

Beat: Miscellaneous

Conjoined Twins, 15 Years After Being Separated

Kendra and Maliyah Herrin

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USPA NEWS - Kendra and Maliyah Herrin were born conjoined at their abdomens, sharing a pelvis, kidney and liver and each controlling one leg. When they were 4 years old, in 2006, a team of six surgeons and 25 support staff at Primary Children's Hospital in Salt Lake City, Utah, separated them in a surgery that lasted 26 hours. The girls are 20 years old now and doing well, but endured quite a bit to get them where they are today.

After their surgery, the girls stayed in the hospital for only 39 days. Kendra retained the single kidney that the girls had shared, while Maliyah began hemodialysis for seven months and in 2007 she was transplanted with a kidney donated by her mother. She did well for eight years, then her body started to reject that kidney. After a few years of intense treatment, Maliyah received another kidney transplant in 2018, which as so far been successful.

Both before and since the 2006 operation, they have been photographed and stared at too many times to count by people who are curious. The experience has forced them to think a lot about inclusion and what diversity means and how to talk to those who are somewhat different. The girls understand what it is like to be bullied because of having disabilities, even though their experiences have been more pleasant. They believe that is because of their strong religious ties, and that of their neighborhood and friends. They do not mind answering questions people may have and prefer that curious people be direct, rather than staring at them.

They talk easily about their physical limitations. Kendra says her muscles are weaker than Maliyah's. They move fast, using walkers when they were at school or elsewhere and scooting at home on wheeled stools like you see in a doctor's office. Maliyah had heart surgery and both girls have had surgeries to place and later replace titanium rods to straighten their backs, as well as smaller procedures to adjust those rods as the girls grew. Kendra had surgery to put a plate in her femur to straighten her leg so it pointed more forward and doctors later put in a bigger plate.

Now that the girls are adults, they are nervous and excited about their independence. They look forward to being on their own and are starting to make plans for their future. Kendra is a certified phlebotomist and has her drivers license. Maliyah is not quite sure what she wants to do yet, but they both enjoy being on social media. They also have videos on YouTube. Their family knows that they will have lives of surprises and challenges and whatever they do, they will always be there to support them.

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