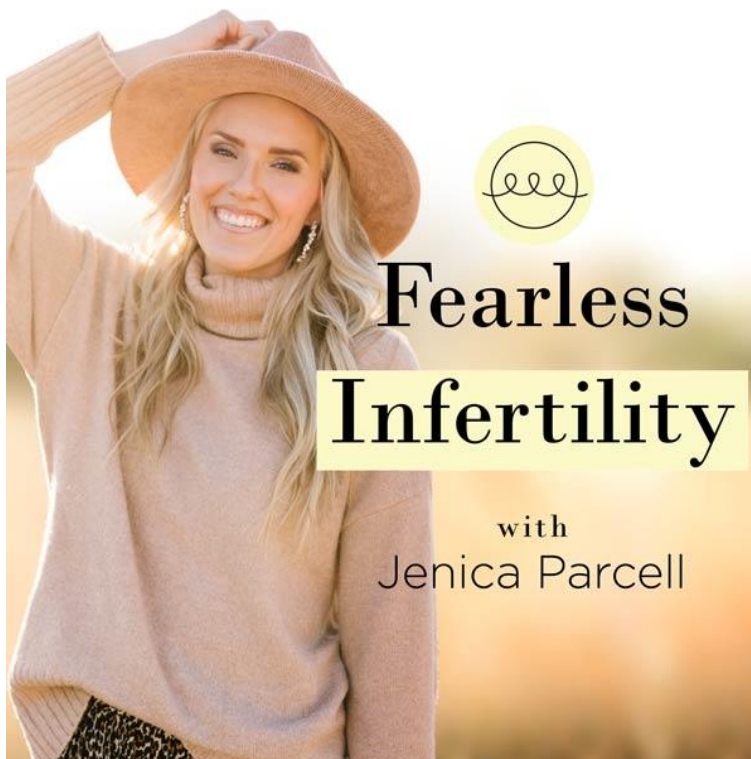


8. Everything You Need to Know About IVF with Gretchen Rossi



Full Episode Transcript

With Your Host

Jenica Parcell

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Hi, friends. Welcome to *Fearless Infertility*, a podcast for women struggling with the mental anguish that comes with infertility. My name is Jenica and after suffering in silence for too long I was able to pull myself out of the dark, take control over my mind, and create joy during my infertility experience. I'm here to help you do the same, sister. Let's dive into today's show.

Hey y'all, welcome back to the *Fearless Infertility* podcast. I am so happy that you are here as usual. My kids are downstairs with their babysitter right now and I feel like it's a little bit of a gamble. I don't personally like gambling. Even if I lose like a couple of dollars, I just feel like that's such a waste, I could have bought like two things from the dollar store. You know what I'm saying?

So I feel like I'm kind of in a gambling mode right now because I'm like they could walk in, they couldn't walk in. It really is up to fate, you know? And so the adrenaline is high and if you are one for really just living your life on the edge, then you are in the right spot right now.

I am so grateful for all of your podcast reviews. I absolutely love reading them. I'm so grateful that the tools that I'm sharing have helped you so much. And I'm so grateful for you being here and really taking your power back in using these tools in your lives and in your infertility, as well as any other trials you're experiencing.

The winner of this week's giveaway for subscribing and leaving a review on Apple podcasts is NYCmarcy. Her subject of her review says, "So helpful and full of love." She said, "I am forever grateful for Jenica doing this Fearless Infertility podcast. I have felt so alone in my journey with infertility. And through this podcast I feel so seen and less alone in this world. I love that her whole approach is about accepting what feelings infertility can bring up, but she does it in such a lovely way that can be applied to all

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aspects of life. Do yourself a favor and listen even if you're not dealing with infertility.”

I love that, so please email us at hello@thesliceofsun.com with your size and address and we will send out some gorgeous blue floral pajamas from The Slice of Sun. They are buttery soft and made of bamboo and you're about to get real cozy. And we'll send out your socks and pajamas.

If you would like to enter to win the giveaway next week please continue to subscribe and review on Apple Podcasts. The reason why this is so important to me is because it helps more people see that this podcast is even out there. And when they're searching for help with infertility and they have no idea who I am leaving reviews and subscribing pulls my podcast up to more of the top of the list.

So it's my goal to get these tools into as many women with infertility as I can because they've been so life changing for me and so powerful for me in my own life. And I know they've been so powerful for all of you as well.

Another review is by Ray-100, the title was, “Encouragement.” She said, “I have not personally experienced infertility, but wow, these podcasts are amazing and still applicable to everyone. I love the way that it has helped me look at my own life and my own trials differently. It has really opened my eyes to the way that I talk to myself and what/how I feed my thoughts. Love these podcasts so, so much. I'm definitely going to keep listening.”

I love hearing this because I completely agree. Like I've said before, and I'll say again, infertility is a huge trial but it's also not our only trial that we'll experience here in this life. And so this podcast and these tools that I share in the model can help anybody with any problem. And I continue to use them every single day with my own mind and my own thoughts.

Another incredible review is from EWoodfox. She says, “Giving hope. This podcast is amazing. I'm loving listening and look forward to new podcasts

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weekly. It's so nice to have a place to help me work through my feelings and emotions. This podcast is giving me hope and also a great reminder that this is something we will get through."

Absolutely. So please continue to leave your reviews and subscribe and I will pick another winner next week of an incredible Slice of Sun pajama and sock set that I personally designed. They are made of bamboo, they're buttery soft, and a portion of every sale goes to women with infertility. So it's really a great way to feel wrapped and loved by this community while also giving back as well. So it's a full circle thing and it really makes me excited to see you guys absolutely loving them as much as I do.

I am so excited to share with you guys today the interview with Gretchen Rossi. I just got back from sunny California and we had a beautiful time sitting down together. And I truly feel like I could have talked to her for hours because she has so much incredible knowledge and wisdom to share based on her own experience.

It is quite the story, the ups, the downs, the heartache. And I love that because of that she's very clear on exactly what she wants you to know that will save you time, and will save you heartache, and will save your body physically. And I love that she's super open about what she would do differently based on her experience going back again.

And I truly believe at the end of this episode if you are going to be doing IVF this episode will give you a really great footing on how to see it going in, what questions to ask, and it could really save you, I think, from having a miscarriage and also save you a lot of time throughout the process.

So I am so incredibly grateful to Gretchen for taking her precious time to sit down with me and share what she's learned through infertility, be super vulnerable and honest, and also, she provides a very clear takeaways on what she recommends anyone that is doing IVF should do. So here we go.

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Jenica: I have on the podcast here Gretchen Rossi. I am so appreciative of you giving your valuable, precious time today to help these women with infertility and share your story and share the lessons you've learned. Thank you so much for being here.

Gretchen: Oh my gosh, I'm so excited to be here. I literally have been a fan of yours for so many years. And it's really interesting how everything kind of comes full circle. Because I remember watching your story way back in the day. And well now five years ago technically, right? Four or five years ago.

Jenica: Right, yeah.

Gretchen: And I remember just crying, like literally crying with you. And I could just feel, and this was before I even knew that like I was going to go through as much turmoil as I went through.

Jenica: Wow.

Gretchen: Because I think you had had like the first year of it and then I just started my journey at that time. And gosh, wow, I just remember just following your journey. And you actually were the reason that I felt so more open to share my story. You were like such an inspiration for me to open up and share your story because I saw how much you just helped me personally by sharing your story. So I knew that if I shared my story, I could possibly do the same for other women out there.

Jenica: Absolutely.

Gretchen: So I'm honored to be here.

Jenica: Oh, thank you so much. That means so much to me. And it's such a testament too to the power of sharing your story. And if you don't, people don't know about your trials and experiences and then when they

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experience it, they probably think that they're alone. And so I love that no matter what trial that you're going through, whether that's infertility or something else, when you're open about it, it can really help other people to know that we're all in this together.

Gretchen: 100%, and I've said that for so many years to so many people. I mean people tell me this all the time, "You're so open. You're an open book about everything."

And it's interesting because I was raised in a home where you didn't talk about anything. Like if there was any issues, if there was anything going on, you kept it very private, very personal. And I remember as a little girl just being frustrated about that because I could see, you know, my mom suffering with something or struggling with something. And she just always put on, you know, a happy face. And it was like, "Everything's perfect, everything's great."

And I truly believe, I mean, I'm a Christian and I'm, you know, religious in that sense. I should say spiritual more than religious, but I believe the Lord teaches us that that's really important to have that community, to have that space to be able to talk. Because he gives us these tough things in life for us to be able to go share what we would consider our mess and turn that into our message that could potentially help so many more people.

So I wish people would just be more open to that. Because I think people think of it, especially fertility or infertility I should say, people feel that it is almost, you know, like a negative thing, or they feel ashamed of it.

Jenica: Yes.

Gretchen: And that's part of the reason that I really opened up is because I was like, "Look, this isn't something to be ashamed of, this is so much more prevalent than we even know." I think it's one in seven people struggle with infertility worldwide. Like that's a large number.

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Jenica: Yeah, that's huge, billions of people.

Gretchen: Yes. And so it's just very sad to see how many people suffer in silence really. And I think that's why I really wanted to open up because I just wanted people to realize that like it's okay to talk about it, you're not alone. There's so many people that have been through what you've been through.

And the more we talk about it and the more we share our experiences, somebody might get a little nugget of information that will help them to grow and possibly fix something that they didn't even know. Because I can't tell you how many times I've talked with somebody that was struggling and I was like, "Did you check for this? Did you check for this? Does your doctor have this? Does your office have that?"

Jenica: Right.

Gretchen: And they were like, "No." And then they come back, you know, a couple months later and they're like, "Oh my gosh, you were so right on that." But had I not spoke about it maybe they wouldn't have ever known that. So just always remember, to anyone out there that's listening, if you feel scared to share just know by you sharing you might actually be helping another person change their lives because of it.

Jenica: Yeah, truly. And I also love what you said about being okay with not kind of being okay.

Gretchen: Yeah.

Jenica: I think that, like you said, you didn't really talk about trials and hardships when you were young. And I think that that's a very normal thing. I think that we're taught to be positive. And we're taught to look at the bright side. And I think that there's a great part of that in life. And we can absolutely choose to do that. But I also think that it's also important to

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honor our feelings and process them and really be okay and realize that if something is wrong in your life it's not because you did something terribly wrong and you need to fix it.

And I think I struggled with that too, especially during infertility in the beginning, because I didn't allow myself to feel these negative emotions. And I thought to myself like, "I'm going through this really hard thing but I have a really good marriage, and I have like a really good job. And so I'm not allowed to feel bad because there's so many good things going for me."

Gretchen: Yeah.

Jenica: And had I just like stepped back and been like, "Girl, like you're going through a hard time, it's okay to feel sad." And just allowed myself to process that rather than running from it would have been so much better for me as a human. I just think that oftentimes we don't allow ourselves to be human beings, we want to be like these robots who power through it all. And that's just not who we are, we're humans.

Gretchen: Well, and beyond that, I mean, luckily for me, because I grew up in a household where it was so the opposite, I became the exact opposite of what I grew up in.

So I actually became probably overly, you know, talkative, and put things out there and share things. But I feel like that is, you know how they say like you grow up in a household and you either do exactly what you were raised with, or you want to do the exact opposite because you don't want to experience that same thing or whatever.

Jenica: Yeah.

Gretchen: And by the way, just as a caveat, my parents are the most amazing people in the world. They're some of my best friends, I love them. That was just one area that they struggled in was, you know, being able to

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share emotions and do things. And back in the day that's kind of what they did, you know?

Jenica: It was pretty standard back then. I feel like people weren't as open talking about trials. They just thought everyone needs to handle it themselves and power through.

Gretchen: Yes. And so because I was the exact opposite of that I sometimes got myself in trouble with that for sure. Like, you know, when you go on reality television, you're so open and honest, and the world has access to you and they have an opinion about everything.

Jenica: Right

Gretchen: Sometimes that can get you in a pickle. But overall I feel like my experience has always been people coming back and saying thank you so much for being so raw, or open, or honest, or authentic. And, for me, that has been just such a wonderful honor to know that God has blessed me with some of these trials so that I can potentially help other people. You know what I mean?

Jenica: I love that.

Gretchen: That's such a cool thing.

Jenica: It really is, it's such a beautiful way to see how he works, that he answers our prayers and helps us through other people. It's incredible.

Gretchen: Yeah.

Jenica: Okay, I would love for you to start with give us a summary of your infertility story. Because a lot of people can relate to this, and everyone's story is so different. So when you're diagnosed with infertility it can be for many different reasons. So will you give us the background on yours?

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Gretchen: Sure. Okay, so mine is probably a little bit different than most because technically I don't really know if I per se was infertile.

Jenica: Right.

Gretchen: Meaning, you know, like if it was me. Because we knew from the very beginning when I was with Slade that he had a vasectomy 15 plus years ago. Now it's probably almost 20 years ago now. And, you know, the reason that he made that decision was because he had two boys before, you know, meeting with me. And his one son, unfortunately, was diagnosed with cancer.

And so he thought it was the responsible thing to do at that time with his partner. They, you know, had a lot of issues even trying to get pregnant and then when they did get pregnant, he got sick and just all these things happened. So he thought that was the responsible thing to do.

Obviously, moved on from that relationship, meets me and he's like, "Okay, that wasn't the best decision for me at this stage in my life."

Jenica: Right, but you don't have a crystal ball, you can't see into your future so you make the best decision in the moment.

Gretchen: Yes, exactly. So because he had that vasectomy, we kind of knew, especially at my age, at the time that we really were thinking seriously about it I was about 36 years of age. And we went and talked to professionals and they said, "Look, your best bet is to try IVF." And so we're like, "Okay."

So we went into it almost like excited. Like most people going into a fertility struggle it's because they've tried for months, or years I should say, and they're like frustrated about it. I was just like, "This is going to be great. You know, we're going to go in, we're going to do a round of IVF, it's going to work. It's going to be so great."

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Jenica: Yeah, I had a similar experience. I know how that feels, yeah.

Gretchen: Okay. So we went in and we did this whole thing. And it was actually pretty great, like it wasn't crazy difficult for me. I mean the shots aren't easy and you don't feel good and like all this stuff. But I had such a good attitude around it that it was actually a little bit easier than most people who have suffered for so many years.

Jenica: Yeah.

Gretchen: And so we go in, we take out 14 eggs. I should actually say we took out like 21 eggs and then 14 came back as good or mature enough, or I should say 17 came back mature 14 fertilized.

Jenica: Okay.

Gretchen: And so we had 14 embryos.

Jenica: Yeah, that's good.

Gretchen: It was really good. Like, so excited, I'm texting all my friends and family. Like everyone's praying for us. And at that time, this was you know five years ago, we did what was called a, what's it called? A fresh transfer.

Jenica: Okay, yes.

Gretchen: Fresh transfer because back then they thought that that's what you should do. Like the technology and everything was teaching us then that a fresh transfer was the thing to do.

Jenica: Yeah, and just for those of you who don't know what a fresh transfer is, it's essentially like right after the embryo is fertilized and they haven't frozen it.

Gretchen: Yes, yes. Thank you for clarifying.

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Jenica: Yeah.

Gretchen: So six hours, literally it was like 12 o'clock at night before we were supposed to implant the embryo at 6am in the morning I get a phone call from the doctor, from the IVF doctor. And he's like, "I don't even know how to tell you this. I haven't seen this happen before. But all 14 of your embryos arrested." Which means they basically all died, I guess in the freezer. I don't even know. Like, I'm still confused by like where they put them, what happens, you know what I mean?

Jenica: You know, it almost seems a little suspicious.

Gretchen: Right?

Jenica: Like my mom and I were listening to another podcast you were on and we were like, "14 and none of them made it?" It's almost like what happened there?

Gretchen: Yeah.

Jenica: But you don't know.

Gretchen: Yeah, so it was very suspicious. And I definitely think I know what had happened after I did a ton of research. But my point being is that it happened.

Jenica: It happened. Yeah.

Gretchen: And I remember, I mean, I got the phone call and I literally just kind of fell to the ground. And I was crying and I was just like, "What? Like after everything we just did, the financial, mental, physical. Everything that we just went through." And by the way, the same time I went in for surgery to retrieve my eggs Slade had to go in for surgery. Because remember he had the vasectomy.

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Jenica: Yeah, yeah.

Gretchen: So they had to go in and remove his sperm at the same time. And that was like a major surgery for him because they had to go down there and cut that open and pull those guys out.

Jenica: Yeah, it's a big deal. So this meant you would have to do it all over again if you wanted to get more embryos.

Gretchen: Yep. So it was just this whole big thing. So we went through all this and I was so unbelievably devastated. I could not comprehend why that happened. I remember I went in like a week later and I sat down with the doctor and the embryologist or the lab guy and I just said, you know, "What happened? What was going on?"

And interesting enough, and I want to share this just because there might be people out there that don't even know this.

Jenica: Okay.

Gretchen: The scientist, who probably shouldn't have said it because the doctor was like, "No, no, no, we're not talking about that."

Jenica: Okay, yeah.

Gretchen: He said, "You didn't have enough estrogen per egg. Like the estrogen levels were really low per egg." And typically, if the egg is a mature egg, the estrogen levels should be at like a certain number. I forget what it is but I remember back then I think he said it was like at 70 or 90, and I think it's supposed to be like 120, something like that at least. Some level of estrogen in each egg. And he basically was like, "So no matter what, I don't think they would have ever made it because the estrogen levels typically have to be at this level."

Jenica: Oh, wow.

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Gretchen: So that was a really interesting first like, okay, weird. Like, why did the doctor put me through this whole thing and be like, "Oh, they moved to blastocyst." Or all the things that, you know, you go through, all the different stages.

Jenica: Now, should he have been able to check that even before they put the sperm and the egg together?

Gretchen: Yes.

Jenica: Wow, okay.

Gretchen: Yes, so that was the part that was frustrating to me.

Jenica: Right.

Gretchen: But this is what leads me, and I'm sorry my story is not very short because this is what leads me to very pertinent information that I really want people to hear.

Jenica: Okay, thank you.

Gretchen: Because it's part of the things that I feel like I found out, and had I not gone through that I wouldn't have found out so many things. And also, I would have never been able to help so many people because of the information I gained through it.

Jenica: Exactly, I love that perspective.

Gretchen: Yeah. And I don't ever, you know, I'm never trying to talk bad about facilities or anything like that. So I never talk about the facilities, because I loved the facility, I loved the doctors, I loved everything.

But I really feel like it is so imperative that you know your facility and you know what level of technology they have, what's going on. Because if they

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aren't at the level that they need to be it's like going to kindergarten versus going to college. It's literally going to be night and day and it's going to be the difference of if you're getting pregnant or not.

Jenica: It's a big deal and to put yourself through so much physically and mentally with something that's maybe a facility that won't give you as high of a chance. It's like if you know obviously, you'll make the right decision, but you need to do the research.

Gretchen: Yeah, so we were forced to do the research because I was just so confused. Like what happened? How could this happen? How did I go from having 14 embryos...?

Jenica: Which is a high number by the way for anybody listening.

Gretchen: Huge number. Huge number I learned, I didn't know that then, but huge number. Especially for my age being that I was 36 going on 37, just all of the things.

So long story short we ended up doing all this research, figuring out all these things, and I maybe will go back to, you know, a little bit more of that in a minute, but just to finish up the story.

Jenica: Okay.

Gretchen: So it took me a good year and a half to even just come out of that because I was in such a funk. I went into a pretty bad depression. It's so hard when you stick yourself with all these shots, and you gain the weight, and you feel like crap, and you look like crap. And you're mentally, physically, emotionally just so worn out. And then you don't have any reward at the end of it.

Jenica: Right, because you're willing to do all that if you get your baby. But when there's nothing to show for it it's horrible.

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Gretchen: It's horrible.

Jenica: Yeah.

Gretchen: So it took me a good year and a half to even be able to talk about it and get back on the horse, if you will, to even consider like, "Okay, what's the next steps?" And the doctors, the TV show was following our story, and so we went on there and shared some stuff, but I could barely get through any segments without crying or like, you know, whatever.

And so then it was my 38th birthday coming up. And Slade had written me a birthday card, and he said, "Hey honey, I'm going to try and reverse my vasectomy and see if we can get pregnant naturally." Because I just did not want to go through the shots again. I had a really bad reaction to the progesterone shots, broke out in hives, just really had some bad things that happened to me throughout the IVF. So he scheduled the reversal. I was so excited.

Jenica: Yeah, that's amazing.

Gretchen: He went and did the reversal; it was so sweet of them. By the way, that's a five and a half, six-hour surgery.

Jenica: It's intense.

Gretchen: It's like an intense surgery. Bless his heart, this man has been through like so many surgeries for me.

Jenica: Yeah, oh my gosh, he loves you.

Gretchen: He does love me. And so he reversed it, we tried for a good year naturally, if you will, to try and get pregnant. And unfortunately, the sperm was not showing up. So that was like done.

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So now I'm 39 years of age, about to turn 40. It was my 40th birthday coming up in October. We had just got the news end of September. And I don't think I've ever cried harder in my life the day that we got the news that like, "Sorry, there's just no sperm and it's just not going to happen."

Jenica: Yeah, another huge blow.

Gretchen: Huge blow after another big major surgery and, you know, all of this stuff. And so I realized at that moment I had to go back to IVF, which I was just not wanting to do. I didn't want to go back to that.

Jenica: Yeah.

Gretchen: And I remember just crying, and just praying, and just saying to the Lord like, "Why would you not give me something that you know I so badly want and I wanted my whole life." Like, this isn't something I woke up one day, I was like, "Okay, now I want a baby."

Jenica: Right.

Gretchen: You know, it was since I was a little girl, I knew I wanted to be a mom. I knew he knew the desires of my heart, like all of that. And I just remember crying and being so frustrated. And of course, every friend of mine under the sun was pregnant, getting pregnant, having their third child, whatever it was.

Jenica: Yeah.

Gretchen: And now I'm pushing 40. And 40 already is a big number, it's like a big milestone in your life. And that's when you kind of have like this moment of like, "What have I done?" Because this is like really what I would call my midlife crisis. Like, you know, where you're not young anymore and you're not quite old, but you're on the brink of going to the other side and you're like, "What's happening here?"

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Jenica: The other side, yeah.

Gretchen: And so I just remember being so depressed and just thinking, "What am I going to do?" And so we decided to go back to IVF. And we went back to IVF, and this was after a lot of research and a lot of like knowing what I needed to look for in a facility, and a doctor, and embryologist. So important, which is what I'm going to talk about.

And we found the doctor and we went to Southern California Reproductive Center, and it was the best decision of our lives. Dr. Surrey was our doctor. And I just could not believe what a difference it makes in facilities, and their technology, and what they know or what they don't know.

And I remember I came in, and I had a stack of papers like this thick. It was so thick because I got all my paperwork from the other doctor. And I had all my medicine and I came in and I set on my medicine out on the table, and I show him all the paperwork. And I'm like, "Okay, so I'm taking all this." And not medicine meaning just like vitamins, like all this stuff I was trying. And I'm like, "And this is how I eat and this is what I do."

And I went through this whole thing, and I show him all my papers. And he's like, and he literally pushes it to the side. And he's like, "I don't care about any of that." And I'm like, "No, no, no, no, you need to look, like you need to see what happened. My estrogen levels weren't good, du, du, du, du."

Jenica: Yeah.

Gretchen: And he was like, "Gretchen, I don't care about any of that. I need to get to know you, I need to see what's going on in your body, I need to see you. Like none of that matters. As a matter of fact, I don't want to know about that because it might like change my thought process of what we want to do and I don't want to be tainted by anything." And I remember just

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going, "That is like the strangest but the coolest thing I've ever heard from a doctor."

Jenica: Yeah.

Gretchen: Because he just really wanted a fresh slate and he wanted to look at me with clean eyes, without being tainted by anything. And he just wanted to make the right decision for me and where I was at, my stage, and my body and all of that.

Jenica: That's amazing. And it's such a relief too, to know you're taken care of, that someone knows what they're talking about.

Gretchen: Yes.

Jenica: Because I have a similar experience where you start and you just, you don't know what you don't know.

Gretchen: Yes.

Jenica: You're trusting these doctors and hoping that you're choosing the right one to help you, but you don't know. And you don't even know what questions to ask a lot of the time in the beginning.

Gretchen: You don't.

Jenica: So going in the second round it's so nice to be empowered with your prior experience.

Gretchen: Yeah, it's so true. And I had done so much research because at 36 versus now I'm 39, almost 40, you can see how many years of research, and knowing, and learning, and technology had changed by that time and everything. But here's the advice I want to give some of the people out there listening about what was a huge difference for me. There's multiple things but I'm going to try and do in a nutshell for you.

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Jenica: Okay.

Gretchen: First of all.... okay. By the way, it doesn't matter if the doctor is the nicest person in the world to you and tells you all the fluffy, beautiful things you want to hear, all that. It doesn't matter because a doctor could be the most lovely person ever and you're still never going to get pregnant.

Jenica: Right, it has nothing to do with their personality.

Gretchen: No. And so I really want to say that because I've heard so many women say, "Well, that doctor like I just didn't feel du, du, du. And like he wasn't du, du, du." You know, and I'm like, "That's fine, but is he getting people pregnant?" Because even if his bedside manner isn't great, like it doesn't matter, right?

Jenica: Yeah, so true.

Gretchen: And so that was the first thing I wanted to say to people, is don't judge a doctor by their results, by who they are. Like with Dr. Surrey, I love him, but he's not warm and fuzzy in the way that, you know, some people need to be coddled like that. He's a scientist. He's very, like, straightforward, he's very like, "Okay, you know, you don't have a good ovarian reserve, this is what we're going to do to make it happen." He's very matter of fact.

Jenica: Yeah.

Gretchen: And so that was hard for me because I like to be coddled a little.

Jenica: Yeah.

Gretchen: But I realized that it didn't matter because he was so advanced in his knowledge and technology. He was actually one of the founding fathers of IVF.

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Jenica: Oh, was he?

Gretchen: Yeah.

Jenica: Oh wow, that's amazing.

Gretchen: So that's the first thing. The second thing is you really want to make sure that the facility that you're at, if possible, has an in-house lab.

Jenica: Okay.

Gretchen: At least for me, I found that this is really important. And has an incredible embryologist. A lot of people just think that the IVF doctor is like the tell all. But I honestly feel like it's the combination of the doctor and that embryologist, because if you don't have a good embryologist, that is like what we like to call glorified babysitter, okay?

Jenica: Yeah.

Gretchen: He is going to make sure that that little embryo is taken care of, and that every little thing that's going on is perfect with that embryo. And if you don't have the right environment, I don't care how great your eggs are, how great the embryo is, if you don't have that embryo well taken care of in a great facility with the top equipment and all that there's so many things that can go wrong when unfreezing the embryo. If they're not even sitting in the correct juice to, you know, be in when they're frozen, all of this.

Jenica: Yeah, they get destroyed so easily.

Gretchen: Yes. And I'm not even using the right words here because I don't know all the words but you get the point.

Jenica: Well none of us do.

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Gretchen: Yeah, but you get the point. You know, the right juice I call it, because they literally have to like sit in a petri dish.

Jenica: Right.

Gretchen: So that's super important. The other thing I really highly, highly recommend to women or couples is get your embryos genetically tested. And I cannot tell you guys this enough, I cannot encourage you guys enough to do this. There is so many unscrupulous doctors and clinics out there. And yes, does it cost more money? Absolutely. But I am telling you right now, you do not want to go through multiple rounds of IVF and multiple implantations just to have a miscarriage, just to have it never take, just to, just to, just to.

Jenica: Right, and that's the problem why a lot of people don't get pregnant even like naturally, is that the egg, there's something genetically wrong with it so it doesn't fertilize. But if you're fertilizing it and there's a reason why the implantation won't occur it's absolutely, I think, I totally agree with you worth spending more money, because you're already so far down the road, it's already so expensive, that spending a little bit more 100% I think is worth it too.

Gretchen: And I want to explain a little bit further why this is so important. You guys, no matter what, no matter how strong they think your embryo is or whatnot, if it's not genetically sound more than likely it's probably not going to survive. And if it does survive, then you might have to be faced with a decision you don't want to have to make.

Now, if you are a Christian and you don't believe in abortion, or you don't believe in any of that stuff then it's an easy decision for you. But if you feel like you might have to go down a different path, why put yourself through that torture? Or why implant something that might take and then you're more than likely going to have a miscarriage?

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Jenica: Right, which I think is often the case if it's not genetically sound.

Gretchen: Yes. And I think a lot of people aren't told this and I think a lot of doctors do not tell you this. And as a matter of fact, I have openly spoke about the fact that I really feel like doctors need to give the patients much more information about this.

Because there are so many patients that they are just another number in a clinic and they come through and they will have you do six rounds knowing full well that more than likely all of those embryos were not genetically sound and it was not going to take. And you now are mortgaging your home, you have multiple jobs, you're borrowing money. It's not right.

Jenica: Yeah.

Gretchen: It's not right.

Jenica: And it's so normal to them because they do it, it's almost like they probably see it as a job, which they should because it is their job, right? But I don't think that they realize the impact that it has on women's bodies and their health and mental health.

Gretchen: Yes, yes. And that's the thing. And I just got off the phone with a girlfriend that was recommended to me to talk to me about this because she had gone through multiple implantations and miscarriages. And she goes, "And we have embryos left so we're going to try again." I go, "Don't." I go, "Why are you going to put yourself through this?"

And after I got off the phone with her, she was like, "Oh my gosh, like you have no idea. I never even saw it from that point of view."

Jenica: And did her doctor never recommend getting them tested?

Gretchen: Never.

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Jenica: Because you can get them tested even after they're frozen, right?

Gretchen: Yes.

Jenica: Yeah, wow.

Gretchen: So actually, I don't know. I think you can.

Jenica: I think you can too.

Gretchen: I think you can but it's sketchy to do it that way. And I'll tell you why, because you're unfreezing, freezing again.

Jenica: So they could probably just get destroyed.

Gretchen: Yes. So if you can do it from the very beginning, when they first take those eggs out, and when they're not frozen yet, that is the ideal time.

Jenica: Yes, okay.

Gretchen: You can do it, but again, it starts to hurt the integrity of the embryo when you're unfreezing it, freezing it again all of that. You really only want to unfreeze it the one time when you're doing the implantation.

Jenica: Okay.

Gretchen: So the other thing is, and shoot, I should have looked up the name so I had it correct again. But I think the technology is called Ipsy.

Jenica: ICSI.

Gretchen: ICSI, thank you. And that's a really important technology that I learned about too through this facility. Which is basically where the embryologist is able to watch the growth of these embryos and it's almost like on a sped-up feed of a video of all the different embryos. And it's

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fascinating, I mean, I got to go in and see all 10 of my embryos that we had and watch them grow.

And what was interesting is one of them, that actually is Skylar today, was the one that we thought wasn't going to survive. Because it went from, it goes typically from two cells, to four cells, to eight cells. And it went from two cells, to five cells, and then it self-corrected itself, pushed out the bad cell, and then went back to four.

Jenica: Wow, that's amazing that they can see that too.

Gretchen: Isn't that incredible that they could see that?

Jenica: She's a genius baby.

Gretchen: Yes, and that was the one egg that came back as genetically sound.

Jenica: Oh my gosh, that is a miracle.

Gretchen: Isn't that? But here's my point, okay, at the end of the day science is amazing, technology is amazing. At the end of the day, that was a God thing. That was a God thing, even the embryologist said, "We don't see that, like that doesn't happen."

Jenica: That's so cool.

Gretchen: That is so rare for that to happen. And I had 10 embryos and out of 10 embryos none of them came back genetically sound except that one, who is Skylar today.

Jenica: That gave me the chills.

Gretchen: Right?

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Jenica: Yeah, that's amazing.

Gretchen: But that was God showing himself to me in that moment.

Jenica: Yeah, I love that.

Gretchen: That was Him I'm saying, "I'm here, I'm with you. I want you to feel my presence. I want you to see what I'm creating here for you."

Jenica: That is so amazing. I love that you see that too. Like He knew that if He did that you will recognize that as His hands.

Gretchen: Yes.

Jenica: That's beautiful.

Gretchen: Yes, because I remember too there's a lot of things that women go through, you know, with fertility in the sense of, or infertility, I always say fertility but it's infertility. Where a lot of people don't realize this, and for any friends out there that might be listening that have loved ones going through this, you have to remember this is almost like a death for some people in the sense that when they have to go through this and it's now all science,

It's now all a scientific thing. It's like you literally walk into the doctor's office and they say, "Okay, what month do you want to have a baby?" And you're like, "Wait, what?" Like you sit down and process like I have to now decide what month I want to have a baby?

And you go from what you imagined to be this beautiful act of two people are in love making love having a baby to now you're sitting down looking at a calendar and deciding what month you want to have a baby. And the next thing you know you're in a room, probably full of five men that are implanting this thing in you.

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It's like it takes the sexy, the beautiful envisioned, you know, moment of what you think is going to happen out of the whole process. And it's like I had to go through almost what I felt like it was a death of mourning not being able to have a child naturally in the way that I had always imagined growing up the way that, you know, the home I was raised in and all of that. The way that I just thought it was supposed to naturally happen.

Jenica: Yeah.

Gretchen: So there's just so many things that women go through. There's just that to begin with from the very beginning. Then you go through, you know, the emotional, mental, physical elements of going through the IVF. Then you go through the financial strain it puts on. I mean, there are many layers to IVF that people don't realize, right?

Jenica: Right, and I completely agree with that. And I didn't see it, I actually had a few friends that did IVF before we even started trying. And you can't until you experience.

Gretchen: Yeah.

Jenica: So that's why I love that you address the friends because I think people want to help. They love their friends and their family that are experiencing it, they just don't know what it's like so how can they? So I love that you're open about sharing about it so they can understand and come at them from a place of support and giving them the love that they need during this hard trial.

Gretchen: Yeah, even my best friend, it was funny at the time, I remember when I started posting about the shots on social and I was crying. And I was so nervous about did I put it in the right spot and what was happening. And it was such a real, raw moment for me. And I remember my best friend calling and going, "Okay, like I know you were going through IVF. But I had no idea. Like no idea." And I was like, "I know."

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And that is part of the reason that I chose to share. And I said this earlier, you were part of that inspiration for me. I chose to share because I knew that even my best friends didn't really know. Because it's not like you call them up and be like, "I want you to come over and see me giving myself the shot so you know what I'm really going through." Like you don't do that, right?

Jenica: Right.

Gretchen: So I put it out there because I wanted people to really understand like how hard it really is. And I really wanted to hopefully use what I felt like was, you know, a really hard, difficult, arduous situation to possibly help the next person out there and make them feel like they weren't alone. I felt like God really put it on my heart to do that.

And the third thing I really wanted to do is I wanted to be an advocate for so many women out there, younger women especially. Like me, in my 20s focused on my career, my 20s, 30s really focused on my career and just totally blind and totally naive to the fact that your eggs really do start to diminish and go away as you get older.

Now, we've all read the articles and we've all heard, but guess what? I know any of you out there listening to me were just like me. "Yeah, but I'm me. I'm healthy. I'm strong. I'm this, I'm that, I'm athletic." Whatever excuses you come up in your head. "My mom got pregnant just by my dad looking at her." You know, all of those things that we play out in our head, which I was one of those people. Don't kid yourself, okay.

You guys, biologically it is proven that we are the most fertile at age 17. The most fertile at age 17, that's like when they're primed to have a baby.

Jenica: Wow, interesting.

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Gretchen: By age 34 we lose half of our egg production. And by age 39 another half of that half already we loss again.

Jenica: Oh wow.

Gretchen: That is science, I'm not making this up. This is science, biological science. So I became a huge advocate for egg freezing, and really being smart about that.

There is so many programs nowadays. Because everyone is like, "I can't afford egg freezing." Guess what you guys? There is programs that can cost you it's only \$188 a month to be able to go and freeze your eggs. If you are a career-oriented person, if you haven't met the right person, if you don't know if you're ready to have a baby, any of those go freeze your eggs. It's like an insurance policy.

Just do that if you really think you want to have children because I don't want anyone to have to suffer and go through the stress that I went through because by the time that we did finally start doing this I was 40 years of age and my egg quality was not good. I got one sound embryo, you guys, out of just that one round where I had 10 embryos that implanted. Only one came back genetically sound. And I was so lucky that I had the one because most people don't have the one at this age.

And Hollywood has glamorized that you can have babies way into your 40s, 50s.

Jenica: Yeah.

Gretchen: Janet Jackson having a baby at 50. Halle Berry having a baby at 46. All these people that it looks like they're having babies, and I was one of those people. Oh, there's technology. Oh, there's IVF. I'll be fine. Guess what? Most of these women are not being honest and forthright in the fact that they are using egg donors.

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Jenica: Oh, really? I didn't realize that.

Gretchen: They are using egg donors. You guys, it is really difficult to have a good sound egg after the age of like 43, 44. It's very few and far between that people have that. I asked my doctor what's the oldest he's ever had a natural egg. He said 46. And he goes and that was like one time.

Jenica: Oh wow, interesting.

Gretchen: And think about how long he's been around doing this. I mean, he was one of the founding fathers of IVF. So that just puts it into perspective for people. And I'm so sorry this is like the longest winded answer ever.

Jenica: No, it's important. I think this is that really valuable information that you've been given through your experiences that you can then help other women with. So I appreciate it.

Gretchen: Yeah, it's so important to me that everyone, because there's so many different levels of this. There's people that, you know, are young and thinking about having a baby one day that the egg freezing is super important. There's people going through the IVF. There's people at the beginning of the IVF. There's people that have done multiple rounds and don't know about all these things that could potentially happen, about the embryologist, about the genetic testing.

The other thing is make sure you're with a doctor that truly knows about going in and really examining your insides. There's so many people that have genetically sound embryos and they won't implant because they have polyps.

Jenica: That's what happened to me.

Gretchen: Okay.

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Jenica: Literally, the first transfer didn't work, the second transfer ended up in a miscarriage.

Gretchen: Okay.

Jenica: My new doctor, with a new set of eyes, went in and I had to get polyps removed before the transfer.

Gretchen: But I can guarantee you that's why you probably lost the baby and was not able to implant.

Jenica: Yeah.

Gretchen: Now, even Southern California Reproductive Center takes it another step even further now. There's another new technology where, and I'm not going to lie you guys, this sucks because it's expensive and it's another round that you basically have to go through.

And so I had to prep my body, they do what's called a mock implantation. I had to prep my body just like I'm going in for a regular implantation. And they don't really do the implantation, it's fake.

Jenica: Oh wow.

Gretchen: They go in and they basically biopsy a side of your uterus to see if it's ready for the implantation. But it gives me another 25% chance that it's going to take.

Jenica: Wow, and if you only have one embryo left, I mean, that's worth it.

Gretchen: Yeah, and that's why my doctor, I told my doctor no. And he pulled me in the office, and he's like, "Listen." He's like, "We've gotten this far." And I love Dr. Surrey, he's such a good friend of mine now. But it was so funny because I was just like, "No, I'm not doing it." Because I was at my wit's end.

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Jenica: Oh yeah.

Gretchen: I had gone through all these rounds of IVF; I'd done all this. My body was tired, I was sore, I was mentally, physically done.

Jenica: Right.

Gretchen: And I just said, "No, I'm not doing it. Like I can't go through one more thing." And he's like, "Listen, we've gone this far, this is going to up your chances by 25%." So I did take a month off. And then we went in and did the mock trial. And then a month later is when we implanted and we got Skylar.

Jenica: That's so interesting. I've never heard of that before; this is the first time.

Gretchen: Yeah, so that's what I'm saying, like I'm chock full of so much information because I've been through so much. And I feel like I'm at one of the best facilities in the world really, that have the most advanced technology. And like you're saying people don't even know some of this stuff. They don't know about the mock implantation. They don't know about ICSI.

Jenica: ICSI.

Gretchen: ICSI, I always say it wrong, I want to say Ipsy like the box, you know, like the makeup box or whatever. Yeah, ICSI, they don't know about, you know, having an embryologist. The other thing that's super important, you guys, is when you are doing genetic testing, if any way possible for the genetic testing to be done in house that is so imperative too.

Jenica: Okay.

Gretchen: A lot of the times it can't be done and I understand that. But when you're going in and you're pulling that part of the embryo out to get

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genetically tested, and think about it, it's being transferred, it has to go in some sort of, you know, compartment, whatever to transfer it to the next place to get tested.

Jenica: Yeah, it's high risk.

Gretchen: It's all of that. So you just really want to think about all of those things. And you are paying money, you guys.

Jenica: Yes.

Gretchen: So you need to interview the people that are doing it. I asked if I could speak with the embryologist, most people don't let you do that.

Jenica: Good for you.

Gretchen: But I did, I wanted to talk to the embryologist I wanted to see the lab. I wanted to see what practices that they did inside that lab. Because you got to remember I had four years of research.

Jenica: Good for you, that's amazing.

Gretchen: Yeah. And they did.

Jenica: And I totally agree with that, too. I think that oftentimes people are kind, they don't want to put anyone out and I'm like, "No, these people aren't running a charity."

Gretchen: Yes.

Jenica: Like you're spending a ton of money, A. But even more importantly your body and your, you know, maybe once in a lifetime last egg, you know, for instance. And so you really need to advocate for yourself and it doesn't matter if people are annoyed, this is your family.

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Gretchen: Yeah, it doesn't. It doesn't, it really doesn't. And again, you got to remember you are paying them to offer you a service.

Jenica: Right.

Gretchen: So do not feel bad. And you can do it in a very kind gracious way. But be forthright in what you know that you want to see or want to understand or whatnot. And I remember walking to see the lab, and again this is probably way beyond what most people would let them do but I really wanted to see what their practices were.

And they didn't allow people in there with perfume. Because you don't even realize these little things that can trigger issues within an embryo. But that's why you have to ask. You have to ask the doctor, you have to ask the facility what their practices are within their lab, within their facility because it can literally make or break having a child for you.

Jenica: Yeah, 100% that is such good information and such great advice.

Gretchen: Thanks.

Jenica: I love that, thank you.

Gretchen: It's a lot of advice, I'm so sorry.

Jenica: No, it's so good. I'm like people, this could save people like years of trying and years of heartache. It's like it's literally invaluable, so thank you.

Gretchen: Yeah, you're welcome.

Jenica: Okay, another question I wanted to ask you is that I listened to your other podcast and I completely felt the same way where I came at the second like full cycle of IVF with a completely different mindset than I did the first. Can you tell me a little bit more about what was different for you the second time around?

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Gretchen: So, gosh, there was a few things that had happened for me. The first, and I kind of mentioned it a little bit earlier. The first one, I was like so giddy, so excited, so like clueless to what was going to happen.

Jenica: Same.

Gretchen: I'm like, "Oh my God, I'm going to be pregnant in like less than three weeks. This is so exciting." Right?

Jenica: Right.

Gretchen: I was just so naive and clueless.

Jenica: Yeah.

Gretchen: The second round I went through so much research, I knew so much, I felt so much more armed with information, you know? And so I felt a lot more capable and strong. And I felt like, you know, I'd read everything, like The Tao of Infertility, all the holistic books. And I knew about acupuncture and the importance of that.

Jenica: Yes, that's a good one.

Gretchen: And just so many things I understood how much more important it was. And touching on acupuncture, you guys, you can do acupuncture throughout your IVF while you're taking shots. And I really highly recommend the night before your implantation.

Jenica: Okay.

Gretchen: I went and did acupuncture the night before my implantation too.

Jenica: That's amazing.

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Gretchen: So that's a really great thing. But I also want to say all of this with a caveat you guys. It's imperative that you listen to your own body. There was a point, because I did two rounds of the IVF with the second facility. There was a point in my second round of doing the IVF that the acupuncture wasn't working for me. I was feeling very anxious about it, I was upset about it. My body wasn't responding as well for some reason. And I don't know if I was just super stressed in that time, I don't know what was happening but I stopped it and it was a good decision for me.

Jenica: Okay.

Gretchen: So I just say that because I don't want you to think like if it works for one person that oh my God, she got pregnant so I have to do this. You have to listen to your body. Your body is telling you specific things for specific reasons. So listen to your body, whether it's acupuncture, the shots. Whatever it is, communicate with your doctor, talk with them. I loved my acupuncturist but I told them what I was struggling with and they were like, "Okay, let's stop it."

For some reason my body was just reacting strange to it. I was getting really tense up in my neck and my shoulders from it and I don't know why. But I stopped it, and guess what? That's when I got my good embryo. So you just never know what's going on with your body.

Jenica: Yeah.

Gretchen: But I did go back the night before I implanted and did it. And it was great and I felt great.

Jenica: It's so interesting you say that, actually during the third transfer that ended up working for me too I did it a few times before, like throughout the egg retrieval part. And then I also did it like after they had done the transfer my acupuncturist, I don't know if that's what you call them.

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Gretchen: Yeah, acupuncturist.

Jenica: Acupuncturist came to my fertility center and like did it like while I was still laying there. Isn't that interesting?

Gretchen: Oh, like right after they did the implantation?

Jenica: Yeah.

Gretchen: Oh, that's very interesting.

Jenica: So I am very much about like researching more holistic ways to help because why not?

Gretchen: Why not?

Jenica: But I love what you said, too. It's like just because it worked for somebody else doesn't mean that you have to do it.

Gretchen: No.

Jenica: I definitely feel like we all have access to personal revelation and I think that like praying about what we specifically should do, you'll get the answers.

Gretchen: 100%, and here's the thing, you guys, your gut is your spirit guide. Okay, I learned this from a couple people that are very connected to the spiritual world if you will. And they have taught me because my gut, every single time I haven't listened to my gut I'm so mad at myself. I'm so angry at myself, because it's always, always, always, always, always without a doubt been right.

But that is your spirit, guys. That is your grandmother, your mother, your whoever is passed, those are those people and heaven talking to you.

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Jenica: I love that.

Gretchen: So listen to that inner voice. If you're questioning it, there's a reason that you're questioning. So always listen to that. Listen to whatever is going on in your gut. If something feels off, there's a reason for it. So just always listen to that.

Jenica: I love that.

Gretchen: Let's see, you just said something else too that I was thinking about that triggered something. But I forget.

Jenica: Something that I love that I've heard you say is that I love you were so open and vulnerable during the process because it was good to see that you were sad and you felt ugly one day. You felt, you know, like unattractive.

Gretchen: Yeah.

Jenica: I love that you said that it's okay to allow yourself to feel that way.

Gretchen: Yeah. Well listen, when you're going through IVF you just feel gross all the time. Like no matter what way you slice it. You are bloated, you have crazy hormones going on in your body. You have to give yourself some grace.

And this is super important too for all the men out there, you really need to be an incredible support person. And by the way, this is not just female male, I know there's a lot of same sex couples that go through this as well. So if you're same sex couples, it doesn't matter. Whoever is the person that is going through the IVF, the other partner, it is so imperative that you are a solid rock for them during this.

They're going to be crazy. They are going to say crazy things. They are going to be off the wall. They're going to be angry; they're going to be mad;

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they're going to cry. There are so many emotions that you go through, but the amount of hormones that you are pumping into your body that are not natural, that are causing your body to do things that are not natural. Okay, you can't expect somebody to not be crazy going through that.

Jenica: Yeah, it's normal to be crazy going through that.

Gretchen: It's normal to be crazy. So please, any partners out there, have grace for your significant other. And I did want to share the raw, and the good, and the bad, and the ugly because I needed people to see that it isn't just this, you know, rainbows and butterflies process. I wanted people to really see what people go through and how gross you feel. I mean, I half the time couldn't even put jeans on because it was uncomfortable on my stomach.

Jenica: Yeah, I was so bloated too.

Gretchen: And by the way, even after I did the IVF it took me a good year, I still have 5 or 10 pounds that are on me that I can't... I have cellulite in places I never had cellulite. I have thickness around my arms, on my stomach, on my thighs that I never had before. It's like your body goes through this really big transition when you're going through that. And then on top of it a pregnancy which, you know, knock on wood thank you Lord that I was blessed with that.

But it's so difficult for the people out there, for the women that go through this and then they never even have a pregnancy. And then their body is changed and their body has gone through this. Like anybody out there listening please know that it's hard. It's like going to war and having all these war wounds but never having anything good come out of it. You're like, why did I just go through all this? You know?

Jenica: Yeah, it's devastating.

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Gretchen: It's devastating. So yeah, so that's the reason that I wanted to share it is because I mean, just all the reasons I've mentioned. I wanted to give people information. I wanted to let people know they weren't alone. I wanted to be an advocate to let people know like Hollywood glamorizes this you guys, and it's not glamorous and it's not fun. And most of them are using egg donors and not being honest with you. All of those reasons is the reason that I chose to share it.

And I shared this a little bit with you before we started talking, but I couldn't see it then but I'm grateful that it took me four and a half years to get pregnant. And I say that because I now realize that this has been a calling that the Lord has given me.

And I didn't recognize it then, I could not understand then. I remember laying in bed and crying and crying and just saying, "Lord, why? Why would you do this to me? Why would you take this from me?" Because at that point I just didn't think I was ever going to get pregnant.

I remember the eve of my 40th birthday just crying when I was in a depression. And I just was like, Oh my gosh, I'm never going to be a mom. Like, why would you do this? And, you know, you see drug addicts that have like six kids and you're like, "Why are you giving them children? And not someone that really wants a child who wants to love and nourish them and all that?"

Jenica: Right.

Gretchen: But I can see clearly now why the Lord put me through this and why the Lord made this process so much longer for me. So just trust that, know that there's a reason that for whatever the outcome is, there is ultimately a reason for it. And you have to trust it, you have to trust the process. You have to trust that the universe has your back no matter what the end result is.

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Jenica: Yeah.

Gretchen: And I got to pose this question to you that was posed to me when I was reading the book, *The Tao of Infertility*.

Jenica: Okay.

Gretchen: And it was such a beautiful question because I think there's so many people out there that really get so set on I want to have a biological child. And the question was, do you want to be a mother or do you want to have a biological child?

And it was one of those moments that I had to surrender that to the universe if you will.

Jenica: Yeah.

Gretchen: And I had to say, "Okay, what do I want? Do I want to be a mother or am I just so focused on I have to have this biological child?" And by the way, you guys, I'm not saying it's bad to have that feeling. Of course if you can have a biological child most people want that. Most people want to be able to look in their child's eyes and see a reflection of themselves and all that. It's human nature.

Jenica: Yeah, that's what we've been told is normal. And that's just what we've expected throughout growing up.

Gretchen: Yeah, so it's not something to be ashamed of. I'm just saying, if you have explored every avenue, if you have done everything you possibly could do, if you're financially beat, if you are emotionally beat, your body's not responding to whatever it is that you're trying to do, I really encourage you to sit back and ask yourself that question. Because there is other possibilities and ways to be a mother whether it's truly to a human, you could even become a bird mommy, I don't know.

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I'm just saying there is other things and I don't want people to lose themselves so much in this process. I've seen so many women just go into a deep depression and never come out of it and feel like there's no hope and joy and anything on the other side of this when maybe God wanted you to go down a different path. And you just couldn't see it in that moment because you were so blind.

And I had that moment where I had to recognize that and it was a very clear moment for me. And I remember I called my mom; it was right after my 40th birthday. I called my mom; you know how your mom is always going to like tell you the truth about something?

Jenica: Yes.

Gretchen: And you're like you don't even want to ask her the question because you're like, "Dang it, if I asked her and she tells me what I don't want to hear I'm going to be so upset."

Jenica: Yes, I love that.

Gretchen: So I call my mom and I said, "Mom," I said, "I love Slade so much, and I am so blessed to have him in my life. But did I make a mistake, like knowing and getting into a relationship with this guy 10 years ago knowing that he had a vasectomy and knowing how badly I really wanted to have children on my own? Did I make a mistake? Like do you think I need to like move on?"

And that's how badly I wanted a baby. Now I'm questioning this man that I am so in love with. And should I just give up on this relationship? That's how desperate I was to want to have this child and how much I felt it in my soul.

Jenica: I love that you shared that because so many people can relate to that.

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Gretchen: Yes. And not to mention Slade and I went through a lot of turmoil during this process too, which that's a whole other episode.

Jenica: Yeah, it's hard, right?

Gretchen: Like, you know, the relationship struggles and everything.

Jenica: Right, absolutely.

Gretchen: And my mom said to me, "You know honey." And I thought for sure, she was going to say, "You know honey, it's time. I think you're right. Like it's time maybe that you just move on."

Jenica: Yeah.

Gretchen: And she said, "You know honey," she goes, "A love like you and Slade have comes few and far between." And she said, "And that's something that you were blessed with from the Lord. And a lot of people think a baby's going to make things better, a baby's going to make them happier." And she's like, "I have three children and you guys drive me nuts to this day." She's like, "You guys literally cause me so much stress, so much heartache, so much this." And it was like this really funny moment for me, because I was just like, "Oh my God, you're so right."

And she was like, "So I wouldn't want you to ever think that just by having a baby you're going to like be happier, or you're going to be more content, you're going to be this." She's like, "Whatever you and Slade have meant for your life, the Lord is going to serve that up to you. You have to be faithful; you have to listen to him; you have to trust that and know that it's going to be okay because you guys are meant to be together."

And I got to tell you this is the moment it changed for me.

Jenica: Okay.

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Gretchen: Ladies out there, couples out there, please hear me on this, this is so imperative. You have to surrender, whatever is meant to happen you have to surrender to it. It is the only way it is going to happen. That is the only way it's going to happen and I say that from the depths of my soul.

I wanted it so badly that I was holding it so tight that I was not allowing it to come into my life. It wasn't until I let that go and I finally just poured into my husband, poured into this man that I was so blessed to have in my life and I let it go that everything started happening.

I couldn't get into Doctor Surrey; it was a nine month wait list to even see the doctor. I was 40 years of age, that meant I would probably not see him closer to 41. All of these things, everything started happening for me. I had a friend who knew a friend who knew a friend who got me into the doctor who du, du, du. All these things started happening organically because I surrendered to it and I let it go, and I trusted that the Lord would bring it into my life. And I really truly started manifesting the things I wanted into my life.

And that's literally a whole other podcast. But I did do a podcast on mine, *Knot Too Taboo* about it, it was called Miracles.

Jenica: Okay, we'll link that in the show notes. Okay.

Gretchen: And it truly was a miracle what happened, and that's a good lesson for people going through that. But you have to surrender it because if you don't surrender it, it will be the death of you. It will take you down. It will make you feel like you're insignificant. It will get make you feel all these things that you don't need to be feeling.

Jenica: Yeah.

Gretchen: And the second that you let that go and you trust the universe you will be surprised what the universe brings back to you. And it might be in a different package, like I just said a minute ago.

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Jenica: Right.

Gretchen: It might be in a different way. I know a friend of mine that was struggling so badly with trying to have a baby. And a tragic thing happened with other parents with these three children, and next thing she knows she's at church and she's adopting these three beautiful children.

And she never in a million years imagined that. But that day at church when they were talking about it laid on her heart. And that was the path that the Lord had for her. But you have to be open to it. You have to see it. You have to be open to what the universe is going to bring you.

Jenica: Yeah, I love that. And I completely agree with it too because oftentimes when you're in the thick of it you can't, you know, none of us have a crystal ball to see into the future. We have signs and we have like little nudges to do and try different things, but it's very hard to see until you get to a place that's a little further away and you look back and you're like "Wow, God had my back. He knew this path all along and I didn't."

I have a small example of I wanted to get this job after college and I was perfectly qualified for it. I had made it down to the final few applicants and I didn't get it. And I was really stumped as to why I hadn't gotten it. And then I ended up getting a job at a software company that ended up paying for most of our fertility treatments, which is huge.

Gretchen: Oh my gosh.

Jenica: And at the time I was, and even at the time that I applied I had no idea that I...

Gretchen: Oh, that just gave me chills.

Jenica: Yeah, it's insane. It gives me chills too because it's probably saved us like \$200,000. I mean, we didn't have to go into debt for it or anything.

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And at the time that I got the job we weren't even trying, so I wasn't even looking for infertility coverage, you know.

Gretchen: Right.

Jenica: And so I'm like, "Thank you, like you had my back and you knew that we would need it."

Gretchen: Thank you for unanswered prayers.

Jenica: Right? It's incredible. And I think that when you're open to that, then you can start to see the possibility, and like you said, relax into it a little bit. And know that like God sees your desires and he wants you to have everything that you want. But He also sends you on a path that will allow you to become this incredible human being that you wouldn't be without those experiences.

Gretchen: Yeah, it truly is about building your character, and we don't want to hear it.

Jenica: Yeah.

Gretchen: And we get frustrated, and we're like, "Lord, my character is fine, can I please just have what I want?"

Jenica: I'm good.

Gretchen: But it is so true, it really is about this journey and about Him truly building your character through that. And as I didn't realize then, it was about the journey of helping so many more people than just myself. Because, I mean, you read Pastor Rick's book, the very first words, A Purpose Driven Life is it's not about you.

And that's the thing you have to remember you guys, is half the time it's not about you. And it's hard not to feel that in that moment because it is all

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about you. You want to make it all about you, you're like, "But it is about me, I'm the one that's struggling, I'm the one that's this." And if I had that attitude every single day, I probably would have never been able to be open and surrender everything to get to the point now where I realize it really wasn't about me.

It was about this journey that I went through were so many people, thankfully, because I do have a platform, because I do have an audience that I've been able to help through this process and help advocate to people being, you know, more informed and egg freezing and all the things. It's like even if it was one person that I got to help, it makes a huge difference. But I was able to help on a much bigger scale. But I could have never understood that when I first started.

Jenica: Yes, I completely agree and the amount of joy that it now brings you and I to help other people through it since we're just a little bit ahead is so incredible. It's added so much value to my life and joy to my life and be able to connect, you know, with incredible women.

Gretchen: Right, right.

Jenica: I love it. Okay, another thing I wanted to ask you is I follow you on Instagram, obviously, and I was watching your Instagram Stories the other day. And her daughter Skylar will be two in July.

Gretchen: Yeah.

Jenica: And she does affirmations with her every day.

Gretchen: Yes.

Jenica: Will you share those? That was so precious, I loved those.

Gretchen: Thank you. So yes, so every night after our bath time routine we do this affirmation with her where we tell her she's bold, and she's beautiful,

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and she's bright and that the world is lucky to have her light. And it's so fun for us because we've been saying it since she was born. And every night we say it to her and, you know, as a little baby they don't respond. They don't, you know, anything. I mean, they do but you know you can tell they don't really know what you're saying yet, right?

Jenica: Yeah.

Gretchen: The video that we captured that night that I posted was so fun because I didn't even know Slade was even filming until like, all of a sudden, I see him there.

Jenica: Yeah.

Gretchen: And I was so grateful he captured it because it was the first time where I said repeat after me because she just had started talking. She, you know, she couldn't say beautiful very well or she couldn't say all the words very well but she was saying it. And every time after we say, "and the world is lucky to have your light." We would always go, "Yay!" And we would always just clap and cheer. And that night she just broke into the "Yay!" And like so excited about it. And I was like, "Oh my gosh." And I've had so many parents reach out to me and say, "Oh my gosh, I'm going to start doing this with my child."

Jenica: I love it.

Gretchen: And I think it is such a wonderful, beautiful thing to do with a child starting at such a young age because it instills it in them. And I even said to her last night as I said it to her, I said, "I hope you say this to yourself every day until the day you die. I hope you wake up and you look in that mirror and you say it every day and you remind yourself of this."

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And, you know, I came up with that little statement, so you can come up with whatever you want. You know you create whatever you feel like is right for your child, or your partner, or even yourself.

Jenica: Yourself, I know, I was thinking to myself that like it's such a beautiful thing. I feel like as children you don't have all of these, I don't know, influences of the world that you kind of start to get as you get older. You just simply know that you're like a loved human being.

Gretchen: Yes,

Jenica: And I love that reminder. I feel that way with my daughter Goldie where she's just so bold and so funny and she doesn't have any filters. She approaches the world being fully present with no filters and she's just perfectly happy with how she is.

And I love that Skylar was in a diaper that night. It was so cool because I'm like, "This precious little girl, her perfect little body." And I feel like, you know, and this is obviously probably another topic for a different day too. But I just feel like as women and in infertility too, you are so hard on your body and it's not good enough, and it's not working right enough. And I love that, it just made me think about how important it is to treat yourself how you would treat your future child or your current child.

Gretchen: Right.

Jenica: Because that's the love that you need to get through infertility, and you're exactly where you need to be, your body's exactly how it should be.

Gretchen: Yes. Well thank you for saying that. I mean, you bring so much more meaning to that even more so for me. And, you know, it's just been a fun little thing that we did since she was a baby.

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But you know what? You're so right. I mean, it's so true that they're not tainted by anything and it's so pure, and it's so beautiful. And it's like, they're just excited. And it's like it's so true, if only we could give ourselves some grace through, you know, all the stuff we go through.

Even today, even through right now, you know? Even yesterday I was at a birthday party and, you know, all these fancy women in Newport, they're all like dressed to the nines in their high heels, and their short skirts, and they're so skinny. And I'm just like sitting there going, "Oh my gosh, I still have like this weight to lose."

And it's like we beat ourselves up. But I'm like, "Gretchen, you created a human being. And you went through four and a half years of IVF, of pumping yourself of these hormones that probably are going to take several years to still get out of your system. So like, give yourself some grace, like don't beat yourself up because you're not perfect, or the way that the world you know, perceives you to be, or you're not skinny enough or this or whatever."

You know, and as I said, like the cellulite and all this stuff, and it's like it's frustrating because the world does teach us, you know, to be focused on all of those exterior things. But when we just take a step back, and we look at this like perfect little human, and we sit there with them we're like, "Okay, I don't care how bad my body looks, how much cellulite I have. I would give all of that up just to be with this little one."

Jenica: Yeah. And I love it, we can learn that so much from our kids too. Because at that age, like my daughter has this cute little belly, like she's not looking at her, "My belly is too big." You know what I mean?

Gretchen: I know.

Jenica: And I've actually been working with a health coach the last couple of months. And I had this like ingrained thought that I just truly believed was

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true. And it was I need to lose weight. And it's like five pounds or whatever. And all of a sudden, she questioned she's like, "Is that true?" And I really thought, "No, it's not true." And the reason why I started working with her was because I literally thought to myself, this is the one thing that's draining so much energy from me that if I had that energy back, I could help so much more women with infertility.

And every time I looked in the mirror, I would look at my thighs like, "My thighs aren't skinny enough, but I'm going to get there." And all of a sudden, I'm like, "I don't need to lose weight. Cellulite is normal and it's fine. And like if I can use that energy and take it back to help people. I genuinely feel like Satan uses ourselves against ourselves.

Gretchen: Totally.

Jenica: Because he's like, "Oh no, this is important. This is what your energy needs to be spent on." Because he knows that if I am so consumed with that, I can't serve God's purpose.

Gretchen: Yes.

Jenica: So my eyes have opened so much and I just love that we've been able to learn so much from our children. And I just like got tears when I was watching that. I was like, "You're such a good mom." And I love that you are just instilling that confidence in her right from the start and I love that they're teaching us too, things that we forgot.

Gretchen: Every day,

Jenica: What we once knew but we forgot.

Gretchen: Yes. And they say that children do that so much for people. I mean, you know, back in the day when your parents would say that and

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you were like, “Yeah, yeah, yeah.” And then you have your children, you're like, “Okay, I so get it now.”

Jenica: Yes.

Gretchen: But you're absolutely right that the devil is very good at distracting us and taking us off of our purpose. And unfortunately, because we live in a world of social media and this and that and everything's perfect and filters and all that, and by the way I'm totally guilty of all the above.

Jenica: Same, I'll put a good filter on when I need a little help.

Gretchen: Oh yeah, and it's hard because the problem is is that everybody else has the filters and then when you put yourself on there and you don't have the filter, you're like, “Wow, I look like crap compared to everybody else.” You know?

Jenica: Yeah.

Gretchen: So it's really hard but that's the thing, like there's so many days that I do look at Sky and I think to myself, “Gosh, I wouldn't want her to be tainted by those things.” You know, like I need to express to her how important it is just to love yourself for you.

So it's such a catch 22 because we live in a world where that is what it's all about and it's hard not to engage in it because everybody else is engaged in it. But yet you have this little soul and this human that you're raising to not be so sucked into all that too, and to love themselves for them and all that. So it's a hard balance, you know, and like you said this is a whole other podcast.

Jenica: Right, right, I probably could do like five podcast episodes on different topics.

Gretchen: Literally.

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Jenica: Oh my gosh. Well, okay, so I want to ask you one more thing before we sign off. What is the one thing would you say, like the one thought that brought you the most peace during infertility?

Gretchen: Let's see, the most peace. Gosh, I'm trying to think because I don't know if I ever felt a lot of peace during my infertility.

Jenica: I love that. I love that, well I love that you're honest about it because yeah, it's easier looking back on it you're like, "Okay, I'm here now so I'm fine with where I ended up."

Gretchen: Yeah, you know, I would say probably what I touched on earlier, is I think it was that moment of surrendering. That whatever was meant to be was going to be. And, you know, I wish I could materialize that emotion for people, because it is a very intangible thing to understand. Like it's really hard to grasp it because people are like, "Well, no, I surrendered. Yeah, I gave it to God."

But it's really strange, it truly is a shift in your physical being that happens when you truly surrender something. And when you truly let it go, and when you really, really, really trust that whatever is meant to be is going to happen. And I would say that was the moment of peace for me, was when I finally said maybe Slade and I are not meant to have children together biologically. And I need to focus on what I have with him.

And I needed to find a way to get my joy back and a way to get out of this depression and thinking that the only way I was ever going to be happy was if I had a biological child.

Jenica: Yeah.

Gretchen: And I think, coming out of that and finding the other things to be content about and happy about is where I found peace throughout the whole thing. And because I found that peace, I honestly feel that my body

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and my mind and everything became much more prepped, and prepared, and capable of getting to that next level and producing the good quality eggs and doing all the things that happened in those next, you know, four or five months.

Jenica: Yeah.

Gretchen: But had I not come to that place of surrender, literally guys, turn on the song I Surrender. This is what I'm talking about. And like breathe it, feel it, put it out to the universe and surrender it. And when you go through that transition, I feel like that's when you will really start to feel peace. And when you start to just learn how to be content with what you already have.

Jenica: I love that.

Gretchen: I don't know, am I explaining that right?

Jenica: Yes. Yeah, absolutely.

Gretchen: Yeah, because I remember that feeling so distinctly and I just wish I could hand it to everyone on a silver platter of how to have that feeling because it truly can be life changing.

Jenica: I love that, you totally explained it really well, too. I think that when you're in infertility oftentimes we think it's helpful to have thoughts like I shouldn't be here, or I shouldn't be experiencing this. But in reality, we see the results that we get from that, and we get very bitter and we're not happy.

Gretchen: Yes.

Jenica: And regardless, either way, whatever is supposed to happen will happen and so you might as well feel peace throughout it. I mean, you know, and that's not to say we're not going to have hard days, and we're

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not going to allow ourselves to be sad and cry. But also resisting reality is never going to get you a different reality. I was in

Gretchen: 1,000%, that's a really good like, what do you call it, metaphor.

Jenica: Yeah.

Gretchen: Whenever you call those, because that was what I was doing 24/7.

Jenica: Yeah, I was too.

Gretchen: 24/7.

Jenica: Same.

Gretchen: 24/7 and I was so caught up in that, that I just spiraled into this depression, and this sadness, and this thing. And I could not even recognize the things around me that I was so blessed to already have.

Jenica: Yeah. I love that. Okay, well Gretchen, thank you so much for your time today.

Gretchen: Of course.

Jenica: Can you tell us where we can find you? If people want to look you up and follow you, where should they go?

Gretchen: So you can find me a couple of different places. You can come to our podcast at Knot Too Taboo. We do a podcast every week there. Well, sometimes it's every two weeks because we're busy with the child. But yeah, so Knot Too Taboo podcast on all the streaming outlets. And then @GretchenRossi on all my social media handles.

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Jenica: Okay, amazing. And we will link all of those in the show notes so you guys can easily access them. Thank you so much for being here today, you're incredible.

Gretchen: Oh my gosh, thank you for having me. I talked a lot so sorry but I had a lot to say.

Jenica: No, it's beautiful, it's really valuable information. Thank you.

Gretchen: Thank you love.

Jenica: Okay, bye.

To celebrate the launch of the show I'm going to be giving away pajama and sock sets from The Slice of Sun that I have personally designed. They are the most buttery, soft, delightful things you'll ever put on your body. And I'm going to be giving away five bundles to five lucky listeners who subscribe, rate, and review the show on Apple Podcasts. It doesn't have to be a five-star review, although I sure hope you love the show. I genuinely want your honest feedback so I can create an awesome show that provides tons of value to you who are experiencing infertility.

Visit thesliceofsun.com/podcastlaunch to learn more about the contest and how to enter and I'll be announcing the winners on the show in an upcoming episode.

Thank you for listening to *Fearless Infertility*. If you want more tools and resources to help you during your infertility experience visit thesliceofsun.com. See you next week.