

Pollock Twins (reincarnation case)

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 upon marrying John. Despite his Christian faith, John also believed strongly in [reincarnation](#), which he first encountered in a novel at the age of 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 left the Church in the 1960s. 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. As their parents were preoccupied with their grocery and milk delivery business, their daughters 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.'

At the age of 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.

On 7 May 1957, when Joanna was eleven and Jacqueline six, they were struck by a car and killed while walking to church with a friend. The driver was a local woman who had 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 were blocked from escape by a wall beside the sidewalk; the impact tossed them into the air 'like cricket balls' and both were killed instantly. The incident made headlines throughout Britain.⁴

Their parents were devastated, but while Florence tried to avoid thinking about the girls, John devoted himself to keep them in his mind. 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, and her doctor predicted a single birth, based on palpation, fetal heartbeat and the lack of twins in either parent's family.⁶ However, Florence bore twin girls on 4 October 1958 and they 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.

Stevenson's Investigation

Pioneering reincarnation researcher [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, and corresponded with them until next visiting them in 1978, when the twins were twenty. At that point he had blood tests arranged to determine their zygosity, which showed they were monozygotic (identical).

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 of the case 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 their deceased daughters 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. The girls quarreled over none of the toys.

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 had been 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 years, 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, and clearly showed that they knew 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 had been 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, almost as if they were reliving it.

The twins displayed [behaviours](#) that were similar to those of their deceased sisters. Like the older girls, they were very close and Gillian liked to mother Jennifer, which Jennifer accepted. The twins looked most 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 her twin sister despite their identical age.

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!' – possibly being reminded of the wall that had prevented their escape in their previous lives.⁹

At the time of their deaths, Jacqueline had still been 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 this 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. 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. ¹³

Stevenson notes that since the twins were monozygotic and therefore identical genetically, genetics cannot explain Jennifer's birthmarks, and maternal impression (psychic influence of the mother on an unborn child) is unlikely to 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 mould 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 their past lives. 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 writer [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. Also, since the two pairs of daughters had the same parents, 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 substantial proportion of reincarnation cases.[19](#) Stevenson found that of 895 cases in his collection in which the previous incarnation was identified, 35% involved birthmarks or birth defects.[20](#)

Stevenson writes that John Pollock responded to a journalist who made the same suggestion by saying that if he had not believed in reincarnation, he would not have shared with anyone the similarities that he and his wife had noticed, and 'there would almost certainly have been no case, or none worth reporting'.[21](#)

Stevenson, who [studied 42 pairs of twins who remembered past lives](#), [See Stevenson (1997b), 1931-62.] concludes that the Pollock twins' case, together with that of another pair of monozygotic twins who display variant appearance and behaviour, Indika and Kakshappa Ishwara, provides some of the strongest existing evidence in favour of reincarnation.[22](#)

KM Wehrstein

Literature

Rockley, R. (2002). Review of *Children Who Remember Previous Lives: A Question of Reincarnation* by I. Stevenson. *The Skeptic Report*, 1 November.

Stevenson, I. (1997a). [Reincarnation and Biology: A Contribution to the Etiology of Birthmarks and Birth Defects. Volume 1: Birthmarks](#). Westport, Connecticut, USA: Praeger.

Stevenson, I. (1997b). [Reincarnation and Biology: A Contribution to the Etiology of Birthmarks and Birth Defects. Volume 2: Birth Defects and Other Anomalies](#). Westport, Connecticut, USA: Praeger.

Stevenson, I. (2001). *Children Who Remember Previous Lives: A Question of Reincarnation* (rev. ed.). Jefferson, North Carolina, USA: McFarland.

Stevenson, I. (2003). *European Cases of the Reincarnation Type*. Jefferson, North Carolina, USA: McFarland.

Wilson, I. (1982). *All in the Mind: Reincarnation, Hypnotic Regression, Stigmata, Multiple Personality, and Other Little-Understood Powers of the Mind*. Garden City, New York, USA: Doubleday.

Endnotes

Footnotes

- [1.](#) Stevenson (1997b), 2041-58. All information in the first five sections of this article is drawn from this source except where otherwise noted.
- [2.](#) Wilson (1982), 3.
- [3.](#) According to Wilson (1982, 6), it was an accident falling off her tricycle, but these two accounts are not necessarily conflicting.
- [4.](#) Wilson (1982), 4-5.
- [5.](#) Wilson (1982), 5-6.
- [6.](#) Wilson (1982), 6.
- [7.](#) Stevenson (2001, 2003).
- [8.](#) Wilson (1982), 9.
- [9.](#) Wilson (1982), 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. (1997b), 1883-84.
- [11.](#) Stevenson (2003), 90.
- [12.](#) Stevenson (1997b), 1893.
- [13.](#) Stevenson (1997a), 225. Birthmarks corresponding with past-life scars, such as that on Jennifer's forehead that corresponded to the scar from Jacqueline's accident, are relatively rare in reincarnation cases; far more frequently, wounds replicated by birthmarks are those that caused the person's death, or, less often, severe injury.
- [14.](#) Stevenson (2003), 92.
- [15.](#) Wilson (1982), 9.
- [16.](#) Wilson (1982), 25.
- [17.](#) Wilson (1982), 12.
- [18.](#) Rockley (2002).
- [19.](#) Wilson (1982), 12.
- [20.](#) Stevenson (1997a), 10.
- [21.](#) Stevenson (1997b), 2058.
- [22.](#) Stevenson (1997a), 225.