



FORTUNE FOR THE FUTURE

## CHAPTER 3

### *Fortune Cookie*

Sometime around 1997, after five years of unsuccessful conception efforts, we accepted the obvious, and began a quest for children through infertility treatments. Along the way we had tears of pain, sadness, relief, and joy, but no pregnancy. Three different gynecologists told Angie that she was one of the healthiest women they had ever examined. I don't know if that made us more frustrated with, or more reliant upon, God's will. Probably both.

We took the basic tests and followed all the procedures and never felt totally hopeless or defeated, partly because the doctors kept telling us we were fine, but there were sure seasons of high frustration! For a while we used Chlomed, one of the drugs known for stimulating egg production. We de-stressed our lives. I started wearing boxer shorts more regularly, and we improved our eating and exercise regime. In addition, my sperm count was tested twice. Both times it was fine.

The first time I had a sample tested was a rare humorous

moment in this ordeal. On the way to the hospital lab, I made a quick turn at an intersection, and the jar and the bag that was holding it rolled off the passenger seat and onto the floor. All of the contents spilled inside the brown bag. For some reason, when I arrived at the hospital, the lab worker didn't want to handle the bag, so he had ME walk it back to the lab! I could tell by their smiles and stifled laughter that I had just provided them a great "what happened at the office today" story.

The process of infertility testing itself, however, is anything but funny. After seeing and feeling the repeated blank stares from doctors, I couldn't decide who was more bothered by our failure to conceive—they or us. Though doctors desire to help, their focus on the end result can lead to aggressive and insensitive interactions. On top of all the other disappointments, we felt that we had disappointed our doctors, too. And that energy didn't help. It's a very emotional process for all parties involved. We're talking about creating life!

We did, of course, try all the suggested positions, timings, temperatures, and magical sexual conception strategies. This makes the entire sexual arena take on an intense level of importance. Spontaneity and passion are often lost since the desire for a child can outweigh the physical desire for your spouse. An attempt at conception becomes an event on the calendar, and sexual intimacy, as a result, often suffers.

I think we did fairly well in this battle, however, mainly

because our commitment to the marriage was already established, and it held a higher priority than our determination to become parents. This took a lot of self-examination and willingness to be vulnerable with one another, and that was beneficial to our relationship; but we certainly would have traded that growth opportunity for an easy conception.

By the spring of 1998, I was beginning to get very restless. I was tired of losing a game we knew we didn't hold the power to win through our own efforts. I wanted to parent, even if it meant raising exotic gerbils or hairless hamsters. Angie didn't feel the same urgency, which really surprised me because she was entering her mid-thirties. This is normally a difficult age for barren women as they realize they might never bear children biologically. More than once from 1997–1999, this difference in perspective led us to some late night (or all night) heated discussions, and one of the reoccurring issues that left us in turmoil was the question of adoption.

Within a period of about six months, I had dramatically changed my thoughts on adoption. And to be honest, initially, it probably had more to do with trying to fill the void than it did with actually choosing a path. Regardless of the motivation, by the time I had done some research and talked with a few adoptive parents, I was sold. So despite my irritation with her hesitancy, I didn't blame Angie for being cautious or apprehensive.

Our marriage survived and grew stronger because of this crisis.

However, I can see why infertility is one of the leading causes of divorce. The tension and pain are excruciating and the need to place blame can be deadly. I'm not sure if it was an act of strength or surrender, but after many difficult nights, we quit focusing on pregnancy all together. We focused our energy into other directions. If it happened, it happened; if it didn't, it didn't!

In the summer of 1998, we ended our six-year stint in a male dormitory as resident directors at Judson College. About the same time we purchased a big 19th-century Victorian home about two miles from the campus. The majestic old home needed some work, and we immediately turned our attention to its restoration and repair.

Home improvement projects proved a great infertility distraction. As we plunged into refurbishing our symbolic nest, we felt something close to the essence of our marital dream—which was for us, to have a family.

I can't tell you how many times I worked outside and thought a lot about children, or the lack thereof, while doing the tasks at hand. That vigorous physical activity was both productive escape and emotional therapy.

"Let's see now, first I'll clean out this old shed. By now, I should have a five-year-old son helping me clean out this shed. I'll have to mow that big back yard soon. It would be perfect for a playground or a neighborhood soccer game. Angie's making homemade pizza and chocolate chip cookies. Angie ought to have a six-year-old

daughter helping her make those cookies. That old barn will need a new door pretty soon. Maybe I'll put up a basketball hoop up over the door."

Finally, in the middle of July, 1999, shortly after returning from our 10th wedding anniversary cruise, I'd had enough of the passive mindset and behavior. It is not our normal style of thinking or doing, and I couldn't take it any longer. I issued a decree in the land of family Anderson and told Angie that we were going to pursue adoption! This was not, and is not, the normal decision-making process in our union. Our marriage has been from the beginning a definite team approach.

We have what Yale professor and author Robert J. Sternberg describes as a "garden marriage." We are most comfortable when tackling goals and projects, but because we both like to lead, conflict and tension often emerge. Interestingly, we feed off of this energy. My former boss once said, "You guys make a great business team, but the marriage must be difficult." He meant that as a compliment, and we took it as such. His analysis was right on.

Angie is excellent with finances and serves as the CFO of our household. She manages to get about two-thirds of our entire household needs (groceries, toiletries, cleaning supplies) for free. Her coupon and rebate organizational structure is more elaborate and complex than my budget spread sheets were at the college. Her nickname is "Bulldog," and her strong presence in the classroom when she taught was often "off the leash" at home as well.

We are both highly opinionated, so sometimes even minor household decisions play out like a courtroom drama.

We actually like to argue. I'm all passion, charm, and soft manipulation, while she's a tough and logical litigator who attacks my emotional presentation with calculated precision. Though we actually enjoy the more-than-occasional sparring, during our season of infertility, we avoided serious fights because there was way too much buried sadness and anger. So my decision to move forward on adoption without her full blessing was unusual.

Since the beginning of our marriage, Angie and I had considered lots of "family" options. My work in crisis therapy led us to talk seriously about opening our home to some type of non-traditional parenting. We had discussed foster parenting, group home supervision, and a variety of other community service possibilities. Then we began to try to get pregnant, moved into the dorm at Judson, and became very confused about the future of our family.

It's ironic how the reality of a situation changes your perception of what is acceptable, what is alternative, and what is a concession. Most people don't like to concede. We like to choose. To make matters more intense, Angie and I are both very competitive. In the early stages of exploring adoption, our drive and perfectionism caused us to see adoption as "second best." Up until the time I made the decision to schedule our orientation meeting, adoption had run the gamut for us—scary, undesirable, alterna-

tive, last resort, and then . . . a concession. Now, I wanted it to be a choice. And the right choice!

After much prayer and many long conversations with God, I began to feel a strong sense of His direction. I asked one of my student workers at the college to get on the Internet and find a group of adoption agencies to consider. I did all this without Angie's knowledge, and I didn't have the slightest idea when or how I would break the news to her.

Angie has a way of letting everyone know when things don't go the way she thinks they should, and I wasn't sure I wanted to push this issue more than I already had. The more I read about adoption, though, the more excited I became, and the more peace I felt about the decision. I was moving forward and knew she would eventually join me, but I wanted it all to happen with her blessing, not her reluctant acceptance.

In order to break the news in a safe way and to stay within the soft manipulations of my personality, I took Angie out to her favorite Chinese restaurant. I brought her brother, Brock, along as reinforcement and a buffer. He was a student at Judson at the time, and often hung out at our house, so it was comfortable and normal to have him join us for a meal. I had shared with him my intention so that he wouldn't be shocked at the announcement.

As gently as possible, I slipped the "big" news into our general conversation while Angie leisurely enjoyed her egg drop soup.

“Angie, I’ve been looking into adoption agencies, and I want to move forward on this process.”

Brock and I locked eyes for a brief second and held our breath in suspense. She actually took it much better than we had anticipated. I think the public disclosure was a wise approach—this time.

She didn’t say anything at first, but began to cry softly. Finally, she responded in typical Angie style with a list of highly detailed questions about the agency, the timing, and the cost of the process. Being a big-picture thinker, and knowing that my wife approaches life in specific and orderly details, I had studied the materials thoroughly so I could present a reasonable number of facts and assure her of my confidence in this move.

Her ability to analyze a lot of information “on the fly” astounds me, and, as usual, she absorbed the material quickly. Her demeanor and spirit let me know that I finally had her nervous blessing. I was glad I had taken the time to do my homework and thankful God had softened her heart prior to the decision.

The sense of relief was enormous! Finally, the walls of defense around the entire adoption process were tumbling down. What at once felt like “second best” we now believed to be a possible blessing and reasonable “choice.” When we ended our meal, the waitress brought us our fortune cookies, and in a typical moment of spontaneous silliness for me, I declared that my fortune would be extremely important to our marriage.

I opened the cookie, read the fortune out loud, and our laughter stopped abruptly. It read, “**You will win success in whatever calling you ADOPT.**” Chills went over my whole body. Brock’s jaw dropped. Angie stared in disbelief. Can you believe that fortune?!? First, Mary on the Metra, now the fortune in the cookie; were these coincidences or was God at work in our future?

We sat in silence for a moment before opening the other two cookies. We read the fortune again and again, feeling the excitement and energy of a special family memory with a touch of the Holy Spirit at the same time. We went home with full stomachs from the buffet and a new sense of hope in our hearts.

The next step in the adoption process for us was to inform our parents. Both our mothers had also dealt with long seasons of infertility, so they truly empathized in our plight. Besides tearful reminiscing of their own barren years, they felt the insecurities all mothers feel when their children’s deep desires are unfulfilled. They celebrated with us when we told them the great news. Finally, we felt as if we had some control in the ordeal! We could put some of the longing and yearning into action.