



## BE ENGAGED



### Policy Publication Releases:

Highlights new and notable publications from Family Research Council. It's a must for anyone wanting to keep abreast of pro-family issues.

[click here to subscribe](#) 



### Help Us Get Others Engaged:

Tell a friend about this publication.

[click here to forward](#) 

# Embryo Adoption In the Words of Their Parents



FAMILY RESEARCH COUNCIL

*Washington, DC*



Thank you for choosing this resource. Our pamphlets are designed for grassroots activists and concerned citizens—in other words, people who want

to make a difference in their families, in their communities, and in their culture.

Recent history has clearly shown the influence that the “Values Voter” can have in the political process. FRC is committed to enabling and motivating individuals to bring about even more positive change in our nation and around the world. I invite you to use this pamphlet as a resource for educating yourself and others about some of the most pressing issues of our day.

FRC has a wide range of papers and publications. To learn more about other FRC publications and to find out more about our work, visit our website at [www.frc.org](http://www.frc.org) or call 1-800-225-4008. I look forward to working with you as we bring about a society that respects life and protects marriage.

President  
Family Research Council

EMBRYO ADOPTION - IN THE WORDS OF THEIR PARENTS  
BY WILLIAM L. SAUNDERS, ESQ., DR. DAVID PRENTICE AND WILLIAM SWEENEY  
SUGGESTED DONATION: \$1.50  
© 2006 FAMILY RESEARCH COUNCIL  
ALL RIGHTS RESERVED.  
PRINTED IN THE UNITED STATES

# Embryo Adoption In the Words of Their Parents

BY WILLIAM L. SAUNDERS, ESQ., DR. DAVID PRENTICE  
AND WILLIAM SWEENEY

## Introduction (Hannah's Story)



Hi!

Hannah, the first “Snowflake”

*My name is Hannah. I am the first Snowflake. I was adopted as a seed and put in my mommy’s tummy to grow. I am now 7 1/2 years old. My favorite subjects in school are art and reading. I pray that God would find mommies and daddies for all the embryos.*

WILLIAM L. SAUNDERS, ESQ. is Senior Fellow & Director of FRC’s Center for Human Life & Bioethics. A graduate of the Harvard Law School, he was featured in its inaugural Guide to Conservative Public Interest Law in 2004.

DR. DAVID PRENTICE is Senior Fellow for Life Sciences at FRC, and an Affiliated Scholar for the Center for Clinical Bioethics, Georgetown University Medical Center.

WILLIAM SWEENEY is an intern with William L. Saunders and the FRC Center for Human Life & Bioethics.



*Drawing by Hannah for Sen. Brownback's office*

*Here is a poster I drew last year. I wrote "We're Kids" and then "I love you" to the embryos. Then I drew three circles, three embryos, and put faces on them. The first one is a girl with a happy face and it's me. I'm happy because I was adopted. The second one has a sad face because he's still waiting for a mommy and daddy to get him. The third one has a straight line for his face and he's saying "Hmmm ... are you going to kill me?"*

*Please help us find mommies and daddies for all the embryos.*

The preceding is true and was written for this publication by Hannah, the first frozen embryo to be adopted in the USA.

In the pages that follow, the reader will find actual testimonies of couples from across the land—from Massachusetts to Maryland to Missouri—who have adopted frozen embryonic human beings. Some of these couples participated in *in vitro* fertilization (IVF). IVF—its wisdom or morality—is not, however, the subject of this pamphlet. Rather, the pamphlet aims to introduce to the reader those who reached out to individuals trapped in cryopreserved prison. Through their parents, you will also meet the children whom they saved.

Sometimes these couples, who are not scientists or doctors, use "pregnancy" in a common, colloquial manner to refer to the time of implantation. However, both they and the Family Research Council understand the scientific fact that pregnancy exists whenever embryonic human beings

are placed in the body of a woman, however they happened to be there and whether they successfully implant in the uterus or not.

## TESTIMONIES - Adopting Families

### Steve and Katie Johnson's Story

#### *Pennsylvania*

We knew when we married in 1995 that we wanted to have a family, but we also knew that it would be difficult to conceive our own child due to Steve's paralysis from a bicycle wreck. About three years into our marriage we started the traditional adoption process.

The following year we heard about Nightlight Christian Adoptions and Snowflakes on a *Focus on the Family* radio broadcast. It took us about a year to get comfortable with the concept of adopting someone else's frozen embryo. Kate was very excited, as she really wanted to experience pregnancy and childbirth.

Initially we were matched with a couple from Maryland and their six embryos, but none of the embryos survived the thawing process. We knew



*Kate, Steve and Zara Johnson*

that because of our ages (by this time we were in our forties) we needed to act soon to seek another match. Four months later, we were matched with five embryos from a Canadian couple.

What a glorious day it was when, two weeks after the embryos were transferred into Kate, we found out that she was pregnant! Kate connected deeply with the baby growing inside her, and our daughter Zara was born via emergency caesarian section on July 8, nine weeks premature, as Kate experienced problems with pre-eclampsia. Steve was amazed that a scrawny three-pound baby girl could immediately and completely capture his heart the very moment he first saw her as she was lifted from Kate's womb.

Zara is now a healthy, happy, smart, energetic bundle of joy who loves life and greets every day as the gift that it really is. We are so blessed and proud to have her as our daughter.

## Jeff and Maria Lancaster's Story

### *Washington*

Like millions of American families, my husband and I struggled with the pain of infertility. I did manage to get pregnant without the help of doctors twice but both pregnancies ended in miscarriages. Our doctor told us we were "done," mostly because I have crossed over into the "40s."

Then one day not long after, my husband heard a radio interview on Dr. James Dobson's show with a woman who gave birth to a child, Hannah, by adopting another couple's embryos. [This is the same Hannah who wrote the Introduction to this pamphlet.] Jeff came home and told me about it and I called the adoption agency.

We were matched with a family of very similar background and values. We knew right away that they were the family that would be part of our lives. They sent us pictures, and wrote us letters, so we could know more about them and the reasons they made the decision to donate their remaining embryos to our family.

Finally, the day arrived, and the frozen embryos were shipped across the nation to my doctor's office. Soon after that, two eight-celled embryos were transferred to my womb. We waited for several days, and to our great joy found out that I was pregnant! Nine months later, I delivered a beautiful baby girl, Elisha. My hope is that my story will encourage families that still want children not to give up hope! I especially want to be an encouragement to older women who have been told they were "too old."

## The Process

*During the process of IVF, most specialists fertilize a dozen or more eggs. They implant only a fraction of these newly created embryos into the mother. The remaining embryos are frozen for storage, but, under existing law, they legally "belong" to the parents, who have the option of using them later, discarding them, donating them for scientific research, or, in many states, donating them to another couple.*

*If the couple chooses to donate the remaining embryos to another couple, they are thawed and transferred into the womb of the mother-to-be.*

*While it is true that the child will not share its adoptive parents' genes, neither does a child in traditional adoption.*

*In a report published in 2000 by the American Society for Reproductive Medicine, the live birth rate per frozen embryo transfer was reported as 36.9 percent.<sup>1</sup>*

## Kevin and Janet Mason's Story

### *Ohio*

Janet and I learned about embryo adoption while listening to a radio broadcast by Focus on the Family. We had come to the realization that if Janet could not get pregnant by IVF, then we would pursue traditional adoption.

Amazingly, our genetic family was also listening to the same radio broadcast about embryo adoption and had an intense desire to place their remaining embryos for adoption. They had been struggling for years because they too believed that embryos are human lives, not extra, left-over blobs of cells from a procedure.

We remember the day when the packet arrived at our home with their profile, pictures, and letters. We opened it and cried tears of joy because we knew at that moment that God had done something wonderful.

Three embryos were thawed and transferred to Janet on our first attempt and she became pregnant with twin boys, Caleb Joshua and Jordan Michael.



*Kevin, Caleb, Jordan and Janet Mason.*



*Tim and Sarah Cochran.*

We can't imagine this world without them. We recently found out that we are pregnant with twins again. What an incredible blessing, to think that these embryos were frozen for nine years, and still God preserved them to be our children.

## Tim and Sarah Cochran's Story

### *Maryland*

In the fall of 2002 we were faced with a major life decision—how to proceed with growing our family.

Our fertility specialist strongly recommended egg donation. However, neither of us felt comfortable or at peace with that option. At the same time, we both felt that God had not closed the door to the possibility of another pregnancy. When we were visiting family in southern California we were fortunate to be given the opportunity to spend two hours with the director of the Snowflakes Frozen Embryo Adoption Program. We both left that meeting whole-heartedly knowing that frozen embryo adoption was what God wanted us to do.

In February we thawed three embryos. All three survived thawing and were transferred. One im-

planted, and we are thrilled and excited to meet the newest member of our family. We look forward to holding in our arms one of the God-given gifts we already treasure in our hearts.

## David and Stacy Giesen's Story

### *Michigan*

David and I were devastated after five hard years of infertility treatment to learn we could not have children. We had dreamed for years of the family that we would have together and had spent thousands of dollars and all our energy trying to realize this wish. One day we stumbled onto Snowflakes Embryo Adoption and were overjoyed. After accepting I'd never be pregnant, I learned I could be pregnant, wear maternity clothes, give birth, and breast feed my adoptive child. We were able to correspond with the biological family, share pho-

*Frank Giesen*



tos, stories, and medical histories, and have a connection for our baby to know his biological family some day.

We felt so much love for the family staring at us in the photos, and their twins were the most beautiful children I had ever seen. I knew God had led us to this family. After an amazing nine-month pregnancy, our little snowflake, Frank, was born in the middle of the night, in the middle of a snowstorm to a very crowded waiting room. He has been such a joy these last 18 months. Frank was such a beautiful, calm, and social baby. He loved getting passed around and meeting new faces. As a toddler, his social disposition brings so much joy into this world. I see him leaning out of the grocery cart trying to play peek-a-boo with the stranger next to him. I see the stresses of the day melt from them as they smile and play back. He is such a force in this world and he is not yet two. I wonder what kind of person he will be as a husband and father. Last week we attended a White House press conference supporting the veto of the bill that would have removed restrictions on the use of federal funds in research that requires the killing of an embryonic child, and thought about what an amazing journey God has brought us on.

## Jeff and Danette Gillingham's Story

### *California*

My husband and I have four little daughters, all born through embryo adoption. They were given to us two at a time. Yes! We have two sets of twins under the age of three, and they are wonderful. Our daughters are all from the same genetic family, so they share their good looks and adorable personality traits. They are such a blessing to us, a gift from God and we would not trade any step of the journey that led us to this point in our lives.



*Two sets of Gillingham twins*

Some people may wonder how important genetics is. For us, it's not important. We know God created these four girls to be a part of our family. We know he protected them and held them in his care. He put them in our hearts before they were in our arms, and when His time was right he brought them to our home.

Embryo Adoption is adoption at the earliest stage of development. It gave me the precious opportunity to carry and give birth to these wonderful babies, to bond with them from the very beginning. And how many women get to have two sets of twins? These children are constantly receiving attention from strangers, which gives us the honor of sharing their story and the story of those embryos still waiting to be adopted.

Make no mistake; God is not unaware of the situation of these little lives. I have heard these babies be compared to those souls on the Titanic, waiting for their impending doom, or for someone to rescue them. Let's be rescuers. Let's be defenders of life.

He settles the barren women in her home as the happy mother of children, praise the Lord. (Psalms 113:9)

## ADOPTION VS. DONATION

*In most states, transferring the legal ownership of an embryo requires only clear, written documentation. Both donation and adoption programs meet this minimum requirement.*

### **Embryo Adoption:**

- *Some agencies refer to the above-mentioned process as embryo adoption. This promotes the idea that the embryo is a child with a child's full rights.*
- *These programs are modeled after traditional adoption, and offer the safeguards and education available through a traditional adoption program. A home study is prepared for the adopting family, including screening and education, which assures that the adopting family is prepared.*
- *The families select each other, with the adoption agency acting only as an intermediary.*

- *The adopting family will have access to information about their child's parents and medical history, and therefore to possible matches for medical needs, such as organ donors.*

### **Embryo Donation:**

- *Donor embryo programs are modeled after the donor egg or sperm programs familiar to most clinics.*
- *The clinic, or sometimes even the doctor himself, serves as an intermediary between donor and recipient, and may select the families to whom the embryos will be given. The donating and receiving families may or may not remain anonymous to one another, and there may or may not be contact between them.*



The Burnett twins

## Robert and Anna Burnett's Story

### *Missouri*

Where do you turn when it seems like even the last resort didn't work? That is the question that we faced. Soon to enter our 40's, our desire to have a child seemed like the impossible dream. We tried medical treatments but none of them worked. We were open to adopting a baby but that just didn't seem to be the path that God wanted us to take. We knew, though, that God had given us the desire to be parents and that He would fulfill that desire.

One day Robert was listening to the Focus on the Family radio program and their topic was Snowflake Embryo Adoptions. We had never heard of such a thing! You can adopt embryos? This was the perfect solution for completing our family! We had been concerned when trying our own IVF that we would have embryos left over.

In June of 2004 we were matched with a family that had 10 embryos left over from *in vitro* that they would not be able to use because of the mother's health.

During my personal struggle with infertility I had claimed Isaiah 61:7 as my promise from God. "Instead of their shame, my people shall receive a double portion." Isn't it amazing how God works? I thought God was promising that the shame and pain of struggling with infertility would be gone.

He did take away that shame and blessed us more than we could ever imagine. On August 2, 2005, He fulfilled the second part of that scripture by giving us our double portion. A double portion of babies! That's right, twins! After many years of waiting, our twins, a boy and a girl, were born.

## Matthew and Janna Weiler's Story

### *Florida*

My son, Sam, was conceived in a laboratory in 2000—the product of IVF. He and thirteen of his siblings were only two cells each when they were frozen by their genetic parents. These fourteen embryos were “extra,” created in case the fresh embryos failed to result in a live birth. Last January, my husband and I adopted all fourteen of those embryos. Our little Sam was the only one out of four embryos to survive all the steps (thawing, dividing, implantation, gestation) necessary to be born last year. The other ten are frozen still, waiting to be born.

Due to deep concerns about the morality of IVF, we never sought a medical solution for our infertility. From the moment of diagnosis, we planned to adopt. Eventually, we chose an adoption agency and started making our way through the stack of application materials. Then one random wintry night we watched “60 Minutes II.” One of the stories that night was about the changing face of IVF. We looked at each other and asked the question that “60 Minutes II” didn't: “What about the male embryos the couple featured in the program didn't want?” That night we researched embryo adoption on the web.

I gave birth to my adopted son. It sounds crazy at first. Yet, it's only crazy because there are babies who need both gestation and adoption. They need the warmth and security of the womb before they can experience the warmth and security of their adopted family.



*Tanner James Brinkman*

## Jim and Doni Brinkman's Story

### *Arizona*

A life without children seemed a curse without cure. My whole life I had dreamed of motherhood only to have those dreams crushed with the words “You and your husband are not likely to conceive children together.” For seven long years we waited for our empty arms to be filled.

In September of 1999, I read an article from Focus on the Family about Embryo Adoption. By December we had finished our home study and submitted all our paperwork. In February of 2000, we received the much anticipated phone call! A genetic family in the Northwestern United States had chosen us to adopt their embryos. They mailed us a letter about themselves and pictures of their family.

Transfer day arrived in August. Two weeks later we received the news we had waited so long to hear. I was pregnant!

Nine months later, we sat staring at the most beautiful little boy we had ever laid eyes on. Our hearts are filled with gratitude for the family that chose life for our son and allowed us the privilege of becoming parents. When we look at our son, we see the fingerprints of God. Infertility was a devastating storm in our life, but the seasons of plenty that came from the rain resulted in a gift of hope—our son, Tanner James Brinkman.

## J.J. and Tracy Jones' Story

### *Texas*

*The following is taken from this couple's online journal, [www.jjandtracy.com](http://www.jjandtracy.com).*

**August 5, 2004:** Yesterday we had our embryo transfer appointment. Unfortunately, we had to thaw all ten of the embryos we adopted. This resulted in three embryos that we transferred.

**August 19:** Today we found out we are PREGNANT! This is still a critical time and we will know more at our first ultrasound. We hope to then find out how many of our three babies are developing and if there is a heartbeat(s).

**August 27:** We had our first ultrasound today and found out we have ONE baby! Everything was so



*The Jones family*

tiny, but we were very fortunate to see a little flutter that the doctor said was the heartbeat.

**September 13:** We went in today for our eight-week ultrasound and everything looks normal.

**November 22:** Tracy is approximately 18 weeks along at this point. We go in for our next sonogram where we hope to answer the boy/girl question. Tracy has had some minor pregnancy symptoms but nothing too difficult so far (easy for me to say).

**December 6:** We had our 20 week ultrasound today and found out we are having a baby BOY! He appeared to be perfectly normal and healthy. We even got to see his fingers and toes. We are so in love with our little boy and are amazed at God's miracle.

**February 25, 2005:** Tomorrow I will be 32 weeks along in my pregnancy. Only 8 weeks to go! At the last doctor visit I was measuring a little small so the doctor ordered another ultrasound. Our little one was fine and was actually measuring 3 days ahead of schedule.

**April 25, 2005:** Forgive us our overwhelming joy in announcing the arrival of Jack Lewis Jones III, a.k.a. Trey. He arrived last night at 8:31 pm. He weighs 8 lbs 3 oz and measures 20 3/4 inches long. Tracy had a c-section and both Trey and Mom are doing real well. Words cannot express our overwhelming joy. Thank you to so many of you that have prayed for Trey and his arrival.

## Bill and Cheri Keating's Story

### *Maryland*

We are high school sweethearts and have always wanted several children. We struggled with infertility for years, like many couples—but we found an option that answered our prayers. That option

is embryo adoption. We are expecting our baby in January.

We became pregnant on the first attempt. From the moment we were matched, joy and gratitude filled our hearts. We can never thank the genetic parents enough for the gift they have given us. We are truly blessed.



*Bill and Cheri Keating's child, in utero*

## COSTS

*Embryo Adoption is much cheaper than most other fertility options. A full in vitro process, a procedure which some insurance companies will not cover, can easily exceed \$20,000. On the other hand, embryo adoption/donation typically costs less than \$10,000.*

*A RAND Corporation study published in 2003 estimates that there are 400,000 frozen embryos in the United States alone, about 88 percent (352,000) designated for family building.<sup>2</sup> About 2.8 percent are donated to scientific studies. With 2.2 percent being discarded, that leaves some 28,000 children whose fate remains undecided.<sup>3</sup> With a 36.9 percent live birth rate per frozen embryo transfer, this means that 10,332 lives could be saved.*

## PLACING FAMILIES

### Bob and Angie Deacon's Story

#### *Virginia*

On December 26, 1998, after 2 ½ years of fertility treatments including IVF, we found out that we were finally pregnant! Words can hardly begin to describe the joy we felt. That joy became even more intensified a few weeks later when we find out we were having twins. What a blessing!

On June 22, 1999 (10 weeks early), our twins were born. At that time the doctors delivering the twins recommended that I not get pregnant again. It was too risky. Because we had two healthy children (a boy & a girl) this news was not too disappointing to us. However, we had 13 precious babies frozen. Their lives were valuable to us and God. Therefore, we knew that taking their lives by thawing and disposing of them or using them for scientific research was not an option for us.

We had heard of embryo donation and started researching it. Later, we heard about embryo adoption, a program where we could choose the type of parents that would raise our children. We knew that God had led us to this option. Although it was hard to let go of our embryos, we knew we wanted them to have a chance to live. The opportunity to help another couple suffering with infertility gave us great satisfaction. Had we not been able to have our genetic children, we would have wanted the opportunity to adopt embryos and experience the joy of pregnancy.

After attending a function where we were able to meet a number of families who adopted embryos, we were amazed to see the great joy and fulfillment these children brought to their lives. At that point, we knew with even greater confidence that we had

made the right decision. We are eternally grateful to the couple who adopted our embryos and gave them a chance at life.

### Tad and Veronica Hiley's Story

#### *North Carolina*

My husband and I were blessed with Boy/Girl twins after our first *in vitro* cycle. We had nine remaining frozen embryos. When our twins were two, we felt we needed to face the hard decision of what to do with our remaining embryos. Then we heard about an embryo adoption program in California. We contacted the agency and started the paperwork and matching process for an adoptive family.



*The Hiley family*

## ADDITIONAL RESOURCES FROM FAMILY RESEARCH COUNCIL

We chose an adoptive family who had struggled with infertility for nine years. They had the same morals and values we hold close in our family. They matched our criteria in every way. They also agreed to the same level of contact. We both wanted an open relationship, but not everyone does. You are matched with all criteria in mind.

Our adoptive family was able to achieve pregnancy on their first attempt, and now has one child who is almost five years old.

My husband and I have complete peace knowing we fulfilled the parental responsibility of our nine embryos. One child was born, but all nine were given a chance at life. We are so blessed to see how God has taken this situation and used it to give another couple the desire of their heart.

### FOOTNOTES

- 1 M.A. Damario, et al., “Embryo cryopreservation at the pronuclear stage and efficient embryo use optimizes the chance for a live born infant from a single oocyte retrieval,” *Fertility and Sterility* 73, no. 4 (April 2000): 767-773
- 2 D.I. Hoffman, et al., “Cryopreserved embryos in the United States and their availability for research,” *Fertility and Sterility* 79, no. 5 (May 2003): 1063-1069
- 3 *Ibid.*



### Adult Stem Cell Treatments - Nine Faces of Success BC06101

While Embryonic Stem Cells have yet to yield any successful treatments, Adult Stem Cells have been used in the successful treatment of over 70 medical conditions and diseases. Read about nine individuals who have dramatically benefited from Adult Stem Cell treatment.

Suggested Donation \$1.50 



### Human Cloning and the Abuse of Science BC04J01

Written by FRC bioethics experts William Saunders and Dr. David Prentice, this incisive pamphlet provides an overview of the process of cloning and powerfully shows how the use of human life in that process is a profound abuse of science.

Suggested Donation \$1.50 



### Stem Cells: Beyond Hype to Real Hope (DVD) DV06103

In a manner easily understood by the average American citizen, this DVD examines the science and the ethics of this controversial subject. It presents the truth about stem cells - what they are, where they come from, how you get them, and their promise for human treatments.

Suggested Donation \$5.00 



### Washington Update WUSUB

Family Research Council's flagship subscription: a daily email update with the latest pro-family take on Washington's hottest issues.

Subscribe FREE today! 

To order these resources or to see more FRC publications, visit our website at [www.frc.org](http://www.frc.org) or call 800-225-4008.