

Pollock Twins

In this celebrated British reincarnation case, two young sisters who died in a road accident appeared to be reborn as twins to the same parents.

Family Background

John Pollock was born in Bristol in 1920 and was raised in the Church of England before converting to Catholicism.^[1] Florence Pollock grew up as a member of the Salvation Army and became Catholic on marrying John. Despite his Christian faith, John also believed strongly in reincarnation, which he first encountered in a novel aged nine. John later told interviewers that at night he would pray to God for evidence of reincarnation, proving himself right and the priests wrong.^[2] (The Pollocks finally left the Church in the 60s.) At the time of the twins' birth, John believed strongly in reincarnation, but Florence did not.



Joanna Pollock, born in 1946, was the couple's third child and first daughter. In 1951, following a family move to Hexham in Northumberland, their second daughter Jacqueline was born. While their parents were preoccupied with their grocery and milk delivery business, the girls were raised mostly by their maternal grandmother.

The girls were inseparable: Joanna liked to 'mother' Jacqueline, which the younger girl accepted. Joanna liked wearing costumes and acting in plays she made up. She was generous and shared freely with other children. Both girls liked combing people's hair, especially their father's. Joanna had a premonition she would never grow up, often saying, 'I will never be a lady'.

Aged three, Jacqueline fell into a bucket,^[3] an accident that caused a small gash on her forehead over her right eye, near the root of her nose. This formed a permanent scar that was slightly depressed and was especially visible in cold weather. Jacqueline also had a roundish dark birthmark on the left side of her waist.

In May 1957, Joanna was aged eleven and Jacqueline was six. On the morning of May 7 they were struck by a car and killed while walking to church with a friend. The driver was a local woman who, in despair at being forcibly separated from her own children, decided to commit suicide by driving after taking what she thought were lethal quantities of aspirin and phenobarbitone. Witnesses saw her driving erratically and bearing down on the children, who could not escape because of the wall on the other side of the sidewalk: the impact tossed them into the air 'like cricket balls'. Joanna and Jacqueline were killed instantly. The incident made headlines throughout Britain; the subsequent inquest and trial of the driver was closely covered by the local paper.^[4]

Their parents were devastated, but while Florence tried to avoid thinking about the girls, John preferred to keep them in his thoughts. On the day of the accident he experienced a vision of them in heaven. Then he sensed the presence of their spirits in a top room of the house, and took to spending time there in order to be close to them. He later said he felt the girls' deaths had been 'punishment from God' for having prayed for proof of reincarnation, but he also felt that his prayer would be answered, by his daughters being reborn into the family. Florence objected to this notion and for a time the dispute threatened their marriage.^[5]

Florence soon became pregnant again, and John became convinced that Joanna and Jacqueline were

about to reincarnate into the family as twins. Florence rejected this belief. Also, her doctor predicted a single birth, based on palpation and fetal heartbeat, and there was no history of twins in either parent's family.^[6] However, she bore twin girls on October 4, 1958. The girls were named Gillian and Jennifer. Jennifer had a birthmark that looked like Jacqueline's scar, and a second birthmark in the same place as Jacqueline's birthmark.

Ian Stevenson's Investigation

Ian Stevenson investigated the case after learning about it through newspaper coverage in 1963. That same year, when the twins were four years old, he met the family at their home, interviewed the parents at length and examined the girls for birthmarks. He met the family again in 1967, then corresponded with them until next visiting them in 1978, when the twins were 20. At that point he had blood tests arranged to determine their zygosity, and found that they were monozygotic (identical), born from a single egg.

Florence Pollock died in 1979. Stevenson visited John and his new wife as well as Gillian in 1982, and continued to correspond with John until his death in 1985. Steven wrote a detailed case report in the second volume of *Reincarnation and Biology: A Contribution to the Etiology of Birthmarks and Birth Defects* and summarized versions in two other works.^[7]

Statements Made by Gillian and Jennifer

Gillian and Jennifer made several statements and recognitions relating to Joanna and Jacqueline between the ages of three and seven.

When the twins were about three, the parents brought out the toys that had belonged to the dead girls and which had been boxed and stored in the attic. Gillian claimed the doll that had belonged to Joanna and Jennifer claimed the one that had belonged to Jacqueline. They both said the dolls had been gifts from Santa Claus (as they had been for Joanna and Jacqueline). When Gillian saw a toy clothes-wringer that had also been a 'Santa Claus' present to Joanna, she said, 'There is my toy wringer', adding that Santa had brought it. Young children frequently quarrel over possession of a toy, but the parents observed that this did not happen here.

Florence Pollock occasionally overheard Gillian and Jennifer discussing the details of the accident. Once she came across Gillian cradling Jennifer's head, saying, 'The blood's coming out of your eyes. That's where the car hit you'.^[8] John Pollock recalled that when he identified the bodies Jacqueline's head was bandaged above the eyes. Gillian once pointed to Jennifer's forehead birthmark and said, 'That is the mark Jennifer got when she fell on a bucket'.

Florence had worn a smock while helping John with the milk delivery business, but put it away when she ceased that work shortly after her daughters' deaths. When the twins were about four and a half, John wore the smock to do some painting, and Jennifer asked him, 'Why are you wearing mummy's coat?' She then became annoyed at Gillian for not recognizing it (the older sister had been at school and had not seen her mother wearing the garment). When John asked Jennifer how she knew the smock was Florence's, Jennifer said her mother had worn it while delivering milk.

The Pollocks had moved away from Hexham when the twins were about nine months old. When they were about four, the family visited Hexham again for the first time. As they walked toward a park, but were not yet in sight of it, Gillian and Jennifer said they wanted to go across the road to the park and the swings, clearly knowing the way.

When the girls complained about the lunch they were having at home, their mother said they could

have lunch at school, and they answered, 'We've done that before'. This was not true of Gillian and Jennifer, but it was true of Joanna and Jacqueline.

The Hexham recognitions are recounted by John Pollock in this [video](#).

Significant Behaviours

According to John Pollock, when the twins discussed the accident between themselves they often spoke in the present tense, and almost seemed to be reliving it.

The twins displayed behaviours that were similar to those of their deceased sisters. Like the older girls they were very close. Gillian liked to mother Jennifer, and Jennifer accepted this, as had happened with Joanna and Jacqueline. The twins looked to their maternal grandmother, who had done most to raise Joanna and Jacqueline, for guidance and love, even though Florence was now entirely available. Also like their elder sisters, the twins liked to comb people's hair, especially their father's. Gillian was more sociable and generous with other children, and showed the same early interest in costumes and acting that Joanna had. She generally seemed more mature than her twin sister.

The twins had phobias related to cars. Their mother noticed that they would be very careful crossing streets, holding her hands (though she knew that could be related to her own caution). On one occasion, when a car engine started near them in an enclosed alleyway, John Pollock observed the girls cringe in terror and cling to each other, crying 'the car! The car! It's coming for us!' – perhaps being reminded of the inability in their past lives to escape.^[9]

At the time of their deaths Jacqueline was still learning to write. Her teacher, concerned that she was still holding the pencil upright in her fist, suggested to the parents that they correct the habit by slapping her hand. When Gillian and Jennifer began learning to write at age four, Gillian immediately held the pencil properly while Jennifer held it upright in her fist; she only started holding it properly at age seven, and even as a young adult would still sometimes revert to the fist grip.^[10]

Physical Signs

Joanna was somewhat slender of build, as was Gillian; likewise Jennifer's somewhat stocky build matched Jacqueline's.^[11] Joanna had a more splay-footed gait than Jacqueline did, and that difference showed up in Gillian and Jennifer also.^[12]

At birth a dark brown roundish birthmark was observed on the left side of Jennifer's waist, at the spot where there had been a similar mark on Jacqueline's. A birthmark corresponding with a past-life scar, such as that on Jennifer's forehead that corresponded to the scar from Jacqueline's bucket accident, is relatively rare in reincarnation cases; far more frequently, wounds replicated by birthmarks are those that caused the person's death.^[13] According to Florence Pollock, this mark was slightly depressed when Jennifer was born, and showed up more during cold weather, as was the case with Jacqueline's scar. No one else in the family had similar birthmarks.

Stevenson notes that since the twins were monozygotic – and therefore identical genetically – genetics cannot explain Jennifer's birthmarks. Nor could an influence within the womb have caused a correspondence with Jacqueline's scar and birthmark. Stevenson doubts whether maternal impression (psychic influence of the mother on an unborn child) could be the cause, as Florence did not believe in reincarnation, although he speculates about paternal impression as an alternative to reincarnation. However, as Stevenson states in a later work, he finds it inconceivable that John and

Florence Pollock could have molded the behaviours of their twin daughters so exactly to match that of their deceased daughters.^[14]

Later Development

As the twins grew older they forgot their past-life memories. During their early years John Pollock refrained from referring to their statements about what they remembered, nor did he discuss with them his belief in reincarnation, which they learned about only at the age of thirteen.^[15]

The twins went on to live normal lives. When Stevenson met them in their twenties, they said they remembered nothing about the memories. They accepted their parents' belief that they were their elder sisters reincarnated, while showing mild skepticism about reincarnation generally. Then in 1981, Gillian experienced some 'inner visions' in which she saw herself playing in a sandpit with her brothers: she perfectly described the house, garden, lawns and orchards that matched a house the family had lived in in Whickham, when Joanna had been younger than four. Gillian had never been to Whickham.

Criticisms and Alternative Explanations

The Pollock case is one of several discussed by British historian Ian Wilson in a broadly skeptical critique. He notes that the case is evidentially weak in that the only witnesses to the statements and behavioural signs are the parents, one of whom fervently believed in reincarnation and cannot said to be unbiased. Also, since the two pairs of daughters were in the same family, knowledge of the older sisters might have been available to the twins through normal means.

As an alternative explanation Wilson proposes maternal impression, writing, 'it can scarcely be doubted that during her pregnancy with the twins Florence Pollock must have played and replayed in her mind the events of the life and death of her earlier daughters'.^[16] However, he concedes that other cases investigated by Stevenson cannot be explained in this way, as the life remembered is in a different family and sometimes a distant location, ruling out any possibility of the mother having normal awareness of the past-life circumstances.^[17]

Richard Rockley, writing for the website SkepticReport, suggests that John Pollock, since he believed strongly in reincarnation, most likely talked about his notion that the twins were reincarnations of their sisters in their presence; also, other family members and friends might have talked about the accident and their deaths. He also suggests, 'The parents could also be reading too much into the twins' statements, or could be lying'.^[18] As Wilson notes, however, birthmarks that match past-life birthmarks, scars or wounds – which none of Rockley's theories would explain – are found not only in the Pollock case but in a high proportion of reincarnation cases.^[19] Stevenson himself found that of 895 cases in his collection in which the past life was identified, 35 per cent involved birthmarks or birth defects.^[20]

As Miles Edward Allen notes, some critics have dismissed the case solely because of John Pollock's strong belief in reincarnation, assuming that this biased his testimony. But Allen points out that despite the fact that Florence Pollock did not believe in reincarnation, her version of events is the same as his.^[21] Stevenson said that John Pollock had responded to a journalist who made the same suggestion in these terms: if he had not believed in reincarnation, he would not have shared with other interested people the observations about Gillian and Jennifer that he and Florence had made – there would almost certainly have been no case, or none worth reporting'.^[22]

Stevenson concludes that the Pollock twins' case – together with that of another pair of monozygotic twins who display variant appearance and behaviours, Indika and Kakshappa Ishwara –

provides some of the strongest existing evidence in favour of reincarnation.^[23]

Literature

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References

Footnotes

1.^ All information in the first five sections is drawn from Stevenson, I. (1997a). *Reincarnation and Biology: A Contribution to the Etiology of Birthmarks and Birth Defects. Volume 2: Birth Defects and Other Anomalies*. Westport, CT: Praeger, pp. 2041-58 (case study of Gillian and Jennifer Pollock) except where otherwise noted.

2.^ Wilson (1982), p. 3.

3.^ According to Wilson (1982, p. 6), it was an accident falling off her tricycle, but these two accounts are not necessarily conflicting.

4.^ Wilson (1982), pp. 4-5.

5.^ Wilson (1982), pp. 5-6.

6.^ Wilson (1982), p. 6.

7.^ Stevenson, I. (2003). *European Cases of the Reincarnation Type*. Jefferson, North Carolina, USA & London: McFarland & Company; and Stevenson, I. (2001). *Children Who Remember Previous Lives: A Question of Reincarnation*, rev. ed. Jefferson, North Carolina, USA: McFarland & Company.

8.^ Wilson (1982), p. 9.

9.^ Wilson (1982), pp. 8-9. Wilson states that during the fatal accident, the three children were facing the car coming at them; Stevenson does not specify.

10.^ Stevenson, I. (1997a), pp. 1883-4.

11.^ Stevenson (2003), p. 90.

12.^ Stevenson (1997a), p. 1893.

13.^ Stevenson (1997b), p. 225.

14.^ Stevenson (2003), p. 92.

- 15.^ Wilson (1982), p. 9.
- 16.^ Wilson (1982), p. 25.
- 17.^ Wilson (1982), p. 12.
- 18.^ Rockley (no date).
- 19.^ Wilson (1982), p. 12.
- 20.^ Stevenson (1997a), p. 10.
- 21.^ Allen (2013), p. 3.
- 22.^ Stevenson (1997a), p. 2058.
- 23.^ Stevenson, I. (1997b). *Reincarnation and Biology: A Contribution to the Etiology of Birthmarks and Birth Defects. Volume 1: Birthmarks*. Westport, CT: Praeger, p. 225.