

04/05/09 - Fearing a Failed Adoption



One of the great fears when one enters adoption, especially domestic adoption, is that they will have an adoption fall through. The picture that comes to most people's minds is something from a cheesy Lifetime movie where the child's Birthmother comes back a year later to reclaim the child from the adoptive parents. If that was a common possibility I don't think most anyone would ever adopt. I've read some adoption experts say that you have better odds of being hit by a bus than a Birthmother coming back to reclaim the child after their parental rights have been relinquished.

The sad stories which are more common in domestic adoption are not the ones movies are made out of. They are the ones where the potential Birthparents decide to parent before the child has been born and sometimes immediately afterwards. The statistics I found for these failed adoptions at most domestic agencies was around 20%.

A lot of people would say, "Well, 20% is a pretty darn huge percentage. That sounds too risky." 20% is also what the risk for miscarriage is in a healthy woman between 20 and 30 years of age. Most couples pursuing domestic adoption previously tried to conceive on their own with or without infertility treatment. A lot of people who pursue domestic adoption are married. They chose to get married when the odds of them getting a divorce was 50%. But did these percentages of

failure stop the couple from trying to get pregnant or getting married? No. They knew what they wanted and went for it despite the risk. That is what couples who pursue adoption choose to do.

Fears of an Adoption Failing

My husband, Paul, and I knew the risks of an adoption failing when we selected domestic adoption. It scared us. We were coming off of three years of infertility treatments where we felt like failures month after month. Our infertility journey ended in the worse of all failures ? a miscarriage. To have a glimmer of happiness and hope brought into your life only to have it ripped away is a terrible thing for any couple to suffer through. It was a very dark time coming to terms that we?d lost our baby. But Paul and I came away from it a stronger couple and knew we could make it through the adoption process.

As for openness in the adoption, we knew that we could hold back our emotions with potential Birthparents out of fear and possibly miss moments of our baby?s pregnancy and birth. Or we could leap right in and emotionally expose ourselves knowing that this baby may not become ours. We chose to jump right in as we didn?t want to have any regrets about the adoption experience with our child. It was a tough decision but one we had to agree on.

For our first adoption, everything was textbook perfect. The Birthparents seemed to read our initial fear and on our very first phone call they joked that they ?would never come rapping at our windows years down the road demanding for their child back.? At times I did hold back some of my emotions out of disbelief that things were finally going right in my life. I was so used to being in the ?fight? stage of the fight-or-flight response during my infertility years that it was difficult to let my guard down. But in the end everything worked out wonderfully and we adopted my first Son, K, only three months after we turned in our adoption profile.

A Match

When Paul and I pursued domestic adoption for our second child it took nine months before our profile was selected. The situation was very similar to our previous adoption. The potential Birthparents were in the picture and wanted contact with us. There was still two more months left in the pregnancy for us to get to know the potential Birthparents even better. I talked to the potential Birthmother directly on the phone at least once a week for those two months. We discussed our childhoods, our current children, and what we planned for the future. Over the course of those discussions I got a feeling that the relationship between the potential Birthparents was rocky. Without them telling me directly, I eventually figured out this was the main reason they chose adoption for their baby.

About a month before the birth Paul, K and I flew down to the potential Birthparents' home state and spent a weekend with them. In my mind I tried to tell myself it was really a mini-vacation and we just happened to be visiting my possible child's Birthparents. It was my way of emotionally protecting me in case the trip ended badly. K was only two years old and oblivious to the purpose of our trip which was a blessing in disguise looking back on the situation.

Our weekend was lovely as we spent hours and meals with the potential Birthparents discussing everything under the sun. By the end of the weekend, all of my possible fears of things not working out were laid to rest. I was sure it was all going to happen. I knew I was going to be back with these Birthparents in a month to get a new Son. Once we flew back home I was eager to wash all the newborn clothes, clean up the future nursery and other "nesting" tasks to prepare for our new baby. I happily told everyone that I was expecting a new Son soon.

I continued to talk to the potential Birthmother every couple days to see how she was feeling as it was approaching her due date. I would jump whenever my cell phone rang. I knew that when she was going into labor I'd have to rush home, pack and get ourselves on a plane as fast as possible. I didn't want to miss any time with my child.

The Phone Call That Changed It All

I was out with friends on a playdate at a local museum when I received a phone call from the potential Birthmother. My heart was racing as I asked, "Are you in labor?" She started crying and said, "Yes. But I need to tell you something." She continued to say that she and the Birthfather had worked out their differences and decided to raise this baby together. I was numb and could only say, "OK?". Through her tears she kept repeating that her decision had absolutely nothing to do with me. She said she adored me and knew I'd get the baby I deserved soon. I told her very calmly, "Thank you for telling me about this decision now. I am sure you will love your baby with all of your heart. I pray that you have an easy delivery, that he is healthy and that you will all be very happy." I stoically said good-bye and she said "I am so sorry. Good bye." while crying as she hung up. It was all over in about 60 seconds.

When I hung up my legs gave out from under me and I collapsed to the floor of the museum. All my emotions came out and my body began heaving from my crying. My friends had no idea what had happened on the phone. All I could spit out was, "She changed her mind. There's no baby." I barely recall them assisting K and I to my car. I called Paul and honestly don't remember what I told him. I don't know how he understood anything as I couldn't stop sobbing. My friends followed my car to make sure I made it home safe. Paul was home by then waiting for me. For the rest of the day we just held each other and K and I cried and cried and cried. It was all we could do.

Mourning Our Loss

Before going through a failed adoption I would have assumed it would have felt just like a miscarriage. In actuality it didn't. Sure, there were similarities of shock, anger and sadness. Yet the reasons for those feelings were not for a death as in a

miscarriage. In a failed adoption there is still a living child in the world and you are grieving that that particular child is not in your home. With a miscarriage you do not know if you will ever get pregnant again. Domestic adoption has a 100% success rate if you stick with it. So even if you have a failed adoption, you know that you will still end up with the child but just not the one you anticipated this time.

I knew there was nothing different I could have done to change the outcome of this failed adoption. I kept looking back for red-flags but could not find any. It was just the way it was meant to be. Logically I knew all of but my heart was aching. Secretly I kept hoping the Birthparents would be overwhelmed with the baby, realize their mistake and call us to come take the baby home. This thought consumed me for at least a month after the phone call with the Birthmother. I knew I had to escape reality in order to clear my mind with what was important in life.

With the money Paul and I saved to use to travel for our adoption we spontaneously travelled to Mexico for a week to be pampered at a five-star all-inclusive resort with K. It was the best cure for us. All of us reconnected and appreciated the family that currently had. During that entire trip, I didn't cry once for the child I thought our family was missing. Once we returned home we were reenergized to move on with life and ready to pursue our second child.

Healing Myself

When I thought about another set of potential Birthparents selecting our adoption profile, my stomach turned and anger rose within me. Immediately I was on guard by assuming that the next potential Birthparents were going to lure me in and then break my heart. I knew that was not true as my K's Birthparents did nothing of the sort. It was then I realized that I was not mourning the loss of the baby anymore, I was mourning the trust that I lost in people.

In general I am a trusting person. You have to work hard to lose my trust. The

failed adoption changed all of that and made me a cynical person. I didn't think that was fair for any potential Birthmother that may select us. They should not be judged on the actions of others that came before them. Every day I took time to try to heal myself. I needed to remember who I was before the failed adoption so I could be the best wife and mother to K and my future child.

Around two months after the failed adoption, the phone rang and I answered it. I have no recollection who it was but I do remember after I hung up I recognized that I wasn't afraid to answer it. We didn't have caller ID at the time so anytime I picked up the phone there was the possibility it was our adoption agency. Due to my recent cynicism I had been afraid to answer the phone to deal with potential Birthmothers. But not anymore. That's when I realized that I was finally healed. Not 100% but enough to move on and be myself once again.

A Happy Ending

Just two weeks later on Valentine's Day, Paul and I received a phone call that a baby girl had been born the day before and we had just been selected to be her parents. We immediately flew to her and had our new Daughter in our arms the next day. It was 13 months from the time we turned in our profile until we adopted her. Those months were some of our hardest times with more challenges than I could ever had imagined adoption would bring us. From the beginning Paul and I knew the risks and accepted them knowing that our marriage was strong enough to weather through anything. I am so glad we accepted those risks in order to get the children we have today.

Do I still think about that baby from that failed adoption? Absolutely. I truly hope that he and his parents are happy. Am I still sad we didn't adopt him? Not at all. Ask any adoptive parent and they will tell you that their child was always meant to be their child. I can look at my beautiful Daughter and know that she was to be in our family. We were to go through that failed adoption to learn about patience, trust, and appreciation of our family. All of those things helped us be better parents for our Daughter once she was born and in our arms.

A failed adoption is never an easy situation whether it is before or after birth. I have friends who even held babies at the hospital, had babies in their homes or travelled across the world to meet a child only to have the adoption fail. All of us were afraid of when we chose adoption that there was a chance we'd have one fail. There are many things in life to fear and it's your choice what to do when faced with them. I, like thousands of others in the adoption community, took a chance, leapt in and am now reaping the benefits of facing my fear. It was worth it all in order to become a parent in the end.

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