

Adopting baby Riley

This is our story:

After the finalisation of Demi's six year long adoption saga in 2008, Iain and I took some time out to recover and reflect on all that had happened, including Iain having to come to terms with the fact that I was unable to conceive a child for him.

We discussed our future at length, our dreams, our desires and our need to have children to share our lives with. Having adopted Demi as a single mom four years before meeting Iain, adoption was a very new concept for Iain to consider, however, this was made easier by the fact that in his three years with Demi he had fallen madly in love with her, and found his relationship with her worth more than the notion of what it would be like to have a biological child.

It took little time for us to decide that we would ideally love to welcome a new little bundle into our home. But once we had made the decision, the rest was easy.

In March 2009, approaching the social work agency that dealt with Demi's adoption, we applied to adopt a baby boy. After a few months, we realised that the ties between the agency and Demi's adoption were preventing our second adoption from being viewed as a separate application, as there were still many issues surrounding Demi's adoption, such as the arrangement to have her meet her biological mother, that were deflecting the social worker's attention from this application each individual case.

At this point, we felt that it was imperative that our second adoption be afforded the same attention and devotion, and as a result, felt it best to transfer our adoption to an independent social worker.

A wonderfully warm and welcoming social worker took on our application, and within a few weeks we were approved. She was so delighted with our beautiful little family and was very positive about placing a baby with us as soon as possible.

In April 2009, I was diagnosed with cervical cancer, which scared us terribly. I was determined not to be taken down by a disease, after all I had over come so much more in the past, I could most certainly beat this too? The doctor informed me of all my options: but in the end, I knew that chemical intervention was not going to serve any purpose, my most logical route would be to have my fertility organs removed, a hysterectomy. After all, it is not like my biological parts were in any way useful to me, since they rendered me infertile years ago. And so I prepared myself for probably the most invasive surgery a woman ever has to endure. There were a few hiccups along the way with the medical aid, resulting in the operation being delayed by several months.

In between all of this, we continued our application to adopt. It was this process and the excitement of a new baby in our lives that kept us up beat and positive about my health. The social worker requested we put together a family portfolio of photos and a little story about us in order to present to a birth mother wishing to relinquish her unborn child for adoption. She would then forward it to an agency in Cape Town she is associated with and see if anything came of it.

On the 10th October 2009, coupled with my health issues and the second adoption application, we had also been preparing Demi to meet her biological mother for the first time. It was an extremely difficult day, and after months of therapy for Demi and us as a family as to how to manage the entire experience, no one could possibly have anticipated the outcome. The biological mother arrived two hours late, which not only stressed us out, but placed Demi under immense emotional strain. She was disappointed, and felt that yet again she had been abandoned. Thankfully the biological mother did not fail us completely. She did arrive eventually, but the interaction was strained, with little communication between her and Demi, in spite of us positively prompting a conversation. Demi was extremely nervous, as were we. Here we were watching our little girl meeting the woman who gave birth to her, but also abandoned her, but also returned to object to my adoption of her, and also returned to indicate that adoption would in the end be Demi's ultimate fate anyway, as she wanted to sign consent for her sister to adopt her. It was possibly the most confusing day of all of our lives, and walking out of there, we were left feeling helpless and worried about how Demi would interpret the experience.

On the 11th October, I was admitted into hospital for my surgery. It went well, better than I expected. I came out of surgery and met with a phone call that instantly began my rapid healing process. Our social worker called to say that our baby boy had just been born. The irony: while one lady was a 1000km's away giving birth, I was ceding my baby making machinery back to mother-nature.

Three days later, I was on my feet, bright as a button (high on pain killers), and I headed home for what was supposed to be six weeks of bed rest. Iain had kindly hired a full time maid, but this did not stop me. On day two of being at home, I started cleaning out the baby room, by day four I was painting it, and decorating it, and in my second week home, (while I was not supposed to be driving), I sneaked a few quick trips to Baby City to buy baby goodies. Within 3 weeks, I had spring cleaned the entire house and prepared the babies room for the new arrival.... no one would ever have guessed that I had just had major surgery.

On the 7th November I received a call from Cape Town social workers to say that we had to be in Cape Town on the 12 November to collect our baby, as the biological mother and father had both signed their consent, and were happy to have us come and fetch the baby before their sixty day "cool off" period had passed. Their only request was that we agreed to meet them prior to leaving Cape Town. We agreed.

Within half an hour Iain booked our air tickets and car-hire, and I had rushed off to tell Demi the great news.

On the 10th November we flew to Cape Town, all very nervous but overly excited to meet our new little chap, whom we had pre-named Riley.

The following day, we had to meet the social worker at the court in order to get a section 10, allowing us to remove the baby from the place of safety and return home with him. We assumed that we would only get to meet little Riley the following day on the 12th, as previously stated, but to our surprise, the social worker told us to follow her back to the home, where we would be allowed to meet our little son and spend a few hours with him. Those ten minutes we spent waiting in the lounge for them to bring him out of the nursery felt like hours. My hands were sweating and eagerness to hold him almost brought me to tears.

Iain too, was very nervous and anxious, this being his first experience of a tiny baby. Riley was exactly a month old the day we met him.

He was wrapped in a beautiful, fluffy blanket, with little “cow patterned” pants on. As the house mom placed him in my arms, with Iain peering over my shoulders and Demi jumping up to see him, his little face appeared from the blanket and at that moment- the only feeling felt was LOVE.

Iain's first words were “he is beautiful”.

Demi's first words were “I love my brother, can I hold him?”

I smiled and swayed him from side to side gently never taking my eyes off his little face. After a few moments of awe, we were invited into one of the rooms, where we could conclude our paper work, while spending some quality time with our son. It was incredible to know that the following day, we would be arriving there to fetch him and take him home, and the idea of leaving there that day without him, broke my heart.

Once he fell asleep, we felt it best to leave and prepare for the next day.

The following day, 12th November, Demi came bouncing through with Iain early in the morning, together with my friend and her children whom we were staying with, to wish me HAPPY BIRTHDAY. They sang, gave me tea in bed and pressies, but ultimately the greatest gift was yet to come.

At 11am, we met with the social worker at the home where Riley was. She explained a little to us about the biological mother and father before they arrived. We spoke about how we would treat the meet, as well as how to conduct the communication between the four of us. We were looking forward to meeting them, and it was not long after our discussion with the social worker that they arrived. We were at ease immediately with each other. They were lovely. The Father very caring and concerned about the baby he knew he was unable to offer a good life to, and the Mother very strong and confident that she had made the right decision. We spent about an hour engaging with them, telling them about ourselves, who we are and how forward we were looking to welcoming their son into our lives. It was an extremely emotional yet liberating experience.

Once they were satisfied that we had “ticked all their boxes” for them, the Father concluded that he was suitably satisfied that we were the right family for the baby, and that so long as we ensure he always has books to read and lots of love, he knew that he had done the right thing. The social worker then led the mother to the nursery for her last few minutes with the baby she gave birth to. The mother told him how much she loved him, and after an intimate goodbye she came downstairs and handed him to me, his new mom. It was possibly the most beautiful and meaningful birthday gift anyone could ever have given me. She smiled at me, and instantly I knew that I would be indebted to her for the rest of my life for the wonderful gift she was so freely giving to us. I could feel both hers and his love for this little baby permeate the room, and it is that feeling we will always share with Riley about his birth parents.

After holding our baby for a few minutes, we handed him to the biological father for his last cuddle and whispers of love. He cried while smiling, knowing in his heart that Riley was going to be just fine.

The proud new Dad, Iain then took his son and sat on the couch admiring him and talking to him, while we bid our goodbyes to the two most incredibly selfless people we had ever met. They left. But what they left behind was a legacy of their selflessness, their genuine love, and their commitment to ensuring he received only the best.

We left Cape Town 2 days later with our son. Everyday we think of and thank his biological parents for the most precious gift. Riley is a bouncing 2 year old now, with the brightest smile and the most mischievous personality. He keeps us on our toes and not a moment goes by when we aren't in awe of him.

This is the story of how we came to raise our little Riley.