

LOOKS CAN BE DECEIVING LOOKS CAN BE DECEIVING

STORY BY MIKE LATONA - PHOTO ILLUSTRATION BY MATTHEW SCOTT

Robert McCormick likes to call parishioners by their first names when serving as eucharistic minister at St. Ann's Church in Hornell. Yet this custom often leads to a case of mistaken identity — not with strangers, but with his own daughters.

Erin and Nicki McCormick, 16 and identical twins, bear such a striking resemblance even their dad can't keep them straight.

"He'll say, 'The body of Christ, Nicki' when it's really me," Erin reported.

By getting identical hair styles and borrowing each other's clothing frequently, Erin and Nicki ensure that such mix-ups occur on a regular basis. In fact, Nicki said that when she and Erin have competed on athletic teams at Hornell High School, "We have to wear name tags so our coaches could tell us apart."

Although they don't encourage such confusion, Brian and Carl Menz, 18, said they have provoked similar uncertainty among faculty members at Bishop Kearney High School.

"Teachers always get us confused early on in the year," Brian said.

Carl noted when he's referred to as "Brian," he attempts to correct his teachers by remaining silent.

"I usually don't respond until they get my name right," Carl explained. He and his brother attend St. Ambrose Church in Irondequoit.

Actually, Kearney teachers have probably been confounded quite a bit in recent years: The Menz brothers are among four twin combinations who graduated from BK June 22. The others were Yuri and Andrian Pawluk; Erica and Sherri Wilson; and David and Kevin Sleight.

Teens interviewed for this story point out that personality traits of twins are often as similar as physical appearances. For example, when the McCormick sisters respond to a question, "We always say things together," Nicki remarked.

Erin added that she and Nicki think so much alike, "If you're on the phone with one of us, you don't know who you're talking to."

Brian and Carl said they are difficult to separate because they spend so much time together.

"We hang around with basically the same people," Brian said.

"We play a lot of the same sports," Carl added. Both share the same employer as well: They're working at Seabreeze Amusement Park this summer.

Other twins who share physical and personal similarities are Jenny and Julie Keefe, 18, from the St. Anthony/St. Patrick Cluster in Elmira.

"We're both really good athletes," Jenny said.

"We average the same grades and hang around with the same friends," Julie added. Both recently graduated from Elmira Free Academy.

Meanwhile, academic achievement is the most notable link between the Pawluk brothers. Yuri served as the valedictorian for the 1997 Bishop Kearney graduating class, and Andrian was the salutatorian.

However, you may not realize at first glance that Yuri and Andrian are twins. Although the Pawluk brothers' facial features are similar, Andrian

stands 6 feet 1 inch tall while Yuri is 6-foot-6.

The Pawluks are fraternal twins. Whereas identical twins develop from the same fertilized egg, fraternal twins come from separately fertilized eggs. This process increases the likelihood that fraternal twins will have differing physical features. Fraternal twins can either be of the same sex, or male and female.

Andrian pointed out that he and Yuri have distinct personality traits as well.

"We're completely black and white. I'm regarded as the one who's more mischievous and outgoing, and generally I'm the one who gets in trouble," Andrian said. He and his brother are parishioners at St. Josaphat's Ukrainian Catholic Church in Irondequoit.

Noting that Yuri was out of town at a competition with the Bishop Kearney debate team, Andrian said, "Public speaking is not for me."

The Keefes and McCormicks said that other people occasionally forget to acknowledge each twin's individual traits.

"My dad says 'The twins did this, the twins did that,'" Julie said. "I say, 'Wait, we're two different people!'"

"We'll be together and somebody will say, 'Are you two twins?' And I'll think, 'Isn't it obvious?'" Erin reported. "I feel like saying, 'No, I've never seen her before in my life!'"

Erin added, however, that she and Nicki always get separate cakes on their birthday.

Andrian said he and his brother asserted their individuality as they strove to achieve the top ranking in their graduating class.

"I think it was very competitive, I'll be the first person to say that," Andrian said. "But it wasn't at a cutthroat level."

If anything, Andrian said, he shares a special closeness with his twin. "We always talk a lot. I always talk to him

more than anyone else," Andrian said.

A similar emotional bond unites Erin and Nicki. "I guess you could say she's my best friend," Erin said.

Meanwhile, Julie and Jenny in Elmira have drawn closer in the past year following the death of their mother last August.

"We do a lot of stuff together that my mom would have done with us," Julie said. She added that they've shared a mutual support system during this difficult period because "we kind of knew what each other was going through, so we could just talk about it."

Andrian and Yuri are extending their closeness into their college years. Both will not only attend Cornell University in the fall, but they have decided to be roommates.

Andrian is quick to point out, however, that the bond will not last indefinitely.

"Just for the first year, we decided to stick with each other," Andrian said. Although the arrangement will help them ease into their new environment, Andrian said he expects them to quickly establish separate social circles.

After careful consideration, Julie and Jenny have decided to go their separate ways by choosing different colleges. Julie will attend Niagara University in the fall, and Jenny is headed to the University of Buffalo.

"It's something new and different. We thought about rooming together, but that was just for a short time," Julie said.

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