

THREE SISTERS

Corvallis couple anticipate triplets

by Jonathan Kipp

Sandi Washburn's morning sickness was so bad, she and her partner, Shelley Willis, started talking about buying the book *How to Raise an Only Child*. But a routine examination three months into her pregnancy not only squelched that discussion, it changed the Corvallis couple's life forever.

The alpha fetal protein test indicated an abnormality. Most likely, the baby had spina bifida or some other neural tube defect, the women were told.

The doctors ordered more tests. "We were in a panic," Washburn said.

Willis' father had died just weeks earlier. So the unexpected news was especially hard for the women to take.

Flat on her back a week later at a Eugene hospital, Washburn braced herself as she went in for a high-density ultrasound. The technician was noticeably quiet. "I just really need to concentrate on this one," she explained.

Washburn stared at the monitor as the technician continued silently scanning her belly. The couple knew that, other than a deformity, twins also could make the test result abnormal.

Finally, the technician spoke. "There are three in there," she said.

Washburn and Willis burst into tears and laughed hysterically. They wouldn't be needing any books about raising just one child. Instead, the couple would be reading up on raising three. In fact, it soon hit them that they would need a lot of things—three of everything.

The couple did not use fertility drugs, so a multiple birth was completely unexpected. (An anonymous friend provided the sperm.) After the doctor confirmed that Washburn was carrying three baby girls, he approached them about "selective reduction," a routine discussion for couples facing a multiple pregnancy.

They watched their tiny triplets for 90 minutes before he broached the subject. They said they experienced every emotion possible during that time, from utter elation to outright fear.

Although both women are pro-choice, they weren't interested in even discussing the options. "They were already kicking each other," Willis said about the babies.

Liza Newcomb answered the phone and heard her longtime friend Washburn say, "Are you sitting down?" She soon learned that the doctors had thought something was wrong with the baby but that everything was fine. Then, Washburn told her the big news.

"Three of what?" Newcomb responded. Within seconds, she was screaming in excitement and shock.

Two days later, Newcomb had a sort of epiphany. She knew in her heart that her friends would need help and that the community would step forward to make that happen.

The mothers-to-be have modest incomes:



Shelley Willis and Sandi Washburn are overwhelmed by the community's generosity

Washburn works with emotionally disturbed children, and Willis is a partner in a small fine arts framing studio. They'd have plenty of love to spread around, but money was going to be a different thing.

Newcomb thought the women would need more space. A one-bedroom condo wasn't going to be big enough.

A bigger car with seating for five would be essential; the couple's pickup and economy-size car wouldn't hold the babies. The more she thought about it, the longer the list grew.

"Sandi and Shelley are probably two of the best-hearted people that I've ever known," Newcomb said. She knew the women wouldn't ask for assistance even though they have helped so many others through the years.

So a group of friends started organizing. They planned a sort of barn raising: Garage sales, an art auction and jars placed around the community to collect donations are but a few of the activities planned to meet their \$500,000 goal.

Part of that money will go toward paying for the 1,000 diapers a month that the triplets will need. "All we need is 100,000 people to give us \$5 each," Newcomb said optimistically.

News of the triplets spread quickly around town. Washburn and Willis said they are overwhelmed and moved by people's generous offers to help out.

The women aren't worried about any negative reaction to their children having two moms. Willis pointed to the outpouring of love and support from the community, gay and straight, as evidence to the contrary. "This is family values," she said.

Newcomb said God knew what he—or she—was doing when those little girls were given to Washburn and Willis. "They couldn't ask for better parents."

The three sisters are expected to arrive in early July. **j**

To donate to THE TRIPLET FUND write to P.O. Box 1055, Corvallis, OR 97333, or contact Liza Newcomb at 541-753-2653 or Liza@oregoncamera.com.

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