

R+E Podcast Season 4, Episode 13

Brave: Eric and Laura's Adoption Story

Craig Robertson: Welcome to season four of the Robertson and Easterling podcast. This is Craig Robertson.

Matt Easterling: And I'm Matt Easterling, We want to thank everyone who has listened to our podcast so far. If you haven't already subscribed, please do so on iTunes, Spotify, or your favorite podcast player. Craig and I are having lots of fun producing this show, and we hope that you're enjoying it as much as we are. It's really hard to believe we are already on season four.

Craig Robertson: That's right, Matt. We've really enjoyed sharing the life stories of some great people. And we have even more in store for you for season four. As you know by now, we are board-certified family law specialists with one of the most successful boutique law firms in Mississippi. As creative problem solvers, we take a holistic approach to the individual needs of our clients.

Matt Easterling: Joining us again this season are licensed professional counselors: Eva and Roane Hunter from Lifeworks Counseling. We're excited to continue our partnership with Eva and Roane. They provide a unique perspective as we help hurting people with the healing process.

Craig Robertson: We're also excited to introduce two new sponsors for season four: Christie Tidwell and Kelly Engelmann. Christie is a certified financial planner and the founder of New Path Planning. Christie's own walk through divorce, coupled with 20 years of experience, make her a perfect advocate for others on a similar path. And Kelly is the founder of Enhanced Wellness Living. Mississippi's leading functional medicine clinic.

Her team's food-first approach to healing along with a variety of lifestyle and regenerative treatment options sets you on a journey to take control of your health and live life well.

Matt Easterling: So, now that we've told you what to expect this season, sit back, relax, and take a deep breath. Everything's gonna be okay. You found us. And what you're about to hear is going to help.

Eva Hunter: Hey, this is Eva Hunter from Lifeworks Counseling. At LifeWorks, our counselors seek to integrate healthy faith-based principles with sound clinical skills. Whether you're struggling in a relationship, or have feelings that hinder your ability to be all you are created to be. One of our trained counselors can help.

We seek to partner with you as our client to find the freedom to live the life God intended for you. We offer our experience, strength, and hope to promote healthy relationships built on intimacy and trust. LifeWorks counseling: the science and soul of connection.

Christy Tidwell: Divorce is the largest financial transaction in most people's lives. Unfortunately, the decisions surrounding divorce are having to be made when emotions are highest. Making choices about assets can feel intimidating, especially when you're not in the best frame of mind. Make sure you know how what you do today will affect your financial future.

My name is Christy Tidwell, and I'm with New Path Planning. I'll use my 20 years of financial planning experience to help educate and advise you during every stage of the divorce process. Visit New Path Planning for more information.

Craig Robertson: So being a divorce lawyer now for over 20 years, unfortunately, I've seen a lot of families that have broken apart, and one of the things that attracted me to adoption work is to see two people come together to reach out and love a child who is in need of a family. And today I have two people just like that with me, Laura and Eric, and they're here to tell their adoption story. Eric, thanks for being here.

Eric: Man, thank you for having us.

Craig Robertson: And Laura. You ready?

Laura: Yes.

Craig Robertson: Okay well, let's do it guys. Laura, tell our listener a little bit about you and your background and just growing up here in the deep south.

Laura: Well, I was born and raised here in central Mississippi, and I'm a teacher at the same school district that I grew up in. -and we live out in the boondocks, a little bit on a 10-acre plot of land, and we love it out there.

Craig Robertson: Eric, what about you? Before meeting Laura, tell the listeners a little bit about you, and where you grew up.

Eric: Well, I grew up in central Mississippi. Born and raised, the same city, still around there. My family was from there, so I think my grandpa opened the first burger joint in that city. So, it's been there a long time. Born and raised, and played baseball and basketball there. Got into the softball world, and now I umpire. (laughs)

Craig Robertson: Oh really? I didn't know that.

Eric: I do, I umpire college softball. So fixing to start this weekend going outta town every weekend and doing that so....

Craig Robertson: Okay, Very cool. I was a baseball player in another life, but I've left that far behind. So, tell our listeners a little bit about how you guys got together.

Eric: Well, that's why I mentioned the softball world because we actually met on the softball field. I played men's slow pitch after high school, and after baseball was done. I started playing co-ed, and somebody called me one night needing a player. -and I came, actually was planning on going outta town to go hunting that weekend, and, I was kinda, Oh man, why I gotta go do this? And I went and played. Somebody was playing third base and we hit it off.

Craig Robertson: I gotta ask, what position were you playing?

Eric: Pitching.

Craig Robertson: Okay so the pitcher and the third baseman; their eyes met across the softball field, and it was love at first sight.

Eric: I think she made a play at third or something, and I went over there and gave her a high five. And it was ever since then it was (laughs) ... yep. And this is funny thing. So we have a pretty good age difference, I went hunting that weekend. We talked all weekend. I think we talked for a good week or two, hit it off, went on a date, and finally asked "Well, how old are you?" We found out we're nine years apart.

Craig Robertson: Wow.

Eric: So we didn't know it though when we first met and talked and-

Craig Robertson: Well, our listener can't see you guys- who's older? I don't even know.

Laura: I am 31. Eric just turned 40 Friday.

Craig Robertson: Wow. Okay.

Laura: So we're nine years apart, so I was going on 19 when we met. So I was really young, so mama wasn't happy about that.

Craig Robertson: Look, it worked out. But I'm with mama, you know.

Laura: It did work out.

Eric: I was nervous.

Craig Robertson: I've got daughters too. So you guys, your eyes met across this softball field? Laura's at third base; Eric was underhand pitching if you wanna call that pitching. That's where the love story started with a high five at third base.

Laura: Exactly like that.

Craig Robertson: Well, talk about life together.

Laura: Well after dating a couple years, we got married. I was still pretty young, but we decided to go forward with getting married, and we started basically our life together. Then we traveled, while I was finishing up school and finished up my teaching degree. Eric had been in his job for many years at that point, and we decided to travel. -and we went all over pretty much just us two. And eventually became time to kind of start talking and thinking about starting a family. And we made the decision to go ahead and try to start just us.

Eric: Well, it kind of went, this is how it went. When we first met, she told me right off the bat I wanted to adopt. And I was like, "Adopt. Why?" And for some reason, she's like I don't think I've ever been able to have kids. And it was strange, but I was like okay just brushed it off my back. Well the day that came when we started talking about having kids, she kind of mentioned adoption again. I was like I'm the last in my family. So, why don't we try to have one? You know let's try to do that first. She was kinda like I'll do it for you. So that's when we started trying, and we were having no luck. How long did we go? Probably a year, a good year. And we had a friend say, "Maybe you need to go see a specialist just to see," and that's when we went to our first specialist. I say first; there's been many. Then we kind of talked to specialists, Laura had a procedure done that was supposed to help. -and they were always positive. "Oh, it'll work. It'll work well." How long did we go to that specialist about a year and a half?

Laura: Mm-hmm.

Eric: And realized well, this is not working. We done all this. She went through all the medicines, and those medicines are rough cause they changed who you are pretty much. So we decided to go to a different one - went to another specialist. Same thing, very positive, but we were doing the exact same thing we did with the first one. We did that for six months, maybe.

Laura: Mm-hmm.

Eric: -and realized this, this ain't gonna work. This is not working either, so I could tell she was really depressed. -and it always made me feel bad because I was like, maybe I'm making her do something she don't want to. And that's when I started getting the thought of maybe we shouldn't do this no more. Well, we got told of another specialist, This ones more into science. You need to go check him out, and so we went to him -very positive guy. You could tell he was doing things other people weren't doing yet. He actually gave us an answer that we've been looking for kind of.

Craig Robertson: The answer to the fertility challenge?

Eric: Yeah, and if you wanna explain that.

Laura: Yeah, it basically ended up being a severe hormonal imbalance. There's a term for it, but it's kind of a big term. And basically it's not impossible for me to ever conceive naturally, but it's extremely hard.

Craig Robertson: Well, talk a little bit more about it sounds like when you and Eric first got together. Adoption was already in your heart. Talk about that a little bit. Did you have intuition about the physical challenges that you had, or was it just something that you felt called to?

Laura: I think it was a little bit of both. I think one: I just kind of had a feeling I would have a hard time, but also of course, we kind of connected through church softball. -and there was a book that I had read actually by Mary Beth Chapman. I don't know if you're familiar with Stephen Curtis Chapman, and it was on adoption. -and something about that just resonated with me at a younger age, when we were first starting out -and I was like Wow. It was just so inspiring.

Craig Robertson: So what I heard you guys say was you had some pretty significant challenges. You met on a church softball field: one pitching one at third base, and you guys got married. You enjoyed being together; you traveled together. But you decided to expand your family and think about having a child, and Eric you particularly wanted to have someone carry on your family name.

Eric: Yes.

Craig Robertson: And you had challenges associated with that, as I think many people who can hear my voice right now can relate to. And you went to one specialist after another, until finally answers as to the difficulty of the challenge associated with having a child naturally. And so at that point, you started thinking about the possibility of adoption.

Eric: I started at that third specialist sitting in the waiting room is when it finally -it was like something that's clicked like we've talked about adoption all our lives. I've been kinda "Huh, let's see first about having one ourselves." But it was just sitting there, this ain't what she wants to do. This is hurting her, so that's when I realized like, "Hey, don't be selfish. Think of her. She's going through all this for you and she's not happy." I could see it every time she took those pills, the medicine. I could tell it was just miserable for her. She would wake up in the middle of the night just all kinds of stuff, and it hit me like, "Hey, it's your turn. Step up. Let's do this."

Craig Robertson: Laura, let's talk about that a little bit because I think that's something that I think our listeners would be interested in about the physical and emotional challenges associated with the fertility work that you were doing. Talk about that.

Laura: Well, I probably didn't get as in-depth as a lot of people do that go through IVF and everything. We never could even get to that point. But I was on some pretty intense medications actually a couple of different kinds, and it caused for me some severe side effects, as far as, just waking up in the middle of the night, sweating, night sweats, and the dreams. Just all kinds of stuff, and it really just affects your motivation and your emotional side. There's a whole emotional side of it, so that was really tough.

Craig Robertson: How did the complications around conceiving naturally impact the two of you? Because at least I've heard and have been fortunate not to experience myself. It just kind of that aspect of your life; your sexual intimacy becomes like a job. It's like three o'clock on Thursday, it's time now.

Laura: That's exactly how it was; it definitely became more of okay we've got to just do this. This is what we're supposed to do. We're on the clock. It definitely affects our relationship.

Eric: It never really affected our relationship. It might have made it stronger...

Craig Robertson: Of course, the man is gonna say that.

Laura: Right. (laughs)

Eric: It was weird in the fact of Hey, you can't do nothing this weekend because at six o'clock Saturday night-

Craig Robertson: We'll be ovulating. Right, I get it. Well let's move forward, and so you guys had different journeys to the idea of adoption being what was in your future. But Eric, you have come around to the idea that this has been really hard on Laura. Let's give this adoption thing a try. What was your first step after that?

Eric: The first thing we ever did; we went to a church that is local around here.

Laura: Yes.

Eric: And I believe your organization was there that night, and that was our first interaction, just to hear, we weren't there to do anything. It was more or less- let's get some info hear the story- see where we want to go. Cause we didn't know where to go? Where to start?

Craig Robertson: And when Eric says "my organization," he's talking about 200 Million Flowers, which was a nonprofit adoption agency that my wife and I founded in 2011. -and one of the big things that we did was educated people like Laura and Eric about the challenges associated with foster care and adoption. And so you guys sat with other people, who felt called to adoption for whatever reason and learned about it.

Laura: Yes, We were there with probably, I don't know 20 other couples or individuals that were really just learning about foster care, private adoption, all the realms of basically children that need homes, right?

Craig Robertson: International adoption, so you can adopt basically from a situation where you're placed with a mother in a crisis pregnancy, or you can adopt from the foster care system and whether that be foster to adopt here locally in Mississippi and in the United States, or whether it's an international adoption, which is basically adopting from the foster care system. However, develop that might be or undeveloped that might be in another country. And so you guys were pulled more to domestic adoption?

Eric: Yes, our first thing we did, we actually called the state of Mississippi and had somebody come out and talk to us about foster care first and just to see if that's what we want to do; what the rules, laws, everything that was involved. And they met with us for about an hour at our house and kind of realized; she led us saying, "This probably isn't the way you want to go."

Craig Robertson: Right. And I think probably what the social worker was explaining to you is that the idea of foster care is, and the goal of foster care is to reunite the child with his or her birth family. And whether that's a parent, or whether that's a grandparent, or whether that's an aunt or an uncle. The goal first is to try to keep the family together, and only when that's not possible is adoption even on the table.

Laura: Yes.

Craig Robertson: And so you guys felt like maybe foster care was not your journey, and so you looked at other options. What happened then?

Laura: Well that's when, we started the process, the home study process at that point. And it took us a while, I mean probably four or five months or so.

Craig Robertson: And talk about the home study process for the listener who doesn't know much about that. I think that's a common question that someone would want to know about. Talk about that.

Laura: So, it's pretty in-depth of course, you do have home visits by a social worker. She came about three times. And all three times were different. One was an interview where she asked everything about our background any and everything. She pretty much asked, and once she was walking around the yard looking at everything, walking around the house seeing what room we had picked out for our future kids. And so it was pretty intense.

Craig Robertson: Yeah. And for the person who's listening and curious about the home study process; it's basically you're being considered to be the parent of a child. And they do that by doing criminal background checks, looking into your marital history, your work history, your financial ability to care for a child they are gonna look at the safety of the home that you're in, and whether or not all of the resources are there that you would need to parent a child. And you know whether or not the surrounding area is safe if you live on a body of water if you live with a swimming pool if there's anything unsafe about the place where you live. And so they pull all of this information together in a report. And that report is the home study.

Laura: Mm-hmm.

Craig Robertson: So you guys are journeying through the home study process after choosing an agency, and once that's finally completed; talk about what happened after that.

Laura: So it was kind of a God thing that happened. We connected with a consultant group in Georgia. It was actually through Facebook. It was just a weird coincidence. They popped up, and I saw that they were really devoted to the adoption process if that was domestic or international, but they really had a heart for connecting families that had gone through fertility issues, or they just wanted to be a family pretty much. And we connected with them as soon as our home study was approved. They basically put our profile out there to agencies that they were associated with, and that could have been agencies out west, up north, all over. So it was kind of different than finding an agency in your state.

Craig Robertson: So you guys actually started the home study process before you even connected with an agency?

Laura: We did. We did.

Craig Robertson: And then you used a consultant to actually find the agency with whom you eventually were. All right, and talk about the process from there.

Eric: So what they do is our consultant agency would send us; you would call 'em cases. You may not get one every month; you may get five a month, and it'll be just telling you about the expectant mother. It might have a little info in it; it might have a lot of info in it. It could have the whole entire family background history to just Hey, it's gonna be a baby girl and it might have the race. That's it. So, it was crazy reading those cases because some of 'em would have their life history and go into great detail, and you would feel so sad reading some of those. So, it kind of touched you in different ways, but he read those and you had the option to present to those-

Craig Robertson: And by present, that means to present your family as an option for being the parents for the child that was expectant.

Eric: Mm-hmm. And so on our presentation, we had to write a letter to the expected mother, and we had a profile book that kinda was pictures of our home and our place where we stay, kind of our history, what we like to do.

Craig Robertson: Yeah, It gives the mom in crisis pregnancy situation just a window into the world that her child would be living in.

Eric: Yes, and so you would present to a case. And the way they worked, which is great. You only could present to one case at a time, and you couldn't present to another until you found out if you had been chosen or not chosen.

Craig Robertson: Right, it was a one-at-a-time, when if there's a thumbs up then you're continuing to work with that particular birth mom. If it's a

thumbs down, then you're free to try to present your family to another woman in a crisis pregnancy situation.

Eric: And that was because they didn't want you presenting to two, and then getting chosen by two -and then they had a situation on their hands then, so you present; you would wait. And I think we went through probably 20 cases, probably a year and a half, worth of cases before we were finally chosen.

Kelly Engelmann: Hi, I'm Kelly Engelmann, family, nurse practitioner, and functional medicine provider.

I founded Enhanced Wellness Living, Mississippi's leading functional wellness clinic with the understanding that one's healthcare plans must be congruent with their beliefs and values. At Enhanced Wellness Living, treatment is focused on you as a whole, rather than just looking at your symptoms, or what particular disease state you have. My team and I partner with you to understand the root cause of your symptoms and educate you on creating a lifestyle of wellness, energy, vitality, and longevity. Combining my food-first approach to healing with inspiration, education, integrity, empathy, and balance. We empower you to take ownership of your health for your life.

Enhanced Wellness Living is proud to offer a variety of lifestyle and regenerative treatment options, including sexual wellness programs. Take control of your health live life well with Enhanced Wellness Living.

Stephanie Walters: We hope you're enjoying this episode of season four of the Robertson and Easterling podcast. I'm Stephanie, the voice on the other end of the phone, when you call. If you think you need to speak to one of our attorneys, you can request a consultation from our website or simply call the office. Getting legal help is not only the best way to take control of your future.

It will give you the clarity needed to feel better. You owe it to yourself and more importantly to your children to take initiative. Be brave. And now please sit back and enjoy the second half of our show.

Craig Robertson: Okay guys, welcome back. We're here with Laura and Eric who met across the church softball diamond: Laura, the star third baseman, and Eric, the underhanded pitcher. They connected on a high-five near third base, and they've been together ever since then. They had fertility challenges, which were difficult. They were difficult in their marriage. They were difficult on Laura's body, and she had always felt this pull to adoption: call it women's intuition, call it just the heart of children in that situation. But Eric, as many men are, was slower to come around and come on board with the idea. He is a proud Mississippian and liked the idea of biologically carrying on his family name, and as often happens, his partner in life, Laura kind of shepherded him along to the idea of looking outside of yourself to love another child. And so they went through the home study process. They hired a consultant who would connect them with agencies around the country when there was a woman in crisis pregnancy with whom they might possibly match. And they did this dozen of times over an 18-month period before they were finally chosen. So Laura, what was that like when you finally got word from the professionals with whom you were working that, Hey we've gotta match this is gonna be your connection and possibly your child.

Laura: Oh, we were so excited. We got a call; it was like eight o'clock at night, and we had gone through case after case and got told a lot of no's - and so we were kind of used to it if you say used to it at that point. But then we got a call -and it was unusual to get a call from a supervisor, especially at night. So when we got the call, we knew something was up, and she told us that the expected mother we had presented to had chosen us -and wanted us to parent her child, and we were thrilled. Very excited.

Craig Robertson: So what happened then?

Eric: You kind of don't know 'cause you're so nervous, you're like how does this work? So talking to them, we were like, What's our next step? And they're like, Well, you gotta pay your money now. And so you have to get all your funds up right then.

Craig Robertson: And let's talk about that because obviously, that's a big part of this because in an adoption journey is one that takes money. And so what type of money was it that you had to pull together?

Laura: So when you get matched, they go through the list of fees and expenses, and it's your usual legal fees and things like that. But it's also the expectant mother fees. And a lot of people have misconceptions about that, but what that goes to is the agency will help her kind of get set up if she's in a hard place -like if she needs help with different things from groceries to things like that. They will help her kind of settle, and that could be also for her medical needs as well.

Craig Robertson: Yeah, and I think that's something that maybe the average person who might be listening to my voice right now doesn't think about because a person who is in crisis pregnancy; it's a crisis. And they might not have a car. They might not have a phone. They might not have good quality medical care. They might not have nutritious foods, and so really one of the big jobs of an agency is to come around a birth mom in that really difficult season of time. And you guys experienced that too because that was a part of the money that you were pulling together

Laura: Absolutely.

Craig Robertson: Was for the birth mom's expenses?

Laura: Yes. And we were prepared for that. Now it did take a lot of help as far as donations and fundraising and things like that for us to work out. But luckily things pulled together and it happened, so we made it happen.

Craig Robertson: Okay. And so, you guys were matched, you pulled your money together, and you paid it to the appropriate place. And how far along was the mom at this point in the journey, if you remember?

Laura: So she was about 12 weeks when we matched. So she was still fairly early in her pregnancy, and everything was going good at that point. We had FaceTimed with her a few times, and everything was looking really good. And then unfortunately things went kind of south about a month later.

Craig Robertson: How so? Talk about that. What do you mean?

Laura: So she ended up miscarrying that child. So, it was pretty devastating for her and for us as well. And we didn't know any real information behind anything surrounding it except ages. He just called, she had a miscarriage, we're sorry. So that was it.

Craig Robertson: Okay. So, your journey wasn't over then.

Laura: Mm-mmm.

Craig Robertson: One of the things I know about people who are called to the process of adoption is it's not for the faint of heart, and there's a lot of disappointment along the way. So you guys did experience that disappointment, but you decided to move forward. What happened after that?

Eric: So, one of the things that happens, when we were picked on this case. We had to sign with the agency that the expected birth mother was with, and when we did that; it was a pretty substantial amount of money.

Craig Robertson: So, what I heard you say was that you guys were working with a consultant, and they would essentially present your package if you will. The information about your family to different agencies across the country who had relationships with birth moms, but once you were matched and the birth mom chose you, then you had to work with that particular agency, which included a pretty significant financial investment on your part.

Eric: Yes, we had the option to keep going through consultants and everything, but if you were matched with anybody else, you would lose all that money. So we had to talk about that and it was a pretty large sum, too much for us to say: Hey, we're gonna have to stick with this agency right here.

Craig Robertson: Right? And so you there are lots of ways to go about the process of adoption. I mean, it's as simple as having a relationship with a

neighbor down the street or as complicated as working with an international adoption agency or like you guys did to work with a more national consulting group. But essentially because you chose to do it that way, you were matched with an agency that you didn't necessarily have, you didn't necessarily choose, but it was kind of chosen for you.

Eric: Yes, and then we started getting cases just for them and there wasn't as many of course, but they told us since ours failed that we would kind of move to the top. I'm guessing that just meant they would see our profile first. So, we started, I think it was the first case?

Laura: Yeah.

Eric: -That we got from them. We talked about it cause you would sit down when you got a case and say: Hey, do we want to go for this one or not? And we decided yes let's go for it. So our spirits were still high at this point. We were kind of down, but we were still staying positive, and we said yes, let's go for this one. So we went for the next one we got, and it wasn't long at all. We got a call back about that one, and she chose us on that one. So this is a different expectant mother different situation, and what we were told and everything we FaceTime with her seemed bright young lady, she was going to nursing school and sounded kind of like, "Why, why are you, you know-"

Craig Robertson: Yeah. Why are you making a plan for adoption?

Laura: Yeah, she was a single mother of three kids, three young kids. So in her situation, she was chosen at that time what she thought was best. And we really connected with her like Eric said: just through FaceTime and we keep in constant contact through the agency. It was going really well, so much so that it actually went all the way up to the birth. We were matched with her for probably a couple months before it was time for her to give birth.

Craig Robertson: So did you guys travel to where the birth mom was located?

Laura: We did- It was out west, so we had kind of packed up our bags and we were expected to be there a few days before the birth to kind of get to know the expected mother and meet her. -And her and her children if she chose at that time. We went out there and met up with her and a couple of the ladies at the agency, and we went to a restaurant. We probably were there for three hours. Talking and getting to know each other, and it was good.

Craig Robertson: And describe that -that's got to be a surreal type of connection with another human being where they're potentially entrusting you to raise their child.

Laura: Yeah, we were nervous, but when we show up, she's telling us she was just as nervous. And I'm like I can't imagine sitting across from someone and they're the person that you're entrusting with your child. She was happy to know everything that we had planned, and what life was like here in Mississippi. It was great.

Eric: She asked if we had a name picked out. We told her the name and this was all the night before she was supposed to go in...

Craig Robertson: -to be induced.

Eric: Be induced.

Craig Robertson: So as far as you guys knew, everything was good. You had kinda put your chips down on this particular agency and were matched relatively soon, and were matched with this particular person who had three older children. -and she was in crisis again and realized that child number four was gonna be maybe more than she could do. You guys had a long first meeting where you felt a real connection, and you thought everything was great. -and she was gonna get induced the very next day. So what happened after that?

Laura: Well so we had a birth plan, the birth mother did, where I would come into the hospital and be banded with the baby. -and be able to come to visit her and the baby. Covid was really bad at that point, so we weren't

sure how we were gonna navigate Eric going to the hospital and me going to the hospital. So we just decided. I would be the first to go in once she had the baby.

Craig Robertson: So Laura, you guys had this amazing meeting with a birth mom, and you are navigating the global pandemic. -and being a potential adoptive parent through that. And I understand that you were waiting on a phone call.

Laura: That's right, we waited the next day and waited till later in the evening and didn't really hear much. Kind of got a couple of texts from the agency saying we know that she's had the baby and the baby's in the NICU, but we don't really know much else. We're sure she's resting and of course we were like We're fine with that, you know? But then the next day turned into we're still kind of waiting on information, and it just kind of went like that for the next few days until basically, it was a few days later. We were told some things have come up, and we're not really sure this is gonna work out.

Craig Robertson: So you guys had a great first meeting with a birth mom. You're waiting on the invitation to come to the hospital. You had a plan.

Laura: Mm-hmm.

Craig Robertson: Hospital plan as to your ability to access the child and have some communication with the birth mom. And so it sounds like you're getting just a little bit of scattered information here and there. And what did you finally learn about this particular mom?

Laura: So exactly what you said, It was very scattered, very unsure information

Eric: for about three weeks.

Laura: Yeah, eventually we learned that the birth mother had left the hospital. She had been discharged, and that was before the baby was

discharged. And unfortunately, he was still in the NICU, and we had no legal rights to foster to visit anything like that.

Craig Robertson: So she had left without signing any paperwork, relinquishing parental rights, and at that point the child became a foster child.

Laura: Correct.

Craig Robertson: Wow. That had to be devastating for you guys having invested so much time, energy, effort, emotional effort actual physical effort, and financial investment. -and it had to feel like a real letdown when you were finally told after three weeks of being halfway across the country that this one was not gonna happen.

Eric: Yeah, this one hurt. It made you question a lot of things.

Craig Robertson: Put that into words, Eric, use some adjectives to describe what was going on with you, when you came to that realization.

Eric: I came to the realization a lot quicker than Laura did. After not hearing for a couple of days -you don't hear nothing- in a guy you start putting things together, and you start realizing, Hey, this something's fishy going on. It's not going right, but I know Laura was still on hope, and she was still wanting to stay. -so we stayed for three weeks afterward waiting every day to hear something. The agency wouldn't give us a full-blown, "You need to go home." They would kind of give you a "We're still waiting to hear, We're still looking for her. We think it's still gonna work." They kind of gave you that speech every day.

Craig Robertson: Well, the truth of this matter is they probably didn't really know.

Eric: No.

Laura: Yeah. And then they also have to be careful, they can't coerce or anything like that

Craig Robertson: And nor would you want them to, right?

Laura: Absolutely not.

Eric: Well the good news is although horribly disappointing, this wasn't the end of your journey. So, what happened after that? We came home, devastated of course and kind of questioning. We didn't know if we could pursue another case now, or if we were kind of in limbo. -and we kinda had to call the agency and ask them like Hey what's going on? And they finally said, "Okay, well, You can pursue other cases now." And I think it was the first case they sent us afterward, which was a little bit after. It wasn't just soon as we got home. I honestly was like thinking maybe we need to sit this one out just because of everything we went through maybe we need a little time to heal. And I think Laura kinda presented without me knowing on that one.

Laura: I think I asked. I may not have. (laughs)

Eric: I wasn't fully on board, not because of the profile or nothing, just because of how we felt. And I just thought we needed a little time to heal. We lost a little bit more money, so I was like we need to build that backup. Just get everything back right.

Craig Robertson: Right and we're remembering things a little differently, but that's okay. So regardless of how things happen. You did present to another birth mom. What happened?

Laura: Yes. And we learned probably a week later that she had chosen us, and that she was due in a month.

Craig Robertson: Wow.

Laura: We were shocked, and we were very hesitant.

Craig Robertson: Yeah, you had made a significant investment with your heart.

Laura: Mm-hmm.

Craig Robertson: And it's hard to trust again.

Laura: Definitely. I mean, I was kind of worried the last one would be make or break

Craig Robertson: Right. That if this doesn't happen- we might not be able to do this anymore.

Laura: Yeah, so we definitely went out on faith again and opened our heart, and it worked out. And birth mother connected with us, and we talked to her. -and it was another situation where she was going through a really hard time, and she just really wanted someone that she could trust.

Craig Robertson: Laura, as a woman, you're sitting and you're looking eye to eye with the biological mother of what could be the child that you're chosen to parent? I mean, what emotions are going through your mind and heart when you're interacting with her?

Laura: Honestly, I'm amazed that she's sitting there making a decision like this, or even just thinking about making a decision. I'm amazed at how God makes women to be so selfless and brave. It's just amazing.

Craig Robertson: Yeah. I get chills even thinking about that because I mean it's just brave. For a woman in that type of crisis, her bodily instincts tell her that she needs to parent and protect that child. But yet the choice, the brave choice, that she makes to entrust to another person that is nothing short of brave.

Laura: Absolutely.

Craig Robertson: So you guys traveled again, you interact with birth mom again, and Eric there's got to be some skepticism associated with this trip.

Eric: There was. -we did this one a little bit different. We didn't just fly out, We kinda asked every day: Do we fly out now? We need an answer from y'all, so we wouldn't go early. We wouldn't be in the situation we were in before. So this one we just did so much differently, and I'm glad we did. - and it worked out perfectly. In the back of your mind, you're like what's

gonna happen? Something's going to happen. And it never really did on this one, but you had that in your mind the whole time

Craig Robertson: Something bad's gonna happen. Something's gonna derail this. So how long after your child was born did the phone ring and say Okay, y'all come to get her?

Laura: We learned early Christmas Eve morning.

Craig Robertson: Christmas Eve?

Laura: Christmas Eve she was born, and they let us know. -and they sent us pictures and they said, "You can wait a couple of days and come out." We would have to quarantine at that point again because of the global pandemic.

Craig Robertson: Sure.

Laura: So, we waited three days and they said to come and get her. And we did!

Craig Robertson: And Eric, I'm a dad of daughters, and I can remember even though it's been almost 18 years ago when I looked at my oldest daughter for the first time. What was it like when you saw her for the first time?

Eric: I don't cry much, but there were tears shed at that moment. I mean, it's a feeling that you hear about from other dads, and when you have a baby or whatnot that feeling you have just. You can't imagine how it is until you do it and sure enough that it is one of the greatest feelings you ever feel it comes from your gut. It's love that you didn't know you had.

Craig Robertson: Mm, That's good. Laura, what about you?

Laura: Oh, it was all of my dreams coming true. And the second I saw her, it was the most beautiful thing I've ever experienced.

Craig Robertson: And what about the birth mom? Did you have a chance to meet her?

Laura: We were hoping to. She chose not to.

Craig Robertson: Well, that's understandable.

Laura: That was her choice. We were completely fine with that.

Craig Robertson: So this time everything's working out, Eric, you see your daughter, you hold your daughter, and did you have to wait before you could travel back?

Eric: Due to some health reasons. She had to stay in NICU for a few weeks, and we went and saw her every day. Spent every day in the NICU with her. We would go home at night to sleep, wake up, and come straight back. -And we did that for two weeks probably. -And coming home was crazy when they finally tell you. It happens so fast because you think just keep going. It's just gonna keep going. Then one day they come in and say All right, it's time to go.

Craig Robertson: Well, I think any parent can relate to that. I can remember even with my children, which are both biological children. Just you're gonna actually let us leave with her. I mean, you guys had a long way to go traveling-wise, but I just had to drive across town with a car seat in my car for the first time. So I can only imagine. It's like you stole something.

Laura: Absolutely. It was very scary.

Craig Robertson: But you made it.

Laura: Oh, we survived, and we definitely made it.

Eric: We didn't even know. We could come home. We kept renting a house. That's where we were our apartment, we would rent for a week at a time.

Craig Robertson: Yeah, like an Airbnb or something like that.

Eric: Cause we didn't know how long we would be there, so we had just rented another house. I was at that point where I didn't use so much

vacation time that I might have to go home. So we were looking at plane tickets for me, we made it home that first night with her not knowing what to do, how to do it, and we called the agency -just to kind of talk to them cause we hadn't heard from 'em -and let 'em know Hey, we were discharged today. -and Laura just so happened to say, "So when does the paperwork start for us to go home?" "Oh, we released y'all today. Y'all can go home now."

Craig Robertson: Wow.

Laura: So, we were on the next flight the next day.

Craig Robertson: I bet you were, so just talk about homecoming. Talk about when your family got to meet your child in these final few minutes that we have.

Laura: Yeah. We had friends pick us up at the airport, and we drove home- and our whole family was there- and it was a huge celebration. Everybody was so excited, his mom and my mom and all of our sisters. It was so exciting to finally get to meet her after hoping for her for so long, so it was wonderful.

Craig Robertson: Tell our listener a little bit about your daughter. What's she like?

Laura: She is spunky, full of spunk, full of sass, and very headstrong. Would you agree, Eric?

Eric: Oh yes, she is a great personality. That was the one thing I remember the first time we ever walked into NICU she smiles sleeping. It doesn't matter. She just smiles all the time and is still to this day that she is so happy. She smiles. She laughs. That was the greatest thing seeing when she was so little. It's all over. She's so happy.

Craig Robertson: Laura, what's it like to be your daughter's mom?

Laura: Oh it's wonderful, it's more than I could ever have dreamed about and hoped for. It just lets me know that every little thing that we went

through was all meant for us to be her parents. I truly believe that we were meant to go through everything, so that we could appreciate what we have with her.

Craig Robertson: And in these final seconds that we have, what advice would you give, Eric, to someone who might be listening to our voices right now and who is considering a similar journey?

Eric: Just know you're going to have a lot of emotions to go through, you're gonna have highs and you're gonna have lows. It's gonna be really hard at times. You're gonna have the lowest of lows, the highest of highs, but those highs you'll never ever see any other way in your life. I mean, it's unreal. So just stick with it- go through it- in every step of the way.

Craig Robertson: Laura, what have you learned about yourself through the adoption journey that you and Eric took?

Laura: I would say that we're pretty resilient, and we've also learned to lean on each other. I would say this experience was so changing for our relationship in a good way. We learned so much more about each other even though we had been together for years. And it really strengthened us more than I could have ever expected. And I think that this experience was just great for our marriage and it was a blessing for us.

Craig Robertson: Well guys, I don't know that I can add much to that. You guys have been so vulnerable and brave, and I know that there are people who have heard your voice today who are encouraged. Who are going through the ups and downs associated with fertility challenges or the ups and downs of an adoption journey, and I just hope that they're encouraged by you guys. So thank you very much for spending this time with us.

Eric: Thank you so much. It was a pleasure to be here.

Laura: Yeah. Thank you for having us.

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