

By AUBREE BROEKEMEIER

Imagine that when you go home, it's just quiet, and your parents haven't arrived home from work yet. Your siblings are nowhere in sight. Wait . . . they don't exist, because you are an only child. That's me, Aubree Broekemeier, daughter of two parents who both have full-time jobs.

I have been told my whole life how lucky I am that I'm an only child, but I have a different opinion. Just think about all that attention being constantly focused on you; some would call that a blessing, but I would call it a curse.

Many people only see the good things about being an only child, or at least what they think would be good. For example, many of my friends say all their payments go to me, and I don't have to bend for any other sibling activity.

The thing is, I wish I *had* to bend for a sibling's schedule. I wish I had a built-in friend who would always be around.

When I see my friends with their siblings, it makes me realize I will never truly understand what it's like to have a sibling. And one day, I can only be a sister-in-law and an aunt through marriage.

On the other hand, I will be an auntie for my friends' babies, and practically a sister in their eyes—but it will never be the same thing.

Additionally, the pressure that comes with being the only child. Every expectation, every hope, every dream my parents have is placed on me alone. There's no one to share the load with, no one to compare notes with and no one to shoulder part of

the weight.

I'm in five sports—basketball, volleyball, softball, track and field and cheer. I'm also in FFA, SkillsUSA and band. I stay busy and work hard, but sometimes it feels like every step I take is being watched.

My parents want the best for me, and I know their expectations come from love. But being the only child means there's no break from being “the one.” No backup. No sibling to take the spotlight for a day.

Don't get me wrong—being an only child has shaped me into who I am. It's taught me independence, confidence and the ability to handle pressure. But it's also taught me what I long for: connection. A built-in teammate. A lifelong partner in chaos.

Someone who understands the mess and magic of growing up under the same roof.

So, while people may say I'm lucky, the truth is that being an only child is complicated. It's a mix of blessings and burdens, freedom and responsibility, pride and loneliness.

And even though I may never know what it's like to have a sibling, I've learned to lean on the people who have become family by choice—my friends, my teammates and the people who show up for me day after day.

Being an only child isn't the whole story of who I am, but it is a chapter that has shaped me more than most.

And maybe someday, I'll be grateful for this unique path. For now, I'm just learning to navigate it—one expectation, one achievement, and one quite, empty house at a time.

Aubree Broekemeier

Mead High School