

# NATIONAL MULTIPLE BIRTHS AWARENESS DAY

May 28<sup>th</sup>, 2005  
Kimberley Weatherall  
Chairwoman, MBC

The Dionne quintuplets – Annette, Emilie, Yvonne, Cécile and Marie, came into this world on May 28<sup>th</sup>, 1934, like all multiple-birth children, not knowing that they were going to face many **unique issues and challenges**. Their journey was **much** tougher than most, yet **they shared** a commonality with **all** multiple-birth children, a frustration with society's lack of understanding of their needs as **individuals**.

That public **now** understands that what happened during the first nine years of their lives was exploitation, but that is **NOT** why we stand here today.

The Dionne family experience underscored the need for a multiple-birth movement in which these injustices would never again occur. In their own quiet way, at 63 years of age, after **decades** of **seclusion**, they brought unwanted publicity unto themselves again by asking the Ontario government, the question “**Why?**” That is why we honour them today.

As Yvonne simply stated, “We want to find the real truth!”

The **real truth** is in their soft-spoken words. In a foreword to “**Finding our Way**” [book produced by former Canadian organization Triplets, Quads & Quints Association] Cécile Dionne says, “*I was **no more than an ordinary person born in extraordinary circumstances** ... My role, is to be the voice of your children, for they <as multiple-birth individuals> may not be able to tell you. Treat us as **individuals**. It is part of everyone's basic needs to feel that there is no one else on this earth who is exactly like them. We are no different. We need to develop our own uniqueness and self-esteem ... the bond between my siblings and me is already so strong. At times, it is stronger than the bond between parent and child. So help me become **my own person** and not an extension of a multiple birth.”*

In a letter to Bobbi and Kenny McCaughey, new parents of septuplets in 1997, Annette, Cecile and Yvonne said, “*We hope your children receive **more respect** than we did. Their fate should be no different from that of other children. Multiple births **should not** be confused with entertainment, nor*

*should they be an opportunity to sell products .... We sincerely hope **a lesson will be learned** from examining how our lives were forever altered by our childhood experience.”*

Multiple Births Canada, originally formed in 1978 as Parents of Multiple Births Association Canada, was founded by parents who **understood and understand** the message quietly being delivered by the Dionnes. Our mission is to improve the quality of life for multiple birth individuals and their families in Canada.

We believe that we **owe a debt of gratitude** to the Dionne quintuplets for calling attention to how their ill treatment affected their lives, the abusive aspect of being isolated from their natural context, separated from parents, for being **denied** an ordinary route to individuality.

We thank Cécile and Annette for agreeing to allow Multiple Births Canada to celebrate National Multiple Births Awareness Day on **THEIR** birthday .. May 28<sup>th</sup>. We also appreciate their words endorsing this year’s theme. *“We, Annette and Cécile, the two surviving Dionne quintuplets, believe **society should recognize multiple-birth children for their individuality while also acknowledging the unique challenges faced by these children and their families.** For this reason we support the efforts of Multiple Births Canada/Naissances multiples Canada in initiating and launching National Multiple Births Awareness Day to be held henceforth on May 28th.*

*Further, we **encourage all Canadians** to become more aware of the social support systems available to multiple-birth families, particularly the distribution of parental leave benefits. Currently, the weekly EI payment and the number of weeks to be paid remain the same, even when the birth involves more than one child. We believe that this **does not acknowledge the issues of delayed bonding and extended physical and emotional demands placed on these families,** consequently we would like to encourage dialogue for **change.**”*

For these reasons, **TODAY** Multiple Births Canada has created a **new** Making a Difference Award. It will be awarded henceforth, **on this date, May 28<sup>th</sup>**, the birthday of the Dionne quintuplets, to adult multiple-birth individuals who have enlightened Canadians to the challenges faced by multiple-birth children and their families. Furthermore, this award will be known as the **Dionne Award**. Today we present it to Cécile Dionne and Annette Dionne.

Accepting on their behalf is the curator of the Dionne Quints Museum, Sharron Clark-Bérard.