



by Jimmy Magahern

Arizona's celebrated Masche sextuplets turned a year old this past summer. Now, can the couple keep the love coming - not to mention the free diapers?

It's Jenny Masche's first day back to full-time work after giving birth to America's 13th set of surviving sextuplets, born at Banner Good Samaritan Medical Center in Phoenix on June 11, 2007. And the 33-year-old supermom is saying goodbye to little Bailey, Savannah, Mollie, Cole, Blake and Grant in front of a camera crew from WE-tv.

Masche never set out to be a cable-channel reality TV star - or even a mom of multiples. When she and husband Bryan, 30, first agreed to try artificial insemination, the couple were merely hoping to have one healthy baby, after trying to conceive naturally during their first three years of marriage and suffering two heartbreaking miscarriages in the process.

But the birth of the sextuplets - the second set to be born at Good Sam (the first, born to Stacy and Steve Bailey of Surprise in 2006, lost two in utero) - thrust Jenny and Bryan into the worldwide spotlight. NBC's *Today* show co-host Meredith Vieira jetted out to interview the couple while the babies were still on feeding tubes, having been delivered six weeks prematurely by Caesarian section. Newspapers

from the couple's hometown gazette in Lake Havasu City to editions in Korea and Germany breathlessly covered the blessed event.

Deal Or No Deal even came calling, having the family on as contestants - where they won \$121,000 and received another \$100,000 donation toward the children's college funds.

"That was a huge blessing," says Jenny, who had to leave her well-paying job as a physician's assistant at a Lake Havasu hospital ER - a position that she admits paid better than Bryan's sales rep job at Wyeth Pharmaceuticals. "That, and all the support from the community."

Several churches, in both Lake Havasu and Scottsdale, hosted diaper drives to supply some of the 70 diapers per day - at \$1,000 per month - the research indicated they would need. For a time, another Lake Havasu chapel delivered hot meals to the couple three times a week.

"All of that basically got us through that first year," Masche says.

But now, after having made it past the sextuplets' first birthday and one last spin of media attention to com-

memorate that event (at least until the babies turn the terrible twos), the Masches are learning what life is like for superparents once the media turns its gaze to fresher sensations.

In September, the *Today* show checked in on the first birthday of a newer set of sextuplets, the Byers in Florida, who had already garnered a catchier nickname than the Masche Miracles: "The Byler Bunch." And this past August, an Egyptian woman gave birth to septuplets, outdoing both the Masches and the Bylers by one.

There's even been a bit of a baby-boom backlash. Internet bloggers have weighed in with their opinions - not all of them favorable. One particularly strident writer in a blog memorably entitled, "It's A Uterus, Mrs. Masche, Not A Clown Car," criticized the couple's use of artificial insemination ("maternal Miracle-Gro") to create what she called their own "Mini-We."

"It has subsided a little," Jenny says of the initial love fest. "When the birth happened, we heard from countries everywhere. Then on their first birthday, we did the *Today* show again. But since then, that's pretty much been it."

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Baby Boom

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To keep the outpouring of support coming – not to mention the much-needed money – the Masches have signed a one-year contract with Women's Entertainment, or WE-tv, a network available to nearly 72 million U.S. cable subscribers. Last June, the network scored a surprise hit with its one-hour special documenting the babies' arrival, *OMG! Sextuplets*. The success of that show convinced producers to green-light a six-week miniseries capturing the family at different times over the course of six months – or possibly longer; the couple has options on a five-year contract.

Jenny has also gone back to work at the hospital, an event captured on video for the first episode of the new series, tentatively entitled, *The Joy of Six*, which will begin airing next June.

She's honest about her ambitions. "My hope is that I can one day make enough income, either through this show or endorsements – or even something silly like baby food commercials – that I don't have to work any more," confesses Masche, who comes from a family of nurses, pharmacists and pediatricians.

"I would love to be a stay-at-home mom, more than anything in the whole world. But when you have six kids, ironically, that's very hard to do."

Cheaper by the Dozen?

Dr. John Elliott, the lead obstetrician who delivered the Masche sextuplets, has been specializing in high-order multiple pregnancies at Good Sam long enough to remember when having just four babies was special enough to get a family on a game show.

"It used to be that if you had quadruplets, that was a big deal," says Elliott, who – thanks partly to the Masche deliveries – has become a familiar TV face himself, as the Discovery Health channel's go-to expert on multiple births. "Now, with all of the reproductive technologies available, quads

are kind of old news. It's the couples having five, six or seven babies that become the sensational news stories and get the community support."

Certainly Banner has seen its share of all of the above. Elliott says 95 sets of quadruplets, 10 sets of quintuplets and two sets of sextuplets have been delivered at the hospital – more high-order multiples than any other hospital in the country, according to the hospital. Today, Elliott estimates half of Banner's quintuplet deliveries are performed on out-of-state patients who travel to Arizona because of its unparalleled success rate.

But that doesn't mean today's gestationally engineered young marrieds are competing in some strange contest to produce the biggest brood. Elliott says most of the cases he sees are like the Masches': couples who invested in fertility treatments as their best chance to have one baby ("or maybe, secretly, twins," he adds), and ended up with a basketball team.

"I've never had a single person say that they were trying to have so many babies on purpose," Elliott says. "Most of them come to me shocked!"

Along with facilitating the miracle of birth with his patients, Elliott is also proud of their financial hell.

"When you're looking at these infertility cycles and the therapies that are necessary, the cost of that is anywhere from \$18- to \$20,000 a month," he reveals. "By the time they discover they're having multiples, many of these couples are already tapping their savings and borrowing money from family."

No wonder Banner puts out press releases on the bigger births to help some of the families stir up community support. "The PR department at Good Sam has been pretty aggressive at trying to generate sympathy and stimulate donations for some of these couples – especially the ones that do have limited economic resources," Elliott says.

But that can be rough when another couple steals your thunder. Shortly before the Masches gave birth to their sextuplets, another Lake Havasu couple, Ruben Santana and Deana

DeLaughter, had triplets. When members of the local chamber of commerce suggested organizing "The World's Biggest Baby Shower" for the Masches (an event that raised some \$30,000), Bryan had to persuade them to also include Santana and DeLaughter in the split.

"When they planned that, my husband said, 'There's a family that just had triplets. Can we do it with them?' He tried to include them the whole time – even though we'd never met them."

Masche, who is friends with another woman who also had twins during the same period, says she sometimes feels guilty that her six babies overshadow every other birth in town.

"I never want anybody to feel . . . outdone by our sextuplets," she says. "My sister had one baby this summer, and I've tried to make him the biggest deal in the world. Because he is a big deal. He is!"

America's Sweethearts

Joe Swift says he had his reservations when his bosses at WE-tv suggested doing a six-week miniseries on the couple featured in their surprise hit documentary, *OMG! Sextuplets*.

"I had to think, 'Sure, we've got entertainment on the physical level, of six babies running around while their parents try to keep up,'" says Swift, executive producer of *The Joy of Six* and also director of development for the network. "But how long before the novelty of that wears off?"

The network had done other documentaries on multiple births before, and the couples hadn't always been so, well, "good on camera," as Swift calls it. Finding likeable babies, easy. Likeable parents of six simultaneous rug rats? Different story.

Then he met the Masches, spending the first few days of shooting along with five other crewmembers at their busy Lake Havasu home.

"I don't know how much of it is media savvy – because they've done a lot of these things by now," Swift says. "But I think they're just naturally likeable. You see friends and neighbors

who are happy to help them out at home. The whole community loves them."

In a way, the Masches have been America's sweethearts since the start, when Bryan proposed to Jenny in front of a nationally televised Arizona Diamondbacks game in August of 2003. An Air Force airman who had already served in Kuwait and Saudi Arabia before being called back to active duty following the events of September 11, Bryan began an online overseas romance with Jenny, a Texas girl who, ironically, had been attaining her physician's assistant degree in Glendale at the same time he had been attending Glendale Community College. Three months after finally meeting each other face to face, they were sealing their engagement on the DBacks scoreboard and millions of TV screens. They moved to Lake Havasu, where both had family.

Jenny says she's happy opening their lives up to the public. "If there's any way I can encourage other mothers out there and maybe make them laugh at how crazy having six babies can be, that's what I want to do."

Mostly, though, she just wants to document this incredible time in her life. Because sometimes, she says, it's all a little hard to believe.

Not only were the three girls and three boys born remarkably healthy for preemies, they've remained healthy since. Jenny even succeeded in getting all of them to sleep through the night – at the same time – after they were only five months old.

"Every single one of them is perfect," she marvels. "I think Grant has had two ear infections, Cole's had one. Molly and Grant have had two bouts of colds. And one rash. But that's all we've had in one and a half years."

Masche credits a lot of their charmed life to the couple's strong spiritual beliefs.

"Especially now after this experience, we're like, 'Okay, God – we get it: They're your kids!'" she laughs.

"We're just privileged that we get to be the ones to parent them," she says. "It's a huge blessing – but also a huge responsibility." ■

