

# SPOKESMAN-REVIEW

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## **Bonus Babies**

### **Moms of multiples find support in Spokane group**

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These are the moms who get twice the love. But on most days, they also have twice the work.

During the first four months after giving birth, Jennifer Larson practically slept in a rocking chair – breastfeeding her twin girls, one after the other, throughout most of the night. Since they were born almost four years ago, Paige and Elaina have kept their mom busy. They both had colic and cried a lot when they were infants. They also learned how to walk, to talk, to use the potty – of course, at the same time.

"When I found out I was having twins, I was totally overwhelmed," recalled Larson, who also has a 5-year-old daughter named Sydney. "I had so many questions and so many challenges."

Fortunately, the Spokane mom found other mothers who knew exactly what she was going through. While on bed rest during her pregnancy, Larson learned about Miracle Bonus Mothers of Multiples – a Spokane-based support group for moms of twins, triplets or more.

For the past 50 years, members of Miracle Bonus have encouraged and learned from one another as they shared their experiences raising twins or more. In addition to nurturing friendships and helping other mothers, the women also have worked together to raise scholarship money for high school graduates as well as support various charities and nonprofits in the region.

With the increased use of fertility treatments, more women are becoming mothers of twins. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's 2007 National Vital Statistics Reports, the twin birth rate in 2005 was 32 per 1,000 births. The rate has risen about 3 percent each year between 1990 and 2004, according to the CDC. That's a total increase of 42 percent since 1990 and 70 percent since 1980.

In Eastern Washington and North Idaho, mothers of twins or more have discovered each other through Miracle Bonus, which is part of the Northwest Association of Mothers of Twins Clubs Inc. The organization currently has about 50 dues-paying members who come from all over Spokane and North Idaho including communities as far as Spangle, Waverly, Desert Aire and Moscow.

The women gather once a month at Bethlehem Lutheran Church on Spokane's South Hill. In addition to reports and question-and-answer sessions, the moms in recent months have been inviting guest speakers to talk about a range of topics from green cleaning to meal planning and family traditions. They also meet to have seasonal parties for their children, play dates and special events including teas, auctions and adult socials.

The women also work together to help others. Every year, Miracle Bonus picks a local organization that needs assistance. Most recently, the group raised money and gathered backpacks, school supplies and



Sheltered from the rain, 3-year-old Paige Larson, front, and twin sister Elaina Larson play at Manito Park.

On the Web:

[www.miraclebonus.com](http://www.miraclebonus.com)

other items for the children who attend Project SPEAR, an after-school and summer program for low-income youth in Spokane's East Central neighborhood.

Most of the Miracle Bonus members are the mothers of twins, but two moms have triplets and another has two sets of twins that are a few years apart, according to Larson, the group's co-president. While many have young children, a few who have been members for more than two decades still attend the monthly meetings to support and encourage others.

"These women have been invaluable," said Larson. "They are the experienced moms – they've been there, done that and are there to help."

One of the "experts" is Jane Edwards of Spokane, whose twins – Nathan and Nicole – are now 28 years old.

"Having twins brought us together," said Edwards, describing the friendships that grew as a result of Miracle Bonus. "We put our heart and soul into this club. ... We stick around because we want to keep that thread going through. People helped us in the past so we need to be there to help others."

Edwards still takes part in the monthly meetings, where she shares her wisdom with the younger moms. She's also there to answer their questions: How do I breastfeed twins? How do I carry them around? Do I put them in the same classroom or separate them when they go to school?

"I had so much fun watching them interact together," said Edwards, recalling her twins' childhood. "They were different as night and day but they were each other's best friends. They were never afraid because they had each other."

Even now, as young adults, her twin son and daughter remain very close, she said.

Although twins are a double blessing, they also can be double the trouble, acknowledged some of the moms.

When her twins were babies, Larson usually scheduled an extra half hour whenever they went shopping or ran errands. Part of the challenge, of course, was just hauling so many kids from one place to the next. Another was all the attention. Twins remain a novelty to many people, she said, so people often stopped to talk and smile at her children.

"It's just different," said Andrea Bailey, mother of 21-month-old twins, Charlotte and Sophia. "You have these little babies that you want to give 100 percent to, but there's only one of you and two of them. ... It's a juggling act."

It helps to know that there are other moms figuring out how to cope with having more than one child who's the same age and has the same needs all at the same time, she said.

Members of Miracle Bonus were there for her from the moment she came home from the hospital, Bailey recalled. Born five weeks early, Sophia and Charlotte had to stay in the neonatal intensive care unit for 12 days. "It was so devastating having to leave the hospital without babies," she recalled.

When she came home with empty arms, she sent out an e-mail to the group. Bailey immediately received responses from mothers of multiples who had the same experience and offered words of encouragement.

"They reassured me that everything would be OK," said Bailey. "They've been such a great organization and a wonderful resource for the community."