

Jedi knights are just a part of the family

By ALISSA WALKER
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I was born in the summer of 1977 just after my parents saw "Star Wars" in the theater. They stayed in sync with the saga; in 1980, their sequel, the birth of my sister, Beth, coincided with "The Empire Strikes Back."

Then, as "Return of the Jedi" entered postproduction, my parents told us they too were expecting a trilogy. On "Star Wars" weekend, the pre-Memorial Day release date perennially reserved for George Lucas' cinematic babies, Beth and I wandered downstairs to find a brother. Luke Skywalker had arrived at our home.

As Luke's sister, I now was Princess Leia, and when "Star Wars" became a part of our family on VHS, it was my duty to watch it daily, three times in a row, memorizing everything and rewinding to make sure I had Leia's smirk and inflection correct — "Will someone get this big walking carpet out of my way?"

The infinite utility of the lines and my endless recitation of them soon made the entire movie evolve into a way for my family to communicate with each other. "Into the garbage chute, flyboy!" was how my mom lighted a fire under my dad's behind. At the dinner table, Beth and I reenacted the exchange between Han and Greedo at the Mos Eisley Cantina in perfect alien dialect. When ordered to do chores, I told Luke to tell my parents he wanted to go to Toshi Station to pick up some power converters.

"That's not really your brother's name," a first-grader told me on the playground after I brought Luke's birth announcement for show and tell. "What, is your family in love with 'Star Wars' or something?"

I shot back my standard insult — "Aren't you a little short for a Storm-



Tom Walker

LUKE, WE ARE YOUR SISTERS: Alissa Walker, right, at age 7, dressed as Princess Leia, with sister Beth.



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FIGHTING EVIL: Carrie Fisher and Mark Hamill in the original "Star Wars." Alissa Walker watched the film daily.

trooper?" — and confirmed all suspicions.

We do love "Star Wars," but we also love the secret language "Star Wars" has given us. Luke was named after the whiner-to-warrior my parents liked more with each movie, but his name also pays homage to the galaxy of lexicon Lucas provided us. Using this insider vocabulary keeps our family tight; sharing it with others makes us feel important. The people I like most in the world tend to agree that

"Star Wars" is the center of the pop culture universe.

When Luke tells people his name, it serves as a great prequalifier. If they don't immediately claim to be his father, or invite him over to the dark side, it's a good bet they're not going to get along with him.

I N 1997, when "Star Wars" was re-released, we were psyched to demonstrate our narrative ability in the theater. But this was a different movie. Greedo shot first. Jabba made a lame cameo. The flow we had memorized from scene to scene was, in Lucas' own words, "gone forever." Luke refused the special edition DVDs when they came out, preferring our flickery VHS copies instead.

And it's not that we hate the prequels, but what we loved from the first ones is missing from virtual Yoda's ever-disintegrating syntax. The characters are no longer quotable. Jake Lloyd cheering "Yippee!" or the brooding boy-band charisma of Hayden Christensen's "I killed them all" won't have many expectant mothers feeling the name Anakin.

Regardless, this weekend will find the five of us home in St. Louis, celebrating Luke's birthday with a final-episode outing. It is, after all, his destiny. But afterward, we'll rush back to our house to

watch the original "Star Wars" to see how our version of the story matches up.

As the creator of so much my family holds precious, George Lucas can never truly disappoint. But like my parents, he should have stopped after three.

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