

Rebecca and Chris feel so lucky to have three children of their own



I gave away TWO OF MY CHILDREN

Rebecca Henderson is best friends with the woman raising her children. Here's her remarkable story...

Seeing my five children playing happily together always makes me smile. Without doubt, they are my greatest achievement. So, it might surprise you to hear that, while I love them all unconditionally, I gave two of them away, to be raised by another woman.

My journey to motherhood wasn't easy. My husband Chris and I had been trying for a baby for years before the GP recommended IVF.

In February 2006, after my eggs were harvested and fertilised with Chris's sperm, experts at a fertility clinic were able to create 13 embryos – two of which were implanted in my womb. Two weeks

later, after a blood test, the clinic called me. 'You're pregnant!' said the nurse.

I was so happy, but the pregnancy itself was terrifying. I was sure every twinge meant something bad. Even after we learnt we'd be having twins, I refused to buy matching outfits or a double pram. It wasn't until Abigail and Rachele were born, in September 2006, that I let myself fall in love with them.

We adored our girls, and Chris and I decided our family was complete. With the IVF success rate under 30%, I couldn't bear any more heartbreak.

But that left us with a problem. In March 2008, the clinic called, asking what we'd like to do with our remaining

embryos. We had two options – they could be thawed and destroyed, or donated to an anonymous couple. But to Chris and me, these embryos weren't just a cluster of cells; they were our children. The idea of discarding them – or giving them away to strangers – felt cruel.

So, we continued to pay £45 a month to keep them frozen while I did some research. In October 2009, I came across a website for embryo adoption: we could donate our embryos to a couple we'd chosen. This way, we'd know our children would be raised in a loving home, and we could even be kept up to date with their progress. Through the agency we'd be sent a photo once a year, and could send birthday gifts.

Chris agreed it was the perfect solution – and yet something stopped us from signing up. Perhaps we weren't ready to let go of the embryos we'd worked so

hard for. Or maybe it was the idea of another couple raising our children.

Then, in January 2011, I started feeling strange. I dismissed the sickness and cravings, but then I spotted a pregnancy test in the back of the bathroom cupboard. When the result was positive, I was speechless. I couldn't believe we'd conceived naturally.

As my bump grew, I started thinking about embryo adoption again. I loved being a mother, maybe now I could help another woman achieve her dream. So this time we signed up and, two months later, we received information about Kelli and Dan Gassman. As I stared at their photo – so in love, but with part of their family missing – I felt the tears well in my eyes. 'We have to help them,' I told Chris.

While Kelli underwent tests to ensure she could carry a child, I gave birth to our daughter Johanna in September 2011. And, when I held her in my arms, I was even more convinced we'd done the right thing.

Four months later, I got a letter from Kelli and Dan, asking to meet us. They were still going through tests, but wanted to thank us in person for giving them the chance to have a family.

Deciding moment

Reading her words stirred a mixture of emotions within me. Did I really want to meet the woman who could one day be raising my baby? But then I thought of my girls. They deserved to know their siblings.

So, in March 2012, Kelli and Dan travelled the seven hours from their home in Oregon to meet us in Virginia. I was nervous, but within seconds my concerns melted away. When Kelli spoke of her struggles to conceive, I shared her pain, and when she talked about how she wanted to raise her children – to be compassionate and respectful – I felt sure she'd make a wonderful mother.

Two weeks later, Kelli fell pregnant. When she shared her good news, we screamed together on the phone. And, when she sent me her first scan, we both stared at the grainy image, trying to work out the head from the tiny toes.

In December 2012, Trevor was born. Kelli texted me a photo of him at just 30 minutes old – but while he was perfect, there was no maternal tug of love. I knew this baby didn't belong to me. It was six months before I met Trevor. But even as I held him, I wasn't looking to see if he



Johanna, five, and twins Abigail and Rachele, 10, are Rebecca and Chris's children

'BIOLOGICALLY HE WAS MY CHILD, BUT HE WASN'T MY SON'

had my eyes or my nose. Biologically he was my child, but he wasn't my son.

An immediate bond

Still, I loved receiving pictures and videos of Trevor. I felt like a proud auntie, putting his photos up on the fridge and showing the girls their little brother.

In April 2014, Kelli and Dan used our embryos to have a daughter, Aubrey. We

Skyped them every week and the children would sing their favourite songs to each other. Then, in July 2016, the whole family came to visit. Watching the kids play together was surreal – they'd never met face to face before, but they bonded instantly. When I watched Kelli scoop Trevor and Aubrey into her arms I didn't feel envious – all I felt was pride.

Now we're just like one big family – and

THE
EMBRYO
DONORS

THE
RECIPIENT
PARENTS



Aubrey, two, is Kelli and Dan's daughter, Trevor, four, is Kelli and Dan's son



Kelli with Dan at the time of Trevor's embryo transfer. Right: pregnant with Aubrey



Trevor's birth was a dream come true for the couple

'WE'RE ONE BIG HAPPY FAMILY'

Kelli says: When Dan and I began trying for a baby, at 42 I knew it could be difficult, but that didn't make the pain any less. Every negative test felt like my heart was breaking a little more. So, when we discovered embryo adoption, it seemed like the perfect solution.

After Rebecca and Dan chose us, I couldn't stop thinking about them. They were giving us the most amazing gift, and I wanted them with us on this journey.

The bond between Rebecca and me

was instant. It felt like being reunited with a long-lost friend – I knew I wanted her to be part of my child's life. So when Trevor was born, she was the first in line for cuddles when we finally met. I didn't feel anxious when she held him in her arms – I felt lucky that my son was adored by so many people. And now, along with Aubrey, we're one big happy family. No amount of thank-yous will ever be enough to show Rebecca and Chris how grateful we are. ⁸⁰

as well as weekly video calls, we try to visit at least once a year.

Any mum will know you can be doing 100 things at once, but still your children are always on your mind. And for me it's also true with Trevor and Aubrey. But I know that while I'm always thinking about them, I'm not the only one. Kelli is a wonderful mum, I'm so happy I was able to make her dream come true.