TWO

A multigenre paper on identical twins

by Brittany McNary

For my Twinner,
Bethany Nadine

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Top: Bethany and I got our red hair from Dad and our easy smiles from Mom, although the smiles didn’t make it into this picture. Here, the only way I can distinguish the two of us is by Bethany’s fuller face. Clearly, we were born identical twins.

Left: Bethany and I pose with our three older brothers in front of the fireplace in the only house we’ve called home.
And Then There Were Two

A son
A second son
A third son
Now they’re nine, six, and four

Please
Let’s just try one more time
He concedes,
But even if it’s a boy, we’re done.

Fourth pregnancy.
Two girls.
Two daughters.

Identical twins.

Red Hair Identity

Say it. Say it twice: Identical. Identical. Nine letters that almost spell identity but switch at the last second. As a freshman in college, Bethany dyed her red hair dark brown. The red-headed McNary twins no longer lived together, no longer looked alike, no longer shared their distinctive hair color. Three weeks later though, all of the brown dye had washed itself out. Apparently red hair won’t stand to be changed. Like it or not, we were identical again.

Last week, she arrived at the bridal shower before me – my bridal shower thrown by my future in-laws. She walked in the door and was greeted by warm hugs and loud Congratulations. Even my fiancé’s mother had to steal a look at her left hand to see if she was me or not. It wasn’t just that we were the only red heads invited to the bridal shower. It’s our red hair, freckles, height and weight, even our mannerisms. This time, she handled the mix-up in stride with a smile and said, “I’m the twin!” I’m the twin. A set of nine letters, claiming our identity, claiming our commonality, claiming another set of nine letters: we are identical.

Dear Britt, I kept thinking of you all during my quiet time and didn’t know why until I realized the sweatshirt I had thrown on as I rolled out of bed was the one on which I had sprayed your perfume. So I said an extra prayer for you.

Love, Beth
A Scientific Look at Twinning

A momma normally releases one egg that may or may not become fertilized. When she releases two eggs that both become fertilized at the same time, the result is fraternal twins. Fraternal twins have an extremely small chance of having the same chromosomal profile, so they are just like “normal” siblings who happen to be the same age.

In comparison, identical twins are born when a single egg is fertilized and splits into two separate embryos. Identical twins are much more rare than fraternal twins. Male-female fraternal twins are the most common, followed by female-female and male-male fraternal twin. Female-female and male-male identical twins are the most rare. Mommas only have a 0.3% chance of giving birth to identical twins.

Even though identical twins share the same DNA or genotype, they usually share different phenotypes. Phenotypes are the set of observable characteristics that result from interaction with the environment. For example, identical twins usually do not share the same fingerprints. In fact, this is a common misconception. Fingerprints are, in fact, an example of a phenotype. Fingerprints are impressions made on the surface of a finger, so the environment adds to those impressions – it is not solely based on genetics.

Nature, then, seems to be in contrast to nurture from even the beginning of twins’ lives. The medical world has only furthered this study by studying twins that have been separated at birth. Behavior genetics studies love to explore which traits are influenced by genetics and which are simply developed over time.

Dear Brittany, The only bad thing about spending lots of time together is the time that comes afterward. I miss you something awful today.

Love, Beth

Dear Bethany, Your text message yesterday afternoon made me cry because I appreciated it so much and Jen was right there and asked if I missed you and all I could do was nod my head.

Love, Britt

Dear Britt, I watched “Valentine’s Day” tonight. One of the characters had a book by Rumi and he kept quoting from it. I started smiling really big, and then I wished that you were sitting beside me because I knew you would be smiling really big, too.

Love, Bethany
**Mirror Dream**

I am running through the halls of my high school after everyone has left. Even the janitors are gone for the night. I run up the stairs and around the corners, past the classrooms, into the common area and through the gym before back around through the school. Over and over. Everywhere I look there are mirrors. I am running from the mirrors that keep appearing on the walls and windows beside me as I run farther and farther. Sometimes I steal glances at the mirrors but I cannot see my reflection. I have no reflection. I run to the science lab where my father has appeared, lecturing an empty classroom on the anatomy of a cat. When I appear, breathless in his doorway, he holds up a small, handheld, galvanized mirror to my face. I see nothing but the walls that exist behind me. He disappears but the mirror keeps floating in the air, and it chases me through the hallways into the band room before falling into a thousand shards. My mom hands me a pair of drumsticks, and I begin playing an elaborate cadence on the snare drum. Suddenly the drumhead becomes a mirror but my face doesn't appear. The drumsticks explode against the mirror and cut splinters into my cheekbones and chin. Sunlight pours in through the windows and students filter into the school, filling the hallways and seats and bathroom stalls, each of them holding mirrors turned to face me. I am sprinting now, trying to get a look at myself in one of the mirrors so I can put a Band-Aid on my bleeding face, but in all of their mirrors, I see nothing.

Competition can't let go of the past. She doesn't want to look at herself in mirrors but they seem to follow her everywhere. She is picky about details. Competition is also a worrier. She wears worry like a tight necklace hiding underneath her designer sweater. When Competition was little, she asked her twin sister to draw a picture, drew one herself, and then presented them to their mother as if she drew both. Then she asked, "Which one do you like better?" Competition hates Losing but isn't satisfied with Winning either.
Dear Bethany, Here in Texas, with its big sky and sand dunes and Gulf waves; with my friends and our tents and our charcoal grill... you are still missed.

Love, Brittany

Litany for Bethany
(inspired by Billy Collins)

You are the rocking chair, the rolling pin and the peach pie. You are a windmill in Ohio, and lilac bushes lining the front yard. You are an African sunset, and brush fire in the forest.

However, you are not a cold bottle of beer, a patient kiss, or blond hair. And you are certainly not the drive-through window.

It is possible that you are the campfire song, maybe even an old library card, but you are not even close to being tennis shoes hitting the pavement.

And a quick look in the mirror will show that you are not the eight-inch crappie, nor the e-mail correspondence.

It might interest you to know, speaking of the plentiful imagery of the world, that I am the piano in the cornfield.

I also happen to be the blue Mason jar, the dog-eared poem, and the rain jacket with a hood.

I am also the lantern lit at night, and the coffee with the creamer. But don’t worry; I’m not the rocking chair. You are still the silver hair in the rocking chair. You will always be the silver hair in the rocking chair, not to mention the rolling pin and somehow – the peach pie.
College Decisions

Like all seniors headed to college, we were told to go on visit after visit after visit. This was a decision that was supposed to culminate eighteen years of life and experience. Guidance counselors told us, *Pick the one that feels right to you.*

I felt like Goldilocks tiptoeing around the three bears’ home. First I drove to University of Dayton and Wright State with a friend. Too ritzy, and too much concrete. Next, I visited Mt. Vernon, the forty-five-minutes-away, small private Nazarene option. Too much like my hometown. I stayed overnight with an older friend at Indiana Wesleyan, similar to Mt. Vernon but more for Christians wanting a bubble. Then I trekked down to Miami, the school my golden-boy older brother went to. I dragged my parents along, and Bethany came too.

It felt like home.

On the car ride home, Bethany announced to my parents and me that she wanted to go to Mt. Vernon. Then she not-so-politely told me that I was *not* allowed to go there, that it was *her* school, and I could pick somewhere else. And even though I loved Miami, all of a sudden I found myself wanting the forbidden. Who was she to declare Mt. Vernon forbidden anyway?

Dear Bethany, Remember when I was so mad and so hurt that you wouldn’t let me go to school with you? Look at us now, huh? That distance has been so good for us. You, dear sister, have become my best friend.

Love, Brittany
I Believe She is Irreplaceable *

Zack will become my husband this summer. As intimate as that relationship is, though, there is still one role that he will never be able to fulfill: that of my identical twin sister.

He wasn’t there during summer bike rides with Dad. He didn’t craft plans to catch Santa Claus. He didn’t roadtrip to Florida with Granny and collect a quarter each time she cursed. He never held Grandpa’s rough, weathered, strong mechanic hands. He didn’t play in the sprinkler with me while Grandma frowned, and he never was a part of skipping high school study hall to drink lattes at the coffee shop.

I can share these memories only with my sister. Not only does she have my DNA, she has my past.

Growing up we became numb to the extensive mix-ups between the two of us. Brittany-and-Bethany. In our house we were grouped as “The Girls.” Since birth, Mom called us “two peas in a pod.” We always went together. We came in one package, and she was my other half.

This last Christmas was my final one sharing a last name with her. We lay in bed together before falling asleep. She began crying and said, “Zack feels like my brother already, but this is hard for me.” She told me that I was getting a husband out of this season, but that she was losing a sister. She told me I couldn’t completely understand how she was feeling.

But I do know what she means. She won’t be the emergency contact in my phone anymore. I will have relationships with sisters-in-law that she won’t be a part of. And I’m completely aware that no longer will the two of us share a bed when we both visit our parents’ home on Amoy West Road. In one day, on my wedding, she won’t be my other half anymore.

Bethany and I made a promise to each other in grade school that we would never like anyone more than we liked each other. I find myself now struggling with this promise. How do I honor her and honor Zack at the same time? It must be done.

Soon Zack will join a residency program, and by that time we’ll have been married a year. We were talking about potential programs the other day; which state we could end up in. *Pittsburg would be four hours from your sister,* I heard Zack consider without my prompting. He knows about our kinship; he knows the strength of our bond. He knows my heart needs to be near hers in some capacity.

Yes, Zack is becoming my home. I’ll wake up beside him and come back to him every evening, and I’ll be devoted – passionately – to him; but still, that relationship will forever be different than the one with Bethany. There is only one person with whom I can be completely honest without worrying about offending, only one person who “gets” me without explanation – and that is my twin sister – and she is irreplaceable.
A journal between
Two faces identical
Thoughts wholly diverse *

A Constant Torture *

In kindergarten
Aunt: Bethany
Twin: I’m Brittany.

In ninth grade:
Teacher: Welcome, Brittany!
Twin: It’s Bethany!
Teacher: Oh, sorry.
Twin: Just kidding. It’s Brittany!

In college visiting home:
Mom: I made you eggs!
Twin: I hate eggs.
Mom: I thought they were your favorite!
Twin: Wrong twin.

Red Nail Identity

When we were born, my parents’ question was finally answered: their second twin (me) was a girl. But then they were faced with a new question: How to tell their two identical babies apart. My grandma painted the big toenail on my right foot bright red. From that point on, I became the twin marked with a flashy vibrant color, and our differences were savored. That love for our differences carried on throughout adolescence. Bethany became the twin who had one steady friend throughout school; I was voted Most Outgoing for senior superlatives. She used spare moments to read delicious words on the porch swing while I trained to run in the state track meet.

Then four years ago, Bethany and I went separate ways to different colleges. In our new worlds where so many people were suddenly so different from us, we grew to savor not our distinctions anymore, but our similarities. Oddly, as we savored the similarities, they increased. I began writing poetry in my creative writing classes; Bethany began a blog as a haven from her nursing clinicals. I gave up competitive running, but we ran side-by-side in a community half-marathon.

I am no longer the twin with a one red toenail. I am now the twin who embraces my sister’s similarity.
Dear Britt, Look at both of us being all professional today- me at clinicals and you doing your field experience. Too bad you get to read Jane Eyre with romancing teenage girls and I'm doing nothing but documentation and warming food. Good thing I love old people! Miss you, twin.

Love, Bethany

The Truth About Why I Love the Number Two
(inspired by Mekeel McBride)

1. Of every number that extends to infinity this is the most reliable: one plus one will always equal two. It is the most basic prime number, and has no other common factor but one.

2. I guess I forgot to mention how a second person can keep the bed warmer on winter nights, and scare away the darkness from your mind.

3. If the number two were able to turn into a person, I'm almost certain it would be someone who feels familiar, like a sister. It would sing along to old country music with you on road trips, buy you a coffee instead of a beer on Friday nights, and hand you an embroidered handkerchief when someone makes you feel small.

4. The number two shows up everywhere, because some things are just better in pairs: Smartwool socks, peanut butter and jelly, salt and pepper, and sisters.

5. If I could have my wish, everyone would experience two. Everyone would know what it's like to have a common factor. Everyone would know that they are not alone in this.
Identities *

I am still the piano in the open cornfield at dusk
You are still the exotic beach near the Australian ocean
But we will both always be the freckled knees and elbows

I am still the coffeeshop beside the train tracks
You are still tears at the sight of an Ohio windmill
But we will both always be the ginger in the cupboard

I am Brittany Nichole, named for the sound of it
And you are Bethany Nadine, named for the heritage
But we will both always be the McNary twins

Our identities are certainly not identical
(You are the only peach pie in this pair)
But being identical is part of our identities

Dear Beth, You are my favorite childhood memory.
Love, Brittany
* Note Page

1. **Mirror Dream**, page 4 – I wanted to create a dream scene that helped explain my relationship with Bethany, so I described some beginning thoughts to Caroline Millard. This scene with the mirrors is inspired by that conversation. In the dream, I am chased by mirrors but cannot see my reflection. This represents that Bethany looks so much like me, but I could never be able to find my identity in her. I am running throughout the halls of my high school because that’s the first time that I really remember struggling to figure out who I was. In the dream, I pursue education and my dad, but I can’t see myself in the mirror he holds up. Then I pursue music and my mom, but I can’t see myself in that mirror either. By the end of the dream, I’m bleeding and still searching.

2. **I Believe She is Irreplaceable**, page 7 – This is part of my “This I Believe” essay written earlier in the semester for EDT 180. I took out the parts that focused on Zack, and changed the emphasis to be more on Bethany and our relationship as sisters.

3. **Haiku**, page 8 – This is a haiku that describes the journals Bethany and I have sent back and forth to each other through our years in college. In these journals we simply write letters to each other. Throughout this multigenre paper you will read several actual excerpts from those letters, identified by the handwritten font.

4. **A Constant Torture**, page 8 – Inspired my real life, of course! These conversations really happened, and serve to show different stages of my acceptance of being a twin. I would get so aggravated when people would mix us up – or worse, resort to “Hey, Twin” – but then in middle school, it became fun to trick the teachers.

Now I still get annoyed when even my own mother mixes us up, although I like to think I’m much more forgiving now.

5. **Identities**, page 10 – I continued and re-wrote some thoughts from **Litany**, page 5. My point with this piece was to show with the first two lines of each stanza that we are separate people with our own stories and experiences. The third line points the reader back to the idea that being an identical twin is still part of our shared identity. I also really like the second-to-last line, “You are still the peach pie in this pair” because it sounds like I’m making a play on the word “pair” and “pear.” ☺

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**Works Cited**


