

My Unique Path to Fatherhood

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It took a lot of people, time, and money to bring me my twin daughters, but becoming a dad is the best thing that ever happened to me.

My 2-year-old twin daughters have brought me more joy, love, and happiness than any words can express. They're my life, and have taught me so much about living in the moment, about what a wonderful mother and family I have, and how important it is to have structure, routine, and discipline.

I always wanted to have children, but never in my wildest dreams could I have imagined how I'd finally become a dad. It took several years, over \$150,000, a lot of love and support from many people, and a great deal of effort for me to have children. Katie and Ellie were so wanted; they were brought into this world unlike most babies, and I am very appreciative for the medical miracle that brought them to me. As a 38-year-old single dad, I'm so grateful to live in a society where my path to parenthood was possible.

My road to fatherhood started when I turned 30 and decided that within five years I would have kids whether or not I had a partner. I never really worried about being a single dad, and I wasn't willing to put my life on hold waiting for a relationship.

When I turned 34, I started doing some research into surrogacy. I wanted children so badly that I never doubted my decision to do this alone, but it would have been nice to share this amazing experience with someone other than my close friends and family.

But I accepted the reality of my solo situation, and got in touch with a surrogacy agency in San Diego that would introduce me to prospective egg donors and surrogates. I hired a lawyer to coordinate contracts and iron out a mind-boggling array of details, including every possible "what if" scenario that could occur during the pregnancy—medical complications, something happening to me, etc.

After doing a lot of research, comparing success rates, and checking references, I hired a fertility doctor (who reminded me of a mad scientist). I secured an insurance agent who specialized in surrogacy to obtain a very expensive Lloyds of London health- and life-insurance policy for the surrogate.

Finally, most surreal of all, I searched through pages of potential egg donors. How does one go about selecting a total stranger to be the biological mother of his unborn children? A good friend of mine suggested choosing an egg donor who physically resembled my sister—dark hair, brown eyes, average height and weight—so that my children would look like they belonged in my family. But for me it wasn't about the color of the donor's hair or her physical proportions. It was more about the connection I felt to her. I looked at medical records, family medical histories, likes, dislikes, hobbies, interests, and of course, the photos. Most

important to me was a clean medical record, a decent grade-point average, and a sense of likes, dislikes, and hobbies. Personal or family history of high blood pressure, heart disease, diabetes, alcoholism, death at a young age, etc., would all have been deal breakers. The egg donor I chose was athletic, into dance, played the piano, and enjoyed art.

I drove from Los Angeles to San Diego several times and interviewed at least five potential surrogates. The first one I selected wasn't able to pass the physical test; she'd had two Caesarean sections already, which labeled her a higher-risk candidate. Another potential surrogate showed up for her interview with her 11-year-old daughter in tow; it was very odd. Still another told me she'd prefer to have minimal contact with me during the pregnancy if she was selected. Most of these women had their own children already, and were not interested in adding to their families.

I finally chose a soft-spoken woman who appreciated my desire to be very involved in the pregnancy. She was a married mother of three, deeply religious, who had loved being pregnant.

Once the egg donor and surrogate had been chosen and contracts were drawn up, the women started taking hormone shots to line up their menstrual cycles and prepare their bodies for the egg extraction and then embryo transfer. The egg donor produced 18 healthy eggs, which were fertilized in a lab with my sperm. The procedure to transfer the embryo to the surrogate was rather quick, but strangely surreal. But I had become used to the process by then, and resigned to the fact that this was what it was going to take for me to have my family.

After a very long two-week wait, my surrogate and her husband drove to Los Angeles to get the results. When we found out the pregnancy test was negative, I was devastated. There was no explanation for why the embryo didn't take. We made a second attempt, this time using several frozen embryos to increase the chance of a pregnancy. Again, the result was negative. The process was an emotional roller-coaster ride. Expenses were increasing, and time was passing. I finally made the very difficult decision to start over. I was determined to become a father.

This time I contacted Fertility Miracles, a Los Angeles-based agency. I secured a new fertility doctor, lawyer, egg donor, and surrogate. I could feel the difference immediately; Fertility Miracles provided a much more personal level of involvement and assistance. I remember the day Karen Roeb from Fertility Miracles called to tell me she had the perfect surrogate for me. She had also just met the perfect egg donor: She was very attractive, young (which is very important, as the quality of eggs diminishes with age), intelligent, and had a clean bill of health.

With a new team in place, I started the whole process again. This was my fourth attempt. Two embryos were transferred, my surrogate became pregnant with twins, and it was like winning the lottery! I'm an identical twin, and I always thought it would be nice to have twins.

My surrogate, Heather, is a wonderful mother to her three terrific children, and she'd been a gestational carrier for another couple before me. She and I had an incredible partnership. I went to doctor appointments with her, saw the ultrasounds with the babies growing inside her, and watched her belly grow.

On September 27, 2007, at 36 weeks, she gave birth to Ellie, who was just 1 ounce shy of 5 pounds. Katie followed 29 minutes later, weighing 6 pounds, 8 ounces. They were healthy girls with very strong and distinct personalities. It was truly the most amazing, unforgettable day of my life. It had taken two-and-a-half years,

but it was so worth the wait.

As nice as it is to always have my own way in raising Katie and Ellie, I wonder what it would be like to share some of the parenting responsibilities. I think what's surprised me most about being a single father has been the constant cramming to squeeze in errands or get work done when the kids are napping, because I always feel that I have to be with them every waking hour . . . because it's just me. Balance is a challenge.

I've taken a semi-hiatus from my work as a real-estate developer so I can be home to raise my children. I know I'm fortunate to be able to do this, considering how expensive diapers, groceries, car seats, clothes, doctor visits, toys, classes, and preschool are!

When people see me out with the girls, they often want to talk to me about being the father of twins. Most assume that Mommy has the day off, and seem to think that men are the less capable sex when it comes to raising children. The mother of a friend of mine actually asked me if I knew to teach the girls how to properly wipe from front to back after I told her that Katie was potty training! Someday I'll have to deal with issues like bras, periods, makeup, and boys. With the help of my mother, the girls' aunts, and some very close female friends, I'm optimistic I'll be able to handle it all.

There's no question that being a single dad is tiring. It's also amazing. I wouldn't trade my life for anything. I still get teary thinking about how much I love my daughters, and how fortunate I am that the two most beautiful creatures on the planet chose me to be their father.

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