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Are You Ready?

A few years ago I was caring for a baby who was going to be adopted. I had him in my arms and was standing outside my church after services when Grace, a woman I knew, came up to me. She was spry and cheerful at the age of 82 and she looked at the child with shining eyes.

“Babies are so wonderful,” she said. She was quiet for a time. “I wish I had known you when I was younger. I would have asked you to find a baby for me to adopt.” It turned out she and her husband were unable to have children of their own.

Grace was a loving person who was always around children, so I had assumed she was a mother. But on that Sunday morning, I learned she had lived her whole life without the joy of sharing her love with a son or daughter.

It was so sad watching Grace look in wonder at the baby, while she seemed to reflect back on her life with regret; it brought tears to my eyes. She had never adopted because she was afraid to.

“We didn’t know what to do or where to begin,” she said. “So we never did have a baby.” If only someone long ago had helped her get started on the road to adoption, she would have had her little one.

If, like Grace, you are unable to have a biological child or have always wanted to adopt and with all your heart you want to love, nurture and

bring up a child, then you should set out to find yours. Fifty-five years ago there was a child out there who was meant for Grace and today there is a child waiting, or yet to be born, who is meant for you.

The New Era of Adoption

As a facilitator of private adoptions, I have devoted 17 years of my life to bringing together prospective parents seeking a child to adopt with birth parents or guardians needing to place one. Within the past several years, I have seen the advent of the Internet and the World Wide Web transform the world of adoption.

Computers and e-mail reduce from weeks to hours the time required to prepare and transfer documents. Prospective parents go online to read the stories of waiting children and to view their photographs. Birth parents seeking a home for their child go to dozens of websites to see profiles of parents wanting to adopt.

Day and night the Internet hums with the activity of thousands of people engaged in adopting. They meet online to ask questions, discuss issues and share their hopes and fears. They network with adoption professionals such as attorneys, facilitators and social workers.

The Internet will not replace face-to-face meetings between birth mothers and adoptive parents, appointments with lawyers to sign papers, or travel to pick up your adopted child and bring him home. Nor will it replace the adoption professional at a "brick and mortar" facility who screens birth mothers, alerts you to potential fraud, prepares you for the social worker visit to your home and is with you in a moment of crisis.

But the Internet is a marvelous tool that will help you in ways you can hardly imagine. This book contains the resources and proven techniques to make the best use of this tool, to optimize your skills to realize a safe, timely and successful adoption.

MARDIE'S STORY

Answered Prayers

As the oldest of five children, I had one sister and three brothers in my family. I loved and helped care for them starting when I was quite young. Mothering seemed to come naturally to me and by the age of eleven, I knew that when I grew up, more than anything else, I wanted to be a mother. I collected clothes and quilted a baby blanket that I kept in a hope chest for the child I would have one day.

I fell in love with a man who also wanted to have children. Bill especially wanted to have a son he could teach to fish, ride a bicycle and play baseball. From the first days after our wedding, we set out to have a family.

The months went by, then two years passed, but no baby came. Couples all around us seemed to get pregnant without even trying. I must have gone to a dozen baby showers during those early years of our marriage. I laughed with my friends as the expectant mothers opened their gifts, but I was crying inside.

We decided to go see specialists and we discovered that we both had fertility problems. I remember the months starting in the spring of 1985 as a blur of tests and fertility drugs, another ovulation on the temperature chart, more poking and prodding, the start of one more menstrual cycle.

I came to dread holiday gatherings because of the humiliating questions. Getting dressed before one New Year's Eve party, Bill and I took bets on how many insults we'd hear that night. He said ten and that was

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about right. The topper was when my Grandpa asked at the dinner table, “Haven’t you figured out how to *do* it yet?”

“We lost that page of the manual,” I said with a smile, though his words had pierced me to the bone.

Some friends I had confided in offered remedies they said had worked for people they knew. We were supposed to eat fish twice a day, make love on the night of a full moon and I was to lie on a propped up board that stood me on my head.

I started to avoid those friends and even my business associates, fearing that someone would ask when we were going to have children or if I was pregnant yet. Bill and I continued to see a specialist who was growing less hopeful. As the months passed, life did not seem so bright.

As the owner of a medium-sized manufacturing company, I had come to believe that if you wanted something bad enough, worked hard and smart enough, you could have it. But that didn’t seem to help with pregnancy. As the CEO, I came to expect that, when I needed something, I could pick up the phone and have it delivered. But I could not order a baby.

In my spiritual life, I came to wonder, since I was sure that God wanted us to have children, why He had not blessed us with a family. Was I doing something wrong? I prayed for an answer and prayed for a baby.

An avid reader, I bought books on infertility and human reproduction, on infant care and early childhood development. I hoped that somehow a baby might pop up out of a book as a result of all my study.

I went to the library almost every day (there was no Internet yet) and the librarian became my friend. One morning she gave me a book on adoption. I took it over to a table and set it down. I sat in the chair and

looked at its cover, but I could not bring myself to open it. I pushed it away and got on with my research into getting pregnant.

When I left the library, I set the adoption book next to me in the passenger seat of my car and took it home. Finally that night, I opened it and started to read. It was scary, because it was about 15 years out of date and written about the old ways of adopting, which seemed cold, secretive and formal. Then I read another book about modern adoption, which seemed warm, honest and comfortable.

After some really bad news from our doctor, Bill and I lay in bed one night talking. I saw that the door to adoption was opening, just as the door to making our own baby seemed to be closing shut.

Within days we decided to adopt. Right away it seemed like there was light shining into our lives again. We were excited about our future with children. Adoption was the answer to my question and to my prayers. ☺☺

Infertility

One out of every six couples in America is unable to conceive a child after trying for a year. Some will go on to have a biological child, others will not. And each year some 60,000 couples, from all walks of life, will adopt because they share a belief that their lives will not be complete without a child.

In 40 percent of couples who can't have babies, the quality of the husband's sperm is the cause. Some women have had surgery to remove reproductive organs; others have trouble carrying a baby to term. And since fertility declines with age and so many women are pursuing careers, trouble conceiving is common among those who wait to start families.

Some infertile couples will try to become pregnant by utilizing home tests to detect ovulation, by taking fertility drugs, or by going to a clinic where the husband's sperm is injected into his wife's cervix. Others will pursue more advanced treatments that use high technology to combine sperm and eggs.

The most proven method is in vitro fertilization (IVF) where eggs are drawn from the ovaries and fertilized in a lab dish with concentrated sperm. Grown for three days into tiny embryos, several are placed in the uterus. If attempted for five cycles, this will make a baby in three out of nine patients. The cost? About \$15,000 per cycle.

Driven by a seemingly desperate need, some patients have spent over \$150,000 on the procedure. And with the financial toll comes an emotional one as well. When embryos fail to implant or when one finally does but then, eight weeks later, an ultrasound shows that the fetus has died, it can be utterly devastating. After one such tragic IVF procedure, one woman shared in an online chat room that it was like the death of a child. "We cried and mourned the loss and I don't know if I'm over it yet. Since we couldn't afford to try again, we had to find a new dream."

Resolving Fertility Issues

Sometimes I see people rush into adoption without taking the time to grieve the loss of the biological child they did not have. They risk sabotaging an adoption or, worse, treating an adopted child as second-best to the son or daughter they might have had.

Before you can adopt with success, you must come to terms with your infertility. For some couples this may take years. Move at your own pace but realize that you are not getting any younger and the longer you wait, the more you delay the precious time you could have with your child.

For me, coming to terms with infertility meant accepting that there was a reason for everything. I don't know why I was unable to have babies, but were it not for my infertility, I would not have adopted my wonderful son. I would not have opened an adoption center which has brought hundreds of children and parents together, changing their lives.

I have known many couples who have faced infertility and moved on quite naturally to adoption. I have known others who have edged toward it uneasily, because their dream of having a biological child meant so much to them.

Before you are ready to adopt, you have to know the answer to this question: Do you want to be a parent or do you want to have a biological child?

Without resolving this issue, you run the risk that you will back out and break the heart of a birth mother. You may *settle* for adoption, but this you cannot do, because the child deserves to have parents who love and cherish him as the most precious thing on earth.

We recommend at our center that if you have unresolved issues about infertility you should seek counseling before you adopt. You may choose to put adoption aside and press on with treatment until you have exhausted all medical options. Then, when you return to take up adoption, you may find, as many people do, that the adoption process is less stressful than conceiving through medical technology.

If you are not sure that you can accept a child who will not inherit your genes, it may help you to talk with other adoptive parents or a counselor. We are still amazed by the traits and characteristics that parents pass on to their adopted children. Will science ever explain what we have seen? Like the adopted daughter whose hair and skin color change so she looks just like her mother. Or the son who has the same walk as his adoptive father, the same crinkling of his eyes when he laughs.

Families created through adoption are true families. After adoption you are a parent and your child will depend on you for his needs, both physical and emotional. All the joys and heartaches any parent experiences will be yours. You will be Mom and Dad.

MARDIE'S STORY

A Mother's Nose

Russ and Julie Connor were in their mid-forties and looked much older than the first time I saw them, two years before, when they first came to our center to inquire about adopting.

Now they were ready, Russ told me, after spending \$60,000 on infertility treatments, trying but failing to conceive. The greatest cost, it occurred to me, was to their relationship. They had seemed so loving before and now they seemed edgy with each other.

Within months we located a beautiful birth mother named Sarah who chose them to adopt her unborn child. The Connors met with her several times and they really got along. Sarah thought they were just perfect for her baby.

Late one afternoon, as I was setting my desk straight and preparing to go home, Julie showed up. She seemed anxious. There was something she wanted to say.

We talked for a little while about how healthy Sarah looked and how happy she was. "She's a great person," said Julie. "Very engaging and all."

"I knew you'd like each other."

"Yes," she hesitated. "But we're declining her offer."

This is a decision that adoptive parents, once matched and after bonding with a birth mother, cannot take lightly. A birth mother is having a tough enough time. She finds the parents she wants and is so relieved, then comes this, like a bolt from the blue.

I asked Julie to explain, but she was evasive.

“Come on,” I said at last. “What’s really going on here?”

“Well,” she answered. “It’s her nose.”

“Her nose?”

“That’s right,” she said. “We don’t like Sarah’s nose.”

I was incredulous. I’d seen her nose. She had a cute little nose. I didn’t know what to say.

Julie sat down in a chair. “Seeing Sarah pregnant like that, I don’t know, it stirred up some feelings. I always wanted to be pregnant. Russ and I always wanted to have our own baby.”

She looked away and choked back tears. “I want to be pregnant, Mardie. We’re going back to Dr. Lewis and try again.”

I went straight to Sarah’s house. She cried when I told her. She loved the Connors and they had broken her heart.

From home I called the wife of another couple. They had three sons and wanted to adopt a daughter. After a miscarriage, she had become pregnant again, only to carry the baby for eight months before it died. She had known for a week that she’d have to deliver a still born girl.

I knew for certain that this couple had resolved their fertility issues. When I told the new adoptive mother about Sarah and her baby, who we knew was a girl, she was thrilled.

It took time for Sarah to get over the Connors but she did. In the hospital, just before going into labor, she said, “This new family we found was just made in heaven.” ☹

Infertility Treatment While Adopting

Many agencies will accept prospective adoptive parents into their programs while they are trying to get pregnant through infertility treatments, though some will ask that you discontinue it. In independent adoptions, those generally handled by attorneys and facilitators, you can usually pursue medical treatment while you are adopting.

At our center, we provide prospective parents with the opportunity to “freeze” their contract for up to nine months in case of emergency or for personal reasons in some cases. This means, for example, that they can change their minds about adopting and return to infertility treatments. Then, they can come back to adopt without additional charges. Some couples have frozen contracts because they became pregnant. After having the baby, they have gone on to adopt a sibling for their biological child.

If you wish to start an adoption plan and still try to have a baby through medical treatment, find an adoption professional who will allow you to put your contract on hold if you conceive.

Fear of Adopting

If you have tried to adopt before and something went wrong, remember that it was not an indication that something was wrong with you, with the birth mother or with your adoption professional. Adoption is a complex process fraught with emotion. Sometimes circumstances spin out of control.

Learn what you can from your experience and keep looking for the child who is uniquely yours. If you stop your search because of a setback, you may miss out forever on the joy and love of your child. The bottom line is: Never give up.

I have had a few birth mothers who, during the pregnancy or after the birth, have decided not to place a child. But the prospective parents did not give up and it didn't take long for me to match them with another birth mother.

At my urging they tried not to project their fears of what happened before onto the next adoption. But some couldn't help themselves. If they didn't hear from the birth mother after a week or so, they'd say, "Oh my God, she's changed her mind."

In a few cases it became a self-fulfilling prophecy. One adoptive mother, Barbara, was so afraid that her birth mother Christie would disappear that she moved her into an apartment near her house and came to check on her at least once a day.

Christie e-mailed me. "This chick is too weird," she said. "I'm outta here."

If you have had a bad experience, which you haven't resolved, you should discuss this with your adoption professional until you realize that this particular case of failed adoption is isolated and you can move on to the next one with confidence.

In Barbara's case, I was able to explain that after screening and counseling her new birth mother, we were certain from years of experience that any risk of a reclaim was minimal. Barbara's fears diminished, she relaxed and the adoption was successful.

Love Is the Reason

Some parents who have already raised children still have an abundance of love and energy to give. Conception is possible, though not likely, and it could be risky to the mother or the child, so they choose to adopt.

Some people adopt because they wish to give homes to children with special needs. Whatever the apparent reason people choose to adopt,

underlying it is a deep, heartfelt wish to be parents, to share their home, their family and their lives with children.

How to Succeed

- **Learn all you can from books and the Internet about adoption and parenting. You may never again do something so important.**
- **Write out a clear and logical adoption plan: Decide which type of adoption is best. Review and revise your plan as you pursue your goal of adopting a child.**
- **Don't become obsessed: Shut down your Internet computer at a reasonable hour. Get your rest, eat well and take time to appreciate your life.**
- **Be realistic and honest when you evaluate your finances and work out your adoption budget.**
- **Be diligent in taking care of each job your adoption professional asks you to do.**
- **Be calm each time you face another stack of paperwork.**
- **Assess your emotional readiness, and that of your family, to adopt.**
- **This can be a stressful time for your children. They need their mom and dad. Tuck them in at night; tell them how much you love them.**
- **Be patient, remembering that it takes nine months to have a baby the old-fashioned way and your adoptive child may not even be conceived for months.**

- Be prepared for the process to take several years if your specific requirements for a child limit the number who will become available to you.
- Get involved, online and in real life, with other adopting families for emotional support, to enhance your parenting skills and the quality of your adoption experience.
- Use the Internet to network with people who can help you in a big way.
- To relieve stress, visualize holding your child in your arms, knowing that when you actually do, your fears and anxiety will drift away.
- Know that adopting is like being pregnant. A wife may experience hormonal changes and both partners may experience fears and sleepless nights.
- Lean on each other and share the vision of your child out there. Your love will grow as you work together to realize your dream.
- Pray.
- You wouldn't stop searching for a child lost in the forest, so do not give up on finding your adopted child. ☺☺

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