

My name is _____ and I live in Brisbane. I became an official IVF patient in 1997 when I became a patient of _____ of the Queensland Fertility Group. I say official because prior to 1997 I had spent around 5 years trying various natural methods to start my family and in 1996 I underwent the first of many exploratory surgeries in an effort to determine why I had not been successful.

My quest – and yes it’s been a quest – to have a family took on official status in March 1997 and ended in December 2000 when I gave birth to my son, _____, who is now aged nine. On my 12th IVF try _____ came into being as a result of a donated embryo from another infertile couple, also patients of the Queensland Fertility Group. Embryos are donated by couples or individuals after they have been successful with their own treatment or have decided to discontinue treatment. At that time they were allocated to deserving IVF couples at the doctor’s discretion – usually because there was no other way of them achieving a pregnancy.

As he is the result of an embryo donation _____ has no genetic connection to either my husband or myself. It also means that he has a genetic family out there somewhere which I believe includes at least two full siblings although I don’t know this officially because all records are confidential.

Ironically, after my very next IVF attempt 15 months later, using a donated egg fertilised by my husband, I gave birth to my daughter, _____ who is now eight. Since that time we have been busy raising our family and dealing with all the regular issues that families are confronted with these days. Lots of joy, lots of work, lots of money (outgoing!) and a great sense of accomplishment and reward.

Our children are very much loved and treasured and without the enrichment that they have given us I imagine our lives would have turned out very differently. We have never made a secret of the way they were conceived and talk often about the fact that “mummy didn’t have the bit she needed in order to have you but _____ knew another Mum who had spares which she wanted to give to me”. My son does not yet fully understand that he is a donated embryo baby and not fathered by his Dad though I talk about him being a “ready made” spec that _____ placed inside me to see if he would grow. Their grandmother has also made them both little books explaining in simple terms about their conception. It’s certainly no secret and some of the books including “Sometimes It Takes Three to Make a Baby” have helped me share with them how they came about.

Unless you know at the outset that you will be unable to use your own genetic material in order to conceive a child (such as being sterile through cancer treatment or needing a sperm donor because you know your partner cannot father a child etc.) you don’t set out in your IVF treatment to seek donor material. In our case we evolved over many years before we even felt able to consider the possibility. Getting donor eggs involves a long wait unless you know someone (like a sister or close friend) who would be willing to donate to you. Accessing donor embryos is even harder – they are like gold – because IVF patients with spare embryos left over after they have finished treatment don’t want to destroy them, don’t want to donate them and don’t want to use them. That is a big ethical and emotional issue in itself.

In my case the paperwork completed by the donor embryo family was different to that completed by the altruistic egg donor. This created an anomaly in the process when it came to seeking non identifying information about the donors I used. The egg donor donated altruistically because she wanted to help an infertile couple but donated on the basis that she didn’t want to know the outcome e.g. she didn’t want to know if any pregnancies or babies came

about. QFG have advised me they will not go against her wishes and declined my request to forward an annual letter on behalf of

With the embryo donors, QFG tried very hard to fix up the anomaly in the paperwork (relating to agreeing to future contact with any off spring created) and were verbally told many times that it was on its way back. The paperwork was never returned despite repeated follow ups and it is my understanding that around that time the couple separated. QFG have subsequently lost complete track of their whereabouts and they believe that the female partner could be living overseas.

The fact that I used donor material to achieve my family is not in question. Nor is the fact that I knew the arrangements at the outset and agreed to them i.e. that the egg donor wasn't in agreement with future contact. I didn't actually know at the time of being pregnant with my son that the embryo donors had not answered that question.

I am concerned that the rules surrounding what you can and can't expect to achieve on behalf of your children who happen, through no fault of their own, to be conceived using donated genetic material differ so much around Australia. I am concerned that because my children were born in 2000 and 2002 that they fall through the cracks and don't fit into any current local or federal legislation. I am concerned too that the responsibility to keep in touch with donors rests with the fertility clinics themselves, in Queensland anyway.

Before you are accepted to be recipients of donor material you are given extensively counselling and have every opportunity to ask all manner of questions and raise concerns. I did all of this willingly and extensively but of course there was an overwhelming emotional desire lurking around me the entire time – I knew at that stage after many years of unsuccessful treatment and invasive exploratory surgery that using donor material was my only chance of ever being able to have a child. In a vulnerable position you tend to believe what you want to believe and accept what you are told. I never thought for a second that the whereabouts of my donors wouldn't be available and I never thought that my request to send an annual letter or card to my donors on behalf of the child they helped create would be denied. You are just not in that space at the time as you move forward with the faint hope that your last chance may, just may, result in a pregnancy which you may be able to hold onto long enough to deliver a healthy child.

To me, maybe because I carried both my babies for nine months before giving birth to them, the fact that donor material was used to help them come into being just means they are all the more precious. To me it is very similar to adoption except that I adopted an embryo then an egg from donors who were happy to help me even though they didn't actually know who I was. The issue of my children potentially wanting to know about their genetic lines is, to me, the same as for those adopted. Some people are curious about it and others aren't. I simply want to be able to offer my children the opportunity should they want it and currently I am unable to do so.

I have the utmost respect for _____ and all the staff at Queensland Fertility Group in Brisbane because without their combined expertise and access to some quite brilliant scientists I would not be revelling in being called Mum every day of my life.

I am concerned for the rights of my children, however, and I will fight very hard to offer them what I think is their right and not a privilege. It is not fair that these rights differ from one State to another. It is not fair that because of the year they were born they miss out on the gains that some States have already made with regard to arranging future contact with donors.

There is of course the other side to consider. I am writing as if it is all about my children wanting to know more. The donors could also, at any point, want to find out more too and that is something that I would need to prepare myself and most importantly my children for. I accept this may well be part of any legislation - if one is indeed formed, tabled and passed.

It took me until I was 43 to become a mother. Not the plan I had when my husband and I married 18 years before that. I wouldn't have planned to have two children only 15 months apart either but I will be eternally grateful to _____, QFG and of course the donors of the genetic material that I so desperately needed to create the family I desperately wanted.

My story is probably not unique from other submissions you have been reading. This is an abridged version as all the events that occurred, the disappointments, the heartbreak and the tears that were shed can't be condensed to a few typed pages. The passion, tenacity, focus and dedication that I harnessed in order to achieve my family is something that I know I have within me. And it is also something that I believe I will draw on again for the very issue you are now grappling with. For this reason, I respectfully request the opportunity to address the Inquiry in order to fill in the gaps and put a very human interface into why anyone would knowingly use donor material to create their family then turn around down the track and want to change the rules. I am that person.

I can be contacted on email _____ or mobile _____ and I thank you for your time in reading my submission.

Respectfully