

Arica and Brittany's Story

Brittany and I met on an online dating app in 2016. We did not actually meet in person until a few weeks later, on Halloween. Brittany's parents and my parents lived in the same neighborhood and I (Arica) ended up at her house trick or treating with my nephew and we have been together since then.

We talked about having children together from the very beginning of our relationship, but we wanted to get more settled in our relationship. Family is very important to us, for me (Arica) this is all I had growing up being a military brat moving every year to two years. I didn't make friends easily because I knew I was going to have to move, so my mom was and still is my best friend and my sisters were always there when I needed a friend. Being around family is what brings me peace and happiness, the unconditional love and support from my family is unmatched.

I (Arica) am the oldest of 3 sisters. So I played mommy to all 3 of my sisters at some point, but my youngest sister who is 12 years younger than me was my baby. My parents both worked multiple jobs, so I watched her, woke up with her in the middle of the night as a newborn, she refused to sleep anywhere else except in my room so I shared my room from eighth grade until my sophomore year in high school. She is the reason why I really wanted to be a mother so bad. As Arica previously stated, family is EVERYTHING to the both of us. I have always been blessed to be around my family. Even though I left home at the young age of 14, I never let the aspect of family leave my heart.

I (Brittany) have 4 siblings, and I am the middle child. Four boys and me the only girl smack in the middle. Even though the middle child I was always the mom of the group. I have always been a nurturer, but I knew I wanted my own family and to love my child how I was loved and in the areas I felt I lacked love in my family. No one is perfect and even though my family isn't perfect, the love is beyond real. From family reunions every two years to backyard BBQ's. Being around them radiates the love that EVERY child should experience. We both come from very large families and we have nieces and nephews who are always with us, so it only made sense. I (Arica) am the older sister and the oldest cousin so the mothering thing has always been who I am. I was the little girl who was always playing house with my friends and I was always the mom 😊

I (Brittany) think for the both of us the sense of urgency, if you will, came when my sister-in-love (Arica's sister) had gotten pregnant. Since he was in the womb, we had grown an attachment especially with Arica being in the delivery room and experiencing his birth made that attachment/bond stronger. Although we love ALL our nieces and nephews this bundle was different. This is what really pressed us to explore our avenues of starting our own family.

We did a lot of research for at home insemination, IUI/ICI, sperm banks (and all that entails), as well as surrogacy. We ruled out surrogacy first as I (Arica) want to be able to experience being pregnant - the morning sickness, hormones, getting bigger, the cravings, being spoiled, and the birth of a tiny human. I (Brittany)

am unable to carry children due to an imbalance in my hormones. I could take medicines or go through IVF but let's be honest, who has, ohhh, \$10,000 laying around. However, I still wanted that experience.

We then explored more about at home insemination, finding several different vlogs of other lesbian couples who went that route, joining several social media accounts for same sex parents, and speaking to family who went through process. We decided to give it a try, we ordered an at home insemination kit online, tracked my ovulation with ovulation tests, and we had a friend who was willing to help us by being the donor. Brittany drew up a contract before we started the process for all parties to state their terms and we signed it and had it notarized. Our donor did not want any rights or be known as the father but instead just like a "play uncle".

We tried several times over the course of 3-4 months with no success. It was awkward the first time we tried with this person - I think what made it awkward was that it was something new for all parties. We tried to make him as comfortable as possible - lit candles in the bathroom, had music playing throughout the house, made sure he had everything he needed to do what he needed to. After the initial try, we all did more research to become more successful. He started eating healthier foods, drinking more water, abstaining from sex before he knew he was scheduled to come over. After the first try, it became almost normal for him to come over every month and take care of business. Unfortunately, he became overwhelmed coming over every month and became less willing to help. In his defense, he had lost his job during this

process and came on hard times. I believe it was just all too much for him to handle at once. It was very disappointing and discouraging so we took a break for almost a year.

After the near year break and having more time with our nieces and nephews it was evident that we needed to start the process again. I mean after all we have been mother figures nearly all our lives. I (Brittany) having my own children wanted to experience a family under one roof. No co-parenting but a family of love under one roof. My (Arica) younger cousin did at home insemination and was successful and seeing that and talking with her really pushed us to get back to trying to conceive.

We found a provider who is LGBTQIA friendly and is so supportive and so uplifting, we got very lucky finding Tracy. What started off as my (Brittany) yearly "Lady" check up turned into a scare (She felt a lump, got it examined and I'm all good), turned into do you want kids?? I explained my/our lifestyle to her and she was game to help us get the job done. We are both VERY blessed to have such supportive family and friends and look forward to sharing this experience with all of them.

As previously stated, we both come from large families of love and togetherness. Alternating nieces and nephews through our home on weekends parenting is our thing. Not only that, I (Brittany) have a little boy of my own from a previous relationship. Watching Arica interact with him and even our nieces and nephews assures me that I have not just chosen my lifetime partner but a mother for our future kids (plural as I am praying for twins, lol). Arica's background in teaching and mine in being a

Youth Development professional have been “Mom” to many without complaint and all JOY!

We are excited to get the process rolling again once this pandemic lifts and praying we are successful. We weren't able to see the doctor to start the tests on making sure I am healthy, no underlying fertility issues, etc etc. Now that we have less restrictions as Virginia has begun the reopening phase I am able to get in with my doctor and get those tests done and start the process all over again. COVID-19 really put a pause on things, especially since the cryobank we chose stopped doing shipments for a period of time. With my doctor not being in the office to see patients, we also weren't able to get the H1 form sent over to her so she could consent to us doing at home insemination through the cryobank. But fortunately during the pause period we were able to save up more money to go to the journey of getting pregnant.