

## Dave and John

by MaryPat Campbell

I was often mistaken for my brother who was born twenty minutes before me. The story goes that they didn't know I was coming until out I slithered, to the consternation of my mother in particular, and my father. Two older siblings were at home already, so my parents all of a sudden had four children under three in our family. We were both big babies at birth and remained so for some years afterwards. We had our own language that no one else could understand, we played and fought and slept together, hated being separated from each other.

My twin died last year and I miss him more than I can say. It's difficult to describe, it's like half of me is gone, the other half of me no longer exists. I can still be mistaken for John now, even after his death.

When we were young we relished being mistaken for each other and played tricks on everyone, especially the teachers at school. They say it's questionable whether any man quite relishes being mistaken for any other man, but I disagree.

We had a secret code to let each other know how we were getting on at school exams, for example. Maths especially at which we were both hopeless. The teachers made sure to separate us during exams, because they knew we had a special means of communication between us that they couldn't decipher. To drop a ruler on the ground beside the desk in the big concert hall now doubling up as an exam room, meant I'm doing OK, how are you getting on? To drop a protractor on the other hand, meant nothing is going right, I can't do it, help!

We were both keen footballers at school and in our final year John, or was it me - was elected School Team Captain. But because nobody could tell us apart we both became captain. Who's captain of the football team this year? Answer, the twins.

Later on we met girls and if I fancied John's girl more than mine, I sometimes went out with that girl and he went out with mine, and the girls were none the wiser. I married a woman very like my twin in temperament, he married a woman quite like me in personality.

As we matured I started to feel hemmed in, and wanted to do things on my own without John. I went abroad, learned a new language, got a job, made new friends. John felt lost without me. He said it was like I had died even though I phoned and wrote letters to him and he to me. I was considered the more independent of the two of us, since I upped and left and he stayed at home. It didn't always feel like that though.

I once mistook myself for him. Walking down Grafton Street I thought I saw my twin John coming towards me and waved to him, surprised to see him in this part of town. When I saw him waving back in exactly the same way in the very same instant I realised I was looking at a mirror image of myself in a shop window.

We grew up, married, and lived in different towns a couple of hours drive from each other. Occasionally when people John knew were in my town and happened to pass me on the street, they said 'Hi John!' I didn't know who they were and had to say, no I'm not John, I'm Dave. The amazement on their faces became almost a regular thing to see.

We both have four children, all roughly similar ages to each other. I have three boys and a girl, John has three girls and a boy. As we got older things changed. John had a stroke, while I remained healthy. Suddenly John looked and became much older than me, I felt guilty and relieved all at once. How had I escaped and he hadn't. What happened to him should have happened to me, and when it didn't I felt guilty and adrift. Now I'm on my own and continue to feel wrong somehow. My family surrounds me, my friends too. But without my twin brother John, I don't feel like Dave anymore.