

*Austin Vaden with twins, Tess & Sydney Unruh  
photo by Chris Fritchie*



## Merry Birthday!

By Allison Harrell

**AT ITS HEART**, Christmas is all about a baby and a birthday. In fact, the entire month of December has become one long birthday celebration marked by countless parties, elaborate decorations, bustling shopping centers and an endless array of delicious goodies. For better or worse, December's packed calendars, stretched budgets and expanding waistlines point to the 25<sup>th</sup> and the birth of one special baby observed by millions around the world. Such jubilant celebration certainly befits the birth of the King of Kings, but it can also pose a challenge to families celebrating the birth of their own Christmas baby.

For any woman, the prospect of welcoming a new little life into the family can be daunting. Factor in the thought of making this monumental transition during the busiest time of the year, and an expectant mom can begin to feel completely overwhelmed. Frisco native and obstetrician Dr. Randy Burt is quite familiar with the trepidation that expectant parents can feel when their due date falls on or near Christmas Day. When asked how expectant moms typically respond to this news, Dr. Burt says, "It's usually not a bad response, but there is usually a nervous laugh as much as anything else because it is such a busy

time of year to think about having a baby."

On average, Dr. Burt estimates that he typically has 12 to 15 patients who are due during the entire month of December. Based on those numbers, it might seem that chances would be slim that he would deliver many babies on Christmas Day. However, because his extended family is also in Frisco, Dr. Burt is often the doctor in his practice who is on call for the holidays.

When asked how often his Christmas Day activities include delivering a baby, Dr. Burt explains, "Either Christmas

Eve or Christmas Day, probably 40 percent of the time I'm on call. During most of our calls we actually have to deliver at least one baby if not more."

While being called in to work on Christmas is not something that most people have to deal with on a regular basis, Dr. Burt takes it all in stride. But what about his wife and two children? Dr. Burt laughs as he explains, "My kids don't find it odd for us to be sitting around the Christmas tree and my pager goes off. Without so much as a good-bye, I get up and walk out the door. We'll be at dinner and I'll get up from the dinner table and run out the door with quick kisses as I'm leaving. My children don't find that to be odd behavior. That's just their way of life."

As for his own feelings about having to work on Christmas Day, Dr. Burt tries to keep it all in perspective. "I love



Dr. Randy Burt  
photo by Chris Fritchie

and knowing I wouldn't be there at Christmastime with them."

As Christmas morning dawned, though, Mrs. Unruh remembers, "The babies decided to make their appearance around 3 o'clock in the morning, just a minute apart. It was a beautiful morning, snowy outside – just perfect. They were perfect. They were absolutely perfect, just tiny."

Proving that there is no rest for the weary, Mrs. Unruh recounts, "I left the hospital about 2 o'clock that same day. I wanted to be home for (daughters) Olyvia and Avery. I couldn't believe I had missed Christmas morning with them."

We'll drive around and look at Christmas lights and say, "Look what they are doing for your birthday! Everyone is decorating their houses for your birthday!"

my children and I love my wife so much that I would rather not be working on Christmas, but when I am, it's never so bad."

Frisco mom Sherrie Unruh has spent a memorable Christmas Day of her own in the hospital. Mrs. Unruh and her husband, Mike, were the recipients of a double Christmas blessing in 2002, with the birth of twins Sydney and Tess.

Already the parents of two daughters, ages one and two at the time, Mrs. Unruh admits that discovering they were expecting twins was a bit of a surprise. They were even more surprised when the twins arrived nine weeks early – on

Christmas Day.

Mrs. Unruh remembers, "Two or three days before Christmas I just was feeling like I needed to go and finish some shopping. So we had gone out to the mall to Christmas shop and I told Mike 'I feel funny.' He asked, 'Are you having contractions?' And I said, 'I think I am. Let's get the shopping done!'"

By the time the Unruhs got to the hospital, Mrs. Unruh was dilated to five centimeters. She remembers, "They admitted me to the hospital and told me I wouldn't be leaving until I delivered. Of course, I was heartbroken, thinking about my other two little ones at home

Having to juggle the celebration of Tess and Sydney's births with the celebration of Christmas is now an annual reality for the Unruh family. When asked about balancing both on one day, Mrs. Unruh says, "I think maybe at first I would have chosen something different, because of having the two other girls and not being there on that Christmas morning for them. But now I think it is so incredibly special and we try very hard to tell Sydney and Tess how special it is that they get to share a birthday with Jesus."

As Sydney and Tess run in to the room, their mom asks the giggling pair, "What does everyone in the neighborhood do to get ready for your birthday?"

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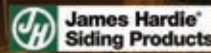
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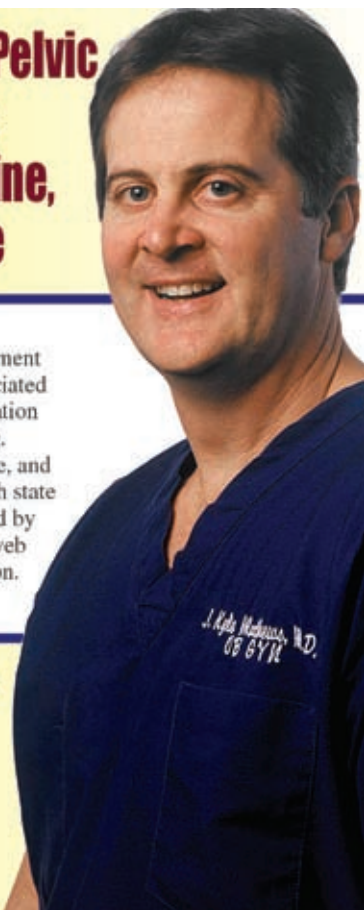
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“Lights!” the five-year-olds answer excitedly.

“We’ve told them that from early on,” Mrs. Unruh explains with a smile. “We’ll drive around and look at Christmas lights and say, ‘Look what they are doing for your birthday! Everyone is decorating their houses for your birthday!’”

Another local mom who experiences the joy of juggling Christmas celebrations with the birth of her own Christmas baby is Lisa Birdsong. Son Austin Vaden arrived on Christmas of 1995, but just barely – he made his appearance at 11:37 that night. Mrs. Birdsong remembers, “He was due on December 17<sup>th</sup>, but I just knew he was going to be born on Christmas. I don’t know why I thought that, but I remember wondering, ‘is that good?’ I just remember making jokes to my friends, ‘just you watch – he’s going to be stubborn and wait to be born on Christmas.’ And I’ll be darned if he wasn’t!”

I have delivered babies in a Santa hat before. After all, I’m giving parents the best present that I could ever give them.

While she admits that it is challenging at times to juggle all the demands of the Christmas season with Austin’s birthday, Mrs. Birdsong considers it a blessing. “It made a great story when he was young. When he was growing up he always wanted to hear the story of the day he was born and of course we emphasized all the things that made it special. Today, looking back on it, it still means a lot to me because when he was little he would always say that he shared a birthday with Jesus.”

Austin himself, nearing his 13<sup>th</sup> birthday on December 25<sup>th</sup>, agrees. “It’s actually pretty cool most of the time, but certain times it can be a little bit annoying because people make a pretty big deal out of it sometimes, and they ask me

a whole lot of questions. But I think it being on Christmas is pretty cool.”

But what about the presents? When asked if he feels he gets shortchanged in the gift department by having Christmas and his birthday on the same day, Austin is quick to reply. “No, I feel like it’s the very opposite. My parents try to do it equal, but for some reason they kind of overdo it. So I feel like it’s almost the opposite.”

Although Mrs. Birdsong and Mrs. Unruh have never met, their strategies to successfully juggle Christmas Day and their kids’ birthdays are similar. Like many kids with a birthday in late December, both Austin and the Unruh twins celebrate with a birthday party earlier in the month so that their friends can join in the fun. When Christmas Day dawns, though, “We make it his birthday before anything else,” says Mrs. Birdsong. “Even though Christmas is a very honored tradition in our family, we try to make it his day first, meaning that we will say ‘Happy Birthday’ before we say ‘Merry Christmas.’”

Similarly, Sherrie Unruh comments, “We sing ‘Happy Birthday’ and have a cupcake or a donut so the girls can blow out a candle on their birthday. We try to make it special so that they never have that feeling that they wish it could be any other day of the year.”

Interestingly, the other strongly held sentiment expressed by both moms involves gift wrap. Explains Mrs. Birdsong, “We certainly don’t expect separate gifts for Austin, but we ask family that if they get him a birthday gift that they wrap his birthday present in birthday paper and his Christmas present in Christmas paper to differentiate between the two.”

Likewise, Mrs. Unruh says, “We have told my family that if the girls receive a birthday gift and it is wrapped in Christmas paper that I will re-wrap it in birthday paper. I want their presents in birthday paper. That is one thing that I feel strongly about.”

Ultimately, the hustle and bustle of the Christmas holiday, as well as the stress of juggling Christmas birthday plans falls away for these moms as they regard their own Christmas babies with a deep sense of gratitude. As Mrs. Birdsong succinctly says of son Austin, “He’s the best Christmas present I’ve ever received.”

As for expectant moms who may be facing a hospital visit to deliver their own little Christmas surprise this year, Dr. Randy Burt reassures that Christmas in the hospital is not nearly as bad as people might think.

## Celebrities with Christmas Birthdays

Annie Lennox  
Sissy Spacek  
Barbara Mandrell  
Jimmy Buffett  
Rod Serling  
Anwar Sadat  
Cab Calloway  
Humphrey Bogart  
Sir Isaac Newton

“When somebody gets admitted to the hospital, if they’re pregnant or for any reason, everybody dreads being there on the holidays, but it’s not nearly as bad as people think. All the nurses are in a festive mood. I’ve seen patients, particularly pregnant women who have been admitted for very long periods of time and are there over Christmas, come in and decorate their rooms with Christmas trees and stockings just like they were at home. It is actually a festive, fun time to be there. It’s not ideal, but it’s not as bad as you think.”

Noting that nurses, doctors and patients alike would all rather be at home on Christmas, a sense of camaraderie and good cheer abounds. According to Dr. Burt, “Everyone would rather be with their family than being in the hospital, but everyone generally has a really good time, and even if it’s a little sad to be away from your family, when it’s all over with, everyone laughs and it’s a big joke that you were in the hospital on Christmas.”

And of course, the reward of having a baby on Christmas Day far outweighs any inconvenience. “I have delivered babies in a Santa hat before,” Dr. Burt laughs. “After all, I’m giving parents the best present that I could ever give them.”

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*Allison Harrell is a writer who lives in Frisco with her husband and their four children, none of whom were born on Christmas day.*