

Egg Donor

Kylie Hughes transcript

This is a podcast about Kylie Hughes' decision to donate her eggs to a couple who were initially strangers. The recipient couple has a son as a result of Kylie's donation. Kylie, who has a husband and two daughters, begins by talking about what led to her decision.

I was reading Melbourne Child in the middle of the night and I was looking up Farm Stay accommodation for the family to have a holiday. In the next column were the IVF ads and there were about eight of them and I read them and one of them just really jumped out at me. I read it over and over and I thought 'this is something that I would like to do'. So, I discussed it with my husband over a couple of weeks and then contacted the woman who had written the letter and the initial response was that they had found someone else so I contacted two other couples, both of whom chose not to proceed with me because they, for appearance reasons, they both wanted people of their own culture and then the first lady came back to me and said that it hadn't worked out with their first lady so they asked me if I was still willing to consider it and we met up and went from there.

So what was it about that letter that convinced you that that was something you wanted to do?

I felt like she was talking to me. It just jumped off the page. I felt her pain and I thought 'I want to help this person'. The way that she writes sounded like the way I would have written the same letter in the same circumstances so I felt like she was appealing to me directly and I just straight away wanted to do it.

So what was your motivation for wanting to donate?

I'd had a lot of difficulties with my own health and with conceiving. I had a lot of years where I thought I wouldn't be able to have children at all and so it was something that had always been in the back of my mind. And once I had my two girls without any undue complications I just felt like that was something that having been through the experience of how difficult it was and how traumatic it was to think that you might not have children that here was something I could do to help and so I wanted to do it.

So what was the next step after reading the letter, or after getting in contact with the recipient?

We emailed initially, back and forth, and exchanged details and I provided my health history and some family history and we eventually met up. At first just the mother and I met and then after a few meetings, once we realised that we were getting along really well, I then met her partner and she met my partner and our children so the two families got together and then we decided to take the next step and go and have the tests and proceed from there.

Was there anyone else involved at this point?

We had through the IVF service some counselling at this point, so I had counselling by myself, I had counselling with my partner and we were offered counselling for our children but we did that privately for our two girls. So we had a number of counselling sessions to talk about why did we want to do it, how did we see it panning out in the years ahead, how would we cope if it didn't work, all those sorts of questions. So the counselling sessions were very helpful. 2

What were the kinds of issues that you felt were important to discuss with the recipient at that stage?

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Most of my concerns weren't about the process itself, it was more about how we would deal with it in the years to come. How would her donor-conceived child cope with that and what would be my role in supporting her family to cope with that. So there were lots of conversations about how would we get together, what sort of contact would we have, at what point she envisaged talking about this with her child and basically what my role would be to support that child as they went through that discovery and dealt with it.

Who was involved in those conversations?

Mostly just the recipient and I. The seed was planted by the counsellor but the conversations were mostly just between the two of us.

And was there a lot of communication also with your husband and your daughters and the recipient's partner?

The two men weren't as involved. They occasionally came to our catch-ups but mostly just she and I met. Both of them were obviously very supportive of us during the process but with all four of us working, we mostly met during the day, we had lunches and things, so it was easy to just organise for two people to be in one spot than four. So most of the face-to-face contact was just between the two women.

And what was the physical process, what did that involve?

The physical process was no big deal really. First we had to get our cycles in alignment. So some equivalent of the pill to do that and then we had a month of IVF medication to promote the egg stimulation and then I had a procedure under general anaesthetic to have the eggs extracted.

How was that for you, that process?

I didn't find it all that difficult. The idea of it was worse than the actual process itself. Giving myself the injection the night before, or it might have been two nights before the actual procedure... I struggled with that. I took about an hour to walk around and calm myself down to finally have the injection but it really wasn't as big a deal as I thought it would be. The surgery itself was very quick, very painless, there was no soreness or anything afterwards. I couldn't believe it was already over when I woke up basically.

And what happened then?

The recipient and her partner were obviously at the hospital as well so I woke up to flowers and a note to say that they'd managed to harvest 11 eggs and they took some of the eggs and picked the best ones and did whatever they do with them and then I got a phone call about six weeks later to say that she was pregnant which was just the most exciting thing. I was absolutely ecstatic that it had worked first time.

And were you in regular contact with the recipient throughout the pregnancy?

Yes during the pregnancy I think I was putting more pressure on her by being a little bit needy because I kept wanting to check that everything was going well and that everything was okay with the baby. So after each test she would ring me and let me know that 'yes everything was fine'. And we had a few visits during the pregnancy which was lovely and then on the day, or the day after he was born, we went in and had a visit, the whole family, so that was really nice.

Were you still having counselling at this point? Where were you in terms of negotiating your role within the recipient's family?

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We really did most of that before she was pregnant. We did keep having conversations about what it is going to be like because it was obviously a lot more real once she was pregnant but all of the counselling was finished by that point. We both felt really comfortable with what we had done and where we were headed with it. 3

And what had you decided in terms of what role you would have in the family?

They decided to always let him know that he was donor-conceived, right from very young. So when I visit him with my children, he knows who I am. We have contact every couple of months. We try and visit once or twice a year to get the children together so that they all know who each other are and what their relationship is and we exchange photos. We really envisage that I will get more of a role when he is older and he starts to think through what it all means for him. Perhaps he will have more questions at that point about who I am and why I did it. So that is down the track a bit. He is only little now.

How old is he?

He is three.

Do you think that at that age he has a good understanding of who you are? You know, how was it explained to him, your role?

Primarily I am mum's friend and secondly I am the egg lady but he just sees me as just another one of his mum's friends at the moment, which is just perfect.

And what do you think – you mentioned that the first arrangement didn't work out with the recipient and then she came back to you and it has obviously worked out, so what was it about that initial situation that didn't work out for her and how was it different with you? What made your situation work?

The first person who had applied to her withdrew from the process. So that put a little bit of pressure on me, knowing that, because I felt like if I decided to withdraw from the process as we were getting closer and closer that that would be very difficult for her, having already had one person pull out. So on those few occasions when I did start thinking 'what am I doing?', it was always in the back of my mind that she'd had someone else pull out before and I think that gave me that little bit of motivation to keep going.

What do you think is the most difficult thing to negotiate?

I think early in the process the donor sees the recipient as having much more needs than the donor does so you tend to think about what they need out of the process and what they need from you. And what I found difficult was getting to the point where I could be honest and say what I needed out of the process because I felt like perhaps my needs weren't as important. But once we reached that point in the relationship where I could start saying that 'I would like this much contact and I'd like him to know who I am from an early age', although she agreed with all of that, there was no conflict or anything, it was just a bit difficult to get to that point of confidence where I could speak my truth and say 'this is what I would like to get out of this process'. So it probably wasn't that difficult once I eventually had the conversation but the planning for it gave me some angst.

Did you get along well with the recipient from the beginning?

Really well. I felt like I had found an old friend. We had a very similar view on life and I really liked her from the first time I met her, so that was great.

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How important do you think that was?

I think that it is very important. You learn a lot of intimate details about the other person and I think when you take this on you are taking on a lifetime relationship so you need to find someone who you would be happy to have in your life for the next 20 years or so. So getting along well was really important.