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Seeing double: a TwinFest party at the UW

At the University of Washington this weekend, more than 120 pairs of twins are meeting in TwinFest. It's a world only they understand.

By Erik Lacitis

Seattle Times staff reporter



Twins often say only other twins can fully comprehend their world.

That viral video of identical twin baby boys talking in their own babbling language to each other, the one from 2011 that's gotten 16 million views?

The same thing happened to Mandi Stockton and Brandi Stockton, both, of course, 23, of Shoreline. They had their own twins language, too.

"We were in speech therapy for six years," says Mandi, or maybe it was Brandi.

Going into elementary school, "We couldn't speak English very well. Even now, if I'm tired, or get excited, I can't say the 'r' or 's' very well."

Saturday afternoon, it was time for 240 twins (120 pairs) such as these two young women to revel in their twinness at the University of Washington student-union building.

They were attending the first annual TwinFest, held by the school's [Twin Registry](#), a research group that now has more than 8,600 twin pairs signed up from this state.

The gathering was certainly a sight for the handful of students hanging out at the HUB on a sunny afternoon. There were a pair of young women arriving in matching jean miniskirts, cowboy straw hats, boots and sunglasses. Even the same red purses.

"Wow," a male student sighed.

There were the two balding guys, equally skinny, wearing matching orange short-sleeve shirts, and the same kind of prescription glasses.

There were a pair of middle-aged women, although only one was wearing prescription glasses. They explained the other refused to wear bifocals.

These days, more and more twins are being born, in large part because of fertility drugs and technology to assist reproduction.

The rate of twin births increased 76 percent from 1980 to 2009, according to the National Center for Health Statistics. Now, about 1 in 30 babies born in the U. S. is a twin.

For certain studies, twins, both fraternal and identical, make excellent subjects. Plus identical twins share 100 percent of their genes.

For a study on exercise in adults, researchers know that growing up, the twins live in the same home, eat the same food. Researchers can then study what happens when they go their separate ways as adults.

Not surprisingly, adult twins who walk a lot are in better shape than those who don't.

At the UW's Twin Registry, since it was started in 1999, studies involving twins have included research about pain sensitivity, sleep duration and body mass, migraine headaches and post-traumatic stress disorder.

In the hopes of raising more interest, Twins Registry leaders decided to hold Saturday's event.

The twins were obviously happy to be around each other.

Mandi Stockton is a nurse, and when going to nursing school she went to Guatemala on a mission trip.

She was gone two weeks, the longest the twins had ever been separated.

"We talked every night," says Brandi, a physical therapist.

They grew up in the Yakima area and then moved to this area. Of course, they share an apartment.

"It's not the easiest thing to explain to friends. We like spending time together," says Brandi.

Boyfriends "sometimes have trouble understanding" that even on a dinner date, one twin will check in with the other.

Especially in their younger years — and that means into their 20s — twins often do not like being separated.

Dana Oliver, 47, a Woodinville operations manager, remembers how in the mid-1990s, her twin sister, Amy D'Andrea, a Lakewood middle-school math teacher, went on a six-month overseas bicycling trip with her future husband.

"I had never been without her for that long. I was so afraid something would happen to her," says Oliver. "My husband at the time was very upset when I wrote a card to her that said she was the most important person in the world to me."

Twins apparently start socializing in the womb.

One piece of research says 3-D videos show twin fetuses reaching out to each other, and even "stroking their co-twin."

Gwen Bernacki, of Kirkland, mother of identical five-month-old twins, Leo and Max, tells how she and her husband, Mashiur Rahman, can watch their boys suck each other's thumbs.

"They smile, they laugh when looking at each other," she says. "If you take one from the room, the

other one gets fussy.”

Not that twins don't fight with each other.

“We were very competitive for friends, for boyfriends,” says Oliver. “I remember we both wanted to have this one friend as the best friend for only us. We fought, we argued.”

But the twins always returned to each other.

“I remember when we'd visit our grandparents for two weeks. We'd play with each other the whole time. It was awesome,” says Oliver. “What better childhood than growing up with your best friend?”

Even when separated by long distances, twins manage to keep that connection.

Arden White, 53, a Microsoft program manager, lives in Snohomish. His brother, Alan, an advertising guy, lives in Royal Oak, Mich.

“We talk on the phone at least once a week, exchange emails multiple times a week,” says Arden.

They visit each other twice a year.

What Arden likes about conversing with his twin is what other twins also say: There doesn't need to be much explanation about this or that. Stuff is shortcut.

“We know how each other thinks. There's less diplomacy. We don't spend more time worrying about feelings or whatever. That stuff goes by the wayside. Like if we're having a conversation on the phone, and he has to go, the conversation just ends right there.”

But what happens is that the next time they begin conversing, says Arden, “it just picks up.”

The way Alan explains it, “Say you could split yourself in two. The first person would totally understand the second person. They're the same.”

But to those hearing some of the experiences about twinhood, it can be a bit unnerving.

Sorina Hoefgen, 31, of Tacoma, has identical twin daughters, Cloey and Cura, who are 12.

“I had to tattoo their names on my arms because I was so exhausted from nursing. If my mom was helping me, we had make sure which twin nursed on which side,” she says.

Each baby would only nurse on a particular side.

The mom says her daughters do fight “like cats and dogs,” but always return to each other.

“They bathe together, sleep together, even though they have separate beds,” says Hoefgen. “In school, their test scores were going down when they were not in the same classroom. They're fine, as long as they can see each other.”

Says Cura about her sister, “She's my best friend in the world.”

Says Cloey, who clings to her sister more, “If I'm away from her for like 10 minutes, I freak out.”

Hoefgren says she's happy to hear the twins talk about going to separate colleges.

“As long as they can talk to each other, I'm sure they'll be fine,” she says, the twins having outgrown their need to be so close to each other.

“I hope so,” says the mom.

Erik Lacitis: 206-464-2237 or elacitis@seattletimes.com Twitter @ErikLacitis



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