

# Camarillo Acorn

## All in the family: Loving couple foster 36 children

### Liz and Erik Thiele began taking in kids in 2010

By Caitlin Trude

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**ALL FOR ONE**—From left, son-in-law Justin Ellis, daughter Sarah Ellis, daughter Emily Thiele, adopted children Zoe and Ella, Liz Thiele, adopted daughter Justyce, son Tate Thiele, adopted son Elijah, and Erik Thiele are camera-ready on the day Liz and Erik Thiele formally adopted Zoe, Justyce and Elijah. Courtesy of the Thiele family Moorpark mom Liz Thiele said her love story began unexpectedly while she'd been fitting a young girl for a pair of glasses 25 years ago.

“She said, ‘I’m going to the zoo,’ and I said to her, ‘Oh, are you going with your parents?’” said Thiele, now 50. “She just looked at me and says, ‘I don’t have a mom or a dad.’”

Thiele, an optician at the time, realized it was the girl’s foster parent who had brought her in for the eye appointment.

“At that time, I was young. I didn’t have any clue about foster care,” she said.

Little did she know that 25 years later she and her husband, Erik, would become foster parents to 36 children throughout Ventura County.

They didn’t actually start fostering until 2010, because, Liz Thiele said, she wanted to be sure it was the right decision for her family. The couple has three biological children: Sarah, 26; Tate, 23; and Emily, 18.

“It takes a long time for people to get to the place where they’re ready,” Thiele said. “When my children were ready and when my husband and I were ready, that’s when we started. It’s been the greatest journey of our life.”

Of the 36 kids the couple has fostered, three were teens, four were toddlers and 29 were infants.

Initially, the Thieles took in newborns, many of whom were dealing with serious health issues.

They’ve taken care of children as briefly as three days and as long as one year.

“There has not been a time in these seven years that we haven’t had a foster child in our home except for one or two months,” Thiele said.

Right now, they are caring for two foster children, a 17-year-old girl and a 4-year-old boy.

The biggest challenge, she said, has been parting with a foster child once they find a permanent home with relatives or an adoptive family.

“I keep in touch with as many of the kiddos as I can, and their families,” Thiele said. “The saying goodbye part (is hard) when the kids leave and you’ve had them since they were newborn. You poured so much into that child . . . it breaks your heart every time.”

### **Forever home**

Although Thiele never planned on adopting children, her family’s become a permanent home to four of the kids she’s fostered: Zoe, 7; Ella, 5; and Justyce and Elijah, both 2.

Ella was 2 days old when she was placed in the Thieles’ home for foster care.

“We had her for about six months when (we were asked) if we could love her forever, and we couldn’t say goodbye to her,” Thiele said. “That started it all. The bond (was) so incredible that we didn’t feel it was right to move her to another home.”

The couple also adopted Justyce, who came to the Thieles at 10 days old, as well as Ella’s biological brother, Elijah, who was put into foster care at just one day old. They were both officially adopted when they were 18 months old.

“I was never going to say no to her biological brother,” Thiele said.

And the family adopted Zoe when she was 4 years old. She’d arrived at their home at age 3.

Zoe has been diagnosed with cri du chat syndrome, a rare genetic disorder caused by a missing piece of genetic material on chromosome 5.

“That was the hardest decision because she’s going to need lifelong care,” Thiele said. “But there was no other option for her, so we said yes to her as well.”

Looking back, she has no regrets.

“We had never intended on adopting any of them, but it’s just what happened on our journey.”

### **Foster VC Kids**

In hopes of encouraging other families to consider foster care, the full-time mom educates parents in the county on the ins and outs of the process.

She is a peer partner educator with Channel Island Social Services, a program funded through the Ventura County Community College District. The program works in conjunction with Foster VC Kids, the county's foster parent resource center.

"Fostering is a beautiful journey and it also has a lot of sorrow in that journey," Thiele said. "We can be an ear (to foster parents), give them a hug, give them encouragement.

It takes a village, and we're a part of that village."

She said her experiences have inspired several families from her church and community to become foster parents.

"(Sometimes) people don't want to be foster parents because they don't want to give a child back or work with the biological parents," Thiele said. "But the rewards and blessings outweigh the other stuff. (We) see the result of loving these children well, whether we love them well and they stay with us forever, or we love them well and watch them go home."

In some cases, she's witnessed happy endings for foster children who were reunited with their biological parents who overcame personal struggles.

"I've been able to mentor young moms that are struggling with addiction," Thiele said. "The biggest blessing (has been) to see their lives change."

Her message to families considering foster kids? Just go for it.

"If you have love in your heart, if you have the desire to help others and help children, foster care is a love story," she said. "It's about loving these children, it's about loving these families and creating environments for success. It's doable. We can do it together."

For more information about Foster VC Kids, visit [http:// fostervckids.org](http://fostervckids.org).

[http://www.thecamarilloacorn.com/news/2017-05-26/Family/All in the family Loving couple foster 36 children.html](http://www.thecamarilloacorn.com/news/2017-05-26/Family/All_in_the_family_Loving_couple_foster_36_children.html)