

54 Kids and Counting

Two amazing Moraga 'angels' fostering babies

By Diane Claytor



Foster Moms Kristin Koelzer, left, and Nancy DeWeese look at a recent picture of former foster child and newest member of the Koelzer family, Isaac. Photo Diane Claytor

For 26 years, Moragans Nancy and Gary DeWeese have had a hand in lovingly raising 34 kids. And that's not even counting their four biological children, all now adults. On the other side of town, Kristin and Tim Koelzer have, over the past 12 years, warmly and caringly welcomed 20-plus children who temporarily lived with them in their beautiful Sanders Ranch home. And that's in addition to their daughter, now a college senior, and twins, who will graduate from high school this year.

The DeWeese and Koelzer families can easily be called angels. They are foster families, unselfishly taking in, nurturing, caring for and loving babies who, through no fault of their own, are unable to safely live with their biological families. In 2014, Contra Costa County alone had close to 1,200 children in the foster care system.

Nancy DeWeese proudly states that she has always been a baby person. "I wanted 6 or 7 kids," she proclaimed. But once they had four healthy, happy kids, "My husband said that's enough. And he was right," she acknowledged. "Teenagers are more challenging for me. I'm not good at the discipline part. But I'm really good at getting up at 2 a.m., feeding a

baby, getting him back to sleep." A neo-natal nurse at Children's Hospital Oakland, DeWeese was working in the intensive care nursery, taking care of very sick babies who were often there for months. Knowing many did not have strong families to go home to, DeWeese said she would worry about them long after they were gone. "I kept thinking, here I've done all this work to get them better and I'd love to be involved in their development, see them grow." So she went home and convinced her

family that they should foster children. "Our youngest child was in first grade. All four were happy, healthy, doing well in school and a joy to raise. We had the resources to help others. It was something I was so passionate about," DeWeese reported. "I really wanted more children in the house. I love what having a baby in the home does for a family."

Luckily, the rest of the DeWeese family agreed, with one caveat. "We would take babies in, care for them and do whatever was needed for as long as it was needed, but we would not adopt," DeWeese explained.

For the next 26 years, that's exactly what they did - 34 times. Most of their babies lived with them for up to a year - some less, some more. Most were picked up directly from the hospital. "Our home was their first home," DeWeese noted. The majority had been exposed to drugs and/or alcohol and many of their birth mothers had received no pre-natal care.

The goal of the foster care system is to reunite children with their biological family. Sometimes this is not possible; in those cases, the hope is that a family will come forward to adopt the children, providing them with a loving home in which to grow and flourish.

DeWeese sounds like every proud parent when she talks of her 'kids.' Her eyes light up as she tells story after story.

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Five-year-old twins Matt and Maddie Koelzer hold Calvin, the first Koelzer foster placement, in 2003. Photo provided

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