

One LGBT Parent's Story (Continued)

Fast forward to the gaybee boom, and the explosion of gays and lesbians over the last 10-15 years or so who have decided to make babies, many by anonymous donor insemination. And now in the new millennium, we have the creation of websites where you can, via cyberspace, locate and then contact other gay and lesbian parents who share the same donor. We are entering completely new territory here, and this could mean our definition of family in the queer world is expanding even further.

When our oldest daughter was just a few months old, we met another donor family in the Bay Area by a set of Seinfeld-esque coincidences that could probably land us on Oprah some day. That was 11 years ago, and we still are unsure about what our children should call each other. Biologically they are half brother and sisters, yet is this really the same as half siblings created by parents who knowingly enter into new relationships after divorce or separation and create new children with new partners?

The difference here is that the biological parent is an anonymous sperm donor we may never even know, and our children are thus connected solely by this unknown person's genes. Perhaps this distinction should not matter, and genetic make-up is significant regardless of how it is transmitted. For some, biology is not what makes children brothers and sisters, but rather it is primarily about growing up together as part of a family.

Other interesting issues may surface. For example when the kids were younger, our donor family had not yet told their children how they were related to our children. My partner and I felt strongly that our children had the right to know, and we wanted them to know from very early on. So during this time period, it was a little awkward when getting together and having to try and avoid mentioning the donor relationship.

Those who come from adopted families, whether gay or straight, and those who were conceived through other alternative reproductive technologies, may share similar experiences when they seek out and find their bio-parents or perhaps uncover previously unknown bio-siblings. They may also experience challenges in terms of the myriad of ways involved in defining and maintaining these relationships.

We try and get together with our Bay Area donor family once or twice a year, and we always have a really fun time. We have all embraced the term 'donor family' to describe this family relationship. In some respects, while our get-togethers mirror a social gathering we might share with other two-mom families, there is something that feels different and special because of the donor relationship that our children share.

Recently we learned of a website called donorsiblingregistry.com, whereby one can, after paying a registration fee, search for parents who used the same sperm donor to conceive children. In doing so we found two more donor families, one in Rhode Island with a girl the same age as our older daughter, and another in Germany with a 12-year old son.

We were all really happy and excited to meet each other through e-mail, exchange photos, and even converse online with a webcam. Fortunately, we hit it off with both families. Two months following our first virtual encounter, we met our Rhode Island donor family in person when they came to San Francisco for a vacation. By that time, our daughters had gotten to be good friends online via instant messaging, and were calling each other half-sisters.

Our meeting this past March was like a beautiful dream. Our two daughters and their east coast half-sister melded together like peanut butter and jelly. There was something indescribably wonderful about watching half-sisters get to know each other in person for the first time, and really enjoying each other and their special bond. They had so much trouble saying good-bye that we extended the stay by having a sleepover that night. If it was up to the girls, they would have extended the visit even further.

Our definition of family has most definitely expanded. Since we are treading on new territory, it's still hard to know what to call these new relationships, but we know that it goes beyond friendship and leans more in the direction of family. Our kids will likely know each other for life in the same way that families do.

There is also something special about this type of relationship because it is the only connection we have to our children's biological other half. For some parents this might not be important, but for us and our children, it has been meaningful. Of course it's fun for us parents to compare behavioral traits and physical characteristics. We decided that the donor must have some wicked dimples, since all the children share this endearing facial feature. Naturally, we tend to blame any negative behavioral qualities on the donor.

So what happens if the parents do not like each other or just don't have much in common other than the donor, or the donor children just don't bond at all? Is it important to maintain a connection like it is with one's family of origin? For some it may feel like a burden or a forced relationship, and for this reason, there may be some parents who choose not to seek out this connection with other donor families.

We feel lucky that we really like all three of our donor families. For us it has been an exciting adventure into uncharted waters, and we are enjoying creating a new sense of family. As they grow to be adults, our children will be able to decide for themselves how they want to define these relationships, and to what extent they want to maintain this family bond with their half bio-siblings.

And as gay families continue to evolve, our rainbow flag has the potential to get brighter and brighter."