbehaving or not doing what my parents are telling her to do, my father would start unbuckling his belt and just the sound of that conditioned stimulus would trigger a conditioned response that turns

my sister from a darling little brat into a reluctant little angel. I know my father never understood classical conditioning but he sure knows how to use it. There's also how my father ended my sister's relationship with her then pesky, worthless, good-for-nothing, morally deprived boyfriend-now-ex-boyfriend by using various conditioning, reinforcements, punishments, and the like. But that is a different story, she was 14 then so that doesn't count. I really don't know if she learned quite enough. But she will always be my sister and God's punishment for me to see the error of my ways and do what He says.