

Families for Children – A Testimony

Having had my last day at work on Friday, I am enjoying my first week of adoption leave and cannot believe that we are busy preparing to have two children and become a family. I had come to think that I would never experience being on maternity leave and yet here we are about to have two beautiful children. We are full of excitement and apprehension. I reflect on the journey to this point and realise that it is exactly one year when we began on the adoption path and how incredibly lucky we are to have been matched so quickly and smoothly.

Knowing that I was unable to conceive naturally and having been advised that IVF would be our only chance, we embarked on the minefield of IVF, researching clinics, overseas options and differences between areas. Over a period of a couple of years we underwent three cycles of IVF and I remember as we embarked on the first one wishing that I was able to see into the future knowing the painful process ahead, the outcome of which fate or only God would have already determined. At this early stage I had been asked the question several times “would you consider adopting.” The process of IVF is life consuming, treatment is planned with the hospital many months in advance with physical and emotional preparation and upon the failure of a cycle one feels the need to immediately begin planning and concentrating on the next. Each realisation that a cycle has failed brings about a sense of bereavement and so in answer to the question, had we truly considered adopting – no, there was an inability to think beyond a stage at a time throughout the process, consumed within the IVF battle. When going through the process it is difficult to decide how many times you should continue to try, on the one hand needing to take life off hold and resume as a couple but with the fear of never knowing if the very next time would have been the one. For us however, it was decided. We were advised that due to my previous medical history and age there was no point in continuing. This actually in some respects came as a relief to us and brought about a period of normal living and projects together for the future as a couple.

With the pain of the emotions of IVF two years behind us, we had recently moved from South Devon to a farm near Holsworthy and now felt able to think about having a family from a totally different viewpoint. Instead of feeling the need to produce a child of our own, the idea of adoption came to us in thinking about sharing what we have with children already in the world and facing the possibility of living in care or being permanently fostered, desperate to have their own family. We suddenly felt a real excitement at the prospect of being able to share all we have with them, to offer them unconditional love, to guide and support them and for them to have the knowledge that we are always there for them.

I began to make enquiries about adoption, not knowing where to begin or how to go about it. By searching the internet I found the contact number for the local authority adoption team and I also saw there were other adoption options, in particular, a charity called ‘Families for Children’ based in Buckfast. I firstly telephoned the local authority who weren’t able to talk to me about the process but instead would put an information pack in the post. I then tried phoning Families for Children and was immediately put through to the manager who spent about half an hour on the phone chatting to me and explaining the process, the challenges ahead and its rewards. We made arrangements for the manager to come out to visit us, together with a lady who would be our social worker, working with us to assess our suitability to adopt and to represent us in our search for a mutual match. The first meeting took place at the beginning of February 2009 and there was so

much information to take in. We were so sad to hear of the circumstances dictating the need for adoption and the effects of this upon the children. It is emphasised how there are likely to be challenges ahead with attachment issues and behaviours from previous emotional experiences but this actually made us feel even stronger about wanting to provide love and security, feeling this was the path which had been destined for us all along. So, we began the process to become approved to adopt and our social worker needed to compile a mass of information on us to fulfil the adoption criteria. We met for a couple of hours each fortnight with an agenda to work through all about our history, our strengths and weaknesses and our views on many things. We had been advised by others that the process can seem quite intrusive, long winded and frustrating at times and yet looking back the time went quite quickly, understanding the need to know us so well. Certainly the aim is by no means to look for perfect people but to have a true and secure knowledge that the children will be safe, loved and able to flourish. As part of the assessment we attended a mandatory course for all adopters which had a huge impact upon us. We heard from adults who had been adopted as children, from other adopters and sadly a mother whose child had been adopted many years ago. We learnt the importance of the adopted child being able to keep a sense of their own identity, their name, what few belongings they may have had from their previous life and the need to recognise their feelings and differences within the family. I remember at school two children in my class had been adopted and it was taboo, thankfully so much has changed today. We will very much encourage our adopted children's individuality and they are aware that their 'tummy mummy' couldn't look after them and they will soon have their 'forever family'.

In September 2009 and upon completion of the compilation of information, we went before the adoption panel and were approved. Shortly prior to this we had seen two children within one of the publications of children who are waiting to be adopted. Immediately we felt a sense of connection to them which could be described as a sense of familiarity and even love. With confirmation of having been approved we contacted their social worker who immediately thought we sounded a promising match. Families for Children have the benefit of being able to work with local authorities across the UK and our social worker began liaising with the social worker of the children, some distance from us. Things started to happen quite quickly from then and we are aware of how lucky we have been, how we were the only couple being considered as a match for the children and how everything seemed to just progress along. We met the children's social workers and representatives just before Christmas for a life appreciation meeting where we found out a wealth of information about the children but we are unable to meet them until everything is absolutely finalised. In the meantime we have a dvd of them and cannot wait until the day we can hug them. That day is nearly here and next week we will be meeting them, spending two weeks with them during a transition period with their foster carers and then they will be coming 'home' as we believe was destined to be. Thank you to Families for Children for the work they do and all the lives they change forever.