

Just before my twelfth birthday, Mother confided in my sister Martha and me that we were soon to have a baby brother or sister. As I remember the occasion, that was exactly what she promised us, cautioning us in almost the same breath that the news should not be a topic of conversation outside our immediate family.

The summer was an exceptionally hot one in Dallas, and Mother found that it difficult to accomplish her usual work of caring for our family of five. Five was a number that I had decided was a magic number, ideal for our family, mainly because there were five sticks of gum in a package. I reluctantly calculated that if we switched to Dentyne gum, we could still have enough pieces for each member of our enlarged family, but my eight-year-old brother would have to change his taste in chewing gum, for he disliked the cinnamon taste. Meantime, Mother enlisted Martha and me in more chores about the house than we had been accustomed to. I had an earned reputation of expertly side-stepping most household chores, but I don't remember that I was anything but agreeable about the extra work. I still did not like to dust the living room furniture which had more dust-catching ledges and crevices than I thought necessary. It was about then that I resolved to have no furniture made of wood in my home when I had the privilege of choosing it.

For my birthday in July, I had a sleep-out in our back yard for my Sunday School class and our teacher whom I adored. She was young enough in age and spirit to think that sleeping outside on army cots, along with ten twelve-year-olds, was a fun way to spend the night. I particularly enjoyed our cooking breakfast on the gas hot plate in the garage. The eggs may not have been perfectly cooked but, with the bacon and bread toasted in a judicious amount of the bacon fat, we had a great time. The only down side of the whole party came when Miss Edwards shared with me her thought that I must be excited about the new baby. On the contrary, I was totally embarrassed by her breach of etiquette in pregnancy talk as I perceived it at the time. Much as I had admired her, after that I felt that she was seriously lacking in social know-how. And, anyway, how had she heard about the new baby? I certainly hadn't told her, or anybody else, and there was not yet any significant change in Mother's appearance, or I would have noticed.

The doctor put Mother on what now appears to be a bizarre diet: brewer's yeast, fresh tomatoes, and lettuce. There may have been other elements in the diet, but those were the primary ones and Mother liked it very much; however, the drastic diet did little to help Mother's hot weather discomfort. Time did pass, however, and once I was back in school in the fall, I was not as totally absorbed in the day-to-day progress of Mother's pregnancy. I did become aware that Mother had begun wearing some strange new clothes. Well designed maternity clothes were a concept of the future. I heard Mother say later that she simply wore larger and larger sized dresses. And they did get quite large although neither Mother nor her doctor noticed anything strange about her weight and girth gains.

In late October, my maternal grandmother, whom we called Mamie, came to stay with us, not an unusual occurrence, for she often visited us for weeks at a time. I realize now that she had a different purpose this time. She was a great help to Mother in managing the house and its three children ranging from eight to twelve. Then, early in the morning on the sixth of November, the day Franklin Delano Roosevelt was first elected president, Mamie and Daddy woke us with the house-rattling news that we had a new sister *and* a new brother who had been born that morning weighing just over five pounds each. The main topic of discussion among Mother's and Daddy's adult kin became "Which one was responsible for the twins?" Twins had been a total surprise to Mother and Daddy, as well as to the doctor. After vigorous denial all around, people began recalling the twins in both families, although none in the current generation.

The main topic of conversation at home, however, was what to name the babies. Whatever names had been chosen before apparently were no longer considered suitable. At least Martha, Brother, and I insisted that the babies should have "twin" names. When the twins were two weeks old, we finally reached consensus about names, satisfying parental desire for family-based names and the younger generation's desire for "matching" names. An unadorned "Ruth," for Daddy's favorite niece, was bestowed upon the little girl. "Thomas Roland," honoring both Mother's father and Daddy's brother became the boy's name, with the understanding that he was to be called "Roland." In telling a friend about the babies, Daddy inadvertently referred to them as "Roth and Ruland," to our great delight.

I was ecstatic about the babies and found the month's wait for Mother's and the twins' homecoming endless. Hospitals did not allow children to visit their mother or their new siblings, so Martha, Brother, and I could only speculate about them. The family spent the time learning a little bit more about the phenomena of twins, although neither Mother nor Daddy would ever claim responsibility for them. They were obviously fraternal twins and, later, proved to look less like brother and sister than the rest of us did.



But they were well worth waiting for. At a month old, they no longer had a newly born look. They had distinct personalities of their own, and the joy of my being allowed to hold them singly or, even once with careful supervision, together was a privilege I did not tire of. I, the one who always tried to shirk household chores, was always eager to fetch diapers and fresh clothes or even to fold the endless diapers twins generate. As they grew older, I found them endlessly fascinating. Neither was my favorite; I found each perfect in his or her special way. As a matter of fact, I think I may have fantasized about their being *my* babies - both of them. Years later after I had my own first baby, I remember being greatly relieved that I had only one, not the twins I had earlier hoped for.

As Ruth and Roland grew, they continued to fascinate me. Although my imagined compromise with Dentyne chewing gum to supply the whole family was foiled, I exulted in the fact that I still had evenly distributed siblings, two brothers, two sisters. Today as November 6th approaches each year, I tend to recall some of their young doings, even when they conspired to cover my newly painted bedroom with *all* of my highly prized new lipstick. Or when they concealed themselves behind the sofa to spy on my dates. I can remember their starting to school, where they found themselves in a first-grade class with six other sets of twins. 1932 must have been a good year for twins. Not until they were sixteen years old did they learn that the United States could elect a president other than FDR. It's hard for me to remember that the vast gulf of twelve years between our ages that separated us when they were little has been reduced to a mere crack now that they are in their sixties. Although I see them often, I sometimes forget that they aren't forever school children.

Meantime, the family twin syndrome has continued. Paul's mother had an identical twin, giving me the hope that our first child might be twins (I, of course, learned better!) But Paul's brother Bill had twins, Billy and Evelyn, during the war (WWII, of course), and during the Korean conflict my brother Willett had identical twins, Terry and Jerry. Brother's twins were born when his first-born, Willett III, was just fourteen months old, so Peggy and Willett could write a book about their experiences with the equivalent of triplets. Later Martha's daughter Susan had twins, fraternal twins, Michael and Marshall. I guess my judgment today is that it's wonderful for mothers, brothers, and nieces to have twins that I can visit, admire, and get acquainted with, but that the mothers, brothers, and nieces are welcome to the work and worry about their twins while I go, carefree, home.