

The joys of single motherhood outweigh the lack of a husband

BY MICHELLE L. START
Special to Florida Weekly

Kim Morgan Vagnuolo, Sheri Nadler and Nanci Christopher all dreamed of being mothers and worried that they might have waited too long for Prince Charming to come along. Each of them woke up one day and decided that being single should not prevent them from pursuing that dream.

"It's something we have been seeing more of during the last five years," said Lisa Daily, a relationship expert for NBC in Tampa. "Women now have the means to support a family on their own. A lot of women feel like if no husband shows up, they're not willing to give up their opportunity to be a mother."

With no man in their lives, Miss Christopher, Mrs. Vagnuolo — at the time Miss Morgan — and Miss Nadler made the decision to go it alone.

Miss Christopher adopted her son, Joshua, as an infant in 1999 from South Carolina. Mrs. Vagnuolo traveled to Russia to adopt Nina, then a toddler, in 2003. Miss Nadler turned to a sperm donor to conceive her daughter, Sophie, who is now 12.

During the 2007-2008 fiscal year, 23 children were adopted by 16 single parents in Lee, Collier, Charlotte, Glades and Hendry counties through Children's Network of Southwest Florida. One woman adopted six children, and two others each adopted two children; the rest were single-child adoptions.

The agency has 125 children now



COURTESY PHOTO

Nanci Christopher and Joshua.

infant was born addicted to cocaine and the hospital would not release the child. Her second attempt resulted in the birth of her son, Austin, who died two weeks later from a rare genetic disease.

"It was horrendous," Miss Christopher said. "I cried a lot. I didn't go out of the house for the first four to five months. I was sad and angry. I didn't know what to do." As a single woman, she added, it was even more difficult because she did not have anyone to share her grief. "The death of that child was the death of a dream. It was devastating on so many levels," she said. "To go through that alone was very tough."

When Mrs. Vagnuolo went to Russian



COURTESY PHOTO

Kim Morgan Vagnuolo.

available for adoption, however, families have already begun the process of adopting 87 of them with 38 still looking for homes.

"We certainly have single women coming in and wanting artificial insemination," said Dr. Craig Sweet of Specialists in Reproductive Medicine & Surgery in Fort Myers. For single women, artificial insemination typically involves using frozen donated sperm. Ultrasounds are run to make sure the woman has viable eggs. Often, fertility drugs are administered.

Miss Nadler did eight cycles of artificial insemination and didn't take. "Then I went to my college boyfriend because the frozen sperm wasn't working," she said. "My daughter knows her father was just a donor. She understands that he did it for me as a gift."

Although the women each said she went into motherhood prepared, there have been some surprises and challenges along the way.

Miss Christopher's first adoption attempt ended unsuccessfully when the

to adopt Nina, she found the child living in a decrepit orphanage, where she had little human interaction and was behind educationally. She was 16 months old, but way behind in growth.

"She was extremely malnourished and I did not know how much work that would take," Mrs. Vagnuolo said. "She's well adapted now, though."

Miss Nadler said she never expected the questions that she has fielded over the years. "I get asked where's her dad and are you divorced," she said. "It's funny the reactions some people have," she said, remembering two men in particular "who were very opinionated" about her choice.

Another thing she did not anticipate was Sophie's insecurities because there was no father figure in her life, Miss Nadler said, adding her daughter worried what would become of her if anything happened to her mother. So Miss Nadler, who had been living in Chicago, moved back home to Southwest Florida so Sophie could feel more secure around her extended family. ■

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