



Michele and Larry Bacak with their children Ryan, Kyle, Lauren, Michael, Andrew, Megan, and Melissa

BIG Katy FAMILIES

Written by Heather Lowrie
Photography by Marisa Hugonnett

With Plenty of Love to Go Around

Just how large is your family? According to the most recent Gallop poll, 52% of Americans believe two kids are the perfect number for a family, while 25% believe that three kids are ideal. There are two Katy families that aren't part of that combined 77% based on their own family dynamics. The Andersen family is busy raising eight children and the Bacak Family has their hands full with seven. Whether you are thinking about starting a family or debating about adding to it, these two couples will inspire you with their stories and advice applicable to us all.

The Andersen Family

Can you imagine driving through Taco Bell and ordering for eight kids and two adults, then hoping they get the order right? This is just one of the many adventures that can happen daily with a large family. High school sweethearts, Dean and Colleen Andersen have been happily married for 26 years. They have been blessed with eight children, Stephanie (25), Kimberly (23), Lindsay (22), Camille (20), Jeff (19), Laura (17), Timothy (15), and Sarah (12). They also have four grandchildren, Eva, Leighton, Tyler, and Brynlee. Dean says, "I am the youngest of 12 children, so big families seemed normal to me."

Finding Joy in the Journey

You can imagine the stares that follow them around wherever they go, especially once they find out, yes - they are all from the same family! Most responses range from "no way" or people automatically think they are doomed to failure, but it is quite the opposite. Colleen says, "Having more children can be difficult but very rewarding. It pays off so much more as time goes by and you learn to appreciate them even more. There is a lot of joy in the journey."

From Utah, to Texas, then off to France, even Australia, and currently in Katy, they haven't let the number of children limit their life experiences, regardless of where they have lived. Yes, there are family vacations, family reunions, and travels to historic spots across the country, but flying has never been an option. Airfare alone would cost \$2,500 to \$3,000 dollars for 10 people. The Andersen family has put six children through driver's education, sent eight kids to their first day of kindergarten, watched five graduate high school, kept track of chore charts, laundry, groceries, birthday parties, and car pool without missing a beat. Colleen even makes her own homemade bread and jam, complete with grinding her own wheat.

Keeping it all Together

There's no need to join any playgroups - they have their own. And fancy restaurants aren't necessary either. They create their own with each child planning, cooking, and serving the meal on their assigned evening. There are lists and more lists to keep track of who is doing what, when, where and with whom, and then actually getting them all where they need to be. Exhausting, definitely, but support from their Mormon religion has always been key to their strength. The wonderful Katy community has always been one of their favorite places to live as well. Colleen says, "It's family friendly and a great place to raise children because it is centered around families." The Andersens are a true asset to our community and their love for each other and their family is an inspiration.



“Having more children can be difficult but very rewarding. It pays off so much more as time goes by and you learn to appreciate them even more. There is a lot of joy in the journey.”

- Colleen Andersen, Katy mom of 8 children

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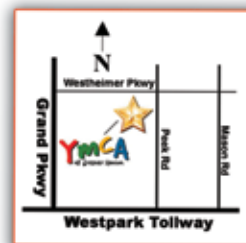
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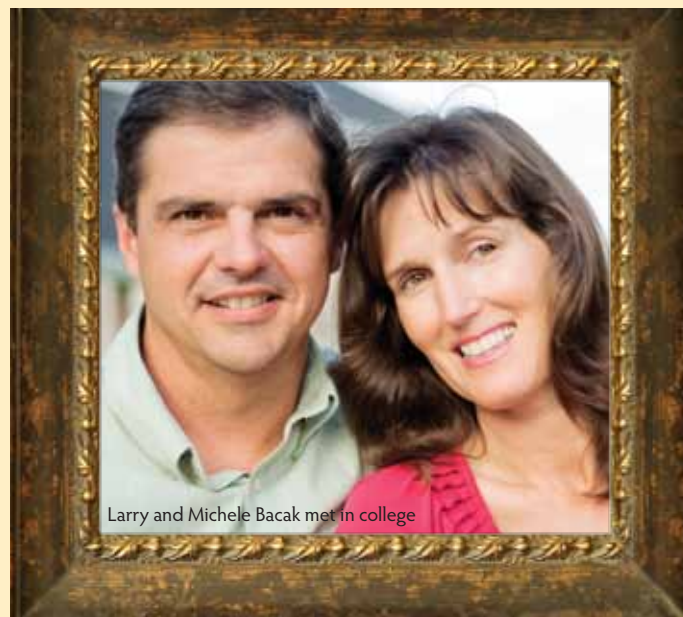
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The Bacak Family

Twenty years ago, if you were to show Michele and Larry a picture of what their family would eventually look like, they would have been surprised. Michele knew she wanted more than two or three, but how did they end up with seven? Michele says, "One baby at a time. They are such a blessing and nothing prepares you for how wonderful it is to hold each child." Michele and Larry met during Christmas break while they were in college. Ryan (19), Kyle (17), Lauren (15), Michael (13), Andrew (9), Megan (7), and Melissa (2.5 months) all make up the Bacak family today.

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From Alaska, Dallas, Indonesia, and finally Katy, their roots have been watered in many different places. The one common language that everyone understands is sharing. Whether it is a room, clothes, or the latest popular gadget, they know the value of sharing and the unselfishness that comes with it. When it comes to grocery shopping Michele says, "I have to simplify. When I see it on sale I stock up on it, and generic items are never out of the question." She has never been bothered by the overwhelming amount of laundry or cooking, but also knows the necessity of teaching her children how to take over these jobs as well.

Setting the Tone

An important part of their family dynamic is the fact that all the children are homeschooled until high school. The Bacak's know that regardless of the number of children any family has, setting the tone is important in any family dynamic. Michele says, "The kids pick up on our mood, our reactions, our judgments and sooner or later they are gone so you learn to value those tough times because you know how fast it goes by." So what is the biggest challenge for this family? Communication- making sure everyone is on the same page. Family meetings and giant calendars are helpful tools to make things run smoothly so there is a predictable flow to the family. Michele and Larry agree that you need to set standards early and start young.

The most important thing the Bacaks say they can do for their children is to recognize their temperament and love language. They want to be the kind of parents that respect and understand the personalities they have been given and not change that into what they think works. With their Catholic background, they recognize the value of life and the importance of guiding their children. The

latest challenge for this family was Melissa's diagnoses of Down's syndrome. Michele says, "She is God's special gift to us, a channel of grace, who will take us down a different road while enriching our lives."

Family Ties

Both families know the value of time spent together and how quickly it disappears. They have learned to pick their battles and make sacrifices along the way. When things get tough for any family, regardless of size, know that it is only temporary and set your sights on the fantastic blessings that children bring because you blink and they are waving goodbye. There is no doubt that these families wouldn't change a thing about the blessings they have been given and Katy is a better place because they call this town home. **KM**

Heather Lowrie is a kindergarten teacher and mother of two. She is married to her high school sweetheart, James. She is a freelance writer and author of The Inspired Wife who enjoys the opportunity to encourage people through her writing.

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