

By Dee Ann Campbell
The Choctaw Sun

BUTLER – “I wanted them to do everything together,” says Evelyn Causey. “But they are really opposite, and I’ve decided that’s even better.”

When Evelyn gave birth to her twins, she prepared herself for a unique challenge in an extraordinary circumstance that only a few parents get to experience. Her girls, she thought, would be connected by more than just sharing a womb and a date on the calendar. They would be together in everything, joined irrevocably by their mutual birth.

But she soon found out that the girls were not so alike after all, with different personalities, different learning styles, and different interests.

And, she discovered that her daughters’ multiple birth was not so out-of-the-ordinary after all – at least not in Choctaw County.

Jayden and Jordan Causey are one of an unbelievable eight sets of twins now enrolled at Choctaw County Elementary School – the highest twin enrollment in the county.

But the high numbers do not just stop with CCES. Throughout the county, the incidence of twins is unbelievably high, with a whopping 21 sets of twins enrolled in Kindergarten through 12th grade at local public and private schools – not counting those twins who are younger than school age or who have already reached adulthood.

Over the past two decades, there has been a significant rise in the number of multiple births across the United States. According to data reported by Kids Health Magazine, the twin birth rate, which had stood at about 1 in 60 in 1971, has risen rapidly, with about 12 out of every 1000 births now involving twins – a figure that is unprecedented anywhere else in the world – except maybe in Choctaw County.

Among local school age children alone, about 16 out of every 1,000 children in the county are twins.

There are several factors that influence the birth of twins. Included in those factors is the race of the parents. Black women have the highest birth rate of twins, followed by Caucasian and Hispanic women. Among the eight sets of twins at CCES, six are African-American.

The number of prior pregnancies and delayed childbearing are also responsible for the rise in twin births. Older women who get pregnant are more likely to have multiples than younger women, according to data collected by the National Center for Health Statistics.

The increased use of fertility medication also plays a role. But for the twins at CCES, the most predominant factor appears to have been heredity. In nearly every one of their families, there is at least one or more incidences of twins in addition to their own.

Despite their heredity, each of the mothers of the CCES twins say that they were more than a little surprised to find out they were having multiple babies. When Evelyn found out she was pregnant, she was surprised – in more ways than one.

“I went on October 31 to get a check up to have a tubal ligation,” she explains. “I went back on November 5 and found out I was pregnant. Later that month, I found out there were three.”

Although one of her three babies did not make it to birth, the other two were born with little complications. Jordan and Jayden are now in Kindergarten.

For Karen Sealey, the shock came early in her pregnancy.

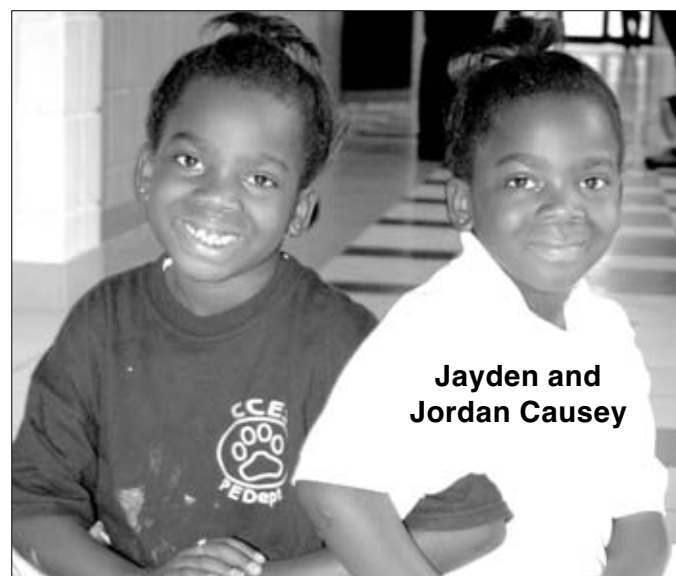
I had started having complications, and they did a sonogram at 5 weeks,” she recalls. “The doctor said, ‘You might want to sit down’. There were two strong heartbeats. I was shocked.”

But Lisa Etheridge, mother of Kindergarteners Nicholas and Nick, had no idea she was carrying twins until days before their arrival.

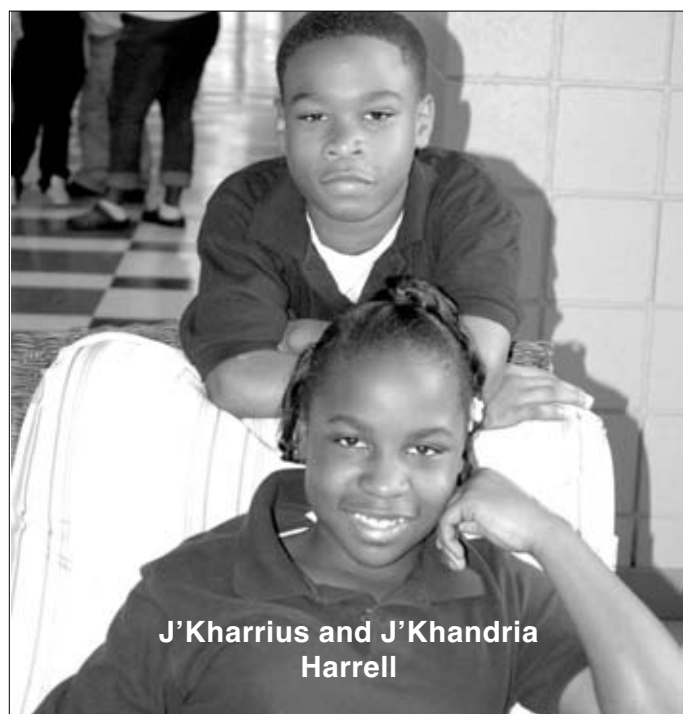
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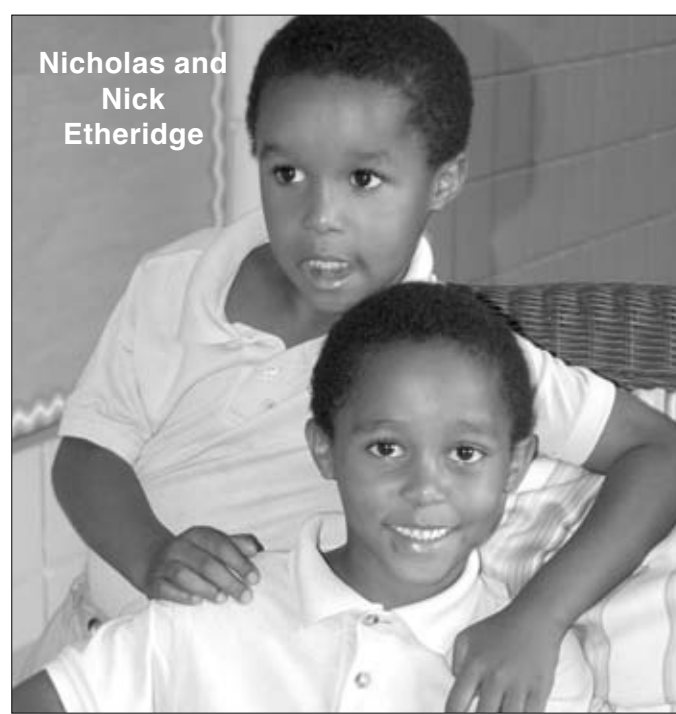
Gracie and Audrey Boykin



Jayden and Jordan Causey



J'Kharris and J'Khandra Harrell



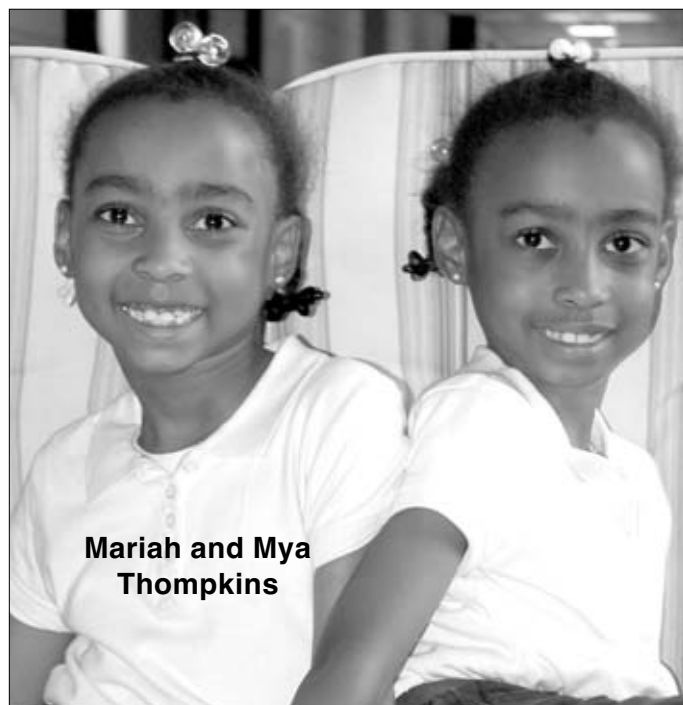
Nicholas and Nick Etheridge



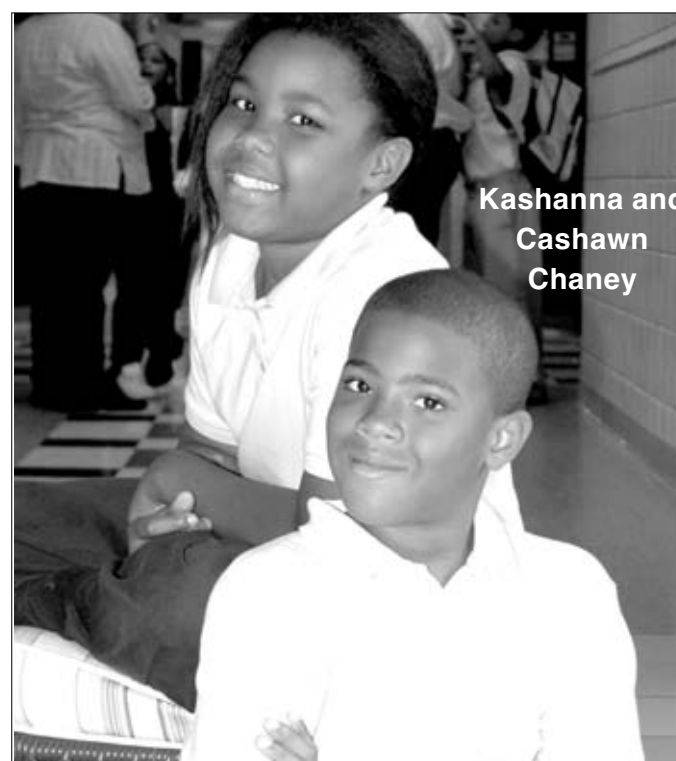
Kristina and Stephen Ford



Dakota and Dylan Sealey



Mariah and Mya Thompkins



Kashanna and Cashawn Chaney

days before I had them,” she says. “It was a big surprise.”

For some of the parents, one of the most surprising factors about their multiple babies has been the unmistakably differences between them.

Although some say their children are alike in unusual ways, others say

that their twins are as different as if they had not shared a womb.

While two of the eight sets of CCES twins are identical, the others are fraternal. Yet the differences in each are obvious, even in those who look alike, like 1st graders Mariah and Mya Thompkins.

“They are identical,” says their mother Charlena. “We can tell them apart, but every now and then we’ll slip up. They are alike, but different in some ways. One is more studious than the other. One more outgoing, more outspoken.”

Another set of identicals – Dakota and Dylan

Sealey – are also very different in demeanor, with one obviously more outspoken, the other more timid.

“Even at birth, you could tell a difference in their cries,” remembers their mother Karen. “Dakota had a softer cry. Dylan has always been stronger, more inde-

pendent. They are still their own individual selves.”

Although Nicholas and Nick Etheridge are fraternal twins, their looks are very similar, causing some people to mistake one for the other. But despite their similar looks, their mother says that they are not alike in personality at all.

“They are just totally different,” says Lisa. “They fight a lot, but they are just like other boys, even if they are twins.”

The differences among twin siblings is obviously more greatly pronounced among twins who are of different genders, like Stephen and Kristina Ford.

“They are two very different children, not alike at all,” says their aunt Kathy Stogener, who has been an integral part of the twins’ lives since birth. “She likes to write and read; he likes to play games. He wants to do it her way, and he wants to do it his way. They’re just different individuals.”

In order to promote such individuality, many schools are adamant that twins are enrolled in separate classes, especially in the younger grades. Although some parents agree with the concept, others are less certain. Still others have fought to keep their twins in the same classroom.

“My twins were separated in the 1st grade,” says Shannon Chaney, mother of 3rd graders Kashanna and Cashawn. “To me, it is better this way, because he can’t always depend on her for everything and she wouldn’t be so dependent on him. They’ve been together for 5 years. I think it’s good for them to become separate individuals.”

Debra Boykin, mother of 1st graders Gracie and Audrey, agrees.

“Until we moved here from Wisconsin, I’d never heard of a school not separating twins,” she says. “We actually try to keep them separate. Twins have to share enough; they need to be separate at school.”

“It was hard when they first separated Jordan and Jayden,” recalls Evelyn. “They would see each other in cafeteria and want to run to be with the other. Now they are more used to it. But they’re twins. What do you expect?”

For the Ford twins, being separated at school does not just mean being enrolled in different classrooms. It means being separated in different grades. In order to give Kristina a little more time to mature and learn, her family decided to keep her in Kindergarten an extra year. Now in 3rd grade, her brother Stephen is in 4th.

But for the Sealey twins, being placed in separate classrooms was not ideal in their parents’ eyes. It was a situation that they fought to change.

“They were split in the 2nd grade,” their mother says. “We didn’t want that. Dakota feeds off Dylan, who is a little more shy, a little more timid. It threw him for a loop, and I could see it even at home. They needed to know the other one was in the room.”

“They’ve been together in class since then,” she adds. “I wish people would realize that there is a bond, and if there are not problems, it is important that they stay together. After all, they came into this world together.”

For all of the twins at CCES, the bond that comes with mutual births and shared genetic codes is obvious.

“They seem to always know when something is wrong with the other one,” explains Shannon Chaney. “They can just pick it up.”

Yet, despite that bond, the twins are distinctly different – if not on the outside, then on the inside. It is a paradox of twinning that is shared by multiples across the world.

Yet, the fact is, the twins at CCES may indeed be more extraordinary than other multiples – simply because it is rare to find so many in one small county. For the 21 sets of twins enrolled in local schools, life as a twin is perhaps not so uncommon after all.