

The Dionnes

Ellie Tesher

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A sensitive and candid inside account of the struggles of the Dionne quintuplets, from "million-dollar babies" to impoverished adults, and their ultimate triumph in the battle for compensation after years of exploitation.

In February 1998, a press conference was held by three tired 63-year-old women, who held up a sign that read JUSTICE NOT CHARITY. Eight days later, the Ontario government -- who had ignored the three surviving Dionne quintuplets' pleas for three years -- bowed to public opinion and awarded \$4 million to the sisters and to their two nieces, Marie's daughters.

The miracle babies -- to this day the world's only surviving identical quintuplets -- were raised in a compound separated from their family and put on display for thousands of tourists. "Quintland" became a cash cow for the Ontario tourism industry, and many people benefited from the bizarre, micro-managed lifestyle the children were forced to live. As teens they were returned to their family, who were like strangers to the girls. As young adults they turned to convents or to marriage and motherhood, desperate to establish lives of their own. Physical ailments continued to plague them, however, with two sisters dying tragically young: Emilie at age 20, and Marie at age 35.

In addition to the personal struggles the three sisters candidly relate, *The Dionnes* recounts the stories of their friends, families, lawyers, supporters, and legions of admirers. It was journalist Ellie Tesher's heartfelt coverage of the sisters' plight that led to a public outcry, ultimately forcing Ontario's Harris government to come up with the money they had pledged not to give. Much more than a rags to riches story, *The Dionnes* is a tale of humanity and courage, of family feuding and family solidarity, and of the long and painful road to justice.



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