

Multiple Births, Multiple Challenges . . . but Tons of Fun!

By Jennifer Wake

Whether they are pushing double strollers at Lafayette Reservoir, cheering for three soccer teams at once on the fields at Miramonte, or keeping close watch for runaway toddlers at the Moraga Commons, parents of multiples (be it twins, triplets, or more) abound in Lamorinda.

Over the last few decades, multiple births have risen for women of all ages, but according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention the largest growth has been among older mothers, especially those aged 35 years and over. Between 1980 and 2004, the twin birth rate increased 31 percent for women aged 20-24, and 133 percent for women aged 40-44.

While raising multiples is becoming more common, it does not come without its challenges.

Dynnel Ryan of Lafayette said she has never known life to be harder than it was in the first three months of her little ones lives. Before Sydney and Preston were born nine months ago, Dynnel envisioned sleeping when the twins slept and peaceful bliss.

"Boy, was I wrong," she said. "I think I slept for about 30 minutes at a time before I had to get up and start all over again: breast feed one, then bottle feed, then pump, put one down and start all over with the next one."

And the challenge of multiples gets more complicated as they grow.

Moraga resident Kim Nichols' – whose 12-year-old triplets, Spencer, Emily and Clark, are in sixth grade at Joaquin Moraga Intermediate – said that until fourth grade, it was quite a juggling act. "During special parties or performances, in kindergarten, for example, I would spend seven minutes at a time in each classroom, rotating in and out hoping to catch just a few moments of each child's performance or activity."

Lafayette mom Kathy Kessenich, whose triplets (Nicolle, Nellie, and Nathan), age 7, attend Burton Valley Elementary along with sister Gwen, age 9, says she tries to stay as organized as possible at home to help with school work.

"Our kitchen has become a mini-school," she said. "I have replaced pictures on the wall with a write and wipe poster for everyone's spelling list for the week, and posters with reading related info on it. My first-graders don't always want to do their homework together, so I need to single thread them to get it done." She cut back a little on sports this year and plans to start splitting them up next year, so they have the opportunity for independence.

Jane Kelson's twin 17-year-old daughters who attend Campolindo are deciding whether to foster their own independence in college next fall.

"They have navigated the often rough waters of middle school and high school, and have benefited from the constant companionship of a best friend and confidante," Kelson said. "The question everyone asks them these days is: 'Are you going to go to the same college?' They don't yet know how to answer."

Along with multiple colleges and multiple activities, come multiple costs.

Mom of three, Lynette Potter, found costs to be much more than expected for her twins Cheryl and Dylan, 2, and older daughter Sarah, 3 1/2. "A double stroller with an optional 'jump seat' by Valco costs nearly \$1,000 – but it's worth every penny," she said.

When Lafayette resident Heidi Madderra had her twins Noah and Em-



Dynnel and Zack Ryan of Lafayette take their twins, Sydney and Preston, 19 mos., for a wagon ride around the block Photo Jennifer Wake

mery 19 months ago, she thought she had enough baby clothes. "But after the first week of them being home, I only had enough clothes for maybe two days," she said. "I have learned about shopping at consignment stores for clothes and toys."

Orinda resident Rosi Kimball received a lot of donated clothes from friends, and gifts from friends and family for 15-month-old twins Jack and Annaliese. "There is also the sale twice a year for multiples where I stock up," she said.

Like many other fathers, Kimball's husband was able to take 10 weeks off work to help, thanks to the Family Medical Leave Act (FMLA). "He helped with every feeding, changing, etc. When he went back to work, the first week was scary," she said. "It was only me."

Rosi went back to work after the babies were 3-months-old. "Luckily I was able to adjust my work schedule to three 12 1/2 hour days a week and one 10-hour payback day a month to make up the 40 hour work week schedule," she said. "My husband cares for the twins one day a week by himself – bless his heart – and we have a babysitter twice a week."

Even Amy Cocotis' 86-year-old grandmother (a retired nanny) watches her 3-month-old twins Josette Marie and Jeaneva Anne once a week.

Cocotis recommends that anyone expecting multiples should join a twins parenting group. "Volunteer to help another member a few hours a week," she said. "It really helped me to prepare by showing me the worst and best case scenarios. I could raise one child in my sleep, I think."

For all these parents, the joys far outweigh the challenges.

"I think everything is more fun with two babies. When we go to grandma and grandpa's, there is one for each to hold," Dynnel said.

"It's still not too late for more," she added with a smile.