

Mayo Clinic  
Mayo Stories

Carlsen Twins  
“Two of a Kind”

TV REPORTER: All things bright and beautiful in the eyes of these conjoined twins.

AMY CARLSEN: When I found out Abby and Belle were going to be conjoined, I was in shock. I was scared.

TV REPORTER: Doctors say they have to be separated, not just for their quality of life but for their survival.

JESSE CARLSEN: We wanted to do some research about where we were going to have them separated. I found Mayo by my dentist, of all places. He asked if I have heard about Mayo. I think the next day we called them.

AMY CARLSEN: Yep.

JESSE CARLSEN: And I left a message on their machine.

DR. CHRISTOPHER MOIR (Mayo Clinic Children’s Center - Surgeon): First I heard was from my secretary actually. She got a phone call. We get phone calls. A family was calling up and said, “You know what? We’ve heard that you guys do conjoined twins. We’re looking for some help.” I said, “Why don’t you just stop by Rochester and let’s see what we can do. What you have sounds like something we’re pretty familiar with and you know what, we’ve got a great team here.”

JESSE CARLSEN: The day after that we were in Rochester. They wanted to see us right away.

DR. CHRISTOPHER MOIR: There’s a time when mothers and fathers hand their children to us, and they trust us to do our best. It happens every single day in the operating room, and I would say that every single time tears are shed. It's a very poignant, deep moment of trust.

PATRICIA CONLON, R.N., C.N.S. (Mayo Clinic Children’s Center): The team led by Dr. Moir I think was very organized from the start. Everybody knew what their role was and the great thing about the team is I think everybody helped each other.

PENNY ROSKOS, R.N., C.N.P. (Mayo Clinic Children’s Center): As for their total care, there are hundreds within the Mayo institution, from radiology to special lab technicians, the nursing care and then all of the surgical specialty teams.

DR. CHRISTOPHER MOIR: We know the task ahead of us. We have rehearsed it, but when you actually see those little girls on the table and we know it’s real and we know there’s no going back and once we make the incision, we’re not stopping, there’s a deep, deep breath there, which doesn’t really get exhaled for about 12 hours later.

*[Operating room scene]*

DR. CHRISTOPHER MOIR: The very best feeling you can get is that these are normal girls.

GIRLS: Splash, splash, pull your hair. No fair, no fair, wiggle your ears.

DR. CHRISTOPHER MOIR: They are free. They are ready to play, to study, to work. They are wonderful, beautiful, healthy, normal girls. They go to school. They pick apples off the tree. They are fabulous, fantastic, great, little girls and to see that just brings a quiet joy.

JESSE CARLSEN: After the separation, it was just kind of back home.

AMY CARLSEN: It's like our life began.

JESSE CARLSEN: Yeah, with two healthy girls and like it was supposed to be.

AMY CARLSEN: There's times where you sit and you think that this really happened. You want to thank God every day and the Mayo team for making this our happy family of four. It's a miracle.

DR. CHRISTOPHER MOIR: They've got a life to lead ahead of them. They have every opportunity that everybody else does.

ABBY CARLSEN: He's the nicest doctor ever.

BELLE CARLSEN: He has a weird name. Moir. Moir.

JESSE CARLSEN: They basically gave us normal, healthy kids like anybody with twins should have. So I wanted to thank them for that.