

Will it be a boy or a girl? One thing's certain, it won't be a baby

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I'm expecting a child. Or maybe two. When they arrive they will already be a few months old. Then again, they may be toddlers. Or as old as five. One thing's for sure, I'm not expecting a baby.

Along with my partner, Andrew, I've just been 'approved' as an adoptive parent. And, as everyone knows (even the woman in the dry cleaners), 'You won't get a baby.' Which is fine. Newborns are scarce, and the demand is high. And we've waited so long for children, it seems apt for us to end up fast-forwarding through their first few years. We can adopt either one child or two siblings up to the age of five.

The adoption process means we've had our lives scrutinised from every possible angle: police checks, health checks, financial checks, employer checks and character references. We've answered dozens of questions about our upbringing, digested piles of recommended reading and attended parenting courses. It's a bit like taking part in your very own reality TV show, only nobody else is watching (so, just like reality TV, then). Assuming all goes well, the outcome sees you rubber-stamped as officially 'decent'.

We could get a call about our children in the next month, or it could take a year. It's impossible to say. So, in the meantime, while we wait, we find ourselves in a surreal limbo. We're preparing our lives and home for children who are out there, somewhere, but whom we haven't met and whose names we don't know.

A few weeks ago, we went to John Lewis to choose curtain fabric for their room. Nothing too babyish (no teddies) but not too old, either (no Potteresque wizards). And, of course, it had to be non-gender-specific. While I don't subscribe to the pink-is-for-girls notion, neither do I relish the idea of convincing a four-year-old boy that the fairies on his curtains really are OK.

Furniture will have to wait, as we don't yet know what we need. And putting their names down for nursery or school is on hold. We don't know what their names are.

What we can do, however, is make changes to fit our new life.

We've always been the sort of people who have found 'home improvement' abhorrent, but now we're the proud owners of a delightful, half-finished conservatory (earmarked as a playroom). We're assured it will be completed imminently. I never appreciated the beauty of a conservatory's foundations till I had the opportunity to stare at them for two months. Quite breathtaking.

Friends and family ask whether the wait is frustrating (for the children, not the conservatory), and the answer is, 'Not really.' After years of waiting for test results to tell us what we couldn't do (get pregnant and have a child), waiting to find out about something positive feels like

something of a novelty. Admittedly, we've only been waiting since July. If nothing's changed in six months I'm sure I'll be feeling less philosophical.

Although excited about our new life, we're also conscious that our freedom as a couple is coming to an end. Last Bank Holiday we drove from London to Brighton for dinner, because it's precisely the kind of thing we won't be able to do when we have kids. I seem to be reading more fiction than usual - big, stonking books that require my concentration. Andrew's going to as many football matches as he can.

And however surreal this wait is, the fact is it's also a happy time. Despite everything we know about how tough adopting can be, we're excited. We reserve the right to be simultaneously apprehensive, of course. We both have dozens of questions that nobody can answer. Andrew's include: 'Will they be able to talk? Will they like us? Will we like them? Will they like football? What if they don't like football? Or worse, what if... they support Arsenal?' Valid questions and justifiable fears, I'm sure you'll agree.

One of the strangest parts of this waiting game is trying to imagine your future with children, when you have no idea who they are or what they look like. I was watching a little boy on the bus the other day and wondering, 'Will our child be a bit like you?' He turned, saw me staring, and as I smiled he slowly turned very red, became rigid and exploded into tears.

Can't wait.

• National Adoption Week runs from 3-9 Nov. For information about adopting, visit Baaf.co.uk or call 020 7593 2000