

KAREN'S STORY



2014 brought something we (as parents of twin girls) never thought we'd have to experience ... our girls attending different schools. They commenced high school (college) this year and they elected to go to separate schools. About 18 months earlier, when the girls were aged 10, Megan announced that she'd like to attend a specific (state/public) school which has more of an academic bent (with a high criteria to gain entry). Zoe's response was 'great - you can go there and I'll go to the local public school'. Hubby and I were floored as we'd deliberately bought into an area with a fabulous (zoned) public school and thought it pretty much a no-brainer that this would be where they both went. However, we'd always said that whatever was right for each of the girls would be what we would support - it was time to put that to the test!

Megan sat the tests to gain entry and we waited to see if she was accepted into the selective school. In the meantime both girls were enrolled in our local public school (as this was the plan for Zoe and the fallback for Megan). A few months later we found out, yes she had been accepted and would she be accepting the spot. Without a moment's hesitation Megan's answer was "Of course Mum" and that was it ... a new journey for all of us.

Common questions over the past year have been along the lines of "why did you separate them?" or "it must have been a difficult decision?" Our answer to that has always been about what is best for each of them and if, for any reason, it doesn't work out then we'll reassess and make changes then. Interestingly (but probably not surprising) is the number of times that we've heard "it's good that you've separated them so they can be individuals". I'm sure that anyone who is a parent of multiples will agree this is a very frustrating (and somewhat ignorant) comment, but generally made with the best of intentions. My standard response is along the lines of 'they've always been individuals but it does help others to recognise that'.

So how's it working for Megan and Zoe? Fabulously - they are both in environments which are right for them and thriving. We are fortunate that both our girls are capable academically, however Megan is more **motivated** to achieve academically (While Zoe's motivation is more balanced between the academic and the creative elements) - so to have them both in the same class/school could potentially have been quite daunting and I do wonder how teachers would have gotten on in attempting not to compare or place expectations on each of them. It's interesting to watch them at the end of a school day - like a lot of siblings they don't necessarily seem to offer support to one another, but if one is upset or struggling with something the other may offer an opinion or suggestion on an alternative approach.

A little background on the girls. Zoe and Megan are fraternal twins (only children) and have always had quite different personalities – neither necessarily dominant, just different. At age 4 (while at pre-school) we helped foster independence and helped others to see them as individuals by having them attend preschool together 2 days each week but on the 3rd day only one would attend (and the other had a day at home with me). This meant that each week one was home with me for a day (which I loved!) and the other would attend preschool.



During their first year at school, they were placed in the same class (at our request), however sat at separate tables. In the early years both at preschool and school they formed independent friends (but typically remained in the same larger group of friends) and if asked to pair up with someone for a task they would typically choose a friend rather than each other. From the 2nd year of school they have been in separate classes (but perhaps together for a couple of hours a week in ‘streamed’ classes for one or two subjects). Throughout primary school they had separate friends, however typically they fell within a common friendship group and from an early age they understood that they would have some common friends and others who will be friends with just one of them. I distinctly remember a discussion with Zoe aged 6 about best friends. She was listing her best friends and named about 3 of them. When I asked if her Megan was one of them her answer (delivered with a good dose of disdain) was “Mum, Megan’s not my best friend ... she’s my best twin!” I think this says it all really – in their eyes their twin is just a given and she may not be the one that they consciously choose to play with or hang out with, however they know they are always there – for playing, talking, fighting or just to hang out with.

As for us, the parents When the decision for separate schools was finalised I admitted to some other twin mums that if I’m really honest I felt a few pangs of ‘but you’re twins and won’t you lose some of that?’ which was really code for “but you’re my twins and I love people recognising that you’re twins – am I going to lose some of that!” I believe there’s an element of realism in both of these, however, like all children, their uniqueness is to be fostered and celebrated and, for them, the path of different schools is helping in this. As for their closeness as twins and do we see this changing as a result of different high schools? I don’t think so – I hope that the bonds of twinship and sisterhood transverse all areas of their lives and that by having a bit of space during the day that they continue to flourish individually, while being able to share their respective journeys and experiences. As we begin the teenage years it will be interesting to see how that transpires – entering the world of puberty, boys, peer pressure and the like I hope they make the most of having someone else going through the same things and can provide a source of comfort, balance and support to each other I guess we will find out in the years to come.