

Lesbian ISO Sperm or Selections from the Heart

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“What are you thinking?” I asked my mom, after a silence. The afternoon light danced on her white quilted bedspread. I was 19 and had just told her I’m a lesbian.

“Well,” she responded carefully, “I always wondered if you were gay so I’m not surprised... it’s just that I always pictured you getting married and having kids”.

“But I still want that. I just want it with a woman”. I replied, without missing a beat.

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Cut to almost 20 years later. My mother and I are FaceTiming between NYC (me) and Toronto (her). We are each staring at an excel spreadsheet on our respective laptops. The left column is a series of seemingly random numbers. "1357", "2398", "1402" and so on. The top column reads: “Eye Color”, “Hair”, “Health”, “Happiness”, “Intelligence”, “Occupation”, “Talents”, “Skills”, “Looks”, “Past Pregnancies” and “Notes”. We are rating sperm donors on various attributes, on a scale of 1 to 5.

How do you choose a donor? I had recently seen the documentary “Happy” by Roco Belic which revealed the latest research that happiness is genetically inherited by 50%. (The other 50% comes from connection with community, compassion/service to others, exercise and gratitude). So I read between the lines of the donor essays to try to determine which donors seemed generally happy. Health was another very important factor to me. My relatives live into their late 90’s so I eliminated donors with extended families who had significant heart or cancer issues. I have worked intensely with special needs children and was also cautious about donors with too many cousins with ADD or learning disabilities. Along those lines, I sometimes wonder if my father is on the spectrum, and had heard about some [studies](#) that concluded that descendants of engineers had an increased likelihood of being autistic. So I avoided engineers or people who seemed anti-social as I didn’t want my geeky genes doubling up with theirs.

I am a performer, and worried that if my artistic genes doubled up with another artist’s, my child wouldn’t have organizational skills so I specifically sought out lawyers or something equally practical. I also made notes on the quality of their writing style and academic scores, to seek out intelligence. Everyone in my family has blue eyes and since I was completely overwhelmed with the selection, I narrowed them down further by only choosing blue eyes. My best friend growing up had gorgeous blonde hair (I have golden brown) so I decided it might be fun to have a blondie. I didn’t make it a deciding factor but did record their hair color in the spreadsheet. I also wanted to choose someone who was attractive in a

way that was familiar to me, like they could be someone I would date, or a cousin, so that my child would fit in with my family look-wise. And finally, I preferred donors with past pregnancies, as I wanted to increase my chances for success.

I was so overwhelmed with the responsibility of selection that I actually looked at donors from almost every sperm bank in America. In the end I went with California Cryobank because they had the largest selection and a very user-friendly database.

I narrowed it down to about 5. Any of them would have been great but I made my final selection based on an emotional pull. I was in love with one of the donor's photos. He looked like a boy I had had a crush on when I was 12 so it seemed perfect.

I did several IUI's and IVF's with that sperm. I kept asking my doctors if I should try other sperm but they reassured me there was no scientific data to support the theory of egg/sperm incompatibility so I stayed true to my initial selection.

After about a year and a half it became apparent that due to my low ovarian reserve, my egg quality wasn't good. I moved to egg donor and my mom and I made another spreadsheet, applying our newfound sperm searching skills to egg donors.

The egg donor I finally chose had had a full genetic panel done (116 genes) and they found 1 mutation. The sperm donors in most banks just have 13 genes screened. So in order to be thorough, I needed my sperm donor to get tested. California Cryobank contacted my sperm donor several times but he never responded. I decided it wasn't worth the risk so I contacted all the sperm banks again, to find out if there were any donors who had already had that specific gene tested. They sent me their lists and I looked through the options. One stood out to me in particular. He was gorgeous, smart, caring and musical. I didn't mind him being a musician this time as I wasn't using my own eggs and the egg donor only had average music ability. And, he was willing to be known donor, meaning my child could contact him when he was 18, so it seemed perfect.

My first attempt with an egg donor worked so I now have a gorgeous, creative, smart and energetic 9 month old who everyone comments looks just like me. And when I complain to those who know me how intense he is, they laugh and say, "I wonder where he gets that from?!" Whether it's nature or nurture, there isn't a child in the world who is more my son. He is just now obsessively learning to walk, with an intensity so fierce I can only compare it to the intensity with which I made the selection to create him.

The other day, when we were in a mommy and me class, another parent was commenting how beautiful and advanced he is. She then joked, "Whatever recipe

you used to create him, it was a good one". "Thanks", I knowingly smiled.

Little does she know how perfect that word is. Recipe. As parents of donor children, we get to be extra proud because we used not only our biology to create our children, but our minds and conscious hearts as well. And as an artist, I can say it truly felt like a creative process.

ATHENA REICH

Bio

Athena Reich is an award winning actress, singer/songwriter and writer. She won numerous awards for her hosting work on the Curious Cook, an LGBT cooking webseries. Her music videos charted #1 on MTV LOGO and her one woman Off-Broadway comedy, "Lady Gaga: #ARTBIRTH" received Time Out Critic's Pick and attention from Lady Gaga herself. Most recently Athena is featured in haveababy, a documentary about IVF by Oscar nominated filmmaker Amanda Micheli. Her newest project is "Baby Steps" on GOMag.com, a webseries following her journey as a single lesbian mother by choice who faced infertility. For shows, updates & more: www.AthenaReich.com