

# Inleiding

WTS (Womb Twin Survivor), VTS (Vanishing Twin Syndrome), alone-born twin or multiple, Early Twinloss, Womb Twin, Twin-Twin Transfusion, half twin... All terms for the same tragedy. There are several names and acronyms for this phenomenon in English; in Dutch, there was not really a name for it yet. At least, I was unable to find it. That is why I chose predominantly to use the term alone-born twin ('alleengeboren tweeling') in this book because, personally, I feel that this is the most appropriate description. Whenever the term 'twin' is used, one could also read 'multiple'.

Where to start when you want to tell your own life story? Do you start with where you are now, at a time when you have got the full overview and finally understand why everything went the way it went? Or chronologically, simply from the beginning, because that makes the most sense?

The year 2012 was the year of truth for me. A year in which I got to experience my own life as a rollercoaster, from one emotion to the next. I went deeper and deeper and connected with my own feelings, pain, fear and all. At times throughout this year I would think: how deep can a person go, how much can a person bear?

Very deep, further than you would have thought possible. And despite the pain, I felt that this was the path I had to follow, even though I had no idea where it would take me. I let myself be taken over by it and kept faith that, somehow, I was being cared for.

Always I was searching, trying to fill the void I had felt all my life with anything and everything. I constantly felt lonely but did not know what I

was truly missing. I was always doing several things at once, starting up any number of projects because every time I felt that this would be it, but I did not manage to actually finish anything. Always there was this inner unrest that would not settle, no matter how hard I tried. And always I was looking for a companion: a search that was doomed to fail. Questions about the Why of it all remained unanswered, even though I fervently kept looking for answers. And so I kept on running, thinking I was doing pretty well.

At the start of 2012 I became very ill. This was the beginning of my rollercoaster and of my true search for the source of all my questions and troubles. The realisation that I once had a twin brother but that he was never born, turned out to have a bigger impact on my life than I had initially expected. At first, it was no more than a fact to me. I did not yet know how this event, looking back, had influenced my entire life. 'Once a twin always a twin'. Whether or not you both saw the light of day: it has a bigger influence on your being than I ever thought possible.

The idea to put my story in writing and share it with the world came to me on an autumn morning in 2012 with a clear intention: I have to share my process, let others be part of my story in order to provide them with the insight that they, too, might be a single-born twin. For by now I know one thing for sure: my story is not unique. What was exceptional, was my search to bring all the pieces of the puzzle together in a way that would make a fitting whole. My own, personal journey!

Suddenly it was crystal clear to me where that inner unrest came from, why I could feel so alone from one minute to the next and why I always felt a latent sense of guilt. And why I always make odd connections, because that is the way in which I came to where I am now. Being able to see the big picture while at the same time connecting the details is my big strength.

One of my life's teachers always put it so beautifully: 'searching the one always means finding the other'. This insight came to me after years of searching all over for something I did not even know I was looking for. Searching for myself, for 'why's', for an answer to questions about feelings of emptiness, of missing something or someone...

I hope my story will captivate you and that I will be able to take you along on my quest in the first part of this book. In addition I have found eight people who were willing to share their stories so that you will be able to read that everyone has his or her own story. And that, simultaneously, there is a lot of overlap and mutual recognition.

After these personal life stories part two provides more background information with assignments and exercises. These are not meant to replace therapy but to get to know yourself better. And to understand why you have always done things the way you have done them. Once you acquire that understanding you have a choice to do things differently from that moment on. Just the way you want it! And hopefully you will then find the peace you have unknowingly been looking for so passionately.

# 1 Different from others

*We do not think of solutions, we discover them.*

## **A brief history of my life**

I was the eldest daughter, born on 29 February (a leap day) in 1968, and I have a sister who is more than two years younger than me.

Neither my father nor my mother was very young anymore when I was born and they were both exceptionally caring for me. My mother soon quit her job as a nurse; they were different times, then. My father worked in education. In addition, he drew and painted a lot and played a lot of sports. When I was in elementary school, he became chronically ill. I slowly watched his health deteriorate and he passed away when I was 31 years old.

For the most part my mother kept the household running and worked in the evenings. From my point of view, her job was basically to take care of everything and everyone.

I was often reminded that I was the eldest: in many situations I had to show that I was the wisest and I did my utmost to meet the demands and wishes of the people around me. For instance, by 'not arguing but taking the high road'. I was a master in fulfilling everyone's wishes. Being good, never getting angry. In this way, I became 'the perfect child' that could adapt to every situation. Just like a chameleon. And like a sea-anemone that searches its surroundings with its tentacles, I, like a truly Highly Sensitive Person (HSP), always quickly noticed how everyone was doing.

Without realising it, I, in a manner of speaking, had placed myself above everything and everyone, even if only to maintain an overview and in that way to be able to do the right things at the right time. I often picked (and pick) up on someone else's grief and pain before they themselves do. Many single-born twins indicate that they self-identify as 'highly sensitive' and that they have the ability to 'screen' another person in a split second.

In primary school I often felt different from others and always had a vague feeling of emptiness. I could be day-dreaming for hours, staring outside and looking at.... well, at what, really? I imagined myself to be a princess, but one who needed to receive a normal upbringing for an important task later in life. And somewhere far off I had a brother, who was also getting a normal upbringing. But, well, surely more children have such thoughts?



When I played, I would talk to myself as if I were speaking to someone else. Apparently I still do this. I often do not even notice it myself. I wrote my diary as if I was telling the stories to someone else.

It was a special moment when I suddenly saw my own birth announcement again. It shows, as you can see, a crow bringing a baby. That symbolism was always clear to me (my mother's last name is Kraaij, which is Dutch for crow) but suddenly I spotted the little black doll, which I am holding in my hand, and the white dove flying away.

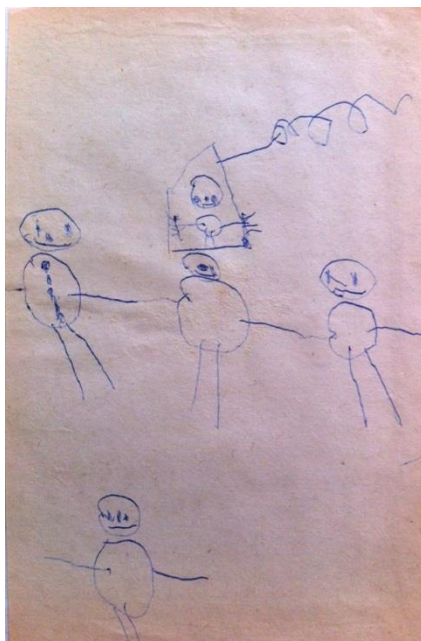
Special indeed, because during my grieving process in 2012 I saw, in a regression session, very clearly an image of a little black figure that I would so liked to have held in my hand. It looks as though my father somehow 'knew' the truth; that there had been another baby and that that baby was no longer alive.

My love for black animals: is this where that comes from? Do I like to rediscover the last image that I have of my brother in an animal? It cannot be a coincidence that I have had so many animals with black fur in my life. Connected to this is that when I was a baby I always clung to my blanket. This messed up my bed a little bit so I was given a small muslin cloth instead. I used this, together with my thumb, for comfort until I was about fifteen years old.

I also remember being very fragile as a child: not a lot of bodyfat, pale complexion, dreamy eyes. At birthdays I was often told that I looked a bit poorly. I was not very strong, had low blood pressure, was regularly anaemic and often fainted, just like that, or so it seemed. Apparently after a while this became part of who I was, because I do not remember people paying a lot of attention to it, although I do feel that my parents were overly worried for me.

Having a look at my general physical health I can say that throughout my childhood my back and feet were far too arched. I only found that out during my training in physiotherapy. But even more when I came into contact with somatics and connected fields, because the arch in my feet (and in my back) could be seen as a sign of not being grounded well, of pulling back from life on earth. Not daring to or being able to ground myself properly is something I still struggle with. Not making full contact with the earth, as if I am only ever here on earth with just a part of my feet or even with just one foot and with the other one in heaven.

I started drawing at a young age and thanks to a father who also drew and painted a lot, I have an entire collection of my old drawings. I was surprised to see what I was able to draw at a young age. I was clearly artistically-minded, although I was, and still am, never satisfied whenever I make something. As I was leafing through an old folder with drawings I had made since I was two years old, two drawings stood out among the rest. I had quite a few depicting our entire family: father, mother, myself and my little sister. But these drawings show a fifth person who is connected to me in some way. I was surprised to have made this at that age. Especially this drawing in which the fifth person,



in their own little house, is connected to me via my head, like a thin line or umbilical cord of their own, connected to the infinite. All drawings have been dated except, as fate would have it, these two. Judging by the ones that come before and after, my guess is 18 June 1972 (four years old). In primary school I often knew more than I let on and not every teacher understood me; so I often decided it would be wiser just to keep my mouth shut. Sometimes keeping quiet is better.

Here, too, my high sensitivity showed. And given that at that time I was not yet aware that not everyone was like that, I often hit a wall with people. The sense of being different and misunderstood started to grow. I felt more and more different and misunderstood.

I was highly empathetic where people or animals in distress were concerned; especially when death was involved. I have tried to save many hurt little kittens, birds, mice and the like. Whenever I failed, it affected me deeply. I have moreover lost many pets in my life. I have learned to bury the pain, as if a kind of resignation came over me. He or she is going to die, or is dead, there is nothing more I can do. Yet another loss.

When I got older I decided not to help stray animals anymore in order to prevent myself becoming attached and not to have to feel the potential loss. If you do not get attached you will not be as affected when something or someone disappears from your life. In that way I taught myself not to get too attached to living beings. Because then losing them, if that were to happen, would not be so devastating. Yet another pebble added to the wall protecting my heart.

Reflecting on my school days, another essential thread emerged. In primary school I always received high marks for 'being communicative', whatever that meant.

But what I remember particularly well was empathising with classmates who were 'different' and did not fit in. I guess you could say I had a soft spot for the underdog. Later, in secondary school, I twice experienced classes being split up and pupils being reallocated to different classes.

The same thing happened during my university studies. And without being aware of it, I was the one who made sure that these reallocations did not break up any friendships.

I was even complimented for it at my graduation ceremony, even though I had never realised that I had done this. It was something I did entirely out of some sort of 'primal instinct', out of my subconscious urge to prevent separations in whatever way.

Looking back through old photo albums I noticed something I had forgotten throughout the years: my little sister and I were often given the same clothes. I found quite a few photos in which we can both be seen wearing the same sweater and trousers. Both wearing patent leather coats only in a slightly different colour. As if my sister and I were twins. How painfully unaware.

If I then take a big leap in time and look back on my own pregnancies I can, with the knowledge I now possess, explain a lot of what I experienced during those times. Especially during my first pregnancy. The first twelve weeks I was worried that things would go wrong and I said this to people all the time. Not knowing where this fear came from and how by that point history had already repeated itself. My own fear and loss were triggered and I subconsciously felt that things went wrong during the first few weeks of my pregnancy, too; that by that point my daughter had also lost a twin.

And then the birth.... I think this, too, acted as a trigger of my own birth trauma. Having to let go, to let my daughter enter into the cold world.

At a certain point my own body was in shock; luckily I had an amazing midwife who guided me well. I almost died due to a severe bleed, possibly a reaction from my own subconscious because I was so close to my own tragic start to life. I have balanced on the edge between life and death many times in my life, as if I was given the choice to end it or to keep going after all. Apparently I still have something to accomplish here on earth, because I am still here. (These lyrics from a song by Pink are strikingly applicable to me: 'But just because it burst, doesn't mean you're gonna die. You've gotta get up and try'). Falling down, crying it out and getting back up to keep on going.

Always balancing on the boundary between life and death, living on the edge, I was very good at that. Especially where physical tasks were concerned I could push myself to the limit. I would keep going even though my body could no longer keep up, exhaust myself physically, deplete myself. And at the same time seeking out those limits to feel that I was alive. If I had not had any children I probably would have gotten into extreme mountaineering. The Himalayas always attracted me, ever since I was a child. I will never reach the summit anymore in this life, but the image of battling with yourself, the elements, the mountain, it always kept tugging at me. For the moment I stick to skiing and 'ordinary' hiking, although even with these sports I often sought out the limits. The bigger the challenge, the more I came into my own.

Life felt like one big competition to me, in which I really wanted to reach the finish line first. And at quite a cost. The only question was: what is the finish line and with whom and at what cost was I competing? For when you are in competition with yourself, you always lose. But giving up was and is not part of my vocabulary and I still get annoyed when people give in and quit. Internally I get very angry and loudly yell 'Get up!'

Somehow part of me just cannot understand something like that, that there are people who just give up and do not keep on going until it is utterly clear that something is pointless.

I especially do not think much of men who quit. It is quite likely that, in my view, my brother just gave up back then without continuing to fight. Maybe he tried and eventually lost the battle. But perhaps I, too, had to fight to stay alive, and I did make it. Who knows.

In any case, during my search my 'foibles' became clear; I had one 'aha'-moment after another.