

BABY PICTURES

©FOCUS

I AM NOT FAMOUS. I PROBABLY NEVER WILL BE FAMOUS. AND YET WHEREVER I GO, STRANGERS SMILE AT ME AFFECTIONATELY, POINT ME OUT AS I PASS BY, STOP TO ASK QUESTIONS AND LAVISH COMPLIMENTS.

ART BY PATRICK W. WELCH
MA(RCA)'91
WORDS BY CARRIE GOLUS
AB'91 AM'93
OH MY GOD

GET USED TO PEOPLE COMING UP TO YOU IN THE GROCERY STORE FOR THE REST OF YOUR LIFE," MY FRIEND DAN SAID SARDONICALLY WHEN I TOLD HIM I WAS EXPECTING TWINS. DAN IS A TWIN HIMSELF, BUT HE ALSO IS AN UNRELIABLE NARRATOR. AS DAN TELLS IT, AFTER HE WAS DELIVERED THE NURSE SAID TO THE DOCTOR, WHO WAS WASHING HIS HANDS, "I THINK THERE'S ANOTHER BABY IN THERE!" - WHICH TURNED OUT TO BE DAN'S YOUNGER BROTHER NICK. IT'S A GOOD STORY, AND IT MAY ACTUALLY BE TRUE. BUT TO MY SURPRISE DAN WAS RIGHT ABOUT THE GROCERY STORE, AND EVERY OTHER KIND OF STORE, AS WELL AS EVERY RESTAURANT, PARK, AND STREET.



I FIRST DISCOVERED MY UNEARNED CELEBRITY THE DAY I WAS ROLLED OUT OF THE U OF C HOSPITALS, ON EACH ARM A BABY BOY IN A MATCHING "GOING-HOME OUTFIT" (SENT BY MY MOTHER, A FIRST-TIME GRANDMOTHER INTOXICATED WITH THE IDEA OF TWO GRANDBABIES). THIS MUST BE WHAT IT'S LIKE TO BE MADONNA, I THOUGHT, AS WE PRESSED THROUGH THE LUNCHTIME CROWD. SEVERAL SETS OF TWINS ARE DELIVERED AT THE HOSPITALS EACH WEEK, A NURSE TOLD ME, BUT YOU WOULD NEVER HAVE KNOWN IT FROM THE CROWD'S REACTION: HEADS TURNING, THE REFRAIN "TWINS! LOOK AT THE TWINS!" AND SEVERAL OFFERS OF "I'LL TAKE ONE!"

I'LL TAKE ONE
I'LL TAKE ONE!
I'LL TAKE ONE

II HAVEN'T DRESSED ALEXANDER AND BENJAMIN ALIKE SINCE, BUT THE PUBLIC ADORATION HASN'T ABATED. SOME DAYS I SMILE SO MUCH MY CHEEKS ACHE. ON THE VERY RARE DAYS WHEN I VENTURE OUT ALONE, I AM ONCE AGAIN ANONYMOUS AND UNSEEN. IT'S A RELIEF TO KNOW I'M NOT MADONNA, BUT RATHER HER PERSONAL ASSISTANT.

ACTUAL REMARKS MADE BY ACTUAL PEOPLE



my daughter-in-law is pregnant with twins right now, but it isn't going very well. One of the fetuses is already dead.

DOUBLE TROUBLE
TWO BOYS! TOO BAD. YOU SHOULD HAVE HAD A BOY AND A GIRL.

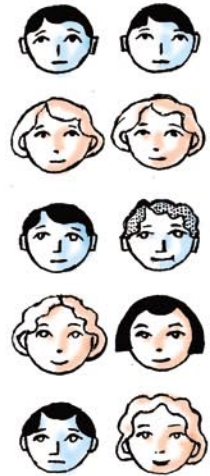


LOOK OUT!
DOUBLEWIDE

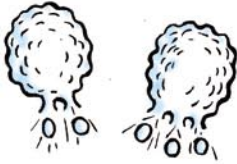
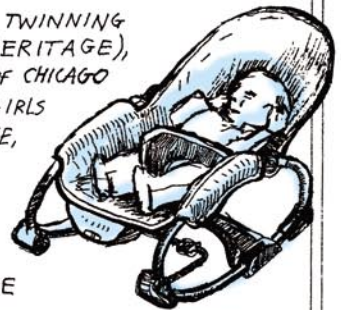




TWIN PAIR MEMBERS ARE COMPARED UNMERCIFULLY," HELEN L. KOCH, PHB'18, PHD'21, WROTE IN "TWINS AND TWIN RELATIONS" (UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO PRESS, 1966), ONE OF THE FIRST PSYCHOLOGICAL STUDIES OF TWINS AS TWINS, RATHER THAN USING TWINS TO GET AT THE NATURE/NURTURE QUESTION. KOCH, A PROFESSOR OF CHILD PSYCHOLOGY AT THE UOF C, FOUND THAT WHEN IDENTICAL TWINS WERE COMPARED, OBSERVERS TENDED TO PICK OUT SIMILARITIES—USUALLY POSITIVE ONES. BUT FOR FRATERALS, THE EMPHASIS WAS ON DIFFERENCES, "WITH OFTEN AN UNFLATTERING IMPLICATION FOR ONE OF THE PAIR MEMBERS."



KOCH WANTED TO COMPARE TWINS TO AN EARLIER STUDY OF SINGLETONS, SO SHE SELECTED SUBJECTS WHO WERE FIVE TO SIX YEARS OLD, WHITE (ODDLY, SINCE TWINNING IS MUCH MORE COMMON AMONG PEOPLE OF AFRICAN HERITAGE), THE ONLY CHILDREN IN THEIR FAMILIES, AND RESIDENTS OF CHICAGO OR NEARBY SUBURBS. SHE WANTED EVEN NUMBERS OF GIRLS AND BOYS, IDENTICALS AND FRATERALS. TO HER SURPRISE, MALE FRATERALS WERE ALL BUT IMPOSSIBLE TO FIND—POSSIBLY, SHE SPECULATED, BECAUSE THE DEATH RATE FOR MALE TWINS WAS SO MUCH HIGHER THAN FOR FEMALE, SO THE POOL WAS SMALLER; POSSIBLY BECAUSE FRATERAL TWINS WERE SO TIRED OF BEING HELD UP TO EACH OTHER AND FOUND WANTING.



NEVER COMPARE THEM," FRATERAL-TWIN DAN SAID—ADVICE IMPOSSIBLE TO FOLLOW, SINCE COMPARISON IS ALL BUT IMPLICIT IN ANY DESCRIPTION. ALEXANDER, MY FIRST-BORN, HAS A FULL HEAD OF RED-BROWN HAIR, EYES, AND A HEART-RENDING IMMENSE CRY—"OOO-HOO-HOO-HOO, OO-HOO-HOO-HOO"—AS IF THERE WERE NO GREATER TRAGEDY IN THIS WORLD THAN A DIRTY DIAPER. BENJAMIN, A MIX OF BLOND AND BALD, IS THE YOUNGER TWIN AND SEEMS IT: LIKE A KITTEN HE KEPT HIS EYES TIGHTLY CLOSED FOR MOST OF HIS FIRST WEEKS, AS IF HE WERE OFFENDED BY HIS EJECTION INTO THE WORLD. YET HE HAS SINCE BECOME THE BON VIVANT, SPREADING HIS TOES BLISSFULLY AS HE EATS, SMILING A GOOFY GRIN OF CONTENTMENT AFTERWARDS.



IDENTICAL?



NOT IDENTICAL



BEN BIG HEAD

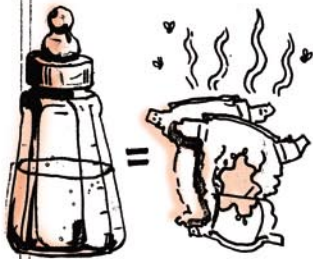
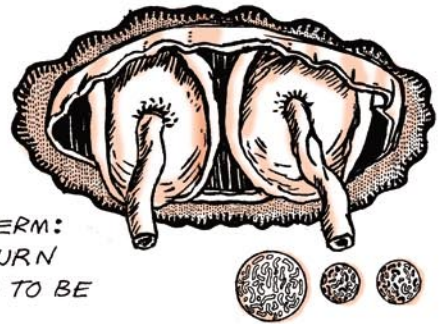


WHICH ONE DO THEY ALWAYS THINK IS THE GIRL?" MY HUSBAND PATRICK HAS WONDERED ALOUD MANY TIMES—ALEX (BECAUSE OF THE HAIR)? BEN (BECAUSE HE'S SLIGHTLY SMALLER)? OR WHAT?—BUT UNLIKE OUR COUNTLESS INTERROGATORS, WE'RE TOO EMBARRASSED TO ASK. AS AN '80s FEMINIST, I WAS ALWAYS VAGUELY CRITICAL OF GENDERED BABY CLOTHING, BUT NOW I SEE ITS PURPOSE: A SHORTCUT, AN ANSWER THAT PREEMPTS THE QUESTION. YELLOW ISN'T ENOUGH; FABRIC PRINTED WITH CARS OR BASEBALLS OR SNAKES ISN'T ENOUGH; BABY BLUE IS THE ONLY CERTAIN SIGNIFIER, AND EVEN THEN STRANGERS DISREGARD IT TO SPECULATE,

A BOY AND A GIRL?



SINCE 1975 THE NUMBER OF TWIN BIRTHS IN THE UNITED STATES HAS INCREASED BY ABOUT 50 PERCENT. FERTILITY TREATMENT IS ONE REASON. ANOTHER IS SIMPLY DELAYED CHILD BEARING: A THIRTY-SOMETHING WOMAN IS MUCH MORE LIKELY TO CONCEIVE FRATERNAL TWINS NATURALLY THAN A TWENTY-SOMETHING. (FOR THIRTY-SOMETHINGS EXPERIENCING THEIR FIRST PREGNANCY, MEDICAL SCIENCE HAS A CHARMING TERM: "ELDERLY PRIMIGRAVIDA.") THE EXPLOSION OF TWINS HAS IN TURN MEANT AN EXPLOSION IN TWIN-ADVICE BOOKS, WHICH TEND TO BE BOTH PRACTICAL AND RELENTLESSLY UPBEAT.



BOOKS FROM JUST A FEW DECADES AGO, HOWEVER, HAVE A MUCH DARKER EDGE, AND THEY TRAFFIC IN WEIRD TWIN STEREOTYPES THAT I HAD NEVER BEFORE ENCOUNTERED. KOCH PERPETUATES SEVERAL IN "TWINS AND TWIN RELATIONS": TWINS HAVE SLOWER SPEECH DEVELOPMENT THAN SINGLETONS. GIRLS IN OPPOSITE-SEX TWIN PAIRS ARE MORE "TOMBOYISH," WHILE BOYS ARE MORE "SISSYISH." FRATERNAL TWINS ARE MORE COMMON AMONG THE LOWER SOCIAL CLASSES. AND, IN KOCH'S CIRCUMSPECT PHRASING, TWINS "DO NOT CONTRIBUTE AS MANY OF THE ABLEST PERSONS TO THE POPULATION AS THEIR NUMBERS WOULD DICTATE."



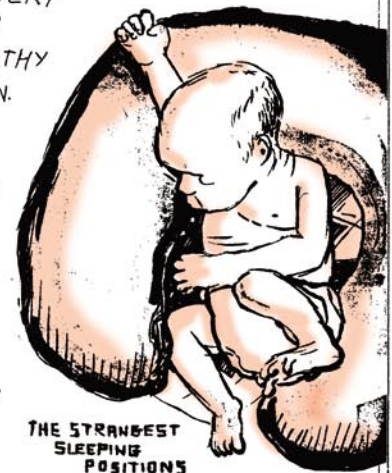
BEN AS A BALD MIDDLE-AGED BUSINESS MAN (AGE 2 MONTHS)

CONTEMPORARY BOOKS, IN THEIR OBLIGATORY CHAPTERS ON "TWINS THROUGHOUT HISTORY," GENERALLY OMIT THE GRUESOME REALITIES THAT AWAITED NEWBORN TWINS IN MANY CULTURES. THE MURDER OF ONE OR BOTH TWINS WAS COMMON, I LEARNED FROM THE OLDER BOOKS, AS WAS THE NOTION THAT ONE TWIN WAS GOOD AND THE OTHER WAS EVIL. APPARENTLY THE BANTU PEOPLES OF SOUTHERN AFRICA SHAMED THE MOTHER,



BELIEVING TWINS TO BE THE OFFSPRING OF TWO DIFFERENT FATHERS; ZULU TRIBES EVEN LEFT THE "ILLEGITIMATE" TWIN NAMELESS. IN SOME NORTH AMERICAN INDIAN TRIBES, THE FEMALE TWIN OF OPPOSITE-SEX PAIRS WAS SMOTHERED AS PUNISHMENT FOR SUSPECTED INTRAUTERINE INCEST. THE CATALOG OF ATROCITIES WENT ON AND ON. BUT ALL THE BOOKS AGREED ON ONE POINT: IN EVERY CULTURE TWINS WERE CONSIDERED SPECIAL, SOMETHING IMPORTANT, WORTHY EITHER OF PERSECUTION OR CELEBRATION.

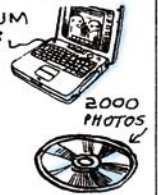
I WONDER WHEN THE BOYS WILL BE OLD ENOUGH TO UNDERSTAND HOW UNINTENTIONALLY SPECIAL THEY ARE, EVEN IN A WORLD WHERE TWINS AND "SUPERTWINS" (AS TRIPLETS, QUADRUPLTS, AND OTHER HIGHER-ORDER MULTIPLES ARE SOMETIMES CALLED) HAVE BECOME LESS AND LESS UNUSUAL. FOR NOW, BEN AND ALEX SEEM ENTIRELY IGNORANT OF THEIR OWN TWINNESS, OBLIVIOUS TO EACH OTHER'S EXISTENCE, EVEN AS LIMBS TANGLE IN THEIR SHARED CRIB. WHEN ONE TWIN IS SCREAMING MERE INCHES FROM THE OTHER'S EAR, AND YET THE NON-SCREAMING TWIN CONTINUES TO SLEEP SOUNDLY, I'M VERY GRATEFUL.



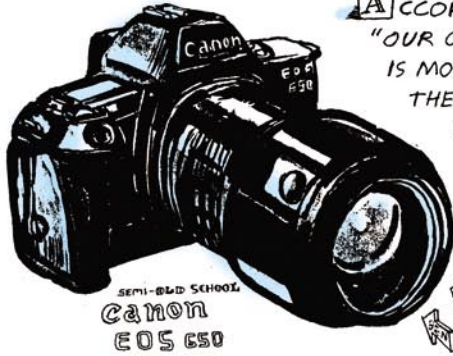
THE STRANGEST SLEEPING POSITIONS

ALL OF MY CAMERAS

PHOTO ALBUM
CIRCA 2003



ACCORDING TO SUSAN SONTAG'S ESSAY "ON PHOTOGRAPHY," "OUR OPPRESSIVE SENSE OF THE TRANSIENCE OF EVERYTHING IS MORE ACUTE SINCE CAMERAS GAVE US THE MEANS TO 'FIX' THE FLEETING MOMENT." SONTAG, AB '51, WAS WRITING IN 1977, BEFORE DIGITAL PHOTOGRAPHY EXACERBATED OUR DESPERATION. I NEVER REALLY UNDERSTOOD THIS UNTIL I HAD CHILDREN. I SPEND ALMOST ALL DAY, EVERY DAY, WITH THE TWINS, AND THOUGH IT CAN BE OVERWHELMING AND EXHAUSTING, IT ALSO ISN'T ENOUGH. I WANT TO BOTTLE THE TIME SOMEHOW, DRY IT, FREEZE IT, PRESS IT BETWEEN THE LEAVES OF A HEAVY BOOK.



DESIGN CLASSIC



PEEK-A-BOO!



DEVICES
DESIGNED
TO KEEP
GRANNY
INFORMED

THE
"FUTURE"
Nikon
COOLPIX B500



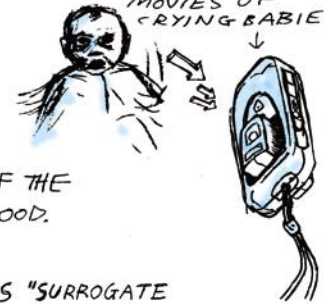
WHY DO THEY ALWAYS
HAVE THOSE DEVICES
ON THEIR FACES?



THE EARLIEST PHOTOGRAPHS OF BOTH MY PARENTS, BY COINCIDENCE, WERE TAKEN AT AGE THREE. THEN THE YEARS EVAPORATE: IN MY MOTHER'S NEXT PHOTO SHE IS TWELVE, IN MY FATHER'S HE IS SIXTEEN. MY GENERATION IS MORE THOROUGHLY, IF STILL ERRATICALLY, DOCUMENTED: ON ONE ALBUM PAGE I AM A GLASSY-EYED, BLACK-AND-WHITE NEWBORN, ON THE NEXT A SMILING KODACHROME ONE-YEAR-OLD. BUT TODAY'S BABIES ARE TRACKED AS OBSESSIVELY AS A SCIENCE EXPERIMENT. IN THREE MONTHS I HAVE SNAPPED MORE PHOTOS OF THE TWINS THAN WERE TAKEN OF MY ENTIRE CHILDHOOD.



TAKES 30-SECOND
MOVIES OF
CRYING BABIES



A PHOTOGRAPH, ACCORDING TO SONTAG, SUPPLIES "SURROGATE POSSESSION OF A CHERISHED PERSON OR THING"; AND SO WE PACKAGE UP THE BOYS FOR THEIR GRANDPARENTS, WHO LIVE THOUSANDS OF MILES AWAY IN EITHER DIRECTION. THEY WILL NEVER SEE THE BABIES WE SEND PHOTOS OF: BY THE TIME THEY VISIT, OR ARE VISITED, THOSE BABIES WILL NOT EXIST, REPLACED WITH INCREASINGLY LARGER, ROUNDER, MORE SOPHISTICATED REPLICAS.



THE DAY I DISCOVERED THEIR FIRST PIECE OF OUTGROWN CLOTHING—A SACK-LIKE NIGHTGOWN THAT ONCE HAD ENCLOSED BEN PERFECTLY—I CRIED.



MY SUMMER BABIES ARE NO LONGER SCRAWNY, DROOPY-SKINNED NEWBORNS WITH THREE MOODS (FURIOUS, SATIATED, AND ASLEEP). NOW THEY ARE JOWLY AND JOLLY, AND TAKING PICTURES OF THEM REQUIRES TWO PEOPLE: ONE TO COAX A CUTE EXPRESSION, THE OTHER TO PRESS THE SHUTTER. ALEX WAS THE FIRST TO SMILE. BUT BEN'S SMILE WAS THE FIRST TO BE PHOTOGRAPHED.

