

Karen's Journey

Hi!

I'm 58 and I am a daughter, sister, friend, radiographer, wife and mother. The journey to become a mother was, however, the longest and most difficult of all to achieve!

I was married at 29 and within 6 months found out that my husband had a low sperm count. We were told that if we wanted a family, it would most likely only be by using donated sperm!

So began my journey to achieve a family, not realising just how long, difficult and heart-wrenching it would be.

First I did artificial insemination with my husbands' sperm while waiting to trial the new ICSI (Intracytoplasmic Sperm Injection) program. This didn't work so eventually we decided to use donated sperm. I did a few inseminations, but still no success.

Next I moved on to IVF using donor sperm. Still no success and after a few tries I was informed that I was going through premature menopause! Now what?

Donor sperm and donor eggs were the only options. So each month I would ring the clinic to see if any suitable egg donors were available and eventually after a year, I was offered the use of donated embryos. We were to be the first to be offered this at the clinic. We jumped at the opportunity.

I did one procedure with two frozen embryos and got pregnant but miscarried after a few weeks. About three months later I had another try with two more frozen embryos from the same donors as before and I became pregnant with twins. Thirty-seven weeks later I gave birth to twin girls, Rebecca and Sarah, incredibly beautiful and perfect. Finally, after nine and half years, I achieved my family. Then five years later I tried again with a frozen embryo that was from different donors from the girls. I had a beautiful, handsome and

perfect boy, William. How lucky was I!

There have been many issues that I have had to deal with over the years. First, dealing with the loss of conceiving and having a child naturally. Then eventually dealing with the concept of using donated gametes and the consequences of a child conceived with donated gametes. Many questions followed. 'How would I feel pregnant with another man who I had not even met? How does my husband truly feel? Will he accept the child when it is born? Will I? Will I love this child? Will he? Will my extended family love this child? Do they use 'ugly donors'?' Yes, you do wonder! Luckily I had counselling and my husband's full support.

When my girls were born - and ever since - there has never been any hesitation or doubt about my love for them. My husband once said, 'It was not our ideal way of conceiving our children but they are our ideal children'.

Once we decided to use donated gametes, there was never any hesitation in telling our children about their conception and how we became our family. Back when the girls were born, there were no sources of information, no books, as this had not happened before. Counselling was important, but did not have all the answers. I wanted information, but sadly, there was none. Plenty of books involved conception from donor sperm or eggs but none from donor embryos were available. So I have been very careful and thoughtful of the language I use to describe any process or feelings to the kids.

I began when they were babes in my arms telling them how lucky I was to have them and how lots of special and clever people helped me to have them. As they grew older, if there was anything on TV or the news I would use the opportunity to talk about IVF and using donors. I always talked openly and honestly. I told them stories at bedtime. Eventually they made up their own stories of how our family all came about! They loved it! Often the questions were asked in the car trip home after school.

A big challenge was to get the kids to understand the role of their

donors. Especially with the girls' donors, we know that it is most unlikely that they will never meet. But with Will, as he was born in 1999, he has the knowledge that he can meet them one day. I believe he will. I have had contact with Will's donors before and after his birth through letters and cards - even photographs have been exchanged. He has just recently viewed these pictures and wants to send a letter to them, too. (Will is now 13.)

So I have had to deal with some different issues with the girls. It is a never-ending process but thankfully I began this when they were babies. There have been many 'dress rehearsals' for explaining different processes of their conception.

I can honestly say I have had no negative experiences from having my children by donated embryos, only positive. There have been anxieties along the way - such as how will I explain different issues to them and to other people - but so far I have managed to get there.

I have always been open and I believe possibly because I am so accepting and truly joyful and loving of all my children, that maybe people can absorb this and take it all in more easily. I remember when my husband and I finally decided to use donated gametes, we did so knowing we were ready to have our children conceived this way even if no-one approved. Luckily they all did!

I wish you all well for your journey ahead wherever it takes you!