

Let's Blow Up Spider-Man!

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Why the heck did I let him do it? And is it my fault?

I'm sitting here, holding my broken Spider-Man guy. My brother Steven blew him up with a firecracker. And I let him.

He said, "Hey, Mark, want to do something cool?" and of course I did. He said, "Let's take your Spider-Man guy, tie a string on his hand — you know, like his web — and throw him out the attic window. He'll fly and swing around just like the real Spider-Man!"

Why wouldn't I? I'd be crazy not to!

I admired my big brother. He did more fun things than I did. He was the star pitcher or 1st baseman in Little League, and when us neighborhood kids played sandlot softball, I was the catcher for him. By the time I was allowed to join Little League, he'd be out of it, so I'd never get to play with or against him on a real field, but I knew that.

He got to go camping with his jerk buddies, and I stayed home. But I climbed more garages, rode my bike further out into the far west, explored more wooded creeks, and swam in more pools and rivers with my friends than he ever did, so I had that on him.

And he would beat me up. Now and then. But we were family. That's what older brothers did to younger brothers. I'd be mad for two days, and then we'd play some game, and all was forgiven.

And then he'd smack my skull into the heater. Now and then. But we were family. That's what older brothers did to younger brothers. I'd be mad at him until the bump went down, and we'd watch Saturday morning cartoons together, eating Cap'n Crunch.

He was kind of mean to our sister, now and then, and he got me to help him take the heads off her Barbie dolls and throw them in the pool. That was kind of fun until Amber got mad and yelled at me, and I knew I wouldn't want that to happen to my toys. But Steven said, "Who cares? She's just a sister." She was mad at us, but we were family. That's what older brothers did to their sisters. She stayed mad for a while about that and some other stuff I don't know about, but Steven didn't really care and told me I shouldn't, either.

A couple of times, my money went missing. Now and then. But we were family. That was what big brothers did to younger brothers. It wasn't much, but it was mine. If I asked about it, he'd just deny it. I suppose he needed it for something. One time, he created a club and told me to get my friends to join. It cost a quarter to join. We each gave him a quarter. He held the first ten-minute meeting in our garage and then never had one again.

And the cops came to visit our house one day because of him. I never knew what he did, but he had his adventures, so a cop visiting the house kind of made sense. We were boys of action. We were bound to get in trouble. Now and then.

And he broke a few of my toys. Now and then. But toys get broken. It happens. And some disappear. It happens. One year, he gave me his cool racetrack for Christmas and then sold it in our dad's garage sale in the summer. But then he gave me his Mad Magazines - the ones without covers, and that was nice of him.

So, when my Spider-Man got half-destroyed, I don't know why I was surprised. He told me, "I never said I wouldn't blow him up. I just said it would be cool." And I'd believed him.

I like blowing things up. A lot of kids like blowing things up with firecrackers. Last year, I'd put together a model of the Bismarck battleship, and it had a motor so it could sail in the pond, and we'd sent it out and it sailed in a circle until it veered toward shore enough for us to hit it with a stick and make it come in without having to wade out to it. And then Steven blew it up. He said it did what it was supposed to do and, like the real Bismarck, it was time to sink it into the Atlantic. So, he did.

So, I don't know why I was surprised that he blew up my Spider-Man. I should have known he'd do something like that.

But I loved my Spider-Man. He was my favorite of the superhero guys I played with. Now, his middle section was blown apart. I could still glue the top and bottom together enough to still play with it, but it's just not the same. I could pretend he's "battle-damaged" Spider-Man, but it's just not the same.

But what am I going to do? I put Spider-Man in my brother's hands and let him tie the string to him. I expected that. I let him tie the string to the attic window handle. I expected that. He threw him out twice to get a good swing. I expected that, and it looked cool. Then he put that firecracker in Spider-Man's bending spot and lit it. That I didn't expect. He threw him out the window and sang the Spider-Man song. And there was a bang. And there were red and blue pieces going away from my Spider-Man guy. And then we reeled Spider-Man back in. The string was still tied to his wrist, but he wasn't whole. Steven laughed and handed him to me.

I am mad. But it's my fault. I knew what he would do, but I let him do it.