

**My IVF
Journey:
Real Stories
from Real IVF
Warriors**

Igenomix®



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My IVF Journey: Real Stories from Real IVF Warriors

Since 1985, more than one million babies have been born in the USA as a result of IVF and associated treatments. Every single one of these cases is unique. However, with all this variation comes a lot of uncertainty. Many women worry how long it will take, if their pregnancy will be healthy, or if they'll even be able to conceive. When you've got so many hopes and dreams riding on your fertility treatment, it's useful to remember that everyone has a story.

At Igenomix, our highly qualified experts are continuously innova-

ting in the field of reproductive medicine. We employ the most advanced technology to deliver the highest standard of care. With our pioneering approach to fertility treatments, we do everything we possibly can to help each one of our patients start a family – no matter their circumstances. Some stories have happy endings and others haven't finished their journey quite yet – but we like to think that we're doing our part to help these couples keep fighting. Nonetheless, sometimes sharing experiences is an important way to prepare for the road ahead.

01

Ashley & Alex's IVF Journey

I remember watching the test happen live. I remember hearing the doctor speak to me. I remember my eyes welling up. I remember being escorted to the bathroom to change. I remember the piercing scream that came out of my mouth and collapsing on the floor. I remember the nurse rushing in to pick me up. I remember yelling for my husband. I remember Alex practically carrying me outside the hospital as anxiety attacked and I gasped for air.

It was at that moment our lives took a hard detour.

Our backstory: At 18 I was diagnosed with Ulcerative Colitis, which is a chronic, inflammatory bowel disease of the digestive tract. In simple terms, ulcers grew in my colon and as they got too wide and too deep, they would burst causing excessive blood loss from the rectum. I had advanced and aggressive UC, and no amount of medication or treatments could get it into remission. After a 5 year battle, and at age 23, I was told it was urgent for me to have my entire large intestine/colon/rectum

removed. I underwent multiple, major surgeries and am now colon free.

Fast forward to Alex and I trying to start a family. After trying for a long time the fun way with no luck, we knew we needed to seek help. In January 2018, I was diagnosed with infertility. We learned at that time A) the inflammation from my UC spread into my Fallopian Tubes, B) the scar tissue from my surgeries collapsed around both tubes causing 100% blockage, and C) I had developed severe Hydrosalpinx due to A and B. We were told IVF was our only option to conceive on our own.

I think I always knew something wasn't right. I think I always knew becoming a mother wasn't going to be an easy journey. What in my life has been? But to hear multiple doctors tell you getting pregnant naturally is not an option, that your body is too damaged from the past to form new life, that you have a 0% chance to conceive on your own; it was absolutely devastating. There has been grief, and guilt, and anger, and deep



sorrow, and disappointment; all of these feelings at the same time, it's overwhelming. There have been gut-wrenching tears, copious amounts of research and educating ourselves on IVF, and many difficult conversations. But our days have also been filled with an abundance of love, unwavering support and a lot of hope.

Since our diagnosis we have gone through 3 IVF Cycles and have had 7 losses. Our fourth IVF Cycle starts soon and we will be adding

PGS testing, additional medications and steroids to our protocol, and completing a Hysteroscopy: a procedure that allows your doctor to look inside your uterus in order to diagnose and treat causes of abnormal bleeding prior to our embryo transfer.

Alex and I refuse to settle for a 0% chance; we will not allow this diagnosis to derail us from our dream of building a family. We have a lot of love to give and will turn every stone to find a way. We

are ready to fight, we are embracing this hardship and we are mixing love and science. Infertility better be ready for a battle.

We wish you loads of luck and are sending you tons of positive energy on your journey ahead.

You can follow our journey on Instagram:

[@some_assembly_required__](#)



We will not allow this diagnosis to derail us from our dream of building a family.

02

Alvie's IVF Journey

**Hysterosalpingogram: a procedure that uses an X-ray to look at your fallopian tubes and uterus*

***Intrauterine Insemination: a fertility treatment that involves placing sperm inside a woman's uterus to facilitate fertilization*

Fifteen agonizing months of trying to give our daughter a sibling, we were finally told that we only have a 3% chance of ever conceiving naturally. So either our daughter is a miracle child and we didn't know it, or she had closed my fallopian tube on her way out - a running joke between my husband and I because humor is necessary to survive infertility.

The HSG (Hysterosalpingogram*) x-ray was the last exam left after the months of panels of bloodwork and tests from both my husband and I revealed nothing was wrong. This exam was optional and almost unnecessary as I had gotten pregnant naturally before. I vividly remember laying under the huge x-ray machine, feet in stirrup, uterus pumped with dye, ready to be told all was normal. But my right fallopian tube refused to spill. There was a blockage. We had conceived so naturally with our first, with an easy pregnancy and an uncomplicated vaginal delivery that nobody expected a physical issue.

With this diagnosis, we were given a 9% success with medicated IUI (Intrauterine Insemination**) and 60% with In Vitro Fertilization (IVF). We knew IVF was the way to go if we were serious about growing our family. Coming to terms with IVF was difficult. None of our friends seemed to have trou-

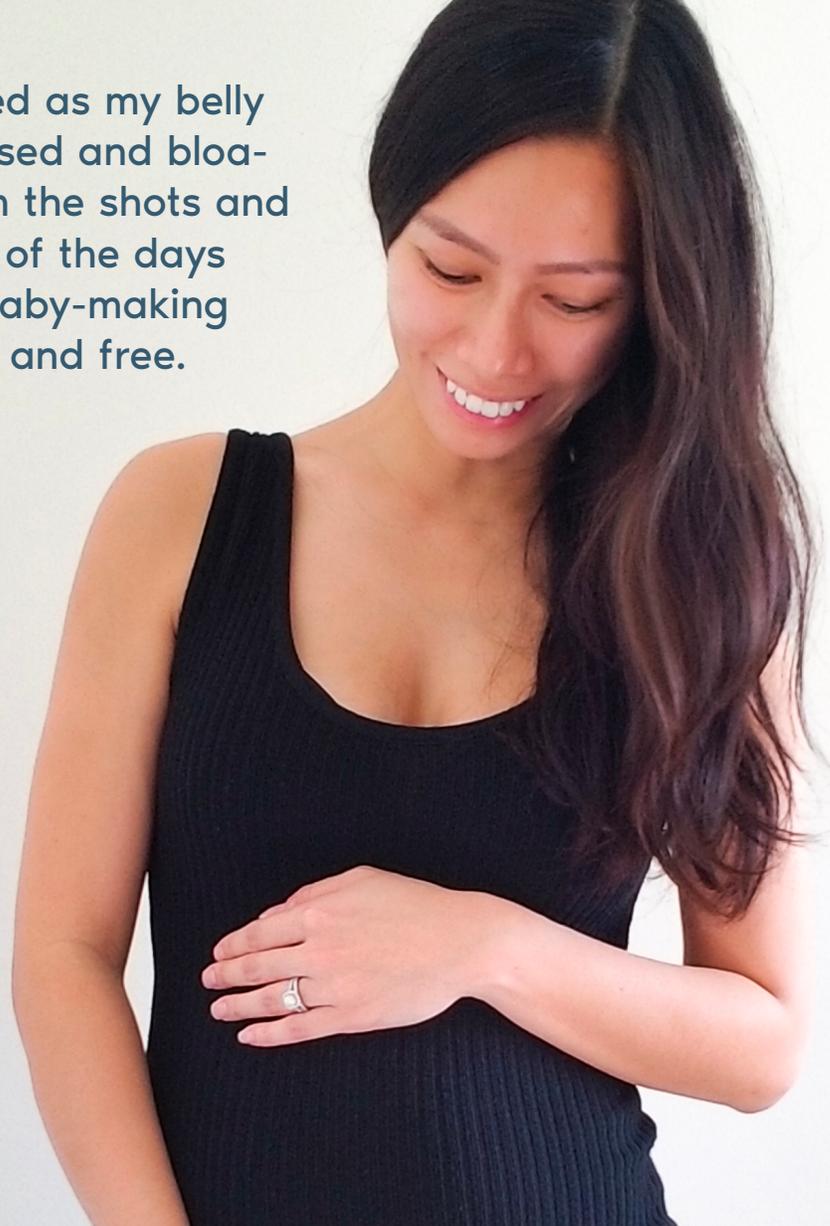
ble conceiving, and if they were, nobody talked about it. It was isolating and I withdrew. I felt guilty having to spend thousands of dollars of our savings. I was ashamed of my body for failing us. I grieved for the loss of creating a child with my husband intimately. I grieved for the loss of "meant to be". I felt like doing IVF was defying destiny, like maybe we weren't supposed to have a second child.

That very notion cut deep. My husband reminded me that we still wouldn't have a second child if that was the case. But the fact that IVF was an option for us meant we still had a fighting chance and maybe we were meant to go down this road. I hadn't quite processed all those feelings when I started the birth control pills - the first step in IVF marking the official handover of my body to science. Once we began, I learned that a lot could go wrong and a lot still had to line up to make this happen. For something as scientific and calculated as IVF, a great deal of it was out of our control and we found ourselves holding onto faith. If it's meant to be, it will be.

As we dove head first into IVF, we knew that the thousands of dollars, emotional investment and time does not guarantee a live birth pregnancy. But it meant a chance, a chance that not many people have.



I watched as my belly got bruised and bloated from the shots and thought of the days where baby-making was fun and free.



****Intracytoplasmic sperm injection: involves the direct injection of sperm into eggs obtained from in vitro fertilization*

PGS (also known as PGT-A) is a genetic study of the embryo(s) produced during IVF treatment, which allows for identification and transfer of embryos free from chromosomal aneuploidies.

Overcoming my fear of needles, I became an amateur chemist; mixing and jabbing myself with 2-3 hormone-filled injections in the abdomen every day for 10 days to grow as many eggs as possible. I had blood drawn and ultrasound scans every other day to monitor their growth; it was a delicate balance of growing as many at the same rate without triggering an ovulation. I watched as my belly got bruised and bloated from the shots and thought of the days where baby-making was fun and free. When the majority of the eggs were at the optimal size, I was put under anesthesia and 17 eggs were retrieved.

By the grace of the universe, all of them were fertilized via ICSI (Intracytoplasmic sperm injection***). Eight embryos made it to Day 5 blastocyst stage and were biopsied then sent for [Preimplantation Genetic Screening \(PGS\)](#). Two long weeks later, we found out 5 were genetically normal. I underwent another surgery to prepare my uterus for transfer and waited to heal. Once I was given the all clear, I started the oral estrogen pills, followed by daily progesterone suppositories and the infamous progesterone in oil shots - 22 gauge needle to my buttocks every other

night for 12 weeks, if the pregnancy is viable. Two weeks of monitoring later, my uterus was considered ready and receptive for a frozen embryo transfer (FET). On the day of transfer, after months of treatment, we knew that there was still a 30-40% chance that this "perfectly thawed" and hatched embryo wouldn't implant and result in a live birth pregnancy.

We are so fortunate that it worked on the first try for us. There wasn't a moment I thought it would work and took it for granted. I no longer question if the way we got our second baby defied destiny. A million things could have gone wrong, but by the grace of the universe, it worked and here we are today. We took a detour, but this child is meant to be. Our daughter

is finally going to be a big sister this June!

You can follow our journey on Instagram:

[@thepineappledetour](https://www.instagram.com/thepineappledetour)



03

Victoria's IVF Journey

Hi, I'm Victoria, and I'm infertile. After 3 years of "trying but not trying" we realized something might be wrong. We started seeing a fertility specialist when I was about 33 years old and my levels were, as my doctor put it, "that of a 48-year-old." "Lovely! We started with IUI and did about five rounds, with the full throttle of stimulation, etc. I really only got a few follicles to fully grow after all the shots and meds my body could consume. After a laparoscopic procedure I was finally diagnosed with endometriosis and low ovarian reserve. More delightful news!

Injections and meds for a few more months in preparation for IVF and when I finally got 2 mature follicles, we decided to seize the day! "All you need is one", they say! Most people would never even consider doing IVF with only 2 eggs, but it was the best we had ever gotten and I needed to try. I needed to know. I woke up from my retrieval procedure to a grim look on my husband's face. I knew it. This was it. The moment I was "expecting" (no pun intended). One egg was actually black in color— I officially

had rotten eggs. Neither egg ended up fertilizing. Shocker. Years of poking myself with needles and crying in my car at baby showers, and this is what I get? This was the death of my DNA, but where was the funeral? I laid there on a cold table with tears streaming down my face. So empty. So hopeless. So broken. So alone.

Our doctor suggested that we move on to donor eggs if we wanted a baby. It took a lot of time to understand and process what it would mean for our family. What it would mean for me. What would be my role exactly? I took the time I needed to grieve my eggs. My DNA. It's a process and you have to go through it, for everyone's sake, especially for the child. But I couldn't wait too long. I wanted a baby and I wasn't getting any younger. I was tired of losing, I was tired of grieving. I wanted to be a mom. To someone. Anyone. Anyone who would take me and call me mom. Right before our last IVF cycle with my own eggs, I started thinking about what I would do if it didn't work. I was mentally preparing for this. My





After taking the time to grieve my eggs and the chance of passing on my DNA, we moved on to donor eggs.

egg quality and quantity was low, I knew it was our last go even before it started. I secretly started doing research, I didn't even tell my husband. I learned that donor eggs had a high probability of working and also allowed me a chance to be someone's biological mother. It was time. Time for me to let go of my DNA. It took a lot of kicking and screaming and crying my eyes out to get to this point and I can't say I was 100% past the sadness, when I finally decided to move forward. But I did feel a smile creeping in. I wanted to experience pregnancy, breast feeding, and giving birth. Was that too much to ask for? Donor eggs were my best chance at doing that. I didn't care what it would take, I didn't care what I had to put my body through, or my finances, I just wanted to be a mom. I had already been through so much; I could handle it. It would be worth it in the end, they said.

After taking the time to grieve my eggs and the chance of passing on my DNA, we moved on to donor eggs. When we started down the route of using an egg donor, everyone made it sound like it was a shoe in. I remember our doctor saying our chances of success were around 90%.

When you select an egg donor, you're basically saying, okay, let's just get pregnant already. You don't really consider that it won't work. It's simple, you choose a young girl with a ton of healthy eggs and then you get pregnant. No brainer. We chose our donor and she looked just like me, twinsies! She had a similar background, family history and overall vibe. I couldn't believe it. We never met, but the agency provided a ton of info. Our doctor even commented, "Wow, Victoria, she's your perfect match". She started her appointments, meds and shots and our doctor gave us the play by play. It was strange to be watching all of this from the side lines, but my doctor made me feel important and connected in the process.

It was the day before her IVF egg retrieval and I'll never forget the phone call from our doctor. She said "I'm so sorry Victoria, your donor really is like you, even her eggs are like yours." She had lost more than half of her follicles overnight and only had 4 that matured. 4 was not enough. I immediately felt an overwhelming feeling of sadness. But this time, my sadness wasn't about me. My tears started to fall. All I kept thinking was - this poor, sweet, young girl. At 28 years old, she is now facing a real life game changer. My heart hurt for her. My connection with her was so strong, I felt her pain like it was my own. And I don't even know her real name.

We didn't know what to do next, but we knew we needed a break. We had avoided planning trips for so long - "just in case" I needed to be local for a procedure or so my husband could be "on call" to unload the swimming soldiers. We put other dreams on hold because our fertility treatments took all of our money. We missed out on life, and we needed to live. So, we decided to take a year off, to travel the world and focus on us for the first time in a while.

I had been grieving for a very long time. I had tried EVERYTHING. Podcasts, yoga, writing, writing, lots of writing. Therapy. Drinking, oh the drinking. I ugly cried - A LOT. I created a shrine in my closet where I would go sit on the floor and pray and I'm not a religious person. I don't even know who I was praying to, but I prayed. With infertility, every day is a new battle. A battle against yourself. To stay strong, when all you want to do is cry. My strength has been tested to unimaginable depths. I wanted to give up so many times. I wanted to quit it ALL. The needles, the pills, the probing and prodding, the constant doctor visits. The procedures. The surgeries. The egg donors. I constantly asked myself - is it all worth it? The financial stress? The marital stress? I would often think: I just can't do this anymore. But somehow, I did. Somehow, I could. I just kept going. It's easy to dwell on how unfair and hard it is. But at

some point, enough is enough. I knew I couldn't be sad and angry forever. I needed to find the good to carry on. And that's exactly what I did. Infertility showed me a new version of myself - a woman who survived tragedy and became stronger from it. I realized that if this is the only curveball I'm thrown in life, I'd consider myself pretty darn lucky. I have so much other stuff in my life to be grateful for. I have fallen in love with my husband in a deeper more intense way. He has my back in a way I can't explain. After all of this, he stills chooses me - an infertile woman. And yep, I FINALLY got pregnant. After a long break, a lot of healing, a new doctor and a new donor, our miracle was made. She came to me when she knew I was strong and ready. My beautiful rainbow after an ugly storm - Miss Florence Viola, born on our 9 year wedding anniversary, the perfect love story. And I know now, it was ALWAYS meant to be her. Had I gotten pregnant years ago, the easy way, or even with my own eggs, it wouldn't be her. And without her, I wouldn't be me. I used to ask myself - Why me? But, now I know why. She is why. She was always meant for us.

You can follow our journey on Instagram:

[@expectinganything](https://www.instagram.com/expectinganything)

04

Corinne & Kevin's IVF Journey

Our fertility journey began in 2017 when, after 2 years of marriage, we were ready to start our family. As high school sweethearts, we had plenty of years to plan when and how we wanted to start our family, and we were excited and ready to be pregnant. We had prepared for our baby in all the 'normal' ways - starting our careers, renovating a house, working hard at being financially stable. We were prepared... or so we thought.

After 10 years on the birth control pill, my period was MIA for weeks after stopping. I knew it could take time to go back to normal, but I was impatient and there was a little voice whispering in my ear, 'What if something is wrong?' I scheduled an appointment with my OBGYN and she gave me the usual reassurances 'this is totally normal,' 'it takes time,' 'don't worry.' So we waited, but not passively. I researched, tracked my basal body temp, joined fertility forums and generally acted like any couple actively trying to conceive. Still, 4 months in, there was no sign of a period, no positive ovulation tests, nothing. Back to the doctor I went, anxious, impatient, and now certain that there was something going on with my

body. They did blood work, asked more questions, and prescribed Provera to initiate a period. In two months, they would do an ultrasound.

As the days ticked away, after the blood work returned 'normal,' I was increasingly anxious. I was ready to be a mother and not at all used to feeling so out of control. The ultrasound day finally came and I lay on my back in that darkened room, naked from the waist down, the only sound the tapping of the ultrasound tech's fingers on the keys of the machine. I felt alone and scared. In the exam room after, I twisted my wedding ring around my finger, waiting for the results. I so desperately wanted an answer, something that could be 'fixed,' but when the diagnosis came, I felt everything slipping out from under me. PCOS. Though there was always a part of me insisting that there was something wrong, there must have been an equal part that was still unconvinced, unprepared to handle that little truth. I was prescribed Metformin, again promised that it should 'fix' me—within 3 months, she said, I should return to normal cycles. If not, I could see a specialist.





When I left the doctor's office that day, I sat in my car, called my mother, and cried. I felt broken, betrayed by my body. I didn't know then that that feeling would become my new normal. That I would spend the next year and a half living my life in 30 day increments, carefully building up enough hope to sustain me and then having it all slip away, again and again.

Meanwhile, I dove headfirst into reading journal articles, published studies on PCOS (Polycystic ovary syndrome), research and statistics from advocacy groups, testimonials from other women whose ovaries were also riddled with cysts, whose bodies had also failed them. Still, I wanted more. The Metformin had done nothing, seemingly, and after a month and a half I was impatient. I was tired of waiting, tired of being told that it was 'normal.' I had been trying to have a baby for nearly 8 months, and had not had a single real period. Had no indications of ovulating, not even once. I was exhausted and yet I knew I had barely even begun.

So, I made the appointment with a reproductive endocrinologist in the area who came highly recommended and waited three weeks for a con-

sultation. I had my medical records sent to me first, so I could read the notes in my chart, see the ultrasound photos they had never shown me. That consultation became the first of many visits I would make to the practice, the first of many times I would sit in the chair across the desk from my doctor and feel as if someone was finally listening to me. As if I had a voice and a little bit of control, in a time when I felt like infertility had taken over my life, left me powerless and heartbroken. Months passed, cycling through varying doses of Letrazole, then Clomid, then eventually combinations: Letrazole and Gonal-F, Clomid and Gonal-F. I had ultrasound after ultrasound, continuous blood work, and an HSG (Hysterosalpingogram) to check for blocked tubes (they were clear, thankfully). Finally, I was ovulating, but still it wasn't enough. A semen analysis cleared Kevin—his sperm count was excellent and the morphology, while just slightly low, was still nothing to worry about. I was the broken one, it seemed, and each month drove that home a little bit more.

On the first cycle with Gonal-F, my last ultrasound showed too many follicles growing in my ovaries. It was too risky, my doctor said, you could end up with multiples. We canceled the cycle, and started over, waiting for the cysts to shrink. Another failure. Another month wasted. My anxiety and

depression was coming in waves now, my broken body failing me over and over again. I was barely keeping it together.

After two more combination cycles with injectables, we were ready for an IUI. Maybe, I thought, this will be it. Kevin held my hand the day of the IUI and it was over in just minutes. I was more optimistic than I had been in ages. I let myself hope again. Just over a week later, my period came again. I went back to my doctor, prepared for another baseline ultrasound, another cycle. He was gentle and calm as he said, "Corinne, it's time to move on. We've tried everything and if it were going to work...well, it probably would have worked already. I think it's time for IVF." I was stunned. When you're going through infertility, you know that IVF is, for most, the end of the road. You know it's a possibility. But you never think it will be you. You think, 'Surely I will be pregnant soon. Surely something will work.'

The day after Christmas we had our official IVF consultation with my doctor. We discussed medications, injections, genetic testing, carrier screenings, retrieval and transfer. We looked at the financial obligations and tried not to panic about the fact that trying this last ditch effort to have our baby would cost essentially all of

our savings, and then some. We tiptoed around the reality of the statistics—at best, a 40% chance of success.

In January, we began our first round of IVF. Ten days of stims. Ultrasounds and bloodwork nearly every other day. A trigger shot. My body was exhausted, but holding tough with the flood of hormones and medications, the constant needles. By the time egg retrieval rolled around, my belly was swollen, the follicles that cluttered my ovaries so big that it hurt to walk, or sit. I woke up from anesthesia loopy and in pain, but happy. They had retrieved 24 eggs. The next day, 17 had fertilized. After a week, we were left with 13 embryos that were biopsied, sent for genetic testing, and frozen. In the end, 6 of our little embryos were genetically 'normal,' and recommended for transfer—5 girls, and just 1 boy.

February began the process of prepping to transfer our strong, beautiful little girl embryo. I took estradiol 4 times a day, began progesterone injections 5 days before our scheduled transfer. February 25 we saw our perfect little embryo, watched on the screen as she was placed in my uterus, and began the hardest waiting we'd ever been through. I was PUPO (pregnant until proven otherwise), and I was desperately excited, and desperately scared. Each

day brought more anxiety, more worry, and fading hope. By the last few days before my blood test I was convinced it hadn't worked. I refused to test at home, feeling a bit of infertility-induced PTSD when it came to pregnancy tests. I spent that final night in tears. All I wanted was to be a mom.

It was late afternoon by the time they called with the results from my beta test and I was so anxious I nearly threw up. Then the nurse said those two words: "You're pregnant!" I sobbed, full on ugly

tears, make up dripping off my face. I called Kevin, crying and laughing and still in disbelief. Our second beta test came back two days later and my levels had tripled. As I write this, I am just shy of 9 weeks pregnant. I have seen my baby girl three times and listened to her heart beat. I am ecstatic and terrified. I am trying to believe in my body again, to believe that come November we will hold her in our arms.

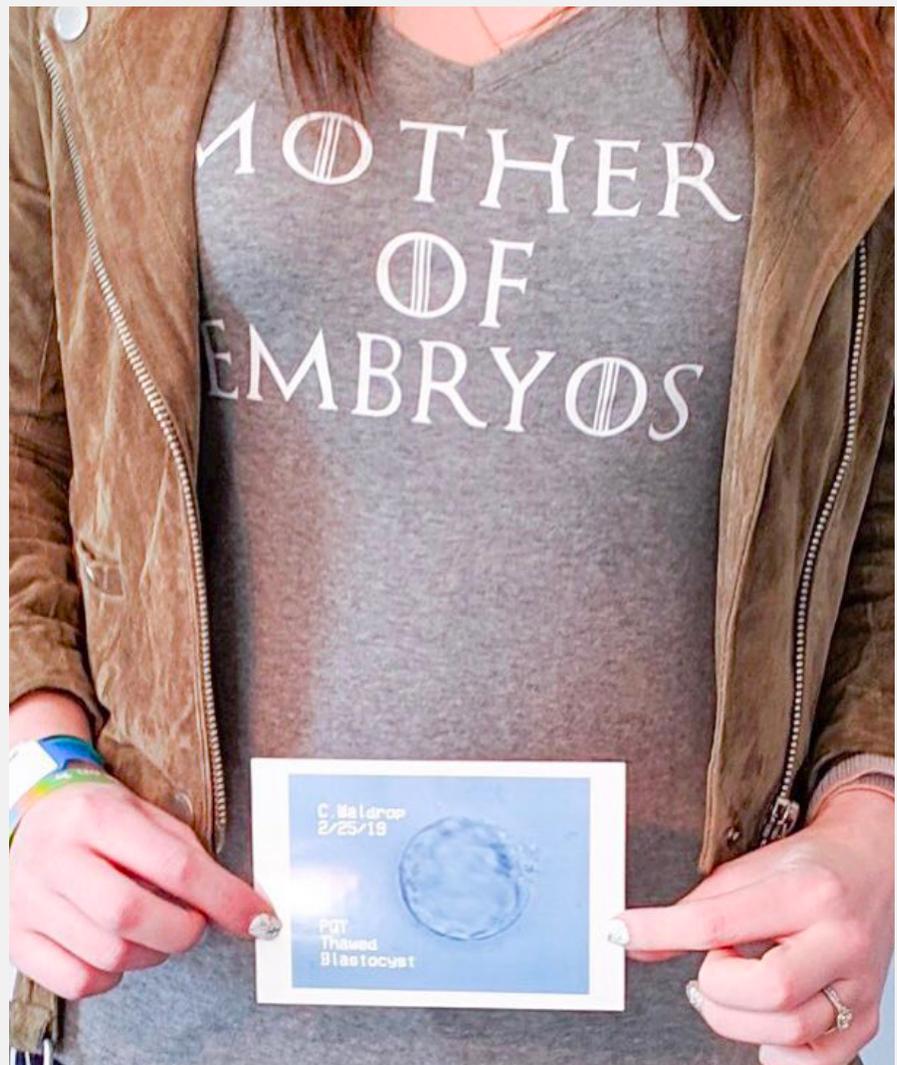
Infertility will never leave me. I will never forget the pain and

heartbreak and loss we experienced, or the fear and anxiety that still sneaks up on me. But I will also never forget the amazing women I have met through the infertility community, or the way our journeys can break us, but still make us stronger, more resilient. And we will never, ever stop being grateful for our little IVF miracle.

You can follow our journey on Instagram:

[@rinneyj](#)

I am trying to believe in my body again, to believe that come November we will hold her in our arms.



05

Lindsey & Michael's IVF Journey



Our IVF journey started in March of 2016. I have PCOS which compromised my egg quality greatly.

After two retrievals totaling more than 30 eggs, a chemical pregnancy and a miscarriage, we decided that if we had any embryos that made it to day five, they would need to be tested at this point.

I changed my life for six months to build egg quality. We knew that would be the trick - if anything would work. At my third retrieval, we retrieved 30 eggs, 20 were mature, and 17 fertilized. We knew it was a numbers game. Our embryos never grew how they should. We had three make it to day five (woo hoo! Never had that many) and all three were PGS biopsied. All three came back normal!

We transferred the first embryo in August of 2018 from that batch and had a chemical pregnancy. We knew with all the trauma that my body had in the past year that it was in our best interest to re-do the [ERA test](#).

Sure enough, my window had shifted 17 hours. We prepared for transfer number six with my adjusted window and lucky number six it was! I am now 27 weeks pregnant and expecting a baby boy in July of 2019.

If it weren't for [Igenomix](#), I am not sure this pregnancy would have been possible. It saved us from a lot of heartache of knowing the chromosome outcome along with my adjusted window. I preach these two tests so much. It's a game-changer.

When you work so hard for something, you want to make sure everything in your control is perfect - this allowed me to feel I gave it my all. I am so appreciative of this process and the gift it has given us.

Patented by IGENOMIX after more than 10 years of research, the ERA test establishes the best day for embryo transfer using a small sample of endometrial tissue.

06

Misty and Jaycen's IVF Journey

After being together for 4+ years and a recent marriage, we were finally ready to start a family at age 38. In theory it seemed like it would be so easy, just time my cycles and it will happen. We were wrong.

After several chemical pregnancies we were left frustrated and heartbroken. We decided to visit our first fertility doctor who did a complete workup on both of us to determine where we stood with egg quality and morphology.

There were a couple of issues with me but my husband was fine. This was good news! The doctor recommended IUI first for a few rounds and then we would see where it took us. We were so excited thinking that this was the ticket to starting our family. Sadly all 3 IUI's left us empty handed.

Next step was to talk about IVF. The costs were going to be astronomical with our current doctor so I chose to do some research and found another doctor out of state that was reasonable with

positive reviews. After our consult we did our first retrieval in the next few months. We did [PGS testing](#) and ended up with 3 beautiful embryos. We transferred our first embryo and waited the dreaded two weeks, sadly, another chemical pregnancy. We just didn't understand!! She was a 5aa quality PGS tested embryo.

We went back to the drawing board with our doctor to discuss next steps. He recommended a new procedure called [ERA](#). It was an out of pocket procedure but all of the results so far were positive with his clientele. What did we have to lose? This was our last opportunity as our budget was drying up.

We did the ERA biopsy and lo and behold our results came back "PRE receptive". Finally some answers we had been looking for. Our doctor recommended we repeat the same test the next month, again, "PRE receptive". This was so promising and gave us the hope we needed to push on for our baby.

We scheduled our next transfer and added 1 additional day of progesterone to our protocol. I had never been so nervous in my life the day of our blood test. It was our last chance, it had to work. We nervously awaited the results the rest of the day. Finally the call came in, it was POSITIVE!!!

We couldn't believe it, we were finally going to be parents. We truly believe in our hearts that without the ERA test we would not be holding our baby girl today. Fertility is not as cookie cutter as doctors once thought and the ERA test proved that 100%.

Since the birth of our daughter I have recommended [Igenomix](#) to another friend who was also found to be PRE receptive. After multiple losses and 4 failed IVF attempts she is now pregnant with a baby boy. We cannot thank Igenomix enough for their innovative test that brought us our baby girl and our dream of having a family of our own.



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07

Heather and Carey's Infertility and Loss Story



I found out I was pregnant for the first time in February 2018. I proceeded to load up on baby books, explore the inner workings of the first trimester and clean out my fridge to prepare for a baby-friendly lifestyle. Over the next few weeks, I had aversions to spicy-smelling foods, my husband and I discussed names and parenting and we even had a nickname picked out for the baby. I started looking at nursery rooms designs and we had a good laugh that our baby would be due around our wedding anniversary. We never expected our journey would take a turn for the worst.

The day came for our first ultrasound around eight weeks and I had a really bad feeling. A week prior I had lost all my pregnancy symptoms but I was told this could be normal and not to worry because it was still early. I will never forget the silence of the technician. She turned the screen away and said to me "are you sure about your dates?" My OB/GYN had called down and explained I had what is called a blighted ovum where the embryo does not develop any further. A few weeks later, I had a surgical procedure to resolve my pregnancy loss.



After having all the tests performed and passed, I fell into the unexplained category as to why we keep experiencing loss.

In June 2018, I learned I was pregnant again. I monitored myself with reliable at-home tests to see if the faint lines would become darker. The lines got darker and then suddenly started to disappear. I had experienced a chemical pregnancy at five weeks. My OB/GYN said they could refer me to a reproductive endocrinologist so they could run a recurrent loss blood work panel to see if we could find answers as to why I was experiencing early pregnancy loss.

My husband and I decided to give it one more chance before this appointment. In July 2018, I was pregnant again. Surely, I had bad luck twice in a row but my OB/GYN said my husband and I are both healthy and it would be very rare for me to experience pregnancy loss again. I immediately called my OB/GYN to get my hCG and progesterone levels checked. My hCG levels were low and not doubling appropriately. I wound up in the emergency room as they checked for an ectopic pregnancy due to my hCG levels. While I was in the emergency room, I experienced a natural loss at six and a half weeks.

Many months later, my husband and I are on the journey to having a baby through IVF with ICSI (Intracytoplasmic Sperm Injection) and [PGS](#) (Preimplantation Genetic Screening). Recurrent pregnancy loss can be caused by many issues: genetic, hormone imbalance, immune system, blood clotting, anatomical – just to name a few. Carey and I went through many blood tests and karyotyping to rule out any issues. Additionally, I went through a hysterosalpingogram, hysteroscopy, and mock transfer to make sure everything was structurally sound for a future transfer and pregnancy. After having all the tests performed and passed, I fell into the unexplained category as to why we keep experiencing loss. Going down the route of IVF with ICSI and PGS allowed us to pick the very best embryos for transfer in order to potentially help with success.

Assisted reproductive technology is a numbers game. I started ovarian stimulation in September 2018 and went in for my retrieval in October 2018. 27 eggs were retrieved, 16 were mature, and 15 were fertilized with ICSI. Only four out of 15 made it to day six where they were biopsied for PGS and frozen for a future transfer. Two weeks later we received our results that three out of four of our embryos were PGS normal and one was abnormal.

Hysterosalpingogram: a procedure that uses an X-ray to look at your fallopian tubes and uterus.

Hysteroscopy: a procedure that allows your doctor to look inside your uterus in order to diagnose and treat causes of abnormal bleeding



INFERTILITY
warrior



#IINØ

In December 2018, we had our first transfer of a PGS normal embryo which ended in a chemical pregnancy. We proceeded to explore another test called an ERA (Endometrial Receptivity Analysis) to gain insight on how to avoid implantation failure by establishing the best day for our next embryo transfer. Even though we

were found to be receptive, we did gain insight into a personalized window of transfer. Our next transfer of a PGS normal embryo in April 2019 was successful and currently, I am pregnant! So far, we have been meeting each milestone. We even saw a heartbeat which we have never seen before. We have a ton of gratitude for

our clinic and Igenomix who are responsible for helping us get this far. We hope our little one will be joining us in January 2020.

You can follow our journey on Instagram:

@makingbabyli



Kellie's IVF Journey

Hello, my name is Kellie Stryker and I'm a Licensed Clinical Social Worker. About 4 years ago my husband and I began the process of starting our family, little did we know what the journey would entail. After trying on our own for a couple months, we got pregnant! We were ecstatic and so relieved it happened quickly. However, around 6 weeks I noticed light spotting and had a gut feeling the pregnancy wasn't going to last. A few days later I began bleeding heavily and it was confirmed I had lost the baby. My husband and I were heartbroken but we had no idea that was only the beginning of our journey.

Another year went by without being able to conceive. We decided to pursue the help of an infertility doctor. We went through multiple IUIs and two rounds of IVF with no luck. It was then that we decided to switch to another doctor who had her own experience with infertility. To our surprise, our first IVF took! Again, we were over the moon but soon our luck changed to another heartbreak. My levels were not rising appropriately and they said I would miscarry. However, on my third blood draw my levels increased. My doctor feared an ectopic pregnancy (which is rare with IVF) and saw blood around my fallopian

tube. I was given methotrexate, a medication used to treat cancer to terminate the pregnancy. However, the medication wasn't working and a third dose was given. My doctor was shocked because only one dose is typically required. Finally, my numbers dropped below zero but now I had to wait 6 months before we could try again to allow the medication to fully leave my system. Another blow we were not prepared for.

After the 6 months, we surprisingly got pregnant on our own! However, my levels started off low and my doctor was not hopeful. To her surprise, my levels doubled appropriately and we were scheduled for our first ultrasound. We were so excited to get to this step and couldn't wait to see our little one on the screen!

During the ultrasound, we anxiously awaited what we so longed to see. However, my doctor looked at us with sadness in her eyes and gave us the news that there was no baby. Again, we were faced with either another miscarriage or ectopic. We couldn't believe it. After much discussion and a gut feeling, we requested a D&C (surgery to remove the pregnancy) to avoid the methotrexate since it didn't work correctly the first time. Following the surgery,



This time we were preparing for the worst but hoping for the best!

my doctor explained that the baby had implanted in my right Fallopian tube which he stated was the size of three of his fingers combined. He also told us that I was bleeding internally and he had no choice but to remove my fallopian tube (a possibility I was made aware of prior to surgery). I was literally numb. I didn't know what to do moving forward and decided we needed to take a break for our mental health.

After a 3 month break, we decided to move forward with a FET (frozen embryo transfer) but during the preparation they found fluid in my uterus. I was given the option to continue with the FET or opt for more testing. We decided the latter because we couldn't bear another loss.

My doctor preformed a test called [Endometrial Receptivity Analysis \(ERA\)](#) which helped to determine the appropriate window for implantation. To our surprise, the test confirmed they had been implanting a whole 24 hrs too early. My doctor explained that the reason for my ectopic pregnancies was most likely due to the window for implantation being closed. Now, they know when to implant for our next FET! My husband and I were optimistic but cautious!

We finally moved forward with our FET and the new plan for implantation. To our surprise, it worked! This time we were preparing for the worst but hoping for the best! During our two week wait I found one of those painted rocks outside a store with the words "believe" written on it. I knew then that everything was going to be okay!

We finally made it to our first ultrasound and we were relieved to see our beautiful baby growing perfectly in my uterus! My pregnancy went smoothly until 30 weeks when I was diagnosed with a blood clot on the left side of my brain and possible Multiple Sclerosis. At 35 weeks, the Multiple Sclerosis was confirmed and that night my water broke. On April 13th 2018, our little miracle Madelyn Grace Stryker came into the world healthy as can be at 5 weeks early! She truly is my guardian angel because if it weren't for my pregnancy with her, I would have never have found out about my diagnosis. She is my miracle and saving grace.

After everything my husband and I went through and experienced, I decided to move forward with opening my own private practice called Rain to Rainbow Counseling which focuses on providing counseling services for individuals and couples experiencing issues with fertility. My experience has taught me that without the rain there would be no rainbows and my hope is to help others find their rainbow through the rain.

You can follow our journey on Instagram:

[@raintorainbowcounseling](#)

09

Karen's Infertility Story

I had no idea what PCOS was, so I Googled it and I was inconsolable reading the search results.

I had no idea about my own infertility prior to the doctor telling me that I am infertile. My sister and I used to talk about if we would have a hard time getting pregnant – this was years before we were with our husbands.

"I just think I am going to have a hard time," she would say over wine and sushi, "What do you think?"

"I really don't think I am going to have a hard time getting pregnant at all. I'm a school teacher, I am meant to be around children," I would answer her.

Years later my sister and her husband got pregnant without even really trying and I was diagnosed with infertility. I have PCOS, which stands for Polycystic Ovarian Syndrome. Basically, it is a good thing and a bad thing. It is a good thing because it means that I have a ton of eggs, but it is also a bad thing because it means that there is no space on my ovary for one egg to grow, become dominant and then ovulate. I don't ovulate, which means I can't get pregnant.

I went off the pill in 2011 and started "trying" with my husband. It was confusing because I wasn't getting my periods, but I also wasn't pregnant, according to the many negative home pregnancy tests that littered my bathroom garbage can each month.

After months of this weirdness, I went to my OB/GYN and she told me what I was experiencing was not normal. She started me on Clomid and intercourse, but nothing happened – I didn't ovulate. The next month she increased my Clomid prescription and again, nothing, no ovulation. It was December and she left a message on my voicemail that I had PCOS and that I should go to the local fertility clinic. It was a Friday afternoon and she was out of the office once I received the message, which was brutal. I had no idea what PCOS was, so I Googled it and I was inconsolable reading the search results.

I started with the fertility clinic and they were very kind and positive about my "situation". We started with Clomid and IUI. It failed and I drank a bottle of wine that night, a whole bottle.

By Karen Jeffries, author of 'Hilariously Infertile: One Woman's Inappropriate Quest to Help Women Laugh Through Infertility'



The next month we did another IUI on the same day that my nephew was born, premature, I rushed from New York to Chicago to be with my sister. Two weeks later we learned that the IUI worked, I was pregnant with my first daughter.

Fast forward two years later and we started trying for our second child. We immediately went to the fertility clinic because there is no point in trying on my own when I don't ovulate. We started with the same procedure that got me pregnant last time, Clomid and IUI. The first month I didn't even ovulate on the same amount of Clomid that got me pregnant two years earlier. We tried again, failed IUI. Tried again, failed IUI. Tried again, failed IUI. Tried again, failed IUI. After my fourth failed IUI but fifth round of Clomid I asked my doctor if I could move forward with IVF. I felt strongly that if "it" was going to happen, "it" would have happened already.

We went forward with IVF. Although it was our first transfer, the whole IVF story is a long one that is available in my book. The abridged version is that I started IVF at the beginning of December, which is quite possibly the worst time for IVF – not that there is ever a good time for IVF. I had forty parent-teacher conferences in December and IVF. The doctors took out 33 follicles, which turned into 17 day five blastocysts. We put one embryo in and found out one week later that we were pregnant with our second child. I woke up Christmas morning and I "knew" it, but I waited and found out definitely a week later.

That is my infertility story. While I was on maternity leave with my second daughter, my husband suggested that I write a book about infertility. He thought it was going to be more of a self-help book, but I started writing and I could not stop. That turned into 'Hilariously Infertile', a website, social media platforms and self-published book, that I use to help other women laugh a little through their infertility, instead of crying.

You can follow our journey on Instagram

[@hilariouslyinfertile](https://www.instagram.com/hilariouslyinfertile)



10

Natalie & Dave's IVF Story

We're high school sweethearts. We made it through the college years. We made it through the stress of finding and starting our first jobs, which turned into careers. Everything has always just fallen into place for Dave and me. Sure, we have to work at our relationship, just like everyone does, but all in all, things were always just easy for us.

We got married on the most perfect day in May of 2012 and knew we wanted to start a family as soon as possible. We gave ourselves a year to settle into married life and learning to live together, which we hadn't done prior to getting married and then decided the time was right. We just assumed starting a family would come easily to us, just as everything else always had. We got pregnant after only a few months of trying, but experienced a miscarriage after only a few short weeks of finding out. That's when real life really sank in. We tried for months to get pregnant again – we thought it would be so easy, but month after month we experienced negative pregnancy tests. Finally, after trying for an entire year, we turned to a fertility specialist

for answers. It turned out, after several failed attempts at IUI (intrauterine insemination), that IVF (in-vitro fertilization) was our solution and we were blessed with our first baby in June of 2015.

Having gone through it all before in order to have our son, I thought I knew what to expect of IVF when we decided it was time to try again. With him it was easy, as easy as the IVF process can go. Our doctors felt confident we would be successful yet again because despite our "unexplained infertility" diagnosis, we had age, health and genetics on our side. We used our last two previously frozen embryos and hoped for success.

We got it. My blood tests came back positive and my pregnancy hormone levels continued to increase. The first couple of ultrasounds even looked great. But, I just had a feeling. I thought I was reading too far into the hormone levels and thought I was scrutinizing the ultrasounds too much. I should have trusted my gut before gushing the exciting news to family and a few friends. But I didn't, and eleven weeks into the pregnancy, we lost our little



one. As devastating as loss always is – we had been there before – I think what got me down the most was the fact that we had to start from scratch again. We had no more embryos and the fear of not knowing if we would be able to ever have more was paralyzing. To worry us more, when our baby was tested for cause of miscarriage, the results were inconclusive, yet another unexplained result.

In my mind, there was no time to waste. I let my body heal and we got back into our next round of IVF as soon as our fertility spe-

cialists would let me. My fear of needles was gone, in fact, I got so used to the injections, I was finally able to give them to myself. It's weird how you just get used to the things that once scared you and you put yourself through things you never thought you could do. When you want something badly enough, you will do anything to have it.

I always wanted four children, but realistically, never thought it would happen. We already had our perfect son and wanted to complete our family by giving him

a sibling. As we started our next round of treatment, all we could do was hope and pray that love and science (modern medicine is wild!) would get us through. And it did, more than we could have ever expected it could.

When I came to after the anesthesia had worn off from the egg retrieval, I remember a wave of nausea came over me and my heart was pounding in my chest as we waited for the doctor to come in to give us the number. It was all about numbers from here until the day the fertility clinic



released me to my regular OB/GYN. The number of eggs, the number of fertilized embryos, the number of growing embryos, the levels of the pregnancy hormones, the sizes of the gestational sacs, the sizes of the fetuses... But this time, unlike last, the numbers were on our side.

Seven eggs retrieved. Three made it to the maturity level of being biopsied for genetic testing. We ultimately decided to send them so we could continue with our plans to expand our family with just a little peace of mind. We needed peace of mind, we needed to know we were giving ourselves the best shot at success. Two of those embryos came back genetically healthy – one boy and one girl. We were beyond thrilled! Now faced with the decision about which to transfer, we took a leap of faith, put it all out of our hands, and transferred both.

We were relieved when the two-week wait ended and our blood test came back positive. We were hopeful when my hormone levels indicated both embryos may have successfully implanted. We were less than surprised at the first ultrasound when it was clear that we were pregnant with twins. Dave was away on business and it was the first appointment he had ever missed. I remember the doctor asking, "Where's your husband?" She knew he was always there with me too. "He's not going to be here to pick you up off the floor after you faint when I tell you you're having twins?" She knew based on the numbers, there were twins in there. However, we were completely shocked a week later, when we went in for another ultrasound scared to death because I was bleeding, to hear her say, "I see no issues, but crazier things have happened...it looks like one of your embryos split." Wait, WHAT?! This time, Dave was there with me and we both just stared at each other, jaws to the floor, in complete and utter disbelief for what seemed like a very long time. It was all such a blur and my head was completely spinning. Did she say split? She's telling us we are having triplets, right? Then we saw it up on the ultrasound screen – it was clear as day. Inside one sac, there was a baby. Inside the second sac, there were two! We were having identical twins and a singleton - THREE babies.

We didn't even know how to feel – surprised, excited, nervous, anxious... I immediately made an appointment with a maternal fetal specialist. While our ultrasound technician had been so wonderful – checking over everyone and making sure everything looked as it should – the doctor came in afterward to review everything and didn't even take the time to let us explain how we felt or discuss our emotions. She told us to consider reduction, a thought we couldn't imagine, especially after seeing and hearing three beautiful heartbeats. We listened while she listed all the dangers that came along with a triplet pregnancy. We listened while she told us all the risks we could encounter if our babies were born too prematurely. I held it together until I got to the car and then I let it all go and just sobbed the entire hour-long ride home. I couldn't believe we had gone through so much to get to this point and now a doctor, who I know was only doing her





job, but who I also now extremely disliked, was telling me to throw it all away. We decided to listen to ourselves as we reminded each other that this was what was meant to be and that everything would work out the way that it should. We decided we were going to do everything and anything we could to bring these three miracles into the world. We decided on a new specialist, one who supported us and our decision, and we did just that.

We have run the full gamut of emotions since this time last year. As I go back through them, it reminds me of the wild ride we were on, a journey that from start to finish, I wouldn't trade for the world as it made us who we are as a family: eagerness of what was

to come, hope that it would all work, joy when we found out we were expecting twins, shock when we learned we were expecting triplets, fear as doctors discussed the risks and suggested reduction, determination that we could carry all three babies, belief that the pregnancy would be uneventful and successful, relief when our babies were born healthy at 34 weeks, and complete amazement that these three perfect humans are ours. We could not imagine life without any of them and we are beyond thankful, grateful and blessed that they joined their big brother and completed our family.

I know there are so many stories just like ours out there, which is why I'm empowered to share. Infertility, miscarriage, loss of any

kind, are so often not spoken of, but they should be. We should all support one another on these journeys. No one should have to do it alone. There is a huge support system out there – when you find the one for you, only good things can come from it. I am not afraid or embarrassed to share my journey because if it helps one person to feel supported, it was worth it.

You can follow our journey on Instagram:

[@coop.and.his.triplet.troop](https://www.instagram.com/coop.and.his.triplet.troop)

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