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Choices that will bear fruit

INFERTILITY AWARENESS, A joint venture with the Infertility Awareness Association of Canada

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Dalit and Peter Hume are now active with the Infertility Awareness Association of Canada.

Danny and Jillian Roth and Dalit and Peter Hume have come to accept infertility will always be a part of their lives. Each couple tried for years to conceive; each sought years of treatment.

In the end, they had to face the sad fact that pregnancy was simply not in the cards. Then each made an intensely personal choice about the future: Danny and Jillian adopted Billy, now three, while Dalit and Peter chose a different route. They decided parenthood would not be their future; they would remain child-free.

Neither choice was easy but each has its own rewards, says Jocelyn Smith, president of the Infertility Awareness Association of Canada (IAAC), the national group that informs, supports and advocates for couples facing infertility issues.

"Accepting infertility is an enormously emotional and difficult challenge for any couple," she says. "The biggest hurdle to overcome is gaining the ability to see that this is not the end of the world, that there are other options, and that each can provide a satisfying and rewarding future."

Accepting and moving on is indeed a mighty mountain to climb, both couples say. And even when the decision is behind them, those who choose to remain child-free will always have a sense of loss and longing, Dalit Hume says.

"It is not something you can ever completely get over," she says. "You have to accept that a continuing sense of loss is natural; motherhood and fatherhood is hard-wired into us. What you must do is understand those feelings will be part of your life always, and then find other *raison d'être*."

While adoption is an alternative, 44.5% of Canadian couples do not consider it a reasonable one for them, according to a survey of 200 Canadians conducted by IAAC - 192 of them women - whose average age was 31.6 years old. Half of them said the reason was that their partner did not agree to adoption; almost 42% said the adoption process was too costly, and 30% said there simply were not enough infants available for adoption.

Danny and Jillian Roth can tell you from their own experience that much of the above is true but that, in the end, having an adopted child mitigates many of the challenges infertile patients face in their struggle for parenthood.

Danny, 37, and Jillian, 40, have been married nearly eight years. He is a public relations consultant and she is an event organizer. Shortly after they were married they started trying to have a family, but their efforts were proving fruitless. They sought the help of a fertility clinic in Toronto.

"We went through four in-vitro procedures there without success," Ms. Roth says. "Then, almost as a last resort, we went through another in New York, but that procedure didn't work either."

"The hardest decision is knowing when to stop treatment," Mr. Roth says. "You always think, 'What if the next one works?'"

The couple say they had decided that New York would be their last attempt at assisted reproduction.

"We came to the conclusion that we had confused getting pregnant with being a parent," Mr. Roth says. "The light clicked on and we suddenly understood that pregnancy was not the end goal; becoming a mom and dad was."

They began to investigate adoption. It was not a smooth and easy course, Mr. Roth says.

"To put it bluntly, adoption is a seller's market," he says. "There just are not many healthy newborns available in Canada."

They admit to being lucky. They found Billy through a private adoption agency licensed by the province to perform such services. The total cost of adoption was in the \$10,000 to \$12,000 range, including all fees, taxes and associated costs, the couple says.

"It actually works out to about the same as a fertility treatment," Mr. Roth says.

Was it worthwhile? "Absolutely," Ms. Roth says. "He is such a wonderful child, such a terrific little boy. He has made every step of our unexpected journey totally worth taking."

Dalit and Peter Hume have chosen a different path. After years of trying to resolve Dalit's infertility, the couple also looked into the adoption process but decided it wasn't for them.

"Trying to remedy infertility can place enormous strains on any relationship," Ms. Hume says. "We came to the stage where we just could not face them anymore. We made the decision to rebuild and strengthen what we already shared and to make the most from our lives together."

Ms. Hume, 43, a fundraiser, and Mr. Hume, a 45-year-old first aid instructor, married 14 years ago and tried for seven long years to have children. At age 33, Ms. Hume found she was suffering from a rare medical condition - early onset menopause.

"I had all the symptoms of a woman 20 years older," she says. "And unfortunately, the fertility treatments we tried did not work."

Initially, they did indeed look into adoption. "But there were so few babies available and the process was so intrusive and stressful after the years of strain trying to have a baby placed on the both of us that we decided it was just not for us," Mr. Hume says.

The couple decided chose to focus their energies on helping others. Mr. Hume changed his job from computer programming to a first aid instructor while waiting to get on the fire department. Ms. Hume focused on her career as a charitable fundraiser and became an active member of IAAC as a board member and infertility support group co-facilitator. Both volunteer with homeless youth.

"I strongly believe in what IAAC does," she says. "The fact is research shows that there will be more and more couples like us in the future. Infertility is on the rise. I think I can help play a role in showing couples that remaining child-free can be an option."

And yet, there will always be that twinge of longing that will never go away, she says. "What is absolutely vital is to make a decision that works for you, which for us meant finding other ways to make a difference in this world."