

They Prepared for Adoption, Inside and Out – Then One Animated Little Girl Changed Their Lives

Busy young professionals in the Washington, D.C. area, Erik and Nikki Vonderhaar have radically altered their lives over the past three years—a process that led them to welcome a baby girl into their family through domestic infant adoption. The transformation happened day by day, as they took small steps that led to big changes.

With their daughter busy playing and sometimes pulling one of them away, the young couple shares in an exclusive Bound4LIFE interview how they saw their way through practical details of paperwork and home preparation ... once they refocused emotionally and spiritually.

Bound4LIFE: Why did you both decide to open up your home to adopt a child?

Nikki: We both had a heart for adoption, but our calling to adopt really crystalized around our 10-year anniversary.

We had tried to get pregnant for about seven years and experienced several tragic miscarriages along the way. After our third miscarriage, we started seeing specialists to try to find out what was happening. Something was going on in my body to keep the pregnancy from continuing to full term. We went through three cycles of IUI (intrauterine insemination), but each time it was unsuccessful.

Erik and I really prayed about what our next steps should be. The hormones I was taking with the IUI affected my body and emotions to the point I could not function well and we weren't

sure if we wanted to continue down that path. We sought out our pastors for some counsel about the options we were considering. They were so helpful in getting us to refocus and to move forward with clarity.

We wanted to gather more information before deciding what to do. We had found Bethany Christian Services online and saw that they were doing a local informational meeting for people wanting to learn more about adoption.

The Bethany meetings were great—but before making a decision on what path we were to take, we stopped and focused on praying. We felt like we were not to move forward until we had clear direction from the Lord. We ultimately decided not to continue with IUI and started asking the Lord if adoption was the route He wanted us to go.

Bound4LIFE: When did that moment come of knowing the way forward?

Nikki: We waited for a couple months—not trying to figure it out on our own, but to hear from God. It was important that we were on the same page, both feeling called to adopt. We didn't want to be in a place where one of us felt pressured by the other about adopting.

During a time of worship at the end of a Sunday service, I remember singing the song "Waiting Here for You." I got down on my knees and prayed to the Lord: I just don't know what to do anymore.

I felt so clearly that God said to move forward with adoption, and quickly. I shared with Erik afterward, and he felt the same. We actually had small group that night and shared with them immediately that we could use their prayers as we began the process.

Bound4LIFE: What did those first steps look like?

Nikki: The very next day I called Bethany Christian Services. We got our initial application in and deposit by the end of that week. Usually it is about a four to six month process, from application to approval. Given the sense of urgency we felt, we were able to get through each step quickly and were approved in just over three months.

Because friends have adopted, we were prepared for this to be a fairly invasive process. You've got to do a lot of things: go to the police station and get fingerprinted, do full background checks, then they review your finances and inspect your home. But the process didn't overwhelm us.

Our Bethany adoption specialist took us every step of the way and told us what to expect next. Rather than dumping a mountain of forms and details on us, she paced us out, saying, "This is what you do now; get this paperwork back to me, and then we'll move to the next step."

We still felt a sense of urgency to move quickly, but didn't know why. We just kept following the steps and doing everything we needed to do.

After we had filled out all of the paperwork and completed the home study, we found out we were pregnant again. Unfortunately, this pregnancy also ended in a miscarriage. We then realized why we felt an urgency to get through the approval process quickly.

God knew this was coming and His timing was perfect. God knew that we would need time to grieve and rest after the miscarriage without having to worry about the approval process. Once we were officially approved to move forward with adoption, we began the waiting process to be matched up with a birth mother.

Bound4LIFE: How did you involve friends and family in the fundraising aspect?

Nikki: We had been praying about what to do as far as finances; we didn't know where any of the money was going to come from. Once we had been approved and were in the waiting process, a friend called me up.

She said, "I've spoken to friends at church, and we want to do a yard sale for you to help with the coming adoption. We'll do everything. We've already gotten approval to use the church building, let's just find a date if that's OK with you?" I began crying, I was so moved.

The yard sale was a huge success and happened because of friends, it wasn't even our idea! In addition, we had a Facebook group and T-shirts that we branded "V3" to sell and get friends involved.

The group Lifesong for Orphans approved us for an interest-free loan, which we paid back using the adoption tax credit when we received it the next year. All of this, plus assistance from our families, helped us raise all of the funds we needed.

We've really seen our church family be the hands and feet of Jesus in our lives.

Bound4LIFE: Tell us about the day when you received an important phone call.

Nikki: The call came in February, right before Valentine's Day—a very busy season at the flower shop where I worked. "We have a possible match," our adoption specialist said. I quickly had tears of joy.

We talked about the birth mother and her journey. She asked, "Would you be willing to drive a few hours away to meet her?" I replied, "Definitely—it just has to be after Valentine's Day!" It turns out that timing was best for all involved.

In late February, we had our match meeting with Zoe's birth

mom. She is a wonderful woman. She knew about us from the profile book we put together. We had also written a letter to potential birth mothers as well as made a video introducing ourselves.

The meeting was for her as well as for us—answering the questions we both had for each other. It went really well, we both really liked each other! Usually about a week after the match meeting, they let you know if both parties agree to move forward. But we found out right after the meeting that the birth mother felt really comfortable with us and wanted to move forward.

Erik: It was all very exciting. The call came sooner than we thought it would, and we were so happy for that. From our approval date to our match was 10 months, which was shorter than the average time frame.

Nikki: Through any process, God gives you little gifts along the way if you're looking for Him to show up. For me, I love to decorate—I like to have things nice and put together, which helped me to design the baby's room in advance.

There was this crib I really wanted, but the price was just ridiculous: \$800! No one I know would pay that. So I was checking Craig's List for a crib, whatever was available—and the exact one on my heart showed up, for \$75 including the mattress.

We were the first to respond and were able to get the crib. It's one of those little things that showed me God knows my personality and He wanted to confirm we were on the right path. Things like that happened along the way, especially when we felt down or exhausted. God provided right when we needed it; it was Him saying, I've got you.

Bound4LIFE: When did you name your little girl?

Nikki: In June, before we even knew of Zoe, I was praying and felt like Zoe was a good name for a girl. Then in August, during my devotional time I was reading through *The Master is Calling* and it talked about having “the Zoe, prayer-inspiring God-kind of life that Jesus intended for us to have.”

It was then—seven months before we met our Zoe—I felt that we would be adopting a baby girl and Zoe would be her name. It was exactly what we wanted for our little girl.

The meaning of Zoe is: The state of one who is possessed of vitality or is animated. A life vigorous, devoted to God, blessed. We know that God has a special calling on her life. She is very animated and full of zeal!

Bound4LIFE: With jobs that involve travel or weekends away, how have you both prioritized being parents?

Erik: It’s nice that when babies are born, they’re not running around yet! We see God’s design there to ease us into parenting. As with any parent, the journey is a trial by fire: we learn as we go.

While we were waiting for Zoe, we took advantage of the time to seek God and prepare our hearts. When we got the call, it felt right; we felt prepared. Since Zoe came into our lives, priorities have changed significantly in terms of how we spend our time and what we’re able to do. It’s been a transition for sure, but a great one.

Bound4LIFE: How has becoming an adoptive family informed your pro-life convictions?

Erik: This journey has given us more sympathy towards women who hear our culture promote abortion as the easy way out.

The truth is, adoption requires a lot from a birth mother—for her to be bravely selfless. She brings a child into the world, yet is not able to parent them; so she has to grieve the loss

of her child.

Adoption is a great example of the redemptive power of God. It might not actually be the easiest option for the birth mother, but the results of the process are incredible for the family waiting for a child to love. Also, we know from our experience that the birth mother receives great comfort—not only was she able to bless a family with a child, but she can know her child is going to be well cared for.

Nikki: Our experience has given me a higher sensitivity to women facing the decision to abort a pregnancy. Going through this process, I can see how it is a struggle for the woman facing this decision. She may have no idea how she'll provide for the child; she's not sure what to do; she feels hopeless. It's a lot harder than we may realize.

Walking through this helps me pray for people in that situation, who don't necessarily get the love and support from their family and friends that they need, which leads them to believe that abortion is the only option for them.

Erik: I have all the more respect for women in that situation who choose life.

For any woman thinking of going through with an abortion, we can attest that there are many families waiting for a child to love. Our culture needs to know that adoption is a beautiful option.

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And step by step, You'll lead me / And I will follow You all of my days."

– Rich Mullins, 'Sometimes by Step'