

Worth the Wait

by Stephanie

July, 2006 (Pre-Adoption) Each morning this week, I have been woken up by my scary baby dreams well before my alarm has sounded. I am not sure why I am so nervous about the arrival of our first baby, but I can attribute these nightmares to two possible sources: how the baby is coming and reading about what to do once she gets here. The second explanation is easier to explain. Now that I know a baby is on her way, I have been voraciously reading every baby book recommended by my friends, most of whom are on their second or third children. These books speak in diametrically opposed phrases: the first author's advice to vigorously shake the baby from side to side to simulate the womb while running a vacuum cleaner and shushing very loudly was immediately contradicted by the next author's note to peacefully stroke the baby down the length of her body in a warm dark room so as not to over stimulate a baby who is most likely crying because she is overwhelmed by all the new noises and sensations around her. Hmmmm.

What do you do with that? I guess I will just follow my instincts, which served me just fine with the first living creature whose life became my responsibility three years ago: my golden retriever Rosie. Just like I have been doing this summer, the summer before we picked up Rosie, I read every dog book I could find. So by the time I rode home with Rosie, I was armed with the false confidence of a woman who thought she knew what she was doing. I had graduated from college, had two Masters' Degrees, and taught my high school students all week with few classroom management issues, so training a dog would be no problem, right? Right! I barely made it down the breeder's street before the crying from the back of my station wagon so broke my heart that I had to pull over and sit on my trunk, petting the most adorable puppy I had ever seen in my life. It was only a matter of a few days before I took her for a walk whenever she stood by her leash and whined and only a matter of a few weeks before she was sleeping on the bed (much to my husband's chagrin). But Rosie was very easily housebroken and trained to come when called,

so I didn't judge myself for caving in on those little things. I knew we had picked the right dog for our family which was sure to include children very soon.

And so I walked Rosie and waited...and went to work and waited...and built a home and a life with my husband and waited some more. But the children never came so we found a professional. Then, once we were in the factory that is a large Boston fertility clinic, trying to make those children took over our entire lives. Going through the fertility process consumed our every waking thought for two years, and not just because we were obsessed with the idea of having a baby. I lost touch with friends, either because I was so miserable that I failed to reach out to them or because I was so scared that another friend would tell me she had just gotten pregnant with her second baby and miraculously it was twins! The isolation wasn't healthy for me, an extroverted people person, so I joined a fertility support group and met sixteen other women also experiencing what I was going through. That helped a bit, but as three successive rounds of in vitro fertilization (IVF) became increasingly painful for me and then failed with no clear explanation as to what happened, my husband and I decided that there had to be a better way to start a family.

So we began to research adoption. We made a decision to adopt domestically because we wanted our first child to come to us as early as possible in her life. We liked the idea of being involved with the process, rather than writing a large check to an agency and just sitting back and waiting. So, we selected our agency very carefully, believing Dale and Raquel to be inclusive, knowledgeable and kind. And then we started the "Home Study" while compiling our photo book. We forced Rosie to pose all over our town and our house because she is ever so much more photogenic than we are and we filled our book with pictures from our lives: family, friends and our adventures.

Somehow, in all that, we forgot about the intangible factor: the superhuman force we have on our sides that no one else on earth can possibly simulate. My mother. My mother

has wanted a grandchild for so long that she just went out and found herself one. She started telling people that her daughter is trying to adopt and then just told more people. She advertised in more than twenty-three states just with the power of her excitement about her first grandchild. And so one evening, we got a call from a friend of a friend of my mother's who had heard that we were trying to adopt. She explained that her neighbor had used a lawyer out of a small southern town in Oklahoma and that lawyer had a new birth mother who had not yet selected a family. We sent our picture book out as quickly as the United States Mail could get it out there and waited to hear from the lawyer.

And then, one night, when my husband happened to come home early from work, the lawyer called to tell us that the birth mother picked us to adopt her baby girl. That phone call was the most incredible thing to happen to us and we were so overcome with joy that we both sat on the floor of our kitchen and just grinned at each other while we listened to the lawyer explain how and why Chinju selected us. It sounds like Chinju liked our photo book immediately but thought that she should take her time, since deciding who would raise her daughter was the most important decision she had ever made. So she brought the photo books to her father's office and he picked us right away, as well. Chinju explained that she loved the way we described each other and she also appreciated how close we were to our families. But mostly she loved the pictures of Rosie and had always wanted a dog of her own. Chinju said that she wanted her daughter to have a dog. We knew that Rosie would sell us to the right birth mother, we just had no idea how quickly she would do it!

We learned that the baby was due on my grandfather's birthday, which made my entire family weep because he had passed away only months earlier. And so we began a different kind of waiting, full of excitement, hope and optimism. We had heard all the statistics: fifty percent of birth mothers change their minds after they deliver. We decided to ignore those facts and allow ourselves to love this baby from the moment we heard about her. We decided that if Chinju changes her mind, we're going to be devastated, so why not enjoy the months preceding the birth?

And enjoy we did. We told all our family, friends and neighbors and everyone we knew was just as excited for us as we were. People who knew how painful the fertility process had been were especially generous, offering to throw showers (which we refused until the baby comes home safely), baby sit and watch the dog while we're in Oklahoma.

And now it's the day before we leave for Oklahoma. Over the course of this last week we have vacillated between exuberance, terror and sheer joy...now we just hope we can sleep for a few hours before heading in to the airport for the first flight of the day.

March, 2007 (Post-Adoption) Gabby has been our baby for over seven months now and I can't imagine a better baby for us and the family we created as we were anticipating her arrival. All those months of the fertility process seem like so long ago each time we look at each other over Gabby's head and grin. We even smile when she cries, because we just appreciate her so much. We both can name the exact moment when being Gabby's parents became all about worrying about Gabby, rather than worrying about every minute detail of the adoption process. It wasn't during Chinju's labor or delivery, and it wasn't even that first night, when Chinju said her good-byes and then checked herself out of the hospital. It was the second night Gabby was alive, when Gabby got a really high fever. Seeing an IV coming out of our baby alleviated any concerns we might have had about bonding with this child or feeling like this child might not truly be "ours". Instead, we stared at that little tube coming out of Gabby's perfect, tiny head and just prayed that she would be fine and that everything would be okay. And it was.

And it is. We love this child more than either of us ever imagined it was possible to love another human being. There are so many nights that we look down at her, sleeping peacefully in her crib, and one of us wants to wake her up just to kiss and hug her. Then, of course, that evening's more rational parent must remind the eager parent that waking a sleeping baby is a bad idea, but we're still tempted. We're tempted to kiss and hug her whenever Rosie enters a room and Gabby gets so excited that her arms start flapping and she squeals and yells to Rosie and Rosie wanders over and licks her face with her tail wagging. That's when we know that Chinju knew what she was doing by picking us based on our puppy. Gabby is obsessed with our dog and her eyes follow Rosie everywhere, each time Rosie is in the immediate vicinity. There was clearly a spot for Gabby in our home and in our hearts before she even arrived, and now she fits into her place just perfectly. And our family has become what it is meant to be because of her presence.