

# 'You may kiss the brides!'

People may think it's unusual when twins marry twins but it feels natural to this foursome



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BY LYNN HADDRALL

Steve Warrington and Susan van de Merwe, left, pose with their twins, Sarah van de Merwe and Chris Warrington, on their wedding day, Aug. 4, at the Cambridge Mill.

PHOTO COURTESY OF LATTE PRODUCTIONS WEDDING PHOTOGRAPHY

Susan van de Merwe tells me about her wedding plans. Or at least I think it's Susan talking. Her twin sister, Sarah, is talking about her own wedding day. They often finish each other's sentences.

Steve Warrington, Susan's fiancé, joins in to talk about the new home the couple will

soon move into. Steve's twin brother, Chris, is talking about the new house he'll move into with his fiancée, Sarah. It's right next door to the house Susan and Steve bought.

Are you thoroughly confused? It's what happens when twins marry twins. It's a special wedding story indeed.

The couples were a few weeks from their



**LEFT:** Steve Warrington (blue sweater) and brother Chris.

**RIGHT:** Susan van de Merwe, left, and sister Sarah at four years old.



Steve, Susan, Sarah and Chris in the backyard of the sisters' grandmother's home in Elmira, a few weeks before the wedding. PHOTOGRAPHY • DECLAN OUTHIT

Aug. 4 wedding when we met in Elmira. After seeing their save-the-date invitation, I figured I could tell the identical twin brothers apart because Chris sported some facial hair in the photograph.

"I asked whether I should keep it for the wedding or not," Chris says with a smile when we meet. "It's gone now."

We chatted in the living room of the sisters' grandmother's home. No one seems too concerned that I might mix up who said what.

"We think a lot alike," Steve says about his brother. "But I would say we're not overlapping our sentences as much as Sarah and Susan."

Susan and Sarah, 32-year-old fraternal twins, can point to twins in their family dating back to a twin brother who emigrated from Scotland in 1844. Steve and Chris have two sets of twins in their family tree.

To all of them, it seemed normal to grow up as twins. But they learned early in life that others view it as special. Susan recalled a family outing in Niagara Falls when they were children and dressed identically. A tour group of Chinese people insisted on taking pictures.

"Our background is Dutch so we had the really jet-blond hair and blue eyes. There was a tour of Chinese people and they all started chasing us because they saw we were so unusual. It was a company trip. And the CEO had a whole photography team. So, Sarah and I are in some company picture in China with everyone behind us. I think my mom liked that. 'Oh, look at the twins.' Later, we knew better and we were like 'no.'"

Chris and Steve, 36, tried to be different growing up, competing in sports and school. They dressed differently because their mother had a system.

"Our mom colour-coded us," says Chris. "So, I was always red. Steve was always blue. We could actually pick our own clothes."

Susan nods and interjects: "And Sarah was always red and I was always blue."

While their double wedding might seem unusual, the romance started in a typically modern way. Sarah met Chris on a dating site. It wasn't a site that had anything to do with twins and they met in person, unaware of the sibling twin factor, which took several weeks to reveal.

"We didn't know about the other twins. We had just gotten along very well. We

went on some dates and it came up that I was living with my brother and she was living with her sister. From that we kind of realized that we were actually living with my twin brother and she was living with her twin sister," says Chris.

One of their first dates was at the St. Jacobs Farmers' Market. Susan tagged along with her sister to pick up a few things and meet the boyfriend. Steve also thought he would come along with Chris.

Susan and Steve ended up going on a couple dates.

"We were saying to ourselves 'Is this too weird? I don't know.' But we got along pretty well so we thought we would just keep going. We really hit it off. We were really matched in terms of personalities," says Steve.

They laugh about the randomness of their meetings, a chain of events that sounds like fiction.

"It wasn't planned," Sarah says. "We didn't go to a special site for twins. It didn't happen like that. It was a fluke."

Steve adds: "People would always ask Chris and me if we ever dated twins. No, come on, that would be so weird. Now, they just laugh. It just worked out great."

Chris says people often ask if it's nice to be a twin. He's not sure how to respond because it's just natural for him.

"I've always been a twin. That's my life. It's just normal to me. It doesn't feel abnormal to me. It's just other people's reaction when you realize it's unusual," he says.

Their education and careers reflect their sibling bonds.

Steve and Chris grew up in Ottawa. They are computer engineers who work in Waterloo. They both completed their bachelor degrees at the University of Ottawa. Steve did a master's degree at Queen's University while Chris did his masters at the University of Ottawa. They moved to Waterloo for their jobs.

Sarah and Susan were born in Niagara Falls, Ont., but moved to Northborough, Massachusetts, when they were four. They

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graduated from the University of Waterloo with a bachelor of environmental studies (double major in environmental and resource studies as well as psychology) and a master's degree in environmental studies. They launched Blueforest Environmental Development company with their business partners in 2016.

The couples consider themselves introverts. They speak softly when talking about the evolution of their relationships, but become animated when they say a story like theirs played out last year in a car commercial on television.

"Have you ever seen the BMW commercial? That is our story. BMW twins. Google it. It's very similar," says Susan as she loads it on her laptop for me to see.

The 30-second video shows twin boys at various stages of their lives, graduating university together, marrying women who look alike, then living next door as couples. All that sets them apart is the different cars they choose at the end of the commercial.

Susan says their story is remarkably similar. They all got engaged the same night after surprise proposals at different restaurants. They bought new homes beside each other in Waterloo. They share interests and hobbies, such as scuba diving, biking and quiet nights at home. And they have different cars.

It made sense to all of them to have a joint wedding. Why put all their family and friends through separate events with the same guest lists?

"It's been actually kind of easy because instead of only two people doing the work, there's four people and there's no big dominant person. We kind of go with the flow. We're not Bridezillas," says Sarah.

They considered a destination wedding but that would have been difficult for family members like Susan and Sarah's grandmother, Patricia Jackson, who lives at Chartwell Elmira.

Their grandmother – and, in fact, the whole nursing home – is following their

plans closely. Jackson's favourite TV show is "Say Yes to the Dress."

Choosing the wedding dresses was much like the rings. The sisters initially chose identical styles.

"We went together," says Sarah. "And we picked the same one, of course," they say in unison.

But Sarah heard Chris's voice in her head saying "don't do it." So the dresses are "similar" but not identical.

The women point out, in unison and with big smiles, that the grooms needed to have the same wedding look – "for pictures and symmetry."

It was up to the photographers from Latte Productions Wedding Photography to make sure those pictures captured the uniqueness of this wedding.

Justin Reid, owner of Latte, was skeptical when contacted about a wedding for two sets of twins.

"I thought it was a competitor pulling my leg," he recalls. "It just seemed statistically

improbable."

But after meeting the couples and hearing more about them, he can see why it works.

"When twins marry twins, you might feel that one couple is compromised a bit, but you look at this group and you can just imagine that marriage is just another way to solidify their friendship," Reid says.

Normally there would be two photographers on duty at the Cambridge Mill venue, but a third was added to cover all the angles, especially the bridal preparation and individual couple photos.

Reid describes the day as a momentous first for his company. It was also something new for Rev. Randy Harris, after officiating at more than 2,000 weddings. He was thrilled when asked to lead the service.

"For them, it's normal to be twins, of course. That's all they know. But for all of us non-twin type people it's quite the event to see twins marrying twins. With authority, I can say it doesn't happen. It's very rare," Harris says.

He designed a service with scripture and prayer, keeping it around 30 minutes as both couples wanted something simple.

"I promised them, as I do all my couples, that I'll take all the pressure. You guys just celebrate and love each other, be in the moment, nothing to think about, just be there, I'll guide you through."

Many elements of the wedding were similar but not identical, including the brides' dresses, engagement rings and vows. Unique aspects of the ceremony included two brides on the arms of their father and two grooms waiting to receive them.

To prepare for the special day, Harris chatted with the sisters on Facetime.

"They both like the same things. They're really connected. You just sense how natural it is with these girls to play off each other and finish each other's sentences."

He describes Steve and Chris as easygoing and happy to keep the events low-key. "They're wise, compliant. They just want their brides to be happy."

Harris looked forward to the crowning moment when he could say: "I now pronounce you husbands and wives. You may kiss the brides."

There were no immediate honeymoon plans after the wedding. A scuba diving trip is planned for the fall, but moving into their new homes is the first priority with one big decision to sort out before moving day: Who gets Rocco? The sisters describe him as "the world's best cat."

They decided on joint custody. Rocco will stay with each couple for a week at a time. If that's too hard on the cat, he will stay with Sarah and Chris. Susan and Steve will adopt another cat.

The couples are embarking on interesting careers and lives, separate but similar. They're looking forward to their new homes and neighbourhood.

"I think we're planning to be here for some time," says Steve. His brother smiles and nods. "Forever," says Susan. Or maybe that was Sarah. 

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