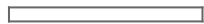


Couple offers hard-to-place children a family where everyone fits right in

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Robert
and
Sheila
Lee play
with
Jazmine,
7, Nico, 6,
and Kylie,
2, in their
front
lawn. The
adoption
was
expected
to be
completed
Nov.
16—the
day
before
National
Adoption
Day.

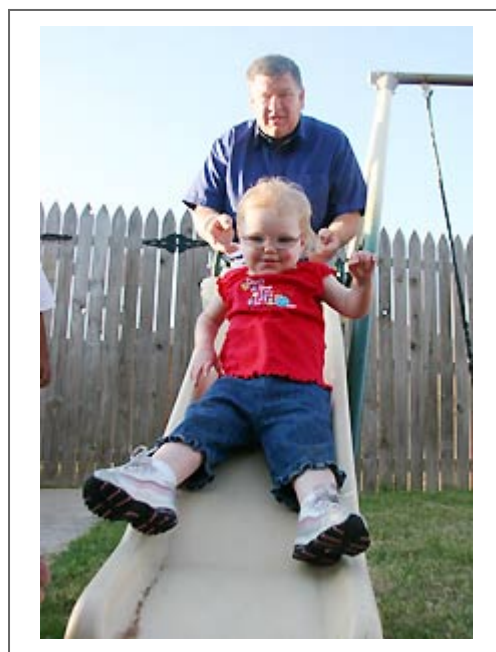
Couple offers hard-to-place children a family where everyone fits right in

By Analiz González

Buckner International

LUBBOCK—Robert and Sheila Lee waited until their four children reached their teens and 20s before starting over with a younger batch—Jazmine, 7, Nico, 6, and Kylie, 2.

The couple brought the three foster children home in March and April of 2005. The plan was to foster them through Buckner, then let them move on.



But the Lees were hooked. A year and a half after the new three landed in their home, the Lees began the adoption process.

“We had no idea we’d get as attached to them as we did,” Mrs. Lee said, looking at Jazmine who hung over her shoulder. “They fit so well with our kids. They’re part of us now.”

The Lees, now in their 40s, said they struggled back and forth before deciding to adopt because they didn’t want to cheat the children out of having younger parents. But Kylie has shaken-baby syndrome and Jazmine and Nico are Hispanic. They knew special-needs children and non-Anglos are harder to place in adoptive homes.

The Lees didn’t want their babies in foster care forever. So, they began the

adoption process.

Mrs. Lee was amazed at how the new children fit in with each other and their existing family. Jazmine and Nico had an older sister with medical problems, so the seizures suffered by Kylie didn't scare them.

The Lees' biological children long had done volunteer work and participated in mission trips, so they were ready to serve.

And if it hadn't been for the Lees' medical background, they never would have been able to care for Kylie, who used to have up to 30 seizures a day. Lee is a lab and x-ray technician, and his wife is a licensed vocational nurse.

"Everyone just fit," Lee said.

Still, the family had to make several adjustments to accommodate the new children.

There are Legos and dolls in the living room and a playground in the backyard. And Mrs. Lee has to drive Kylie to Dallas every couple of months so she can see a doctor. Kylie has had about 30 doctor's appointments and four hospital admissions since she's been under the Lees' care.



The Lees expected the adoption process to be complete in mid-November. Weeks before, Jazmine was already making plans.

“When I get adopted, me and Amy (the Lee’s 17-year-old daughter) are going to the mall,” she said. “And when Kylie grows up, we’re all going to go to Hawaii.”

Kylie also attends physical therapy twice a week, and the Lees get help from a nurse who visits their home during the week.

Lee even quit his job for one year so that he could stay home and care for Kylie, whom doctors said would never walk or talk. Now, she does both, and he insists the sacrifice was worth the reward.

“She’s our miracle baby,” Mrs. Lee said. “We just didn’t accept the diagnosis that she wouldn’t get better. She’ll look at me now and say, ‘I love you Mama.’ For a child who’s not supposed to talk, it’s just amazing.”

And the Lees don’t mind having a full house.

“A lot of people don’t understand that it’s a calling God has put on our lives,” Mrs. Lee said. “Six kids at home and one away is the norm for us now.”

But she added that bringing in more children has had its challenges, like juggling Kylie’s medical condition with work and raising teens and young children at the same time.

Jazmine has grown a lot since she first came to live with them, Mrs. Lee said, remembering how scared she was when she first came in.

“One night she was sitting on my lap and we were talking about Jesus. Jazmine said, ‘Who is Jesus?’ and I said Jesus is the one in your heart. Then Jazmine said with teary eyes, ‘I don’t feel anything in my heart.’

“Since then, Jazmine has grown close to God,” Mrs. Lee said. “She spends time praying and looking forward to church. She says she wants to be a foster parent one day.”

Although Kylie, Nico and Jazmine found a loving home with the Lee family, many children still are displaced.

“There are kids sleeping in CPS offices because there aren’t enough homes for them,” said Anna Rodriguez, program manager for Buckner in Midland. “They are our responsibility.”

For information on becoming a foster parent, visit www.buckner.org.

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