

Embryo Adoption- A Unique Option Ellen and Tim

Like many couples, from the start of our marriage we shared the dream of having children. Tim frequently joked that he wanted 2.5 kids (the national average). My younger brother had been adopted from Russia so adoption was always part of our discussion for building a family as well. What we didn't know was how a unique type of adoption would play a role in our lives.

After several months of attempting to have children on our own with no success, I went to see an OBGYN who told me everything looked in order and she expected to see me back in her office "pregnant in no time at all!" Unfortunately, that was not the case, just as it isn't for many other couples who struggle with infertility.

After a year had passed and we still longed to start a family, I confided in a co-worker about our struggles to conceive and the desire to adopt. She told me about a couple she knew who had *adopted embryos and given birth to their adopted child*. I was immediately intrigued, went straight home after work and started researching!

There are currently more than 1 million human embryos in frozen storage in the United States. The majority of those embryos are said to be held for use by the couples who have created them. According to the CDC, each year the use of in vitro fertilization (IVF) increases at a rate of 4 percent to 6 percent, which also increases the number of frozen embryos. If the embryos are not placed with a recipient family for reproduction they either continue to be stored, or are thawed and discarded, abandoned or donated to science.

Many people who choose embryo adoption have already attempted to get pregnant via IVF. At that point, their doctor might advise them to purchase human eggs and/or sperm. If they don't want to pursue this option, they might be open to using embryos that have already been created, rather than making a purchase to create even more.

We were blown away! What an amazing thing to be able to adopt children as embryos and to carry them in pregnancy! We spent several months thinking and praying about how to proceed. I talked with women who had gone through embryo adoption. I listened to video blogs, researched agencies, talked with agencies, and read the book *Souls on Ice*.

In the midst of all of this, we learned that our inability to conceive was possibly due to Polycystic Ovarian Syndrome (PCOS). The Reproductive Endocrinologist told us about intrauterine insemination (IUI), but we decided embryo adoption was the right choice for us.

We considered three different embryo adoption agencies. Each one had great things about them, but we chose Snowflakes Embryo Adoption Program. We felt comfortable with the people we talked to and we were able to get answers to most of our questions upfront. Actually, our confidence in the program grew with each and every interaction.

The Snowflakes program has grown at a rate of 20 percent or more over the past 7 years. More than 2,000 families have donated their embryos through Snowflakes and over 1,600 adopting families have

applied to the program. New providers of donated embryos enter the marketplace annually. And Texas has a greater number of embryo adoptions than that of other states.

When families are particularly interested in adopting an infant, embryo adoption is the least expensive and quickest. Domestic infant adoption in the U.S. has been shrinking rapidly over the past several years because infants are not being placed for adoption. Birth mothers are either aborting or choosing to parent instead. International and foster adoption are other choices but can be difficult if a family wants to adopt an infant specifically.

In April 2017, Tim and I submitted our adoption application to Snowflakes. Their home study was completed in about three months. Then it was time to enter the matching phase of the program. Incredibly, we were matched with a donor family in 10 days. We still felt that we needed some time to pause, think, and pray. Two days later, we gratefully accepted the donor family's invitation to match!

Next came the adoption and communication agreements. Once the contracts were returned, signed, and notarized by both families, it was time to ship the embryos to our fertility clinic. Our 'embabies' arrived at our clinic in December 2017. In early 2018 we had our first frozen embryo transfer, but it was not successful. It was heartbreaking.

After taking a doctor recommended break and spending some time healing, we decided to move forward with a second transfer of the two remaining embryos that were part of the original adoption in June 2018. It was then that we finally had success! It was amazing to feel our baby kick and watch my belly grow. We could not wait for the day we could hold him in our arms and tell him how much God loves him.

The dreams we had of building a family at the start of our marriage finally came true. Not in the way either of us expected, but even more than we could have imagined! Now we have a beautiful toddler named Ryan, who was born March 2019.

In December of 2020, God saw fit to bless us with a biological baby boy. It thrills me to think how it was not that we ultimately could not have a biological child, it was that Ryan was so obviously supposed to be part of our family, and that his life is such an incredible blessing to us and everyone around him.

We are grateful for Nightlight's Snowflakes program, and how God used them to bring us Ryan. We are grateful for the donor family who entrusted us with such a gift.

I recently recounted to Ryan again his unique journey to us, and his response was "I came home!" How right he was.