

Dear Expectant Mother,

We are Brandon and Rachelle. We live in a small, Midwestern town where Brandon is a Realtor, and Rachelle works part-time in information technology. Nearly all of our extended family lives nearby, which means we have grandparents, aunts, uncles, and cousins, eagerly waiting to welcome a new child into our family and shower him or her with love and attention.

We have been married for seven years. We have struggled with infertility throughout those years. Through IVF and a donor egg, we were blessed with Shelly, our two-and-a-half year old daughter. Since Shelly is not Rachelle's biological child, we already know and understand that it's certainly not biology that determines love. We long to adopt and to add



another miracle child to our lives.



Shelly awaits a little brother or sister.

Rachelle: I am the middle child and the only girl in our family. My older brother claims I have all the personality traits of the oldest child, because I'm organized, responsible and always taking charge. But I wonder if that's just because I was the only daughter. My parents knew they could count on me.

I spent my childhood playing with my brothers and the other kids in the neighborhood. We were always outside, riding bikes, playing ball, or making forts. My mom reminds me of a call she received from a neighbor one day, asking her if she knew where her daughter was. My mom didn't hesitate for a second before replying, "Yes. Up in a tree." And that's exactly where I was, perched at the very top of a tree. No surprise to her. In fact, she wondered why the neighbor considered it remarkable enough to make an inquiry.

My parents are loving, warm people and they raised us to put family first.

My dad was a pastor of a local church until I was in fourth grade. Then he took a position at a college/seminary, where he worked until last year. Now he is a pastor again. My mom was a stay-at-home mom for most of my growing up years, although she worked at a grocery store for a couple years while my dad got his doctorate degree. It won't surprise you to hear that I was raised with strong, Christian values. I grew up with parents who lived their beliefs. When I was in high school, my parents started taking in foster children — 25 in all, through the years. I learned from their example how love and patience can change the life of a child. Their commitment to family, service, and God has profoundly affected how I try to live my life.



On the merry-go-round.

now. We talk all the time. My older brother, Andy, lives in our town. He's a great brother and a great uncle. My younger brother, Rob, lives in Paris. In spite of that distance, we still talk on the phone all the time. I can't wait until we can go to France to visit him. I imagine how amazing it will be to show our children another country, another culture. It's hard for me to imagine not having siblings who understand you so deeply just because they've always been there and have shared your life story. We also know that Shelly will be an amazing big sister who will dote lovingly on her new little brother or sister.

Growing up, we spent a lot of our family vacations camping. We built campfires and roasted a lot of marshmallows over the years. I have a spoon collection from all the places we visited, the Grand Canyon, Mount Rushmore, Yellowstone, Colorado, and Washington, D.C., just to name a few. I remember how hard it was to get out of the warm sleeping bag when I had to go to the bathroom in the middle of the night. I loved climbing in the mountains and seeing wildlife we never saw at home. Now, Brandon, Shelly, and I join my parents on camping trips. They've upgraded a bit. When I was kid, we slept in tents. Now they have a pop-up camper. But, the campfires are still the same. And so are the s'mores and mountain pies.



Brandon and I are a perfect match. He's warm, funny and compassionate.

We continue other family traditions, too. On Christmas Eve, we go to my parents' house to read the Christmas story by candlelight, sing carols, and open one present. My mom always bakes the same treats for Christmas: Chinese chews, Babe-Ruth bars, peanut butter balls, and fudge. Now, she bakes cookies with Shelly and their favorite is cut-out sugar cookies. I

know she can't wait to add ten more little, sticky fingers in the cookie dough. It's no surprise that a mom who's taken in 25 foster kids adores children!

Brandon and I have started some of our own holiday traditions, too. For Christmas, we decorate our house with Rudolph and the Island of Misfit toys. We put stuffed characters on the mantle and around the house, ornaments on the trees, and use Rudolph cutouts for cookies. It's a family affair, and the decorations are for playing with, not just to look at. Each year, the whole family watches the original Rudolph movie, Island of the Misfit Toys, and Frosty the Snowman. We bought a special ornament for Shelly when she was born, and she gets to put it on the tree each year. We can't wait to add a new child's ornament to our decorations. I grew up with this tradition, and even now my mom saves my ornament until I visit at their house, so I can hang it on their tree, myself.



At a golf course near Brandon's parent's house. Shelly and her cousin like to putt on the green with their grandpa.

I have a degree in business. I've always liked finance, spreadsheets, and formulas. I began my career in financial planning and compensation. However, I now work only part-time, which required a career change to information technology. I work two days a week, and Shelly's grandmas take care of her on those two days. I can't think of a better childcare arrangement. And they assure me that they are more than ready to have another grandchild to add to their fun.

I met Brandon after college, through a mutual friend. We dated for more than two years before we got married. My dad was the pastor at our wedding. It was wonderful.

Far more wonderful than the wedding, however, is our marriage. Brandon is warm, quiet, and laid back. He's a great complement to my personality, since I'm always on the go. He is terrific with his real estate clients. They know, as I do, that he's absolutely trustworthy. He is a rock. Recently, Shelly was sick (with a ruptured appendix), and he was a comfort to both of us. He is fun and compassionate with children.

When he walks into a room, kids make a beeline for him, and he loves it. Nothing is more important to him than being a father. He says it is his favorite role in life. And it's a good thing, because Shelly is Daddy's little shadow. I don't know how many times I had to get towels and dry clothes after Shelly got soaked "helping" Daddy water the flowers and plants this past summer and fall. I can only imagine how many more towels I'll be fetching when we have two children watering the garden, or playing in the sprinkler, or going to grandpa's house for a swim. I can't wait.

We all three love to be outdoors. We take bike rides and go for walks in our neighborhood. During the warmer months, there are always kids outside and you can hear the laughter and voices of children playing. We often join them, or they join us in our backyard, playing on the swing set or in the sprinkler. Shelly also takes classes at the Y. It is fun to watch her explore and learn by being active.

Brandon: I'm a middle child, too. I have an older brother, David, and a younger sister, Tara. My parents divorced when I was six years old. Both have remarried, so my blended family has expanded. I have two brothers from my step-dad's other marriage and a sister from my mom's second marriage. I'm so fortunate that we are all very close, not just in terms of living near each other, but in terms of friendship. It's been wonderful to have so many siblings to share my childhood.



Fun in the pool.

My father is a calm, gentle, and loving man. He was a teacher while I was growing up. I wanted to be just like him. One of my favorite play activities was to "play school". I used to set up a schoolroom

in my bedroom or the basement, stocked with Dad's school supplies and a grade book and pretend I was a teacher. When I was 15 years old, my dad left teaching and opened his own real estate firm. He is such an inspiration to me that I suppose it's no accident that now I'm a Realtor, too. Working as a Realtor, I have a great deal of flexibility in my schedule. I am grateful for that. When Shelly was hospitalized for the ruptured appendix, I was able to be at the hospital with Rachelle and Shelly around the clock. I wouldn't have wanted it any other way.

I also love golf and tennis. My dad taught me how to play tennis, and we still play together.

My mom started working after the divorce at a jewelry store, and she's still there. As much as she enjoys working with the clients, she says that without a doubt, her favorite job is watching her grandchildren, Shelly and Tristan, my sister's son. Not only are grandmas great babysitters, but I think it's wonderful that Shelly is able to play with her cousin so frequently. They adore each other.



**Brandon's mom and family gathering for the holiday.
Babysitters and playmates galore!**

I've always looked forward to the holidays, because it meant seeing our extended families. We'd get together with grandparents, aunts, uncles, and cousins. I still remember the joy of playing with my cousins at these family gatherings. I liked the hustle and bustle in the kitchen — and the great food that came out of it. One of my favorite family recipes is "cocoa bread." It's peanut butter and buttered bread in a bowl of cocoa. I still love it

and look forward to it along with my brother and sister, aunts, uncles, and cousins. I've even gotten Shelly hooked on cocoa bread, though I think you have to have been raised on it to like it, because Rachelle thinks it's awful.

When I was growing up, we'd go for dinner at my mom's parents' house every Sunday. My mom is an only child, so we were the only grandkids and the center of attention. My grandma was a great cook. I make her pizza for our family now. And unlike the cocoa bread, that's widely appreciated.

There were lots of kids in our neighborhood when I was growing up and always a game going on. Playing sports was a big part of my life in high school and college, especially tennis and basketball. I'm not playing as much basketball as I used to, but I still love sports. If I'm not playing myself, I like to be a spectator. I took Shelly to a high school basketball game recently. I think we have another sports fan in the making! She had so much fun, clapping and cheering along with the rest of us. I think playing sports makes for healthy, happy kids, so I'm going to give my kids every opportunity to play whatever sports they like. But that's not all. I won't just drop them off at games, I'm ready to coach, too, and volunteer my time.



We're huge sports fans.

As guys go, I'm definitely the sensitive type, and I'm not ashamed to admit it. I'm always kissing and hugging Shelly and telling her I love her. I want her to grow up knowing how much we adore her and give her a strong sense of self so that she is well-prepared to go into the world. I look at Shelly with wonder and am grateful every day for the joy she's bringing us. I can't imagine our lives without her. But I *can* imagine how incredibly wonderful it will be to have another child in the house. I can't wait to hear our kids whispering to each other, laughing at some joke we'd never get, arguing over whose turn it is to do the dishes, or who gets to sit shotgun in the car. But most of all, I can't wait to see the friendship growing between my kids.



Chopsticks for two.

Rachelle is the love of my life and an incredible wife and mother. Everything she does is 110%. She's intelligent and organized and should take full credit for making our house a home. (She's shy, but not among family and friends) Rachelle's mothering style is very hands-on. She is always talking to Shelly, teaching her, encouraging her, and reading to her. I know that she's longing to have another infant in her arms and another child in her heart and home. I know that nothing would make either of us happier.



We live in a great old neighborhood with lots of kids.

Rachelle and Brandon: We live in a three-bedroom ranch house in an older neighborhood with tree-lined streets. We are close to a park and the library. In warm months, we often ride our bikes there. There are kids' activities at the park, year round. Last summer, Shelly and one of her grandmas went to a weekly craft program there. It was wonderful to see the creations she'd bring home each week. Shelly loves to swing, so the park is one of her favorite places to visit. It doesn't hurt that there's a McDonald's nearby, either. She's also crazy about French fries.

No one would have to wonder if a child lives in our house. There are toys in every room. We have a big glassed-in back porch that is our favorite room in the warm summer months. It is basically a big toy box, as we want Shelly to play wherever we are. Rachelle's mom has

saved many of her old toys, which are now Shelly's toys. It's really fun to see Shelly playing with her mommy's Care Bears and Strawberry Shortcake dolls. During colder weather, we spend a lot of time in our family room, in front of the fireplace, reading books, playing games, or just talking.

Our cat, Tigger, is usually in the thick of things with us, curled up as we read, or cuddling with Shelly. Tigger or "Tigger Buddy", as we often call him, loves kids and looks forward to his treat from Shelly every evening.

We love having friends and family over, going out to dinner, or to see a play. Many of our friends have young children, and we have lots of neighbors with kids. Our community has an excellent school system, so it's filled with young families. We want to give our children every educational opportunity, so we have already started a college fund for Shelly, and we will do the same for our next child.

In closing, we know how fortunate we are to have one healthy, happy child. But we can't help but long for a second. We both grew up with siblings, and we know how much that has enriched our lives. We know that Shelly and your baby will be as loyal and loving to each other as we have been with our brothers and sisters, creating a bond that will last a lifetime.

We want to raise confident and happy children, who are secure in the love of their family. We believe that having their little souls entrusted to us is a miracle, and we will strive to live every day honoring the gift we are given. If you choose us to adopt your child, we will raise him or her to know that your decision was an act of love. And if you want, we will keep you updated on your child's progress through the years.



If you would like more information about us, please call our attorneys, Steve or Joel Kirsh, at 1-800-333-5736. They will be happy to answer your questions.

All the best,

Brandon and Rachelle