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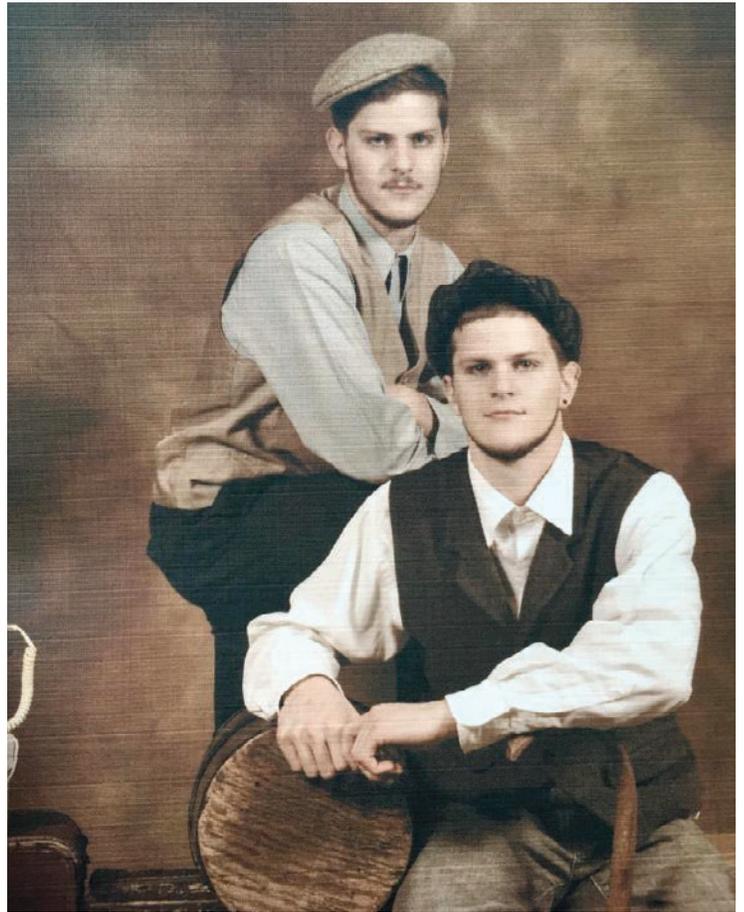
May/June 2016



Even If We BEG

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by Bari Diane Adelman



"Mom, please don't let us go to the same college—even if we beg!"

So implored my 18-year-old identical twin sons, Kevin and Corey, when college was just a glimmer in their identical sparkling blue eyes. They're 24 now, and college is well behind us.

Their request caught me off guard, as this was the first time the boys had ever spoken of the difficulty of navigating the yin-yang, push-pull of their relationship. They had never before acknowledged how hard it was to reconcile their conflicting desires to be together — yet apart. Close — but not too close.

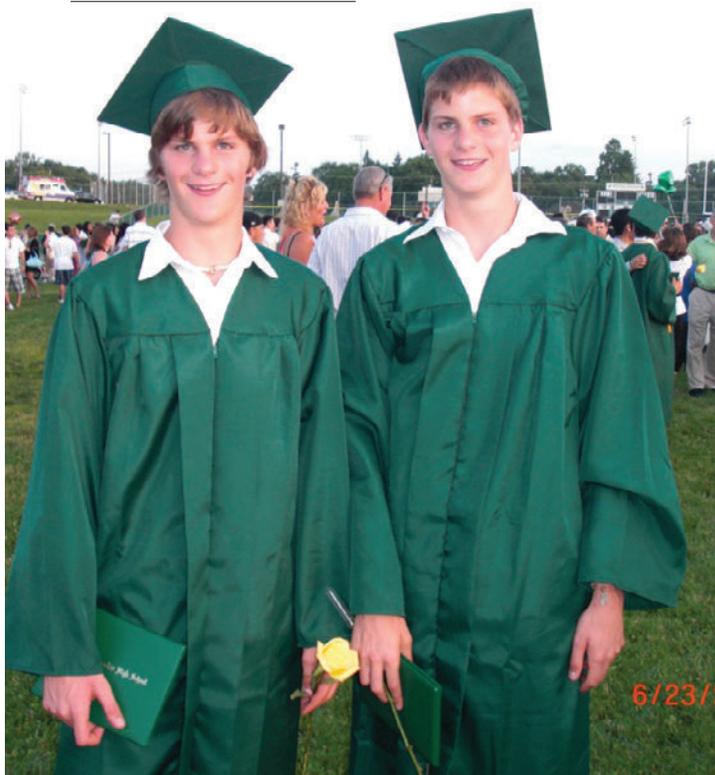
Now, as college loomed, they were asking their loving mom to be their referee. Clearly, they didn't think attending the same school was the best idea, but somehow feared that when push came to shove, they might not be able to resist the urge.

I found myself getting nervous as the time grew closer. Would I have the guts to intervene, or the heart to separate them?

I had long been astounded by the closeness of their bond. From early infancy on I had watched them, wondering what was it like to grow up looking into the face of a brother who looked exactly like your own reflection in the mirror. I'd pondered what it might feel like to have a twin with the same genetic makeup you did.

I read a book by an identical twin who describes the daunting challenge twins face in having to hammer out differentiated and distinct senses of selves—despite their extreme intimacy.

As the mom of identical twins, I can assure you the extremeness of this intimacy is not exaggerated. I have marveled at it often, and caught glimpses of the psychological work involved in working through its intricacies.





cies. Watching my sons navigate their closeness, while attempting to carve out their own unique identities, has been endlessly fascinating.

But passive observation has been just half the story. The other half has featured me in the starring role of a mom actively attempting to parent her twins into two strong independent human beings. I was fiercely determined to do it well, afraid that if I didn't, the boys might become too attached at the hip, afraid to separate as they grew up.

Decisions needed to be made from an early age. When asked if I wanted to put them in the same nursery class or separate them, I decided to follow the prevailing wisdom of the time, which said it was best to keep them together in nursery school and separate them in kindergarten.

When the first day of kindergarten arrived, I was a wreck. How would the boys handle their big separation? In fact, they handled it like champs and managed being apart for six hours a day without a glitch. I breathed what would be the first, of many, sighs of relief.

Perhaps this journey would not be as difficult as I had anticipated. I turned my worry to academic performance. How would they handle their emotions if one or the other did better in school? Once again, my anxiety was for naught. Their grades were

almost identical — on both homework and standardized tests.

I graduated to fretting about their social lives. How terrible it would be if one were more popular than the other. They stole my thunder again. Highly sociable, they had no problem finding friends. Interestingly, they often shared friendships, as they naturally gravitated toward the same kids.

As the years passed, the desire to differentiate themselves from each other grew more intense. Although their interests were eerily similar, they managed to find ways to strike out on their own. While neither liked traditional sports, they took a liking to more 'extreme sports' — and, rather creatively, Kevin became a skateboarder, while Corey took up roller-blading.

When the adolescent need to assert independence through appearance hit, Kevin grew his hair long and Corey pierced his ear. (I survived). Both boys discovered a love of music, so Kevin took up guitar and Corey mastered the drums.

Finally, it was time to apply to college, and the big decision loomed large. But here, where the story might have taken a dramatic turn, it veers off in a surprising direction.

Kevin and Corey never begged to go to the same school. Somehow, when the time to choose schools arrived, both boys seemed to know from a place deep in their hearts, that it was time to forge their own

ways. Although they applied to many of the same schools, they ended up choosing universities that were one hour apart from each other. They wanted to be able to visit each other easily, and often.

Life went on and both boys attended college, even studying abroad in different countries. Separation seemed to come a bit more easily. Following graduation, Corey made the biggest leap yet, deciding to move cross-country for a unique job opportunity.

Fast-forward one year. Although Corey loved life in Wyoming, he felt strong pangs of separation. He called one day to say he was heading back East to join his brother in upstate New York. He moved next door to Kevin and the boys switched their career focus in unison. They are now training to be chefs! Their passion for food — and each other — has taken them in a direction neither they, nor I, could have foreseen.

Their grand plan? To open a restaurant together someday. Dual chefs — they've already trademarked a name, and spend their free time reading cookbooks, buying kitchen tools, and testing new recipes out on their friends.

For me, it's been a long, twisted road to learning that this was Kevin and Corey's journey all along. That my actions were never as powerful as their own, and that no one knew this better than they did.

Now that I've watched my boys work their way in and out of each other's lives over many years, I've come to understand that the challenge of negotiating their twinness was theirs all along. When I look back at the tremendous energy I put into trying to get it right, I realize I took on an unnecessary burden.

I've come to believe the greatest gift we can give our children is to take a step back and watch them forge their own paths into adulthood. Our most important responsibility may just be to give them the space and encouragement they need to grow into the adults they're meant to be—room to bloom, if you will. And then, of course, to stay out of their way. ♥