

[00:00:00.570] - Melissa Corkum

Hey friends, welcome to episode 212. This week we are bringing you another adoptee perspective. And this interview came about because we talked about embryo adoption a while back on the podcast. We will link that in the show notes. And someone reached out and said, hey, would you be interested in talking to the first ever adopted embryo? And we were like, yes, of course. And so Hannah, welcome to the show and thank you so much for being willing to come share part of your story with us.

[00:00:35.720] - Hannah Strege

Yes, thank you so much for having me.

[00:00:38.330] - Melissa Corkum

So before we jump in, could you just tell folks a little bit about who you are as a person, however little or detailed information you want to share?

[00:00:48.990] - Hannah Strege

Sure. So my name is Hannah Strege and I'm in my Masters of Social Work program at Baylor University. And I'm set to graduate this upcoming August of 2023. It's so crazy to think that the next year is coming around so quickly. I have my bachelor's in sociology from Biola University, and I'm originally from San Diego County, and I now live in Colorado Springs.

[00:01:13.180] - Melissa Corkum

So great. I had so many questions when I was preparing for this interview. But we're going to try to keep it simple and not too overwhelming for people, and focus on not just the embryo part of your story, but just also we are really passionate here at the Adoption Connection about giving space for particularly adoptee and birth mother voices. And so you also have your own journey as an adoptee, not to mention, I think unusual is not the word I'm looking for, but probably it's not the majority way that adoptees come to be adopted. So have you always known you were adopted?

[00:01:53.370] - Hannah Strege

Yes, I have. My parents never kept it a secret from me and I'm so blessed for that. And that they told me I was adopted as a seed and put into my mommy's tummy to grow. And that was the story I held on to for dear life for until I got a lot older, and I would just tell people I was adopted as a seed and put into my mom's tummy to grow. And that was the story and that was the end of the conversation, because these are my parents and since my mom is both my adopted mom and my birth mom, it just seemed the easiest way to explain it.

[00:02:23.140] - Melissa Corkum

When you would give that narrative to people. Did you ever get follow up questions that were hard to answer as a child? Did your parents talk to you about how to answer questions? Because it is a little unusual, and I think more so something that people just aren't as familiar with.

[00:02:40.020] - Hannah Strege

Yeah, especially at the beginning because this program is only as old as I am and so we were really kind of the test subjects of how people would respond. But I said it so matter of factly that it was almost like there were no further questions. Just like, okay, that's it. And usually further questions don't come in until people are like, have a moment to sit with it. And they're like, okay, she's adopted as a seed and put into her mommy's tummy to grow. And then they have a ton of follow up questions, but they don't really know how to word them. And so my family and I have gotten every question under the sun, just because it is complicated, but we want people to be aware and understanding, and understand what we did and clarify that for people if they have questions.

[00:03:20.750] - Melissa Corkum

What would you say to parents who have something in their story? Maybe it's not embryo adoption, that can be a little tricky or maybe does get a lot of welcome or unwelcome questions from either family members, friends, the public, people in the grocery store. Speaking as an adoptee, how would you recommend parents prepare their children who are adopted for such questions?

[00:03:51.930] - Hannah Strege

I think even as an adopted parent, you know your child best, and you know how they would respond to complicated questions and how that would look. But you're also in control of how much you choose to share with that person. And I think as I've gotten older, I've really taken into account, like, well, I'm in control of what I say and how I explain my story. But the truth is always really what matters in telling the truth and telling your narrative is always really important. And your testimony is so powerful to share with other people. And so you know your child and you just need to trust that you're instilling these values, these conversations. And you're having these conversations early, so if a stranger or these questions do come up, your child will know how to react.

[00:04:38.010] - Melissa Corkum

You're bringing up something that we talk a lot about here, which is following our child's leads, and just the different ways that adoptees, well everyone, processes the world in different lenses, and that includes adoptees. And so you know a little bit about the enneagram. And we have used that as a tool here at the Adoption Connection because we think it's really helpful to help understand the variety of ways that particularly adoptees, see the world and see their stories. And so can you tell people a little bit about your type and what that means to people who have no idea what a number is? We can share your number, but then also kind of some of the main characteristics of that. And then can you kind of maybe loop that back to how that allowed you maybe - because I'm thinking maybe that played into the way that you were able to kind of so confidently just tell people a little bit about your story and kind of leave it, or say it in such a way that it didn't leave a lot of room for questions, or be okay with answering people's questions and not maybe feeling a ton of shame or however that experience was for you. Can you kind of connect some of those dots for us?

[00:05:53.250] - Hannah Strege

Sure. So I had never heard anything about the Enneagram until I got to college, and I was in a sociology class and my professor had us take the Enneagram test to figure out what kind of social worker we'd be. And I always thought, like, I've taken the Myers Briggs, I've taken those. And I'm like, well, I just don't understand. I feel like I'm being put in a box. And they're like, well, the Enneagram doesn't put you in a box. It allows for growth and shows you how you respond to stress, and it shows you how you respond when you're growing and just doing you and doing your best. And so I found out during that test that I'm an Enneagram wing three or 3 wing 2, and that means that I'm the achiever. And so really, that's kind of played out in my life that I just have a lot of goals. I've been kind of reaching for the stars ever since I was a kid, and I think my adoption story really has played an impact on that. And just like how my parents have shown me that adoption is not second best and that there's so much good that can come out of sharing my story and helping others through their adoption story, and understanding it and navigating all the different paths of well, I have a biological family, but I also have an adopted family, but I also have my own feelings about how I feel about the adoption.

[00:07:06.620] - Hannah Strege

So being the achiever, it just has really shown me that I can do anything that I want, and that I really have tons of goals and I'm super confident in myself. But having that wing 2, it also means, well, I care about what others think of me and I want to help others, and I'm really compassionate. And a lot of women in the Bible or Christian women are often seen as Enneagram 2s. And so it's just been such a blessing to kind of understand myself in that way. But also having used the Enneagram to kind of see how it will affect my career and how it affects me with clients has really been a blessing as well because I never even thought of applying it that way.

[00:07:53.670] - Melissa Corkum

Yeah. One of the things we know about Enneagram 3s along with 7s and 8s is that we are good for better or for worse, at putting feelings aside or even suppressing them. So have you found that to be true in your adoption story? Like, have you processed it with a lot of big emotions? Has it been more like matter of fact?

[00:08:17.070] - Hannah Strege

I feel like it's been more matter of fact to the public since my story has been so public for so long, just that I do have feelings about it, but I just don't let them kind of get in the way of all the good that my adoption story can do. And sharing that adoption is an amazing thing and that other people need to experience it if God calls them to.

[00:08:37.910] - Melissa Corkum

I know a lot of adoptees talk about feeling a sense of loss, but that's also in a situation right, where they were also grown in the tummy uterus of another birth mom and then separated, where your story is a little bit different. Do you feel, I guess this is two questions. One, feel a need to connect to your biological family? And two, do you feel a sense of loss around not being connected to them?

[00:09:08.750] - Hannah Strege

Starting with number two, I don't feel a sense of loss because of how embryo adoption really kind of works is the sense that these couples are biological families, underwent IVF treatments, which is in vitro fertilization, and they created X amount of embryos. And in my case, my biological parents created more embryos than they could parent. And so really, they gave me the gift of life by placing me for adoption, giving me to a family that would love me and raise me as their own, and I would get to experience life. Whereas the other side of that is if they didn't do that, I would still be remaining in frozen storage. And so it's not that they didn't want me or they didn't love me, but it's that act of love that they gave me up enough to give me the life that I deserved. And so I don't feel a sense of loss, but a sense of gratitude. And I'm sorry, what was the other question?

[00:10:04.050] - Melissa Corkum

Do you have a desire to be connected or stay connected to your biological family?

[00:10:10.770] - Hannah Strege

Yeah. So I feel like I get this a lot. And I think that the narrative that a lot of movies and TV shows play is that you need to find your biological family to figure out who you are. And that's not true. I feel like we've been fed this lie, and a lot of parents have been fed this lie that, oh, my gosh, my kid's going to want to go find their biological family and go on this self defining journey. And for me, that was not the case. But I know it is for some people. And I know it's the case for a lot of people that just want to find a sense of belonging. And it's there, but it's not your whole story. And your life doesn't magically fall into place once you meet those people, because just because we're not related by blood doesn't make us not family. And so I think that that narrative and that lie we've been fed through social media, that your life is just magically going to fall into place once you find your blood relatives is not the case. And that you need to know who you are as your own person and not as attached or defined to somebody else.

[00:11:16.150] - Melissa Corkum

I'm imagining that you have full genetic siblings out in the world. Do you have connections with them? Again, not as a means of, like you were mentioning, trying to find belonging or even your sense of identity, but just any curiosity or any desire to stay connected.

[00:11:37.310] - Hannah Strege

Yeah, so I have biological siblings, and I went to Disneyland with them right after I graduated high school. And so that was really a fun kind of middle ground place to hang out. And I have them all on snapchat. We send cards back and forth like we have a relationship. And it's a blessing to be able to have an open adoption where I can know everything about them and contact them if I wish. But what I tell so many moms that are nervous about embryo adoption, what that looks like is your child's in the driver's seat. They get to choose how much contact they want in the future, if they want them at all. I mean, giving your child that authority is so important, and it empowers them to make decisions that are right for them. And so I really love that my parents really kind of gave me the reins on what kind of relationship I want with my biological family and that we have a great relationship today.

[00:12:33.600] - Melissa Corkum

What age do you feel like your parents started kind of turning over that to you? And what would you say to parents who are parenting infants or toddlers who may not be able to voice that yet or might

not have the maturity to kind of know what the future could or could not bring. So what would you say to parents in that space in terms of how much contact? What would you do? How do you learn to follow a child's lead, especially a young child?

[00:13:04.250] - Hannah Strege

Yes. So at Nightlight Christian Adoptions, that was the adoption agency my parents went through, they know all of the tips and tricks for how to know what kind of open adoption you want. If you want to closed adoption, do you want the door slightly open, like what that looks like, and that it looks different for everybody else? I can really only speak to how my parents did it. And so we had an open adoption. We sent cards every year, but it wasn't really until I was 18 until I got the authority of what that looks like for me. And it really was empowering because my parents said, well, it's your relationship, it's not our relationship. And so when I was 18, I'm legally an adult. I'm able to make my own decisions. But every child is different. And the way my parents did it might not be the way that works for other people, but it just really is about what works for you and your biological family and also what your biological family wants. I mean, they could not want an open adoption either. And so that's something you agree upon at the time of the adoption and that the agency will help you work through.

[00:14:11.090] - Melissa Corkum

How has your story, your origin story impacted your current work? You mentioned social work and graduating soon, so congratulations on that. Can you talk a little bit about how that has impacted kind of what you see yourself doing in the future and kind of what those goals and achievements might look like?

[00:14:30.980] - Hannah Strege

Yeah. So as an enneagram wing 2, I'm also a helper and so I did want to get into the helping profession in some degree, and adoption has always been a huge part of my story and who I am. And so I really end goal, like thinking big picture, I want to open my own adoption practice and counsel biological families, adoptees and placing families and adopted families in adoption. And just really working through everything that we do Kind of now. My mom and I really help take new moms under our wings and just kind of helping them and dispel some fears that they have rightfully so about adopting and then adopting a frozen embryo. It's all a lot. And so opening my own practice will really allow me the space to counsel these people and just walk alongside them in their story and just also share from experience and learn with them and grow with them. And I'm really excited for that future.

[00:15:29.610] - Melissa Corkum

That's amazing. Is there anything else that you would want adoptees who are adopted to know or adoptive parents just based on your story and your experience?

[00:15:46.030] - Hannah Strege

I think all Snowflake Adoptees I've met are different in how much they share their story, and that's totally in their court and I have been so open with mine from the beginning. But I think embryo adoption is so interesting because, you know, we're born into this family, we're not biologically related, but we're born into this family and so life for us doesn't look so different from the average family. And so just not sharing your story is up to them. But I do know a lot of families that have chosen not to tell their kids that they're adopted and I think that explaining to your child that they're adopted is a blessing. It's a blessing to know where you come from and it's a blessing to know where you're going. And just adoption is a part of yourself and if you don't know your story, you're not able to share all the wonders that God's done in your own life with other people, because your adoption story has given you a platform to share your journey with other people that may be hurting. And I think it's really important to share that with others. And really for the new moms, I just think that if you're thinking about or praying about going through embryo adoption, just leave it all up to the Lord. Fear is not from God. And if you're worried about how your child will perceive their biological family or perceive their story or not be able to understand it, He will give you the right child for this and not to worry. My mom and I are always open to talk to other families that need guidance or counselor. Just want somebody to talk to because we've been doing this for a long time and walking this journey. And so I think that's what I would say.

[00:17:25.790] - Melissa Corkum

Well, Hannah, I really appreciate your honesty, your maturity about your story, and your mom's willingness to walk alongside other people. I know that you will do great work. The world needs more folks serving the adoptive community that also have the experience of kind of living this life, especially on the triad sides of the adoptee and birth moms. So I'm really, really excited for your practice whenever that comes to fruition, and all of those things. Thank you. We will share your Instagram handle and ways to connect with you in the show notes if folks want to reach out, if they have additional questions. So we're just really, really grateful for you sharing a little piece of your story with us.

[00:18:18.890] - Hannah Strege

Thank you.