**Early Recollections of the Diamond Valley Twins Club**

We are four mums who met at the Diamond Valley Twins club some 34 years ago. Through our contact with the Diamond Valley News, we met a keen and charismatic local identity called Rosalie Bray. Rosie wrote about community events and helped local clubs to promote fund raising activities, meeting nights, etc. We are still friends with Rosie today and it has been her dedication to and respect for her local community that has led to the writing of this article. We thank Rosie for giving us this opportunity to tell our story.

So, how did the Diamond Valley Parents of Twins club begin? In 1972, a mum of twins keen to help others in a similar situation put an advertisement in the local paper and as they say, the rest is history. The club’s humble beginning, borne from a need for knowledge and a desire to help, heralded the formation of a self-help group now offering assistance to families over a much wider catchment area than we could ever have imagined. When we joined, we learned that the President didn’t know she was having twins until the day *after* the delivery. None of us knew exactly what that felt like but we certainly knew why it had happened. Today, there is an immense amount of information and the Australian Twin Registry (amongst other institutions), offers an impressive range of organisations to help with every aspect of a multiple birth. So what role did our club play?

In the early 1970’s, there wasn’t a whole lot of information about multiple births. Our club provided a point of contact – a link. Each of our mums was different – every pregnancy was different, some twins were diagnosed early, some were not – every birth was different and the transition from hospital to home often had its problems. We focused on sourcing information and offered practical advice and emotional support. Importantly, our club was more of a self- help group than a group of volunteers. The club’s momentum continued simply because its members wanted to help others through what they had gone through themselves even as they may still have been experiencing the next stage of their twins or triplets’ development. Often, a few dads would come along to a meeting or two to add their perspective. Members were encouraged to take on different tasks on the committee thus building self-esteem and pride in a job well done. The club’s liberating environment also fostered and supported members to use their current skills.

The club’s overall aims were to provide a means of sharing communication on the care and raising of multiple birth children. It aimed to provide social meetings and functions and it aimed to be a non-commercial, non-sectarian and non-profit organisation. It also co-operated with other organisations having related interests. This final aim included a close affiliation with the State and National Bodies of the Australian Multiple Birth Association. In 1977 A.M.B.A produced, ‘Guidelines for Parents of Multiple Birth Children’. These bodies lobbied local councils and government to provide funding for studies on multiple births.

So, from a lone advertisement in a local paper, it became a small but dedicated band of parents who offered coffee mornings and play groups, a time to ask questions and the space to feel normal again. Over time and mainly through word of mouth or the occasional news story (but in some cases via a letter or a visit from a club member), more and more parents with multiples attended. The club name changed to specifically include parents of triplets and quads. Eventually, the gatherings outgrew family kitchens and play rooms and a larger space was sought. Around the time we joined, the club had 11 committee positions including President, Vice President, Secretary, Treasurer, Welfare Officer, Editors (2), Librarian, Badge & Scrapbook Officer, Thrift Box & Equipment Officer, Membership Secretary and A.M.B.A Liaison. We met at 8.00 pm on the first Wednesday of every month at the Occasional Day Care Centre, 21 Knight Street in Watsonia. A membership fee of $10.00 per month covered the cost of the Club’s newsletter and a copy of the (Australian Multiple Birth Association) A.M.B.A. newsletter.

Through personal interaction and local paper articles, momentum grew. Stories and resources were shared and ideas were put into action. Open and understanding hearts and minds offered first-hand knowledge and reassurance to those who needed it. Sometimes it was for the dads, sometimes it was for the children or other siblings, but mostly, it was for us mums. The club grew because it was different things to different people. Some parents attended meetings unsure of exactly what it was they needed to know but knowing that they absolutely needed to know it. Often mums just wanted to talk about how they were coping or, not coping. Some mums were unwell. They needed an understanding hug and a sympathetic ear. Others needed the ‘social aspect’- time out from a stressful, relentless and demanding routine. Some came to find out how to involve their partners – how to talk to them about the changes they were all going through. Some mums joined a netball team. Others took part in promotional events such as our fashion parade at a local shopping centre sponsored by one of the local shops. Others shared their craft skills – for example, making paper carnations for one of our Mothers’ Day events. The club was a melting pot of personalities who had a knack for getting all sorts of things done with a smile and a sense of fun.

Of course, for many mums, it was the feeling of ‘sisterhood’ that they sought. Through common needs and understandings, members formed friendships and in many cases, life time bonds with other mums. Sometimes these friendships formed through chance meetings. For instance, if you needed someone to mind your twins or triplets so you could get out for a drop of sanity – who better to mind your multiples than a mum with multiples of her own – someone on your wavelength. Club membership offered this life-line and those members who felt they were able to offer such help – did so unconditionally. Shared ground, respect and a sense of emotional bonding – this was the fabric of the club and it gave parents an opportunity to have their questions answered and their fears dispelled. It also gave them an opportunity to help others. Mums attended meetings when and if they could. If regular absence was noted, there was always a friendly phone call to see if everything was okay but beyond that, well, we all knew how time consuming multiples could be. Of course, looking after yourself as well as very young babies wasn’t the only source of concern. There were always questions about the incidence of multiple births (including triplets), the differences between fraternal and identical twins (zygosity), decisions around separating twins at kindergarten and school and the very difficult issue of dealing with multiples with special needs. Fortunately, due to the intuition and persistence of our club president at the time – these issues were soon to be the subject of extensive and extremely valuable research.

With the full support of all committee members, our pro-active and generous president contacted La Trobe University and in time, met and discussed these issues with Dr David Hay, (who had initially trained as a psychologist in Aberdeen and Birmingham).

Dr Hay began the La Trobe Twin Study in 1976. It covered all facets of children’s behavioural development at home and at school, with particular emphases on how twins differed from single born children and on long term predictors of behavioural problems. The study followed the development of over 2000 children (twins, their siblings and cousins). Dr Hay’s particular interest was speech and reading leading to the analysis of multiple birth data from the 1975 National Survey of Literacy and Numeracy.

Dr Hay and his associates, up until this point, had carried out the largest and longest study of twins but funds from the National Health and Medical Research Council were running out. Researchers hoped to raise $20,000 to complete a new aspect of the study - a national project looking at twins in school. To raise money, our club participated in a ‘Twice as Nice’ fashion parade at Glen College, La Trobe University. This particular endeavour attracted interest from local and Melbourne papers. We were very proud to be part of such an important and timely initiative.

Dr Hay had a long and happy association with our club. He commended our initiative and attended events when he could fit them in to his extremely busy schedule. To honour his contributions, Dr Hay was made a club Patron around early 1980. He was also the National Patron of the Australian Multiple Birth Association (**AMBA**) for over 20 years (retiring in 2009) and previously was a Vice-Chair of the International Society for Twin Studies (**ISTS**).

From one advertisement in a local paper to one phone call to a local University. How true it is that initiative and a sense of purpose can and does lead to some extraordinary outcomes and to some extraordinary people.

Speaking of initiative, early in the 1980’s, the club decided to ‘trial’ visiting new mums in their homes. It worked well but obviously relied heavily on those members whose children were already at kinder or school. However, it was a personal and much needed stamp of recognition and support for many sleep deprived and panicky mums. Many of those visited later became committee members and so the momentum continued.

To enable the bulk purchase of special one-off souvenirs for resale, a temporary co-op was formed during the 1980’s. However, with an expanding membership, increased funds enabled the club to promote itself through a range of fund raising events. We were personally involved in many but in particular those that were around what was then called, Twins Week (early August). Of course, special days such as Mothers’ Day and Christmas were always a time for celebration and fund raising. Our Christmas picnics were a sight to behold. You really did think you were seeing double – and you were! They were often supported by extended family members and they were a time to reflect on just how lucky and special we all were to be parents of multiples.

In the scheme of events, club members of the time were especially proud of their totally absorbing fund raising pantomime ‘Tickety Boo’, and musical,’ Twin Follies. There was a job or a role for everyone. Rehearsals offered quality time out – and quite a few late nights! The happiness just kept spreading and after our performances, we spent many wonderful nights reminiscing. These productions not only raised vital funds but also allowed dads and extended family to be involved in promotion or hands on activities. They also let members spread their wings – try something different – step out of mum mode into ‘Colleen Thorn Birds McCulloch, ‘Sonny or Cher’, A Mr. Men character, The Wicked Witch or the Good Fairy. We had so much fun that when some of us attended an A.M.B.A State Conference in Adelaide, we actually performed (looking just like t-bags I might add), our then famous, ‘Twin Club T-Bag Rag’.

With our growing membership/skill base, we were also able to sell mugs, t-shirts, bumper stickers, windcheaters (‘Twins are Twice as Nice’ and ‘We’ve Got Two of the Best’) and our claim to fame – a booklet we compiled in 1988 called, ‘Multiple Choices’ - a guide to managing multiples – pregnancy to eighteen months. It was 34 pages of members’ stories and 11 pages of handy hints. It was written, edited, designed and printed by club members and paid for with a council grant. Certificates of Appreciation were given at various meetings and acknowledgement made of everyone who took part in any of our events. Again, initiative helped us to instigate ways to be enterprising. After all, we had a wealth of information and ability at our fingertips.

The club prospered. It had continued to be welcoming, constructive, affirming and very importantly – focused. We regularly acknowledged the initiative of former members by inviting them to special meetings and we thanked them for taking their initial leap of faith. We continued to work towards providing whatever it was that families needed: prams and other equipment; nappy, sleeping and feeding advice and a babysitting club. Our Newsletter was full of tips and tricks as well as little stories from mums, funny jokes and pictures (some from dads), quotes and lists of things to do in your very limited spare time. To some, the club was a life-line. To others, it was an opportunity to leave the intensity and relentlessness of multiple parenting for a few hours or a time to let off steam or gain a different perspective just by listening. For some, the meeting structure itself provided a welcome distraction. The club was a sanctuary. It was somewhere to take a deep breath and slow down.

Everyone listened. Everyone understood. Families joined the club to be part of the club. We all wanted to make a difference. We were proud, proactive, and protective of our integrity and zealous in our endeavours and here we are, 34 years later writing about our humble beginnings.

These are our collective recollections and we apologise for any discrepancies caused by the passage of time, lack of literary expertise – or both.

Please know that researching and writing this article has been immensely satisfying. It has been undertaken in good faith and has brought back many wonderful memories of many wonderful people.

**Written by Linda Court, Lynda Johnston, Helen Steele & Maree Walshe**

**November, 2016**

I was lucky enough to become involved with the Twins Plus through writing the local news and event for the Diamond Valley News Paper.

I heard about this club and called Linda Court (who then lived in Watsonia) enquired about meetings and other activities. Linda soon ‘put me right’ about receiving information about the club and its doings. Each month the morning after their meetings, I would knock on Linda’s door and there, attached to the refrigerator would be a report, just enough to tell the reader what was happening and inviting new parents of multiple births that there was help for them . Each time I arrived at the door, there was a big welcome and two little girls (Cassandra and Jessica)would be happily involved with one activity of another. Always very calm and organised.

I soon became great friends with the Court family and very pleased to say I still am. I went though all the different stages of its clubs growth. And enjoyed all the productions always amazed that everything seemed to fit into place. Everyone seemed to be using their special, skills and having a great time as well as fund raising.

I am so grateful for my involvement with the Multiple Births Club, because of its absolute commitment to helping and making a difference in families lives when needed.

I want to thank Linda, Lynda, Helen and Maree for taking the time to record the history and details for the Greensborough Historical Society.

Rosalie Bray.