The Story of Hannah Strege: The World’s First Adopted Embryo

“To Society She Was an Embryo, to Her Parents, Hannah Was a Child Deserving of Adoption”

By Hannah Carter, Director of Education
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Jeremiah 1:5, “Before I formed you in the womb, I knew you; before you were born I set you apart...” For Marlene and John Strege, this verse became even more relevant to them on December 31, 1998 when they welcomed their first adoptive daughter, Hannah, into the world. She had two eyes, one nose, ten fingers, ten toes, and she was a human being just like any other child that had been born. However, instead of being adopted after birth, she was adopted as an embryo.

John and Marlene Strege had been through a long process of trying to have a child. In January of 1997, they were praying about what to do next when Marlene, asked her doctor if instead of creating more embryos through fertility treatments, if they could adopt one. The doctor thought about it and said he did not see why not. After seeking God in prayer and consulting their pastors, they began the process of embryo adoption, or snowflake adoption. Ron Stoddert, executive director of Nightlight Christian Adoptions worked with them to establish an embryo adoption program.

Marlene notes, “We did not just want to pick an embryo off a clinic’s list. We wanted to have a formal adoption process just like any other parents would have when adopting a child.” The Streges underwent a home study and other procedures necessary to show that they could take care of a child. After all the papers were put into place, they were successful in being matched with a placing family (the genetic parents) and were able to adopt embryos. From there four embryos were implanted into Marlene’s womb, but only one survived.

Nine months later, on December 31, 1998 at 7:07 AM the Streges gave birth to their daughter. Since Hannah’s birth, she has become an advocate for other embryos. At the age of two, Hannah began to pray that other embryos could be adopted and given moms and dads.
Marlene notes that she is continually amazed at the opportunities that God has given Hannah to speak up for life and for the value of embryos.

In a visit to the Whitehouse, Hannah had the chance to meet President Bush and she overheard him talking about how certain groups wanted to destroy embryos in a press conference. Hannah looked at her mom with a frightened look on her face asking, “Mommy, are they going to kill me, I was an embryo?” Hannah’s mom reassured her that these scientists were not going to kill her, and that she had misunderstood what the president had said. Hannah emphatically replied, “Mommy you don’t do experiments on babies, you don’t kill babies.” Hannah captured in that one moment what many have missed, “excess or leftover embryos” are persons deserving of protection not destruction.

These embryos are not property to be donated, but rather persons to be adopted.

Embryo adoption brings a new face to the stem cell debate. Over 3000 children have been born as a result of embryo adoption. The Streges were excited to hear that Georgia passed the Option of Adoption Act HB 388 which leads the nation in establishing embryo adoption in law in the state of Georgia. To find out more about embryo adoption, visit www.embryoadoption.org.

(The above picture is a poster that was compiled by Hannah’s Parents to show the journey of their little girl. Hannah is now 10.)