

The Magazine for Multiples Since 1984

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the
Gifts,
Double
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**Open Season
on Sitters...**
Cornering the
Marketing on
Holiday Sitters!

**Celebrating
the Holiday
Season with
Your Twins**

**5 Ways to Help
Your Twins
Sleep Soundly
this Holiday
Season!**



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On the Cover:



Meet these adorable 9-month old fraternal twins, Cason & Calon from Massillon, Ohio. Cason is always on the move. Once he learned how to roll, he was across the room in seconds. Calon has been laid back since he was born. He just wants to be held all the time. He gets up on his hands and knees and rocks back and forth. Together, they have worked really hard at ignoring each other. Cason will occasionally pick on his brother, as he army crawls over to Calon and snatches whatever he was playing with. Proud mom Jessica says "These boys will have their lives well documented as our family owns a photography business. How amazing it is to be able to capture the daily lives of twins!"

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Learning to Not Sweat the Small Stuff...

Raising kids these days is tough work. It's filled with so many ups and downs. It's challenging, exciting, heart-breaking, joyful, tiring, educational and amazing all at the same time... And, it's the best job I will ever have in my lifetime!

When my life gets over-scheduled, over-stressed and hard to handle with my four boys (twins and two younger singletons) which it often does, it's sometimes difficult for me to remember how truly blessed I am. To even have the opportunity to experience all the wonderful (and not so wonderful) things motherhood brings to my life is such an amazing gift...in fact THE MOST AMAZING GIFT I could ever have. So why then do I continue to get stressed out over every little thing?

Starting this holiday season and into the new year, one of my main goals will be to concentrate more on everything that is important in life and focus less on distractions and the little things that don't matter and won't matter a year from now anyway.

That is why I absolutely love the book by Richard Carlson called *"Don't Sweat the Small Stuff and It's All Small Stuff: Simple Ways to Keep the Little Things From Taking Over Your Life"*

This book makes so much sense to busy parents like us and it's easy to read with a ton of practical tips and advice inside its' small, paperback frame. It is actually the best \$8.75 you will ever spend! With chapters entitled 'Make Peace with Imperfection'; 'Let Go of the Idea that Gentle, *Relaxed* People Can't Be Super Achievers' and 'Turn Your Melodrama into a Mellow-Drama' is advice to live by... Other chapters like 'Ask Yourself the Question, Will This Matter a Year from Now?'; 'Learn to Live in the Present Moment'; and 'Be the First One to Act Loving or Reach Out' clearly is a practical guideline when juggling all of the numerous roles we play in our lives. So this holiday season, take a "time-out" just for you and try practicing some of the tips in that book to help you eliminate the stressors in your life. Maybe then you can enjoy your parenting journey much more and begin to concentrate on making special memories with your family that will last a life-time... So, join me in not sweating the small stuff because it is all just small stuff anyway, right?

We are so excited to present our annual Holiday Gift Guide issue that gives you a ton of great gift ideas for your twins/multiples and for you, too! From our top gift picks, to stocking stuffers, tech gifts and more we know you will really enjoy this jam-packed issue of TWINS! We also include timely holiday articles like: Celebrating the Holiday Season with your Twins; Open Season on Babysitters; 5 ways to help your twins sleep soundly and ways to shop smart without breaking the bank this year! Plus, you will love all our adorable holiday-themed pictures of 40 sets of twins/multiples to round out the issue. We do hope you enjoy every moment this holiday season brings to you and yours and we thank you for your continued loyalty and support for the world-leading resource and #1 parenting magazine for twins/multiples for the past 31 years!



Sincerely,

Christa D Reed

Christa Reed,, Editor-in-Chief
 twinseditor@twinsmagazine.com

Send Your Twins a Letter from Santa with SantaSentMeALetter.com.

SantaSentMeALetter.com launched in 2007 when founder Kelly Easterling saw the excitement a letter from Santa Claus brought to his young son several weeks



before Christmas. Kelly realized that other parents would love to bring such joy to their children to get them into the holiday spirit, and SantaSentMeALetter.com was born. Now entering its eighth season, the business, still 100% family-owned and operated, has provided thousands of families all over the world with fully customized and personalized letters from Santa Claus.

With 20 exclusive templates to choose from, parents and family members can use the Online Letter Editor to completely personalize each letter to each child, right from the web site. Every letter is then delivered on Santa's own custom stationery (available only at SantaSentMeALetter.com), guaranteeing that each is unique and "authentic." Santa signs and wax seals each letter by hand before postmarking it directly from the North Pole. Parents can even add an optional Nice List card or a Magic Key that Santa uses to give gifts to children in homes that don't have chimneys.

SantaSentMeALetter.com is proud to use the highest quality materials while being extremely economical. In addition to taking great pride in the product, Kelly and his hardworking team of "elves" are committed to providing the best customer service so families can enjoy a magical experience, from beginning to end. And at a time when getting mail has become a novelty, what kid doesn't like to get an actual letter? **Now all TWINS Magazine readers and fans can get 15% off any package by using TWINS2015 at check-out!** Visit www.santasentmealetter.com to learn more and to place your orders!

Tubby Table Toys Makes A Clean Sweep This Fall Awards Season

The first and only bathtub activity table for toddlers has made a clean sweep of the 2015 toy industry awards. **New Tubby Table (\$39.99)** was named Dr. Toy's 10 Best Active Products and 100 Best Children's Products for 2015. Judges from Creative Child magazine named the engaging bath table Product of the Year. Baby Maternity magazine gushed over its appeal to toddlers and babies and happily bestowed its Top Choice Award 2015. The bedtime bath ritual (and the dry bathroom floor) will never be the same! Plus, the Tubby Table was invented by mothers of twins!

Dr. Toy, aka Stevanne Auerbach Ph.D., has witnessed every type of juvenile product on the market for the past 30 years. "It is sturdy fun that encourages children to play in the water without a mess," she noted when judging this ingenious activity table. The new Tubby Table (www.TubbyTableToys.com) has specially designed table surface that keeps the soapy water in the bath, not splashing onto the tiled floor! When bath time is done, Tubby Table folds up for easy storage. This holiday season, expect grandparents to be Tubby Table's best customers because it's the perfect gift. Grandmas can buy one for their house and one as a gift for their grandchild's home. Move over rubber ducky, there's a new way to get kids squeaky clean — without the squeaks or squawks! Visit www.tubbytable.com for more information.



Guidelines and Prenatal Content for Starting Multiple-Birth Specific Prenatal Class in Your Community

If there are no Multiple-Birth specific prenatal classes in your community and your local club would like to provide families with classes suited to their needs, Lynda Haddon has put together a course outline to get you started. Lynda has been teaching multiple-birth prenatal classes for over 22 years and over 1,000 families have taken her classes. Her experience has culminated in these Guidelines and covers six hours of class time. Cost for the Guidelines will quickly be covered after one or two sessions of your own classes, and your club will have created a vital support resource for your member families.

These Guidelines include all the information needed to set up or augment classes in your community. Content covers a multiple-birth pregnancy and birth with rich, pertinent, detailed information and resources that parents expecting multiples will need. Topics include:

- Nutrition for pregnancy and breastfeeding;
- Dad/partner's role;
- Simultaneously breastfeeding two babies;
- Dealing with the roller coaster emotions around the pregnancy;
- Preparation of any other children and pets;
- Cherishing the marital relationship;
- Community support organizations and resources;
- Items to have on hand in class to demonstrate parents' special journey;
- Relevant books and internet resources;
- Glossary of terms and definitions so that you can properly use or explain terms parents will be hearing at their medical visits, and so much more.

The Guidelines are geared towards individuals with little or no medical background and whom are interested in starting multiple-birth specific prenatal classes. Multiple-birth support clubs, in particular, will find it an easy step from the "conception to birth" of their classes!

Check it out at www.jumelle.ca at the same time, learn about Jumelle, Twin Tracking App available from iTunes Lynda's App to keep track of which baby did what, when and for how long. Includes hints and tips for the first six weeks as well as the complexities of breastfeeding two babies.



Shop Smart

Without Breaking the Bank This Holiday Season

by Rachel Namoff, Arapahoe Asset Management

LIMIT YOUR GIFT LIST

If your shopping list includes more than five people outside of your immediate family, cut down on the number of people on your gift list. Then, make a homemade gift, like baking some cookies, to give to all the people you snipped from your original gift list. Ensure you spread the holiday cheer without looking like a Scrooge. And enjoy a fun activity with the family!

GIVE PERSONALIZED GIFTS INSTEAD OF EXPENSIVE GIFTS

Start the holiday by taking a moment to think about what those on your list could really use. For example, if your sister loves to bake but can't get the hang of homemade piecrusts, you could buy her a simple pastry-making tool for less than \$10 and include a copy of a fool-proof recipe. A small, individualized gift is priceless.

BUDGET BASED ON YOU

Your sister Susie always gets you the fanciest presents. However, if you are in a different place in your financial life you shouldn't follow suit. If you are doubting if those on your list will appreciate the less expensive presents you buy them, think back to what you received from loved ones when their budgets were tighter. You are likely to be better friends in the New Year if you are not creating debt loads for each other this year.

GIVE YOUR TIME

It is your most precious commodity, and constantly depleted. Your time. Far-away family and friends might love nothing more than a visit from you. Give small gifts and large hugs from afar. If you're tight on cash and want to send a gift, try a 'FaceTime' calling card. If long distance minutes aren't part of their phone plan, an old fashioned calling card is a great way to reach out. Give family extra minutes to call you when you can't fly to see them - it's a great way to let them know that you miss them!

GIFT YOURSELF A BETTER SPENDING HABIT

Hmmm, wondering how am I going to pay off my credit cards next month? Get over the anxiety by gifting yourself a new and improved spending habit. Try this, for every dollar you spend on gifts, find a way to remove that dollar from your regular spending. Around the holidays, use those savings to buy presents. Next month—and the rest of the year —what you save can go into your savings account.

Rachel Namoff is Managing Partner of Arapaho Asset Management and is confident that everything is possible, and figure-out-able. Rachel is a founding member of AAM, a financial educator, an esteemed art collector and overtly happy and positive. <https://aamisit.com/>



REAL Advice for mothers of multiples

by Wendy Bohon Clarey

People will give you A LOT of advice. My advice? DON'T LISTEN!! Here's what people will say, and here's my response.

1. Sleep when the babies sleep – This may work for people that only have one baby, but when you have two or more babies there are days, weeks even, when there is *always* a baby awake. Also, everyone needs a little down time to take a shower, eat, use the bathroom, or just sit on the couch and try to regain some semblance of normalcy. When my twins were born I was exhausted, but I was also desperately in need of some ME time. Everybody telling me to go sleep all the time stressed me out.

2. Make a schedule for helpers before the babies are born – Really? Sounds great, but practically speaking this is almost impossible. You have no idea what you're going to need. With multiple babies (and multiple schedules) you're never quite sure what's going to happen, or when. And if you're breastfeeding or pumping, well, no one can do that for you. And I was painfully aware that no one was interested in doing my laundry or cleaning my house; they wanted to see the babies. They might bring a casserole (YES - BRING ALL THE CASSEROLES) but that was the

limit. Plus, I didn't want people washing my dirty underwear or seeing my ratty socks. What's a future MoM to do? Don't worry about scheduling help beforehand, ask for all of the casseroles in single portion sized bags and if people want to help and you have something for them to do, then by all means, take them up on the offer.

3. Put the babies on the same schedule – This works for some MoMs, but I couldn't make it happen when my babies were newborns. I was nursing one baby and pumping for the other so feeding times were difficult and never synced up. Additionally, one of my babies just requires less sleep than the other. They are two separate people after all. If I kept the sleepy one up to get him on the schedule of the wakeful baby, he got so overtired he COULDN'T sleep. And here's some twin math for you. 1 sleeping baby does not = 2 sleeping babies, but 1 crying baby = 2 crying babies.

4. "Follow the advice in X book, it works like a charm" – Stop reading books. (Not entirely of course). But recognize that books should just be guidelines, not laws. I was so overwhelmed for the first few weeks (cough cough, months) that I was desperate for help and advice. I followed books to the letter and felt like a failure when the tricks didn't work for me. It wasn't until I threw up my hands and said "Forget it!" and followed my

intuition that things started to improve. I was so stressed out about messing up. For instance, I was terrified to give them pacifiers because of “nipple confusion”. So I often had two screaming babies who couldn’t comfort themselves and I didn’t have enough arms to comfort them both. My best friend finally said “Just give them the binkies. Nipple confusion is better than the three of you crying all day.” I popped binkys in their mouth and Viola!, peace. I just needed someone to give me permission to follow my instincts. So here it is – I give you permission. Follow your instincts.

5. Breast is best – No it isn’t. BEST IS BEST. Whatever is best for you and your family is best. Of course breast milk is wonderful, the bonding time is wonderful and if you can breastfeed your babies you absolutely should. But if you can’t **THAT’S OK**. I don’t know a single person who had an easy time breastfeeding. It’s hard. It takes a lot of work. And sometimes it just doesn’t happen. And that’s if you only have one baby! When you add in a second baby, and the fact that many multiples are born before they’ve developed the skills necessary for nursing, it can be almost impossible. I spent months feeling like an utter failure because I had to supplement with formula, and because only one baby would latch. I was bound and determined to make enough milk for both of them - so I was pumping, nursing and bottle-feeding. The problem was, I was trying so hard to do it all that I wasn’t taking care of myself. I was barely sleeping. I was grouchy, tired, and miserable and run down. My marriage was suffering; my relationship with my older child was suffering. Looking back, it wasn’t worth it. Let me give you the advice that snapped me out of it – **“Your babies need a mother, not a martyr”**. After I got the message I still pumped and I still nursed, but I gave myself a little bit of grace, and when I decided to wean them at 7 months, rather than at a year as I planned, I was ok with it. And so were they. I was a happier, more attentive mother. I’m glad I made the effort, but I wish I had had the insight and confidence to temper my efforts and maintain a more balanced family life. Again, what’s best for you and your family is the best thing for your babies. That may be the breast, and it may not.

6. Finally - don’t compare yourself to mothers that don’t have multiples. Even if they have a lot of kids. Even if their kids are close in age. It’s just not the same. Don’t expect to be able to baby wear, or go to baby yoga, or do swim classes like those moms. If you can that’s great; if not, that’s ok. If you’re keeping your babies and yourself and your family happy and healthy then you’re doing a great job! You do you, MoM, you do you. ♥

Wendy Bohon Clarey is a practicing geologist and a recreational writer. She currently resides in Maryland with her husband, daughter and fraternal twin boys.



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5 Ways to Help Your Twins Sleep Soundly This Holiday Season



*by Nicole Johnson,
Founder and Lead
Sleep Consultant at
The Baby Sleep Site®*

The holidays are fast-approaching! But while the holiday season spells delicious food, family celebrations, and special gifts for many, for those of you with multiples, all that celebrating can also mean missed or shortened naps and crazy night waking for your little ones.

So how can you celebrate and enjoy the holiday season while also safeguarding your twins' usual sleep schedule and routines? Simple: use the 5 strategies below!

5 STEPS TO BETTER HOLIDAY SLEEP FOR YOUR TWINS

- 1. Allow your twins' personalities and dispositions to guide you.** If your twins adapt well to change, then you can likely party to your heart's content and not worry much if bedtime and naps are out of whack for a week or two. However, if your twins don't respond well to change, it may be in your best

interest to stick to the usual schedule as much as possible, and choose your "schedule-busting" activities carefully. If you have one of each - that is, if one twin is adaptable and one isn't - then it's usually best to plan around the less-adaptable twin.

2. If you value your tandem schedules, prioritize them. If you have your twins on the same schedule - and if you value those mirror schedules - then prioritize them as much as you can over the holidays. That may mean you can't let Aunt Carol rock one twin to sleep if it's not nap time yet, and it might mean you have to leave a party early to preserve bedtime, even if one twin is still rarin' to go.

3. Minimize those late bedtimes. A few late nights (ideally not consecutive) are fine for most children, but avoid too many. Late bedtimes tend to result in overtiredness, which in turn means early-waking and nap issues for most babies and toddlers. And if your twins share a room, a too-short nap or middle-of-the-night crying from one twin will likely disturb the other - something no parent wants to deal with!

4. Prioritize the first morning nap. Some of your holiday activities may mean missed or shortened naps, and that's okay, as long as you plan well. If your twins are still taking two naps and you know your twins will have to skip their afternoon naps, be

sure to prioritize the morning nap, as that nap is usually the most restorative of the day. And in general, avoid activities that will force your twins to miss the morning nap; it's better to schedule those activities in the afternoon.

5. Give your twins plenty of time to adjust once the holidays are over. Actually, you may need this adjustment period just as much as your twins! After a few weeks of rich food, busy activities, late nights, and out-of-the-ordinary schedules, everyone needs a few days to get back to normal. This is especially important if your twins have gotten out-of-sync with their sleep schedules. Plan for a few at-home days during which you can get your twins back into their typical eating and sleeping routines by putting them down for naps and bedtime about 15-20 minutes earlier than usual until you can ease them into their normal schedule. These days will no doubt feel "off" as you get back to normal, but spending this kind of concentrated time will help sleep get back on track quickly and (relatively!) painlessly. ♥

Nicole Johnson is a married mother of two wonderful boys and owner of The Baby Sleep Site. If you have your own sleep issues, Nicole and her team at The Baby Sleep Site® can help!

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Caution Mother at Work!

by Ruby Coats-Mosher

The greatest risk associated with a multiple pregnancy is premature delivery. It has been estimated that half of all twins and three-quarters of all triplets are born prematurely, or before the 37th week of gestation. Exactly why premature labor occurs is not completely understood, but contributing factors may include poor nutrition; physical and mental stress; infection; metabolic disease; and uterine, placental or cervical anomalies. Although additional explanations for premature labor with multiple births concern the over-stretching of the uterus and over-crowding, this seems somewhat less likely because of the number of healthy, well-nourished women who have given birth to normal-weight babies at term.

Ruby Coats Mosher resides in Emporia, Kansas, is a veterinarian and the mother of fraternal twin girls.

Since the precise cause of preterm labor is not known, there is no guaranteed method of prevention for all women. There are, however, some practical steps that a woman can take to reduce the risk of going into premature labor. These include securing early specialized prenatal care; strictly following physicians' instructions; keeping to a balanced and nutritious diet; reducing stress as much as possible; utilizing the physical and emotional support of others to cope with that which is inevitable; getting plenty of rest; and recognizing the signs of impending preterm labor. Before being able to recognize what is abnormal for her pregnancy, however, a woman must be familiar with her body to be able to recognize what is normal for her.

False Labor

The uterine wall contains a powerful muscle which contracts periodically throughout a woman's life. Many non-pregnant women feel these contractions during menstruation as "cramps". Pregnant women experience two types of uterine

contractions: non-labor, or Braxton Hicks contractions; and the regular contractions which result in childbirth.

Braxton-Hicks contractions are also known as false labor and are usually painless. They may be felt as a tightening or hardening of the abdomen occurring at somewhat irregular intervals. A variety of things, ranging from changing positions or activities can also make Braxton-Hicks contractions diminish.

False labor contractions, unlike those of true labor, do not get progressively close together, and usually occur less than four times per hour and last for only 25 seconds or so. Frequency and duration of contractions vary from pregnancy to pregnancy, however, so it is important that each woman become familiar with her own normal uterine activity.

It is suggested that a pregnant woman take every day to monitor her uterine contractions. This doesn't mean that a woman should spend time worrying about contractions and whether they may lead to premature labor—quite the contrary. The time should be spent relaxing and simply becoming acquainted with the natural rhythms of her uterus.

One way for a woman to monitor her contractions is to lie down with a pillow behind her back so she is supported slightly onto her left side. Then, using her fingertips, she should press her abdomen gently in various locations, feeling the shape and firmness of her uterus. It can be helpful at first for a health care professional to show a woman how to palpate her uterus and to feel for contractions.

When the uterus is relaxed, it is easily indented with the fingertips. While the uterine wall is soft, the babies can be felt. It is easy for a woman to mistake the firm feel of multiple heads and bottoms as a contraction, but with experience she'll learn to distinguish the hard "bumps" of babies from a contraction in which the entire uterus tightens into a hard globular shape, and then relaxes.

It may also be difficult for a woman carrying multiples to feel contractions simply because her uterus is stretched so tight that it always seems firm. But an electronic fetal monitor strapped over the abdomen can pick up contractions even when a woman can't.

A doctor may prescribe a home electronic monitor for patients at risk for premature labor. The monitor belt is worn for a specified period of time, then the unit is hooked up to either a telephone or computer so data can be relayed to a medical center where it is then interpreted by a nurse or physician, who decides if the mother needs further attention at that time.

Whether a woman registers her contractions herself, or they are electronically monitored, the duration of a contraction is times from the point when the uterus begins to tighten to the point of relaxation. The interval between contractions is timed from the beginning of one contraction to the beginning of the next one.

A record of monitoring sessions helps track trends toward longer or more frequent contractions. Along with the contraction times, a woman may also want to record her activities prior to the monitoring session, in case it may become evident that activities such as crying, sex, or balancing the checkbook may trigger an increase in contractions.

Preterm Labor

Women carrying multiples may experience increased preterm contractions which could be a sign of impending preterm labor. As opposed to Braxton-Hicks contractions, preterm labor contractions become progressively longer, stronger and closer together. Also, the contractions of labor are associated with the cervix beginning to dilate, soften and shorten.

If a woman detects any of the signs of preterm labor, she should call her doctor at once, because if labor can be detected before the cervix undergoes significant change and before the membranes have ruptured, the medical team has the best chance of forestalling delivery. Bedrest and increased fluid intake can sometimes stop the progression of early preterm labor.

If contractions continue to be regular, occurring four or more times per hour, and the cervix begins to show changes, medication is usually indicated to manage the contractions. There are drugs

commonly prescribed and used to quiet the uterine muscle and to manage preterm labor.

The statistics for preterm labor among women carrying multiples can be intimidating, but a woman can do much to weight the odds in her favor. A woman carrying twins or more need not—and should not—be afraid that she will delivery early. What she should do is educate herself about the potential problems, take good care of herself, and work closely with her obstetrician.

It does appear that a woman who monitors her labor has a greater chance of delivering near term, and the extra effort is surely worth it. Each day in nature's most perfect incubator—the womb—is a priceless gift from a mother to her unborn babies.

As early in pregnancy as possible, it is advisable for an expectant mother to consult her obstetrical caregiver about the signs of preterm labor. Also, it is helpful for her to discuss what to do if she has a concern or is she thinks she may be going into premature labor. She should find out if she should call her physician first or go immediately to the hospital's labor and delivery unit. ♥

Is it Labor...Yes or No?

The following signs are generally recognized as indicators of possible premature labor and should be monitored and reported to your medical provider.

Regular uterine contractions occurring four or more times per hour—false labor contractions will usually diminish after a time, or with a change in position; true labor contractions will continue. It is important to know that labor contractions may not be painful, or even uncomfortable.

Menstrual-like cramps—these lower-abdominal cramps may be rhythmic or constant.

Lower, dull backache—backache is common in pregnancy, but this will feel different than previous backaches. The ache may be continuous or intermittent, and may radiate to your sides or front.

Pelvic or thigh pressure—again, this pressure will seem different than previously experienced and may be persistent or rhythmic.

Intestinal cramps, diarrhea, or abdominal gas pains.

Vaginal discharge of water, mucus or blood—Discharge can be a sudden rush or a persistent leaking. Bloody discharge can range from pinkish to brownish.



Jonathan Rowntree is the Editor of **The British Gent** and freelance writer who has worked with numerous national and international publications. You can follow him @TheBritishGent

Finding the Right **Formula** for Your **Twin**infants



by Jonathan Rowntree

When it comes to making a decision about feeding twins, new moms are faced with a lot of questions. The first thing you are probably trying to decide is what type of baby formula you should be using. There are so many different versions available on the market that it can quickly become confusing, especially for new parents. In addition, some people are probably telling you that you should be breastfeeding but the truth is, breastfeeding twins can be exceedingly difficult. There is

certainly nothing wrong with feeding formula to your babies. The key is choosing the right one and knowing whether or not any special concerns exist concerning the health of your children that could be adversely impacted by feeding formula of a certain type.

When choosing the right baby formula, you have to understand that there are whole milk versions available as well as those made from soy. In addition, some formulas contain fatty

acids, thought to increase growth and development while others are fortified by iron. The best way to decide which brand of formula is right for your children is to speak with your pediatrician about your concerns so that he or she can help you walk through the entire process. Much of the decision will be based on the weight of the twins and whether or not they have a clean bill of health. That is why it is so important to involve your pediatrician. It also makes the choice easier for you to make and speeds up the entire process considerably.

Of course, you need to be aware of any special concerns that you might have regarding the health of your children. If one or both of your children is allergic to milk products or some of the other ingredients contained in the formula, you may choose to go with a hypoallergenic version that is much easier on them to digest without causing stomach problems or rashes. There are even versions of baby formula available that are made for lactose intolerant children. If you know what the potential health concerns are, you can find a formula that caters to those needs more quickly.

Another important element to consider is whether you want to use powdered baby formula or the liquid formula that is ready to use. You can save a lot of money by choosing the powdered version, but if you are on the go a lot, having to stop and mix up formula can be a real problem, as it has a tendency to clump when

it is mixed with water that has not been warmed. Therefore, you might want to consider using the liquid formula. For the most part, it will depend on both your schedule and your budget.

After you consider all of these things, you can decide which type of baby formula is right for your own twins. The most important thing to remember is that you can always gauge the effectiveness of the formula you are using by watching how your children respond to it. If they are able to easily digest it and they are gaining weight normally, then you have made the right choice. ♥



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Assume Nothing When it Comes to

Toy Assembly— and on Christmas Eve, Even Less

by Melinda L. Wentzel

Melinda Wentzel is Planet Mom: It's where I live. Visit me there at www.notesfromplanet-mom.com.



It has been said that you can tell a lot about a person simply by looking at how they handle three things in life: a rainy day, lost luggage and tangled Christmas lights. No doubt, “toy assembly” could easily be added to that list. Even more telling—toy assembly WITHOUT INSTRUCTIONS on CHRISTMAS EVE. Yep, WAY telling.

Needless to say, my husband and I learned plenty about one another last year on December 24th as we struggled to remain calm despite the plight that befell us. (Let’s make that “volumes” we learned). Heck, it was an EDUCATIONAL FEAST.

At precisely 3:00 p.m. that day we made what could only be described as a horrifying discovery: One of the toys we had purchased—a multi-level, 56-inch, 197-piece Swiss Family Rob-

inson style doll/tree house—had NO instructions. That’s right—NONE. Zip. Zilch. Nada. We know this to be true since we nearly destroyed the box in our frantic search for said directional material, to no avail. And no matter how many times we shoved our heads inside the box, tipped it on end and meticulously examined each little packet that poured out, we were faced with the same grim reality: THEY JUST WEREN’T IN THERE! And no amount of wishing would have made them appear; although at one point I seriously considered calling the North Pole to make a special request. I may as well have.

First, we tried contacting the store where we bought the blasted thing. No luck. It just so happened to be the last one on the shelf; so we couldn’t drive there to make an exchange, nor could we tear into another box to peek at its instructions. (Hey, we were desperate!) We then called the manufacturer, whose kind, caring and oh-so-compassionate answering machine wished us a politically correct “Happy Holidays!”

“Lovely—just lovely,” we thought. Perhaps it’s best that we didn’t leave a message. It would have been ugly.

We even got online in hopes that those elusive assembly guidelines would be available for downloading. Perish the thought. Too sensible. In lieu of that, we were able to view photos of the wretched thing—FULLY ASSEMBLED, I might add. All 197 pieces. Together. As one. Totally indivisible. Earnestly I studied that picture; somehow it just didn’t seem plausible that it had once been a jumbled mass of wooden thingies. Duct tape and/or Super Glue HAD to have entered the picture at some point. Although I was hoping they wouldn’t be a part of our solution that night. Stranger things have happened.

Meanwhile the clock kept ticking. We were due in church soon and after that we had tentatively planned to WRAP EVERYTHING (Procrastination Central here…)—so using that precious time to assemble what had become a monstrosity of a toy was out of the question. It was now or never. Do or die.

So the two of us (Tweedledee and Tweedledum) pooled our meager resources—common sense, manual dexterity, mechanical ability and patience—and met the challenge head on. After two full hours of heated debate, we emerged from the basement victorious. The “monstrosity” had been assembled—totally without the aid of duct tape, glue or a single marriage counselor. Unquestionably, the picture on the box had saved us. Had it not appeared there in such fine detail, I am certain that we would have been the proud owners of 197 distinct wooden thingies.

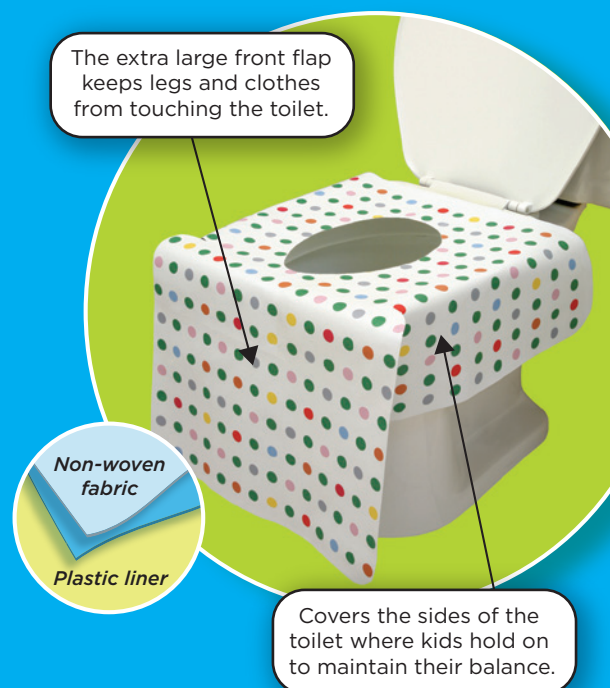
I suppose then we could have presented the silly thing (unassembled) as one of those colossal “gift projects.” You know, “the gifts that keep on frustrating…” Granted, it might not have been completed till now, but it would have certainly lived up to its claim: PROVIDES HOURS OF ENTERTAINMENT. Yep, that would have been entertaining alright; but I wouldn’t know as much about my spouse now, would I?

But then again, I’ve seen him handle tangled Christmas lights. ♡

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Double the Gifts Double the Giving

HOW TO HANDLE THEIR HECTIC HOLIDAY WISH LISTS!

Patricia Edmister, Ph.D. resides in Sherman Oaks, California is the mother of fraternal twins and was the director of developmental psychology and children's study at the California Family Study Center.



by Patricia Edmister

As the holidays approach, many parents of multiples begin to agonize over gift giving options.

- Do I have to give each child the same thing?
- Do I have to spend the same amount of money on each child?
- Does each child need to receive the same number of gifts?
- Do I give them things they want or things they need? What if only one of my children needs certain things---will the other one(s) feel unfairly treated?

What should I tell relatives and friends to do?

Actually, these questions aren't very different from the same ones asked by parents who have children of differing ages. Although most parents try to be as fair as possible, in the process they sometimes lose sight of what gift-giving is all about—showing other people that they are cared about by demonstrating sensitivity to their wants and needs.

The first step, then, in choosing gifts for children is to determine, with input from them, what they want and need.

Parents might start by trying to see each of their children's desires from their respective perspectives. Why does each of my children want a particular item? Is it because a friend or co-twin has or wants one? Or has the desire been created through media hype, something that happens a lot around holiday time?

Then parents are advised to evaluate the desired item from their own perspectives, starting by looking at its health and safety factors and moving on to its appropriateness for their child's developmental level. To determine appropriateness, the parent should ask:

1. Is my child ready (in terms of her cognitive and motor abilities) to use this gift appropriately?
2. Is this item something that will stimulate her creativity and imagination, or does it serve only one function, which will bore her after a short period of time?
3. Is it worth the asking price? Many toys featured in the media or in connection with a holiday movie promotion are greatly

overpriced, may be of poor quality and are one function-only items.

THE “WISH LIST” SECRET

One way to handle this problem of children constantly barraging parents as the holidays near with “I want this,” and “I want that” is to develop wish lists, one for each child, which parents can start either at holiday time or maintain throughout the year.

To begin this special list, parents need to first explain the concept to their children, saying that it is a list of the various items they’ve mentioned throughout the time period prior to the holiday (or birthday, for that matter) that they really want you, relatives, friends and Santa (if appropriate) to think about when it comes time to gift giving. Parents should emphasize that putting an item on a wish list doesn’t ensure that the child will receive it, but that it will be considered by others.

Then, when a child says, “I want...” in a store, while watching television or while looking through catalogs or magazines, ask him whether he wants that to go on the wish list. If so, add it to the list. Shortly before the actual holiday, parents need to sit down with each of their children and his list and go over it, scratching off whatever the child no longer wants. Everyone will be surprised by the number of items requested early in the year that don’t make the final cut at the end of the year.

By keeping an individual list for each child, parents are better able to purchase individual gifts for each child. And children are better able to understand that they don’t necessarily want the same things, nor are they likely to get the same things. This way, parents are demonstrating respect for their children’s individual preferences and desires.

MONEY MATTERS

Children at the preschool age don’t have a good sense of monetary values, so it isn’t critical that parents spend the same amount on each child. If they compare gifts, it is much more likely to be in terms of the number of gifts received or the size of the gifts. These concepts are much more within their developmental level.

Thus, if co-twins are into such comparisons, and one child wants a lot of small things, like several Barbie outfits, and the other wants a particular Lego set, it might be wise to package the Barbie outfits into a big box, to be counted as one gift.

Again, parents’ goal is to try to give each child what he or she wants, while trying to keep comparisons to a minimum.

If they observe Christmas in their household and hang stockings, parents may want to wrap small items as stocking stuffers, ensuring that each child has lots of presents to unwrap.

FAMILY RITUALS

Some families have established family practices around gift-giving that make it more fun. For example, a family might give each child at least one gift to fit each of several standard categories,

such as: Something to Read; Something to Wear; Something They Need; Something to Listen To; and Something to Eat. That way, over the year, it becomes a ritual to try to guess what each person will receive by category, and at the same time, makes giving them something they need more pleasurable.

It is important to begin differentiating gift-giving early so that children do not develop unreasonable expectations as they get older. If two children have the same item on their wish list as a priority, it’s okay to give it to each of them, as long as they realize why—that they didn’t get the same thing just because they are twins.

There may be times as they get older when they want an expensive gift, such as an MP3 player or TV that they will have to share. Parents will make their learning to share more difficult if they’ve always given each his own. Parents may even want to start a family practice of giving twins one gift a year to be shared between them, provided a common item can be found on both their wish lists.

When it comes to helping family and friends with their gift-giving; pass on ideas from the wish lists. Rather than saying, “Oh, they’ll be happy with anything you want to give.” Too often, the latter sets everyone up for unhappiness—the children, who receive gifts they don’t want, you, if the gift is not appropriate for the children developmentally or in terms of safety, and the relative, who does not feel appreciated when the children “turn up their noses” at it.

It’s much better for parents to take a pro-active role by making concrete suggestions for successful gift-giving. And, if you have specific toy-buying guidelines you’d like relatives to respect, now is the time to mention them—not after the buyer is embarrassed by the children’s response to their gifts or when tears and tantrums follow the children’s being unable to play with the toys. ♥

WATCHWORDS TO BUY BY!

- Does the toy you are purchasing reflect your values—for example, is it educational, non-violent and cooperative in nature?
- Is this toy appropriate to your child’s cognitive and motor skills?
- Will it stimulate your child’s imagination and creativity, or is it a single-use toy?
- Does the toy promote sex-role stereotyping and is that a message you want to convey?
- Are you buying the toy based on your child’s wishes and/or needs?
- Is the toy safe?
- Is the toy a good value and worth what it costs?
- Is your child going to maintain interest in this toy or might he be asking for it in response to media hype?
- Are you buying something for your children to share?
- What basis will the children be using for comparing gifts, and are you being responsive to that?



by Christina Baglivi Tinglof

Celebrating *the* Holiday Season *with your Twins*

It happens every year around this time—colorful toy catalogs begin to fill your mailbox daily and as your children pour over them with such concentration you'd swear that they've memorized every page and price. Yes, Christmas and Hanukkah are just around the corner. And while it may seem like just yesterday that the kids were splashing around in the backyard pool, it won't be long before you hear them utter those five little words, "I want that for Christmas."

To a child, gifts are such a big part of the holiday season but as adults we know that Christmas and Hanukkah are also about family, spirituality, and altruism. Fortunately, savvy parents of multiples have found all sorts of unique ways of getting into the spirit of the season by embracing traditions, both old and new. Keeping holiday rituals alive not only spreads a little cheer this time of year but also builds strong family ties and deepens sibling relationships, and helps to create memories that will last throughout your children's lives.

WELCOMING IN THE SEASON

From winter festivals complete with a visit from Santa to holiday parades, the beginning of December is a busy time for many local parents of twins clubs. Many clubs adopt a family in need or help out at a local food bank—both of which are a perfect way of introducing your young twins to the spirit of giving. "We love walking in our town's Holiday Parade with our Moms of Multiples Club, The Gemini Crickets," says Linda de los Reyes, a Los Gatos, Calif. mother of four-year-old fraternal twin girls, Anna and Mia. "All the kids wear the club's T-shirt. Kids are either riding in a wagon, stroller, or bike that's decorated in holiday colors." Yet even if you're not an active member of your local club, you can find ways of helping out in your own community or just create traditions unique to your own family. "We started having a twin-themed Christmas," explains Sue Kannenberg. "We would take Derek and Sarah's picture together wearing the same outfit sitting next to the tree." The Poughkeepsie, NY, mom would also write down the sweet things that her four-

year-old twins would do for one another throughout the year and then wrap up the slips of paper in little boxes. On Christmas morning, after Derek and Sarah would open them, Sue and her husband would read them to their children. With the arrival of their third child, however, they changed course so they wouldn't exclude their youngest, and now instead cast handprints each year to hang on the Christmas tree.

But some family traditions are rooted in pure practicality. "Each year Santa comes to our house a few weeks before Christmas for the boys to sit on his lap and take pictures in front of our tree," explains Jenn Duke of High Point, NC. "We started this when Cameron and Caden were a little less than three months and we really wanted their picture with Santa but didn't want to take them out during RSV (respiratory syncytial virus) season being that they were premature."

DECKING THE HALLS

In our house, we set up the Christmas tree early in the season (it's artificial) so we can slowly savor our holiday activities throughout the busy month. We ceremoniously hang each and every ornament, reminiscing about where we were when we bought them—the 2002 Salt Lake City Olympics, the summer in Yosemite. Chris Parente's children all have their own collection of ornaments given to them over the years. "Ornaments from mom and dad represent the growth we've seen in the kids," says the Morris Plains, NJ, mom. Eight-year-old fraternal twin Joseph prizes his "karate boy" ornament while his co-twin, Elizabeth, cherishes a pillow that has the embroidered word "dream" on it to inspire her to reach for her goals. Not only is ornament collecting a tangible way to preserve family memories but it also reinforces each twin's own individuality, highlighting their unique characteristics and interests.

For some, however, decorating the Christmas tree is also a time to pause and reflect, especially for those families who've lost a multiple. "Together, as a family, we hang the special ornaments such as the silver bell and the baby bassinet with the name of our angel baby," says Kristen Felty

of Charlotte, NC. Her five-year-old sons, Mac and Cooper, are surviving triplets. Cooper had an identical twin, Bennett, who was a stillborn due to complications from TTTS (Twin-to-Twin Transfusion syndrome). "It's always a bittersweet moment," says Felty of their yearly rite.

GIFT GIVING GALORE

Even with all these endearing traditions, Christmas and Hanukkah's biggest draw is still gift giving. Yet how do you instill the idea that "it's better to give than receive" when it comes to your young twins? Simple. Make it fun. Every holiday season since my fraternal twin boys were in kindergarten, I've taken each of them out separately for an afternoon of Christmas shopping and then to a special lunch. What started out as a unique way to spend some alone time with each child (something I felt they sorely lacked) has grown into a cherished family tradition that now includes their younger brother, too. The added bonus? My children are learning firsthand the joy of giving.

Jackie Leeds' eight-year-old identical twin boys also enjoy buying gifts for one another but the Ocean City, NJ, mom also encourages her sons, Joshua and Hunter, to remember those less fortunate this time of year by encouraging them to also purchase a toy for another child in need.

CAN YOU SAY THANK YOU TO GRANDMA?

Teaching your twins to be thoughtful gift givers is only half the story, however. Being a gracious gift receiver, on the other hand, is a whole different chapter. And no one knows this better than parents of twins who are often the mediators between relatives who insist on giving one gift to both and the twins who don't understand why.

"My mother-in-law buys my boys one gift to share all the time," says Karen Johnson of Carson, Calif., who asked me to change her name for fear of being recognized by relatives! "One year when they weren't even two, she bought them one tricycle. Imagine how that went over?" Frustrated, Johnson asked her husband to call his mother to let

her know the chaos that the one trike caused but it proved to be too uncomfortable to do.

Melisa Tulotta experienced a similar situation when a close family friend gave her then three-year-old boy-girl twins, Aidan and Emma, one present. "While the gift had two of the same items—nesting building block sets—the kids still felt it was one gift and were very blunt about their feelings," remembers the Hamilton, NJ, mom. "When only one child was handed a gift, the other immediately said, 'What about me?'" Embarrassed, Tulotta quickly tried to diffuse the situation by encouraging them both to open it together but it was still a very uncomfortable moment for all.

And if you think two kids sharing one gift is difficult, what about three? Christina Ganiel-Ballard, mother to four-year-old fraternal triplets, Aidan, Bryce, and Ballard, has often had to referee when her brood has received one present to share. "First, all three fight over who will open the gift and then they fight over who will play with it first," laughs the Galloway, NJ, mom.

When Gretchen O'Shea's mom gave her then eighteen-month-old boy-girl twins, Molly and Patrick, one toy shopping cart for Christmas, the ensuing arguments caused the Cranford, NJ, mom to take action. "I made sure to be specific later on with everyone," she says. From then on, she told friends and family about what each child would like for Christmas and even their birthday. "I tried to make it more about their individual tastes."

Creating a "wish list" for each child every holiday season is a great idea says Cindy Post Senning, great-granddaughter to etiquette guru, Emily Post, co-director of The Emily Post Institute in Vermont, and author of *Emily's Christmas Gifts*. "There's no problem with giving a relative or close family friend a wish list before the holidays. In fact, it can be very helpful."

The trick, according to Post Senning is to keep it simple. Give individual lists with each child's name printed across the top, and make sure each list is different thereby stressing their individuality. "You may want to say something like, 'These are a few things that the boys were hoping for but if you had something else in mind, please feel free to give it.' The point is to be clear but not do it in a demanding way," she says.

And what about after the fact? What do you say—if anything—to someone who continues to give one gift to both your twins? "Obvi-

ously you don't want to say anything while the children are opening the gift," Post Senning stresses. Instead, wait a week or two after the holidays and try to gently bring it up to Grandma in a conversation. You don't want to offend her, Post Senning says, but rather just make her aware that constantly giving one gift always causes a bit of grief. Another option says Post Senning, is to let Grandma see the aftermath first hand. Instead of stepping in quickly when your twins begin to squabble over one gift, allow it to play out a bit. Let the noise level rise and then calmly stress the concept of sharing and taking turns. "Have her see that it requires some special diplomacy on your part with your kids," Post Senning says.

ONE KID'S NIGHTMARE IS ANOTHER KID'S DREAM

For every family that dreads the one-for-two gift exchange, other families welcome it. "I actually love gifts they can share," says Ann Wiczekowski. When her identical twin girls, Chloe and Sydney, were little, the family lived in a very small house where two of everything was out of the question. "I encouraged family to buy toys they could share like a doll house or kitchen center." But the Hamilton, NJ, mom also included smaller gifts for each girl such as two dolls to go with the playhouse helping to counter any negative effects and intra-twin fighting.

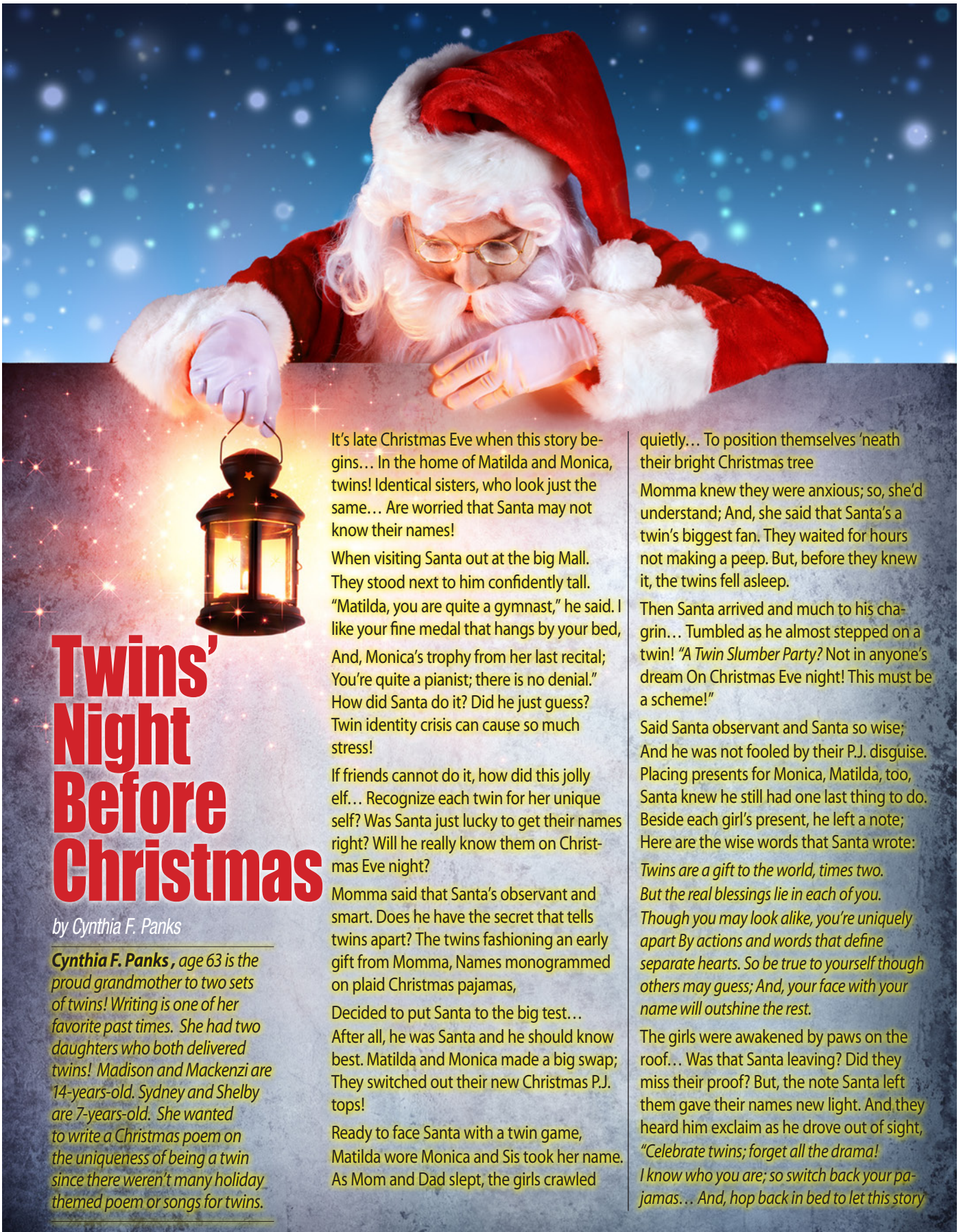
On the other hand, Cheryl Lage, author of *Twinspiration: Real-Life Advice from Pregnancy through the First Year* and mother of seven-year-old boy-girl twins uses the one-gift dilemma as a teaching opportunity. Before any holiday where gifts are expected, Lage does a bit of coaching by reminding her children that they need to show appreciation for any gift regardless of what it is. "With two same-age children the glut of incoming holiday gifts is overwhelming. Yes, the kids are individuals but no one can have everything they want all the time," she says. Lage fears that giving twins two of everything simply to avoid fighting is counterproductive and often has negative consequences. "In an effort to foster individualism in twins, we may occasionally swing too far into overindulgence," she says.

HERE'S HOPING FOR HAPPY HOLIDAYS

As you gear up for yet another holiday season, remember that your kids take their cues from you. By concentrating more on altruism and building a sense of community and family, and focusing more on what traditions mean the most to your family, the gift giving (and fighting) may take a back seat. Well, we can hope, can't we? ❤️

Christina Baglivi Tinglof lives in Southern California and is the mother of three sons, including fraternal twins. She's the author of *Parenting School-Age Twins and Multiples* and *Double Duty: The Parents' Guide to Raising Twins*, available from the TWINS Parenting Bookshelf. Christina's website is www.talk-about-twins.com.





Twins' Night Before Christmas

by Cynthia F. Panks

Cynthia F. Panks, age 63 is the proud grandmother to two sets of twins! Writing is one of her favorite past times. She had two daughters who both delivered twins! Madison and Mackenzi are 14-years-old. Sydney and Shelby are 7-years-old. She wanted to write a Christmas poem on the uniqueness of being a twin since there weren't many holiday themed poem or songs for twins.

It's late Christmas Eve when this story begins... In the home of Matilda and Monica, twins! Identical sisters, who look just the same... Are worried that Santa may not know their names!

When visiting Santa out at the big Mall. They stood next to him confidently tall. "Matilda, you are quite a gymnast," he said. I like your fine medal that hangs by your bed, And, Monica's trophy from her last recital; You're quite a pianist; there is no denial." How did Santa do it? Did he just guess? Twin identity crisis can cause so much stress!

If friends cannot do it, how did this jolly elf... Recognize each twin for her unique self? Was Santa just lucky to get their names right? Will he really know them on Christmas Eve night?

Momma said that Santa's observant and smart. Does he have the secret that tells twins apart? The twins fashioning an early gift from Momma, Names monogrammed on plaid Christmas pajamas,

Decided to put Santa to the big test...

After all, he was Santa and he should know best. Matilda and Monica made a big swap; They switched out their new Christmas P.J. tops!

Ready to face Santa with a twin game, Matilda wore Monica and Sis took her name. As Mom and Dad slept, the girls crawled

quietly... To position themselves 'neath their bright Christmas tree

Momma knew they were anxious; so, she'd understand; And, she said that Santa's a twin's biggest fan. They waited for hours not making a peep. But, before they knew it, the twins fell asleep.

Then Santa arrived and much to his chagrin... Tumbled as he almost stepped on a twin! "A *Twin Slumber Party*? Not in anyone's dream On Christmas Eve night! This must be a scheme!"

Said Santa observant and Santa so wise; And he was not fooled by their P.J. disguise. Placing presents for Monica, Matilda, too, Santa knew he still had one last thing to do. Beside each girl's present, he left a note; Here are the wise words that Santa wrote:

Twins are a gift to the world, times two.

But the real blessings lie in each of you.

Though you may look alike, you're uniquely apart By actions and words that define separate hearts. So be true to yourself though others may guess; And, your face with your name will outshine the rest.

The girls were awakened by paws on the roof... Was that Santa leaving? Did they miss their proof? But, the note Santa left them gave their names new light. And they heard him exclaim as he drove out of sight, "Celebrate twins; forget all the drama!

I know who you are; so switch back your pajamas... And, hop back in bed to let this story

Open Season on Sitters Cornering the Market

ON HOLIDAY SITTERS



by Nancy A. Moeller

The holiday season means parties, gifts, decorations and constant fun for children, but for the parents who have to provide all those activities, it means squeezing even more into an already packed schedule. Most families have to hire more baby sitters during this time of year, not only for parties, but to get everything done. Since sitters and money are in high demand between Thanksgiving and New Year's Eve, parents of multiples have to be creative in using their time and their caregivers during the holidays.

PARTY TIME!

Saturdays in December are premium nights for holiday parties, so sitters need to be lined up early. "I line up my sitters the minute I know the date and give

them a reminder call a week ahead of time," says Lisa Cranwell-Bruce of Atlanta, mother of four children including 3-year-old twins. It's a good idea to have a back-up plan in case a sitter cancels.

While you're searching for holiday sitters, don't forget New Year's Eve. You may not be thinking about 2016 during Thanksgiving or early December, but the other families competing for your baby sitters are. By the first day of December, most regular sitters have a job for that busy last night of the year.

HOURS OF SHOPPING TO DO

Baby-sitting isn't just for parents' nights out, but for shopping as well. Sara Adler of Boca Raton, Florida, uses a "mother's morning out" program to care for her twins, Emily and Alexander, while she does last minute Hanukkah shopping or food preparation. "You feel like it's: On your mark! Get set! Go! Let's see how much I can get done in three hours," laughs Sara. Even if the hours are short, these programs usually provide activities and fun for children while mom or dad checks a few things off the gift list.

Kay Allison, of Barrington, Illinois, has been fortunate enough to have family members come and care for her 3 1/2 year old twin girls, Kate and Lucy. Still, Kay found that to get all her shopping done, she had to get child-care help. "I think with multiples you really need someone older than 21 when they are younger," Kay advises. For that reason, Kay hires sitters whose regular job involves working with preschoolers.

SEASON FOR SLEEPOVERS

If you are fortunate enough to have family living nearby, you should consider having the kids spend the night away from home,

either separately or together. One of the advantages of having children spend the night away is that parents can get several things done at once. The parents might use the opportunity to go out in the evening, then get up and get some shopping done the next day. Without the kids at home, parents don't have to leave the presents in the car until bedtime, risking accidental discovery.

ENDLESS WRAPPING

Even after you have finished shopping and partying, there are still plenty of activities around the house that must be done. How is it possible to assemble the latest complicated toy with the threat of children waking in each time you hit the hammer? Sometimes it's best to have the house to yourself, even if it's just to complete the holiday baking without having to stop and fix a peanut butter sandwich.

If family isn't available and funds are running low, a reciprocal agreement with another family may be your best choice: We'll take yours if you'll take ours. This works best close to the actual holiday so that everything is home from the stores and ready to wrap.

Recruit help from family or neighbors

One problem for large families is that use of extended family members as baby sitters might not be possible. It's not easy to handle so many children alone. As an inexpensive solution for this problem,

families might try hiring a mature preteen to help the grandparents care for the children.

If the youngster hasn't started baby-sitting by herself yet, she'll get a lot of experience

while being supervised by an adult, and she won't charge nearly what a teenager with a driver's license may. The grandparents will be spared some of the more physical aspects of caring for your children—lifting into cribs and high chairs, for example.

These same preteens can be excellent help for you while you're trying to accomplish those last minute items at home. There may be a mom in your neighborhood who would love to send her 10 and 12-year-olds over to your house. That way the mother will get some time alone, while her kids will entertain your multiples. In return, you get some free help and an opportunity to sneak off and wrap last-minute packages. ♥

Nancy A. Moeller of Atlanta, Georgia is a stay-at-home mom and freelance writer. She is a mother of triplet boys.

FINDING AND KEEPING SITTERS

Parents of multiples face special challenges in getting baby sitters. Here are a few things you can do to make life easier for your sitters:

- Dress your children differently or put their names on their shirts.
- Introduce the twins to the baby sitter so she'll know who's who.
- Be objective about the job requiring more than one sitter. If any children are still in diapers, you may need to consider an extra set of hands.
- Two baby sitters don't necessarily mean two the same age. A teenage with a preteen sibling or a parent/child combination might work well and cost a little less.
- Most sitters will tell you that the hourly rate isn't what makes them take or decline a job when they're available—it's the work conditions. If the job always requires feeding the children or constantly entertaining them, they may be inclined to turn it down. Hire her for some nights when the children will spend much of the time asleep.



Holiday Gift Guide 2015

We found some fantastic finds for everyone on your list this year! Check out our annual recommendations and gift ideas sure to be a huge holiday hit...



Stocking Stuffers

Tegu's NEW Bespoke Collection, myBlockhead.

These are made to order heirloom quality magnetic wooden toy blocks. Create your very own Blockhead, ready and eager to accompany you on countless adventures at home or on-the-go. You give it your own style and personality, they'll deliver the goods. \$20 including shipping

1 Binxly Baby shopping cart hammock.

This comfy cart hammock quickly and easily clips onto most carts, hangs elevated so you have plenty of room for groceries, then simply rolls up to fit in your purse or diaper bag when finished. \$49.95



Compose Yourself –

This digital music game features a deck of transparent cards and access to an exclusive website to compose, share with friends and family, or download/print your own custom sheet music – featuring more than a billion melody combinations. (Ages 6+) \$15.00



2 Wrap your newborn in Baby's First Christmas Blanky as either Rudolph or Clarice

Baby's first Christmas blanky-Clarice or Rudolph. You can even entertain your kids with the Rudolph plush toy as it plays music and nose lights up! \$16.41; Clarice: \$16.50.

3 The Arm's Reach Co-Sleeper Ideal Co-Sleeper®

Perfect for twins! Like all of their Co-Sleeper® bedside bassinets, the Ideal Co-Sleeper® is a safe way to bond with your babies as soon as they come home for the first time. \$224.99



Our Top Picks!



4

The BUB Baby Less Mess Changing Pad Cover

Luxurious nursery product features a cozy top half attached to a soft, waterproof bottom that allows you to quickly and hygienically wipe away messes -- and avoid that extra load of laundry. \$44.98.

Stocking Stuffers

Zubits magnetic shoe closures

A brand new way to put on and take off your shoes without ever having to tie shoelaces again! Zubits are threaded through the existing laces. Once you find your desired fit knot off the laces, then tuck the excess, snap together and you're done.

Comes in three sizes, six colors and are suitable for ages 5 and older. \$19.99 - \$21.99.



Glitzies DIY Hair Bling

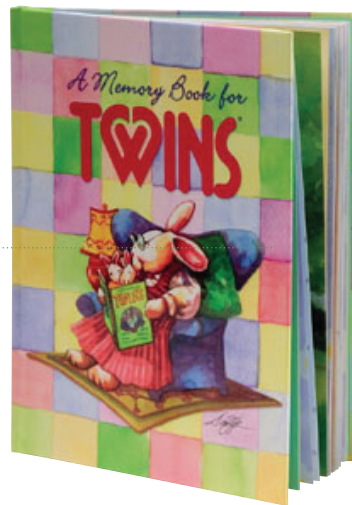
Glitzies is the perfect accessory for parties, dance recitals, gymnastics and more! They are super easy to apply and remove, so you can change up your style for any event! All retail for just under \$10 a pack.



5

TWINS Lifetime Memory Baby Books.

Get your hardbound baby memory book specifically made for twins. This hardbound baby book captures special moments in your life and the lives of your young twins! Consider buying a pair for your pair to create a keepsake for both of them. NOW ON SALE—for only \$4.95!



6

Billy Goat Baby Crib Shoes

A new collection of whimsical and artfully-designed baby booties comprised of high-quality, handcrafted leather. Comfortable and easy to wear Velcro straps to keep booties snug and secure on feet. Ages 6-12 months this cute and colorful shoe and sock box set is the perfect gift set. \$39.99





Stocking Stuffers

ROBLOX Gift Cards

give kids access to premium in-game content and introduce them to a massive and growing world of free games and accessible developer tools. ROBLOX get kids to delve deeper into something they're passionate about, learn skills at their own pace, and explore potential career paths in game or software development. ROBLOX gift cards are available for purchase at most retail outlets where video games are sold



Ninja Nesting Dolls

Stack inside each other, a perfect gift idea and an interesting take on the traditional Russian Nesting Dolls. Armored with their shuriken, Nunchucks and swords, great for decoration and storing small items. This set of 6 all stack within one another to create the perfect gift and decoration. \$19.95 from Kitson



7 Umi Moccasins

This new Bevin moccasin is unlike other baby moccasins as they feature Umi's patented UmiCloud Footbed for optimal support and comfort for little feet. Available in four colors with butter soft leather linings and ultra-thin, natural rubber outsole. \$49.95 available in kid sizes 1-8.



8 Munch Mitt

Teething is painful! Keep babies calm through the teething stage with a unique solution to soothe aching gums. Helps provide pain relief for babies in the process of teething and protects their hands from irritation due to chewing. Munch Mitt comes in purple, green or yellow and with a handy travel/wash bag. \$18.99 for 1 or \$35.00 for a set of 2

9 The Gymini Super Deluxe Lights & Music activity mat

Offers baby an engaging and feature-rich developmental environment.





10

PortaPlay™ Convertible Activity Center

Entertains baby with bounces and delightful learning toys. PortaPlay™ also folds flat for maximum portability and minimum storage space. Converts easily to a Play Table and more for a product that always surprises. Activity Center is good for ages 5 to 12 months

And the Play Table is good for ages up to 5 years old. \$149.00.



Stocking Stuffers

Logo Loops

Ready-made and customized cotton/Lycra headband loops. Browse the Holiday Loops section full of colorful choices for everyone on your list. Each band is made of 90% cotton/10% Lycra stretch. The headbands are machine washable and can be tumbled dry—one-size-fits-all. \$13.99.



Holiday Specs Plastic 3D Glasses

Affordable and just plain FUN for the entire family - even Grandma! Instantly transform any gathering to one full of bright colors and amazing Christmas-inspired images! A surprise for your eyes, Holiday Specs 3D Plastic Glasses miraculously transform LED lights into seasonal figures of candy canes, snowflakes & more!



11

Multi-use Peripop™ animals Peripop™

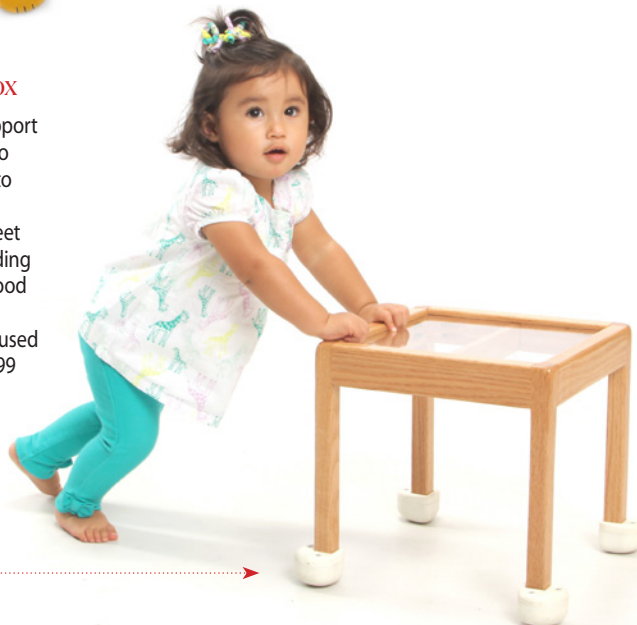
Helps keep stuff inside but that's not it. From blanket to play mat has endless possibilities: provides additional storage solutions; a great stroller blanket—the head folds over stroller bar to prevent blanket from slipping off; and a great play mat. \$69.99.



12

Little Balance Box

Offers stability and support for babies or toddlers to transition from sitting to kneeling, standing and walking. The floating feet allows for seamless gliding across carpet, tile or wood without damaging the surfaces. It can also be used as a toddler table. \$69.99





Picks For Parents

The IMUSA Tortilla Press

Traditional and durable design that allows for perfectly pressed homemade tortillas, with just the right thickness and round shape. Create authentic, restaurant-style tortillas. \$29.99.



PubWARE

Unbreakable tulip, pint, rocks, and stemless wine glasses, that looks and feels like real glass, but won't crack, discolor, haze or cloud like cups made from acrylic or polycarbonate. \$49.99.



13

New Tubby Table

Colorful and enticing, this activity table measures 14" x 17" to fit in virtually any size bathtub. Fantastic for bathing twins, this playful tub toy has an adjustable pedestal to raise the table up or down, depending on the height of the children. Ages 18 months \$39.99. USE TWIN15 to get a 15% DISCOUNT!



14

50th Anniversary Rudolph The Red-Nosed Reindeer Light Up Musical X-Mas Plush

Celebrate 50 years of the beloved holiday special! Just press his foot and his shiny nose glows as he sings! Built-in battery for hundreds of plays. Safe for all ages. \$31.99.

15

Glide Bikes Balance Bikes

These bikes help kids as young as 18 months old confidently learn to ride a bike. A foot rest is ergonomically located on the bike so kids can rest their feet while "gliding." Once they have mastered balancing, replace the foot peg system with the pedal assembly and they are ready to start cycling. Hand brakes are also included. \$79.99





16

Sevi Magnetic Playsets

Each of the four themes: Circus, Four Seasons, Faces and Fashion offer brightly colored magnets adorned with realistic artwork. Each box is easy to close and carry to take on a trip. It also stores perfectly on the bookshelf. Ages 3+ \$30.00.



Picks For Parents

CardNinja

A Simple Solution to Staying Organized... keep the important items you need- ID, cash, credit cards- all in one convenient spot. CardNinja is a spandex sleeve with 3M adhesive that attaches to the back of any smartphone to keep your cards and money secure. \$9.99



Camera Lens Travel Coffee Mug

This quirky bottle looks like a Camera Lens and boasts a stainless steel lining and a screw top lid - making it ideal for use as a travel mug. The Ready, Sip, Action Travel Bottle Costs \$23.99



Olbas Herbal Bath

Turn the tub into a Swiss spa. Olbas Herbal Bath is a delightful, therapeutic and fragrant bath liquid from Switzerland. You can use it in your bathtub or for lots of bubbles! Use it in the shower as a liquid soap - makes an excellent body wash that will stimulate all your senses and leave you feeling clean and refreshed. Excellent as a footbath for tired, aching feet.



17

Green Toys® Mini Construction Vehicles.

Scoop it! Mix it! Dump it! Made in the USA from 100% recycled plastic milk jugs. Perfect in a sand box, toy box, or gift box, these pint-sized trucks are just right for little hands, and can easily be tossed in a diaper bag for on-the-go fun. Each vehicle comes with its own bulldog construction worker, and the figures are interchangeable among all three. \$16.99 each.

18

Barbie® Doll's Iconic Dreamhouse®

Three-stories and seven rooms of endless fun! includes all the lux features perfect for Barbie® doll including a working elevator, built-in garage and pool. Rooms come to life with Barbie® Dreamhouse as girls play with the five interactive accessories complete with realistic motion and sound. 3+ years. \$199.99





19

Lil' Critters Roll & Discover Ball

It's a circus of fun with the Lil' Critters Roll & Discover Ball. This soft ball has loads of entertainment for active babies, all rolled up into one toy. 6m - 24m / Price \$14.99.



20

PlayWheels Skateboards

The collection includes 21-inch plastic & wood skateboards and 28-inch wood skateboards in kids' favorite characters: Disney Princesses, Disney's Frozen, Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles, and Spiderman. Created for kids who want to have fun and be outside, the skateboards are designed for beginner skateboarders. PlayWheels 21-inch plastic skateboards (\$27.99); PlayWheels 21-inch wood skateboards (\$17.99); Ages 5-8



21

Pirasta Coloring Posters

Proudly made in the USA. Four different scenes to choose: Let's Color America: Take a tour of the USA; The Big Apple: New York City; Food Fight; and Funny Farm. Each poster retails for \$32. For more information, visit



22

Paper Punk Kits

Themes From Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles to Amazing Cityscapes. Paper Punk offers fold-to-play kits that kids can't wait to get their hands on. In a matter of minutes, SpongeBob (\$12.95), Snow Gal/Snow Guy (\$9.95) or Ape (\$15.95) can appear in their 3D stand-up glory. Also available is the Paper Punk cityscape. Urban Fold (\$24.95) allows all ages to build a paper block city, and includes over 650 stickers! With no scissors or glue needed, Paper Punk leaves no mess.



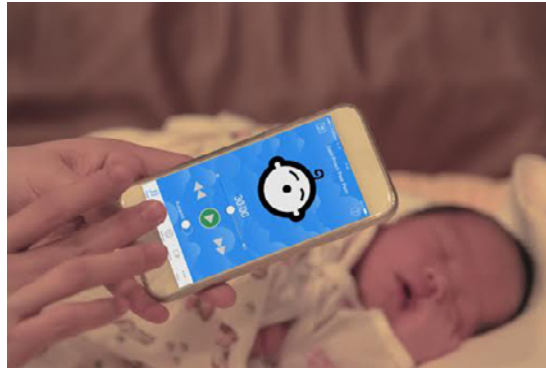


Appy Holidays With These Great New Tech Finds

1

SleepHero App

A smart app for tired parents that settles your babies to sleep and keeps them asleep. SleepHero is the only one that allows you to record your own lullabies and stories. Or you can choose from a library of 35 other white noise sounds, including one that mimics the sounds of a mother's womb. Newborns up to age 3. \$3.99



2

BabyLOVE

is a personal toy shopping app for mobile parents that chooses the perfect toy and gift options for their kids. Selects toys for children ages 0-6; Toys selected are all linked directly to Amazon for purchase through an easy "Buy" button; FREE for download on iTunes

3

KidsConnect:

A small phone with four pre-programmed numbers, parental control of incoming calls, built-in GPS, real time tracking and voice monitoring. Sends a text to parents when their child enters or leaves a predetermined location such as school, etc. \$79.95 with cell service plans provided by Value Wireless for as low as \$13 a month.



4

LifeJacket2 LifeJacket 2

The Altec Lansing iMW577 Life Jacket 2 Bluetooth Wireless Speaker features great sound, voice confirmation, and an onboard microphone for clear, hands-free communication. The rugged jacket is IP67 Waterproof/Dustproof/Shockproof rated and it FLOATS! With 16 hours of battery life and power bank capability you can remotely charge your smartphone anywhere and rock out all day long. \$149.99





Kids and Family Games

1

Leo Messi FootBubbles —

Kids love bubbles. And kids love soccer. Now kids can blow bubbles into the shape of a soccer ball, and with the special socks, perform tricks with the bubble ball ... just slip on the Messi socks, blow a bubble into the shape of a ball and see how many times you can juggle the bubble with your feet. \$9.99



2

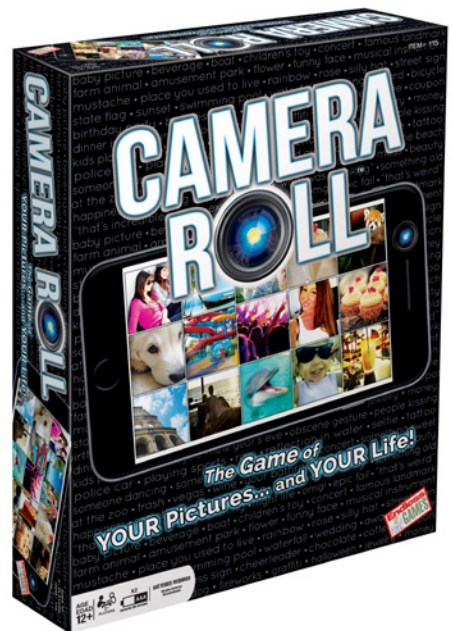
Schmovie Family Edition —

The object is to write funny titles for make-believe movies based on an outlandish premise. Collect Schquid Trophies for winning titles as you laugh yourself silly. \$19.95

3

Camera Roll

The most popular camera in the world is an iPhone – but how often do you look at those pictures? Do you really know what you have on your camera roll? Every player is involved in every round! Just find a photo with whatever the card says. Will YOUR picture best fit the card description? Will you have the winning CAMERA ROLL? Ages 12+





4

Rooster Race

The object of the game is to make educated guesses; to predict if the value of the top card in your card stack is higher or lower than the last card played by your opponent. If you have ever played war or blackjack, this will be your next card game favorite for family game night! \$19.99



5

Lumpy Cubes

Is a quick-play stacking game designed to improve your memory, reaction time, and motor skills. The unique feature of this game is that each patterned challenge card has only one way to be correctly stacked. If you find it and stack it first you win! Ages 6+ \$19.99



6

Slumber Party

Spin the spinner and attempt to complete one of over 200 ACT IT, WORK IT, or PARTY Challenges. Being silly and having fun is the name of the game at this Sleepover, so be prepared to sing, laugh, perform, and make a general fool of yourself!

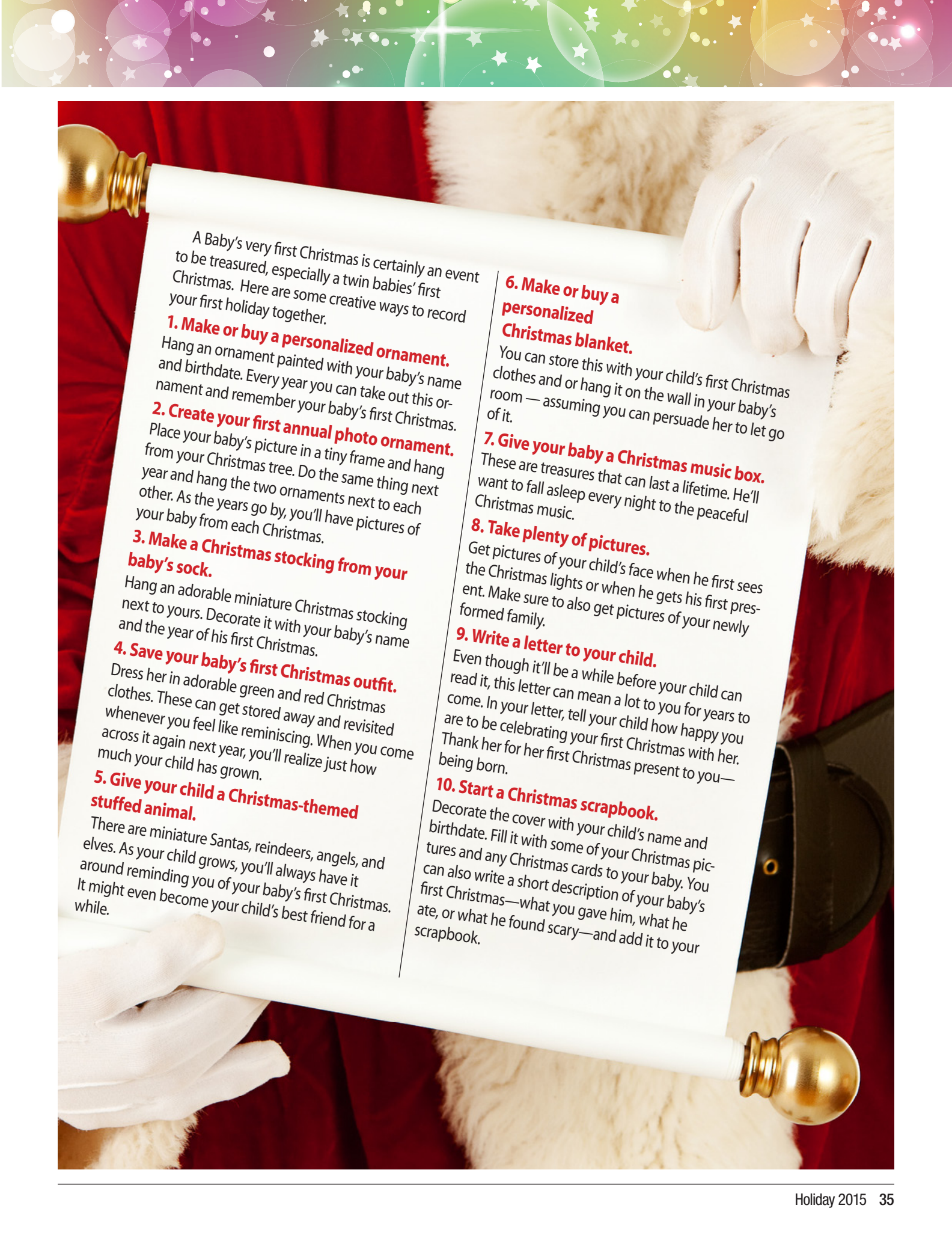




10 Ways to Preserve Your Twins Very First Christmas

by Karin A Bilich
from American Baby





A Baby's very first Christmas is certainly an event to be treasured, especially a twin babies' first Christmas. Here are some creative ways to record your first holiday together.

1. Make or buy a personalized ornament.

Hang an ornament painted with your baby's name and birthdate. Every year you can take out this ornament and remember your baby's first Christmas.

2. Create your first annual photo ornament.

Place your baby's picture in a tiny frame and hang from your Christmas tree. Do the same thing next year and hang the two ornaments next to each other. As the years go by, you'll have pictures of your baby from each Christmas.

3. Make a Christmas stocking from your baby's sock.

Hang an adorable miniature Christmas stocking next to yours. Decorate it with your baby's name and the year of his first Christmas.

4. Save your baby's first Christmas outfit.

Dress her in adorable green and red Christmas clothes. These can get stored away and revisited whenever you feel like reminiscing. When you come across it again next year, you'll realize just how much your child has grown.

5. Give your child a Christmas-themed stuffed animal.

There are miniature Santas, reindeers, angels, and elves. As your child grows, you'll always have it around reminding you of your baby's first Christmas. It might even become your child's best friend for a while.

6. Make or buy a personalized Christmas blanket.

You can store this with your child's first Christmas clothes and or hang it on the wall in your baby's room — assuming you can persuade her to let go of it.

7. Give your baby a Christmas music box.

These are treasures that can last a lifetime. He'll want to fall asleep every night to the peaceful Christmas music.

8. Take plenty of pictures.

Get pictures of your child's face when he first sees the Christmas lights or when he gets his first presented family.

9. Write a letter to your child.

Even though it'll be a while before your child can read it, this letter can mean a lot to you for years to come. In your letter, tell your child how happy you are to be celebrating your first Christmas with her. Thank her for her first Christmas present to you—being born.

10. Start a Christmas scrapbook.

Decorate the cover with your child's name and birthdate. Fill it with some of your Christmas pictures and any Christmas cards to your baby. You can also write a short description of your baby's first Christmas—what you gave him, what he ate, or what he found scary—and add it to your scrapbook.

Double Takes

Your Adorable Holiday-Themed Photos!



1

Monty & Barnaby, ID
Age 10-months
Brackley, Northamptonshire, UK



2

Landon & Mackenzie, FR
Age 1
Surf City, NC



3

Adyson & Alayna, FR
Age 11-months
San Antonio, TX



4

Jeffrey & Jacob, FR
Age 7-months
Conroe, TX



5

Alex & Nora, FR
Age 1
Norfolk, NE



6

Makynlee & Makynzie, ID
Age 10 ½ months
Hewitt, TX



7

Kenden & Landen, FR
Age 5.5 months
Nabb, IN



8

Harley & Dylan, FR
Age 7-months
Mexborough, Doncaster (South Yorkshire) UK

Holiday 2015



9

Colin & Jack, FR
Age 3 ½
Cincinnati, OH



10

Logan & Campbell, ID
Age 5-months
Bethesda, MD



11

Skye & Bodhi, FR
Age 7-months
Los Angeles, CA



12

Claira & Olivia, FR
Age 3 (in photo now age 4)
Round Lake, IL



13

Jake & Leon, FR
Age 1
Essex UK



14

Ryan & Emily, FR
Age 5-months
Wayne, NJ



15

Taylor & Cadee, FR
Age 3
Calgary, Alberta Canada



16

Sophia & Isabelle, ID
Age 2 ½
Sierra Vista, AZ



17

Luke & Olivia, FR
Age 10-months
Highland Park, IL



18

Lora, Victoria & Marie, FR Triplets
Age 5
Bulgaria



19

Mason & Michael, FR
Age 2-months
Chazy, NY

Double Takes



20

Henry & Katarina, FR
Age 4-months
Plainfield, NJ



21

Cameron & Madison, ID
Age 9
Oshkosh, WI



24

Riley & Eric, ID
Age 17-months (in photo now age 5)
Warman, Saskatchewan Canada



22

Thomas & Theo, FR
Age 13-months
South West London, England, UK



23

Mavis & Maverick, FR
Age 4-months
Cedar Hill, TX



25

Eli & Dylan, FR
Age 2 ½
Sugarloaf, PA



26

Ian & Karsyn, FR
Age 3-weeks
Hannibal, MO



27

Adelyn & Henley, ID
Age 5-weeks
Columbus OH



28

Elijah & Alexander, ID
Age 6-weeks
Abbotsford, BC Canada



29

Kaden & Kameron, FR
Age 2
Fayetteville NC



30

Madeline & Isabelle, FR
Age 2 ½
Schomberg, ON, Canada

Holiday 2015



31

Dylan & Skylin, FR
Age 4
Royersford, PA



32

Valentina & Thiago, FR
Age 6
Fort Myers, FL



33

Brother Trevor, Age 5 with sisters
Callie & Cameron, FR, Age 3 1/2 months
Pine Grove, WV



34

Hank & McCool, FR
Age 14-months
Madison, WI



35

Leah & Maximus, FR
Age 5-months, Drayton Valley
Alberta, Canada



36

Penny & Olivia, FR
Age 8-months
Minneapolis, MN



37

Orval & Oakes, FR
Age 14-months
Sedalia, MO



38

Mikaela & Beckham, FR
Age 1-month
Monroe CT



39

Anastasia & Sophia, FR
Age 3 1/2 months
Shelton, CT



40

Adalyn & Alexus, FR
Age 1-month (in photo now age 2)
Avon, IN

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