



VARTA

Victorian Assisted Reproductive
Treatment Authority

VARTA's Twilight Seminar "How are you going? - Experiences of donor-conception", held April 2013

There is nothing to be feared

At the seminar Riley talked about his experience of being donor conceived. For as long as Riley can remember he has known about his conception.

Riley met with his donor for the first time five years ago. Now, aged 23, Riley shares his upbeat view on being a donor-conceived person.

Transcript: Riley, donor-conceived person

Hi everyone, my name is Riley. I can, I know what you are up to, I know what you are up to with this whole thing, you have got a very clear agenda here. I am on the complete opposite spectrum of the other two people you have heard talk.

The first thing people ask when they find out that I was donor conceived which is something that you don't have to know very much about me to find out. I am very open about the fact that that is a part of my life. If you ask when did you find out and I am unable to answer that question obviously because I don't know. As soon as I was old enough to start asking questions about my conception I would imagine around the age of two or three, my parents told me. That generally, in most settings this is how babies are made but in our, situation we needed assistance from someone, we needed a man to come and do a kind thing to help you get here.

And it is such an alien concept to a three year old. I remember being, having my brother ask the same question, he is two, three years younger than me. I was six when he was being told the same thing I was like this is beyond the realm of understanding, I was like, sure, sure, if this is how it works that's fine, I will go with it. But I mean as a child it is the sort of thing that, it just, the significance of it didn't really hit me particularly hard and even now standing here as a 23 year old, it has never really mattered. Honestly the fact that I have been donor conceived, I understand that I am one of a very privileged few of people who are sort of my age and beyond, and the way that these attitudes and principles that were at work when you guys were, like, sort of being saved up was very different. And attitudes have changed now, definitely for the better.

But I guess I understand that I am very lucky and very privileged to be in the position that I am in now and to be able to stand here and say to you very honestly that it has never ever, ever, been an issue for me, the fact that I have been donor-conceived. I have never been ashamed of it, it has never; I have never questioned my parents legitimacy. I have never looked at my dad and said he is not my father, I mean I have said it for a range of other reasons, I have questioned his legitimacy as my father for every other reason on earth. But the fact that there is no biological link between he and I, is irrelevant.

And it is very interesting hearing stories from Louise and saying, her saying things like, her sister came from a different donor, I have a brother and a sister and they are both from different donors, there are three different donors in my family and, it is completely irrelevant. It has never been a cause for disconnect or concern or anything else like that. You had to use, this is the other big issue, Ross had to use the word social father, the biggest difficulty, the most enormous difficulty that I have with this whole realm is that I'm in a culture. Sitting

here tonight is my biological father and one of my biological sisters. And I don't like using those words because they, there is an enormous level of implication there.

In the room tonight is a man who was kind enough to put spunk into a jar many years ago and help me get here. And I am enormously appreciative of the kindness this man showed many years ago and enormously appreciative of the relationship we have developed since meeting him nearly 5 years ago now. But having said that he is not my dad, I have one dad, he yelled at me when I was in trouble, he paid my school fees, he put dinner in front of me on the table. That is fatherhood as far as I am concerned. We hated each other at many points in our lives. We had all the butting of heads that happens between a teenage male and his father but that is so much more important than something as arbitrary as being related to someone.

Having said that I am enormously appreciative of the relationships I have with people, to whom I am biologically related to in this thing. And I will tell you what, for parents who are concerned about their offspring pursuing relationships with the persons they are biologically related to later in life, in anyway undermines or de legitimises their role as a parent. You are dreaming; you are having a laugh.

When I saw my biological father I was not looking for a replacement, I was not looking for a second father, I was not looking for anything other than an interest, more than anything else I wanted to see if we had the same colour of eyes, which we do. You know, I wanted to see what we did or what we didn't have in common. The things that I got from my dad, the things that I got from my donor, it is just, it has been a very interesting and a very rewarding journey.

I can't stand up here and say that this has ever been a cause to consternation in my life. Unfortunately my sister was bullied relentlessly at school, which is absolutely fowl and whereas people talking to her about growing up with someone who isn't her real father and these attitudes are, these are primordial, like cavemen attitudes to have. And obviously we are well on the way to getting rid of.

There is nothing, it is very easy for me to say this and I don't mean any disrespect for the people who have toiled through all sorts of conflict and strife in their lives. There is nothing bad about this process. There is nothing to be feared as a result of this way of having a life come into being. And it especially now, especially now with these attitudes in this decade or however you want to put it.

I came from parents who I think have shown enormous foresight and wisdom in deciding to tell all three of us from the very beginning. And it is incredible to see the difference in attitude that I have with my brother and sister. My brother has absolutely no interest in meeting his donor and never wants to. You know, I have spoken to him and said, you know, time is running out. And he is just like, he doesn't want to. My sister is still undecided, but it is not a big thing, it is not a big deal, and it isn't going to be a big deal unless you make it.

The easiest way to make sure it does not stuff up for you is to not tell people and to not be honest about it and to not. If you treat it as though it is something to be ashamed of that will, that is how it will be viewed by the people you are raising. And my parents showed, as I said, enormous wisdom. And I still cannot get them to come and impart this wisdom to you, I am acting here by proxy to tell you that openness and honesty is the key to this sort of thing without freaking you out.

I don't mean to disparage or take anything away from the people who have bled and sweat and cried over these issues because they can be terrible but I was very fortunate to come from a family in which these things were treated with an enormous level of openness and honesty and as a result I am able to stand here in front of you today and say that this is a journey that, above all else is just an interesting little twist in the journey of life that we are all a part of.

So big sign off, here we go, I have got to condense it all into one thing. Do it, don't be worried about it. It is fine.

Thank you very much for listening to me.

The End

For more information on donor-conception, contact Kate Bourne on 03 8601 5250 or email kbourne@varta.org.au