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Pride Feature: One Couple’s Journey Through IUI

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Building a Family with a Vial of Sperm, Perseverance, and Dolly Parton – One Couple’s Journey Through IUI

Years before Cady and Alex Ramirez were a couple, they were friends. She had always wanted kids, but it wasn’t until she reconnected again with Alex and eventually married her, that Cady realized, it wasn’t just kids she wanted. She wanted kids with Alex.

They found **Dr. Carter Owen** of **CCRM Northern Virginia** through a local non-profit that brought LGBTQ+ parents and prospective parents together, helping them through their journey to parenthood.

“That’s what we’ve found,” explained Alex, “It is quite the journey.”

Alex and Cady knew they wanted Dr. Owen’s help in bringing their baby into the world after watching a webinar that CCRM presented in partnership with a sperm bank.



“We learned [from the presentation] that we know nothing about baby-making!” Cady said with a grin. But the couple liked Dr. Owen so much that they decided to contact her for an initial consultation in April of 2021.

The couple knew already that Cady would be the one to carry a baby for this pregnancy. But it wasn’t out of the realm of possibility Alex would carry in the future or they would do reciprocal **in vitro fertilization (IVF)**, a process where eggs would be retrieved from Alex and after fertilizing them with donor sperm, would be transferred into Cady’s uterus.

Dr. Owen laid out the options, including both **intrauterine insemination (IUI)** and IVF. “We were under the impression that the only reason we needed a fertility clinic is that we didn’t have the right equipment,” explained Alex, not because of any fertility issues.

Both of them went through a complete fertility workup to potentially catch any issues that may affect future pregnancy attempts, no matter who ended up carrying a baby. Dr. Owen helped them manage their expectations—IUI may not work the first time, and that helped alleviate the stress and anxiety Cady and Alex felt if their cycle wasn’t immediately successful.

Since Cady didn’t have any concerns come up in her medical history or fertility testing, she chose to try several rounds of unmedicated IUI—meaning she wouldn’t take fertility medications—and test for ovulation at home.

They also needed to find a sperm donor, another thing that turned out more challenging than anticipated. Initially, they wanted a donor who was of the same nationality as Alex, but they quickly discovered that particular donor’s immense popularity, with vials of sperm being snatched up as soon as they hit the database.

Eventually, they realized they were going to need to widen their search. Their biggest qualification was genetic history—they didn’t want a donor who had similar predispositions as either of them.

“The amount of information you get [from these profiles] starts to get overwhelming,” Alex said.

In the end, it came down to the personal note each donor provided in their profile. Cady and Alex were so moved by one particular profile that their decision was made.

Donor chosen, Cady and Alex moved forward with their first IUI—but it didn’t work. Cady took it hard. “I was like, why am I even trying? I give up.”

Alex was quick to remind her of Dr. Owen’s advice on managing expectations. But the second IUI a few months later didn’t work either, and Cady took that one hard too. Even though their odds of pregnancy were the same as a heterosexual couple not using fertility treatments, it was tough. “It’s a very emotional journey even if you know the chances are low,” explained Cady.

While they didn’t make any changes to their treatment plan, they knew if their third IUI didn’t work out, it would be a chance for the couple and Dr. Owen to reevaluate their plan and whether adding fertility medications may increase their chances of success.

“One of our signature moves is we brought in celebrity prayer candles,” laughed Alex. Candles with Dolly Parton and Celine Dion, looking regal, with a paper cutout of a flame placed on top since fire wasn’t allowed in patient treatment rooms. Dolly Parton was there during the IUI that worked.

The day before Halloween of 2021, Cady and Alex made their last attempt of the year.

Their pregnancy test at the clinic was scheduled for that Monday and over the weekend, Cady started spotting. She thought her period was coming. “There was a lot of sobbing in bed,” she added.

They planned to cancel their beta, just as they had the first two when Cady had gotten her period. Convinced they were dealing with another unsuccessful cycle, Cady wanted to cancel the appointment. But when her period didn’t start, she decided to take a home pregnancy test. And immediately tossed it in the trash.

“She’s impatient!” Alex joked of her wife, “She didn’t give it a minute to even let it work!”



But when Cady happened to glance in the trash to throw something away, she saw the two lines. In disbelief, she grabbed it out and rushed to show Alex who told her right away to take another one. Sure enough, it was positive too. They graduated from CCRM at 8.5 weeks and are due in July.

When asked what advice she would give to other couples on their fertility journey, Cady said, “Start early. Even if you’re not ready [to get pregnant], it’s not too early to just educate yourself. Ask lots of questions and don’t be afraid to interview more than one fertility specialist to find one that’s a good fit for you.”

“It helped to think of the process as a journey,” added Alex. “This could take a long time, so get yourself mentally prepared. There are a lot of highs and lows.”

Through it all, Cady and Alex didn’t think of themselves as brave or strong, words many people tend to use for those going through fertility treatments. “People told us all the time, ‘You’re so brave!’” reflected Alex, “And we’re like, we’re just trying to have a kid like everyone else.”

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