



NZMG Foundation Helps Dual Active Military Couple Realize Their Dream Of Parenthood

By Jennifer Lynn Maxwell

On February 10, 2012, the NZMG Foundation's very first success story arrived in the tiny package of Zachary James Sullivan, 6 lb. 8 oz., 19 inches, with both of his parents right beside him. Mom, Rachel, was the first person to hold him and dad, Jim, cut the cord.

As the first couple to participate in the NZMG Foundation Education Program, the Sullivans have experienced the fullness of the Foundation and the Foundation community's support. "So many people share in the joy we are feeling right now."

"With a process as personal and emotional as adoption is, it really means the world to have a group of people that you know are always cheering for you," Rachel said. "Everyone on the Foundation's Board and Advisory Committee has taken a personal interest in [our] journey."

The Sullivans learned about the NZMG Foundation through Board Members Karen and Michael Pearlmutter, who knew about their struggles with infertility. For Rachel and Jim, a dual-active military couple, choosing adoption brought unexpected logistical difficulties including finding an agency which would willingly advocate for them. As the NZMG Foundation's Education Program is available free of charge to North Carolina residents who have experienced infertility, the Sullivans enrolled.

"I really, honestly, credit the Foundation and Education Program with how fast Jim and I moved through the process once we decided that we were going to adopt," said Rachel. "It allowed us to focus our research and make decisions much faster than we otherwise would have been able to. We submitted all of our paperwork for our home study in May 2011, completed our home study visits in June, went active with our agency in August, matched on September 26th and placed in February [2012]."

The NZMG Foundation Education Program, working specifically with those who have experienced infertility, addresses each step on the emotional, legal, and financial journey to domestic adoption. Personalized to the unique requirements of each participating couple, it



simplifies the adoption process “into manageable chunks,” identifying and prioritizing the central issues. By doing so, the program empowers and enables each couple to then conduct effective research on their own.

A key feature of the program is its segment which models successful family profiles, increasing participants’ knowledge of how to best make their own profile as effective as possible. “I think a lot of families struggle [with creating their optimal profile]” said Rachel. “We would have struggled with that [too] if it wasn’t for NZMG Foundation.”

A more individualized struggle the Sullivans faced was how to work with the military in order to receive appropriate maternity and paternity leave.

No precedent existed for an adoptive mother-to-be who, as in Rachel’s case, was 14 days away from deployment to Afghanistan when word came that she and James had successfully matched with Zachary.

Pregnant service members are non-deployable and receive an automatic 6-month deployment deferral. “The idea of someone coming home from deployment for ‘maternity’ reasons was unheard of,” said Rachel.

Thankfully, their chain of command provided “incredible support,” and decided to remove her from deployment altogether. That decision made Rachel the precedent for adoption leave for dual-military couples. “I still can’t help but wonder,” she said, “if someone else under a different chain of command would have been so lucky.”



Because they have now created the precedent for appropriate time-off for expecting adoptive parents, Rachel and James have surprised themselves with the fact that they are unanticipatedly leading the way for change for leave-of-absence structures within the military for adoptive parents.

With their successful navigation of the adoption process and its hurdles of military logistics, Rachel and James are now able to hold their cherished son Zachary James in their arms. The knowledge that they have gained through this process, and which the NZMG Foundation’s Education Program has gained through partnering with them, will serve to enrich the NZMG Foundation, its educational program, and its participants to come. **NZMG**

For more information about the NZMG Foundation, please visit: www.nzmgfoundation.org.

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