

I am a Human Alien

I am a human alien walking amongst 'normally' conceived humans. I eat sleep and breathe normally, though in my past lies a history that is known to be somewhat significantly different to others.

"When you're married you then have a baby."

I thought this way up until the dawn of hard core curiosity in my life. It all began in year 3 whilst watching an episode of Degrassi Junior High- quite a daring show to watch since the pre-screen always said "teenagers only". This episode was quite different - a teenager pregnant?

This news broke my original opinion about kids and marriage.

"What was the truth? Why is a teenager having a baby?"

Mum was busy cooking in the kitchen and I casually glanced up at her and said, "Where did I come from?" At this point Mum froze, called up her friend and eventually pulled out some books with rather comical cartoons. I looked in it, in a way disgusted with what I saw. "So this is how babies are made?"

I stuck with this idea outwardly, as kids at school seemed to endorse it. I was still not satisfied. "Is this how I was really made?" I asked as I pointed to the couple in the cartoon.

"Ah...not quite...you see you were conceived.... I mean you were made through IVF."

"What?" I thought, as I was trying to comprehend the three letters.

"You are a test tube baby," Mum's face was a little tense. This sounded quite serious. A baby in a test tube? That is not possible.

That day I was given two magazines with babies from the front to back covers - I was relieved to hear that I wasn't created like the cartoon depicted in the book mum originally placed in front of me. But if this was the normal way to make babies then how was I made? The words in these magazines were very big and I was contented with seeing my picture featured in a magazine. I turned the pages not able to comprehend what the magazine was explaining.

I promised myself I would read them in Year 4 - I should be able to understand them by then. According to Mum I was the fourth IVF baby born in NSW. I knew that IVF was something special but what it was, remained a question I left unanswered, as it was a hard concept to understand.

For the next five years if anyone mentioned birth I immediately said, "I am the fourth IVF baby born in NSW" I didn't actually know what this meant, but 4th sounded special.

It was a place I wished I had received in the school athletics carnival.

I wasn't interested in what IVF was until year eight. I learnt about reproduction.

Out came, the constantly repeated line, "I am the fourth IVF baby born in NSW"

The class didn't know enough about IVF to praise or criticise my unusual phrase. They asked me many questions to find out more, such as "Are your parents really yours?" or "Do you feel 'normal'?" A commonly asked question was "What does IVF mean?" I really did not know.

I had to find the answer.

I searched through the magazines given to me when I first became interested in conception. They provided me with an emotional aspect to the topic and factual side too.

They also had a souvenir appeal and marked my historical conception as a record to be remembered. These ideas simmered for the next year as I attempted to comprehend the IVF process and what it all meant.

With each bit of new information I gathered, my interest grew. I decided to write a story on this subject for a science competition for school. I needed to research the subject to gain a greater knowledge so I could write with deeper understanding. I sent an e-mail to North Shore A.R.T to introduce myself and ask for information to fill the science gap to give me the background for the story. Professor Saunders replied to my e-mail and told me that the original team was still intact and asked me and mum to visit them at the A.R.T clinic in Chatswood. I felt excited and curious when mum and I left Newcastle early one Friday morning on our journey to Sydney.

"Please follow me," Professor Saunders said. My gut tightened as I entered into his office, which looked onto a grey, wet winter day. The conversation flowed as I sat in the flat-backed chair trying to string a plausible sentence in order to bring up some conversation. Though this soon proved unnecessary "This is fantastic", he replied to my amazement, "you are the first IVF child to have contacted us and has shown an interest in their conception."

I was amazed to hear this as I thought there would be at least someone else who had contacted the team.

"Laura you're one of the pioneers in IVF," mentioned Prof. Saunders. This statement was a real assurance to me that my often repeated line, "I'm the fourth IVF baby born in NSW" was actually true. I was delighted to be thought of as something so special by such revered people when I think myself as being no different from anyone else.

Apparently, the day that I was born was planned exactly 40 weeks from the day of conception, not one day more or less. This day was the 7th of July 1983 by caesarean section at the Royal North Shore Hospital (RNS). On an average day 20 people visited Mum on the week of my birth. On one day mum had a top of 22 people all at the same time crowding in the room to see the new baby. Mum said, "she had the most visitors that week than anyone else in the hospital."

I was invited to visit the lab at Hunters Hill hospital, where I was conceived. I looked at microscopic images and equipment such as the incubators. I was shown how a potential life can be produced from a tiny cell about the size of a

small grain of sand. I looked at these tiny beginnings of human life under the microscope and realised that at one stage I was in that same place. The sights I saw in the lab fascinated me.

After my visit to the team at NS A.R.T I asked myself 'what is it like to be an IVF child?' I found this hard to explain to myself, as I feel perfectly normal. The idea of being different or 'alien' still had not crossed my mind until I encountered this question. The only difference is the method of my conception.

I am pleased that my parents told me the history of my conception. This has opened up new ideas for careers for the future and has given me a greater understanding of IVF.

As Dad drove us home I started to think about what I had discovered. I had learned more in the two journeys to Sydney than I had learnt from a textbook. I was conceived normally. This program provided Mum with a chance of pregnancy that was hard to achieve naturally.

I know now I am as normal anyone, no matter how they were conceived.

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