IDENTICAL

By Mrs. Paul E. King
IDENTICAL
By Mrs. Paul E. King

When we were born, Mom said we looked so much alike that she couldn't tell if I was Laurie or Lori. The only way she knew that I was Lori was by the little red birthmark beneath my right arm, almost in the very center of my tiny armpit. To make matters even more complicated for my parents -- in telling us apart, I mean -- our "longitudinal" (pardon me) measurements were identical and each weighed the same as the other.

Handing us to our parents for the ride home from the hospital, so Mom and Dad often told us, the nurse laughed and said, "Lori or Laurie, I cannot tell. Take them home and treat them well. And if, perchance, you get them mixed, you'll soon get used to your identical fix" adding, Mom said, "Of all the identical twins I've seen and worked with here, these are positively and absolutely the most identical."

I've said all that for your benefit. You see, we're still so very identical that it can become quite frustrating at times. Like today, for instance: I was going down the hallway of Langley Christian High when I heard someone calling Laurie's name. Naturally, I kept right on walking.

"Too stuck up to answer, huh?"

Todd's words cut deeply as he passed me.

"Just because you made it for the State competition is no reason for pride, Laurie."

He rushed away before I had time to tell him that I wasn't Laurie and that I hadn't meant to ignore him.

Laurie was blest with intelligence and an outgoing personality that won her a host of friends, Todd included. Ever since he'd started coming to our Christian school he had pursued Laurie, who was nice to him, like she was to everyone else. But she wouldn't date him. I didn't ask her why she refused to go out with him because, being identical, I was sure she felt as I did about him -- that he was extremely shallow, spiritually speaking, and that he was quite egotistical, thinking too highly of Todd Webber and of his 4.0 grade average.
"Congratulations, Laurie!"

Emilie's words sliced down the middle of my private thoughts. I hadn't known she was anywhere near me in the hallway.

"Surely am glad you'll be going to the State competition in February, or whenever, God willing. How come Lori doesn't ever seem to take these things seriously like you do and try to win? She's just too passive and. . . ."

"Thanks, Emilie. Lori tries. I'm Lori. No hard feelings toward you. God made each of us different."

"Oh, I . . . I . . . Hey, I'm sorry, Lori. That wasn't very nice or kind of me to say what I did. I . . . I . . . ."

"It's all right, Emilie."

"But . . . but . . . don't you feel . . . well, badly toward me? It wasn't actually a kind thing to say."

I smiled. "Truthfully, no. I don't feel badly toward you. There was a time in my life when I would have. But not anymore. You see, Emilie, after my conversion I heard that God had something more for me; a deeper work which would eradicate and take out the old carnal nature and set me free from peevishness and other things displeasing to God. I stayed on my knees in prayer until I was sanctified wholly. His Divine Love fills my heart so completely until the hurts of life turn out to be only for my good and for His glory. True, I have feelings, but not carnal feelings any more. So that means that I love you as much as ever."

"I . . . I'm sorry I said what I did."

"Forget it, Emilie. You'll always be my friend. And maybe, in a way, I am more passive than Laurie. But I'm me. And I promise you that what you see of me is all me; there's no pretense or show or strut. This, too, was taken out and purified -- cleansed and purified -- by God's Holy Spirit."

Emilie was silent for a moment. Then she said, "And, so what that you didn't make it for that State competition in speech; I see where there are far
more important things to achieve in life than that. Lasting things. Thanks, Lori. And thanks for remaining my friend. Today I saw Holiness demonstrated -- in you."

She hurried into the library in search of a resource book for one of her classes and I continued on my way to Mr. Pugsley's math class, praying as I walked.

Mr. Pugsley was exceedingly demanding, and hard on anyone who was late for class. In many ways this was good, for it kept each of us on "tiptoe" to make sure that we weren't late. Mr. Pugsley told us again and again that when class was scheduled for a certain time we must be there at that time; not five or ten minutes late. Nor even one minute. He declared that by being late we were doing him an injustice, not to mention ourselves, and that we were forming a habit that would follow us and cling to us for the rest of our lives. And he was right, of course. So I always saw to it that I was in my seat, ready for class to begin, at least five minutes early. By practicing this and doing it daily in school, it helped me to apply the same principle in getting to church on time and to my part-time job at Hillside Grocery Store where I helped as a cashier at the checkout counters.

I saw Laurie as she slid into her seat just as I entered the classroom. I smiled and waved to her then took my seat and opened the math book to the day's lesson, wondering if the test I had heard we were having was going to be a big one or just a quiz. Mr. Pugsley was good at giving quizzes; lots of quizzes. But he was a great math teacher and I learned much and profited greatly by his teaching. And, long test or short, big test or quiz, I would do my very best and leave the results with God, who promised wisdom to those who asked and sought for it.

Class began at its usual "fast-clip" pace; Mr. Pugsley wasted no time at all in getting into the lesson. Not ever. He felt time was of too great essence and value to be wasted or trifled with. And he was right again. Laurie and I both agreed about this, and felt it was true. But when he called on me to come up to the chalk board and do one of the new problems according to the new method being taught by some of the secular schools, I felt frightened. I didn't know how to begin. Our school used the old method. Panic boiled up inside of me.
I stood to my feet and started down the aisle toward the blackboard with trepidation and fear.

"I called Lori's name out" the teacher said, stopping me dead in my tracks.

"But . . . but I am Lori," I replied softly.

"Is this a game you and your sister play?" he asked, getting quickly out of his chair and stepping to the side of the desk while his steel gray eyes looked more unkind than I had ever remembered them having looked, or been.

I felt tears start. I was frightened. Then I sent a quick, silent prayer up to Heaven and answered, "No, sir. Laurie and I don't play that kind of game. I am Lori."

Mr. Pugsley scratched his head then found the paper with his seating arrangement for the class on it. Then he blushed scarlet. "Forgive me," he apologized. "Having identical twins in one's class is quite a mathematical problem; not in the sense of solving problems or balancing equations but in the sense of 'equating' which twin is Lori and which is Laurie. I'll choose the hardest math problem to this. Take your seat . . . Laurie, please."

"Lori" I corrected softly. "Thank you, Mr. Pugsley. I'm afraid I could not have done the problem by using the new method. I . . . I've forgotten how, since coming here and sitting under your teaching."

A smile parted Mr. Pugsley's mostly unsmiling lips and he actually looked pleased. Then looking at me, he exclaimed with the most satisfied tone of voice I had ever heard from him, "That is very good, Lau . . . I mean, Lori. I was merely going to put my two 'identicals' to the test, wanting to see just how successful my teaching has been in undoing what they had been taught before enrolling here. And now, Class, we will be having another quiz. Get out your paper and pencil. . . ."

The quiz wasn't hard; in fact, I thought it was quite easy. I even enjoyed working the problems. But math was one of my easier subjects; one in which I made good grades. Now take French . . . well, that was not easy for me. I
struggled to acquire what grades I made in it. Not so, my twin; she made some of her best grades in French. And in chemistry, too.

Laurie must have been in a big hurry to get home, I decided, when school was dismissed for the day, because she wasn't waiting for me when I got to the steps outside. I had been doing some work for Mrs. Crickett in the Home Ec room so I was a bit later than usual at leaving.

It had been another wonderful day, I felt, except for those times when I was mistaken for Laurie or she for me. Even that was more funny and confusing than being anything else, I thought, smiling as I walked. There were times when Laurie and I talked about making some kind of neat little sign to wear across our back, stating, "I am Lori" and "I am Laurie" But we didn't like being conspicuous so we decided that, very definitely, that was not for us. Still, there was another time when we had wondered if it would help people to remember us if we made only two letters -- LA, for Laurie; LO, for me -- and sewed them somewhere on our blouses and sweaters. This, too, we vetoed, deciding (again) that it would be conspicuous.

Mother met me at the door when I got home. "What's wrong with Laurie?" she asked softly. "Did something happen at school, honey?"

"Laurie? Why, I don't know, Mother. Is she ill?" I felt fear grip me. "She seemed perfectly well in school. Where is she?"

"In the bedroom. She was crying when she came home."

I gasped. Whatever could have happened? I wondered, rushing down the hallway to the bedroom Laurie and I shared. Mother followed me.

Seeing my twin lying face down on the bed, I dropped to my knees on the floor and threw my arms around Laurie. "What's wrong?" I asked gently. "Why are you crying?" I was crying by now.

Laurie's shoulders shook with sobs.

"Laurie! Laurie!" I cried. "Are you sick? Are you hurting? What's wrong? Please tell Mother and me."
She lifted her pretty face, and with eyes that were swollen and red from weeping, she looked at me. "I need help, Lori," she cried.

"Help? Whatever is wrong with you?"

"First" she said, "I've hated it that we were so identical. I almost felt like we were one instead of being two separate and individual people, because of the way people treated us and kept getting us confused and mixed up thinking we were the other. I wanted my very own personal identity."

"Well you have it," I told her softly. "No matter how identical and alike we are, we're still very much individual people, Laurie. God saw to that. You have your very own set of fingerprints and I have mine. No one in this vast universe has any like them. God made each of us wonderfully different, even if we are identical."

"I know that" Laurie declared, still sobbing. "And I'm thankful for this. But today, when Emilie told me what she had said to you, and then how sweet and gentle and kind you were to her, I realized that you and I weren't identical, Lori; not in a spiritual way. And suddenly, I wanted to be. Oh, I feel like I'll die unless I get truly sanctified wholly. I want to be identical, Lori, in spiritual things. I couldn't have been sweet to Emilie if she had said that to me."

My tears wet my sister's face. "The Savior's waiting to sanctify you," I said brokenly. "And He'd be happy for this kind of identical."

"I really need to be sanctified" Laurie sobbed. "I've been jealous of you for being such a math whiz and for getting to sing in the girls' ensemble in school. In my heart, I'm hateful and . . . and mean."

"Oh Laurie, no! Why, you are ever so much more talented than I am, in so many things. God made each of us to be different. He expects us to use the gifts and talents He's given us for His glory and His highest good. That is all I've been trying to do."

"I know, Lori. And I want to get rid of this wretched thing inside my heart that eats away at me whenever I see you doing anything great and good, and that rises up inside me when you receive any praise. I want us to be really identical in this way, Lori -- of me being dead to all these things. Like you are.
Please pray for me . . ." And Laurie got up from the bed and fell on her knees, sobbing.

"Oh, we will. We will -- Mother and I," I answered, as Mother and I joined Laurie in prayer.