

## Trisha's Journey to Motherhood – a Blog Series

We are proud to introduce Trisha and the story she wishes to share about her journey to motherhood. Written over a three month period from pre- to post-baby life, this blog series covers the spectrum of the process from when Trisha came to realize she would need to use an egg donor, to when she realized she finally conquered her battle with infertility. Her hope is that by sharing her story, she'll help others navigate their own journey.

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### The decision journey Part I: The beginning of my fertility journey and the decision to use donor eggs

I hope you are well on your way to what will be one of the most exciting experiences of your entire life. I know I'm there.

Every day I feel the little thumps in my belly, I do mental cartwheels and somersaults, while grinning from ear-to-ear in disbelief and with pure excitement. After years of trying to conceive, never did I think I would one day be wobbling around with a little jelly bean growing inside of me. As I type, he is bouncing all over the place... thank you double shot hot cocoa!

I guess you are probably wondering who I am, so I'll just go ahead and introduce myself. My name is Trisha and I am a 38 year old working professional who has gone through seven failed IUI and three failed IVF cycles using my own eggs. After my last two IVF cycles resulted in a total of 30+ poor quality eggs, we decided, through the support of our reproductive endocrinologist (RE), to opt for donor eggs. Never in a million years did I think we would go with this option, but my goodness, am I ever so happy we did. Not only does it cost about the same, if not slightly less (depending on whether you choose frozen or fresh), than the traditional IVF procedures, it is also more promising if, like me, you can't conceive using your own eggs.

I plan to share my experiences with you, answer all of your questions, and help you arrive at the decision that is best for your family and you through your baby-making journey. I know it is not an easy decision, especially to use "someone else's" eggs. But please – I BEG YOU, do not look at it like that... (I'll wait while you toss that thought out of your head for good). Listen, nobody can ever tell me this baby growing in my belly is anything less than my very own, as my blood and snack cravings continue to give him life. Our connection is so magical that it overrides any thought of us not being genetically tied. We are connected – PERIOD! I mean, it was I, who just guzzled down a hot cup of cocoa to wash down my peanut butter and dark chocolate Kind bar. And, as a result of this delicious snack, it is he who is bouncing around in his one and only mother's belly. Did I mention how amazing the feeling is of him bouncing around in there?



### The decision journey Part II: Deliberating fresh v. frozen eggs

Fresh versus frozen...yes, no longer a choice you only make when trying to decide which veggies to buy. Believe it or not, you have this choice when it comes to donor eggs. Another easy decision to make, right?

The truth is, it is not an easy decision for everyone, if at all. But hopefully, I can share enough of my story and details around the options that will help you in your decision-making.

First, let me say, initially I had no idea there was a frozen donor egg option. Actually, once we realized my eggs weren't viable and having a baby naturally was probably never going to happen or, if it did, the struggle – emotionally and financially – would make it difficult to find happiness through the process, we thought adoption was the only or most likely option. I thought to myself "What does it really mean to use donor eggs? Where would we get the eggs? Do we ask a stranger? Do we ask someone we know? How do you do that and get them to still love you, knowing the process you are about to put them through with all of the medication, appointments, and procedures?"

I know that there are plenty of recipients out there who have fantastic outcomes using a known donor – but personally, I preferred going through a professional donor egg agency or bank to find my egg donor, especially knowing that these donors would be thoroughly screened for medical and genetic conditions. Furthermore, I felt that this route made the legal and donor-recipient relationship guidelines a lot cleaner.



Okay, let's get down to what you really want to know. We will start with fresh eggs. As I am sure you can imagine, I was really excited when I learned my dream of carrying my own baby could still be a reality. A new kind of energy hit me – knowing I can still experience pregnancy with our very own child and shop around for the one who would give us the most special gift we could ever ask for, made life and the process of becoming a mom fun again. Over the next few weeks, I spent countless hours searching egg donor sites and combing through their databases of pictures and profiles. There were so many options; it was like being a kid in a candy store.

As I searched egg donor sites, I stumbled across the option for frozen donor eggs. My first thoughts were – what is the difference between fresh and frozen (besides the obvious), and how does the frozen donor egg process work? Again, whose eggs would I use? Without getting too deep, here is what I can tell you about the two separate options.

With the fresh option, there are more opportunities for you to hit some 'thumbs down' situations, many of which require you to wait longer than patience will sometimes allow (at least for me). Let's be honest, after all of the waiting we have already been through, what is the last thing we want to do when we approach a new 'promising' process? That is right – WAIT! Without a doubt and no matter how you receive your eggs, fresh will take longer than frozen. Period. Why? There are several reasons, but for now I will name just a few.

- First, you have to find your donor match, and then you need to ensure that the match is available. This can take weeks, even months, and several candidates before you find the 'perfect' match.
- Also, while donors typically get some pre-screening tests done, it is only after they're selected when they undergo the more thorough medical and genetic testing – so there's the risk that you 'perfect' match may not work out if she doesn't pass screening or an unfavorable medical/genetic condition manifests.
- If your fresh donor passes the screening with flying colors, she then has to prepare her body for the process, using medication over a period of a few weeks/months before she begins her monitoring and collection process. You'll also need to coordinate your own cycle so that it synchronizes with hers, which can add additional time.
- You then need to cross your fingers that the donor complies with taking all her medications correctly and shows up to all her appointments. On top of that, you'll have to pray that she'll avoid any complications such as overstimulation or premature ovulation, and that she'll produce plenty of healthy, mature eggs.
- In our 'perfect' world, all the steps above will just go according to plan though, right? There I go with the sarcasm, again.

Another thought to consider is the cost of a fresh donor; it's about twice the price of using frozen donor eggs. Maybe this is because with a fresh cycle, a clinic would have to cover the costs for medication and appointments to synchronize the cycles of the recipient and donor, and compensate the donor for traveling and accommodations. I'm not sure, but whatever is the reason, all your ears will hear is Cha-ching! Cha-ching! Cha-ching!

Frozen donor eggs, on the other hand, are much more affordable, which takes away some of the stress. But what I really like about the frozen option is you can get started IMMEDIATELY because the eggs are already ready to go. Oh yes, you heard me correctly – IMMEDIATELY! If you find the donor eggs you want today, you can move through the process and get pregnant as early as your next cycle. Why? Because all of the work the fresh donor has to go through is already done. There is no screening of the donor, no stimulation, monitoring, or collection requirements... the eggs are already on ice waiting for you. All you need to do is search through the photos and profiles and make your selection. Yes, it is just that easy. And trust me, you have several wonderful options to choose from with the egg banks that actually offer this as an option like FairFax EggBank.

## The decision journey Part III: Finding the right donor

[written post-partum]

I tell you, having been a mother for only 12 days now, it is hard to imagine what life was like before our little boy arrived into our lives.

As I am sure you can imagine, we are extremely excited, thankful, and overwhelmed with joy when it comes to our newest addition to the family. He is the most adorable little 'son-shine' a mommy can ever ask for. If I could, I would give our donor the BIGGEST hug for this most special gift she has given our family. I love him! I love him! I love him!

Back when we first started our journey, I remember how conflicted I was about the idea of using donor eggs. Initially, I did not think I could ever embrace the idea of having a baby that was not made with my own egg. Knowing what I know now and being the mother of this most precious little baby of mine, I think my feelings were attributed to the lack of knowledge about donor eggs and the lack of awareness about my options – fresh v. frozen. Now that we are here, I have absolutely no regrets and even laugh when I think of the mild resistance I had about frozen donor eggs. Well, hopefully through my experiences I share with you, I can help you quickly get past that barrier – if it is one – for yourself and family.

Once we decided to go with a frozen donor, I immediately began reading through different profiles and viewing pictures of the many donors in the Fairfax EggBank database. What I thought was going to be a drag of a task, actually ended being a really fun process. I mean, it was shopping for crying out loud... who doesn't love to shop? Using the Fairfax Eggbank database, you have the option of selecting different donor characteristics – race, height, education-level, etc. It is like the eBay of 'donor mommy' shopping – easy to filter through to find exactly what you need (but minus the price-bidding war).

While trying not to be too picky, there were certain requirements our donor had to meet:

- Physically, she had to look like similar to me.
- Educationally, she had to have completed at least a Bachelor's degree.
- Health was not an issue because Fairfax EggBank ensures the ladies meet thorough and strict health standards before being accepted as a client.
- Proven success, whether she had her own children or a recipient was successful using her eggs through a frozen or fresh cycle.
- After a few days of viewing profiles, I finally narrowed my list to about 10 donors. At the top of the list was a beautiful and intelligent young lady, who is the same bi-racial blend as me – Black and Filipino. She was perfect! My husband also agreed. However, just when I thought my decision was made, I learned my "perfect" donor had no proven successes.

We know the logic that at some point, every proven donor was a first-time donor at some point. Furthermore, we know that many recipients have gone on to become a parent through the help of a first-time donor. However just like with my debate of considering a known or unknown donor, choosing proven vs. unproven was another personal preference of mine – so please, look inwards towards your own feelings if you're in this phase of the donor egg process – especially if you find a donor who you felt was meant for you. Also, look to your Fairfax EggBank coordinator to seek additional guidance – they are there for you all the way! For us, we just decided not to go with our first option.

Instead, we opted for the next perfect donor on our list. After learning she has two children of her own and two other recipients were successful using her eggs, we knew, without a doubt, we found "the one.". Even if she was not the same bi-racial mix as me, she was still beyond perfect. Besides, she and I share some of the same features, which was a major plus. Now, if anyone were to ever say to me – he has your smile, eyes, or hair, I can say, YES – he sure does!

## **My transfer and the eventual "BFP" (big fat positive)**

Egg bank selected – CHECK! Decision made whether to use fresh or frozen donor eggs – CHECK! Perfect donor selected – CHECK! Okay, so what happens next? Well, now that the "tough" parts are behind you, it's time to get ready for one of the BIGGEST moments you have been waiting for... the transfer.

As you wait the days/weeks for the stars to align (AKA your mid-cycle days to approach... because remember, your transfer will be around the same time your body would have naturally ovulated), you will be a busy little bee as you prepare for the transfer. Now, everyone's protocol is different, but you should expect to start the estrogen – lots of it – and also visit the doctor for one or more uterine lining checks. For those who do not know or cannot remember, during this process, the doctor is checking whether the estrogen has done its job by thickening your uterine lining... think thick! If your lining is good to go, then your little eggs are then prepared for thawing and "mating" with the sperm.

Depending on what your doctor decides, the day of thawing starts your countdown to either a Day-3 or Day-5 transfer. I was a Day-5 transfer. As the days progressed, my doctor told me how many eggs fertilized and how many embryos made their way through the healthy maturation process (2-3 days after the mating process). Once your day (either Day-3 or Day-5) approaches, get ready for a quick and painless transfer. If you have a Day-3 transfer, you should have one or more embryos to transfer, and if you have a Day-5 transfer, you should have one or more blastocysts to transfer.

My sweet baby was transferred on Day-5. At this stage, he was expected to be a blastocyst but was only a Day-4 late stage morula. We actually thought the cycle would not be successful since development was a little behind, but we were absolutely, positively wrong! Turns out, the best place for your little one to develop is right in the mommy's tummy. Our Day-4 Morula continued to mature and is now a happy baby boy!!

After your successful transfer (fingers crossed), the 10-14 day wait until the day you take your blood draw pregnancy test – I am not going to lie – will seem like an eternity. You will feel like you have every pregnancy sign in the world and you will secretly wish you had one of those “I’m done” turkey poppers on your belly button to show whether you are successfully pregnant. Instead of obsessing (I know – that is all you will do), try to relax by doing prenatal yoga, listening to music like Mozart (highly recommended for the baby), and talking to your bundle of joy. I used to read children's books to my baby, while listening to Mozart baby music.

### Getting the BFP



Finally the day arrives for your pregnancy test. Now, when I said the 10-14 day wait between the day of your transfer and the day you get to take your pregnancy test would feel like an eternity, I should have warned you that the few hours you wait to get your pregnancy results back, would feel like an eternity times 100. Let me tell you... the pregnancy test day was the longest day of my life.

I took my test early in the morning and my results did not get back to me until around 3:00pm that same day. I was at work and could not concentrate on anything besides the unknown pregnancy test results. I excused myself from the office and went on a walk for what seemed like three hours of pacing back and forth on the same short street. Towards the end of my walk, however, I could not help but notice the CVS on the corner about 1/8 of a mile away. So, although I received final confirmation about my results at 3:00pm from my doctor's office, I have to be honest and say I already knew at lunchtime that I was officially pregnant. Why, you ask? Because I broke the rule and purchased a digital early pregnancy test before receiving the doctor's call. Thank you, CVS!

Needless to say, I had the happiest moment of my life (at that time) when I saw the PREGNANT indicator flash on the tiny pregnancy test screen. While completely over the moon excited, I still needed to hear it from the doctor. Once he informed me we were positively pregnant, the surreal news had my husband and me overjoyed and nervous at the same time. My concern then transitioned to – will it stick? Will we get through the critical first trimester period? What can I do to make sure everything is okay each day? Yes, all of these questions race through your head once you know the pregnancy is real. But who can blame you, right? You have finally arrived at one of the greatest moments you have been waiting for, and now, as a soon-to-be-mommy, your motherly instincts kick in and you begin to worry and hope for the best. But do not worry (haha!)... you are totally normal. CONGRATULATIONS!!

## Resources I used throughout the decision process

Okay – I am probably telling you something you already know, but I will just go ahead and share it again... going through the process of deciding which donor egg options to select is NOT an easy task. For some of us, when we opt for a donor egg cycle, we are literally putting all of our eggs in one basket. As such, the last thing we want to do is make a wrong decision, right? However, with so many choices and so many protocols that result successfully for other women, how do we know which are the right and wrong decisions for ourselves? While I don't have the answer to this question, especially because I second-guessed every decision I ever made for myself, I can tell you a good old, healthy scream worked for me whenever I encountered an indecisive moment.



So, what resources did I use throughout the donor egg process? Let me preface this response by assuring you I do NOT work for Google (=). But yes, Google was my very best friend throughout this process (Obviously, if your preference is another web browser, that option is equally as fine). I “Googled” nearly every aspect of my donor egg process.

### Finding the Right Donor Egg Bank/Agency

I would be remiss if I do not let you know that before deciding to use Fairfax EggBank, I researched other donor egg banks and donor egg agencies as well. This research provided me the knowledge I needed to make the decision between frozen and fresh donor eggs. It also helped to confirm Fairfax as the best choice for me. As mentioned in one of the earlier blogs, before realizing we would need to use donor eggs, I was oblivious to our different options, although I notice other women mentioned donor eggs in a few IVF blogs. Still, I did not realize this to be an option for me.

Before deciding to use Fairfax EggBank, I contacted perhaps a dozen other donor egg banks and donor egg agencies, and reviewed profiles of hundreds and hundreds of donors – in America and other countries. I kept a log of each clinic and donor I was interested in learning more about. By keeping all the information on a single spreadsheet, I was able to prioritize and eliminate donors more easily, many being fresh donors... which equaled an even longer wait and more costs.

### Figuring out How to Pay for Donor Egg Costs

The cost involved in fertility treatments can be enough to make you lose your breath, even if you have outstanding medical insurance. I have top-notch insurance, but it does not cover the donor egg portion of the process. We had to purchase the eggs outright before our insurance actually kicked in. To ensure we would have enough money to cover all expenses, we researched different options for financing, even high interest loans, because we wanted to understand all of our financing options should we not be able to get one through our personal bank.

ARC Fertility was the first financing firm we contacted. They are an excellent source for financing, offering a variety of packages that are nearly tailor-made for all approved applicants. The issue, however, is while they offer a donor package with a money back guarantee option, it is only available for fresh egg cycles.

Online crowd funding, like GoFundMe, is also an option. We actually used this and raised more than \$10K. In addition to sending the fundraiser link to our family and friends, we had ‘request for donation’ postcards made with our picture and a snippet of our story printed on the front, and sent them to celebrities (seriously!), who have also experienced fertility issues and to the different medical doctors (offices) within a 10-mile radius of our home. I am not sure if any of the postcard solicitations worked, but I can tell you we had several anonymous donors – so who knows?!

If the personal bank or crowdfunding options do not work and you still need financing, there are other lenders. Fairfax EggBank offers financing through CapEx and Prosper. There are also other options you can consider such as Lending Tree, Lending Club, and Avant.

Through the Internet, you have all the information you need at your fingertips. I can only stress to you, do your research and try not to stress. Perhaps the most vital resource you will have and not yet mentioned is your own doctor. Ask him/her about options related to funding and other helpful resources. Through my doctor, I not only found Fairfax EggBank but also my acupuncturist, who came to the doctor's office to give me two treatments on the day of transfer. My doctor was a rich source of information.

## Reflections from my husband and his advice to other partners

[written by Trisha's husband as a pre-Father's Day blog]



Words can't describe the way I felt when Trisha called to say – "WE'RE PREGNANT!!" I had wanted to hear these words for more than four years while we were trying to have a baby. Not just because I was ready to be a father, but because I knew it was so important for Trisha. She wanted nothing more than to grow our family and be the best wife and mom for our family. And, I have to tell you, she is killing it. She is the absolute best!

As Father's Day approaches, I reflect back on last year. It was during Father's Day weekend 2015 when we had our transfer. I can remember when it was taking place, I looked at Trisha and then up at God and said in a silent prayer, "Please let this be the one. Amen." Afterwards, as we sat in IHOP, watching the other fathers celebrate the day, I only hoped that for Father's Day 2016, I'd be right along with them... and I am. I am a proud dad of the most special little boy!!

Our son is only a few months old and doesn't understand what we're celebrating today. But, I know. And I couldn't be happier. Finally, I get to enjoy this day – starting today and for the rest of our lives – eating pancakes alongside the other dads and sons.

You know what's even more exciting? Thinking about the years ahead when we finish the day off on a father-son boating, fishing, and hiking trip. Just us guys, enjoying ourselves as we get dirty and eat lots of junk food that's not approved by mom HAHHAHA!! I can't wait!

For all of you on the dad-to-be journey, I wish you all the luck in the world. I know the road isn't easy, but hang in there; especially for your wife or partner's sake. If you're anything like me, you almost feel powerless; you wish you can take away the tears and hurt and pain but can't.

As men, we want to fix everything, but with infertility, you're limited on what you can do. To be honest, patience is your best tool. Always remember you're in this 'fight' together. You should allow this time to bring the two of you closer by talking about the process and sharing in the decision-making that's best for your family. Do not ever say – "It's whatever you want."

Have an opinion and be her comfort. Most importantly, never let her feel like this is her fault.

What worked well for Trisha and me was finding a hobby the two of us enjoyed together. We would hike a few days out of the month; it was great. She also started "collecting" puppies and, as much as I didn't want us to have any dogs, it was what made her happy and helped with the "void" – so puppies we got. As a matter of fact, we now have three of them. And, to be honest, the dogs brought each of us comfort during our struggle, and I'm thankful for each them.

Other advice I can give... attend as many, if not every, appointment you can with your wife or partner. When she cries, let her – and don't ever say "it will be okay" because that's not what she wants to hear right now. She hears that enough from people outside of the home. From you, she needs to hear that together the two of you will get through the struggle, and whatever is in store for your future, you will accept and accept together. Remind her you didn't marry her for the children, although they will definitely be a blessing. Instead remind her you married her because you love her and want to spend the rest of your life with her. No matter what, you want to be there for her. Every. Step. Of. The. Way.

Again, from one father to one-to-be, best of luck to you. I'm telling you, you don't know what smiling is until you see those eyes looking up at you for the first time. Being a father is amazing... it's the greatest gift God (and the egg bank LOL) can give to a man. I love my son with all of my heart, and I will teach him how to love with all of his heart, too.

## Our future – What stories will we share with friends/family and our child(ren)

### What will we tell people about our donor egg journey?

This is a topic my husband and I discussed early on in our process. I should probably start by letting you know that you readers know more about our journey than almost everyone in our personal lives. Apart from our mothers, my sister, and two close but not best friends, “strangers” are the only people who know our entire story. Not that we are ashamed of our donor egg family, but because we know some people may not protect this decision with the tenderness it deserves. It would shatter my heart if someone, especially someone we trust, ever used our family as a topic of mockery or gossip. As such, there are some parts of our story we elect to keep private to a certain degree.

Here is how we see it....



What is important is our child was made out of pure LOVE. He is our baby, who grew in my belly for 9 long months. We have an indescribable bond that is only shared between the two of us. It is magical! I still think about the day he was pulled (via c-section) from my belly. The moment I heard him cry, I let out my own cry that came from a place so deep within my soul... a place I have never felt before. I can still remember the instant and greatest love, joy, and relief that came over me... we finally got to meet our sweet baby boy, who looks exactly like his father, may I add. I am telling you, he is the number one reason I was born.

So, back to what we will tell people. As far as family and friends are concerned, those who already know, are the only people, who are not “strangers,” we plan to tell (well, almost – keep reading about “others”). What they know – because there is nothing more to share – is all they will know. We trust in each of them to keep our family secret sacred. For “others” in our lives, they will know our story about the challenges we faced when trying to conceive, and how we met our eventual success through IVF (just not the donor egg part). With “strangers” and “others” in our lives who struggle with fertility (we will only tell other people we know in our lives – family, friends, or acquaintances – if they struggle with trying to conceive themselves), they will know our ENTIRE story. We find it an honor to help other families make their own decision about their options to have a child, even if it means “others” in our lives knowing about our decision to use donor eggs... I believe helping families make the decision about their family is reason number two for why I was born.

Now, will we tell our son? We still have not decided. If we do, it will not be before he is 18 years old. Some of the questions we ponder are – Why does he need to know? How will it make him feel? Will he see me differently? Will he understand? Will it hurt him? Can we deal with the rejection, if it means being honest, should he decide to respond this way? There are so many questions for which we do not have the answers right now. And, any of what we will share will depend on his personality. Will he grow up to be an open-minded individual? If so, and we decide to talk to him about how he was conceived, will we share our story about IVF only or the full truth regarding donor eggs? Again, we do not have the answers at this time and do not believe it to be important right now, either.

In the end, whatever we decide to share, our son will always know he was made with lots of love sprinkled with a little bit of sugar and spice. He will know it takes mommy parts and daddy parts to make a baby and, sometimes, when these parts are not working very well, doctors help mommies and daddies make babies like him.

**Trisha continues to be a beacon of light to help others as they navigate their journey, and actively encourages anyone in need of support or guidance to reach out.**

**If you have questions for her, e-mail [success@fairfaxeggbank.com](mailto:success@fairfaxeggbank.com).**