



Above: Mrs Dorothy Chin with her brood of five – (from left) Adriel, Alicia, Amanda, Annabelle and Andre – who were born in that order on April Fool's Day in 1997. The two boys and three girls were the first set of quintuplets to be born in Singapore. ST FILE PHOTO

From far right: Mr Humphrey Chin and Mrs Chin, both 53, with Adriel, Alicia, Amanda, Annabelle and Andre, all 21. Mr Chin said being a father of quintuplets is a privilege he would not trade for anything. ST PHOTO: KEVIN LIM



# They expected four babies, and then there were five

Couple recount joys and struggles of parenting Singapore's first quintuplets, now 21 years old

Calvin Yang

It may have been April Fool's Day, but what happened to civil servant Humphrey Chin and his financial consultant wife Dorothy on April 1, 1997, was no joke.

The couple were expecting four babies, so it came as a surprise when a fifth bundle of joy was born at KK Women's and Children's Hospital – after going undetected in pregnancy scans.

The two boys and three girls were the first set of quintuplets to be born in Singapore in 1997. According to birth records, only two mothers are known to have given birth to five or more children all at once here since.

"I was lost for words," a youthful-looking Mrs Chin, 53, told The Sunday Times. "There were mixed feelings. I was happy as it was a bonus for the family, but also concerned for the health of the babies."

The "Chin quins" were born a minute apart through caesarean section. When the five – Adriel, Alicia, Amanda, Annabelle and Andre, in that order – turned 21 last month, the family held a birthday bash at a

relative's condominium function room, which was attended by more than 100 friends and relatives.

"The memories spent with my children and my wife are my fondest," said Mr Chin. "Attending their graduation and looking forward to their next milestones, eventually raising a family of their own, will be truly a blessed fulfilment."

## ON TURNING 21

Both parents are adjusting to their children being adults now.

"Giving them space and a sense of personal responsibility are some big areas that Dorothy and I are learning to do," said Mr Chin, 53, adding that they still encourage their children to return to their Housing Board maisonette in Bukit Batok before midnight.

But they do not impose a curfew.

Amanda, the middle child, said her parents have loosened the reins. "The perception of freedom, along with its responsibilities, is a very dicey issue since my parents have five kids to think about at the same time," she added.

"Since we are now adults, our parents have become more understanding that we have instances where

we need to have our 'me' time."

However, Annabelle is a little fearful of the responsibilities that come with freedom. She also admits to worrying when her siblings are out late.

"It is a bit embarrassing but I guess I am a little protective of my siblings, even though I know that they are more than capable of taking care of themselves," she said.

## SAME SAME, BUT DIFFERENT

Growing up, their parents gave them space to develop as individuals. They even made sure the children were not dressed alike.

Amanda, a pre-school educator, said: "Our parents believed that even when bringing up five children of the same age, every child is unique and different."

Despite being linked by birth, all five have different personalities.

Big brother Adriel is observant and pays attention to little details. The full-time national serviceman, who dreams of being a pilot, often takes charge to resolve problems among the siblings.

Alicia, an applied mathematics undergraduate who has no qualms about giving hugs and saying "I love you", can be counted on to suggest a spontaneous day out.

Amanda, who has a passion for nurturing young children, supports the family with simple tasks such as buying groceries or even giving

## CHALLENGING TIMES

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MR HUMPHREY CHIN

them a simple treat.

Bookworm Annabelle is the family peacemaker who would offer her siblings a listening ear.

And happy-go-lucky Andre, who is the tallest though the youngest, is the most playful.

Their friends do not notice that they are quintuplets, said Andre, who is pursuing a diploma in engineering with business.

"They would be surprised as to how my mum was able to give birth to five babies at once, and would

question how our parents were able to support all five of us."

## GETTING IT RIGHT THE FIRST TIME

When they were told to expect multiple births, the Chins read parenting books to prepare themselves.

None described the drama.

Mrs Chin was awake during the caesarean procedure and recalled hearing a lot of commotion in the operating theatre.

"When I overheard one of the doctors remarking that 'it's amazing', I was relieved as I knew that the delivery had gone well," she added.

As they were born prematurely, the babies had to be placed in incubators to maintain their body temperatures.

The couple decided not to have any more children as "we wanted to provide the best that we could afford for them", said Mrs Chin, who wrote a book, *Our Amazing Quins*, to chronicle the parenting journey. "It is already a blessed handful at one go."

While it was easy to share quality time in the early years, it is challenging now that the young ones are pursuing studies or starting careers, said Mr Chin, who graduated with a Master of Science in Communication Management from Singapore Management University in 2016.

"There were times that were trying, as I needed to balance my time

with my five children and my wife due to work and study commitments," he added.

Besides using WhatsApp to chat, the family catches up over home-cooked dinners and also sets aside time for conversations on the sofa.

Managing finances was tricky, as the Chins had to consider the expenses involved in raising not one, but five children at the same time.

The family often relied on the goodwill of others. Wet market stallholders would sometimes give them a discount when they discovered the size of their family, said Mr Chin. They would also usually dine at home, except for the occasional birthday celebrations.

For 17 years, they drove around Singapore in a red 10-seater goods-cum-passenger van.

Once, to save money, the Chins photocopied maths textbooks for the children in black and white, only to realise that some of the sums required them to distinguish between different colours.

"We had no choice but to buy five sets of books instead," said Mr Chin. "As they were all born at the same time, it was a challenge to have hand-me-downs for five sets of clothes, books, bags and so on."

## PRIVILEGE TO PARENT QUINTUPLETS

Yet being a father of quintuplets, said Mr Chin, is a privilege he would not trade for anything.

"I am relieved they have grown into young, independent adults... It has been an uphill parenting journey and I feel that they have grown just right," added Mrs Chin. "Just timely for Humphrey and I to have more couple time."

Challenging as it has been, there are benefits of living in a big family, said Annabelle.

"I know that my siblings will always be there for me."

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