

INFERTILITY AWARENESS

A joint venture with the Infertility Awareness Association of Canada

Choices that will bear fruit

Danny and Jillian Roth and Dalit and Peter Hume have come to accept infertility will always be a part of their lives. Each couple tried for years to conceive; each sought years of treatment.

In the end, they had to face the sad fact that pregnancy was simply not in the cards. Then each made an intensely personal choice about the future: Danny and Jillian adopted Billy, now three, while Dalit and Peter chose a different route. They decided parenthood would not be their future; they would remain child-free.

Neither choice was easy but each has its own rewards, says Jocelyn Smith, president of the Infertility Awareness Association of Canada (IAAC), the national group that informs, supports and advocates for couples facing infertility issues.

"Accepting infertility is an enormously emotional and difficult challenge for any couple," she says. "The biggest hurdle to overcome is gaining the ability to see that this is not the end of the world, that there are other options, and that each can provide a satisfying and rewarding future."

Accepting and moving on is indeed a mighty mountain to climb, both couples say. And even when the decision is behind them, those who choose to remain child-free will always have a sense of loss and longing, Dalit Hume says.

"It is not something you can ever completely get over,"

she says. "You have to accept that a continuing sense of loss is natural; motherhood and fatherhood is hard-wired into us. What you must do is understand those feelings will be part of your life always, and then find other *raison d'être*."

While adoption is an alternative, 44.5% of Canadian couples do not consider it a reasonable one for them, according to a survey of 200 Canadians conducted by IAAC — 192 of them women — whose average age was 31.6 years old. Half of them said the reason was that their partner did not agree to adoption; almost 42% said the adoption process was too costly, and 30% said there simply were not enough infants available for adoption.

Danny and Jillian Roth can tell you from their own experience that much of the above is true but that, in the end, having an adopted child mitigates many of the challenges infertile patients face in their struggle for parenthood.

Danny, 37, and Jillian, 40, have been married nearly eight years. He is a public relations consultant and she is an event organizer. Shortly after they were married they started trying to have a family, but their efforts were proving fruitless. They sought the help of a fertility clinic in Toronto.

"We went through four in-vitro procedures there without success," Ms. Roth says. "Then, almost as a last resort, we went through another in New York, but that procedure didn't work either."



Dalit and Peter Hume are now active with the Infertility Awareness Association of Canada.

"The hardest decision is knowing when to stop treatment," Mr. Roth says. "You always think, 'What if the next one works?'"

The couple say they had decided that New York would be their last attempt at assisted reproduction.

"We came to the conclusion that we had confused getting pregnant with being a parent," Mr. Roth says. "The light clicked on and we suddenly understood that pregnancy was not the end goal; becoming a mom and dad was."

They began to investigate adoption. It was not a smooth and easy course, Mr. Roth says.

"To put it bluntly, adoption is a seller's market," he says. "There just are not many healthy newborns available in Canada."

They admit to being lucky. They found Billy through a private adoption agency licensed by the province to perform such services. The total cost of adoption was in the \$10,000 to \$12,000 range, including all fees, taxes and associated costs, the couple says.

"It actually works out to about the same as a fertility treatment," Mr. Roth says.

Was it worthwhile? "Absolutely," Ms. Roth says. "He is such a wonderful child, such a terrific little boy. He has made every step of our unexpected journey totally worth taking."

Dalit and Peter Hume have chosen a different path. After years of trying to resolve Dalit's infertility, the couple also looked into the adoption process but decided it wasn't for them.

"Trying to remedy in-

fertility can place enormous strains on any relationship," Ms. Hume says. "We came to the stage where we just could not face them anymore. We made the decision to rebuild and strengthen what we already shared and to make the most from our lives together."

Ms. Hume, 43, a fundraiser and Mr. Hume, a 45-year-old first aid instructor, married 14 years ago and tried for seven long years to have children. At age 33, Ms. Hume found she was suffering from a rare medical condition — early onset menopause.

"I had all the symptoms of a woman 20 years older," she says. "And unfortunately, the fertility treatments we tried did not work."

Initially, they did indeed look into adoption. "But there were so few babies available and the process was so intrusive and stressful after the years of strain trying to have a baby placed on the both of us that we decided it was just not for us," Mr. Hume says.

The couple decided chose to focus their energies on helping others.

Mr. Hume changed his job from computer programming to a first aid instructor while waiting to get on the fire department. Ms. Hume focused on her career as a charitable fundraiser and became an active member of IAAC as a board member and infertility support group co-facilitator. Both volunteer with homeless youth.

"I strongly believe in what IAAC does," she says. "The fact is research shows that there will be more and more couples like us in the future. Infertility is on the rise. I think I can help play a role in showing couples that remaining child-free can be an option."

And yet, there will always be that twinge of longing that will never go away, she says.

"What is absolutely vital is to make a decision that works for you, which for us meant finding other ways to make a difference in this world."

Clinics offer quality care

Infertility is defined as the inability of couples of reproductive age to establish a pregnancy within one year of unprotected sexual intercourse. If a couple goes beyond this one-year term without getting pregnant, they should move on to a fertility clinic, where they will find the experts who can determine the problem. When the female partner is over 35 years of age, consideration should be given to being evaluated sooner, perhaps after six months.

Couples also need to know that their problem may respond to something as simple as changing their lifestyle, but they should seek out the experts when they realize that there may be a problem. Also, it is important to know that 50% of infertility cases now result from difficulties with the male reproductive system.

The Assisted Conception Taskforce (ACT) booklet is a very handy reference for new patients to have. It can be downloaded for free at www.assistedconception.ca. ACT is a team of patient leaders and health professionals from more than 20 countries around the world. This group is quite unique in that there are patient leaders and doctors working together and these experts have created this booklet.

Twenty years ago, most fertility treatments began and ended with the family doctor. Today, there are modern fertility clinics in most major cities and hospital centres in Canada and around the world. There are 65 clinics in Canada, but only 35 do IVF treatment.

Staff members at the clinics will answer questions about fertility evaluation, diagnosis and treatment. The clinics will

provide information on the factors that are important when trying to conceive and show how to maximize chances of success. A doctor will discuss advantages and disadvantages of the treatment options.

Canadian clinics have helped thousands of people become parents. Here are some of those clinics; others can be located on the IAAC Web site at www.iaac.ca, which receives almost 15,000 visits monthly.

CREATe Fertility Centre Located in downtown Toronto, CREATe's goal is to provide the best care for those who need special help to build a family. Dr. Cliff Librach and his team take a highly personalized approach to patient care, which they define as "paying close attention to the patient's unique social, cultural and spiritual needs and not just addressing medical needs." Dr. Librach also welcomes singles and same-sex partners. www.creativf.com; 416-323-7727.

First Steps Fertility Located in North Toronto. As Canada's only all-women physicians centre, Drs. Marjorie Dixon, Sony Sierra and Fay Weisberg proudly convey their slogan "Women's fertility in women's hands." Their goal is to work as a team with patients to provide the highest standards of reproductive care in a holistic, compassionate, ethical and professional setting. The three-woman team is dedicated to culturally sensitive, evidence-based medicine, using state-of-the-art technology to achieve fertility goals. www.firststep-fertility.ca; 416-221-7545.

Genesis Fertility Centre Vancouver-based Genesis is where Dr. Al Yuzpe and his team, internationally recognized as experts in the field of reproductive medicine,



Dr. Cliff Librach, founder of the CREATe Fertility Centre in Toronto, advocates a personalized approach to care.

continue to set the standard for comprehensive and individualized fertility treatment in a compassionate, supportive environment. For the appropriate group of women, the clinic is having success with elective single-embryo transfer (eSET). The goal is to give patients the best possible chance of having a healthy baby. www.genesis-fertility.com; 604-879-3032.

Heartland Fertility and Gynaecology Clinic Heartland has an 11-year history providing reproductive health care in Winnipeg. It is the only clinic within an 800 kilometre radius that offers full infertility evaluations and state-of-the-art treatments. The supportive nature of the staff, the individualized care provided to patients and the design of the clinic itself provide a calm and compassionate environment. Drs. Gordon McTavish, Jeremy Kredentser and Francis Lee agree that "sometimes, even miracles need a helping hand; that's where we come in." www.heartlandfertility.mb.ca; 204-779-8888.

IVF Canada & The LIFE Program The Toronto-based

LIFE Program was the first in-vitro fertilization clinic to open in Canada, in 1983. The original physician team continues to ensure that their patients have access to the newest and most successful reproductive technologies available, while participating in clinical research and providing access to patients who do not meet the criteria of other IVF clinics (older females, hepatitis positive status, inaccessible ovaries, etc.) The group has generated many firsts in Canada and maintains a patient-focused environment where proven technologies provide their patients with the best possible outcomes. www.ivfcanada.com; 416-754-8742.

LifeQuest Centre for Reproductive Medicine The centre features two clinics, in downtown Toronto and Thornhill. The multi-disciplinary team provides comprehensive care in a warm and respectful environment with Canada's most inclusive on-site private embryology laboratory. The group of leading infertility specialists provides personalized care including state-of-the-art treatments. "Thanks

to significant strides in the field of reproductive medicine, couples previously diagnosed with unexplained infertility are now finding explanations and, often, treatable causes for their fertility problems," says Dr. Ken Cadesky, medical director. www.LifeQuestivf.com; 416-506-0804.

London Health Sciences Centre, The Reproductive Endocrinology & Infertility Program The

team of medical specialists and multi-disciplinary staff has been offering comprehensive onsite infertility services for 25 years. Treatment is partially funded by the Ontario government health insurance for specific conditions requiring in-vitro fertilization treatment. Full institutional and hospital support allows minimization of administrative fees. Their experience with providing innovative and caring infertility treatment has resulted in the birth of more than 4,000 babies. www.lhsc.on.ca; 519-663-3019.

McGill Reproductive Centre Since its inception in 1996, the Montreal reproductive centre has been at the forefront of research and technological advancement in the treatment of male and female infertility disorders. It has gained national and international recognition for its multi-disciplinary team of world-renowned physicians. The centre has developed a revolutionary new technique of freezing human eggs called the McGill Cryoleaf System and has achieved some of the world's best results in both in-vitro maturation (IVM) and oocyte (egg) freezing. www.mcgillivf.com; 514-843-1650.

Mount Sinai Hospital Reproductive Biology Unit and IVF Program The Toronto centre offers the most established and experienced hospital-based fertility and IVF program. Their integrated medicine program includes a new state-of-the-art laboratory and research facility. They help

with informed decisions about infertility treatments and care, with unprecedented access to their physicians and nursing care team; visitors are treated with respect and compassion. Mt. Sinai is a University of Toronto-affiliated teaching and patient care centre, which has the largest group of Royal College-certified specialists in reproductive endocrinology and infertility practising at one centre in Canada. www.mt-sinai.on.ca/reproductivebiology; 416-586-4800 ext. 4748.

Ottawa Fertility Centre The centre features the most modern fertility centre in the country, according to medical director Dr. Paul Claman. In addition to five subspecialty trained fertility specialists, the centre employs more than 50 staff who are dedicated to helping patients resolve their fertility problems and focused on treating patients with respect and compassion. They are an advanced, full-service centre where all fertility diagnostic testing and treatments are provided under one roof. The medical team started the IVF Program at the Ottawa Hospital in 1988 and moved to its new centre in May, 2006. www.conceive.ca; 613-686-3378.

The Toronto Centre for Advanced Reproductive Technology The state-of-the-art centre was founded by Dr. Robert Casper in 1993. Since Dr. Casper is a world leader in the research and treatment of male and female infertility, the centre has extensive experience and new therapeutic approaches for women over age 38. Clinic services include infertility work-up and diagnosis, cycle monitoring, intra-uterine insemination, donor insemination, IVF/ICSI, oocyte freezing, known donor oocyte cycles and Preimplantation Genetic Diagnosis (removal of a cell from an embryo at an early stage of development and testing it for genetic disorders). Counselling and acupuncture services are available. www.tcartonline.com; 416-972-0110.