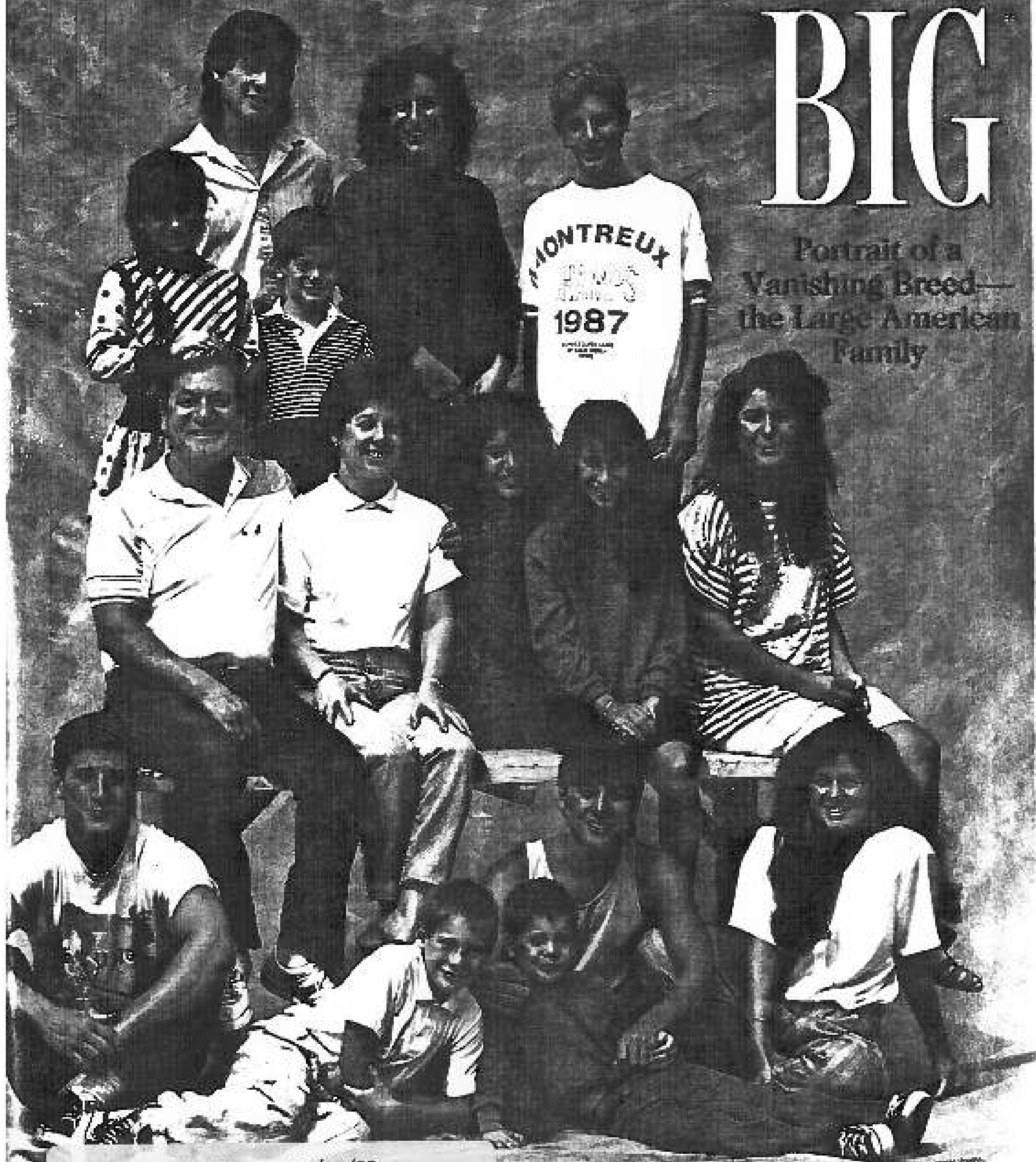

Tino and Joan Franco and their 13 children

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COVER:
The 15 members of the Franco family of Canoga Park. Top row, from left, Jessica, 10; Tino Jr., 19; Jacob, 7; Jenny, 23, and Joshua, 14; middle row, parents Tino and Joan, Jackie, 16; Jamie, 12, and Julie, 22; bottom row, John, 21; Danny, 8; Jared, 6; Joe, 25, and Judy, 24. Photograph by Peter Darley Miller / Visages.
Story on Page 10.

FEATURES

BIG

BY CATHRYN JAKOBSON

Trend analysts now say that Americans are pining for a return to the traditional family—especially around the holidays, when some contemporary households sit down to a subdued dinner with hardly enough people to pick a small turkey clean. For an experience that is becoming rare in this country, have a seat at the dinner table of Joan and Tino Franco of Canoga Park, parents of 13 children, ages 6 to 25. A day with the Francos reveals a lively, if endangered, species: the kind of family that fulfills old-fashioned needs for support and togetherness while coping with all the challenges of raising one child—feeding, housing, nurturing and educating—multiplied by 13.

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THE ESCALANTE EQUATION

BY JAY MATHEWS

Visitors to Garfield High School in East Los Angeles today tour the aging campus with the frequency and reverence usually reserved for a European cathedral. Ever since teacher Jaime Escalante's success with calculus students was dramatized last year in the hit film "Stand and Deliver," Garfield has been held up as proof that academic excellence is possible in a poor, minority school. Much attention has been focused on Escalante's methods; not as much is known about the man himself, particularly his struggle to return to teaching after immigrating from Bolivia. An excerpt from "Escalante: The Best Teacher in America," a book published this month.

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Not at home.

Los Angeles Times Magazine

BIG

With 13 Children, the Francos of Canoga Park Are Part of a Vanishing Breed Who Have Chosen to Be Fruitful and Multiply. How Do They—and Three L.A. Families Like Them—Cope?

■

BY CATHRYN JAKOBSON

ONCE HER EYES focus in the dim reaches of the CostCo grocery warehouse in Canoga Park, Joan Franco is ready to roll. Two of her children, Jacob, 7, and Jessica, 10, grab a cart and trot off. Joan strides behind, issuing cautions and directions as they head down the soap aisle.

Joan has never been a hesitant shopper. Everything she chooses is the biggest, and with good reason: She and her husband, Tino, have 13 children, nine of whom live at home. Out of mammoth cardboard cartons, she plucks heavy packages as if they are weightless. Although she is only 5 foot 1, she seems to have the strength of 10, the kind of muscle that comes not from Nautilus equipment, but from lifting toddlers and infants, often simultaneously, for years.

Into the cart goes a 25-pound box of Tide, enough to wash the 35 loads of laundry she does each week. Then a vat of Borateem bleach. Four loaves of bread, which, at 44 slices each, will disappear at the rate of one a day. Three big bags of frozen chicken thighs. Two king-size frozen cheesecakes. A giant package of Bagel Dogs. A 5-pound tub of Imperial Margarine. A huge box of Grahamy Bears to satisfy her children's constant requests for snacks. A bucket of chunky peanut butter. Three pillowcase-size plastic sacks of dry cereal, used at the rate of one a morning. Hershey's chocolate syrup is considered and rejected; the last time she bought it, the kids went through 3 gallons of milk in a day. Ten pounds of rice. Three pounds of marshmallows and 5 pounds of chocolate chips. Fifteen rolls of toilet paper. Two thousand feet of plastic wrap. A thousand plastic sandwich bags. Big bottles of the strawberry-scented shampoo her daughters use by the gallon. And finally, two books—Dominick Dunne's new best seller and a lavish collection of photographs published by National Geographic.

When mom and the kids sail into line, the cart is loaded to the gunwales and the bill is more than $200, but for Joan, that's only a moderate total. When she goes to Albertson's or Ralphs, she generally rolls up to the cash register with two full carts, and other shoppers whisper, "Look out, don't get behind that lady. You'll be there forever."

JOAN AND TINO Franco's 13 children range in age from 6 to 25. Joan was 19 and Tino was 24 when they started their family. At a time when many parents are settling down to enjoy their empty

Dinner at the Francos', from top left corner, Julie, Jessica, Sandy Larson (Joe's girlfriend), Joe, Tina, Joan, Daniel, Josh and Jacob.

nests, the Francos still have five kids in elementary school.

Families with flocks of children have always caused heads to turn. Still, even two decades ago, it wasn't unusual for a middle-class family to have six or eight children. As recently as 1967, of 48 million American families, more than a million had six or more kids under 18. A survey by the Census Bureau 20 years later found that of 64 million families, only 178,000 had six or more children. The large family—especially the large middle-class family—appears to have become an endangered species.

"Children used to be an economic asset," says Thomas Espenshade, a population expert at Princeton University. "When the United States was young, and agriculturally oriented, children were valued for their labor. Now, they've become an economic liability. That doesn't mean that there aren't good reasons for having them, but they aren't economic reasons."

Are any middle-class parents left who are convinced that the benefits of a large family outweigh the drawbacks? Many of the people consulted for this story—doctors, teachers, real estate brokers—laughed when asked if they knew of families with six or more kids. "They don't exist anymore," a nun at a Catholic school insisted. "Nobody can afford them."

But large families did turn up: in Torrance, in Santa Monica, in Woodland Hills, in Canoga Park. One family profiled here, the Danielsons, is Mormon; they admit readily that their decision to have eight children was made primarily for religious reasons. And it may come as no surprise that the three other families are practicing Catholics (although two of the mothers were

Photographed by Rosemary Kaul

The woman her children call "Bargain Joan" strides through the CostCo warehouse on her way to amassing $200 in groceries.

brought up, at least in part, as Jews). Yet of these, each says that the church was not a factor in the decision to be fruitful and multiply. They had many children, they say, simply because they love them.

Trend analysts tell us that these days Americans are finding the notion of the traditional family very appealing. This nostalgia is heightened around the holidays, when some contemporary households sit down to meager tables of four or five or less—hardly enough people to pick the smallest turkey clean. The Roper Organization took note of this development in a 1987 report: "The family is back. It is seen as something to join." After years of seeking alternative life styles, in a time of increasing numbers of single-parent homes and the decline of the nuclear family, we're returning to the idea of having a safe, warm place to share our burdens and our joys.

"The baby boom generation feels isolated, empty and vulnerable," says Nancy Kaufman, a specialist in family relations who heads the Psychotherapy Consultation Center in New York City. "To counter these feelings, they are searching for a sense of community, a feeling of permanence and a direct purpose, which they believe they will find in a family."

For people in search of a sense of community, the Franco family is one all by itself.

Cathryn Jakobson is a Los Angeles writer.

THE FRANCOS LIVE in a ranch-style house on a quiet street in a modest neighborhood in Canoga Park. Joan's yellow Dodge Caravan, with license plates that read "MOM UV 13," is parked outside, and Josh, 14, is running a Weed Eater up and down the edge of the front walk. Joan, in white slacks and a pink T-shirt, appears at the front door, explaining that the doorbell hasn't worked in 15 years. Little details that might drive other people crazy—messy bedrooms, sliding glass doors that won't slide—just don't bother her. She has other concerns. She is followed into the kitchen by two of them: Jamie, 12, and Jessica, 10, bright-eyed, talkative girls with long, streaming brown hair.

Joan herself has a sparkle in her blue eyes and weighs only 5 pounds more than she did when she married Tino. "Write this down," she says. "Not all mothers of large families wear muumuus and flip-flops and waddle when they walk."

Suddenly, the kitchen is flooded with children who had been occupied in the five bedrooms in the back of the house. Jacob, Jared, Josh and Daniel tear in. Everybody wants a snack. The poor old refrigerator, opened 20 times an hour, creaks on its hinges. Milk, juice and Grahamy Bears appear, and peanut butter and jelly are spread, quite literally, all over the kitchen table, which is covered with an oilcloth. Or, to be precise, two oilcloths taped together, because no one cloth could cover a table this large. Joan spent forever and $1,200 to find a table that was big enough for all of them. Most of the

models she saw during her search were for "those ideal families with one boy, one girl, Mom, Dad and a dog," she says. "They weren't meant for the kind of crowd we've got here."

Jared, 6, accidentally spills most of his glass of juice on the floor. Without an accusing look or word, Joan hands him a towel and shows him how to mop it up. Her children learn very early not to expect their mother to clean up after them. Jacob smacks Jessica with a plastic bat, and they both rush to Joan for mediation and comfort. More kids climb into her lap and clutch her around the neck.

As she hugs and kisses her children, Joan conjures up the image of a 1950s housewife. But besides her huge task as primary manager of a gigantic brood, she is also a nurse in the infant intensive-care ward at Kaiser-Permanente Hospital in Panorama City. She works two or three 12-hour shifts a week, often in succession, so that she can have a large block of time off to spend with her family. She works for the money, but also for the stimulation. After a week at home with the children, she's ready to kid around with some adults.

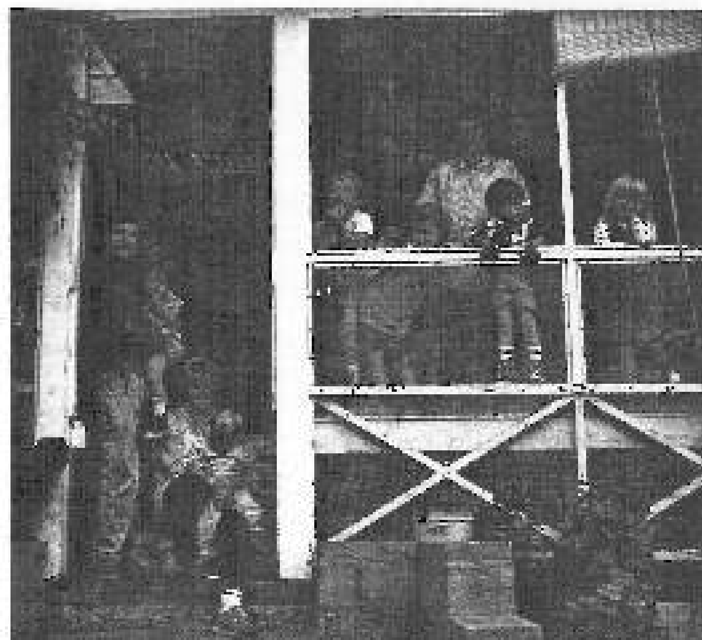
The Francos' living room is so freshly vacuumed that the machine's tracks are visible. But no amount of vacuuming can hide the fact that even this "best" room is subjected to extraordinary abuse. Pictures hang at odd angles. The cushions on the sofas and chairs look as if they've been used to build more than one fort. No "valuables" are around—crystal and china must be kept out of reach of the little ones. Yet the room has warmth—the sofa where Joan sits to knit or crochet after dinner; the chairs where kids gather with books and read to one another. Sometimes everybody gets together in this room and spends an evening singing while Tino plays his guitar. The room has no television, and it never will. It is meant to be a place for family togetherness and communication.

Joan shows off a collection of family photographs on one wall, pointing out each child, in order of age: Joe, 25; Judy, 24; Jenny, 23; Julie, 22; John, 21; Tino Jr., 19; Jackie, 16; Joshua, 14; Jamie, 12; Jessica, 10; Daniel, 8; Jacob, 7, and Jared, 6.

Every child has a given name beginning with the letter "J," even Tino Jr., who, like his father, is Justino, and

The Murphys

Six Children (Plus)



From left, Michael with Brady, 2; Chris with Flannery, 13 months; Mike, 8, Shaunesey, 5; the housekeeper, Lina Ventura; Reilly, 3½, and Harmony, 6.

When Chris Murphy comes to the door of her rambling Santa Monica house, she's clutching her youngest child, 13-month-old Flannery, in her arms and is pregnant with another child, due in mid-December. Upstairs, her husband and most of their six children—four boys and two girls, the oldest aged 8—are on one of the porches watching a fire over on Wilshire Boulevard.

A couple of the kids are in Daddy's arms; a few are clinging to railings. Every child has a nickname, so it's tough to figure out who's who: There's Shaggy, the Flake and the Refrigerator, fondly known as "Fridge." Some of the kids appear to be extras, and this turns out to be the case; the neighbor girls love to hang out at the Murphys' because it's a fun place. The Murphys also have 3 dogs, 4 cats, 10 rabbits and an assortment of fish. In the back yard is a full-size trampoline; inside are dozens of toys and games and hardly any furniture. All around is a feeling that this is a place where kids are more important than grown-ups.

Michael and Chris met at County-USC Medical Center nine years ago; he was a resident, she was a nurse, and they were working on the same patient. "I asked him out," Chris says, "and he said no. I didn't realize he was going with a girl upstairs in the ICU." A week later, he called Chris and told her he wanted to take her up on her offer. They began to date and were married shortly thereafter.

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Peter Darley Miller / Visages

half of those children were expected to survive to adulthood. As the population became increasingly urban, the average fertility rate dropped. But in certain pockets of the country, particularly in agricultural areas, large numbers of children continued to be the norm. In heavily Catholic communities, especially those populated by recent immigrants, large numbers of children were the rule, not the exception.

During the Depression, the national fertility rate dropped to 2.2 children per couple from just under 5 at the turn of the century. After World War II, it soared: During the 1950s, 37% of families had four or more kids. But by 1965, readily available birth control was shrinking the size of U.S. families, and the onset of the women's movement did so even further. By 1987, fewer than 10% of American families had four children.

Even Catholics, traditionally known for their large families, are no longer producing exceptional numbers of kids. "The difference between the fertility rate of Catholic families and the rest of the country has disappeared," says Espenshade, the Princeton population expert. In 1982, according to the Population Reference Bureau, only 12% of the Catholic women in the United States had four or more children.

Large families persist in some areas of the country. The Hutterites, an agrarian religious group living in North and South Dakota, produce an average of 10 children per family. The Amish people, based in Pennsylvania, Ohio and Indiana, produce an average of seven. Mormons are encouraged to have as many children as possible; in Utah, families of eight or 10 children are common. But even Mormons are having smaller families. Says Carlfred Broderick, a Mormon with eight children who is a professor of sociology at USC: "The rule is basically 'plus two'—two more children than the national average. The plus-two rule . . . tends to fluctuate with the norm, so when the average American family was having four kids, we were having six; now the average is about two kids, and the norm for Mormons is four."

Generally, the size of families diminishes as the socioeconomic level rises. Lower-income people tend to produce more children. Married couples with six or more children, according to a 1987 report by the Census Bureau, have an

The Danielsons

Eight Children

From left, Holly, 12; Darrel; Jenifer, 17; Linda; Steven, 11; Joseph, 4; Laurel, 14; Jeffrey, 16; and Carl, 8. Patricia, 19, is not pictured.

As Mormons, Darrel and Linda Danielson of Torrance are expected to give birth to as many children as they feel they can manage. For some church members, three or four kids are enough. Others have 10 or 12. The Danielsons have eight, ranging in age from 4 to 19.

Both Darrel, 42, and Linda, 40, who met as students at Brigham Young University, grew up with several siblings—he had four; she had seven. They always intended to have a large family. And the cycle is about to begin again; their eldest daughter, Patricia, who attends BYU, is to be married this spring.

Mormons adhere to scriptural commands to multiply and replenish the earth. But beyond that, they believe that everyone existed spiritually before they came to earth, where they must attain a body, be tested, die, then move on. Mormons believe that all spirits must have an opportunity to be embodied, and that is another reason they have so many children.

But there are other reasons. "The joy you get from having children is magnified when you have more," Linda Danielson says. "There's more love, more interaction, more play."

The Danielsons have four girls and four boys. And with each child, there are differences. "Every single one has a distinct personality," Linda says. "They just come with them. You think you know how to raise them, after five or six, and then you get to the youngest and it's a whole other story."

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Peter Darley Miller / Visages

Joan watches after-dinner roughhousing between Joe, 25, and Jacob, 7.

> Sometimes, when Joan tells a child the family can't afford something, the retort will come: 'So why did you have so many kids?'

Daniel, whose name is really Jay Daniel. Joan tried to bail out of the "J's" about halfway through, but her kids wouldn't let her. They thought the ones whose names began with other letters might feel left out.

Joan began dating Tino, who is the head mechanic for a fleet of trucks at a San Fernando Valley concrete-manufacturing company, when she was almost 17. She was about to finish high school and preparing to attend Cal State Northridge. Joan's parents were frantic about the relationship. Tino was five years older than she, he was not a college man and he was Catholic; Joan's family is Jewish. Her parents shipped her off to spend the winter with her Aunt Ruth, who lives in Sweden.

But the separation did nothing to cool the couple's ardor. The day Joan returned, Tino met her at the airport. "Are we still on?" he asked. She said they were. He was relieved because he had already rented a hall for the wedding and furnished a house for his bride-to-be.

The Francos never sat down and decided how many kids they would have. Joan was the eldest of three children. Tino, born in Mexico but raised in California from the age of 12, is one of six children, but grew up thinking that two kids are plenty. After each child was born, Joan and Tino declared that it would be the last. "But then we had so much fun with each baby," Joan says, "that when it began to walk and talk and crawl, the desire to have another took over."

Ten of the children are a year and a half to two years apart in age. "I believe in birth control, whether people want to use the rhythm method or an artificial method," says Joan, who converted to Catholicism when she married Tino. "People think that those of us with big families are ignorant on that subject, that most, or all, of our kids were accidents, but that's just not true. Every single one of our kids was planned and wanted."

Joan found having babies quite easy; her deliveries, she says, were a breeze. "If having babies had been tough for me," she says, "you can be sure we would have stopped.

"We're happy with these kids," she says. "We would never, ever want to have fewer than the number we have. But we're very aware that in this day and age, children are not an asset. They are a liability. They don't go into the fields to work. They don't produce anything. They just cost you money. And I think it's irresponsible to have them if you don't want them. The saddest thing in the world is people who have children and wish they didn't."

The size of the Franco family sets it apart, but it has at least one other distinguishing factor. Joan, who is active in parochial school affairs and considers herself to be a good Catholic, is raising her children with an understanding of Judaism, the religion in which she was raised. Her children stay home from school on Yom Kippur, and they are the only children in the parish who look forward to full-blown Passover seders each year, led by Tino in English. Each December, the family lights the Hanukkah candles as well as decorating the Christmas tree. Just as the children listen avidly to their father's tales of Mexico, they are asked by Joan to regard these celebrations of Judaism as part of their cultural heritage. But she would never ask them to alter their Catholic faith.

The Francos have great plans for their children. So far they've raised one nurse, Judy, and one nursing student, Jenny; a journalist, Joe, and a budding anthropologist, Julie. Tino Jr. is a struggling rock musician. John is planning to become a chiropractor. Joan is not as concerned with what they are as who they are. "I want them to grow up so that I can talk to them," she says. "I want them to have a sense of humor. I want them to be interesting people."

ONCE, AMERICANS had solid reasons for having large families. In the early 1900s, the average mother bore six children, according to the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. The infant mortality rate was high—barely

The Mahoneys

Eight Children

Standing from left, Joe and Gail, family friend Peggy Sweeney and Katie, 14; seated from left, Dan, 10; John-Paul, 7; Becky, 13; Joe Jr., 16; Theresa, 5; Kim, 18, and Sarah, 9

GAIL AND JOE MAHONEY OF Woodland Hills intended to have two or three children. But after years of trying, they were told that they probably couldn't have any. Then, after Gail began to take fertility drugs and the Mahoneys gave birth to their first baby, Kim, 18 years ago, Gail's doctor said they should thank their lucky stars and start thinking about adoption.

Instead, they went into production. They had four children in five years, one miscarriage, and then four more, ending with an even number of girls and boys. The youngest child, Theresa, is 5. Peggy Sweeney, 24, a college student and family friend who has lived with them for five years, helps out when things are hectic, which is most of the time.

"I think the fact that we had trouble getting started gave us a much greater appreciation of children," Gail says. "They're not objects. They're not just something you can plan on." Her love affair with her kids starts in the uterus. "They're already real people when they're in there," she says. "Some are bouncy, like Ping-Pong balls. Others are huge and lumbering."

At the time of her first pregnancy, Gail was teaching autistic and aphasic children. She expected to resume working, but bringing up a family quickly became a more interesting job. "Being a parent—that is a career," she says. "There are no limits to the hours. There are no pay raises or bonuses. But nothing could be more rewarding than shaping these new people."

The Mahoneys, who are Catholic, nearly stopped having children after

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average total income of $28,259 per year. Married couples with two children, on the other hand, have an average total income of $42,052 per year. "The people with the most income, the highest education level and the best jobs have the fewest children," Espenshade says.

JOAN FRANCO IS spending the morning at her children's elementary school, St. Joseph the Worker, in Canoga Park. She likes to spend as much time here as she can, helping out with computer classes, acting as nurse at the school fair and running the used-uniform sales. "The kids like to see me there," she says. "They love to know that their mom is in school." She takes advantage of the used-uniform sale to pick up some choice items: a pair of perfectly good blue corduroy pants will fit Jacob, a blue jacket will fit Jamie.

With 13 kids, saving money is always on Joan's mind. Her kids call her "Bargain Joan" because she's constantly clipping coupons and looking for a deal. Although she is very careful with a dollar, the Franco home has more of an aura of bounty than of deprivation. Good things to eat, such as homemade powdered doughnuts and chocolate chip cookies, are always available.

Joan and Tino don't believe in giving their children allowances. "Why should I pay them?" Joan jokes. "They should pay me." She prefers to bestow the occasional gift or treat on a particularly deserving youngster. Sometimes, Joan will tell a child that he can't have something that he wants, because they can't afford it.

"So why did you have so many kids?" the child will retort.

"How many do you think we should have had?" Joan asks. "Inevitably," she says, "they think we should have stopped around the number they are."

The Franco family's expenses, all told, are about $50,000 a year. (Their total income is a bit higher than that, but they prefer to keep the figure private.) The mortgage on the house they have owned for 19 years is very small and almost paid off. "That's what saves us," Joan says. "We could never manage if we had to pay $1,000 a month." If they were starting out now and needed a very basic five-bedroom, two-bathroom house such as the one they own in Canoga Park, they could expect to pay

at least $250,000 for it.

Food is by far their biggest expense. About $270 a week is spent on groceries and dry goods. Education comes next; at the parochial schools the Francos attend, school fees for seven children, including books, are $5,200. Expenditures on school uniforms, shoes and other clothing, which is shared and passed down as it is outgrown, come to $5,000 a year. Health insurance is provided by Kaiser at a cost of $3,000 a year, deducted from Joan's nursing salary. (It costs the same to insure one child as it does to insure all of them.) Water, telephone, electricity and gas bills are all higher than the average family's—about $380 a month. Car insurance for Joan's van as well as one elderly car and an ancient pickup truck, both driven by teen-agers, is $2,000. Gasoline and auto repair costs account for another $2,000. Even though Tino is a crack handyman, Joan buys service contracts for household appliances whenever she can; her husband can't always fix a broken washing machine immediately, and a backlog of laundry would be disastrous.

'Frankly,' Tino says of his kids, 'I like them best when they're young. After they hit their teens, they get a little weird.'

The Francos spend virtually nothing on entertainment. They almost never eat out and depend on books, music and $2.99 videotapes for an evening's diversion. The children enjoy few luxuries, none of what many people consider the "perks" of childhood: no piano lessons, no summer camps, no annual family vacations, no new wardrobes. They receive new toys, but not pricey toys-of-the-moment. They are carefully culled from sale tables every time Joan shops and stored until somebody deserves a present. A treat is a fast-food lunch or a stack of new paperbacks, or the sound track from "The Phantom of the Opera."

The Francos do without things some families would consider absolute necessities. A good life insurance policy is one of them. An adequate policy would cost them $75 a month, and that is money they feel they cannot spare. "If anything happened to Tino," Joan says, "I'd be nursing full time in a minute. It would be hard, but I could do it."

Some Franco expenses would be barely noticeable in a two-child household. Birthday presents for other children's parties—figure two parties a month per child under the age of 15—eat up about $600 a year. Birthday presents that Joan and Tino buy for family members cost about $550, with an additional $2,000 allotted for Christmas gifts. Keeping kids in bicycles costs $300 a year. "Bicycles are important. Everybody in the neighborhood knows it if you don't have a good one," Joan says. "If they didn't have good bicycles, they'd really feel poor."

Christmas is a major event in the Franco household. Joan starts shopping six months ahead to take advantage of bargains. Then the Francos pull out all the stops. "There are huge piles of presents all over the living room," Jessica says with delight in her eyes. The smaller Franco children call their older brothers, Joe and John, who share an apartment about a mile away, and insist that they get up at 6 a.m. and come over. Everybody has a stocking, although Joan has been trying to terminate the practice for the older ones. "Every time I mention it," she says, "the little ones get furious. They can't believe I'd try to deprive their brothers and sisters of their stockings. So I end up stuffing them with razor blades and shampoo."

For the past few years, Joan has tried unsuccessfully to convince the family that they should pick family names out of a hat at Thanksgiving and only shop for one or two Christmas gifts. "It's always been absolutely necessary to get something for every single person," says Julie, 22. "But that didn't mean we bought it. When we were little, we'd look behind the couch to see what had fallen there—books, statues, that sort of thing—and then we'd wrap those things up and give them away."

The Franco children grow up knowing that they are expected to attend college, but that they're going to have to work to put themselves through. Joe, the eldest son, now a news editor for the Newhall Signal, held a full-time job to pay his way through Cal State Northridge. "Even if we could pay for a whole college education," Joan says, "I'm not sure that we would. We might pay for half. It means more to them because they have to work to have it. My parents paid for my education, and it didn't mean enough to me. I quit." (Joan left Cal State Northridge at 18, when she and Tino were married. She returned nine years later to earn a nursing degree.)

THESE DAYS, RAISING one child from birth to age 18 in an urban area, not including preschool, day care or college tuition, costs parents $92,228, or $5,123 per year, according to statistics from the U.S. Department of Agriculture. It costs the Francos about $50,000 a year to raise nine kids (the four oldest are self-supporting); that's about $5,500 per child, so they are very close to the national norm. There's a catch, however.

According to the calculations of Princeton's Espenshade, the average middle-class family with two children devotes about 40% of its income to raising them. The Francos devote at least 85% of their income to raising the nine that still live at home.

Espenshade notes that few middle-class people these days are willing to put every penny they earn into raising their children. One hears often of couples who are postponing childbearing because "they can't afford kids" and of parents who have decided to stop at one because "raising kids has gotten so expensive." But Espenshade suggests that these parents have jumped to the wrong conclusion. If only the first 18 years of a child's life are considered, in terms of percentage of income expended, the cost of raising a child has changed very little in the last three decades. "The number of dollars expended are higher," he says, "but not the fraction of income that goes to kids.

"In some sense," Espenshade says, "we are much more conscious than our parents were of what we are spending on our kids. We're less willing to make the sacrifices our parents might have made. On the other hand, our expecta-

tions are accelerating more rapidly than our income. We're no longer content just to clothe our children; we have to put them in name-brand clothing. We have to provide them with special lessons and orthodontia and college tuition, or we don't think of ourselves as good parents. This just was not true in previous generations."

DINNER IS SERVED at the Francos after most of the kids have finished their after-school activities—volleyball, football, soccer, drama, chorus, etc.—and Tino gets home from work and showers. It is not unusual for a couple of Francos to straggle in later: They find their supper on the stove when they finally arrive. Joan long ago gave up worrying about who shows up at the table.

Tonight, 10 people are present for dinner, which consists of a huge pot of chicken and rice, piquant and flavorful, put on the stove to cook earlier that afternoon by one of the older daughters. Joan is frying doughnuts and dousing them with powdered sugar. She doesn't worry about keeping her kids away from sugar, although sometimes their passion for snacks drives her to distraction. "They're like fish," she says. "They'll eat until they go belly up."

Without any special request from their mother, Jackie, Jessica and Jamie pitch in to help make dinner and set the table. The girls do all the housework, including laundry. The boys are responsible for yardwork, but there isn't much of it. At times, the girls have protested the division of labor and threatened to strike. Joan is sorry that they feel so burdened, but rules are rules, and rules are especially important in a large family. Over the years, she has come to agree with her husband's point of view: that male and female responsibilities ought to be divided along traditional lines. In an ideal world, she thinks, men would work to support the family, and women would stay home to take care of domestic life.

"I think we were better off before the women's movement," she says. "Now we're stuck with two full-time jobs: raising a family, and working outside the home. The workload for women has basically doubled. But the workload for men doesn't seem to have increased at all."

Tino sits at one end of the table, his still-wet hair slicked back neatly. Joan perches on top of the washing machine, where she has sat for years, her plate on her lap. The bowls, plates and drinking vessels on the table are all the unbreakable kind—nothing else would make sense in a house where an average of three spills occur per dinner. Attention is paid to table manners. "Jessica," Tino says, "split your bread before you put butter on it."

Josh sits next to his father and talks about fishing, welding and the circus he attended the night before with a priest and some kids from the parish. What he liked best was when the elephant went to the bathroom. "That totally messed up two rings," he says. The younger kids guffaw. "Bathroom humor abounds," says Joan, disgusted. "They're supposed to outgrow it, but there's always an audience for it in this house."

Everybody finishes in about 20 minutes, and from the youngest to the oldest, they scrape their plates into the garbage and put them in the sink. The doughnuts disappear almost as soon as they hit the table, and the boys go outside to play in the fading light. The girls help their mother clean up quickly and join their brothers outdoors. Joan settles down on the living-room sofa with a pale blue sweater she's knitting for her mother-in-law. For a few rare minutes, the house is absolutely quiet.

Tino excuses himself to pick some peppers for his famous hot sauce off a bounteous bush in the back yard. Although his wife describes him as "the noisy one" and "the fun one" in the family, the patriarch of the household seems shy. He is more reluctant than Joan to discuss his family; he considers their personal life a private matter.

For 20 years, Tino had the swing shift at Cal-Mat, working on the firm's fleet of diesel trucks from 4 p.m. to 12:30 a.m. Although working nights gave him the opportunity to take extra day jobs to support his kids, this also meant that he didn't see much of them on weekdays. Each afternoon, he was getting ready to leave just as the kids were coming home from school.

"I got used to working evenings. It didn't bother me," Tino says. Then he adds, with a note of regret in his voice, "But I only saw the kids on weekends, and I think there was something lost in the relationship with the older ones. I know there was."

Jacob, 7, comes out to help with the pepper-picking. "Daddy, is this one ripe?" he asks, as Tino rubs the boy's hair.

"Frankly, I like them best when they're young," he says of his kids. "After they hit their teens, they get a little weird."

For the past year, Tino has left for work at 7 a.m. and returned at 5 p.m. It is only recently that he has enjoyed traditional hours, and everyone—including Joan, she admits—has had to adjust to having him around in the evenings. They used to have relatively peaceful mornings together, which she liked. During the evenings, she ruled the roost. Now, the house contains another powerful presence. The kids treat Tino with gentle respect. The older ones genuinely admire how hard he's worked to take care of his family. But it is their mother they go to if they have a problem.

"You know, no one thought this marriage would last," Tino says soberly. "But you see how wrong people can be. It lasts because there's unity and shared values and no time to argue about anything. It's really just love that holds it together. I owe most of it to my wife. She's the key, the kingpin."

If Joan is the family's emotional pillar, Tino is the lawmaker. He makes most of the rules, and they are absolute. No dating until 16 for boys or girls. No waltzing off at night without saying where you're going. No rowdy behavior in public. No talking back, especially to your mother. Spankings are not uncommon, although children who have misbehaved learned long ago to insert large paperback books into the seats of their trousers.

Tino's parenting methods are traditional. He thinks that grounding a kid works much better than psychoanalyzing him. "I think kids are easy to raise," he says. "When you give a command, it's not a game. It must be obeyed. It's OK to be a child's friend, but there's no point in being buddy-buddy. Kids don't want you to be their pals. There needs to be some distance and some respect."

Administering the actual punishment (other than a spanking, which is given by whichever parent is on hand) is usually left to Joan. Tino doesn't think she's strict enough, but she has her own theories of child-raising. "With adolescents, if you go overboard, you just erect barriers," she says. "It's best to keep some communication open. They're sneaky enough without you giving them more ammunition."

Like all families, the Francos have had their share of problems with their children. Tino Jr., now basically reformed, was a hell-raiser in high school, more interested in playing electric guitar than in studying. Judy, the glamorous eldest daughter, has a familywide reputation as the "temperamental" child. She's famous for being moody and unpredictable in a group where everybody else is helpful and agreeable most of the time. "Judy thinks she's an only child," Joan says. "We don't know why."

Still, nobody has ever been in trouble with drugs and no one has ever been arrested, which seems a remarkable accomplishment considering the sheer number of kids and the era in which they live. The children are polite and friendly; they rarely interrupt, whine or beg. They speak fondly of their parents, but they seem to almost revere Joan. Even Tino Jr., the rebellious one, turns instantly on his heel one evening when Joan calls him as he heads down the front walk for a night on the town. "Yes, Mom, do you need something?" he asks.

"Tino, I want to cut your hair," Joan replies.

"Later, Mom," Tino says. And then, gently: "Is that OK?"

FEW MENTAL-HEALTH experts have studied large middle-class families. One who has is Dr. Herbert Strean, director of the New York Center for Psychoanalytic Training and an expert on family analysis. Strean, the author with Lucy Freeman of "Raising Cain: Raising a Healthy Sibling," has found that, in general, children from large families grow up learning to tame their impulses and handle frustration.

"When a child is part of a group of siblings," Strean says, "he has to learn quickly to cooperate and consider the needs of others if he is to survive peaceably. There will always be competition and jealously; no family is exempt from sibling rivalry. But children in larger families are more sensitive to the wishes of other siblings and cope better with their jealousy.

"What's very noticeable," he says, "is that siblings in large families are much closer. The oldest takes on a key leadership job. There may be a tendency to make one of the children a parental surrogate, the 'mother's little helper.' Usually, this role is assigned to the oldest child. Such an assignment has its advantages and disadvantages. On the positive side, the parents aren't as harassed when they delegate responsibility. The eldest child feels he's in a special position and learns to be a leader. [But] since the oldest child is often perceived by the younger one as a parental favorite, the younger siblings may assume, either correctly or incorrectly, that the parents do not hold them in the same esteem as they do the older one."

"Children and adults who come from larger families are usually more self-reliant and have more advanced social skills," Strean says. "Preschoolers from big families make an easy transition to school, because they're not infantilized or indulged at home. They tend to make friends more easily because their social skills are very well developed."

"On the negative side," he says, "children from large families don't learn to express a wide range of feelings. There's a certain constriction of emotion. Sometimes resentment manifests itself in unconscious ways: in bed-wetting, for instance. The crucial variable is how the parents feel about raising a large family. If they really enjoy it, if they're comfortable and not overwhelmed, the kids reflect it. If they are pressured, upset, or burdened with the drudgery of it, you see it in the kids."

Katherine Schlaerth, a clinical associate professor of family medicine and pediatrics at the USC School of Medicine, and herself a mother of seven, also found that parental attitudes are important. Schlaerth interviewed parents of 75 large families of different socioeconomic groups as research for a book she is writing. "What I heard repeatedly," Schlaerth says, "is that to raise a big family, you really have to want to do it. It's like being an Olympic diver. It's a commitment that you make early. You know it means making a lot of sacrifices; that you won't have a lot of the fun your friends are having. But you do it because it means a great deal to you."

In most large families, Schlaerth found great emphasis on household chores. "You see young children who are very independent in self-care," she says. "It's not uncommon for young kids to cook meals, wash clothes and iron. Older ones are accustomed to taking care of younger ones. Without being asked, they'll help with bedtime, a bath or a snack."

Having many children in one house can detract from parental time with each, Schlaerth says, but it makes for very close relationships among the siblings, and "that's a bond that lasts for life."

WHEN THE Franco children move out and get places of their own, they're astonished by the incompetence of their roommates. "They can't cook or do laundry," says Julie, who lives with a roommate in San Diego. By the age of 6, every Franco had learned how to wash clothes, whip up an omelet, heat and deliver a bottle, change a diaper and comfort a crying baby.

Apparently, growing up in a mob scene hasn't made the older ones want to avoid having families. Joe says he'd like to have four boys and four girls. John, the family's most competitive one, says he'd like 14 kids, one more than his parents have. The girls, perhaps because they have shared more of the day-to-day responsibilities of child care than the boys, are less enthusiastic about looking after multitudes. Still, they say they'd like "smallish" families of three or four kids.

Despite its size, the Franco family is a tight unit. Call on a Saturday morning, and often some of the children who no longer live at home will be in the kitchen. They rely on each other for fun and for help with serious problems. No one would dare beat up a Franco in the schoolyard; he'd see stars as soon as the rest of the siblings heard about it.

"Your best friends," Jenny says, "are your brothers and sisters. You can depend on them. It's something you never forget."

The Danielsons

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From the time they were able to walk, the Danielson children have been responsible for helping to take care of the house. "Part of being in a family is helping," Linda says, "and it's something we taught them early." As a result, every room in their house is clean and well-organized.

"During the week, we're up by 6, if not before," says Linda. "Before they leave for school, the littlest one takes the trash out, the next older one unloads the dishwasher, and the rest of them clean the living room, dining room, back bedrooms and pick up outside. They work on a rotating schedule; they have a different job each week."

Long ago, when the older children were still young, the Danielsons devised family rules. For example, if a child left a possession lying around and someone else had to pick it up, the one who lost it had to pay a quarter to get it back. If it wasn't claimed within two or three days, the price went up. If someone bothered or hurt another, the names of the victim and perpetrator were put on a list. At the end of a few weeks, the family met and decided what the consequences would be. For instance, a name-caller might have had to do a whole load of dinner dishes for the object of his name-calling. A child found guilty of teasing might have lost TV privileges for a week. But now that the children know the rules, Linda says, "we never have to have family meetings anymore."

Linda worked as a secretary before her first child was born but has been a full-time mother since. Her husband, whom she describes as a terrific father, just started a new job in crew planning and scheduling for Flying Tigers, the air transportation service. "When the children were little," Linda says, "he was always right in there helping. He wasn't one of these husbands who comes home from work and stares into space. There were a lot of babies and he was always in there, helping with the feeding and changing."

Last spring, Darrel found himself without a job. His employer, Western Airlines, was bought by Delta, which offered Darrel a job in Atlanta that gave him less responsibility, Linda says. He decided not to uproot the family. It took six months to find another job, during which he did some consulting work. "The church tells us to save money and to store food," Linda says, "and it got us through that period without too much stress."

Linda says she saves money by serving simple meals and passing clothes down the ranks when the older children outgrow them. The Danielson children have been raised to know the value of a dollar. Everybody works. One daughter gives piano lessons. Another sells athletic shoes. Other children baby-sit. Each receives a $5 allowance every two weeks. "We provide the necessities," Linda says. "They provide everything else."

The Danielsons intend to have no more children, and Linda says she will not miss having an infant around the house. "I'm ready for another era of my life," she says. "The baby era was a precious one. They love you unconditionally, even when your teen-agers don't. But I'm ready to go on."

—C.J.

The Mahoneys

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four when Joe, 45, a marketing vice president for Prudential Insurance, developed a serious health problem. They weren't sure if he would be able to go back to work, but he eventually recovered. The children, he says simply, "are my blessings in life."

The Mahoneys live in a six-bedroom, six-bath house on half an acre, with a pool and a hot tub. They like to sit around the pool at night and talk. Gail thinks that children learn a lot by growing up with many siblings. "They learn coping skills," she says. "They've experienced methods of solving problems in a great big laboratory where everybody loves everybody else."

The children do most of the housework, including a massive cleanup once a day. "We're constantly using the electric broom," says Katie, the eldest daughter. "We break them so often that Mom reassembled one from all the parts we had lying around."

There are rules: No running in the hallway. No laggardly eating—a timer is set for anyone whose plate isn't clean when the rest of the family is finished. No eating outside the kitchen. One hour of television a night, maximum. No playing the baby grand piano unless you are taking piano lessons. The second piano is fair game to all.

Gail watches the household budget carefully so that there will be money for such activities as skiing, which they all love. An ardent collector of coupons, she attacks the newspaper food section every Thursday with a pair of scissors. Her food bills are around $200 a week, even with two athletic sons who eat as much as she can feed them. "I stick with really nourishing stuff," she says. "I don't buy cookies. I buy boxes of 24 granola bars instead." They go through at least seven gallons of milk each week.

At 45, Gail misses having an infant, but finds that the demands are just as great with older children. "I had to change a lot," she says. "I've gotten a lot more lenient. I used to be a perfectionist, but I learned that you're never really in control, even if you think you are. So I no longer even maintain that illusion. I take problems as they come and I like myself better. Having eight kids is a very humbling experience."

—*C.J.*

The Murphys

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Michael, who is a practicing Catholic, comes from a family of seven children. Chris, whose parents are Methodist and Jewish, has two sisters (one is her twin) and a brother. Her parents live nearby, and they have converted their back yard to a playground for the grandchildren.

Chris and Michael knew from the beginning that they wanted a lot of children and that they wanted them right away. "I didn't want to be going to Little League games in my 70s," Michael says, "although I'd do it if I had to."

Their first baby was born nine months and a few days after their wedding. Chris continued to work as a nurse until their fifth child was born, and she will probably go back to work, one night a week, after their seventh child—"and their last," she swears—is born. "It will be extremely difficult," she says, "not to have a baby around."

Michael, 40, and Chris, 36, do not seem to need, or want, to be alone together. "We never say, 'Go away, Daddy and Mommy want their privacy,'" Chris says. The three eldest kids slept with them when they were infants and toddlers. That started to get a little crowded, so now parents and children, except for the baby, Flannery, all sleep in the same big room, distributed among four beds.

Michael occasionally will come home from his neurology practice in the evening, read the kids some stories, serve five bottles, put them to bed and go back to work. When he comes home again at midnight and goes to bed, he'll soon have some sleeping companions.

"To have all these kids," Michael says, "you have to be lighthearted and mutable. You can't have a lot of fixed ideas."

When children wake up in the middle of the night and need comforting, Michael always gets up with them. "Fortunately," he says, "I do not need a lot of sleep. I can get up 12 times a night and not feel bad in the morning. I get my energy from the kids."

—*C.J.*