

The Family That

Fort Bend Family with 11 Kids (and One on the Way) Has Lots of Love to Go Around

Written by Jennifer Heath
Photography by Suzi Issa



Leslie

Lindsie

Lathon

Dad Joe

Mom Karen

Landen

Lexie

Leilah

Lev Built

Logen

Lacie

Larrissa

Laren

Lainey

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As an only child, Karen Lev never experienced sharing a bedroom with a sister, getting teased by an older brother, or waiting her turn for the bathroom. Needless to say, she only wanted one thing while growing up: a brother or a sister. Fast forward to today, and things have changed quite a bit. With a daughter on the way, Karen and her husband Joseph now share their lives with their 11 children: Lindsie, 17; Leslie, 16; Logen, 15; Larrissa, 13; Lacie, 11; Lathon, 9; Landen, 8; Lainey, 6; Lexie, 4; Laren, 2; and Leilah, 10 months.

“It’s hard to describe our family when you don’t know what it’s like to have a small family,” Joseph says. “This is what family is to us. It’s brothers and sisters coming and going and friends wanting to visit. It’s just family.”

More to Love

Growing up in Rosenberg, Karen imagined settling down and raising several children. During high school, she started working at a local grocery store through a co-op program. When the store closed, she transferred to another location and as luck would have it, met Joseph who was also working there. For this couple, opposites seemed to attract, as Joseph came from a family with seven brothers and sisters. “He told me, ‘We’re finally fixing to get some girls in the store,’” Karen laughs. “It just took off from there.”

Karen and Joseph married in October 1992. A couple of years after they walked down the aisle, Karen was headed to the hospital to give birth to their first child. They decided all their children would have an “L” name. “At the beginning, it was easy to come up with,” Karen recalls about the names. “We started with Lindsie. And then Leslie was named after her great-grandfather. When Logen came, we said we have to give him an ‘L’ name, or he will wonder why he was left out. And so it happened that we felt that way all the way through.”

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The Lev family at their home in Rosenberg



For the next decade, the couple made trips to the hospital to welcome home a new “L” child to the family. They usually announced their pregnancies with an ultrasound picture being passed around. As the family grew, the older children always helped pick out the names for their younger siblings.

An Even Dozen

In November, the family will welcome home their 12th Lev child. “To not be pregnant is not too often,” Karen says. “It is nice though, to do more with more energy when you’re not pregnant. But we have always wanted a big family; I always said I wanted to at least make it to 12, an even dozen.”

Karen also ran an in-home daycare for young children for several years. She would watch kids after school or while their parents worked. “I could not even begin to know the number of diapers I have changed, several thousands,” Karen recalls. “I have had kids in diapers for the past 17 years, along with all the childcare kids. It doesn’t bother me anymore. I feel like a pro at it, all this practice. You do it very quickly, [because] as they get to be toddlers, you have to be quick before they pull the great escape.”

Never a Dull Moment

With a large family, the one thing missing is quiet. Karen says she goes to the bathroom to find a few moments to herself. The TV is always tuned to cartoons, and the house is always buzzing with children.

“As for Joe and I, we really never have any alone time or one-on-one time,” she says. “We have never had that experience, although it would be nice. We do have our problems, so it would be nice to have that time.” The family also sacrifices lavish trips, family vacations, and eating out at restaurants because of the cost. For free fun and sun, they take short trips to the beach.

The Lev Family *by the Numbers*

Babies still in diapers	2	Loads of laundry each day	4
Bathrooms in their house	2.5	Gallons of milk each week	7-8
Bedrooms in the house	5	Number of seats in their van	15
Number of cell phones	5	Number of cats & dogs	9
Weekly grocery bill	\$550	Years Joseph has worked at SW Water	20



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Meet the Levs

- Lindsie Marie, 17
- Leslie Anne, 16
- Logen Charles, 15
- Larrissa Karen, 13
- Lacie Roseanna, 11
- Lathon Joseph, 9
- Landen Edward, 8
- Lainey Jo, 6
- Lexie Rose, 4
- Laren Christian-Azriel, 2
- Leilah Mary, 10 months

A Challenging Medical Condition

Lately, though, Karen has been flying to New York City on a weekly basis with her 2-year-old son Laren, where he receives medical treatment. Laren has a genetic defect that has caused him to have severe club feet. The specialists have been putting new, full-leg casts on each leg on a weekly basis. There will be at least 12 sets of casts by the end of the treatment in June.

The family recently learned that Laren’s spine is tethered, eliminating the option of having future surgery on his feet. “His feet will always retract back to club feet, because of his spine,” Karen says. “We’re not sure where we go from here. They have ordered a lot more tests, and we need to decide what we can do.”

Gina Marrinucci, a close friend, lets the family stay with her in a one-bedroom hotel room in Philadelphia, only a few hours’ drive from New York City. “Laren is a little guy with a huge medical issue, yet he has taught me more about courage, imagination, and SpongeBob than anyone else I have ever met,” Marrinucci says. “He is a special child and already possesses the kind of wit and wisdom that is sometimes difficult to find in children twice his age. I admire how the unconditional love provided by his family continues to build his confidence and his self-esteem.”

One-on-One

In addition to traveling with Laren, Karen takes Leilah, her youngest daughter, and at least two other children with her each trip. She needs extra hands to haul the two car seats, wheelchair, and suitcases around. The trips allow her to not only seek the best medical care for her son, but also to spend some quality time with each child, away from the hustle and bustle of the family’s normal routine.

“Spending one-on-one time with each child never really happened until we started having to travel to Philadelphia,” Karen says. “We walk around the mall or just sit and talk. The downside is that I’m having to leave other kids behind.”



Logen is a huge sports fan



Lindsie loves her unique room, which, like her brothers’ and sisters’ rooms, shows off her individual talents and interests



Lathon, Landen, and Laren have fun playing Rock Band video games together

Home Is Where the Heart Is

While Karen is away, Joseph takes care of the children, with lots of help from the older children, family, and friends. "It's a hard job that Karen does," he says. "She does a lot. The kids watch out for each other and look after each other. There's just a lot of love between each other in this house."

The Lev children are quick to point that out, too. When asked what their favorite thing about having a big family is, they are almost unanimous in saying that there is always someone there for them to talk, play, or laugh with. "There's so much love going around," shares Lindsie, 17. "I can always expect to get an instant smile put on my face and a big, welcoming hug when I walk into the door." SLM

JENNIFER HEATH loves being a freelance writer for Sugar Land Magazine and mom of two sons, Landry and Ryan.

"You always have something to do and you don't feel lonely. If you need help with school, there's always someone to help."

-Lacie, 11



Leslie is very creative and loves to draw and talk on the phone



Lacie, Lainey, and Larrissa are all animal lovers who enjoy spending time with their cute pets





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