



VARTA

Victorian Assisted Reproductive
Treatment Authority

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

There is no shame in being donor-conceived

Chantele's parents told Chantele when she was eight years old that she was conceived using donor sperm, but not all of her family knew she was donor-conceived.

Chantele shares her story about growing up in a loving family and meeting her biological donor when she was 18.

Transcript: Chantele, donor-conceived person

OK, so yes it is very clear. So I am the middle ground person here. I am going to tell you two nice little stories.

The first one a very kitsch little story so, I grew up in a fabulous home, made a fabulous attachment with both my mother and father. Perfectly natural, normal and even today when I think about doing something hard and when I want somebody to be proud of me I think of my dad, I don't think of David who is my donor, who is also here today. So I am very very lucky, so very kitsch.

Grew up and was told at the age of eight, then when I got to the age of 18 decided, yeah lets go see if we can go find out who this guy was and funnily enough David was also looking too. A few months later we met. Wow, amazing, so we realised we lived 1 ½ km's from each other. Amazing, we kept bumping into each other, I met his children and over the last ten years I have actually been able to create fantastic relationships with his family and his children and it is just, you know, it is fabulous. The most amazing story you could ever hear. And so that is great, sounds fantastic right? But there is always a 'but'.

I am going to tell you the second story which is a bit of a story of shame. And this shame is, and I am sorry if I start to cry because it is still quite raw for me. It is a story of a little girl who was told of her conception when she was eight and realised she was different and from that time started to be bullied at school and grew up knowing she was different and she was ashamed to tell who she was. I wasn't, although it was very open within the family, within the immediate family we weren't allowed to tell people. My grandmother still doesn't know and that is a shame I have carried with me for a very long time.

But that is OK, you get through these things. I met David, I still felt ashamed because although he wasn't ashamed of me I knew his wife didn't want to meet me. I knew there were times when I went to his house and I knew that his wife didn't know I had visited and there were times when I met his children, I knew that I probably wasn't meant to happen. And I felt ashamed and I carried that shame. But we dealt with that and things went along as they always do, and things got a bit better.

But the shame came back, and the shame next came back when it came to me getting married. And of course I have David, I have three wonderful half siblings as well as my own brother and of course I wanted them all to be on the wedding table, of course why wouldn't they be. He is my flesh, I am part of him, he is part of me. But then I get the questions from my mum and dad and it is not their fault, absolutely not. But they weren't told what to do in this situation, if this happened. How could you know, we were basically the first ones that went through this so how could they know.

But they said, how can they be on the table, people will ask questions, who are these people, they can't just rock up. All their family and friends will be there and that was when I finally gave up the shame that I had been holding for so long and

realised that it wasn't my shame, it was the shame of the adults around that I had been carrying as a little girl for so long and finally as an adult I was able to say, that is your problem, I am proud of who I am and I am proud of how I was made and you need to start to tell people because it is not something to be ashamed of because if you are ashamed of this then you are ashamed of me.

And so that was the day I probably let go of that shame, or not let go of it but perhaps placed it where it needed to be. And so what I say to all of you out there, all of you who either have children or are thinking about having children or have a baby on the way. Like Riley said, it is fine to tell but make sure you sort your stuff out first. Make sure you realise the implications that you can have.

And my temperament was different to my brothers so how he has dealt with it is different. But I carried the shame when my parents should have dealt with it beforehand. People should have helped them deal with it; people should have helped them know that it is ok to tell people. You shouldn't be ashamed no matter who you are because in fact I am so proud of my parents for having done this now as an adult and like I said I could not have had a better attachment with my father or my mother. But I guess, yeah, if there is one thing people do tell everything in this research tick boxes for me, everything about the attachment between father and child, about the mothers being helicopter parents. It is all there, it is exactly like reading my life story. So I sit there and say, thank you so much because I didn't realise that people were actually worried about us.

So please tell your children. If you need people to help then of course we are out here. But also tell your family, be proud of this. It is not something to be ashamed of we do grow up and we do become fantastic people because we have grown up in a loving caring family and that is all any child needs. Now working in mental health I know that, I know that what we need is loving attachment for youths. We need love and we need support and that is all. And we need openness and honesty about all.

So thank you for listening to me tonight and thank you for just being here and just being interested because I think that is really important. Really important.

The End.

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