

Donor Siblings, and a New Kind of Family

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As we swelter toward July 4th and traditional family gatherings, I find myself contemplating the meaning of the very new, and very non-traditional, type of extended family that has dropped into my life.

Last month I posted eight words to the Donor Sibling Registry, a Web site that helps form connections among the children conceived by sperm, egg or embryo donations. *Girl born October 2008. Boy born May 2010.* I was required to enter one other key piece of information: the name of the sperm bank and ID number of the donor that we used to conceive our children. The match popped up instantly from my simple query, like a book in an online library catalog.

Two messages awaited me when I logged onto the Web site the following morning. Janedog in Canada has one child and wants to make a connection. Tripk6 has two children. They live on the West Coast. The three children are all born from the same donor that we used. “Doesn’t he make beautiful babies?” asked Tripk6 rhetorically.

I had been lurking on the site for a couple of years, while our children evolved from inert newborns into interesting toddlers. From a safe distance I watched as mothers announced new donor siblings. *Girl born September 2010. Boy born May 2011.* The mothers were bravely extending a digital hand, hoping to connect with people they had never met who have offspring biologically related to theirs. I was curious. I was afraid. But most of all I simply didn’t know if I was ready to acknowledge the connection.

I had also wanted to feel ordinary for a little while longer. The two years

spent trying to conceive our daughter entailed dozens of inseminations, three in vitro fertilization cycles, one miscarriage, and too many fertility drugs. Finally pregnant, I reveled in being like everyone else after my long stint on the sidelines. Once our daughter arrived the game continued. I was on the mommy team and no longer felt like the awkward girl hoping to be picked. For at least a few years, I wouldn't have to think about how to start telling her that she's donor-conceived. That bridge would be crossed once I'd had my bit of normal.

My daughter and I started reading a new book earlier this year. I remained a passive observer on the registry site, but it was our first step onto the bridge. "My Story," by the Britain-based Donor Conception Network, is a series written for young donor-conceived children in simple, direct, and age appropriate language and pictures.

Our version explains that a baby grows when a sperm meets an egg, but that when a daddy's sperm cannot meet a mommy's egg, some kind men give their sperm so that the mommy and daddy can have a baby. It's not quite Goodnight Moon, but this is going to be our children's reality, and I want them to feel normal. Armed with the bittersweet recognition that it was time to leave our old normal and embrace our future normal, I knew it was time to post our eight words. *Girl born October 2008. Boy born May 2010.*

Underlying those eight words are a sassy, smart and eccentric girl, and a loving, flirtatious and giggly boy. Within a week I was part of a private Facebook group and I quickly discovered that *Girl born September 2010* is a sweet, inquisitive spitfire. *Boy born May 2011* never stops moving while awake, and is so very cuddly. I also found a dozen women who are funny, engaging, and besotted with their children, who they refer to as "diblings".

Wendy Kramer, one of the founders of the Donor Sibling Registry, told me that people come to this in their own time, and in their own way. Still, I felt like a bit of an idiot. I'd quietly tortured myself for over three years, wondering who these people are and what their children look like, but too spooked to find out. The sinister feeling had grown stronger the longer I lurked. But the mothers are women I'd like to have a drink with. I'm already as curious about them as I am about the diblings. I felt like I'd been peering into a house through a gap in the

window curtain, then once I finally turned the handle the door was flung wide open by the warmest welcoming committee.

This is all still very new, and I don't know what it all means for my family. But I know that our lives just irrevocably changed. Our children will not grow up knowing their biological father, but they will have the opportunity to be in contact with a number of children who share half of their genetic heritage, and for that I'm glad.

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