

## Our A to Z story

By Andrew, Adam, and Zachary

When we first started dating, the idea of eventually having a child was always the plan. We just didn't exactly know how that would come about being a same-sex couple. We slowly started to research, and then researched some more. The available information and opinions of others on how we should create our family were quite overwhelming but ultimately, we came to the decision that adoption was the best path for us to bring a child into our lives.



We thought deciding on an adoption agency would be simple, but quickly discovered that was not the case. We had originally wanted an agency near our hometown. However, being a same-sex couple, we quickly discovered that most local agencies would not accept us as clients.

When we started branching out and reading about agencies throughout Michigan, we stumbled upon Hands Across The Water (HATW). We were thrilled to learn that not only did HATW speak publicly about being LGBT affirming, they had a strong track record of successfully matching birth families with same-sex couples. In our research, we found some agencies that were happy to work with same-sex couples, however, they did not have much experience in matching them with potential birth parents. HATW was the exception.

Starting with our first interaction, we were very comfortable working with the staff at HATW. As our home is several hours from the agency's main office, they were happy to meet with us via web conference to answer questions and provide information about the process. It was the first time we felt like the adoption process was possible. Instead of merely sifting through information, we felt like someone was guiding us through the process. We quickly decided that HATW was the right fit for us and

we started working on our home study. Even though we lived some distance from the agency, we never felt isolated. Someone was always available to answer a question or to check in on us.

After completing the home study, we started the waiting process. Everyone kept saying, “it will happen when it happens,” or “it will happen when it is right.” Though we can say now that it’s true, those were some of the most frustrating words at the time. The social worker checking in on us was always so validating and acknowledged the emotional rollercoaster we were enduring. She was amazing with proving empathy and support during the journey. One of the things we loved most was her asking the amount of contact or updates we wanted during the waiting time. At first, we preferred frequent check-ins, even if there were no updates. As time went on we wanted less contact, as it was a reminder that our match did not yet happen. Our social worker encouraged us to *keep living life* rather than trying to plan events around “*what ifs*”—*what if we get a call today... or this month... or next month.*

As time passed, the feeling of uncertainty—whether or not it would happen for us—resurfaced. At this



point in time, it was January and our home study renewal would be coming up in May. We were thinking that we needed to accept the fact that we might not have a child. We decided that when May arrived, we would not renew the home study a third time. Although we were receiving so much love and support from family, friends, and even the staff at HATW, it did not change the fact that there was nothing we could do to find our child.

In February, we received a call that there may be a possible birth mother and a possible match. The agency wanted to provide some details and to see if we were interested in having our adoption profile shown. This was not the first time we received a call like this, so we found ourselves excited but we knew not to get our hopes up. Days passed and we then received one of the most exciting, yet terrifying, calls! We learned that a birth mother had selected us to meet her and her newborn baby. This was on a Tuesday and a meeting was scheduled for Friday. The baby was born premature and he was in the newborn intensive care unit (NICU), so our meeting was going to take place at the hospital.

Friday arrived and we met with our social worker at the hospital. A few minutes later the birth family arrived. Though the meeting lasted a couple hours, we felt so comfortable right from the start. We had always hoped for some degree of openness with adoption but when you don't know the birth family, it is difficult to imagine what that truly means. After talking with the birth family, we could understand and picture what future interactions would be like. Following the meeting, we were informed that the birth mother wanted to move forward with her adoption plan and allow us to adopt her baby. We knew instantly that we also wanted to move forward. That afternoon, we started the process to adopt our son.



Since our son was born premature, he was in the NICU for several weeks. We made frequent trips to the hospital during the week and would stay near the hospital on the weekends. During this time, we were able to get to know our son's birth family more. HATW was constantly checking in on how we were doing while they completed the legal process. They were wonderful in helping us navigate this new experience for us. Whenever we had a question, they were readily available to walk us through and provide support. At times when a possible barrier arose, HATW kept us calm and talked us through the process as many times as we needed them to. In July 2019, the adoption finalization took place, allowing us to officially adopt our son Zachary.

The staff at HATW will continue to be a resource and support system as we navigate this new chapter of life. Although we will not receive regular updates or visits from our social worker, we know that should we need anything, help is only a phone call away. It does feel slightly odd to be on the other side of the process but comforting to know that if any questions arise, HATW is available to offer guidance. They have been, and will continue to be, a comforting support system and wealth of information for us.

Now that we are a family of three, life is everything that we always hoped it would be (with a few surprises along the way, of course). We feel complete! It is bizarre, but we now enjoy enduring the sleep

deprivation, late night feedings, and mountains of diapers that come with raising an infant. We enjoy it because none of this was ever a guarantee for us.

It is funny how the smallest things have changed for us. Before going to bed, we make sure that there is enough milk thawing in the fridge for the next day—something we never imagined would be part of a normal routine. We are loving the mundane day-to-day tasks and simply find joy in our son's coos and smiles. We love splashing through bath time, reading bedtime stories, and make room for enough tummy time each day.