

## "One woman's journey to Hope Restored"



### **My Story... Becoming a Mother Via Egg Donation**

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By: Anonymous

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By the time I turned 30 I had lived many lives. I was married, separated, divorced, lost, gained and lost 100 pounds and had met the second man I was to eventually marry, but this time for good. It took him a while to do the marriage thing, and one of the driving forces was how much we both really wanted a family. We never talked about how many or how to space them or whether we wanted boys or girls, just the general, we want a kid type of thing. My husband is an only child and adored being the one and only in his family. I, on the other hand, perceive only children as extremely loving souls, but slightly selfish and anti-social. (Remember, I live with my husband). I was relatively young when we finally married, 35, and my husband was 38. We didn't wait long to "try" for a family (why wait - we had partied for over a decade), and I found myself not using precautions a few months later....but to no avail.

My menstruation cycles were always like clockwork. I was not even 36 and I knew physically and emotionally, I was a fertile woman. I asked my husband to have the "man" test, just to quiet my silent anxiety. To our total astonishment and disbelief, the results of his tests came back extremely low....like in, off the charts below normal in the areas of sperm count and motility (movement). The doctors called it "severe male factor," not just male factor, but severe male factor. I could not get the words out of my mind.

Fortunately, I am a mover and shaker. I wanted a child and badly, so we moved very quickly to the offices of a private reproductive endocrinologist (RE). (In addition, my husband did everything and anything to participate - boxer shorts, less exercise, no saunas and nightly ice packs). We are fortunate to live in an urban city with many RE's and many well renowned clinics and medical centers. We chose a private physician partly because he took our insurance and partly because we had no hint that a simple insemination (IUI) would not work. Actually we were convinced that after a couple of months of IUI's, we would be pregnant. The RE was extremely reassuring and kept us coming back and back and back. We saw him as patients over a two year period with no pregnancies, not even a chemical pregnancy, nothing, nada, zero, zilch. After over a year of IUI's, (actually this was clinically "too" long a time for low motility), sometimes mixing in sperm donor, we moved on to in vitro fertilization (IVF).

I was on every kind of pharmaceutical drug combination, from Clomid to Metrodin to Pergonal and every combo thereof. The first IVF, with Lupron (a drug to suppress your system), shut me down so much, that it killed all my eggs. The second IVF, without Lupron, yielded about 8 eggs, 2 of which fertilized (extremely low fertilization results) and these embryos were transferred to my uterus. Hopes were extremely high, but no pregnancy.

IVF's three and four were relatively the same. Finally we were told, in addition to male factor we have low fertilization results and I am a low egg producer for someone my age. We were out of our minds. I was drinking in between IVF's, my husband was despondent and distraught. We were fighting constantly and I even had an affair one summer to try and get pregnant and tell my husband that it was a miracle. Our marriage was extremely tense and I thought I wanted a divorce. We both weren't interested in sex....why bother? I cried every month at that time of the month and walked around depressed, like why bother living? Why was God doing this to us?

With some guidance from friends and talking to people in the field of infertility, we eventually left the private RE for a very well-known facility. After spending a year on the waiting list when we were called for our first IVF, we were delirious with excitement. One thing about infertility....it will keep your mood changing like a rollercoaster and will either bring your marriage closer together or push you further apart. We went to the new facility for that infamous third day sonogram in preparation for our IVF cycle.

I was told that an ovarian cyst I had developed from the years of fertility medications had grown quite large and for optimal IVF success I would need a laparoscopy. The new physician who was treating us was and is extremely well known in the field of infertility and we unequivocally trusted him. He really wanted us to be pregnant. In addition, we had come by the information that the old RE had a less than adequate embryologist and with my husband's sperm count, we needed the best. Fortunately, by now Jacques Cohen had developed a procedure called ICSI, where they insert the sperm directly into the egg, rather than insertion into the outer layer of the egg. With

this new procedure, combined with the trust we had for our new RE and the cyst removed, we were beyond convinced that a baby was in our near future.

Armed and ready for our first IVF at this medical center, we received a phone call from our new RE informing us that he was moving to another large medical center to head their infertility program. We had a choice to stay with a great program or go with another great program and we left with our doctor. In October we had our first IVF; four eggs, four fertilized, 100% fertilization rate, excellent "looking" embryos.....twelve days later, a chemical pregnancy, a nothing; a number a bit above 5 where they had to say I was pregnant, but I was not. We were grief stricken and panicked. Emotionally and financially, we were weary and drained.

One innocent day our beloved doctor sat down with us and mentioned egg donation. What? Just like that. I almost fainted. I wasn't a candidate for egg donation! I WAS 39 with a 6.5 FSH! THIS WAS SEVERE MALE FACTOR! I could not believe what I was hearing. Egg donation? This is for older women, rich women, high FSH women, not me. We only had one IVF with the miracle doctor! What was he saying? We were here for male factor, MALE FACTOR! What was going on? The voices were screaming in my head. The anxiety in my heart was beyond belief. I can feel the palpitations and relive them now as I write to you. The shame, the guilt, the WHY me, what happened, how could this be? We trusted this man and he wants us to go to egg donation?

A few days later, after I calmed down, I went to see the doctor privately for a consult. Basically, it went like this. He said he could do IVF's on me for another few years, a few IVF's per year, estimate \$10,000 a treatment plus medications, to find that good egg; the egg that apparently was not coming to the surface for some unknown reason. Yes, the egg was probably there, but what was more important to me, being a parent or holding on to this finding the good egg theory? If I had thousands and thousands of dollars in the bank, and was in a better emotional place, he would keep us coming back and back, IVF after IVF, shots after shots, but when do you move on? When does having a family and loving and nurturing become more important than something the size of a pinhead? When is enough enough? I was, after all, a "low" producer, and this was not desirable, especially for IVF and especially for ICSI. Also, I had a "history" of a few failed IVF's (even though we do not like to include the years with the private RE). So, now we were considered male and female factor and we were in this "life" for four years. Four long years of trying and praying and crying and making deals with God. Many many of our friends had dated, gotten engaged, gotten married and had children since we started this process. We were disgusted by the entire scenario.

As a team, we decided to put our name on the donor egg waiting list and to try one more IVF with my own eggs. If it did not work, at least we would not have to wait long because our name would have been on the list. (Waiting lists for egg donation can be a year or more). I cannot even put words to paper the feelings going through me that March when we did our next IVF procedure. If this did not work, we would be "giving up" my genes, my eyes, my sensitivity, my generosity, my sense of humor,

my loving heart. As you have probably summarized, the procedure did not work. Again we had four eggs and one hundred percent fertilization, but no pregnancy, and these years of struggle now became our version of "enough is enough."

I spent the next few months getting used to the idea that someone else would be a part of my becoming pregnant. I was not even 40 and there was this faceless, nameless, generous soul who was going to contribute to me having a family. But what I did know right away, was this woman would not be a part of my "family." She would be an anonymous, ambiguous figure contributing a mere seed to my pregnancy. My husband and I believe one hundred percent in this technique being anonymous, like the proven success in decades and decades of sperm donation. The medical center we chose believed the same thing.

What seemed like an eternity went by, which in reality was only a few months. We received the phone call we were anxiously awaiting. The clinic had a match. Just like that. A beautiful, young girl, with my eyes, a mother of two, who had successfully donated two times before (the limit is three times). A student, who came from a large family, with an untouched medical history, (ironically, my genetic history is riddled with cancer, heart disease, diabetes and smoking!) with talents for music and art and the law. I was exhilarated and overwhelmed. There was, of course, one downfall....my husband wanted her to be taller! What followed was another rollercoaster of events: the Lupron, the synchronization of cycles, the possible other recipient (which never came to fruition), the fertility drugs, the stimulation, the phone calls, how many eggs?, HOW MANY?, the disappointments, the quality of the embryos and then of course, the transfer day. After all was said and done, our donor produced eleven eggs. We were devastated because when you go through a process like this, you really want some frozen embryos, if the fresh IVF is unsuccessful. We knew the odds of success and we had never had a frozen cycle with my eggs.

Sunday morning we went to our facility for the transfer. Of the eleven, only eight embryos had quality fertilization results and only five were transferable; three had to be discarded. Again, we had one chance. (Of course this time, the eggs were 25 years old instead of 40 years old). I remember the wonderful physician who performed the transfer. She was loving and sensitive and she cried with us when we received the news of no frozen embryos. She really wanted us to be pregnant and she trembled during the transfer. It took 30 minutes; a procedure that usually takes five minutes.

Twelve days later, (the most stressful 12 days of my life), as I was in the middle of a job change, I received the phone call. Congratulations! I was pregnant! I cried. My husband cried. My numbers were high and they said we had a chance of having multiples, but would know better when they did my second beta test. If the number more than doubled every 48 hours, we had a good chance. It did. The week six sonogram showed two beating hearts! TWO, not one. We were out of our minds with excitement. TWINS! Our dreams had come true.

How can I possibly come close to describing the rest of this story. At week 20, during the level two sonogram, we found out we were having a boy and a girl, Baby A and

Baby B. During the nine months or so that I was pregnant, I truly bonded with my children and they became mine, no matter how they got there. I took implausible care of myself and delivered my twins in the 38th week, which is remarkable for a twin pregnancy in an "older" woman. All I could think about was what would they look like and of course, if they would be healthy.

Today, many months later, A and B are my life. Every minute I spend with them is a joy. They complete me. Yes, they especially look like my husband, at least to me, but no one else seems to think so. I am told B has my eyes and is my image, and A has the shape of my face. The smiley faces they have when I walk into the room are priceless. They adore me. We are a family. As I write this, I cannot wait to get home to see them.

My husband and I made the choice not to involve anyone (except my best friend and some cyber buddies) in our decision, which is why this article is anonymous. Today, months later, we are extremely grateful we did not tell anyone. People just cannot understand until they actually walk in your shoes and we did not want anything about our children to be related to an "anonymous" person. We believe our children should know first and just pray that they are regular, normal kids.

I have gone through periods when I wonder, "Who are these children? They are strangers. They will never look like me or have my laugh or mannerisms. I sometimes have glimmers of regret because I could have searched for that good egg that I am convinced is inside of me. But does it truly matter? Did I really "give something up," or have the courage and the mental health to "move on?" Was and is the glass half empty or half full? These thoughts come from my head and not my heart because I believe in God and believe God speaks through people and believe your children chose you. Therefore, God invented the process of donor egg and these were the two children I was meant to have. Being there when your children are sick, when they fall and cry, when they need you and when no else is there, is truly what parenting is all about. And they will have my sensitivity, my generosity, my sense of humor and my loving heart because they will learn it from me. I am eternally blessed and grateful.

