

# PATHWAY 2 FAMILY

TWENTY YEARS  
**STRONG:**  
Embryo Adoption

.....  
**EMBRYO  
QUALITY:**  
Is it an Accurate  
PREDICTOR of  
PREGNANCY  
SUCCESS OR  
FAILURE?

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 **nightlight**®



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Have you heard?

Embryo donation and adoption have allowed more than 6,000 babies to be born into loving families. It may be the solution you have been searching for. Learn more in this issue of **Pathway2Family** or at [www.EmbryoAdoption.org](http://www.EmbryoAdoption.org)



Additional Copies Available at **Pathway2Family.org**



Contents

- 3 | Twenty Years Strong
- 4 | Do You Have Embryos in Frozen Storage?
- 5 | Embryo Donation and Adoption: Dispelling the Myths
- 6 | Embryo Quality: Is It an Accurate Predictor of Pregnancy Success or Failure?
- 10 | Emotional Healing through Embryo Donation
- 14 | Grief Speaks First

Check out our website for more information, videos, and webinars about embryo donation and adoption at [www.EmbryoAdoption.org](http://www.EmbryoAdoption.org).



TWENTY YEARS STRONG

In 1997, a woman and her husband approached a friend who was an adoption attorney about the use of donor embryos from their fertility clinic. Marlene asked, “Would it be possible to adopt these embryos rather than just accept them as a donation? To know something about the people donating them?” Ronald L. Stoddart, Esq. is a glass-half-full sort of man. Rather than dismiss the idea outright, he gave careful consideration to how he could apply the best practices of adoption to embryos. An adoption model would help people gift their remaining embryos to a family who would be willing to give birth to those embryos. Together, Ron, Marlene, and John worked to develop the Snowflakes Embryo Adoption Program – a program that is now celebrating 20 years of providing hope and joy to couples around the country.

On December 31, 1998, Marlene and John welcomed the very first embryo adopted baby into their loving arms and named her Hannah. Hannah is now 18 years old and has her own passion for telling people about the option of embryo adoption. “Children are not donated to families, they are adopted into families!” Hannah excitedly explains. She has had many opportunities to share her adoption story with schoolmates and in the media.

Right around the same time Hannah was born, more embryos were being created for a couple through in vitro fertilization. This couple used IVF to create the family of their dreams. But, once their family was complete, they decided to keep their remaining embryos in frozen storage until they could determine what would be best for them. Seventeen years

later, in 2015, they decided to give their embryos a chance to be born and chose to donate them to another family through the Snowflakes program.

Their embryo gift was received by Elizabeth and Marty. They already had a little girl, but had been unable to achieve another successful pregnancy. They then learned about embryo adoption. Elizabeth and Marty accepted the match with the embryos that had been frozen in 1998 – embryos created before Elizabeth and Marty had even met one another! In June 2016, they welcomed baby Marley Jade into their family; a healthy 8lb 1.3oz, 20.5” little girl born from an embryo that had been kept in frozen storage for nearly 18 years!

In December 2016, the Snowflakes program welcomed Snowflake baby #500 into the world. Has the Snowflakes program been a successful option for families on both sides of the adoption equation? The answer is a resounding, “yes!” Embryo adoption is an amazing option available to both the embryo donor and the embryo adopter. Over 1,200 families have donated their embryos to another family through Snowflakes. Some of the adopting families have even given birth to multiple children from one set of embryos gifted to them – full genetic siblings to one another. When approached with an open mind and an open heart, embryo adoption is a win-win for everyone involved in the process.

There are now multiple organizations in the U.S. offering embryo adoption services. Visit [EmbryoAdoption.org](http://EmbryoAdoption.org) to review these programs and determine which program may be the right one for you!



HANNAH #1



CHARLOTTE #316



CHARLIE ANN #325



COLE #331



MARLEY JADE #470







# Do You Have Embryos in Frozen Storage?

Your choices are limited.

Many couples who choose in vitro fertilization to help them have children often face a difficult dilemma after they have completed their family; they must decide what to do with their remaining embryos. Are you one of these couples?

Most fertility clinics and cryo-banks bill annually for embryo storage and those bills frequently arrive at the beginning of the New Year. What can be done with these embryos?

**First**, you can simply pay the bill and continue to store them for another year.

**Second**, you can choose to thaw them and discard them.

**Third**, you can choose to donate them for scientific research.

**Finally**, you can donate your embryos to another family for reproduction. When you were undergoing IVF you had one goal in mind: to have a baby. The embryos resulting from your treatment were created so you could give life to a baby.

Perhaps you have had one or more children from this set of embryos. Before you made them, you may have had a different attitude towards them. Now, perhaps your attitude has changed. Donating for reproduction is the only option

available to you that gives each of your embryos an opportunity to live the life you created them for.

Embryos may be donated for reproduction through your fertility clinic, if they have an embryo donation program. Or, you can empower yourself with the ability to choose the family who will receive your embryos by working through an embryo adoption program. When you place your embryos with an embryo adoption program, you have the added security of knowing the families you are selecting from have received education and vetting through the adoption home study process.

In addition, you can know the outcome of your embryo gift to the recipient family. Did they get pregnant? Did they have a baby? Do they have any embryos left to attempt another pregnancy in the future? Embryo adoption opens the door for you to have future contact with this family.

A list of embryo adoption agencies can be found at [EmbryoAdoption.org](http://EmbryoAdoption.org).



EMBRYO ADOPTION  
AWARENESS CENTER

10<sup>th</sup>  
anniversary

## Embryo Donation & Adoption: DISPELLING THE MYTHS

There are many misconceptions about embryo donation and adoption. For anyone considering this life-affirming adoption choice, it's important to base decisions on facts, not fiction.

### MYTH

### REALITY

#### PROCESS



Embryo adoption is as expensive as IVF.



Adoption studies are a waste of time and money.

Embryo adoption through an agency takes longer than through a clinic; many people are never selected.

Especially when donor eggs are required, IVF can be much more costly than embryo adoption.



Home studies ensure that the adoptive family is mentally, emotionally, and financially ready to parent.



Approved home study families have the opportunity to adopt in a timely manner.

#### AVAILABILITY



Donors prefer to give embryos to an anonymous recipient.



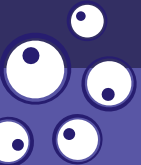
Embryos remaining after IVF cycles, and those donated to adoption, are not high quality.

Clinics have long wait lists for embryos; agencies must too.

Often, donors want to know who received their embryos and whether children were born.



Donated embryos are healthy and viable. Recently, a healthy baby girl was born from an 18 year old embryo!



Agency programs have embryos waiting for a match with a family. New donors call daily!

#### FAMILY DYNAMICS



Donors will later feel that the child that resulted from their embryo was meant to be in their family.

As an adoptive family, it can be hard to bond with a baby that is not genetically your own.

Open adoption means that the donor family participates in all holidays, celebrations, etc.

Donors are devoted to raising their own children, but feel their embryo also deserved parents.

Carrying the child, experiencing birth, and raising him/her forms strong, natural bonds.


Future communication styles are mutually agreed upon by both families.



When you move beyond the myths, you find that embryo adoption is a caring process in which agencies, donors, and recipients work together to cherish life and respect the needs and feelings of everyone.

Contact us to learn more about embryo donation and adoption at [www.EmbryoAdoption.org](http://www.EmbryoAdoption.org)





# Embryo Quality:

## Is It an Accurate Predictor of Pregnancy Success or Failure?

*By Laura Best*

It was a dark, snowy Friday night when I was driving to meet my husband at a local fundraiser. I typically drive in silence, but I had stumbled across a radio program that caught my attention. My husband and I had been unsuccessfully trying to build our family for over three years. The initial testing had left us without answers. We were preparing to meet with a reproductive endocrinologist (RE) and were nervous about the "next steps." At the time, we did not know embryo adoption existed. Should our next step be IVF? Could we do IVF and still honor our faith and honor life? These discussions were weighing heavily on my heart.

Alexander Brooks  
& Makenna Lee





As I listened, the message focused on the sanctity of human life, even in its earliest stages, and my eyes welled up with tears. A part of me grew scared as I began thinking that IVF may not be the right choice for us. I arrived at my destination, saw my husband, rolled down my window, and said I would meet him inside. As he walked away, the message concluded, and right there in front of me, fireworks started going off. I couldn't have planned the timing better, but there they were...fireworks.

A few weeks later, our RE advised us that they would do a workup evaluation on me and then likely would recommend IVF if all came back okay. We shared our beliefs with them about not creating more embryos than we would use. They hesitantly agreed to honor our wishes, warning us our chances of conceiving would be significantly reduced with these restrictions. We left feeling a little defeated and more confused than ever.

We returned to our RE's office ready to discuss the recent test results and next steps. We were floored when our doctor said, "premature ovarian failure" and mentioned our chances of conceiving, even with IVF and without any of our "restrictions," were less than 5%. I was shocked. I was angry. I was confused. I felt every emotion under the sun. Devastation set in. But now we knew for sure, the door to IVF was shut.

Somewhere in the fog of the next few months, I learned of embryo adoption and that night of fireworks started to have new meaning and new hope. I had been heartbroken over the possibility of not being able to feel life grow inside me. I wanted to experience the joy of childbirth. Embryo adoption truly was and is the answer to our prayers. So, we began our embryo adoption journey.

A year later, we had been through one failed frozen embryo transfer and had been matched with a second family. We were head-over-heels in love with this family. They had chosen life for their three embryos and had agreed to place them with us. We felt such a strong connection to them and were overjoyed with the match.

When our embryologist received the embryology report, she called to tell us we should consider sending the embryos back. We quickly said no; we were committed to our babies. She went on to tell us the embryos were graded a B, BC, and C, and there had been a power outage when they were being frozen. The power blipped for just a second and then the generator kicked in. But, with the fragility of embryos, she feared we wouldn't even have viable embryos once they were thawed. We were crushed, but held onto hope that this was the plan for our family and we needed to stay the course.

Two months later, we were pleasantly surprised to show up for our transfer on September 5, 2009, with two viable embryos ready to transfer and one left safely in cryopreservation for a future attempt. On September 15, we heard the words we had waited so long to hear... "You're pregnant!" And, despite the embryologist's initial concerns about the embryo quality, our dreams were coming true. On June 2, 2010, we gave birth to our beautiful baby girl, Makenna Lee.

And let's not forget about that little "C" embryo that was waiting in the freezer for us. Against all odds, he survived the thaw beautifully, and on October 14, 2013, we completed our family with the birth of our sweet baby boy, Alexander Brooks. While embryo adoption may not be the right choice for everyone, it blessed us beyond expectation and measure.



The  
Best Family



# Emotional Healing

## through Embryo Donation

*By Jennifer Gray*

In 2008, my spirit was broken when my marriage ended after almost 12 years. Literally overnight, I became the single mother of a 2 ½ year old daughter, uncertain and scared about the future. It took nearly six months to finalize our divorce, and I was faced with the reality of what to do with our four remaining frozen embryos. I was awarded custody of the embryos, and soon realized the only option available to me was to place them with a family for adoption.







"I did not want either of us feeling shame about my choice to donate my embryos. I introduced her to the adopting family & to Josh through photos. I described them as close family friends that were "like family."

I did an online search and learned about Snowflakes Embryo Adoption and Donation. I met with a counselor through my church and prayed. Over the next year, I realized that I needed to do what was best for the remaining embryos, and for me. Those four frozen embryos were not a mistake; they were created so God could give them life. Once I really grasped this, it became clear I could do this – place my embryos with an adopting family.

I reviewed three family profiles presented to me by the program. The third family profile I reviewed felt like the perfect fit to me! They had two biological daughters and had opened their home to helping children in the U.S. foster program. They were raised with the same faith I was, and they learned about Snowflakes Embryo Adoption through their church. The Snowflakes team, working with me and the adopting family, really helped me determine what would be best for the children born from my embryos and what type of communication plan I would be comfortable with moving forward.

A little background on me...I struggle with control. As the adoption process began, the control freak in me continued to try and figure out God's plan for these embryos. For their first frozen embryo transfer, the adopting family transferred two of the four embryos. My feelings ran the gamut. What if they had a girl? What if they had a boy?

The adopting family's son, Josh, was born when my daughter, Shelby, was six. She was too young to understand all of the details, but I began the process of telling her the story. I did not want either of us feeling shame about my choice to donate my embryos. I introduced her to the adopting family and to Josh through photos. I described them as close family friends that were "like family." She saw photos and received updates about his milestones and felt good about that.

I struggled. Josh's pictures were nearly identical to my daughter's baby pictures! I found comfort in my faith and had confidence I had made the right choice.

When the adopting family was ready for their next frozen embryo transfer, the doctors had told them that there was only a 20% chance of pregnancy success. Against the odds, their second son, Matt was born in 2013. He was absolutely perfect and healthy in every way. Shelby, my daughter, was now 8. One night as we snuggled up in bed, she talked about "the boys," as they would affectionately be known forevermore, and God facilitated a loving, honest dialogue between us about her brothers. Tears come to the surface as I think of that sweet, but painful conversation.

At Christmas, we flew to meet the family in person. It was scary and magical, awkward and perfect all at the same time. Josh was 3 and Matt was an infant. We savored our time with them and marveled at their beautiful resemblance to my daughter. My mind turned to what I had learned from my faith; God works all things together for good.

This past May, during a visit to see the boys, I realized and accepted my role in helping my daughter embrace this part of her family story. My role was and is to help her do what is best for her in connecting with her brothers. I am Shelby's mother before anything else, and my job is to be true to that and support her as she builds a relationship with her brothers across miles and age differences.

I wanted to share my story because it's uncommon to hear about people who have placed their embryos for adoption as a result of a divorce. When I made this decision, I did not feel like my family was complete. I wanted more children, but I could not do this with the embryos I had in storage. The choice to destroy the embryos was never a consideration for me, however. Even with fear and uncertainty about the future, I knew this was the right choice for all of us. My daughter has biological brothers who were adopted, and we are proud about it. While I have moments of sadness, those are overshadowed when I see the beautiful eyes, smiling faces, and hear the beautiful voices of the boys say, "Miss Jennifer!" It's one of the sweetest sounds in the world.

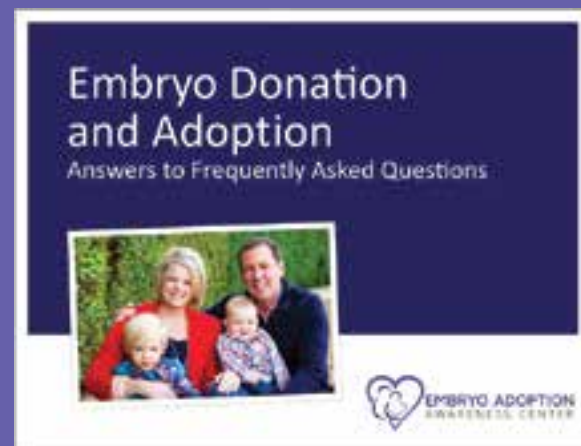


Shelby, Matt, & Josh

## Watch our recent webinar...

The Benefits of Early Decision Making for Your Patients:  
Death, Divorce, and Remaining Embryos

[www.embryooption.org/webinar-library/](http://www.embryooption.org/webinar-library/)



For questions on embryo donation and adoption, check out our new FAQ e-book

[www.embryooption.org/resources/faq-ebook](http://www.embryooption.org/resources/faq-ebook)

# Considering Embryo Adoption?

- Couples, once in your shoes, now have embryos remaining from IVF
- Some of those families have chosen to donate those embryos to adopting families like yours

Your bundle of joy is waiting for you!  
CONTACT US TODAY TO LEARN MORE.

970-663-6799 • [www.EmbryoAdoption.org](http://www.EmbryoAdoption.org) • [info@EmbryoAdoption.org](mailto:info@EmbryoAdoption.org)





# Grief Speaks First

By Jana Rupnow

The first word our daughter said to us was “bop!” It wasn’t a word in Chinese or English that we were aware of. We were pretty sure “bop” meant something along the lines of, “Who are you? Put me down. I’m angry.” So, when people ask me when I started talking to my child about adoption, I tell them we started communicating with each other about adoption from the first day.

## What we bury, we carry through time.

Except for the word, “bop,” most of what we communicated about adoption in the beginning had no words. As time went on, we read her storybooks, like most adoptive parents do, and used simple phrases to explain what happened. I can attest that talking to children about adoption in the preschool stage helps them accept the information more effortlessly. It also set the stage for us to continue the conversation whenever it came up. However, reading *I Love You Like Crazy Cakes* forty-seven times was a small fraction of what was actually being said between us.

Even if parents do not openly discuss adoption with their child, they still communicate their attitude about it. According to Dr. Albert Mehrabian, a professor of psychology at UCLA, 93% of communication is nonverbal: 55% body language and 38% tone of voice. A child will come to understand adoption more through what their parents are feeling rather than what they are saying. Nonverbal communication plays an even larger role when adoption is deliberately not talked about. Parents that do not talk about adoption with their child are actually saying more than they may be aware of.

In eight years of working with families, I have found the biggest obstacle to open communication about adoption is a parent’s repressed grief. Adoption has inherent loss and grief for both parent and child. Most adoptive parents have not fully healed from the losses they experienced during infertility. Healing takes time and no matter how much work has been done, it’s normal to experience some grief while parenting.

The nature of our family’s adoption brought grief to the surface immediately. Our daughter lived with a foster mother in China for the first year of her life and the separation was traumatic. For months after coming home, she would awaken from her sleep in a crying rage, about six times a night. She was very difficult to calm. Even though I prepared for this possibility, when she raged, something painful stirred in me, too. It was my own anger,

deeply buried and displaced. This was not how I imagined I would feel during the first few months with my baby. Processing loss takes a willingness to feel discomfort. When parents bring their baby home, they want to leave the painful past behind. Sometimes, this is when real grieving begins. It is tempting to want to bury grief and carry on with the distracting job of parenting. What we bury, we carry through time. Grief gets heavy and tiresome and can show up in different ways, such as irritability, resentment, or contemptuous feelings toward your child. Repressed grief may be displaced into negative parent reactions, like detached body language or an unpleasant tone of voice. Ongoing feelings of sadness, resentment, regret, or jealousy may cause distance between a parent and child. Years of unresolved grief has the ability to time travel through generations by influencing the parent/child bond.

By talking with a professional or joining a support group, a parent can continue the healing process. Parents who are able to resolve their grief have the ability to help their child work through genetic loss. Luckily, my daughter’s grief uncovered mine, and there was no stopping the feelings that came to the surface. I had to feel it to heal it, and so did she. She also needed me to heal. By processing my grief, I was able to own my negative feelings and not project them onto my daughter. My husband comforted her in moments that were too much for me. Over and over, we held our daughter in the night and told her she was safe and loved. We grieved with her, confronted our fears, and talked about the hard stuff. Fearful, sleep deprived nights gradually turned into peaceful days of acceptance. We are better parents because we got better at accepting both sides of adoption, the loss and the joy.

**Jana M. Rupnow is a licensed professional counselor, adoptive mother, and adoptee. She specializes in fertility, including third party reproduction and adoption in her private practice in Dallas, TX. Learn more about Jana at [janarupnow.com](http://janarupnow.com) or contact her at [jana@janarupnow.com](mailto:jana@janarupnow.com).**





# DREAMING ABOUT BUILDING A FAMILY?

Begin to create your  
lifetime of memories.

- Embryo adoption is an exciting new source of hope
- Embryo adoption allows you to experience pregnancy and childbirth
- No costly IVF or egg donor expenses
- Our caring, hands-on staff guides you through the process

Embryo adoption may be the  
right choice for you.



LEARN MORE TODAY!

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[info@snowflakes.org](mailto:info@snowflakes.org)