



# Katy's **Brady**

**Blended Families Making it Work**

Dr. Christian and Audrey Webb and their children, Noah, Chloe, Lauren, Hannah, and Avery



# Bunches

Written by Julie Battelle & Select Photography by Marisa Hugonnett

**W**e all know the *Brady Bunch* sitcom from the 60s and 70s painted an overly rosy picture of the perfect step-family. Their household was made up of six well-behaved siblings, two adoring parents, and even a full-time live-in maid. Unlike real-life families, the Brady's had no exes, shared custody arrangements, or split household schedules to contend with. *Katy Magazine* met up with several real-life blended families to see how they are overcoming these challenges and forming bonds of love.



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In reality, about 65% of all remarriages involve children from previous unions and one in three Americans is a member of a blended family in one way or another. Even though statistics say two-thirds of remarriages involving children will end within the first five years, several Katy families are proving that fact wrong. With their strong determination, devotion to one another, and plentiful helpings of love and faith, these Katyites are loving life after merging their two families into one.

## Yours, Mine, and ours

It was a fateful flight from Philadelphia to Houston in September 2006 for Cinco Ranch residents, Chris and Marya Chaney, when assigned seats put them side by side for the first time. "We talked during the entire three hours of the flight!" Marya remembers. The conversation revealed the many things they had in common, including being single parents with young daughters – Marya's was 6 and Chris' was 3 at the time. The seed of love was planted during that flight, and over the next few years, it blossomed into a beautiful wedding on a Brazilian beach in July 2008.

Chris' daughter lives most of the time with her mother. Marya, a child of divorce, knows what it is like to be a step-child, so took measures to make sure her step-daughter felt every bit a part of the family. "Because of my experiences, it was very important to make sure that [she] didn't feel like a guest in our home," Marya shares. "She has her own room and she chose how it is decorated. She has her own clothes here, so she doesn't have to bring clothes back and forth. I try to use my experiences to make her experience better." From the start, Chris and Marya knew they wanted another child,



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and this past January the family was made a little larger with the addition of a baby brother. "Again, it was important that both of the girls met their brother at the same time, and with cooperation from her mother, we were able to make that happen," says Marya.

There are times when balancing their children (now 10, 7, and 4 months) and marriage can be a challenge, but through it all, Chris and Marya say the secret is to put the marriage first and reach out for advice when you need it. "We have a weekly date night, which is really important for us, but we also seek out people in similar situations to get additional insight into the unique issues we face as a blended family," says Marya.

## The Best of Both Worlds

Veronica Malhiot of Katy tried to prepare for the challenge of a blended family before she remarried eight years ago. She had two children, ages 11 and 5, and her husband-to-be had a 7-year-old daughter. "The ages of our children actually worked out perfectly for us," she says. "I read books about blending families before we were married, and it actually went smoother than expected. Most of the books said it takes two to five years. We had a few bumps the first year, but the kids have really bonded and now see each other as their 'real' brother and sisters."

The key to their success was spending a lot of time with all the children before the marriage, which helped them get to know each other and adjust to having new siblings. "Being a step-parent is the hardest thing I've ever done, but it's also the most rewarding," Veronica says. "I've experienced a different kind of love I didn't know I could feel."



Mark and Veronica Malhiot and their children, Heather, Kassidy, and Tyler

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Rob and Lisa Polk and their children, Samantha, Carlos, Andy, Brittany, Olivia, Caroline, and Seth



*“We had a few bumps the first year, but the kids have really bonded and now see each other as their ‘real’ brother and sisters.”*

-Veronica Malhiot

Every family has sibling rivalry to some extent, and a blended family can magnify those issues, but on the flip-side, children of a blended family have twice as many parents to turn to for advice, guidance, and learning. “My son has been exposed to tools, building engines, and learning how things work that he otherwise would not have, because his father just isn’t interested in that type of thing,” Veronica explains. “Likewise, I’ve really bonded with my step-daughter with cooking, shopping, and putting clothes together, because her mother doesn’t have the same level of interest in these things that I do. I believe the more people, the more role models a child has, the better off they are.”

One of the perks of a blended family is having visitation weekends. Two weekends a month, the Malhiots’ children visit their other parent and the couple has the house to themselves. “It’s really the best of both worlds,” Veronica says. “We raise our children together, but

also get our private time to cater to our marriage. Some weekends we go out and kick up our heels, but other weekends we just stay here and do nothing together.”

## Lucky Number Seven

Rob and Lisa Polk say they knew nothing about how to prepare Lisa’s three young children (ages 9, 5, and 4 at the time) for her remarriage. “We explained to them the best we could that he was going to be my husband,” says Lisa. “We made sure they understood that he was not replacing their biological father, but that he would love them and care for them and provide for them in every way that a daddy should.” This was Rob’s first marriage, and with no children of his own, he jumped into his new-found father role with loving gusto. The kids weren’t quite ready, though. “Handling the new arrangements was mixed for the kids,” says Lisa. “Rob was so excited about being a parent, but in a situation like this, I really feel like we should have eased into that.”

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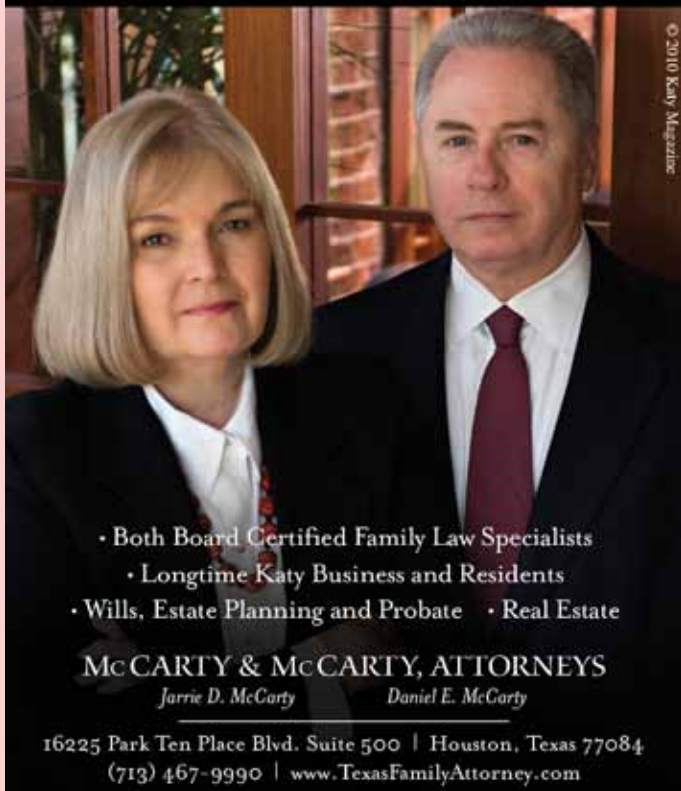
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Lisa's youngest, only 4 at the time, took the most time getting adjusted. "His understanding was that this man was coming in and wedging himself between him and mommy," Lisa shares. "We handled this [by] reassuring him over and over again that we both loved him and also [by] showing him that Rob and I were on the same page." Rob has come a long way from his early days of fatherhood. Lisa gave birth to their twin girls in August 2005, and over the last year, the couple has also adopted Lisa's niece and nephew, bringing the grand total to seven children and six years of wedded bliss for the couple – a full house by any count.

Rob is quick to credit the couple's faith as a guiding force that has kept them centered through the struggles over the years. "Our relationship with God was really non-existent when we first married," he says. "However, through God's plan and works, he has built a cornerstone in our lives that we continue to grow in." Lisa echoes Rob's feelings, adding, "Rob and I are no Mike and Carol. I can honestly and whole-heartedly say we've had our struggles, but we do have some of the best seven kids in Katy!"

## It Had to Be Us

Dr. Christiaan and Audrey Webb met in McAllen through a colleague and friend. Audrey was a senior in college at the time working on a bachelor's degree in business and Christiaan was in his first year of private practice as an ob-gyn. Electricity sparked the air between them and immediately, their relationship began to grow. Soon, it became clear that their connection was undeniable, so they decided to put together a meeting for his children with hers on neutral ground for all. "Our kids were very accepting and supportive," says Dr. Webb of the Women's Health Center of Katy. "They, too, could not deny how natural it was for us to be together. We made each other better people."

But even with the power of love behind them, merging two families into one is as much of an art as it is a skill. Their faith taught the Webbs the importance of building a strong foundation of leadership in their parenting. To ease the transition into their successfully blended family, they've used love, mixed with discipline, integrity, and family prayer. "It is important that there is a defined line between parent and child," Dr. Webb says. "Our kids have emotional security, because they understand that the foundation of our family is the lord Jesus Christ and a strong marriage." Audrey adds, "When arguments or issues arise, we remind them that we are a family – all of us. Our family has a level playing ground. Everyone is treated equally with no preferential treatment, which usually eliminates jealousy. The best thing about a blended family is there is just that much more love and support to go around."

She says the most difficult part about transitioning from being a single parent to being married was learning how to relinquish control of the household and allow her husband to lead the family. "For years, it was just me," Audrey says. "It felt like I was losing my independence, but I have come to see that it is not losing independence, it is embracing our interdependence together." **KM**

*JULIE BATTELLE is a freelance writer and single mom, who one day hopes to have her own blended family success story.*

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Marya and Chris Chaney, with their Katy kids, Emily, Carson, and Seanna

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