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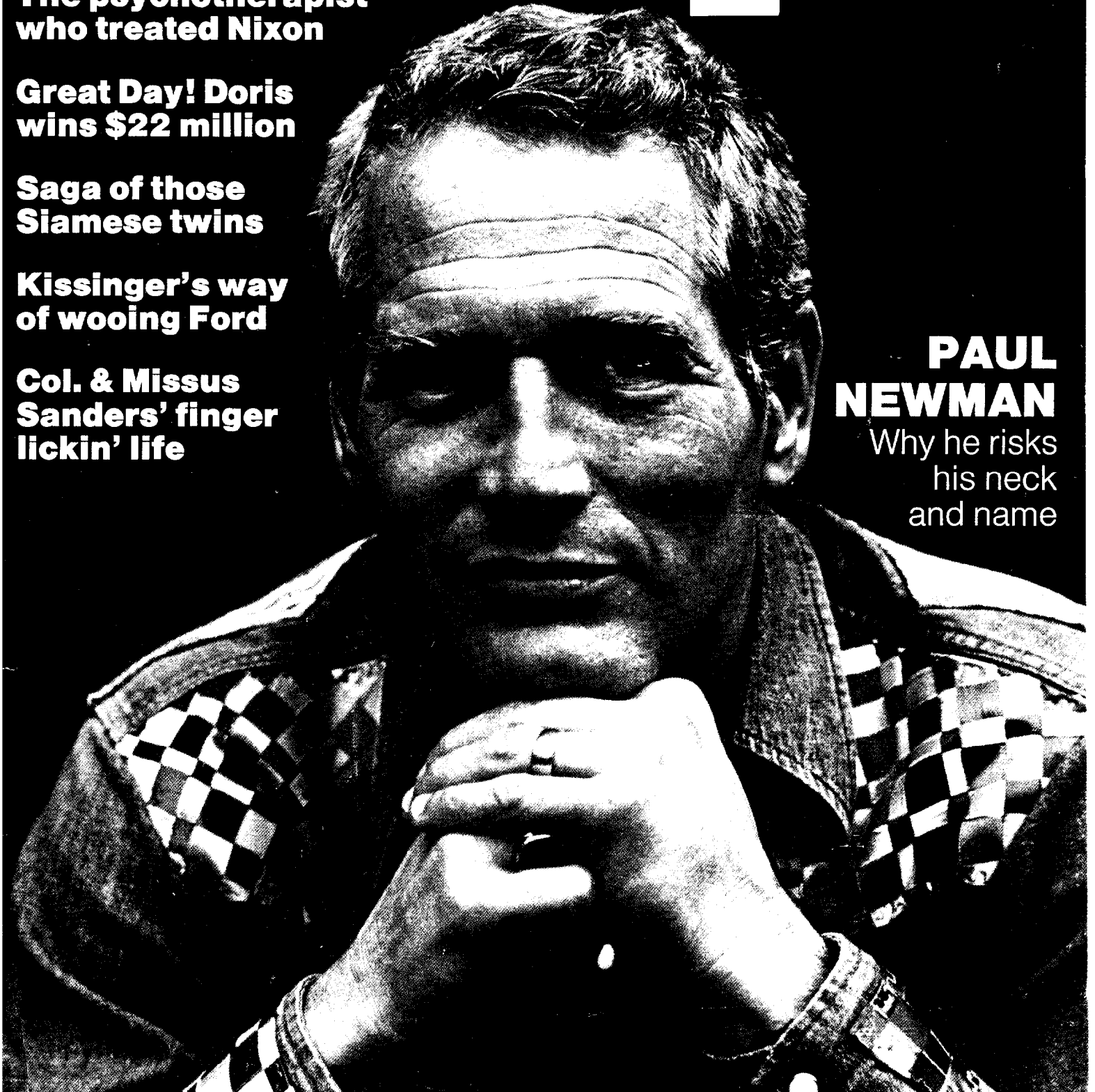
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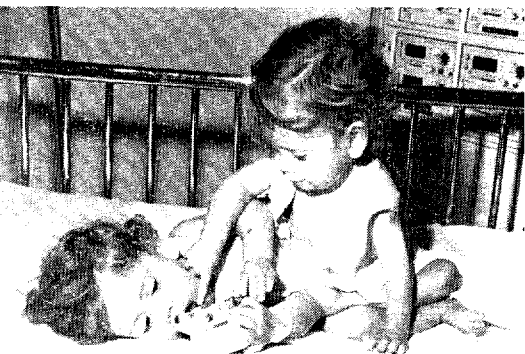
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THE GOD-FEARING SURGEON WHO SEPARATED THE TWINS



MORT ROND

Before they were separated, Alta (upright) entertains Clara. Because of the way they were joined, one usually had to sit up for the other to sleep.

In the doorway of his Dominican Republic store, Salvador Rodriguez, the father, beams, flanked by two of his three sons.



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For Mrs. Farida Rodriguez, beaming broadly in the embrace of a Philadelphia pediatric surgeon, it was a mother's moment of relief and joy. At home, 1,500 miles away in the Dominican Republic, the father, Salvador Rodriguez, was the happiest man in the tiny village of Las Auyamas. He had stayed home to look after their sons and the family store. For them the news was good; for the world, historic. In a rare and difficult operation the "Siamese twin" daughters of the Rodriguezes, joined at the waist and pelvis, had been successfully separated.

When they were born 14 months ago, Clara and Altagracia Rodriguez seemed doomed to spend life sharing the same grotesque body—if, indeed, they would live at all. Hospital attendants in the town where they were born did not offer much hope. Yet as they neared their first birthday, it was clear that both girls were remarkably healthy. That they frequently played together, happily rocking back and forth on their shared torso, made their plight all the more poignant.

This summer, word of their condition reached Mrs. Dianna Zimnoch of Warrington, Pa., a member of a Community in Christ church. She and her congregation arranged to have Mrs. Rodriguez and the twins flown from the Caribbean to the Children's Hospital of Philadelphia, where, under the direction of Dr. C. Everett Koop, over 10 hours of surgery made each little girl

a reasonably normal human being.

It was the seventh time such similarly joined twins had been separated, only three of the previous operations had been wholly successful. While word of Koop's surgical triumph circled the earth, the news was somewhat slower in getting to the Rodriguez fam-

After the operation, surgeon Koop and the girls' mother share a proud moment.

ily. A radio station in Santo Domingo contacted a telephone company office in San José de Ocoa, a mountain town 90 miles to the southwest, and from there a jeep was dispatched to remote, primitive Las Auyamas. To the joyfully bewildered Rodriguez, Koop and his fellow physicians were "gods," performing a miracle the family could scarcely hope for. But Koop, who describes himself as "a pretty deeply committed Christian, a Bible-believing conservative evangelical," was quick to put the accomplishment into perspective. "Obviously," he said, "we

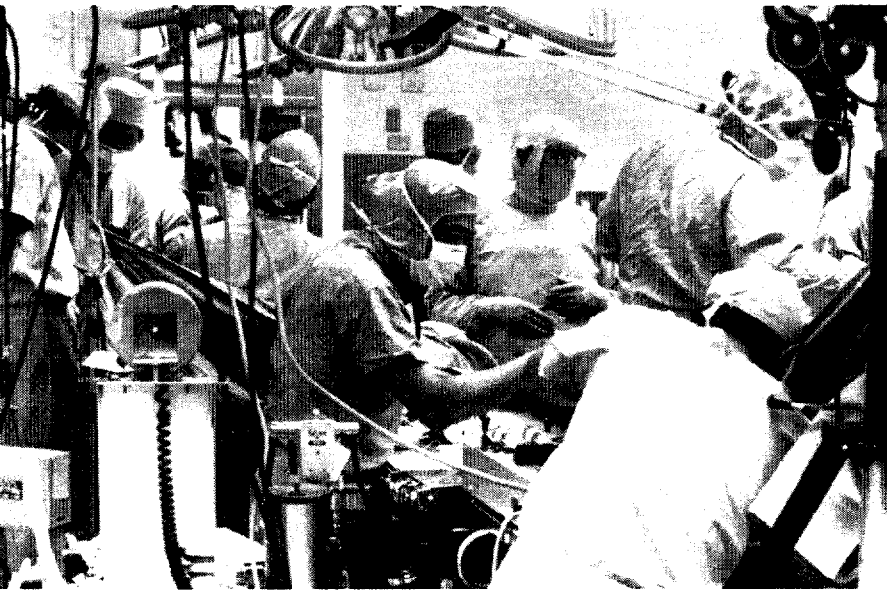
cannot do what God has done. But we have done what we can do."

A graduate of Dartmouth College and the Cornell Medical College, Koop, 57, can hardly remember a day when he did not want to practice medicine. Growing up in Brooklyn, of Dutch and German parentage, he recalls, "I never went the fireman or policeman route. I always wanted to be a doctor, since the age of 5. In fact, I always wanted to be a surgeon. The idea of being able to use my hands to make people well fascinated me."

Twenty-seven years a surgeon,

nearly all of them as surgeon-in-chief of Children's Hospital, Koop approached the operation with a certain optimistic realism. "What we had here," he explains, "was a decision whether to allow these little girls to live as a monster—not a very pretty term, but nevertheless the term we use—or to give them the hope of living as separate individuals, each with her own life."

That choice was not without agony for the Rodriguez family. "There was one thing I had to translate to the doctors 20 times a day," recalls Mrs.



During the operation, Dr. Koop (above, right center, with glasses) directed the 23-member surgical team.



In front of a lighted viewing glass, Dr. Koop and an associate review X rays of the two girls which were taken prior to surgery.



Photographs by Arthur Schatz

Zimnoch. "The parents didn't want the operation if it meant that one of the girls had to die so that the other could live." With Koop's assurances, the parents finally consented.

Although both girls are small for their age—Alta's postoperative weight was eight pounds, Clara's 13—they were proclaimed healthy and are expected to be able to return to the Dominican Republic by the middle of this month. For the moment, however, they were confined to the infant intensive care unit, their tiny figures dwarfed by the wires, tubes and consoles that

monitored their every bodily function.

Occasionally visible when they moved restlessly were two rows of small, sterile mother-of-pearl buttons sewn onto each tiny abdomen. The sutures from each side of the incision were wound around the buttons, thus lessening any chance of tearing the skin.

Because they spent the first 13 months of their lives side by side, Clara and Alta are sharing the same hospital bed. While still watching their physical signs, the doctors are in fact as concerned about their psychological

adjustment to the enormous shock of being separate from one another. As Koop looked in on the two, Clara reached out and touched her sister's hand (see following pages). "We will, of course, keep them together as much as possible," he said in his best lecture hall manner. "You see, they have always held hands while they slept." He paused and the bearded surgeon's voice softened. "Isn't it wonderful?"

CONTINUED

Intently watching a monitor of her heart rate, Dr. Koop examines Clara, the larger of the two newly separated girls.





On the evening of her first night as a separate little girl, Clara (left) reaches out to touch the hand of her sister Altigracia as the two drift off to sleep.

