I’d always wanted a sister. When my first little brother was born, I was mildly disappointed that he wasn’t a girl. But it was the first younger sibling I’d ever had and the novelty of the experience quickly dispelled all discontent. When my parents announced that another baby would soon join our family, however, I was determined that this one would indeed be a girl. Every night during my bedtime prayer, I would earnestly ask God to give me a little sister. I was six when the long awaited time came.

A babysitter was procured for my older brother and me. The three of us were lounging around a game of Junior Monopoly, with the afternoon sun streaming through the blinds and leaving a pattern on the living room carpet, when the phone call came. As the oldest, my brother had first rights to the phone. I gleaned little information from his one-sided conversation. I snatched up the phone when it was my turn, but I was sorely disappointed. Another boy! I buried my face in the arm of the couch and cried.

While originally bitter towards the newcomer, I soon loved my youngest brother as much as an older sister could love anyone. Still, I wasn’t ready to give up the idea of a little sister. Over the years, however, my prayers for a little sister grew more and more irregular and sporadic.

When I was twelve years old, my parents began to fill out the papers necessary to apply for adoption. It seemed to take them forever, and I wished that I was young enough to get away with nagging them constantly: “Have you finished yet? Can’t you hurry?” Finally, they were almost finished. Then, unexpectedly, on the way to church one Sunday, Mom and Dad told us another baby was on the way. I tried to match everyone’s enthusiasm, but I just couldn’t. If we adopted, I could be sure to get a sister. Doing it this way was just a guessing game. But love is a hard thing to hold back, and so when the baby died just a month later, I found that I had allowed hope to grow more confident than I had thought. I believed that I had a little sister, but I never had the chance to meet her.

Hope can only last so long, and I was tired of hoping. I didn’t think I would ever have a little sister. We waited. I was sixteen when we achieved a small victory; we were approved as an adoptive family. Only a small victory, because if they say you can adopt, but don’t give you any little girls to adopt, then you are still without a little sister.

One day, my dad had an idea. “You know, we should apply for foster care. If we can’t adopt, we could at least give a child a home for a little while. And who knows, maybe it could lead to adoption.” They say never to foster with the hope of adopting, because it just gets your hopes up. So we didn’t. We applied to be approved for foster care, and we were approved. I was expecting no response, but to my surprise, six weeks later, they asked us to take care of a three-year-old girl once a week. It was called “respite care”; her foster mom was older and needed a break sometimes.

When I first met Alisha, she was wearing little brown boots and a jean jumper. Her hair was blonde and curly, partially pulled back with two ribbons. I didn’t think she was the cutest thing in the world. I didn’t always want to be with her or hold her; in fact, she was overwhelming because she couldn’t focus on one thing for more than five minutes. Our house was so much noisier than normal.

Week by week, whenever she came to visit, her behavior became worse as she became more comfortable with us. The first time we put her to bed, she went right to sleep. Each successive night became more of a struggle. I started having to go to bed earlier on the nights she was visiting, because she would just cry or lie awake until I came to
About two months after she started visiting, the courts released Alisha for adoption. Since we had a friend who worked for the Children’s Aid Society and put in a good word for us, and since Alisha was already familiar with our family, we were told that we had first choice of adopting her.

You’d think that after all those years of wanting a sister, I’d be thrilled. You’d think I would jump up and down, and tell all my friends. You’d think that, but it wasn’t so. Actually, I was mostly indifferent. I was seventeen and finishing grade twelve. It seemed like I wouldn’t really be able to enjoy having a little sister at this point. Plus, I realized that having a younger sister and sharing a room wasn’t just fun; it would require some sacrifices.

For the next few weeks, we prayed often about this important decision. We also began to think about all the ways our family would change having another member so much younger than the rest of us. But one of the questions we asked ourselves was, “If we don’t adopt Alisha, will we miss out on a blessing that God had for us?” We all thought that we would. And more important than the question of whether adopting Alisha would be good for us, was whether it would be good for her. She was a little girl who didn’t have a mom and dad who took good care of her; she was passed from home to home. She needed us, and we wanted her.

When Alisha came, I had to stop reading in my room late at night. I couldn’t make noise in my room early in the morning. In fact, I stopped sleeping in my room for about two weeks, because I discovered Alisha had terrible nightmares and yelled in her sleep. I didn’t think about it though. I didn’t even care. It was different, but different is not bad. Different is sometimes very good, especially when it means having a little hand to hold on walks to the candy store or a little girl snuggled up against you when you’re reading Curious George. It’s the best when you hear the words, “You’re my favorite sister,” even if you’re her only one. Nothing is more fun than the triumph of a three-year-old learning to play Uno, a four-year-old learning to ride a bike, a five-year-old learning to read. And it makes me want to be the best person in the world when I see how she wants to be just like me.

I think Alisha is the cutest, smartest little girl in the world. She says all the funniest things. We’re so much alike. She is daring, spunky, and friendly. Sometimes I forget that we’re not biologically similar, and that we don’t get our curly hair and brown eyes from the same place. I forget that I haven’t always known her, that I don’t know what she looked like when she was a baby, or how old she was when she learned to walk. I forget that there was ever a time when she wasn’t my sister.

More than twelve years after I started praying for a sister, I finally got one. It was definitely worth the wait, and looking back on my life now, I am glad that it worked out just the way it did. The day that mom and dad went to the agency and got all of Alisha’s papers signed over to us, we all celebrated, and now, every year we celebrate the day Alisha became a Graber.

Kristen Graber, from Sault Sainte Marie, Ontario, will graduate from RBC this spring with an associate degree in general studies. She hopes to attend nursing school in the fall in her hometown.