

in college. We laughed ourselves to sleep nearly every night—except on those heartbreaking nights when we cried each other to sleep.

Simply speaking, twins know each other best because they spend more hours with one another than they do with anyone else in the world. Most twins probably spend more time together than they do in any other relationship.

All the publicized (and sensationalized) studies of the freakish similarities and sensibilities between twins raised apart have obscured the developmentally consequential fact that twin children need what all children need: acknowledgment of and respect for their individuality.

Unwanted attention

A walk through the neighborhood or a trip to the grocery store with twins turns us into mobile conversation pieces. Common rules of courtesy and propriety seem to be ignored by many adults when it comes to twins.

My kids have been pointed at, stared at, examined, discussed and audibly compared to each other all of their lives: "Look at the eyes on that one. They're a little rounder." "Oh, look at this one's nose. It's a little broader." "My goodness, but look how they're sucking their thumbs—just exactly the same way!" Tell me, how many ways are there to suck a thumb?

Luckily for these twin-intruders and commentators—some of whom have come dangerously close to being objects of this mother's wrath—twins are conditioned to be patient and tolerant.

Taking turns

Again, there is nothing mysterious or strange about the unusual strain of patience in twins. After all, I never did master the skill of breastfeeding two infants simultaneously.

So from day one, Aaron and David learned to wait whether for mom's milk, dry diapers, strained sweet potatoes, piggy-back rides, undivided attention, help with

homework, driving lessons or even a sympathetic ear for adolescent heartache.

Taking turns and waiting are, for twins, a way of life—much more so than for children of a single parent, as I am. When the twins were three or four years old, I watched them almost fluidly swapping and trading toy trucks and cars.

Just kids

Today, it doesn't surprise me that they easily share the one very-used car they both have to drive. This apparent generosity is not linked to some mystical synergy passing between them. It's a pattern of behavior learned from the day of their births, maybe even several months before that.

The vast majority of twins are probably not worthy of a single sentence in *Ripley's Believe It or Not*. They're really not good conversation pieces at all. They're just kids—silly, goofy, naughty, normal, annoying, loving, lovable, needy little kids. They're not, I'm afraid, even terribly rare—especially these days when multiples are becoming more common.

So seekers of the exotic, mysterious, strange or incredible will have to look elsewhere than at my sons. Collectors of conversation pieces and other novelties must depart from the company of my twins empty handed.

However, those who will contribute to the respect—rather than the confusion and shyness—of a couple of nice young guys are welcome to meet my two singularly adorable sons. Just look one straight in the eyes, and say, "Hi! My name is Sue. What's yours?" Then, shifting the angle of your gaze squarely into the other's eyes, say it again. ♡



Laura Bernell, of Campbell, California, is an extension English instructor and the mother of 16-year-old twin sons.

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