



Just what they hoped for! Lyette and David Reback's children: Back row (left to right): Glory Grace and Kemper; third row: Daly Kay and Trinity; second row: Ryli and Bliss; and front row: Courson and Liberty. Lyette was expecting her ninth child in February.

The More the Merrier

Large families reveal their secrets to happiness

BY KRISTEN DE DEYN KIRK

CHERYL CLAPP OF SMITHFIELD LOVES CHILDREN, BUT SHE NEVER THOUGHT SHE'D HAVE HER OWN

"When I started teaching, my husband, Porter, saw how challenging the kids could be, how much they need," remembers Cheryl of the early days of her 27-year marriage. "He said we weren't going to have children."

But then, "the Lord decided otherwise." Twenty-two years later, they have five

children.

What changed for Porter? "I guess he just got hooked," jokes Cheryl.

She now gets up at 4 or 4:30 a.m. every morning to have some personal time or get a jump start on her teaching duties. She no longer drives to a school, instead teaching right in her own home. She taught Jennifer, her oldest, until she left for Longwood College four years ago. Anna, 10, and Andrew, 15, still study at home, and Brian, 18, and

Stephen, 13, attend Denbigh Baptist Christian School.

The kids are up at 6. Brian and Stephen are out the door about 7:15, and Anna and Andrew hit the books with Mom at 7:30. On Tuesday and Thursday, Cheryl drives Andrew to a program on the Peninsula for children with dyslexia. Afternoons are filled with sports including indoor and outdoor soccer and track.

Andrew also plays the clarinet in an orchestra and takes private lessons. In ad-

dition to teaching, chauffeuring the children to activities, and working out at the YMCA, Cheryl also tutors a student with dyslexia. All those delightful demands mean Cheryl is flexible about some things.

"Dinnertime varies," says Cheryl, "and all of the children are skilled in the kitchen. I'm not the only one cooking."

Lyette Reback of North Palm Beach, Florida, a mom of eight (most likely nine by the time this article hits the streets as she was due in late February!), is a firm believer

in children doing chores.

At one point, she hired people to help run her big household. That ended when the family was once sick with the flu and one assistant came to work. She walked in, saw a household of sick people, and quickly declared "I quit."

"I looked at my oldest (who's now 12)," says Lurette, "and said 'we're going to figure this out on our own.'"

She's paired up each of the older children with one of the younger ones and put them in charge of making sure the younger child gets ready in the morning. They clean their rooms and get dressed and washed up without Mom supervising.

And when they come downstairs around 8:30, they must have a Bible verse memorized. Daly Kay, the oldest, makes breakfast and then the day of home-schooling, playing and swim lessons begins. The children do chores, too.

"They clean the bathrooms. I admit sometimes I walk in and can't tell it's been cleaned, but they work at it," says Lurette. "I recently put the oldest three girls - Daly Kay, Ryli and Bliss - in charge of doing the laundry. I tell my friends I'm in management, upper management!"

Lurette feels blessed to have wonderful friends who support her and her husband David's decision to have a large family. They both knew that's what they wanted. On their first date, David asked how many children Lurette would like, and she said "as many as God will give me." They couple was engaged 10 days later.

Others, unfortunately, do not always share their excitement. People comment about how they'll pay for college and ask if they "kept trying" until they had their boy, Courson, their seventh child.

"I intentionally named my third girl 'Bliss' because I was tired of people assuming I wasn't happy to have a girl," Lurette says. "We even had to reassure my oldest that we had put money away for college because she was hearing the things people would say and got worried."

Dealing with unsolicited comments has been a challenge for Shelia Vuckovich from Mokena, Illinois. She and her husband have seven children, ranging in age from 22 to 22 months. She gets asked if the family is a blended one, if their 3-year-old is an "oops" baby because she's nine years younger than her closest sibling and if her husband is going to get fixed.

"I tell them there's nothing 'broken,'" the witty mom says. "I would never ask someone why they only have two children and question their decision. My children are happy; the oldest two got into college. We all pitch in and the older ones take a lot

of pride in the younger ones' accomplishments. We're happy!"

Cheryl from Smithfield feels the same way. She's proud that two of her children talk about being missionaries and helping others, and she believes their goals stem directly from her and her husband's openness to people - both around the world that they've met by traveling and in their home.

"Large families are very rewarding," says Cheryl. "We see that our children enjoy people and want to be around them." *A*

What You Can Learn From Parents of Large Families

- Make decisions based on what's right for each child. The Clapps home-schooled three of their children and sent two to private school, knowing that those two craved even more time with other people.

- Wake up way before dawn to have some personal time.

- Give children responsibilities - even if they don't do their chores perfectly.

- Limit TV time by staying busy and not investing in the newest models. The Clapps' TV is 26 years old; one of their sons jokes that it's a big screen if you move in real close!

- Consider exercising with your child. You get fit, set a good example and spend more time together. David Reback, dad to eight going on nine, sometimes asks his oldest daughter to join him for his early-morning workouts.

- Slow down and listen - especially late in the day when kids tend to reveal more. It's hard because you're tired, but you can often learn what's really on your child's mind around bedtime.

- Try to eat breakfast and dinner with the children as often as possible.

- Let everyone know how grateful you are for your children. Shelia Vuckovich tells people she couldn't imagine life without each and every one of her seven.

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