

Triumphant twins

Sisters separated as children celebrate 25 years together

By JENNIFER EYRING

After being separated for 24 years, twins Honi Brett and Alison Schlesinger are now celebrating the 25th anniversary of their reunion, a milestone showing they've been together longer than they've been apart.

June 25 marked the 25th anniversary of the twins' reunion. The women were separated at a young age because their parents were heavy heroin users. Ms. Brett was raised in Smithtown by her aunt and uncle, Sally and Murray Brett, and Ms. Schlesinger, who has cerebral palsy, was sent to live with her paternal grandmother. However, when their grandmother passed away, Ms. Schlesinger went back to the twins' biological mother, Zelda Weiner.

"My adopted mom, Sally, who was married and already had three children of her own, couldn't take in a child as disabled as Alison and felt that as long as Zelda took care of her and she was a client at United Cerebral Palsy, she would be safe," Ms. Brett said.

Ms. Brett, who now lives

in East Northport, said she remembers going into the city to visit her mom and sister when she was around three years old, but the visits stopped shortly after. She tracked her mother down when she was 16 and met with her, but the meeting went so poorly that she was afraid to reach out to her sister.

"I had struggled," Ms. Brett said. "I remembered having a twin sister. I think from the time I was a little kid, I went through a long phase where I put it into the back of my mind, but in adolescence, I began to think of her a lot."

In 1990, Ms. Brett, who's now an associate professor of Liberal Arts at Five Towns College, went to graduate school at Sarah Lawrence and realized she wanted to write a book.

"I had always wanted to write about my family situation," Ms. Brett said. "I knew that this was a story I wanted to tell."

However, Ms. Brett knew she couldn't write the story until she was reunited with her sister. So she started making some phone calls and found out Ms. Schlesinger

was at United Cerebral Palsy on 23rd Street in Manhattan. After speaking with Ms. Schlesinger's social worker, a reunion was planned.

On June 25, 1990, at 27 years old, the sisters were finally reunited. Despite being separated for so many years, Ms. Brett said there was an instant connection.

"It really filled that hole in my heart," Ms. Brett said.

She said it was the scariest thing she's ever done.

"I was so fraught with emotions: fear, guilt and sadness," Ms. Brett said. "But it was extremely healing because it profoundly changed both our lives for the better."

However, the reunion did come with some heartache.

"The hardest thing about reuniting with her, especially at first, is that she wanted to live with me," Ms. Brett said. "She wanted me to just take her out of the situation she was in."

Ms. Brett said this request pulled on her heartstrings because she wanted to help, but she knew she couldn't provide the care her sister needed. Ms. Schlesinger currently lives at Tanya Towers



Honi Brett (right) and Alison Schlesinger.

in Manhattan and comes out to East Northport to visit her sister every few weeks.

After all this time, Ms. Brett, now married to Gary Aumiller and mother to their adopted daughter Skyler, is still working on her book, titled *Zelda's Children*. She said although it's been difficult to write about, she couldn't have done it without reuniting with her sister and the entire process has been very healing.

"It has been extremely cathartic," Ms. Brett said. "I really don't suffer the major depression I used to."

Ms. Brett said she's done several drafts of the book

and it's been a hard story to tell, especially concerning the character of her biological mother. However, she is determined to finish it and may self-publish when she has a completed version.

After their tumultuous beginnings, the twins are now preparing to celebrate their 53rd birthday together in September surrounded by family.

"I'm grateful that I found the courage 25 years ago to initiate that phone call and commit to our relationship," Ms. Brett said. "It's a testament that the bond between twins can never be broken."