

The night I decided to tell my father, he and I were sitting alone, side by side, in a fine Italian restaurant waiting for more family to arrive for dinner.

"Dad, Kent and I have decided we want to raise a family. We're gonna have kids."

Dad stared at his whiskey as he put it down, and carefully wiped his mouth with a cloth napkin. When my father had something important to say, he was very deliberate. I recognized it was one of these moments when he turned to face me.

"Son, do you have any idea what you're doing?" he asked slowly.

"Of course we do. Kent and I have spent a lot of time talking about it," I nervously huffed.

It's now seven years later, and, in the meantime, my husband and I have had three children – 5 year old twins and a 2-year old. Looking back, my dad was right; we had no idea. And I'm not really talking about raising the kids themselves, but just getting there. We had to set up and navigate relationships with the agent who would find our egg donor, the woman who donated eggs for us, a surrogacy agency, the two women who carried our three kids to term, and a flock of legal and medical professionals who circled us in turn. The "What to Expect When....." books don't have a title about egg donation and surrogacy. There were so many small decisions that added up to enormous effect. We went through these journeys, and the relationships they spawned, with virtually no guidance.

I am an avid advocate of same-sex parenting. However, I'm not intellectually complacent about how our family was built. I feel I owe it to our kids to be reflective about what we've gone through and what it means for them. The folks at Donor Sibling Registry seem to resist easy answers, too, lauding and respecting the beauty of all kinds of families, but not being naïve about the challenges of third party reproduction issues. The muddle of contentious issues involved may not always be comfortable, but it is where real families live, and where you can craft practical solutions that work to support emotionally healthy families, for now and in the future.

I came out as gay a very long time ago, so can remember the time when a gay man, unless he was divorced or in a certain kind of arrangement with his lesbian friends, lost his chance at being a parent by being out. I'm proud of and astounded by how much has changed since those days. I want same-sex families to become even healthier, stronger and more durable. One of the ways I hope to help is to talk about family creation choices and what's at stake for everyone who participates.

Many surrogacy agencies and fertility clinics allay parental anxiety about the donation process by encouraging intended parents to think of donors simply as altruistic people we should buffer ourselves from, as much as possible. It's easy to feel completely beholden to those helping professionals because they're experienced, usually very compassionate, and they hold an important key to the families we are struggling to build. Advocating any change to their process feels like ignoring a doctor's advice. As we perused the first set of donor profiles sent to us by a local attorney, I was aware of the expectation that we steer towards a coldly functional separation.

How one should treat other people is very high on the list of what we hope to teach our kids. As they've gotten older, and their birth story starts to become something they can grasp, I've become resistant to the notion of portraying our donor (and surrogates) to our children as having been just really really nice service providers. I feel an enormous sense of gratitude towards these women. I also feel some palpable responsibility to not reduce their place in our family's history to a footnote, especially as a means to reduce the complexity of our kids' origins to something neat and cozy, whether for them or anyone else. I don't know how our children will feel about their birth story when they grow up, but it seems insane to presume that they'll take no interest in any of the women who were instrumental in their birth. I want to model a behavior for our kids, where they see in the stance we take towards our donor and surrogates a literal reflection of the values about relationships that we tell them we're teaching them.

Our society is at the forefront of a revolution in human reproduction. I'm sure that one day experience and research will deliver a knowledge base about donor conception for intended parents to access and use, one that isn't available today. Until then, those of us who are pioneers in this area have a job to do, as best we can.

Donor-conceived children who know the circumstances of their birth will inevitably become aware growing up that their biological linkages have a different quality from most of their peers and even from others in their family. Our job as their parents is to reflect on questions that in many ways are similar to those of all other parents: What is the best way to help my children along the path of discovering their own sacred story? What will help them build the identity that their conception story will then be a key part of? What will support them in embracing this identity as part of their path to becoming emotionally healthy adults?

If we do our job well, we might also be helping future parents of donor-conceived children to feel more confident when they ask *themselves*, "do I have any idea what I'm doing?"