

Ultimate Overtime Duty: Dads and Multiples

by Libby Carty McNamee

When thinking about starting a family, most men envision a little bundle of joy swaddled in a baby blanket, not two or three bundles of joy arriving within minutes of each other.

The concept of becoming a father is awe-inspiring enough without entertaining the possibility of multiple births. “We weren’t planning on having any more kids after Jordan, so I just kept getting dogs. When my wife told me about the twins, I was practically lying on the driveway,” John Swatzyna reminisced with a chuckle. “Now we have three boys and three dogs, and I can’t imagine not having any of them.” When his wife Tonya went on bed rest at 26 weeks, he slept in a chair next to her at the hospital every night. “I never went home — I didn’t want to,” he confessed.

They were literally in the middle of relocating to Richmond when Tonya had to have an emergency c-section at 27 weeks. She delivered identical twin boys, Caden and Connor, weighing a scant two pounds apiece. Since the movers had come the previous day, they didn’t have any of their belongings, let alone a stitch of baby gear. The boys had a rough beginning with ten weeks in the NICU as well as several surgeries for Caden who was later diagnosed with cerebral palsy. “It was such a crazy time, but we were closer then than we’ve ever been,” John reflected.

When considering the cost of daycare for two babies, the Swatzynas decided to have John stay home as the primary caregiver. John has thrived in the role, reveling in the opportunity to spend quality time with his children. In fact, for the first six months of the twins’ lives, they were not out of his sight for more than an hour. “I remember those middle of the night feedings. I would rock one in the bouncy seat with my foot while feeding the other. And then I’d switch them,” he laughed.

“When people jokingly ask me if I’m ‘Mr. Mom,’ I say, ‘No, I’m Mr. Dad.’ I’m a parent.” John continued, “Some men have trouble with their self-worth when being the at-home parent, but I was meant to do this job. I do my best here, so my wife can succeed at her job.”

The Richmond chapter of the Dads and Kids Club has been a lifeline for John, especially being a stay-at-home dad new to town. They meet regularly for playgroups and enjoy a monthly kid-free Dad’s Night Out to eat dinner, play poker, or go bowling. The club has no dues or official meetings but does have its own fantasy football league.

Another invaluable resource has been the Southside Area Mothers of Multiples (SAMOM), an organization providing a support system and social network for families with multiples. Within SAMOM, John has helped establish a separate group for Multiples with Special Needs.

John admits to getting lots of stares and comments when he is out with the twins. Never at a loss for a one-liner, John quips, “Hey, she could have had triplets.”

Tom Delano’s wife did have triplets — Thomas, Tessa, and Gena, later followed by a singleton, Cole. Tom works an incredibly demanding job as president of his own company. Despite the pressures of building his own business, he tries to get home at lunchtime and leave work by 5:30 to help his wife and spend time with his kids. Once everyone is asleep, the self-proclaimed workaholic toils away into

the wee hours of the morning, still available to the children if they awaken. In fact, the kids have all called out for Daddy in the middle of the night since they were babies.

Tom takes the hectic life as the father of triplets in stride, praising the support they received from SAMOM. “To me having the triplets was a gift. We are multiply blessed. I’d have ten more kids if I could.” He pitches in wherever he can - tying ponytails, painting fingers and toes, as well as coaching baseball and soccer and attending dance recitals. “We’ve been to Disneyland at least three times,” he recounted. “It’s a great way to connect with the kids. Plus I’m a big kid myself. I’m doing a lot of these things for the first time.”

When tossing 130-140 cans of baby food in his cart at the grocery store, people would ask, “Do you run a daycare?”

Patrick Hines, father of twins Fred and Abby as well as singleton Emma, doesn’t run a daycare but close to it. He and his wife Julie are equal partners in raising their children as well as in owning the Playroom, a fun place for kids to play indoors with both Southside and Northside locations. Also heavily involved in SAMOM, the Hines wanted to start their own business but didn’t want to lose any time with the kids.

They decided upon creating the Playroom since their kids would really enjoy being there. Normally Patrick works in the morning while Julie is at home with the kids fielding their limitless supply of questions. Then in the afternoon, they switch roles, quite literally. “We each bring a different perspective and elicit different responses from the kids. I tend to be the more old-fashioned one, but it’s nice to know that if the kids get hurt while I’m there, they never call for Mommy.”

Unfortunately babies do not arrive carrying a handbook, whether they are born individually or as part of a matching set. Of the countless strategies for raising multiples, there is no “right” answer, only establishing a consistent routine that works best for your family. One thing is for sure - life is better for everyone when Dad is around as much as possible.

For further information about SAMOM and Richmond Area Mothers of Multiples (RAMOM), please check their websites at www.samom.com and www.ramom.org.

For more information about the Richmond chapter of the Dads and Kids Club, please refer to their [website](#).

Libby Carty McNamee, a local freelance writer and attorney, hopes to become a better parent herself after taking tips from these devoted fathers.

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