

PairTree

Local business matches birth moms with adoptive parents

BY STEVEN POWELL
Bainbridge Island Review

Erin and Jaime Quick of Bainbridge Island said they didn't have a horrible time adopting a baby. But they'd heard the horror stories.

So when Erin decided to open an online adoption business last summer, she decided on an agency with a modern twist called PairTree.

If couples can be united online by sharing information about themselves, why couldn't the adoption process be the same way? PairTree already has more than 800 adoptive families and more than 150 expectant moms registered and has had seven successful matches. Self-matching is the fastest growing method of adoption in the U.S. It means expectant moms connect directly with adoptive parents then use an attorney or agency to finalize the adoption.

Advantages of self-matching include: Expectant moms and adopting parent(s) can build a direct

relationship without a middle man. On average, self-matching shortens the time and cost to adopt by 75 percent — which makes adoption a reality for many more people. Instead of a year to 18 months it takes six to nine months. Instead of up to \$60,000, it costs around \$15,000.

PairTree isn't the first online self-matching adoption business — the Quicks actually used one — but it has some unique characteristics.

Couples who want to adopt create an online profile, answering questions. Some may seem rather odd, such as: What scares you? What famous person would play you in a movie? Would you rather live in an RV or on a sailboat? Others are not odd at all, such as, What's your philosophy on parenting?

Erin came up with the questions and an algorithm to sort the answers to them. After creating a profile, expectant mothers look at their answers. When the mom finds someone she



Courtesy photo

Erin Quick and her two adopted children.

likes, they get in touch and arrange it.

As a working woman, Erin said she delayed getting

pregnant until it was too late to happen naturally. After three years, three miscarriages and \$70,000,

the Quicks decided to adopt.

Looking at the traditional route, they were "blown

away at how expensive and slow moving" it was. "We can't spend that much and wait two years," she said, adding they had to find another way.

They used an online self-matching agency where they had to find their own expectant mom on the internet. It only took a month, and they were in Michigan holding their son Emerson.

Erin said they went to a one-cafe town, had lunch and not long after was picked by the mom to receive her son. Erin said the birth parents had a long-term relationship, loved and respected each other, but wanted different things long term.

"How lucky we were. We know how great it can be," Erin said, adding much of the time babies are adopted out the new parents are asked, "What kind of drugs is it OK that the birth mom uses?"

The Quicks used the same process three years later when they adopted Abigail in Houston. In that case, the mom found the Quicks online months before the due date, "so we had more time to get to know what our relationship would look like," Erin said.

"It was clear to us from the get-go she wanted to be more involved," Erin said, adding a direct relationship with your expectant mom is invaluable — as you'll most likely be connected for the rest of your lives.

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The 12 PairTree Personality Types



The Caregiver



The Creative



The Explorer



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The Jester



The Lover



The Magician



The Neighbor



The Rebel



The Ruler



The Sage

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She said it's always a tense time during an adoption after the birth because parents have from 48 to 72 hours to change their mind. Erin said about 95 percent of adoptions now are open, and birth parents can stay as involved as they want, as long as adoptive parents agree. Erin said they hear from Emerson's birth family a couple times a year, while they text weekly with Abigail's birth family. The Quicks have birth family pictures in their house.

Emerson is quick to correct people when they ask about Erin. "I didn't grow in my mom's belly," he says, according to Erin.

She said the "dynamics work almost exactly" like a dating application. The adoptive couple creates a profile, and PairTree, based on the 12 personality types, does the matching.

Erin said the mom doesn't go through the same personality matching process because she may not want the adoptive parents to match her. She may want them to be different. "She may want her child to see the world and go on planes and be an explorer," something maybe the mom never has done, Erin said. "Or she may want someone who will smother the child with love and attention - the caregiver type."

Erin said the expectant moms really like the "more meaty information on these families. We make sure people feel connected." She said it's great when people let their personality shine through. On their profile, for example, they had on a horse head costume. "Abby's birth mom said, 'Oh, we found them.' You never know what's going to resonate with expectant moms," Erin said. "What makes you different?"

One of many things Erin thinks makes PairTree different from other online agencies is it really cares about the birth moms, so much so that it donates 5 percent of profits to organizations that help those mothers. "The way they're treated today is borderline negligence," Erin said. Many find out "it's harder than they thought it would be" and as a result need to go through years of therapy. "One of best things is making the world a better place for expectant moms. Birth moms give the most and get the least," she said, adding their process is free and confidential for those moms, and they get to make the first move.

Erin said one of the major reasons people don't use online adoption is the fear of getting scammed. She said they were scammed when they tried to adopt the second time. Fake moms prey on adoptive parents. "It shook my confidence to the core," she said, adding it's easy to be scammed because you want a nice environment so you make allowances for things. "It's a much different situation than you've ever been in."

To make sure her clients don't have to worry about that, they all have to go through a home study with



Co-owner Justin Friberg



Co-owner Erin Quick

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an approved social worker. "That takes that fear off the table," Erin said, adding, "You get a genuine connect from day one." Traditional adoption methods are costly because they are "slow to adopt technology, which makes the process much more efficient," she said, adding once they do that "costs should drop." PairTree works with many other organizations. "We don't compete, we collaborate," she said.

Erin said they work with Planned Parenthood and Crisis Pregnancy Center — both sides of the political spectrum of pro life and pro choice. "Our only requirement is they're open to all people — no discrimination," she said. They work all over the U.S., but not internationally because those connections can be "pulled based on political whim." Erin said working with these families, "We feel a really strong connection. These families are the most resilient people."

For example, one of their first PairTree customers were within two weeks of picking up their child after trying for 3½ years. But when they drove the eight hours to pick it up they found out it had died. "We were all heartbroken about this. I can't even imagine that grief," Erin said, adding PairTree decided to comp their membership for life so they can keep trying. "I've got my fingers crossed that it will happen for them again."

Erin said she feels tremendous pressure for the adoptions to work. "There's two sides through every adoption. It's the heaviest feeling you ever go through," she said of the obligation to the birth and adoptive families. Previously, Erin was a global consultant for 13 years so she's "been down this path before" starting a new business. But I've "never wanted to work more than do now. I'm much more passionate about this one."

Website (www.pairtreefamily.com)

The traditional approach to adoption — hiring an agency — includes fees up to \$60,000 per child, long timelines of between a year and 18 months, and is fraught with fraud. The primary pain point is the ability to find and connect expectant moms to adopting families — which is the focus of PairTree's self-matching platform.

PairTree is leveling the playing field, to make adoption a viable path to parenting for more people. Similar to dating apps it provides meaningful insights into adoptive parents, helping mom pick a future for her child, not just the family.

Testimonials from people like Amber and Trevor in Washington state say:

"We have experienced two disrupted matches. We have built relationships with mamas, we have traveled literally across the country, we have poured our heart and soul into them (as they have done to us, as well), we have walked away from a hospital empty handed and heartbroken. When we first began this journey, PairTree was not around yet. After our second disruption we found PairTree, and loved the simplicity and mission of the program."



Erin Quick holds daughter Abigail.

Courtesy photo