



Multiple Births  
Naissances multiples  
C A N A D A

## National Multiple Births Awareness Day!

**May 28th**



[www.multiplebirthscanada.org](http://www.multiplebirthscanada.org)

Multiple Births Canada /

Naissance multiples Canada

PO Box 432

Wasaga Beach, ON

Canada L9Z 1A4

Tel. / Tél. : 1-705-429-0901

Fax / Téléc. : 1-705-429-9809

Toll Free / No. sans frais :

1-866-228-8824

[office@multiplebirthscanada.org](mailto:office@multiplebirthscanada.org)

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## Backgrounder

In Canada, there are currently 120,000 twins, triplets, quadruplets and quintuplets, otherwise known as multiple-birth children, under the age of 13. Of these 48,000 are aged 5 and under.<sup>1</sup>

### THEME FOR 2007

This year Canada's multiple-birth community is: *Raising awareness of the need to recognize and encourage the individuality of multiple-birth individuals, while respecting the uniqueness of their multiple-birth relationship.*

### IN THE WORDS OF PATRICIA MALMSTROM, MBC ADVISORY BOARD

"Young multiples have primary relationships with their parents as well as with their multiple-birth sibling(s). This strong bond between co-multiples is a unique relationship that influences how multiples interact with family and friends, and fascinates the general public and researchers alike, yet its implications are still not fully understood by many Canadians.

Multiple-birth children are individuals, and as such their development as individuals must be encouraged and respected in all aspects of their lives. For multiples to have the extraordinary benefit of growing up in supportive partnership with each other, we must also respect and nurture the development of healthy relationships between them."

### IN THE WORDS OF LINDA LEONARD, MSN, RN, MBC ADVISORY BOARD

"Multiple-birth parents are usually aware of the importance of helping each child develop their individuality while at the same time respecting the uniqueness of being a multiple. However, fostering individuality is easier said than accomplished during the initial weeks and months after the births.

Immediately after the birth, mothers are recovering from the physical and emotional stresses of multiple pregnancy, may be dealing with extended hospitalization of their infants due to preterm birth and other health conditions, frequently experience considerable sleep disruption and deprivation, and are engaged in getting to know and form a loving bond with each of their babies. Too often, sufficient home help is unavailable or unaffordable. Parents struggle to contend with the unrelenting demands of caring for two, three or more babies, plus those of older children.

The challenge of promoting individuality is further compounded by the desire to treat the babies equally and fairly while at the same time responding to each of their differences and preferences. This seeming paradox can often lead to internal conflict and feelings of guilt and inadequacy, especially on the part of the new mother. Parents require information and reassurance that these challenges are part and parcel of being a multiple-birth parent, and are not a reflection of their parenting capabilities."

<sup>1</sup> Statistics Canada (2004). *Births*. Ottawa: Minister of Industry.

[www.statcan.ca/english/freepub/84F0210XIE/84F0210XIE2002000.htm](http://www.statcan.ca/english/freepub/84F0210XIE/84F0210XIE2002000.htm)



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## Backgrounder (cont'd)

### IN THE WORDS OF DR. KERRY JANG, PH. D, MBC ADVISORY BOARD

"Every child is different, even identical (monozygotic) twins. Respect these differences, and as a parent of multiples, if they wish to be treated the same, then that is OK; similarly, if they want to be treated differently, then that is OK too."

### IN THE WORDS OF CATHERINE AND CONSTANCE ELCOMBE, ADULT TWINS

"While Mom was most certainly important in our lives, Connie and I addressed our inquisitiveness and problems to each other first – and, secondly, if necessary, to Mom.

Mom maintains that she raised us as individuals. She insists that she dressed us differently. She encouraged friends and neighbours to treat us as sisters, not twins. However, when we look through the dozens of photo albums and slides we always chuckle at what we see. There we are, two little girls dressed exactly alike, the exact same haircut and often with a large white name tag on us for the photo because as infants and even now, in our hometown, nobody other than Mom and Dad and our siblings could tell us apart. We had an older brother when we were born, and when we were about nine years old, Mom and Dad brought two more brothers into the family.

In our home town we are still (after 50+ years) referred to as 'the twins'."

### IN THE WORDS OF CONNIE GIROUX, MOTHER OF UNIVERSITY-AGED TWINS

"They have repetitively shared with me how difficult the past two years have been while they have been apart, living in cities hours away from each other.

They have developed wonderfully as individuals. All along they have articulated beautifully with me, as their mother, about their extra-ordinary special twin bond. I've admired the fact that they have never denied themselves their twinship, even though teachers and people along the way have tried to de-rail their relationship.

Holly and Rebecca both are very different people who complement each other's lives. They are the dearest friends to one another. I have learned, over the years, to foster the individuality while understanding the undeniable closeness that even a mother's love could not alter.

I have noticed that at our house there is no ownership, it is shared possessions with respect, and I have always attributed that to twinship. Communication, compromising and cooperation were major keys to raising healthy twins. Because the girls learned early from each other, they seemed to have well developed skills when they arrived in the classrooms of the educational settings.

They will be twenty years old in May of this year, and it has been fascinating to share my days with them as their single mother. It is very uncanny to witness the unspoken communications that takes place in the lives of identicals (monozygotic twins). To be a friend to one twin means you are accepting the loyalty of both twins.

I will always continue to encourage my girls to celebrate and discover their connection to their fullest."



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## Backgrounder (cont'd)

### IN THE WORDS OF AUDREY HUBERMAN, Ed.D, ADULT MONOZYGOTIC TWIN

"My experience of being an identical (monozygotic) twin and navigating my dual identities is one that caused me to write a doctoral thesis. Therefore, responding to the question in a letter seems almost impossible to me. As you know I am the key-note speaker for the 2007 conference and will speak at length about the twin experience and the parenting practices that I believe encourage "respectfully connected" relationships among multiple-birth sets. My research reveals that the multiple birth experience is simultaneously complex, challenging, dynamic, and emotional. At the conference, I will explain these terms. However, for the purpose of this letter I will try to communicate how these multifaceted aspects of twinship affected my self as an individual and as a part of a multiple-birth set.

In retrospect, I see that my relationship with my self and my identical twin sister has changed dramatically over the years. Initially, during my childhood and adolescence, I was immersed in and preoccupied with my multiple birth status. I felt pulled between my loyalties to my self and my co-twin. In practice, this made it difficult to pursue friendships without feeling like I was burdening or abandoning my co-twin. During my young adulthood, to manage this conflict, I emotionally and physically distanced myself from my twin-status and thus my co-twin. During that time, I moved, married, studied, and had children. With my personal goals met, my interest in my multiple birth status regained significance, as evident in my chosen doctoral topic, and I became reflective and interested in the multiple birth experience. Today, I believe that through the process of thinking about, talking about, and writing about my experience I am able to balance my twin selves – the "I" and the "we" - similar to the way that I am able to balance the many others parts of my self such as the "personal" and the "professional".

It seems unfortunate that my appreciation and sophistication of managing my relationship with my self as an individual and as a multiple-birth member was only realized during adulthood. In some ways I feel that I missed out on enjoying my co-twin during my childhood, adolescence, and young adulthood. It is perhaps this regret that inspires me to help other multiples and their families to develop a mature understanding of both self and other."

### IN THE WORDS OF GAIL MOORE, MOTHER OF TWINS, MBC BOARD MEMBER

"As a Mom of twins plus two, who were 4 and 6 when my dizygotic twin boys were born, I have a few "photographs in time" that define the unique relationship shared by my guys.

One is playing with them when they were toddlers. It always amazed me that after playing one-on-one with let's say Zachary, the first comment that he would say was, "Okay, now it's Jeremy's turn." and, vice versa. From the very beginning each boy wanted his twin to get the same love, attention and fun as he was getting.

Another memory is taking them to the dentist. Zachary always went in first because he was braver. This time in particular, Zachary was finished and sitting with me in the waiting room. Jeremy was maybe 6 or 7 years old and was not happy with the work being done on his teeth. We could hear him crying and I could see Zachary making faces which I mistakenly thought were comments on his brother being a wimp. The hygienist asked me to help calm down Jeremy. I asked Zachary to come help me, not realizing that as soon as he saw Jeremy in distress he too would break out in tears, personally feeling his twin's pain. That connection is truly amazing, and really complicates how a parent of multiples has to handle certain situations."



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## Backgrounder (cont'd)

IN THE WORDS OF DR. LOUIS KEITH, MD. PhD., TWIN TO DONALD M. KEITH

"Much has been said about the need to remain an individual while enjoying the special bond that is unique to being a multiple. I am a twin and, as far back as I can remember, realized that I was not my brother, was different from him and did not want to be him. And while doing so, I would not give up the pleasures that went along with twinship.

To be sure I did not think in this neat sophistic manner when I was a child, a teen or even a young adult. The defining moment in "growing into" the two-sided glove that it was our lot to have in life occurred in our late twenties. Donald, my older and better half, a twin A, who could not let me forget that I was and would forever be twin B, wanted to go to dinner at a particular restaurant. I gladly picked him up in my car and we proceeded on our way, only to fall into a long, recurring babble and battle about a topic that we frequently disagreed about. Each of us had our position and we were not about to change. In the midst of the discussion, I turned to him and said, "You know, if we continue these arguments just because we disagree on a particular point, we stand the chance of becoming enemies and losing the best thing we have, our twinship. At the worst, we could wind up not speaking at some time in our life and that would be a tragedy for each of us".

Donald became silent, thought for awhile and then said quite simply, "You're right. We will never agree on everything and that is perhaps the thing that we have to learn from this discussion". To make a long story short, the argument was over, we proceeded to dinner and although many years have passed, each of us clearly remembers that moment as a defining moment in our respective lives.

From a psychoanalytic point of view, we had, in that very moment, completed the process of "double differentiation", the event that all multiples must pass thru if they want to be individuals and enjoy their multiplicity at the same time. It is something that every singleton must do, but the singleton only has to differentiate from the mother and her breast in order to know who is who as an individual. In contrast, the multiple must do that and also differentiate from the twin, the triplet partners or the partners of a higher order set.

As the years passed, our twin bond had grown tighter and continues to this day. We have just returned from a trip to Kiev, Ukraine, where Donald stood up and started to give a lecture on my behalf when I was slightly delayed in arriving to the lecture hall. As we had dressed identically (why not, we are MZ twins) the audience did not know the difference. He just started as I might have started using the slides, which I had prepared. When I entered the hall, I realized what had happened and coolly walked up to the lectern, thanked him, shook his hand and gave him a big hug. The audience loved it, I continued the lecture and when it was over we both not only took the applause but thought it most appropriate to share it.

One day this will be over and it will be the death of one of us that will sever the bond. When that day comes, and it will, the bond will continue in a different way, because both of us are so used to talking out loud to the spiritual other in the absence of the physical other, that it will just be a continuation of the conversation that we individually began together so many years ago.



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## Backgrounder (cont'd)

IN THE WORDS OF DONALD M. KEITH, TWIN TO DR. LOUIS KEITH

Defining or describing the twin bond or the bond in other higher order multiples is an exceptionally difficult task. This is not an excuse on my part; rather, it is the recognition that the bond, and my bond as a monozygotic twin in particular, is ethereal, spiritual, and has its origin in my very soul. That said, the definition of the twin bond for another set of twins might be very different, and my explanation incomprehensible to them. In addition, there is the possibility that the bond is often different (more intense) in monozygotic multiples than in dyzygotic pairs, as well as unlike sex twins.

We now know that the communication between multiples begins in the womb, with videos of kisses, laughter, punching, and biting. We can see all of the human emotions in ourselves before we officially became ourselves.

Thus, the rest of my comments will describe my feelings about my twin bond with my brother and how it has ebbed and flowed over the years.

When you have multiples, you as parents must be aware of the four Cs in the lives of your children. Too much closeness leads to comparison, which can translate into competition (often fierce and combative) and when the children are in school, accusations of cheating. Parents too, have to realize that however close their children are in their youth, they will be separated by school, job, marriage, and ultimately, death. It is the parent's responsibility to prepare their children for each of these separations.

The strength and character of the bond has to do, in my mind, with the age and finality of the differentiation the multiples make in their own lives. The situation that my younger brother Louis describes in his comments is true, and most importantly, had a major influence on how we perceive each other now and how our lives turned out. Now that I think back on that moment, some 40+ years ago, I clearly remember a weight being lifted from my shoulders when the words closing a long-standing disagreement came out of my mouth. This non-acceptance of Louis as a separate, distinct individual was a terrible burden for me, but when I realized in fact that he was separate, he was distinct, and unique, never to be changed into my clone, the burden was gone. In that split second, all was well in my heart.

When that final argument was over, things that seemed extraordinarily important became inconsequential. We could both accept the other for what he was, warts and all. We no longer spent time and energy trying to convert the other into ourselves. We were free to use these resources to support and promote the other's goals, desires, and ambitions. We did not know it that day, nor would it manifest itself for years, but when push came to shove, we were there for each other, be it a book chapter needing a writer, a presentation needing a presenter, or a private banker dishing out a quick and dirty loan.

I am acutely conscious of the unconscious thread that joins us. It is as if an elastic band joins our shoulders. When we are across the table, the band is thick and unstretched. When we are thousands of miles apart, the band stretches down to a millionth of a nanometer in width, a wisp, a thought, a feeling that is always there, a link to each other.

Two reasons the bond is not well understood in the singleton world is that many singletons have no one, neither spouse, friend, nor child, with whom they have such a close, longstanding, emotional bond. MOREOVER, some are JEALOUS of those who do. These people can see and feel the bond between the pair, and for the most part, it is a strong and positive bond. They desire a similar relationship, but cannot have one, not because they are not worthy of such a tie, but because life has not dealt them a situation where such a bond is present.