

## Sister act

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As a little girl, Colleen McLean just didn't know what to do when little sister Meghan arrived.

Suddenly, she had to keep quiet during the day, couldn't run around the house anymore, and got sent to her room for poking the baby awake. Soon enough, she felt like there was nothing to do – until she discovered a new best friend, the girl in the mirror.

In the mirror, she found solace: a girl who always listened, laughed at her jokes and played dress-up with her. And once the baby grew up a little bit, the sisters ended up becoming best friends.

That story makes up the heart of *The Girl in the Mirror*, written, illustrated and published by local residents Colleen McLean and Meghan Irvine.

"I still think the Girl in the Mirror is my best friend. But I think my sister's alright too," reads the book's final page, the older girl's arm stretched around her sister.

In an email interview, McLean (nee Irvine) said the story takes its cue from her childhood memories.

"I had a very active imagination as a child so the story is essentially based on my real experiences," she said. "It's about growing up and the bond that can develop between siblings – my sister really is my best friend, but it took time to develop that relationship."

With Colleen handling the writing and Meghan taking care of the art, the book is a perfect primer for children with a new brother or sister in their lives.

"After being interested in books my whole life, I wanted to try writing one myself," McLean said. "I did some writing in university but this is the first book I've written."

She didn't have to look far to find an artist – Meghan is a teacher at Tawingo College in Huntsville, where she handles a grade 3/4 split class and the grade 7/8 art class. She also has a Fine Arts degree from University of Waterloo – the sisters' hometown – and University of Western Ontario and has taught art privately.

"This was something Colleen and I had always talked about doing," Meghan said. "We're very close friends and spent a lot of time together as kids doing projects together. She always loved to write, and I always loved to draw. It was important for me that we see this through, especially since it's a story about us."



**TEAMWORK.** Sisters Colleen McLean and Meghan Irvine drew on their own childhood experiences for their first book together. *Submitted photo*

A "project of love," the sisters decided to self-publish in order to maintain creative control.

After all, they know their target market first-hand; in addition to Meghan's teaching background, Colleen spends her time working with children as a manager at a Tim Hortons Children's Foundation camp.

"I have worked with kids for many years and hope to continue to do so," Colleen said.

Meghan said the feedback has been great from young readers.

"Neither of us have children, but we have read it to friends of ours whose kids really enjoyed it! They always ask 'is the story true? Is that what you both looked like?'"

Well, as Meghan noted, pretty much.

"I based the illustrations on what Colleen and I looked like as kids, although I exaggerated Colleen's curls a bit to look more like they did as she got older," she said.

The Girl in the Mirror is available now at The Bookcase and Ahimsa Yoga Studio (both in Huntsville) and through [meghanirvine.com](http://meghanirvine.com).

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