

Hope for Three

A family's journey to help their triplet daughters diagnosed with autism live life to the fullest

*Written by Hope Collins Montgomery
Photography by Suzi Issa*



Eric and Hope Montgomery with their triplets Londyn, Lakin, and Lauren and son Collin



Londyn



Lakin



Lauren

From the very beginning, our journey with our triplet daughters, affectionately known as the Triple Divas, has been quite extraordinary. Born by natural conception in 2006, they entered into this world singing loudly, also known as screaming. Londyn was born first, weighing 4.6 pounds, followed by Lakin, weighing 4 pounds, and Lauren, weighing 3.9 pounds. Their little exquisite hotel stay – in the neonatal intensive care unit – lasted eight days, and then they all came home. The odds of having identical triplets are one in 200 million. We hit the lottery, as my husband Eric says. Upon hearing I was pregnant with triplets, I looked up into the heavens at God and said, “Aren’t you full of jokes today?”

The World Comes to a Halt

The first two and a half years of life with the girls were exciting. Eric and I received very little rest without the luxury of a nanny or housekeeper. The triplets’ big brother Collin adjusted well from being the only child to being a part of four. The Triple Divas were thriving, eating, moving, grooving, and getting into everything.

Then all of a sudden, for diva number two, Lakin, the world came to a halt. She was living and breathing, but our beautiful little girl was not the same. There was no eye contact. She wanted to play by herself instead of with her sisters and brother. Soon, the words started to fade. Was this just a phase or something else?

A Mother’s Intuition

My gut was telling me this was not just a phase. Yet, when I asked opinions of several in the field of pediatrics, speech therapy, and members in my multiples group, I heard many different things. Some told me, “Give it a little time,” or, “This often happens with multiples, especially when you have another dominant sibling.” I chose to believe this version and ignored my gut. After all, identical triplets do not occur often. I, nor very many others, even had a clue as to how this normally worked.

A few months passed, and my intuition kicked into overdrive. I took Lakin to a speech pathologist, who told me there was no need for therapy. After her second visit, I nearly lost it. Clearly, a speech pathologist was not the person to help in our investigation of finding out why Lakin’s voice was vanishing. Lesson learned: Be sure to listen to that little voice in your head. Intuition is that subconscious thought or what many call “God’s little nudge.”

The “A” Bomb

After consulting with a developmental pediatrician and neurologist, Lakin was diagnosed with pervasive development disorder, not otherwise specified (PDD-NOS), one of several disorders on the autism spectrum. When the autism bomb dropped, we began to investigate the disorder to answer our many questions. What is it? What causes it? How can it be treated?

Our concern shifted from Lakin to all three of our divas. They are, in fact, identical. We were told that for the time being, they were developmentally delayed. It was suggested that enrolling them in a half-day, pre-kindergarten program with speech therapy would improve their progress tremendously. It did not quite work out that way. Today, all three divas are on the autism spectrum at varying levels, but autistic, nonetheless.



When the Montgomery family learned all three of their daughters had autism, they started learning all they could about the developmental disorder.



Eric and Hope first noticed developmental delays in their girls when they were nearing 3 years old.



Even though they are identical, Londyn, Lakin, and Lauren have varying levels of ability.

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The Triple Divas and their big brother Collin, who has been very supportive

The autism bomb may have fallen, but the Montgomery six refused to let it detonate. We wiped the tears and held our heads high. We are staying strong, but there is still so much stress, tears, and heartbreak. There is a constant wave of “what ifs” and questions about who we can trust and if a treatment is fact, fiction, or fraud. All of these emotions swim through my head. On some days, it can suck the air right out of you. In spite of all of this anxiety and fatigue, we are still fighting for our girls.

Unique and Unpredictable Traits

Autism has many different traits and not everyone is equipped to handle it, especially if you do not have the faith, heart, or moxie. I am speaking about all those who encounter the unique abilities of a child with autism, from parents and caretakers to teachers, therapists, and physicians.

The Triple Divas are identical, but their level of ability is not. The various treatments that are available to assist them may work for one, but not for the others. Sometimes, they may work for all three. Londyn is the highest functioning. Lauren’s abilities are a mixture of high, moderate, and low. Lakin is still considered nonverbal, but has a way of letting us know what she wants. As unique as this is, we desperately want her to speak. She has shown that she can, so we work hard to make her use her words. Autism may be unique and unpredictable, but there is one thing that is certain: The Montgomery six will never give up.

Autism Does Not Discriminate

Parents who are in the trenches battling autism come from all different educational backgrounds, religious beliefs, ethnicities, and cultures. Adults and children with autism all have a story to tell. These stories may be similar, but they are never the same.

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) an average of one in 110 children in the U.S. is diagnosed with an autism spectrum disorder (ASD). Millions more are diagnosed worldwide. ASD is more common than childhood cancer, diabetes, and AIDS. Yet there is no cure. There are merely treatments.

Speaking Out

Eric and I are private people. We both have been taught to handle issues that come about on our own. With our faith, we believe we will overcome any trial. Yet as hard as we try, we cannot handle this alone. Doing research, implementing treatments, and handling

the huge financial obligations that go along with treatments are truly overwhelming, and that is putting it mildly. Battling autism is a team effort. Our hope is that by speaking out and sharing our story, we will not only make a difference, but we will be the difference!

Our children are God's extraordinary gifts to us. We know that God's grace will see us through. We do not exactly know how or when, but we believe in our soul that it will happen. In the meantime, we will keep battling, adding to team Triple Divas, with the faith and hope that God will continue to place incredible people and opportunities in our lives. Together, we will give our girls the best life possible while opening doors, giving hope, and inspiring others. SLM

HOPE COLLINS MONTGOMERY works part-time as a public relations practitioner and is the CEO of Montgomery 6 Enterprises. Her husband Eric works full-time as a pharmacy technician and is a pharmacy school student working toward his doctorate. Big brother Collin is a smart, lovable, and talented 9-year-old. The Triple Divas, Londyn, Lakin, and Lauren, are 5 and are making strides every day in their battle with autism. The Montgomery six reside in Richmond.

EDITOR'S NOTE: We would like to thank Hope and her family for sharing their story of courage, determination, and faith. If you have an inspirational story you'd like to share with the Fort Bend community, please email editor@sugarlandmagazine.com.

Lauren and dad Eric



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