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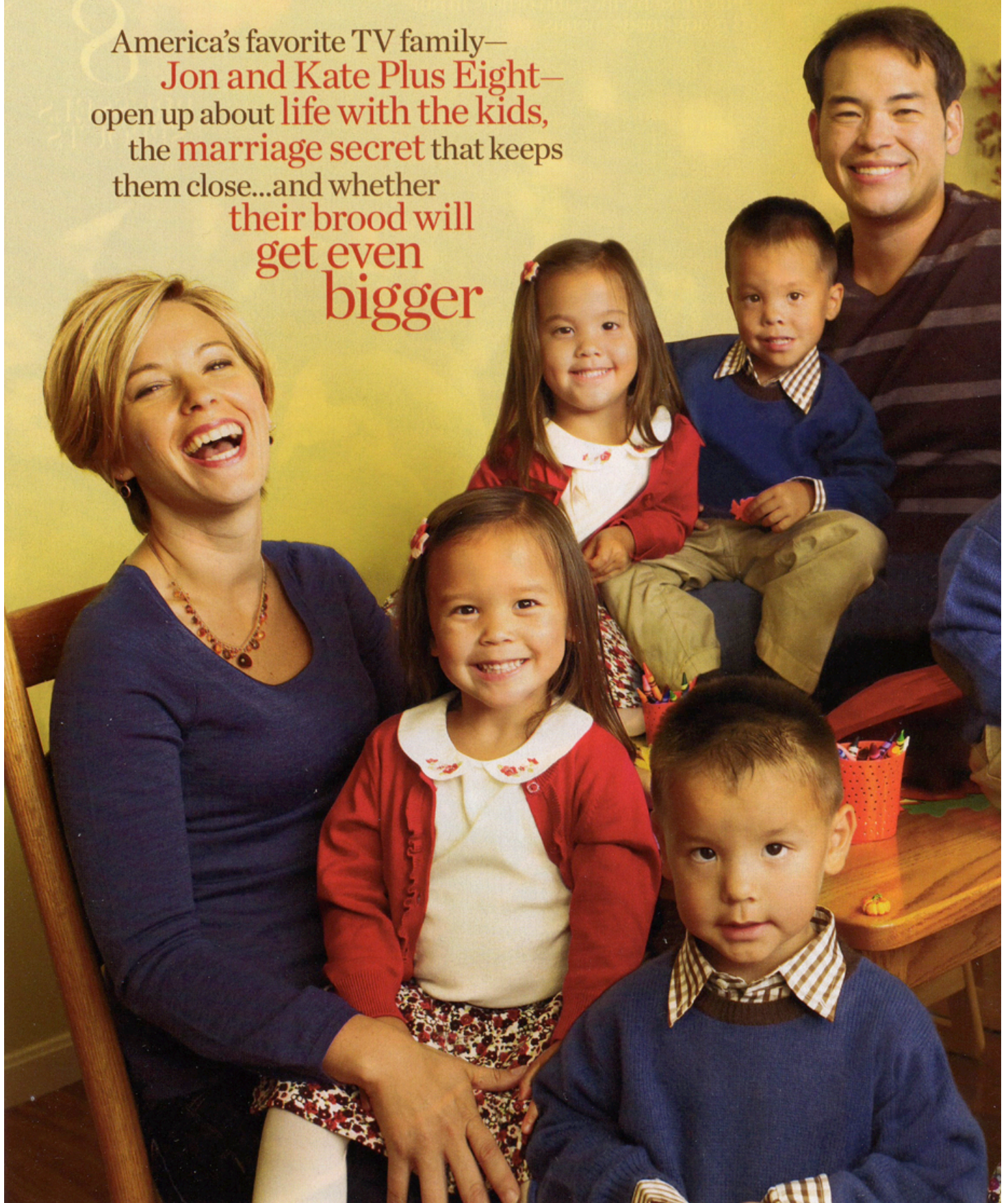
CINDY McCAIN & MICHELLE OBAMA
Honest, open talk

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YOUNGER-LOOKING EYES IN 15 MINUTES

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America's favorite TV family—
Jon and Kate Plus Eight—
open up about **life with the kids**,
the **marriage secret** that keeps
them close...and whether
their brood will
**get even
bigger**





a family affair

BY JENNIFER GRAHAM KIZER
PHOTOGRAPHS BY MARC ROYCE

at the garage entrance of the Gosselin family home, there's a handwritten note: "No shoes in the house, please." Lined up across the floor are dozens of pairs, a slipshod rainbow of green Crocs (with frog eyes); red ones (like ladybugs); shiny brown Mary Janes; sparkly silver ballet slippers; bright, rubbery flip-flops; and various others. Also: several bigger pairs (these in boring, grown-up browns and blacks). Clearly, bare feet of all sizes have preceded you inside. Mostly little ones.

You enter through the kitchen, which is pulsing with the energy of a big crowd in a small space. House party energy. "Welcome to the chaos!" yells a cheerful Kate Gosselin from across the room. If you're one of the 24.6 million people who've seen TLC's *Jon & Kate Plus Eight* so far (the show's in its fourth season), you catch her sarcasm-spiked humor. Kate, 33, and her husband, Jon, 31, are raising twins and sextuplets—two 8-year-olds and six 4-year-olds—in this suburban Pennsylvania home. It's a complicated high-wire act in anyone's book, but for three years now, they've done it with TV cameras in tow. Roughly four days a week, a production crew marches alongside the Gosselin kid parade of Cara, Madelyn,

Alexis, Hannah, Aaden, Collin, Leah, and Joel. Attempting to control the chaos is Kate's primary occupation. And with this many kids—talkative kids—it's a challenge, as you discover when the Plus Eight approach.

Leah: "You can hold my doll. It's a boy. His name is Steve, and this is his penguin, Icy."

Aaden [*holding up five fingers*]: "Guess how many stuffed animals I sleep with?"

Joel: "Do you like my haircut?"

Collin [*with Doodle Pro sketch pad*]: "I'll tell you what to draw.... No, make it bigger.... That doesn't look like my mommy."

Mady [*sitting this close*]: "These shoes are too big. And I don't like how these socks feel. Do I have to wear them?"

Leah [*planting her hands on her tiny hips*]: "Where's Steve? I told you to watch him!"

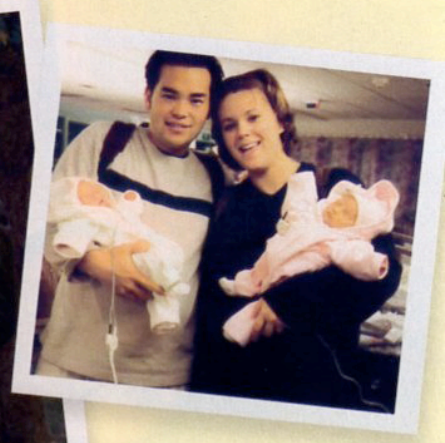
Three more kids approach. Ten minutes of this, and even that Old Woman Who Lived in a Shoe would be frazzled. How on earth do the Gosselins do it?

the new normal

A few hours later, Kate and Jon are able to sit down in their remarkably clean living room and chat during the kids' afternoon naptime. This is the Kate seen on TV: on task, but also conscious of the whining that's taking place on the floor above. "Honey, Leah needs her chewy," she tells Jon, pointing to a worn baby blanket on the floor. And the Jon seen on TV dutifully grabs it and heads upstairs. "People come here and say, 'I feel like I'm watching your show,'" says Kate. She widens her eyes in that recognizable way she does when pointing out the obvious. "That's because this *is* our show." It's truly a normal day in their lives.

Well, sort of. "We will never feel normal again, TV show or not," says Kate. "Does anyone see a family with twins and sextuplets every day? No. It took me until the little kids were almost 2 to completely accept it."

That's good news for viewers, because watching the Gosselins' daily life has made for a compelling, strangely comforting TV show—and TLC's highest-rated one. Part of the appeal lies, no doubt, in the fact that this household is busier than yours. In fact, it's one lost sippy cup away from total pandemonium. Surely, Jon and Kate *continued on page 228*



Our Decision, Our Destiny

*In this exclusive excerpt from their new book, **Multiple Blessings**, Kate Gosselin recalls the day she and Jon learned how many babies she was carrying.*

The Friday before Thanksgiving of 2003, as the smooth wand of the ultrasound device rolled over my uterus, I blinked hard and then stared at the bright screen. Instantly my mind scanned the information. I was a nurse. I had had twins. I had also experienced what seemed like hundreds of ultrasounds. There was no mistaking what I saw, yet instantly I was in a state of denial.

As if in a trance, we all just continued to stare, as my doctor began his fateful count. One. Two. Three. Four. I started sobbing and turned to Jon. The chill of

reality washed over me as I watched my husband—my best friend, cheerleader, and storehouse of strength—slowly drop to his knees at the count of five. He couldn't bear to look anymore. I really don't think anybody wanted to look anymore, but the count continued. Six. Seven. Letter G. Yes, the life-changing fuzzy little blips were being named A, B, C, D, E, F, and G.

There was a slight upward lilt in the inflection of the doctor's voice as he tried to sound positive. I think as much for his own comfort as for mine, he went on to explain that he was able to detect a fetus in "just" four of the embryonic sacs. As Jon and I tried to catch our breaths, a nurse with 25 years of experience turned to me and with quiet truth gently said, "Kate, in all

A Family Affair

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could never have imagined such a life when they struggled with infertility (due to Kate having polycystic ovary syndrome). But thanks to infertility treatments, the couple conceived, and twins Cara and Mady were born on October 8, 2000. The Gosselins were the very definition of cautious, controlled parents—each night, Kate and Jon would put all the Fisher-Price Little People back where they belonged in the dollhouse, in precise order. Kate concedes, “Jon and I were ridiculously, over-the-top anal.”

Three years later, they returned to the fertility clinic. As they relate at the opening of every episode: “We decided to try for just one more, and ended up with six!” Their initial reaction to the news was shock (see the excerpt “Our Decision, Our Destiny” from Jon and Kate’s new book, *Multiple Blessings*, page 156), and the worrisome prospect of how this would affect Cara and Mady. In fact, once the babies arrived on May 10, 2004, daily life as they knew it changed forever. Kate tenses as she recalls the bleak months that followed, when dozens of volunteers crowded in to help care for the sextuplets. She struggled to show her gratitude, but “we didn’t even know 95 percent of the volunteers in our house,” she says. “I can’t accept every person who walks in to feed my babies. My five-pound babies with reflux—I’m supposed to just hand them over? There were days I just wanted to cover my head with a pillow. But I knew my babies were counting on me, and I had to keep it together. I had to keep it together for Jon, who was falling apart—he’d been laid off when I was pregnant and was applying for every job under the sun.”

The woman who once put all the

Fisher-Price Little People in perfect order was at the center of an often uncontrollable situation. Still is. “I think that [having twins and sextuplets] is where God has put me to force me to let go,” she says. And let go she did, in a very public way: The family filmed *Surviving Sextuplets and Twins*, which aired in May 2006 (a news report about Kate and Jon had caught a Discovery Health producer’s eye). Kate appeared in a bathrobe for much of the show, amid cribs filled with crying babies.

Ironically, by the time filming started, the Gosselins were finding their sea legs. “Jon [an IT technician by trade] got a new job, and I was able to go back to work part-time,” says Kate, a former nurse. “We could pay our bills and have some pride.”

Never did it cross their minds that they might ultimately help support themselves with a reality-TV show. But when filming the special *Surviving Sextuplets and Twins: One Year Later*, says Jon, “they were already talking about doing a series.” And so the Gosselins landed their new job: living their lives—in a fishbowl.

going public

Beyond the antics of all those kids, it’s surely the parents’ personalities—and their interaction—that draw viewers in. Kate is high-strung and adrenalized; Jon possesses a natural sangfroid that often strikes his wife as lackadaisical. And of course, sometimes he is. Friction ensues. Half the time, Jon plays along as the henpecked subordinate; other days, he’s fed up and sardonic. Their exchanges are unflinching, and the result is perhaps the most honest and relatable marriage on TV.

For the record, there’s palpable warmth between them in person. Despite their differing temperaments, these are two foxhole-bonded people who yearn for the same things in life:

raising their family like other people do, with their feet on the ground. Kate calls their frequent bickering “harmless” and “an honest back-and-forth.” She says that female viewers send her e-mails saying, “You took the words right out of my mouth.” “I’m still asking Jon, when I’m stressed out, to notice please and ask me, ‘How can I help you?’” she says. “By the time we’re married 50 years, maybe he’ll ask me that. But our marriage is going to go through many more years of fine-tuning. Right now it’s taking a beating, because we have a house full of children.”

Another factor draws them close as a couple: Somewhere in the past, an emotional chasm unfolded between Kate and her parents and Jon and his mother. “Other families of sextuplets have both moms living right around the corner, helping them,” says Kate. “We’ve had none of that.” Jon’s father, who passed away in 2005, is the only grandparent whose image has appeared on *Jon and Kate Plus Eight*—a curiosity among fans of the show. The couple is determinedly evasive about the reasons for their absence, but they’re happy to share the effect of it. “People see us arguing, and they say, ‘When will Kate and Jon split up?’ Well, never,” says Kate. “He’s the only one who’s been by my side through all of this.”

Squeezing in couple time also helps. “When the kids are in bed, we like to hang out, have conversations, and watch movies together,” says Kate. They travel sans kids for speaking engagements. “We always slip in some fun while we’re away,” says Kate. The ability to dine out and make the simple request “table for two” is a romantic rush. So is an afternoon of shopping, like the one spent last spring in South Carolina. “It reminded us how much fun we have together,” says Kate. “Of course, we shopped for the kids!” →

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principles of extreme parenting

But their best moments as a couple tend to come at the end of a challenging day with the kids. "It's when we do a crazy trip, like taking them to New York City, and we conquer it," she says. "We've actually high-fived!" Kate thrills to the husband-and-wife teamwork that these excursions require. "All of the proper supplies packed and organized: We both enjoy it!" she says.

Though the family has a part-time helper and meals are prepared for them on filming days, Kate has had to learn to let the small stuff slide. "You'll see my little girls with their hair messy," she says, sighing. "I'm trying to focus on the enjoyable moments, rather than keeping them clean every minute." Still, Kate has developed some tough-love tactics that she considers sanity-saving, though some viewers find fault with them. "You have to realize you're setting the rules for life," says Kate. "With six, we have no room for error." Specifically, here's how they keep their smallish house from looking like a ransacked Toys "R" Us: Don't buy too many toys. Upstairs toys stay upstairs. Basement toys stay down. And they don't deviate from those rules—ever. Kate developed her method for putting kids on a sleep schedule when the twins were babies: She let them fall asleep in their cribs on their own. "Mady cried for an hour, and I cried in the next room," says Kate. "But every night it got shorter. I've done that for every one of my kids." Picky eaters don't scare her, either. Her policy: "If you don't want the dinner I've made, the next meal is breakfast."

Of course, firm parenting can't remedy everything: "As a rule, there

is usually somebody who is crying or upset," says Kate. For these tough times, she summons a couple of mantras. One: "It could be worse. They could be sick in a hospital." Two: "Bedtime always comes."

Kate's true burden isn't exactly caring for the children; it's the inability to offer any of them her exclusive attention. This leads to a particularly fierce brand of mother guilt. "It's hard to turn my brain off at night," she says. "When I choose Leah to take to the grocery store, and I don't know when I can tell the rest of them when their chances will be, that's guilt," she says. That's why she's OK with the kids infringing on her private time a bit. "Mady will come in and close the toilet lid and sit there and talk to me while I'm in the shower," she says. "I like to hear what they have to say." She calls these times her happiest: "For me, that's more like normal parenting."

Happily, "my roughest day now doesn't compare to what we went through in those early months," says Kate. Like nothing else, the experience drew them closer to God. The Gosselins say they had no choice but to trust in divine provision for their family—and they got it.

"Things that I started wishing for and praying for out loud started materializing," she says. She'd remind Jon that they needed paper towels, and an hour later, a volunteer would drop off a case. She'd make a mental note that the yard needed weeding, and a church group would call two days later offering to do it. "Right when I would flash back to when we'd been just a family of four and thought, We could have just been fine, He would very literally give me examples of how He was going to provide for me," she says. "I don't care if you believe in God or not. You couldn't explain it any other way. There's not a little man who sits be-

hind the sofa phoning people."

Kate and Jon still firmly believe that their greatest help comes from above. "Many days I think to myself, The stress is too great," she says. "And then I am reminded that I don't need to rely on myself but on God. And I haven't fallen apart yet!"

what's next

So many unusual variables have already shaped their marriage; they're hardly able to process what life will be like down the road. "The other night," recalls Kate, "we sat on the porch swing drinking decaf, and asked each other, 'When we're old, what will we be like?'"

"I suddenly realized that I'm going to have five son-in-laws!" says Jon. "I'm not sure if I like that!" Adds Kate: "I have very vivid dreams of our family in the future—a house full of love, laughter, and lots of grandkids to spoil!"

The time she dreads? She admits that a house full of 13-year-olds is a little "too painful to think about." But the period that really concerns her is the day they all leave home. "I'm already worried about that empty-nest syndrome," she says. "Just as they came in a big group and overwhelmed us, they will likely leave in a big group, and the quiet will be even more deafening. Thus, our plan to adopt a tagalong."

That's right: They've looked into adopting a child from South Korea. "But we're over the kid limit," says Kate. Couples who have more than four children are generally ineligible to adopt from that country. "We only have double the amount you are supposed to have!" says Jon wryly.

"I know I'm crazy," Kate says. "But the desire [for another child] will not leave me. When you have eight, what's one more?" Kate then pauses, looks at Jon, and adds with a smile: "And then that would be it, for the record." ■