



Inconceivable: A Medical Mistake, the Baby We Couldn't Keep, and Our Choice to Deliver the Ultimate Gift

Carolyn Savage , Sean Savage

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A medical mistake during an IVF procedure. An unthinkable situation . . . you're pregnant with the wrong baby. You can terminate, but you can't keep him. What choice would you make?

Carolyn and Sean Savage had been trying to expand their family for years. When they underwent an IVF transfer in February 2009, they knew it would be their last chance. If they became pregnant, they would celebrate the baby as an answer to their prayers. If not, they would be grateful for the family they had and leave their fertility struggles behind forever.

They never imagined a third option. The pregnancy test was positive, but the clinic had transferred the wrong embryos. Carolyn was pregnant with someone else's baby.

The Savages faced a series of heartbreaking decisions: terminate the pregnancy, sue for custody, or hand over the infant to his genetic parents upon delivery. Knowing that Carolyn was carrying another couple's hope for a baby, the Savages wanted to do what they prayed the other family would do for them if the situation was reversed. Sean and Carolyn Savage decided to give the ultimate gift, the gift of life, to a family they didn't know, no strings attached.

Inconceivable provides an inside look at how modern medicine, which creates miracles daily, could allow such a tragic mistake, and the many legal ramifications that ensued with both the genetic family and the clinic. Chronicling their tumultuous pregnancy and its aftermath, which tested the Savage's faith, their relationship to their church, and their marriage, *Inconceivable* is ultimately a testament to love. Carolyn and Sean loved this baby, making it impossible for them to imagine how they could give him life and then give him away.

In the end, *Inconceivable* is a story of what it is to be a parent, someone who nurtures a life, protects a soul, only to release that child into the world long before you're ready to let him go.

Inconceivable: A Medical Mistake, the Baby We Couldn't Keep, and Our Choice to Deliver the Ultimate Gift Details

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Beth says

Wow. I thought I knew "the story" after reading *Misconception*, told from the point of the view of Shannon Morrell (whose frozen embryos were implanted in Carolyn Savage's womb due to an unbelievable medical mishap). But, like they say, there are two sides to every story (at least!), and this story would be hollow had the Savages not shared their point of view. I admired their values that led to them making the right choice, even when it meant emotional heartache (oh, what heartache!) and isolation, not to mention the physical risk it put on Carolyn to carry a child (yes, they were willing to endure for their own child, but to do it for complete strangers -- that is integrity). This is a well-told story, honest and forthright as well as compelling (I finished the whole thing in less than 24 hours!) and well-written. I appreciated the insights into how to be a good human being while still being "real" about it. It's quite tempting to compare which couple in this mix-up had it "harder," but I think the public could take a cue of the Savages' empathy and compassion; check out this insight from Sean Savage on page 258:

"So many people suffer devastating losses, and it seemed wrong to compare what Carolyn and I were going through to anyone else. Each is powerful in its own right."

This is such a hard principle to implement, and while the Savages may not be perfect at it (who is?), I think they are definitely leading the pack. I still feel for the Morells and am glad I read their book, but I'm even more grateful to hear the Savages' story and wish them the best as they continue to heal. This story was fascinating and gave me a lot to think about.

Meggin says

"The IVF mistake was simply stated: Carolyn Savage was pregnant with someone else's embryos. She and her husband Sean were forced to make a seemingly inconceivable choice: Either terminate the pregnancy, sue for custody, or deliver the baby—and relinquish it. The Savages decided to do what they would hope that another couple would do in a comparable situation. This is their story. Impossible to read without placing yourself in their situation."

I couldn't agree more. The whole time I was reading this, I was thinking, "What would Adam and I do if something like this ever happened to us?" This was a remarkable book about remarkable people. I absolutely loved how completely real they were about their feelings, too. They talked about the despair they felt, and how they were jealous and resentful of the genetic parents. I also loved how the book jumped back and forth between Sean and Carolyn, so the reader could really get a good look at each of their feelings.

The part of this that maybe hit me the most was the lack of support this couple got from their church. They are Catholic, and the Catholic church does not condone assisted reproduction in any form. In Carolyn's own words, "Our very own church was not there to support us in our time of greatest need." I thought to myself, "They need to be LDS!" I can only imagine how our church would rally around a family going through a situation like this. It pained me to think that their church would turn their collective backs on them during

their struggle.

When the time came for the delivery of the baby, I was crying hard. I couldn't even help it. It was so painful, yet tender, too, as Sean and Carolyn passed their baby over to his genetic parents. It really tore at my heart!

Though I wouldn't put this on the same level as "Little Women" or "The Count of Monte Cristo" (hence the 4- and not 5- star rating), it was an emotional, thought-provoking story that I would completely recommend.

Kristen says

I cannot stomach this dull memoir. Perhaps a ghost writer would have helped? Carolyn Savage comes off sounding whinny and self absorbed.

You know those memoirs where you almost hope something awful will happen to the main character/narrator to actually give her something to whine about? Yes, this was one of those.

My impression of this book:

"We are Catholic. We want to have lots of Catholic children but only have three. *whine, whine, whine* IVF is expensive and against Catholic beliefs. *whine, whine, whine* Pregnancy is painful and difficult for me and at the end of it, I don't even get to keep the baby. *whine, whine, whine*

While the Savage family find themselves in a very difficult situation, I found that I couldn't sympathize. I tried but they didn't make me care about them or their situation. As a writer, you need to make your audience care and they failed at this.

Jonathan Minnick says

Interesting story, but so whiny.

Vonette says

I was torn on how to rate this book. First, let me say that I have not read the other side of the story written by the genetic mother, Shannon Morell, but I would like to now. Let me start with the good things about this book. The writing was pretty good, and most of the time it held my interest though I do think it could have been shortened. The story is worth hearing. The Savages were brutally honest about their emotions, and I applaud them for their honesty -- for the most part (more on that below). I will warn the potential reader that these raw emotions can be difficult to read about. They are sometimes rather ugly, but they are undoubtedly real. I also applaud the Savages for avoiding the appearance that they were some sort of saints. Despite the beautiful thing they did in carrying this baby and giving it to the rightful parents without a fight, they admit to feeling anger and bitterness. They do not hide the strain this placed on their marriage. They are genuine people with the same kind of failings and weaknesses the rest of us have.

Now I must move on to the critical part of my review. In one area I felt the Savages' honesty was inappropriate, and that was the way they spoke about the genetic mother Shannon. I understand that they were being honest about their feelings, but I believe the negative feelings they had about Shannon should first have been discussed with Shannon and then only revealed to the public after the two families had talked

things out and agreed to make them public. Instead, I got the impression that the Savages intentionally hid their negative feelings from Shannon, giving her the impression they liked her, only to reveal the truth to the whole world in this book. What a shock that must have been to Shannon! Part of the reason I want to read Shannon's story is that I think the Savages often misunderstood her just as much as they felt she misunderstood them. They wanted her to feel their pain, but they never seemed to understand how much she, too, must have been traumatized by this, how much she too lost that she can never get back. I often felt these two families never sat down and honestly communicated their feelings to each other. If they had, perhaps the Morells would have given the Savages more interaction with the baby after it was born because they would have understood how important it was to the Savages and how much the Savages loved this baby. I think the Savages tactic of downplaying their feelings for the baby in order not to "scare" the Morells backfired.

My main reason for being disappointed with this book, though, was that I was expecting a story of a family who overcame great tragedy by relying on God and drawing strength from Him. In short, I was expecting something like Corrie Ten Boon's "The Hiding Place." What I got instead was a humanistic story of a couple who spoke about faith and about God in a nonpersonal way while relying primarily on their own inner strength and the love of their friends and family. Not surprisingly, the story did not end with any sense of triumphantly overcoming adversity by the grace of God but instead ended with a sense of continuing pain and brokenness with no real healing or peace in sight. The Savages explicitly rejected more than once the idea that God was working out His plan in their lives through this painful experience. They are correct that God did not cause this tragedy -- human carelessness did. But they refuse to deal with the fact that an all-powerful God could certainly have prevented it from hurting them if He had chosen to do so, and that an all-powerful God is capable of taking tragedy and using it to bring about His perfect plan for our lives. We can't always see why He allows pain in our lives, and sometimes we won't understand it this side of heaven. But often we DO come to understand because we see the joy and blessings that could only have come about through the pain and tragedy. Corrie Ten Boom saw this in her life, just as I have seen it in mine. Sometimes, as in the life of Joseph in the Bible, God allows tragedy for a good purpose, and He walks with us through it -- giving us strength when we ask. Yet I never heard the Savages speak of turning to God for daily strength. Instead, one sentence stood out to me in a negative way when Carolyn says to God, "I don't need you right now. I'm OK with whatever happens." That shocked me. One thing I know is that I need God all the time, even when I think I'm doing OK on my own. It always goes better when I rely on His strength instead of my own. I hope the Savages discover this truth and eventually find the healing and peace they seek.

Missy says

Kind of lame. I just didn't "get" these people.

Jill Heather says

An oddly unaffecting story about an avoidable medical error.

The IVF clinic where the Savages were being treated accidentally implanted another family's embryo -- and Carolyn Savage got pregnant. From the beginning, she and her husband Sean knew that they would not have an abortion, and that they would not seek custody (custody they would have been unlikely to win, though this does not appear to have been any part of the reason they chose not to seek custody.) This book covers the period of the pregnancy (a fairly high risk pregnancy) and the first few months after the birth.

The story is horrible, with the Savages put in a terrible position, but at no point did I feel much for them. The book is about how they felt, how they decided, how they dealt with the impact: the writing on this was poor. (It did not help that I heard on the radio that their surrogate is pregnant and in the third trimester with twins, their fourth and fifth children, so I knew how the entire story played out.)

They were also ungraceful towards the Morrells. Not that I think that the feelings were wrong, or even any different than most people would feel. But there is a difference between what you think and what you publish.

Sheryll Putnam says

A more honest read about the mixed up embryo story; after reading "Misconception", I felt really disturbed because I really disliked the woman after reading it. She was self-absorbed and her personality just bugged me. All she could say was how badly she was suffering. The whole time, I kept telling myself, "Consider how Carolyn Savage felt, you egotistical, self-absorbed woman!" Perhaps this is why I ran to get "Inconceivable" as soon as I heard it was out.

"Inconceivable" told the story of Carolyn Savage, the lady who chose to carry the baby after learning he was not hers. She told her story with grace and honesty, and even as I wanted to cry for her, she didn't write with self-pity. I read of her experience, and her doubts, fears, and pain, and I felt for her. I wanted things to work out so she could have kept Logan. Her willingness to place her baby--and I think he is, in fact, just as much hers as he is Shannon Morel's--amazed me. Her choices were painful, and yet she kept her promise to give him to his genetic parents. Her story was uplifting and made me really respect and admire her. I could not have done what she did, and knowing that she had to turn the baby over to that troll (sorry, I am just disgusted with S.M., I just saw an interview with her and it rubbed me the wrong way) bothered me a lot...I found myself hoping that the Savages have blessings to "make up" for their terrible loss...and that the Morrells let them see Logan.

The religious aspect didn't bother me, though it provoked a lot of consideration on the Church's view on reproduction, which I believe is outdated and cruel. I think that God gave us science, and reproductive assistance is part of that science. To judge Carolyn for bringing children into a strong family with a loving core and faith cannot be considered wrong, nor could telling others who do not wish to be parents to practice birth control. If anything, this judgement sheds more of a light on the hypocrisy of the Church itself, not those who wish to expand their families. Again, not to continue to preach, but the doctrines in some cases are silly.

Overall, a real tear jerker that will appeal to mothers, especially those who have experienced infertility. It doesn't have the happy ending I would have liked, (hearing they got another baby from the surrogate, etc) but it sure did make me think to myself, "These are good people, I would have liked to know them."

Rachel says

I read this over about a 12-15 hour period and both this and the book by the bio mom in 30 hours both. My heart goes out to the Savages. I understand people's feeling like their boys should've been enough but they wanted a bigger family from the beginning and though not every moment of the book is about that I feel it came through that they were throughout the pregnancy with Logan still very involved with their sons and their

baby girl. Many of us aren't at our very best when not feeling good during parts of pregnancy and there was a second parent to step in at those times here. If expecting their own child as should have been that can happen and Due to the extreme situation it's only human that they'd be somewhat distracted at times. Their honesty on their moments of extreme upset (incl that they felt they weren't always as in the moment during this time with their kids) do not discount all the sporting events and family dinners and all that involves caring for kids of all ages but I'm quite sure they still did all of that. It just was not the main theme of the book.

Of course they may not inspire the same sympathy as a couple desperately trying for their first child BUT they were financially stable, older now and came from big families. They loved that tho they didn't have 4-6 kids close in age as intended their sons were and had ea other as playmates, and they wanted the same for MK their little girl as the boys were near teens by now. I think they had every right to proceed and I also believe of course they had every right to the expectation that they'd be implanted with THEIR own embryos. I felt bad that there was a layer of distrust or whatever the correct wording is between the moms but I think whether Shannons messages were intended to be off putting or not, again this book is an HONEST telling and Carolyn Savage is human (she did a miraculous thing and showed a graceful face to the world; in the books she tells us how HARD that was; if she was going for sainthood as has been suggested then she'd make it sound easy; again she never asked to be a surrogate) and I think any of us in this boat would be jealous and upset that this other woman while clearly a victim in her own right on a few fronts thx to the mix up was still ultimately getting a very positive end from this pregnancy whereas the Savages were getting accolades they never cared to have but no child they did care to have and plenty of emptiness and heartache. To be honest even though reading Misconception (which I also sped thru after this book but felt more rushed in the putting together of than this loving and thorough telling as if the Morrells just wanted to get it out that they aren't the bad guys) helped me sort of get some of Shannon's POV a little better and where she was coming from...I still felt for the Savages more. Not that the Morrells aren't like able people and not that they weren't dealt a rough 9 months and loss of being pregnant but the concerns once they'd been told the pregnancy would be continued such as miscarriage concerns are ones we all have with each pregnancy and though it would've been nice if the savages had felt up to chatting more and getting close sooner and I understand that may have alleviated some of their issues, the fact is the savages were going through a trauma the worst of which they knew was yet to be...while the Morrells knew that once these months of worry were over that there arms and hearts would be fuller for it and since they're eternally grateful they should I feel also be understanding of just how hard this was for the birth parents.

At one point Paul gives Shannon a msg in their book that the savages "have no desire to fight for custody" and I think that was whether from the Savages word for word or misquoted I think some problems stem from their possible misunderstanding of that sentence. They had the desire and would've happily kept the baby but I'm sure it meant they weren't going to try to fight for/kidnap another couples child that they WANTED. Of course if Carolyn and Sean had been up for closer contact sooner I think they may have ended up seeing Logan more that first year after his birth but they were bottom line all four just good just normal people dealing with this nightmare thrust upon them day by day and hindsight is always 20/20. I think the Savages to return fully to their story rose to the occasion far better than most of us would have and Logan is a very blessed little boy.

I was happy to see a somewhat more recent interview with the Savage family and to know that aside from a spoiler I won't say here that has me double tickled pink for them that they looked happier and at peace. I wish them many years of happy family life and tons of grandchildren one day. I feel better as a person for just reading about them.

Carmen Marie says

Why in the world would I read a book like this? Did I want to read about this couple's strength in an

unbelievable situation? I don't know, but just looking at the photos in this book made me cry. After spending years and years trying to expand their family, Sean and Carolyn Savage turned to IVF. Desperate for just one more child, they undergo an embryo transfer only to find out shortly thereafter that the embryos weren't theirs. The fertility clinic had made a colossal error! What transpires is their gut-wrenching journey to deliver the baby and to give him to his rightful parents. Despite thinking of the baby as their own (How could Carolyn Savage not bond with the baby growing in her own womb?) they knew that once the baby was born, their time with him would be measured in minutes before he was given to his biological parents. No matter how honest and candid the Savages were in telling their story, I don't think I can truly fathom their subsequent grief over losing the baby. Although not easy to read, especially if one has experienced any fertility difficulties, their story is quite compelling.

Crystal Nelson says

The subject matter of the book was what attracted me to it. However I felt that either the writing or delivery was poor. While I assumed I would have strong feelings of empathy for the couple I really didn't connect with them and I've struggled to figure out why. I'm not a religious person so their choice of IVF didn't and doesn't affect my viewpoint (I'd be a supporter of that choice). I do value honesty but I suppose I was looking for them to have an epiphany about the situation and see some positives. Their claim about giving a "gift of life" seemed empty and like they were seeking validation and their proclamations about not wanting to go public seemed equally false. While I don't think they started with that intention (going public) I also don't feel like they owned the decision in the end. Back to the emotion of the book, I think it's missing introspection, growth and depth. It wasn't until I read the unofficial companion book "Misconception" by the genetic mother that I was able to feel for Carolyn. It was at this point that I related her experience to mine, giving birth to a stillborn in my third trimester, bonding with a child and then having to leave the hospital with empty arms... Perhaps they both would have been better off to write a book together with alternating chapters of their experience?

Ruth says

I'm having difficulty with this review. How much do I write about the book and its merits as literature and how much do I write about the authors?

I debated about accepting this book for review, since as a Catholic I believe in-vitro fertilization is immoral. I figured that the authors espoused a religion that did not so believe and that I'd be able to see their point of view, even if I didn't agree with it. Unfortunately, I was wrong on both counts. However, I'll be the first to admit that my beliefs about IVF may color my opinion about this book.

Some memoirs manage to tell the story without seeming self-absorbed; this one does not. All the way through what we hear is that Carolyn and Sean wanted, and what they went through to get it. Despite having two lovely boys, they wanted another child so they decided the Catholic church (for whom Carolyn worked as a school principal) was wrong in its teaching about in-vitro fertilization. They chose IVF and had a beautiful daughter. They didn't want to leave the spare embryos frozen (and they wanted another baby) so they underwent yet another IVF procedure and that's where the mix-up occurred. During the pregnancy they hired a surrogate to carry the embryo the doctors didn't implant in her--thereby putting another woman through at least part of what she herself was experiencing.

I'm sure Carolyn and Sean are nice people and they have a beautiful family. I'm really sorry for what they had to go through, and from what they wrote, I don't think the biological parents of the baby treated them well--but how does one treat a gestational surrogate? The book itself is mildly compelling and definite reminder of all the things that can go wrong with procedures like IVF--things that range from the destruction of "unneeded" embryos to mix-ups like this one--and that doesn't being to address the issue of surrogate parenthood.

In the end, even though I should have been crying buckets for the wonderfully selfless thing Carolyn and Sean did in giving up the baby without a fight, I just didn't care. I'm sure it is hard to write a memoir--a book about yourself -- without seeming self-absorbed or self-congratulatory, and this book is the perfect illustration of that. Grade: C

Jean Godwin Carroll says

An unbelievable story about a woman who was implanted with another couple's embryos. Because of their religious beliefs, they made the difficult decision to give birth to the baby, and then gave the baby to the genetic couple.

Although the story was fascinating due to the topic alone, I found a couple of points about their story off-putting. First, they make an admirable, yet unfathomable, decision to carry through the pregnancy. They also decide upfront that they will give the baby to the rightful genetic couple and not sue for custody. Yet Carolyn's obvious contempt and disdain for the genetic couple comes through clearly. Both Carolyn & Sean felt that the genetic couple did not express their gratitude properly. Also, throughout the story, they expound upon their deeply-held religious views, and yet, in the end, they proceeded with IVF against the Catholic Church's policy. (I'm not saying I agree with the Catholic Church's stance, I was more bothered by their religious hypocrisy).

Ashley says

I went to a discussion with the authors and I can't wait to read this book - I was very impressed with this couple and am glad they are sharing their story.

The best way to describe this book is honest. At times I would like to think I would handle things differently than Carolyn did, but really, who knows? Hopefully no one else will have to go through a similar situation.

Book was a quick read and written from each of their perspectives. They are good people and I hope that they get to add to their family soon along with getting to know Logan (the baby from this book) as he grows up.

Kate says

I found the author whiny and self righteous and self centered. I was a little disgusted at how proprietary she was towards the child, knowing full well it was not her child. I felt bad for the biological parents.

