

Twin sisters share identical interest

Written by Ariana M. Taylor, Daily Vidette Staff Writer
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Identical twins share nearly the same DNA, however it is uncommon for a set of twins to share the same place of work. For twins Maureen Brunsdale and Jean MacDonald, their role as ISU librarians gives them the unique opportunity to remain a part of each other's everyday lives.

As adolescents, Brunsdale and MacDonald grew up on a farm in a small town in North Dakota. Brunsdale was known as the outgoing sister, whereas MacDonald was considered to be the shy, conservative one. Despite their distinguishing personalities, their mother always told them apart by their clothes.

"My mother was very smart [because] she did not dress us in the same clothes. We always had our own identities through what we were wearing. The closest we would come [to being dressed alike] would be when my mom would dress us in similar outfits but different colors," Brunsdale said.

MacDonald added that she was typically dressed in green while her twin was dressed in red because not many people could tell them apart when they were kids.

The identical twins took advantage of their similarities in the second grade when Brunsdale, the extroverted one came up with what she thought at the time was "a brilliant idea."

"I thought it would be brilliant for April Fool's Day to switch classes. I [told] Jean that we were going to switch classes [but] she put a twist on it and said let's just tell everyone that we're going to switch classes but then not do it," Brunsdale said. "We told everyone that we were going to do it. The day came, I went to my class and she went to her class and we got called down to the principal's office."

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The twins explained that even though they did not follow through with their mischievous plan, they were unable to prove their innocence.

“That was the first and only time that I had ever been pulled into the principal’s office,” Brunsdale added.

In the face of their youthful spirits, the ambitious twins gained interest in specific career paths at a young age. Brunsdale, special collections and rare books librarian, once hoped to be a farmer while MacDonald, languages and literature librarian, once desired to be an archaeologist.

“We were raised on a farm and I thought farming would be for me, but I realized early that I don’t have the temperament for it,” Brunsdale said. “To be a female farmer in North Dakota, which is a place that’s beautiful ... but the ideas there are a little bit more antiquated than what we have here in Illinois. There would just be no way to be a wife, a mother, and a farmer.”

MacDonald added that no one thought her twin could work in a library because she would have to be quiet, which was not easy for Brunsdale.

“I had a lot of dreams when I was a kid. I wanted to be an archaeologist, a linguist, a train engineer. I wanted to be everything,” MacDonald said.

As MacDonald was finishing graduate school, she realized that she wanted to be a librarian like her sister and her aunt.

“Being a librarian [meant] that I could stay on campus and keep my mind active, [while working]

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with college kids ... the best people in the world, and get paid for it," MacDonald added.

While Brunsdale was a librarian at the University of South Dakota, MacDonald obtained her degree in library science from Iowa. In 1995, MacDonald received a job in Milner Library's general reference unit.

"In 1996 there was another opening here at the library. I said, 'Maureen, why don't you apply for the job here in town because we had been living apart for five years or so,'" MacDonald said. "Maureen interviewed and fortunately got [the job] and we've been working together ever since."



MacDonald added that it was very difficult for her and her sister to be apart.

"You don't know the pain. It was before Internet chatting, so we could e-mail but we couldn't see each other," MacDonald said.

"Life is so much easier when she's around. There's a comfort level and she always has my back," Brunsdale added.

Though their days typically consist of one or more students asking if they have changed their attire, the women continue to enjoy their professions here at ISU.

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“I happen to think I work in the best place on campus because I get to oversee four distinct and unique collections. I learn something new every day from the people who walk through the door,” Brunsdale said.

Brunsdale continues to dress flashier while MacDonald dresses more subdued; however, do not be misled on April Fool’s day, for these gregarious twins like to switch things up every year.

“We came into the world together, we’re fortunate enough to be together now, and Godwilling we’ll leave at the same time because I can’t imagine life without her,” MacDonald added. “I wish everyone could have a twin because there is really nothing like it.”