Where's the baby?

I write so much about my 3-year-old, Melise, that some of you might wonder where my baby has gone. Little Alina is here! She's always here—in my arms, on my back in a carrier, sitting on the floor nearby—always bearing witness to the shenanigans of her big sister.

I was telling my cousin that Alina's developmental milestones (smiling, clapping, crawling, etc.) seem to creep up and surprise me because I'm so busy taking care of Melise. My cousin immediately felt sorry for Alina. Yes, it is a shame that Alina isn't getting the full attention that baby Melise received. Melise, like almost every first-born child, practically had cheerleaders as we applauded her every little move.

But don't feel sorry for Alina. She has a special role as Mommy's cohort. Always being attached to me, she gets to add her input to the planning of each day. Most of the time she is the "silent partner," but her opinion is always heard, believe me. Alina has ultimate veto power over any activity!

As I get dressed every morning, Alina keeps me company and practices her conversational skills: "Ba, ba, baaaa! Maaaba ba!" She's very expressive, especially when she thinks I'm taking too long to pick an outfit. If you notice that my shirt and socks don't match, just blame it on the baby!

Melise loves to be creative with her wardrobe, which sometimes leads to clothing being put on in very strange ways. If Mommy doesn't think it's very funny, Melise will look to Alina, who always grants her sister a giggle. Sometimes, Alina will even applaud.

I shake my head and say, "Please don't encourage her, Alina!" She just laughs and claps more. Alina knows she's an important part of this family.

When we eat, Alina eyes the food closely. She isn't ready to eat everything on the table, but she will disagree with that whole-heartedly. I'll give her a chunk of peach to eat while the rest of us eat steak. She'll suck the peach dry, but her head follows my fork as I take a piece of steak and put it in my mouth. I was thinking about teaching her sign language, but she's already decided that banging her hand on the tray means, "I want steak!"

Alina spends a lot of time riding on my back in a carrier. She finds it entertaining, although she often fusses if she can't see what I'm doing. I'm sure I look pretty silly mixing pancake batter while holding the bowl out to my side so Alina can watch. If she gets really bored, she bounces up and down while punching my upper back. It doesn't hurt, but I get the message loud and clear.

In one way, Alina is just like baby Melise—one or the other of them has been present for the writing of every column. As I'm typing, there is always a sleeping baby on my lap. Sleeping is the important part there. I'm not sure how any mother could work on the computer otherwise!

The point is, don't feel sorry for Alina. She will never be forgotten, never ignored, never undervalued. Being the youngest may be vastly different from being the oldest, but it is still a special position in life. And Melise will probably find a million faults with being the oldest child as soon as she's old enough to hold that conversation!

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