

The MBF's FOUNDER, DR ELIZABETH (LIBBY) BRYAN, FRCP, FRCPCH,
born May 13 1942; died February 21 2008

EARLY LIFE

The eldest of three sisters, Elizabeth was brought up in Yorkshire. Her father, Sir Paul Bryan, DSO MC was a Conservative MP for two Yorkshire constituencies following distinguished careers in the army and then in business. Her mother trained as a physiotherapist but in middle life became very ill with bi-polar disorder. Educated at Queen Mary's School, Duncombe Park in Yorkshire and Benenden School in Kent, Elizabeth did most of her medical training at St Thomas's Medical School but completed it in Scarborough after she had returned home for a year to care for her mother and to help with her father's electoral campaign.

CAREER

Elizabeth worked at hospitals in York for some years and then, after her marriage, at Queen Charlotte's & Chelsea Hospital in London, where she was a Consultant Paediatrician from 1979 – 1995. There she undertook research into low birth weight babies during which she became especially interested in identical twins born after suffering from the rare twin-twin transfusion syndrome. She went on to study many families with twins and became increasingly interested in the psychological and social aspects of bringing up multiple birth children. There were joys, certainly, but also many practical and emotional problems both for the parents and the children themselves even where none of the children had died or was disabled.

In York early in her career, and already interested in multiple birth families, Elizabeth helped to set up York Twins Club and in 1978 played a leading role in establishing the Twins Club Association, which later evolved into TAMBA (Twins and Multiple Birth Association), a self help organisation for parents of twins which flourishes to this day.

As a result of her growing interest in twins, Elizabeth Bryan set up Twins Clinics firstly in London and then also in York and Birmingham. With growing numbers of multiple births resulting from the spread of infertility treatments, she also set up specialist clinics for what was then known as Supertwins (triplets and more). These clinics supported families where one or more multiple birth baby had died or had special needs. At each of these clinics, parents with relevant experience acted as volunteers, helping to look after the children so that the parents could have an uninterrupted conversation with the doctor and each child could be examined individually while his twin or triplet sibling(s) were cared for outside.

THE MULTIPLE BIRTHS FOUNDATION

In 1988, conscious that the medical profession was showing too little interest in multiple births she launched a professionally led organisation to complement the work done by TAMBA. This was the Multiple Births Foundation (MBF) to provide not only direct support to families but also to more fully inform the many different professionals involved with their care. Later, as her reputation grew around the world, she became President of the International Society of Twins Studies from 1998 to 2001 and was an Associate Editor of Twin Research. She also later helped to found Herefordshire Home Start going on to become the first Chair of the National Home Start Consultancy.

In 1998, Elizabeth Bryan handed over Directorship of the MBF to Jane Denton, CBE, who continues to run the organisation. Until 2005, Elizabeth remained the Foundation's very active and supportive President.

INFERTILITY

In 1978, Elizabeth Bryan had married ex-diplomat and writer, Ronald Higgins, attended by a huge retinue of twins from York Twins Club. To their sorrow, they had just one failed pregnancy and no children of their own. They wrote a book about it as a guide to other couples: *Infertility – New Choices, New Dilemmas* (Penguin 1995).

CANCER

Many members of Elizabeth's immediate family were discovered to carry the BRACA 1 gene which greatly increases the risk of developing some forms of cancer. Both her sisters contracted the disease and Bernadette (Bunny) died of ovarian cancer in 1995. Despite prophylactic surgery, Elizabeth herself contracted pancreatic cancer in 2005. She followed her illness and treatment with scientific interest, typical humour and great determination right to the end. Her long fight, and the implications of living with the BRACA 1 gene, are well and movingly documented in her book *Singing the Life* which was published by Vermilion in 2007. Her other sister, Felicity, is one of the UK's leading literary agents and founder of Felicity Bryan Associates.

AS A PERSON

Elizabeth Bryan was a remarkable person with an extraordinary ability to empathise and advise on the joys, difficulties and sometimes pain involved with bringing up (or being) multiple birth children. The wealth of experience she accumulated and recorded continues to be the basis of the MBF's work. She was also a charismatic speaker, in great demand worldwide, and a leader with both formidable energy and a gift of encouraging her staff to do what they would never have believed themselves capable of achieving. Blessed with an easy temperament, self-discipline, enthusiasm and a need for remarkably little sleep, she expected (and got) the best from people. High expectations together with an irrepressible sense of humour earned her both loyalty and a huge number of friends.

Thanks to outstanding care from her GP and the local nursing service, Elizabeth was able to stay at her beautiful Herefordshire home throughout her illness and it was there, with Ronald and a close friend at her side, she died peacefully and with great dignity on 21 February 2008.