**Ep-11-Master**

**SARAH:** [00:00:00] Nontraditional families.

[00:00:06] This is basically a family that is not made up of married male, female, and a child or children. If you are someone who wants to have children, but doesn't necessarily fall into the traditional category, there are ways to make it happen. Here's Joanna who carried her partner's egg and delivered a baby girl.

[00:00:22] **JoAmber:** [00:00:22] So I. Carried ambers, ambers egg, which is awesome.

[00:00:26] So we got to both be part of the process in the pregnancy and Reese. So, um, but they're, you know, that was one of the biggest options we had to discuss and think about and,

[00:00:39] research. And,

[00:00:40] with that, we went to different fertility clinics and. A walk through, you know, between IUI and IVF and ICI, all the different things.

[00:00:51] you know, we had to take into account the different timelines, costs, success rates on all these different options.

[00:00:58] Being a same sex couple there's no oops situations happening here. So a lot of thought goes into kind of each step of, of this process.

[00:01:09] **SARAH:** [00:01:09] Hi, I'm Sarah hosted the Juna women podcast and founder of Juna. Our mission here at Juna is to help guide women like you through your trying to conceive pregnancy and motherhood journey. Today's episode is the 11th part of our family planning series. And we're talking about some of the ways to become a parent that don't follow the traditional path of marrying someone of the opposite sex and getting pregnant to help us with this topic.

[00:01:32] I sat down with Amber and Joanna, a same sex couple from North Carolina.

[00:01:36] Today's episode is more conversational and the goal is to share the personal experiences and stories of these strong women.

[00:01:43] Let's get into it

[00:01:48] to start things off I want to find out what the process was like for Joanna and Amber

[00:01:52] They are same-sex married couple who wanted

[00:01:54] to have biological children

[00:01:56] I specifically wanted to know how and when they decided to have children and what that journey looked like and felt like for them

[00:02:02] as you heard earlier Joanna was the one who carried the baby but it was Ambrose egg fertilized by a sperm donor that she was carrying

[00:02:08] This was the option that felt right for them

[00:02:11] **JoAmber:** [00:02:11] some of those options, you know, initially we talked about who would carry, um, we, you know, being in a same sex couple, we have kind of the, that, uh, unique, unique, unique options, I guess. Right. We both could, could carry, which is, which is pretty awesome. But, um, with, you know, the embers medical history in others, she could technically carry.

[00:02:36] we kind of did a risk, you know, we looked at the different risks and although they were a little higher than we would want. Um, so it made sense for me to carry.

[00:02:43] so, but the really cool part is, and we'll get maybe more into this later,

[00:02:47] we decided to do reverse IVF.

[00:02:49] I just want to touch on too, because, you know, while we were looking at, heading into a fertility clinic immediately, um, it was more because. We didn't have the luxury of like, you know, this going on for a few years, we actually thought the process was going to be so much quicker than it was. Um, we just thought we would go to a fertility clinic.

[00:03:07] We would, you know, by donor sperm we would move on and this was going to happen. And just a short period of time. And really from the time that we met with the first clinic, To the time of our transfer, I'd say it was probably like eight or nine months. It was not a quick process. We were like in our brains, it was a lot quicker, but I would, if people are listening to, like, we looked at IUI and ICI, like where there was much more in depth, um, involvement from a fertility clinic, but there is also the option of home insemination, which we didn't explore it.

[00:03:39] You have to have, you know, a fertility clinic kind of sign off on it, at least in our state, but that is a less expensive option for people that are thinking about starting a family as well. Um, and it's one that we, we don't, we didn't dive too, too far into,

[00:03:54] **SARAH:** [00:03:54] I wanted to dive a little deeper into what exactly took nine months to get things going for them Here's Amber

[00:04:00] **JoAmber:** [00:04:00] I think really it was more just being a part of fertility clinic. There were things that took longer because of being a same sex, couple, like we had to meet with legal.

[00:04:10] you have to choose a donor and then it has to be shipped. So you, you know, that, that process and all the paperwork has to go through.

[00:04:16] and then it has to be stored.

[00:04:18] but then there's, there's.

[00:04:20] the process that everyone goes through, like you have to meet with the nurses and there have to be classes that are on the books already and they can't be full, you know? And so there are all these different things that once you would get through one, you felt like it happened pretty quickly.

[00:04:33] You know, the next class was four weeks out. And so you couldn't move on to the next step until, so I think it didn't slow it down too much from the same sex couple aspect. I think it would, it was primarily just the process that exists

[00:04:47] **SARAH:** [00:04:47] as I was traveling with Amber and Joe I was starting to wonder what the process of choosing a sperm donor was like I was trying to put myself in their shoes What criteria will be the most important to me Do I get to see pictures Can the child ever find out their identity What was this like?

[00:05:01] **JoAmber:** [00:05:01] This was like a whole new world for us. Um, and you know, when we told family and friends that we were kind of starting this process, this is where we received. A lot of questions because people are just fascinated by it. We were too. Um, and there are numerous options for finding a donor. Like there are people that talk about asking friends or, you know, people that they know, um, and asking them donors, we felt more comfortable often for someone anonymous.

[00:05:29] Um, and, um, You know, we went into it assuming that there were like a handful of donor banks in the United States. And we were really surprised by the sheer number. Um, they're over a hundred private clinics in the United States are donor donor banks. Um, some of them were like private clinics and some are associated with academic hospitals.

[00:05:52] And of all of those, there are some really large ones that you, you know, if you've ever been to maybe a conference or, um, You know, you look at it online, they kind of rise to the top. And a lot of those bigger companies, our fertility clinic had mentioned, or they had brochures on because I'm sure they shipped them to clinics, but we still did our research.

[00:06:12] Um, we learned that summit. This is kind of how we started. We learned that there are certain accreditations, um, that clinics can receive. And those accreditations, like by the FDA and a few other things, we felt like that was kind of a must. It was like, um, The one that we chose. Did extensive testing on the donor background checks quality testing.

[00:06:36] And they did like numbers, like comparisons of like what's involved versus other banks, which is, you know, important obviously. Um, but really to like the fact that only 1% of the applicants for this bank ever became donors after their screening and testing was kind of a big deal. We also were looking at, like, we kind of narrowed it down to three banks and we noticed like with one specifically, they were using a lot of younger donors, like 18 and 19 year olds.

[00:07:01] And it kind of, um, made us like pause. And so the, the bank that we went with was. They had a lot of donors that were getting like advanced degrees. And not that that's like mandatory, but I felt like really then there was informed consent, right? Like they knew what they were getting into. This was not like an 18 year old that was looking for kind of extra money.

[00:07:23] And so that really is how we decided on this one bank, but from how did we choose our donor? Um, so we looked initially and we would like honed it down to a few. And then just a few days later, they were completely. Depleted. And so we decided to wait to make a decision. After we looked into this bank a few times to make, to make, do we had to make a decision to choose the donor.

[00:07:47] Um, and so when we finally got on to make this decision, it's things like hair, color and height, and, um, you know, we tried to choose one. We knew we were going to be using my eggs. So we tried to choose a donor that looked kind of like Joseph, we decided to just do this one time. Um, there would be a chance that maybe.

[00:08:06] You know, the heart child would kind of look like both of us. And so, um, the first time we hit like submit, we got like eight, we received like 80 donors. And if you ever had the chance to go in here, you get like personality profiles and voice clips. And. Entire maternal paternal aunt, uncle grandparent histories.

[00:08:27] So it's not a short process. I'm like we cannot look through 80. And so we kind of honed it down and we went through 15 to 20 donors and we settled on three. And this specific bank only allows you to look at, um, like three photos of the donor. And I think the oldest picture is like, when they're in may, maybe they're like nine or 10 years old.

[00:08:48] So it doesn't show it old pictures from a privacy standpoint. Um, But we ended up choosing one. Um, and yeah, that's how we just had the decision. I think the bigger thing was we had been informed by some of our friends that had gone through this process was the decision and how many to buy, um, because they had found themselves in a position where they bought several vials and then had a few failed attempts that IVF.

[00:09:14] So they didn't retrieve enough eggs, um, the first time. And then it didn't work the second time. So they ended up getting. Pregnant like the third time, but then they had new vials left. So they were lucky enough to go back in and their donor had been depleted, but they ended up getting extra from another family that didn't use their extra vials that were in the bank still.

[00:09:35] Um, and so that, that was a decision too. Like how many times are we going to try? Um, you know, if it doesn't work. And so that is something that we didn't know going in that was helpful to know because literally like. Four or five days after we purchased through this bank. Um, he, the, the donors supply was completely gone.

[00:09:59] **SARAH:** [00:09:59] That is fascinating

[00:10:01] with the sperm donor process complete. Now they had to find a fertility clinic here's Joe, and how they chose their clinic

[00:10:07] **JoAmber:** [00:10:07] it was really important for us to find a clinic. That made us feel okay about asking so many questions and we're fortunate that we had options. Um, so at one of our first consults that we went to, we walked away feeling pretty disappointed with the, with the appointment.

[00:10:25] You know, they were a bit dismissive to our concerns. They made us feel like our questions were a little silly and then they couldn't really give us definitive answers on. On costs or even kind of a timeline, um, and this being such a big investment, you want to know those, those answers upfront. Um, so after kind of thinking about it more and we talked to a friend, uh, she reminded us, you know, look at other clinics and we're like, Oh, you know, like we, sometimes you just need that little extra push of like, Oh, right.

[00:10:54] Like what are we? We have other options. Um, so then she gave us a recommendation of one in the area. So we looked it up online. They're clearly supportive of same sex couples, which is also something it's in the back of our minds. Like we want to make sure we have a doctor, um, like an OB who supportive our fertility clinic.

[00:11:12] We wanted to make sure it was supportive, especially being in the South. You never really, you know, it's kind of always in the back of your mind of who's going to be supportive and, and. Yeah, be okay with that and be with us. Um, so we went to this website, um, there's a rainbow flag right on the home page.

[00:11:28] So we're like, Oh, okay, well, this looks like a good option. So we already felt better about them. And then we went to that first appointment. Um, our doctor took the time to answer all our questions was very thorough about the process, the timeline they're able to give us definitive costs, you know, with, or without insurance

[00:11:47] **SARAH:** [00:11:47] cost of having a child through IVF, a sperm donor, and fertility clinics is something you have to consider. But Joan, Amber had a cool perspective on it. Here's a bit of our conversation on the financial side of things.

[00:11:58] **JO:** [00:11:58] We were fortunate in that, uh, ambers company has a lifetime fertility allotment. So we had, uh, we have, we had money to use towards fertility. Yeah.

[00:12:11] **SARAH:** [00:12:11] That's incredible.

[00:12:12] **AMBER:** [00:12:12] We were very fortunate because it's, it is not state law in North Carolina. So, um, it just, and we just, we were very fortunate because there was a policy change about 12 months prior to this pro our process starting at our company. So that's how we ended up, um, with assistance and it's for us even still, it was costly.

[00:12:33] Um, so yeah, I imagine paying cash would, I mean, it's a huge investment.

[00:12:42] **SARAH:** [00:12:42] it was, I, it was a heat my in California, which is so insane to me that they like California and New York were like two States that don't and I, New York has changed, but that, that, that don't cover IVF. And, um, so when we went through this, it was all out of pocket expenses and it sucks.

[00:13:00] **AMBER:** [00:13:00] I remember talking to someone one time about surrogacy because, um, she had lost her fertility too. Um, a chemo that she used back in the day, and I was just like $80,000. That's so much money. And she said, you know, it is, but people don't think twice about that for a college degree. You know, like obviously they think twice about it, but it's not something it's an investment in their future.

[00:13:25] And she's like, and so as a kid and that's kind of the way we looked at it and I was like, Oh, you know, it never, that didn't ever occur to me. So, um, I thought that was a really neat way of looking at it.

[00:13:35] **SARAH:** [00:13:35] it is. And, you know, I it's, it's funny cause I like, there's so many things that you can. Like, like a nanny, the, you know, the first few years is almost as much as college too. And you're like, yeah, but you just like find a way, but I always, I always think of like, college is this like massive expense, but I'm like, actually we're, we're, we're literally paying for college every year.

[00:13:58] Yeah, exactly. Um, but no, that is a great way. Like it's an investment in your future and, but it does, I'm sure it feels really heavy when you're, it's just all of a sudden at once.

[00:15:49] I learned something during my conversation with Joe and Amber about something called second parent adoption since Joe carried the baby. But it's Amber genetics, Joanna's parental rights could be challenged.

[00:16:00] So basically you have to go through a legal process to make sure both partners are officially parents.

[00:16:06] **JoAmber:** [00:16:06] One of the things that we learned kind of before we even started the process, um, was we, there is a second parent adoption, um, that you have to do as a same sex couple. So I don't know really the, what the federal law is called or, but essentially I believe it was built for heterosexual couples. So if someone at any time believes their child, um, You know, they have a child with someone else may, you know, and they didn't know about them.

[00:16:38] They can always challenge that, right? Like you can ask for a paternity test, if you, if you feel like it's your child and the law protects that person. And if it comes back that it is a match, then that person has rights. So it always defaults to genetics. And I guess it works against same sex couples is really kind of the perception of this law.

[00:16:58] And so even though Joe carried, because it's my genetics. Material, even though she's on their birth certificate, her parental rights could still be challenged. So, um, I know the human rights campaign has like a section on second parent adoptions and every state has a different, um, route to go through to get the adoption accomplished in North Carolina.

[00:17:21] There is no, there's no such thing as a second parent adoption to like, kind of make sure that you have rights. So we had to go through. A step parent adoption is what they call it. So we, we kind of started the process before she was born, making sure we had some paperwork together. And we had been working with, um, a law firm that the fertility clinic actually put us in contact with.

[00:17:47] So I think this is really the importance of finding not only a competitor, a clinic you're comfortable with, but also a clinic that is. Experienced in same sex fertility. Um, and they understand the laws in their state. They immediately connected us with this firm and they had us actually meet with them prior to us even starting the process of IVF.

[00:18:11] And yeah, so we were informed. And so once she was born, obviously she has to be born for the, and we received her birth certificate two weeks later. Um, We received more paperwork. We had to prove that the donor was anonymous. So we had to get paperwork from the sperm bank, from the fertility clinic when they received it from the bank, you know, when they transferred it to make sure that that was actually an anonymous donor sperm.

[00:18:42] Um, and then once they agree that we didn't need consent from an anonymous donor, um, The submission of our home visits was made. So now we're in final review, but we're still waiting. So we did have to have two home visits by a social worker, the first one, um, you know, they walked through her house and then it was more of a, like one on, or I guess two on one interview.

[00:19:05] Um, talking about how we met, how he planned to raise her. Um, then they kind of watched us with her and then she came back again, weeks later, um, they obviously realized like, this is not an easy. Process, you know, that you have a stranger coming into your house with your own child, that you have to adopt.

[00:19:23] So there, even though it has to be done and she asked very specific questions and really checked her house out, she, you could also tell that, you know, she was. It didn't feel like an interrogation. It felt like a conversation, but apparently there was a report that was written and then that was submitted.

[00:19:41] So now we're just waiting for final review, but given everything that's happening with like, you know, the closing of a lot of businesses also governmental offices, um, I'm I imagine it's sitting in a stack somewhere waiting for review, so that's kind of okay.

[00:20:08] So different States have different rules. I know. We looked up in California, there are certain counties, um, that you, they just give you the list of the documents that you need. And you show up with 15 or $20 and you submit for a court date show up and it's done because they realize this is not, you know, we had to do a criminal background check on Joe, which was fine, cause she has no criminal background, but it's just very invasive, you know?

[00:20:33] And I, so it's a process. At least the process exists. In the state, it's just a process that we had to dive into.

[00:20:40] you know, step parent adoption was didn't make it super easy, but there isn't another route.

[00:20:54] **SARAH:** [00:20:54] we've covered a lot of the logistics with Joe and Amber, but I was curious what advice they wished they had had before they started this whole process. Here's Amber.

[00:21:03] **AMBER:** [00:21:03] I would say Joe touched on it, like find a comfort, find a clinic you're comfortable with, um, whether it's recommendations from others locally have walked through the experience. That's a great option. We didn't have someone to turn to, um, to ask. So if you're in that situation, start with our website.

[00:21:19] Joe mentioned. You know, just the flag on their website. Um, you'll have a pretty good idea if they've worked with same sex couples before. Um, and it's a huge decision in investment emotionally, physically, and financially, really. And while we didn't think about it going into our fertility journey, I'd absolutely encourage friends to, and to consider two consultations at two different clinics.

[00:21:43] I think of it, like if you're doing like. A major remodel or you're going to buy a vehicle or you're making any big investment. You're getting more than one, you know? And so this is, uh, this, this is not, this is about your health too. So I think it's super important, um, for, to get to consultations. And for us from the minute we walked in to the Carolina conceptions, we, we, it felt different.

[00:22:08] It felt more comfortable and everyone should feel welcome and accepted by the staff and physicians guiding. Guiding them through what it's a really incredible experience because it's a vulnerable experience too. Um, she also mentioned like, one thing we did not think about was, um, do they have, um, do they do a lot of analysis?

[00:22:27] Like what are their success rates? Do they have them split out by age, different types of like IUI? I, um, I see an ICI and IVF, ours were very number focused and it is clear. They have, um, A team that just analyzes everything to see where they, what they could do better. And that was surprising to us. We didn't even think to ask it.

[00:22:48] We just found these, these rates up after we signed on, I'd say the second thing would be. When meeting with a provider, if it's not proactively shared, and you're a same sex, couple ask about the legal process. Um, our clinic, like I said, had had a relationship with LGBTQ family attorney and they had the doctors themselves had a solid understanding of what we needed to do.

[00:23:12] And so, um, You need to know what extra steps you are going to need to take before, even starting the process versus that of a heterosexual couple. And then I guess finally it would be for us communication. Um, I guess is key regardless, but it was essential during this experience. And there were so many big decisions along the way that we had to make from beginning to end, like from the clinic that we chose, which donor, where were you going to choose?

[00:23:37] And a bit another big one, which you probably can relate to is like, what pharmacy are we going to for our medications? Cause there were wildly different prices. I mean, one person quoted us like $18,000 and another was like 5,000 for the same medications. Um, and then on top of those decisions, You know, one of us is injecting her body full of, you know, turbo powered hormones to ready ourselves for retrieval while the other one is doing the same for transfer.

[00:24:02] So communication, staying connected and checking in really made the entire experience a really positive one

[00:24:14] **SARAH:** [00:24:14] Okay. That's all for today.

[00:24:18] I learned a lot in my conversation with Joe and Amber, and I'm happy to share. They're going to repeat this process and go for baby. Number two,

[00:24:24] the love we feel for our children is truly magical and their story is a perfect illustration of that.

[00:24:29] I hope you found this episode helpful and can utilize their experience and advice. If you're considering starting a family in a nontraditional way.

[00:24:37] If you have any questions, comments, or need some more guidance during your trying to conceive journey, please email me at Sarah at

[00:24:45] On the next episode, we'll be talking with Amy from Kansas about starting a family through adoption.

[00:24:51] Thanks for listening. And we'll see you next week.