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From the Los Angeles Times

COLUMN ONE

## 6 + 4 = 1 Tenuous Existence

An illegal immigrant couple with six children were already living in poverty. Then the quadruplets arrived. They're still in a daze.

By Sam Quinones  
Times Staff Writer

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With two teenage daughters at home and triplets still in diapers, Angela Magdaleno's family overflowed from a one-bedroom apartment in South Los Angeles that they strained to afford.

Diapers had to be changed 15 times a day, feedings held every three hours. One triplet, 3-year-old Alfredo Jr., needed special attention because he was born with liquid on his brain and partially paralyzed.

Even simple events — like going to the store — required complex orchestration.

And that was before the quadruplets arrived.

On July 6, Magdaleno gave birth to two boys and two girls, drawing national media attention as a bewildered mother of 10 (with nine living at home). Now, she and her husband, Alfredo Anzaldo, 44, must figure out how to provide for everyone on Anzaldo's maximum pay of \$400 a week as a carpet installer.

As cameras flashed two weeks ago, capturing the 40-year-old mother with her newest progeny, she appeared dazed, even morose. They'd have to leave their \$600-a-month apartment for something bigger. They'd have to buy a minivan with room for four more car seats.

"I was afraid," she said. "I still feel like I can't believe it."

U.S. immigrants' stories often are about reinvention and newfound prosperity, about leaving behind poverty and limitations.

But that is not Magdaleno's story.

Both Magdaleno and Anzaldo are illegal immigrants, settled for years in an immigrant enclave. Magdaleno has the same number of children as her parents, who were peasant farmers in Mexico. Like her parents, she is living in poverty and struggling to provide for her family.

"It's not sweet," said her 36-year-old sister, Alejandra. "It's very sad. The life for girls back there in Mexico is the same as the one Angela has now. They marry and have children, and that's their lives."

Neither Magdaleno nor her husband speaks English, though she has been in the United States 22 years and he 28. Even her teenage daughters speak mostly Spanish; their English vocabulary is limited.

Yet all of Magdaleno's 10 children are U.S. citizens. The triplets receive subsidized school lunches. All the youngsters have had their healthcare bills covered by Medi-Cal, the state and federal healthcare program for the poor.

Alfredo Jr. had been hospitalized all his life until recently. He's had three state-funded brain operations and will require several more, the family said. The couple receive \$700 in monthly Social Security payments to help with his medical needs.

"I thank this country that they gave me Medi-Cal," Magdaleno said. "There's nothing like that in Mexico."

Magdaleno's existence contrasts sharply with that of her younger siblings, who followed her to Los Angeles but then left. They have settled in Lexington, Ky., had no more than two children each and built better lives than they had known before. Four bought houses. Their children speak English fluently.

Magdaleno's sisters struggle in vain to understand her. "She still thinks like people in Mexico — that's what I think," said her 38-year-old sister, Justina. "You have to think first of your living children instead of thinking of having more."

Magdaleno struggles to explain. She said she was wearing a birth-control patch to keep from getting pregnant, then took it off when it made her nauseated.

"I didn't want any more children," said Magdaleno, who used fertility drugs to conceive the triplets but said she did not use them in the case of the quadruplets.

"Four is too many. I'm still trying to believe this happened to me."

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Angela Magdaleno's story began as many Mexican immigrant stories do: in a village where work was scarce and wages were low.

She grew up in Los Positos, in the central Mexican state of Jalisco, the eldest of 10. For girls, life consisted of hard work, little schooling, no birth control and thus, said Alejandra, raising "all the children God gives you."

Angela and Justina left school at fifth grade to work in fields and tortilla shops to help support their family.

In 1984, hoping to make more money to send home, the girls were the first Magdalenos to cross



illegally into the United States. Angela was 19. The sisters found work in sewing factories, and apartments in the growing Latino immigrant communities of South Los Angeles.

Over the years, their eight siblings followed them.

Angela married, had two daughters, then divorced.

In 1990, she met Anzaldo, an immigrant from the state of Nayarit, Mexico, who had three daughters from relationships with two women — one in the U.S. and one in Mexico. Anzaldo was working in auto shops.

The couple married in 1992 and had a daughter together.

Magdaleno then had a tubal ligation. She thought she was done having children. But a few years later, things changed.

Anzaldo had only daughters, and the couple were getting older. He saw his chance at having a son slipping away.

"I wanted a son," he said, "because I didn't have one."

Magdaleno too had always wanted a boy. Anzaldo paid for an operation to reverse Magdaleno's tubal ligation. The couple thought they might return to Mexico after the child was born.

But for several years, she didn't get pregnant, Magdaleno said.

So she asked a woman who returned periodically to Mexico to bring her back fertility drugs. The woman supplied her with various pills and injections over several years, Magdaleno said.

"I took a lot," she said. "I don't remember what they're called."

Finally, in 2002, Magdaleno got pregnant — with triplets.

Talk of returning to Mexico ceased when their son, Alfredo, was born with hydrocephalus.

Their life became cramped and chaotic, with seven people crammed into their one-bedroom apartment.

Joanna, Magdaleno's oldest daughter, now 20, dropped out of high school and moved out with a boyfriend about the time Magdaleno became pregnant with the triplets. She now works in a factory making dolls for Disneyland, her mother said.

As Angela was having children, her siblings were undergoing a transformation of a different kind. They were slowly leaving Los Angeles.

Her sister Alejandra was the first to leave. In Los Angeles, she and her husband were barely able to make ends meet. As in Mexico, "there was little work and it's poorly paid," she said.

Eight years ago, she and her family moved to Kentucky, where a friend said there was more work and were fewer Mexican immigrants bidding down the wages for unskilled jobs.



In Kentucky, Alejandra picked tobacco. The work was hard and she didn't know the language. But soon, life improved. Over the years, she invited her siblings to join her. One sister married a man who managed a Golden Corral, a chain of all-you-can-eat buffets. Soon several Magdaleno siblings were working in Golden Corrals. Their husbands found work installing windows and as farm-labor contractors. They went to night school to learn English because few people in Lexington speak Spanish.

Today, the Magdalenos in Lexington earn more than they did in Los Angeles, in a city where the cost of living is lower. Kentucky is now their promised land, and they talk about California the way they used to talk about Mexico.

"What we weren't able to do in many years in California," Alejandra said, "we've done quickly here.

"We're in a state where there's nothing but Americans. The police control the streets. It's clean, no gangs. California now resembles Mexico — everyone thinks like in Mexico. California's broken."

Justina was the last to leave Los Angeles, about the time Angela was pregnant with the triplets.

She and her husband wanted better schools for their sons, 15 and 9.

In Lexington, she said, "at the school there are just people who speak English. It's helped my children a lot."

Justina, who came to the U.S. with Magdaleno, applied for legal residency under the 1986 amnesty law and is now a U.S. citizen. Magdaleno never applied.

The sisters say they have urged Angela to come out to Kentucky — at least to visit. She said she hasn't because her son has been hospitalized so much.

Last year, however, she sent her daughter, Kelly, 17, to Kentucky for several months. Though American born and raised, Kelly hadn't been outside South Los Angeles.

In Lexington, school was hard because few people spoke Spanish, and the city "barely had one Spanish radio station," Kelly said.

Her cousins, she said in English, "use more educational words than here. My cousin is 7 years old, and he has a better reading level than me. He don't see picture books or drawings or anything like that. He just likes books with pure letters."

Girls from Mexican-immigrant families in Kentucky, she saw, were in their mid-20s and still didn't have children.

"I said, 'Damn, that's weird,'" Kelly said. "The girls right here in Los Angeles are like in Mexico. There are girls that are 14, they got kids."

The family in Kentucky "is more in the United States than" her mother, Kelly concluded. "They want a better education for the kids. With less kids there's better possibility of you having something."

Magdaleno, meanwhile, was raising six other children and using a variety of birth control methods

— the latest being the contraceptive patch.

She said she was stunned when doctors told her that she was carrying quadruplets.

"She didn't do this on purpose," said Dr. Kathryn Shaw, who delivered the couple's triplets and their quadruplets. "She was not at all elated, and not excited about the fact that they were quadruplets."

All are healthy, Shaw said, but weighed between 3 and 4 pounds at birth. They remained at White Memorial Medical Center in East Los Angeles long enough to gain weight, then came home this week.

Now Denise, Destiny, Andrew and Andrey are with the rest of the family.

For Angela Magdaleno, their arrival — 22 years after she left Mexico and entered the United States hoping for a different life — has brought her full circle. Her older daughters, like girls in Mexico, have been drafted into helping raise the new children.

"I don't have anything," she said. "Just children."

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