

## “I’m sorry—the birth mother has changed her mind”

After enduring every adoptive parent’s nightmare, Tom Motyka and his wife, Michelle, finally got a happy ending.

Tom Motyka as told to Kate Rae  
September 4, 2020

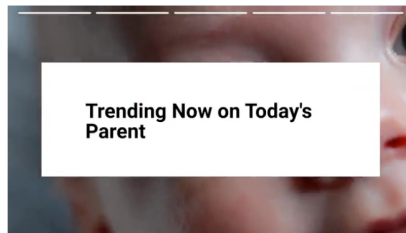


Photo: Joanne Loewen

After **trying for a year to conceive**, undergoing a heartbreakingly unsuccessful round of in vitro fertilization and waiting two long years after our initial application to adopt, our two-day-old baby arrived at our home on Christmas Eve.

Brought over by his heartbroken young birth parents, he was absolutely beautiful. It was an incredibly emotional transfer—our happiest moment coming up against their saddest—but once they left, we quickly packed the baby up and drove over to my sister’s house, where my whole family gathers every Christmas Eve. Everyone was so excited and instantly in love. The next day we hosted Christmas for my wife Michelle’s family and relived the whole joyful introduction all over again. It was amazing.

On Boxing Day, we were lounging around, staring at our new baby, thinking about going for brunch, when the phone rang. “I’m so sorry,” our adoption counsellor said. “The birth mother has changed her mind.”



In Manitoba, where we live, both the birth parents and the adoptive parents have 21 days to revoke their decision, no questions asked. Our little boy was picked up that same day, a complete 180 of Christmas Eve. And just like that, our dream turned into a nightmare. We were devastated. I called both of our families to break the terrible news.

We had been well prepared for the 21-day rule, and before he was placed with us, we’d thought, Well, how attached can you get in three weeks? We’d only had him for two days, and it was almost enough to make us give up on the idea of adoption entirely. But we kept our application in what’s called “the box” at the agency for birth parents to peruse. We heard nothing.

Every year on the anniversary date of your application, you have to redo the medical and police checks. One more year, we kept saying. But by 2014, almost four years after we first put together our application, we decided this would really be our final year of trying. We were prepared to become a couple of DINKs (Double Income, No Kids), to focus on travel, work and **building our cottage** instead of becoming parents.

But on October 3, my phone rang. “Are you sitting down?” our counsellor asked. “This is the call. Are you still interested?” I just laughed and laughed.

A pregnant teenager had chosen us as her baby’s family, and we had four weeks to get ready for his arrival. We met several times with her and her parents, who were closer to our age than she was—an incredibly awkward situation, where we tried as hard as we could to make them all feel comfortable and understand what kind of people we were, what kind of parents we’d be. They all knew about our previous experience and assured us over and over that this was a done deal. Still, we didn’t tell any of our family—we wanted to spare them the pain if it didn’t work out again, and the more people you tell, the more people you have to untell if things go wrong. We were both very nervous and yet somehow very optimistic.

A few days after he was born, our baby, the birth mother, her parents and the counsellor arrived at our house. There were tears streaming down everyone’s faces as the birth mother handed him to us. We were trying so hard to be guarded, but how do you not fall immediately in love?

Because we’d decided not to tell anyone about baby Shane until the three weeks were up, Michelle called in sick to the school where she taught for the whole three weeks. I kept it a secret from my co-workers. Every time the phone rang, one of us would run out of the room with the baby so the caller wouldn’t hear any cries in the background.

On November 29, my birthday, we were 10 days in, and we knew we couldn’t back out of the tradition of having our families over to our home, so we went ahead with it. Michelle’s mother turned the corner into the living room, saw Shane and immediately burst into tears. Then came her dad, who did the same thing. My mom and brother popped around the corner, and my sister was so shocked, she slapped Michelle’s shoulder. There was a lot of joy and excitement, but much reservation as well: We were all incredibly aware that we still had 11 days to go.

Finally, at midnight on Day 21, a huge weight lifted from our shoulders. Two of Michelle’s friends showed up at 7 a.m. with **gifts and clothes**. He was finally, truly ours. We couldn’t have been happier.

Shane is just about one year old, and we still have visits with his birth mom and dad. Together we agreed on four visits a year, and we’ll see how that frequency feels for everyone as Shane gets older. We’ll explain to him, “That’s your birth mom. She grew you in her tummy.” And luckily, the adoption counsellors are available indefinitely if any of us needs help in any way.

Our file is still in “the box.” Maybe we’ll keep it there for one more year.