

# 54 Kids and Counting

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The Koelzer family, from left: Tim, Kristin, Isaac, Maddie and Matt  
Photo Terry Riggins Photography

A back bedroom is filled with children's furniture and toys and hanging prominently on the wall is a collage featuring photos of 34 beautiful babies. Eleven of the DeWeese foster children were adopted and DeWeese maintains an excellent relationship with most of them, as well as their adoptive families. Over the years, she's attended their sporting events, family gatherings and birthday parties. She receives updates, cards and pictures. One of her 'kids' recently called to excitedly report that he is about to become a parent himself. She proudly displays pictures of these 11 kids in her living room and, as she shows them off, touching each one, the love she feels is obvious.

DeWeese readily admits that it's always hard having to give a child up; she said she could never have done this if she hadn't known that her own children could never be taken away from her. "We came in knowing we wanted to help lots of children and that we weren't going to keep any of them. That doesn't mean that I didn't get emotional and weak-kneed each time one had to leave," she said.

As president of the Contra Costa Foster Family Network, DeWeese works with foster families throughout the county, offering education, advice and support. "I always advise new foster parents that their job is to love and nurture their foster children for whatever time they have them."

As for her biological children who are now having children of their own - nine and counting - DeWeese said she loves what being a foster

family did for them as they were growing up. "It definitely had a positive effect and I imagine that some, if not all, will become foster parents themselves someday."

Kristin and Tim Koelzer also love kids and love being parents. New to Moraga in 2000, Kristin Koelzer saw DeWeese at church holding an adorable five-week-old baby. Koelzer started asking questions. As she learned more about what DeWeese did, she and her husband decided fostering would be a good way for them to give back and continue having young children in their lives. They began the foster training and approval process. "We also wanted to get approved for adoption," Koelzer said, "just in case we were ever in a situation where we fell in love with a child we were fostering." And it's a good thing they did.

In 2003, the Koelzers received their first foster placement. "Calvin was a beautiful, five pound African-American boy and we all instantly fell in love with him," Koelzer said. In fact, she noted, everyone fell in love with him. "He became a fixture in Lamorinda; everyone embraced him." After six months, the County found the home where his two older siblings, also adopted, were living; the adoptive parents wanted to add Calvin to their family. But, Koelzer said, "We loved him, knew we could give him a good home and wanted to adopt him. I absolutely did not want to give him up." The County believed the other home would be a better fit. As Koelzer told the story of losing

Calvin, even now, 12 years later, her eyes filled with tears and her voice choked up. "It was such an amazing experience having him," she said. "And it was very tough on all of us when he left - we had to grieve the loss of a child." While the Koelzer family remained close with both Calvin and his adoptive family, and, in fact, still have contact, "I knew I never wanted to go through anything like that again," Koelzer explained.

Although there were several other longer-term placements over the next 12 years, the Koelzers began doing mostly short-term respite care - taking in kids whose foster families needed relief, were going on vacation, looking for a short break. "It was similar to babysitting," Koelzer noted. "It was great still having babies around, but because we knew it was for a short time, we didn't get quite so emotionally attached."

In 2012, when their older daughter went off to college, "instead of getting a puppy, I put our name back on the emergency care list," Koelzer said with a chuckle. Six weeks later, 2-month-old Isaac came into their lives. "His birthday is the same as mine, which we took as an omen." There were so many other signs that "Tim and I knew this child was placed in our lives for a reason," Koelzer, a spiritual woman, continued. "He deserved a good life, we loved him and we certainly didn't want him to go back into the system." Within the year, the Court terminated the birth mother's parental rights and the Koelzers began adoption proceedings. It was a very lengthy process, but last year, Isaac officially became a member of the Koelzer family.

Koelzer knows Isaac's biological mother and knows that she loved him but, sadly, was unable to care for him. "Isaac will always know where he came from and that he was loved. He is social, funny and energetic. He just exudes happiness," Koelzer reported. But, she admitted, he has issues that are common in children whose birth mothers abused drugs. "It's nothing we can't handle and every day it gets better. He's already in an early inter-

vention program through the Moraga School District and is receiving amazing support."

Koelzer, who is a marketing consultant and teaches at Saint Mary's College, plans to continue doing respite foster care. DeWeese, who still works at UCSF Benioff Children's Hospital and helps out with her grandchildren, said once she retires, she'll "definitely take in babies again."

Like DeWeese, Koelzer believes fostering has taught her biological kids so much. "I know this experience has had such a positive impact on them and I know one thing for sure,"

she said. "They will always serve others ... because of what they've seen and experienced."

Both Koelzer and DeWeese praised the Lamorinda community for the love and support they so willingly gave. Local pediatricians provided services to all the foster children at no charge; friends have lovingly embraced the children over the years. And both are so humbled by their roles as foster parents. "It's been far more rewarding than I ever thought it would be," DeWeese said. "And it's had more of a far-reaching influence than I ever thought it would - on us, our children and our community."

## Musings from a Lamorin-Dad 'Time is Fleeting'

By Paul Greenstone

Before I had kids, friends who had children told me time flies once you have them. I'd nod, smile and think: "Sure. Whatever." But next week my son will turn 7, and you know what I'm thinking? "Time sure has flown."

Twelve years ago, I was living in Los Angeles where I managed actors, writers and directors, and produced some films. Life was good but far from great - until I was set up on a blind date with an attorney in San Francisco. Life got great and in 2006, Naomi and I got married and San Francisco became my home.

When we had our son, David, Naomi and I decided I'd be a stay-at-home dad, which was both exciting and incredibly scary. I shut down my company and we moved to the East Bay. (Everyone moves out of SF when they have a kid, right?)

Naomi joined a mom's group, I became a playgroup leader, I took David to music and Gym-boree classes, book readings at the library. I'd get looks of: "Oh, the daddy's spending some quality time with his child," and too many (seven!) comments about how cute my grandson was. Harumph?!

It was few and far between when I'd meet another stay-at-home-dad. But on the "plus" side, thanks to my new mommy friends, I knew more about breastfeeding, nap schedules and parenting techniques than most of my guy friends.

In 2013, for various reasons, we decided to move and found our

"forever home" in Orinda. Naomi joined Lamorinda Moms and subset groups like, get this, Moms Who Are Lawyers and Moms Who Are Employment Lawyers. Amazing! I met a number of other stay-at-home-dads, continued as a playgroup leader and took David to swim classes. (Swimming's a big freakin' deal in Lamorinda!)

And David is now a first-grader at Glorietta Elementary School where he enjoys the daily meditation and/or yoga sessions after recess. (What?!)

When I think about what David is doing now, downward dog deep breathing aside, and what we get to experience with him in the future, the tick of the clock doesn't seem to matter as much anymore.



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# Is this too young to go to Cal?

Actually, it's just the right age to get an eye exam at the University of California Eye Center. And again at three years. And regularly after that. (We developed ways to test kids' eyes while they play!) We're part of the UC School of Optometry, and offer you LASIK surgery, contact lenses, and an Eyewear Center with a vast collection of designer frames, too. We take most insurance plans, and major credit cards. It's time for your whole family to go Cal!

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