**A Thing or Two About Twins**

*Become a twin for a time. OLLI member, Nanci Smaby, and Program Director, Johnna Norris, invited their identical twin sisters to a virtual members coffee hour. Surprises, secrets, and insights await.*

**A POLAND:**  OLLI member Nanci Smaby is an identical twin. In fact, she was even born in the twin cities. So, is seeing her twin sister Sue like looking in the mirror?

**N SMABY:** When I look at her I don’t see me. It just doesn’t even occur to me that we look alike and the only time it does seem that we look alike is when I see photographs.

**A POLAND:** OLLI Program Director, Johnna Norris is also an identical twin. Does she have a telepathic connection with her sister Georgie who lives in New York?

**J NORRIS:** If Georgie is in New York and if she cuts her finger,

(FAINT CHUCKLE)

**J NORRIS:** Am I feeling it in California? And I’m like no that is not the way it works.

(LAUGHTER)

**A POLAND:** Nanci and Johnna have recently joined their identical twin sister at our virtual OLLI coffee hour. Where they share the double-edged experience of twindom with a group of fascinated members. Stay tuned and become a twin for a time.

(SOUNDBITE OF MUSIC)

**A POLAND:** Welcome to *In Conversation: The Voices of OLLI.* OLLI, O-L-L-I is an acronym for the Osher Lifelong Learning Institute located at and networked with the Palm Desert Campus of California State University San Bernardino.

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**A POLAND:** Identical twins, they are not exact clones. So, what’s alike and what’s different? You may be surprised. Individuality is where their conversation began.

**N SMABY:** I think we are both extroverted and we both love to have lots of fun and we both have loads of energy but we have very different personalities. I have learned and spent a lot of time learning the enneagram which is a basic personality philosophy and what I have found through my studies is that identical twins never have the same exact personality. They always have a different personality. Which again people are surprised especially if we tend to look the same on the outside.

**J NORRIS:** The way our parents would tell us apart when we were little is that I had a birthmark, which was a red dot above my belly button. So, when people asked, is this Johnna or is this Georgie, I would totally embarrass my parents and I would lift up my dress and said “look it’s Johnna!”

(LAUGHTER)

**J NORRIS:** I just see Georgie I don't see myself. Our personalities are different in different ways but things like our voice, our intonation, our laugh, and things like that are very similar. Obviously, in appearance too, we look very similar. I think it was about a month ago when I posted a photo of me with my kids in a mask because we were in public and Georgie’s husband commented on it and said “Oh my gosh. You look exactly like Georgie in a mask.”

(LAUGHTER)

**J NORRIS:** Her daughter was like, “that’s really creepy mommy.”

(LAUGHTER CONTINUES)

**GEORGIE:** Yeah, that photo really threw Gavin for a loop because you know and I am sure you guys find this as well but my husband would never confuse Johnna for me. Yes, I don't look at Johnna and say “Oh my gosh you look so much like me.” She looks very different as far as I am concerned. That photo really blew his mind a little bit and he was like, “Wow that can really be you.” So yeah, we share a lot of— we have the same dark sense of humor and you know we can definitely set and tell each other inside jokes. Sometimes it will take as little as a singular word for Johnna and I to be crying laughing for the next hour. So, we share a lot that’s unsaid but personality-wise I think growing up I was far more introverted than Johnna was. Johnna was definitely a little more outgoing and I am still pretty much an introvert I was made for COVID, working at home works for me.

(FAINT LAUGHTER)

**GEORGIE:** But I know

(LIGHT LAUGH)

**GEORGIE:** Johnna is the opposite of me while I have enjoyed the ability to work at my home office during COVID. She has really been dying to get back to campus and to be in her work office. We had different reactions to this in a very weird world.

**F FURINO:** Can I ask as a former dynasty writer, did you guys in high school try to fool a boyfriend?

**GEORGIE:** Oh yeah.

(LAUGHTER)

**GEORGIE:** I think Johnna and I got busted really, really young trying to switch classes in first grade—

**N SMABY:** So, did we.

(FAINT LAUGH)

**GEORGIE:** And so, it was kind of like we’re not terrible liars. So, it was kind of a traumatizing experience. (LAUGHS)

**J NORRIS:** We were totally busted in first grade. I think it was only five minutes in. I think I asked Georgie to switch classes with me that day because I didn't want to do my math homework so I was like “Georgie, let’s do this” because I knew it was going to be a math lesson and we switch and our teachers knew right away and we got scolded terribly. There was one time though that we dated boys that lived, we call it ‘Up Island’ when you live in Long Island, going anywhere west it was Up-Island and so our boyfriends would have to take the trains to East Hampton and I think there was one time.I don’t know if it was me or you but one of us sent the other running towards the boyfriend to see if he could figure it out and it took him a minute and we were kind of offended.

**GEORGIE:** I think that was you and it was Chris Frye.

**J NORRIS:** Yeah, I remember that.

(LAUGHTER)

**J NORRIS:** I remember that. Nanci, did your parents know they were having twins?

**N SMABY:** The story is that she did know she was pregnant but not happy about it because she was almost forty and this was not just one great little bundle of joy. But when we were born, I was going to be Sally and Susan was going to be Susan. My brother said, “If I have two more girls in this family, I get to pick my sister's name” and so he picked Nanci.

(LAUGHTER)

**GEORGIE:** That’s so sweet. Being the fifth and sixth children you guys were probably thrilled to have each other because you had each other, right?

**N SMABY:** Right and we ended up as you guys. We got a lot of attention and I really think that it screwed up my sister that was two in a half year older because she had been the apple of my parent's eyes and all of a sudden, we came and she was kind of shoved behind us.

**SUSAN:** She was kicked out of our crib.

**J NORRIS:** Our parents actually had no idea they were having twins. I was born, we were actually born three months premature at Desert Regional, here in Palm Springs. I was born first—

**N SMABY:** Me too.

**J NORRIS:** And my dad said the entire room just erupted after I was more and they were like, “We need another setup, we need another setup!” and both of my parents were low-income and they were hippies, seventies, and they were like “What are you talking about?” and they said, “Another one is coming! Another one is coming!” After three minutes that I was born, Georgie made her entrance to the world to two very shocked and terrified parents.

(LAUGHTER)

**SUSAN:** Were you in incubators?

**J NORRIS:** We were helicoptered to Loma Linda and we lived in incubators in Loma Linda for the first three months of our lives.

**F FURINO:** Wow.

**J NORRIS:** We have pictures of us with quarters next to our heads.

**GEORGIE:** Yeah, we were really little.

**J NORRIS:** I mean my dad said we can each fit in the palm of his hand.

(INAUDIBLE SOUND)

**GEORGIE**: I mean at that time it was the late seventies. We were very fortunate that we survived, and now there are so many advancements in neonatal care but because of their decision to get us to Loma Linda Care we thrived and you couldn’t tell from either of us that we were so little. I think two pounds when I was born.

**J NORRIS:** Mhm. Yeah, I think Georgie was two pounds and I was two point five.

**GEORGIE:** Yeah, I think so.

**OLLI MEMBER:** The umbilical cord weighed two pounds.

**N SMABY:** Sue and I were six weeks early, and we were in incubators for six weeks. My mom said that what made us so easy was that we were so regimented by the time we got home that we just had a hospital schedule. So, she said that we were great little babies.

**J NORRIS:** Georgie actually had heart surgery.

(GASP)

**J NORRIS:** When we were born and she was absolutely furious and upset about it. What they did was that they brought me in instead of trying to hold this little baby down, they put me next to her, and apparently, she was like “Ok, I can do this.”

**GEORGIE:** What made a difference, they found that throughout our stay, if Johnna was moved too far away from me, my heart rate would plummet. So, they were like let's put these cuties together. Johnna could have gone home a lot sooner than she ended up going home because she was fairly healthy but they kept her around for my sake, so thanks, Johnna.

**OLLI MEMBER:** Well, I am an old friend of Susan and Nanci and I do remember them telling me they had twin talk as little kids, like their own language.

**J NORRIS:** Yeah,my mom would one-hundred percent say that even when we were very little babies she would watch us and we were carrying on conversations with each other.
(LAUGHTER)

**GEORGIE:** I wonder Nanci, do you guys remember, cause Johnna and I never had a developed language like when we were little kids, these are our words.

**N SMABY:** No all I know is that when we went to kindergarten the teacher said that if we cannot say our own names and people could understand them then we’d have to repeat kindergarten.

(LAUGHS)

**N SMABY:** We both were in speech therapy until fourth grade but what happened was that because we came from such a big family, our siblings could all understand us and they were able to pick up our language but I guess nobody else could.

**J NORRIS:** There are times when someone would say something and we just look at each other and I know what you're thinking and you know what I’m thinking with just one look.

**GEORGIE:** When I understand something that Johnna is feeling just by looking at her or just by a singular word where I can already follow where she is going. It feels like telepathy but I’m not sure that it is telepathy but it feels that way.

**OLLI MEMBER:**  Susan what were you going to say?

**SUSAN:** I was going to say that I don’t think, when we were both pregnant at the same time and you were due, and I was thinking would I feel something, will I know and nothing. I don't remember anything like “Oh, I think she’s going today.” When I am looking at you or when you're talking I can kind of feel what you’re talking but I don’t know if I ever felt telepathy.

**OLLI MEMBER:** I will say that you two will often call me within minutes of the other one hanging up.

(LAUGHTER)

**N SMABY:** The other weird thing is that when Sue comes out to Palm Springs for a month in the winter and we haven’t been together for months and she will walk out and we will have exactly the same color on. I mean that's not telepathy but people ask this a lot, that is one twin question I get a lot. How I would answer is that, I think we know each other so well, so for instance, if I know something is going on in her life I can feel her anxiety, I can feel whatever she is feeling but it is because I know her so well, I have a feeling I would know how she would react and vice versa.

**J NORRIS:** I agree with that one-hundred percent. People always ask that is the number one question. If Georgie is in New York and she cuts her finger,

(FAINT CHUCKLE)

**J NORRIS:** Am I feeling in it California? I am like no, that is not the way it works. It is more, I have such a regard for her and I know her so inside and out, that if she is hurt or going through something I am immediately going to have an emotional response to that because I feel like I know how she’s feeling.

**OLLI MEMBER:** I have a question but this is to all four of you. What is the best thing or things about being twins?

**N SMABY:**  I’d say that I just would always have my very best friend and that is the best thing. I am not saying that we have not gotten mad at each other over the years, that is not the case. We know that no matter what that we are there for each other. So, that for me is my very best feeling about being a twin.

**GEORGIE:** Yeah, I would agree. I mean it is just that feeling and knowing that you will always have somebody that you can count on and I am in a very solid healthy marriage but nobody, I can’t count on anybody in my life like I can ultimately count on Johnna. She is always going to be if I am ever in a real crisis, the first person that I am always going to reach out to.

**OLLI MEMBER:** Can I jump in here?

**OLLI MEMBER:** how do your husbands feel? Do they look and you and say you know but for you, I could have been in love with her?

(LAUGHTER)

**MEMBER:** or are you kidding, you guys are so different? I am curious about that.

(INAUDIBLE, OVERLAP OF VOICES)

**GEORGIE:** I think all of our husbands have a healthy desire to stay in happy marriages so probably that’s immediately not going to be their reactions.

(LAUGHTER)

**SUSAN:** well I dated Gary in ninth grade before Nanci.

(LOUD GASP)

**J NORRIS:** No way.

**GEORGIE:** Such a scandal.

**N SMABY:** Yup.

**SUSAN:** Yup. It’s true.

**J NORRIS:** He wasn’t tainted goods after that Nanci?

**N SMABY:** No.

**J NORRIS:** See anyone Georgie dated, it was like I don't care how cute he is, I can’t touch that. That’s—

(LAUGHTER)

**J NORRIS:** It was like a rule, I think it wasn’t just an unspoken rule, it was a rule like if someone we dated, that was it. They were done. That is so interesting, how was that relationship in ninth grade?

**SUSAN:** Oh sure, I would say a summer. I mean this is ninth grade, a long time ago.

**N SMABY:**  A long time ago. Things were different.

**SUSAN:** And things were very different. Gary for sure knew Nanci but they didn’t get together until when Nanci?

**N SMABY:** Senior year.

**SUSAN:** Senior. Yeah.

**N SMABY:** Susan’s first husband was Gary and so we both had married a Gary.

(LAUGHTER)

**OLLI MEMBER:** I am curious to know. So, I’m a social psychologist, how do you deal with death and death anxiety?

**SUSAN:** You know I don't have death anxiety but it is interesting. I have thought it will be so horrible when if in fact, Nanci died first and then everyone will be calling me Nanci. So, mine is not that

**N SMABY:** Oh, interesting.

**SUSAN:** Anything bad will happen, it’s just I know it will be very difficult for either one of us when one of us passes away.

**N SMABY:** I can’t think about it. it’s too scary.

**GEORGIE:** Yeah, if anything happened to Johnna and her husband you know, my husband and I are the ones who will swoop in to take care of Mary and Lucy. I remember when Johnna asked us to do that, thinking that if anything were to happen to Johnna, I would just feel this overwhelming urge to scoop Mary and Lucy up so they felt somebody that looks like their mom was around. It was only something I can think about for a few minutes before I was like

 (LOUD EXHALE)

**GEORGIE:** And thought that this needs to go away. I can’t handle that.

(FADING LAUGHTER)

**A POLAND:** on that somber note the conversation turned to a lighter topic. Those festivals that attracts thousands of identical twins.

**N SMABY:** I think for me that when I have seen that twin group in Ohio or wherever they get together every summer, Susan and I think about should we go. What turns me off about it is that they all look exactly identical. They are all wearing the same earrings, the same head stuff, the same clothes, and that for me… we both have worked hard to develop our own individuality and for us to be put back in that box where everyone calls us twinnies, I am not doing it.

**GEORGIE:** Yeah, I think I have the same reaction you do. I have developed my own life, my own personality, and I feel so fortunate to have a twin but I am definitely not looking to be in matching rompers going to some festival with a bunch of… it almost feels like it's a horror movie or something.

(LAUGHTER)

(SOUNDBITE OF MUSIC)

**J NORRIS:** Aw, thank you, everyone! It’s so good to see all of your faces.

**Everyone:** Thank you.

(INAUDIBLE VOICES)

**OLLI MEMBER:** Thank you guys.

(SOUNDBITE OF MUSIC ENDS)

**A POLAND:** In conversation at the OLLI coffee hour. Always an engaging way to start the day.

(LOUDER SOUNDBITE OF MUSIC)

**A POLAND:** This has been in conversation the voices of OLLI. Our thanks to Cal State San Bernardino in Palm Desert. Along with the communications study professor, Lacey Kendall, and her media students. This podcast was produced for OLLI by Lou Gorfain and I am Dr. Arlette Poland.

(SOUNDBITE OF MUSIC FADES)