



Musical Babies

As a postpartum doula I am hired to help mom and dad learn how to care for their newly born child as they settle into the previously uncharted territory of family life. I am hired to be an expert in newborn care, and the holder of the latest research and information. Sometimes I have the wonderful pleasure of the roles suddenly being reversed and feel humbled before the innate wisdom of a new parent.

One rainy afternoon in winter I got a call to support the parents of twins. The infants were miracle babies and their parents wise in inexplicable ways. I settled into the couch in their cluttered living room as Charlotte explained the history of her new family. The identical girls had been born at 32 weeks of gestation (eight weeks before term) and had spent almost 10 days in the Newborn Intensive Care Unit. Her pregnancy had been high risk and at 16 weeks of gestation the doctors recommended that one of the twins be "selectively terminated." Peter and Charlotte gambled with fate, and won. Looking now at the tiny sisters sleeping side by side in the crib they shared, such an option seemed unthinkable.

At exactly 12 days of gestation, four days after the twins began to separate into individual entities, the amniotic sac did not split into two sacs as it should have. The tiny embryos were destined to go through the full arc of gestation inhabiting one amniotic sac. This condition is called *monoamnio* and the dangers include the potential for the babies to grow together and become Siamese twins, or for the two umbilical cords bringing nourishment and oxygen to the developing fetuses to get tangled and knotted until blocked. The danger of one fetus becoming what is called a "silent twin," who eventually dies from lack of nourishment, after the life-giving cord is choked off, is statistically pronounced.

As fate would have it, these little girls' father's ear was not tuned to hear statistics and medical predictions. Peter relied obstinately on his own belief in the transformational power of music and the vital connection he and his wife established between their voices and their unborn babies. It was several weeks into my assignment before I actually met Peter, but my

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observations of his thriving premature twins, led me to appreciate the invisible, yet tangible net of confidence he created protecting the whole household.

Each morning I arrived at 7:00 AM. With the extra pair of hands in the house, Charlotte would proceed with pumping breast milk so it would be available for me to give the babies while she napped. Like a gripping serial each day I heard the next installment in their amazing story. Peter was a rock musician who arrived home from work at 3:00 AM, then cared for the twins until 6:00 AM. I had been told he was a New Zealander by birth, and from the casual family photos on the refrigerator I saw a large young man with a shock of red hair and the wild energy of an ancient Scot clansman. I couldn't help but think to myself, "I'll place odds that guy's rock and roll cooks."

The evidence of a life devoted to music filled up the tiny house. Several drums, two guitars and a keyboard had causally found a place to live beside the crib the girls shared, the changing table and the breast pump. Stacks of books and hundreds of CDs filled the built-in shelving, revealing an eclectic taste in music: cultures and places, old and new, experimental and established. Slowly the story began to emerge of how Peter had undertaken a delicately balanced regimen of music and voice therapy throughout the pregnancy to keep both twins thriving. He and Charlotte would wait for the movement of the unborn babies to indicate they were awake and began playing gentle, simple and melodic music from around the globe; Peter felt the ubiquitous flute found in all cultures was an appropriate choice. He spoke in turn to each twin and would explain to them the importance of working with the process of growth they were involved in and how the music could be a source of sustenance. Charlotte would position her chair so the music directly pointed toward the twin inhabiting that side of her quickly expanding stomach. Both Charlotte and Peter then spoke directly to the twin in question asking her to listen and involve herself in the process. No one will ever know exactly why these little girls continued to thrive until they crossed that boundary when they could safely live outside the womb. Can anyone quantify the simple miracle of the human voice or define the healing power of music?

Finally, the day arrived when Charlotte asked me to stay late. Peter would be getting up to relieve me in the early afternoon. He emerged from the bedroom on cue with his red hair

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standing out like Albert Einstein, his presence filling the room like sunshine. Hannah and Sarah, the identical little girls were both awake. True to form he spoke to them both directly, casually picking up Sarah in one big hand. Still under six pounds she fit in his hand like a loaf of bread. No fawning baby talk, no sweet cooing. He asked them straight questions and listened profoundly to every wiggle, movement and sigh, fully engaged in the communication. The tiny girls responded from long practice emoting with their whole bodies a preverbal form of communication which didn't need specific words to convey its substance.

I was dying to tell Peter I had been amazed by his remarkable application of music therapy and ask him if he was aware of the groundbreaking studies that substantiate the sensitivity of unborn children to music. I only got half of my comment out before a hilariously irreverent laugh from Peter stopped me. "Sometimes you just get big lucky," he said, making it obvious he wasn't really interested in an intellectual analysis of the variables.

In the course of my work, I sometimes pray for an opportune moment to share all the wealth of information now emerging about prenatal sensitivity and responsiveness, or the cutting edge new studies about newborns and how awake, aware and interactive they are. Somehow I got the feeling this was one family that didn't need any information from books, research or studies. I kept silent and marveled, wondering if science would ever catch up to the wisdom that comes from listening to our own hearts.