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Don't

(Reposted from original interview with Jennifer Lahl, at www.eggsplotation.com)

I grew up in foster care and aged out at 18 without ever having a family. I was a good kid, talented in the arts and academics. I worked hard with the hope that a family would want me. I was never adopted so needless to say I've been desperate to be a part of a family my entire life.

I was never paid for my eggs. I gave my eggs away. A few years ago, I gave my eggs to good friends with the naive belief that this was a way for me to be part of a family--and I would even have a genetic connection! I was promised that I would always be part of the family and the child's life. I was told that I was "always meant to be part of their family and that their family never felt complete until I came along." I wanted to give my friends what I never had--a family. I thought, "When would I ever have a chance to make such a huge difference in someone's life again?" And I would be part of a family too. How could I not do it? I was so eager for love and had no one looking out for my best interests which made me easily exploited, even if unintentionally.

I took Follistim, Menopur, and Lupron. The doctors assured me there were no long term side effects from egg donation. The only risk was OHSS which only happened in 1% they said. Knowing what it's like to yearn for family, I went through with the egg donation for my friends. I had to take some genetic tests for diseases, health tests, and a counseling session over the phone. The counseling session was about my life history and how the egg donation might affect my friends. It was never about my psychological needs. I produced an unreal 47 eggs. At first I felt pride in that. Now that I know better, I am angry that the doctors risked my health and allowed twice the normal amount of eggs normally produced by donors to develop and allowed my ovaries to stretch beyond safe levels. I was so uncomfortable. I looked pregnant. I had to hold up my distended abdomen just to walk during the last few days before the retrieval.

During the egg donation process the doctors and nurses were super supportive except for when I questioned anything like the fact that all the drugs came in my friend's name. When I questioned it I was told "Because she's the one paying for everything" in a pretty harsh tone. Um, she may have been paying financially, but she was not the only one paying for the donation. Plus, it's illegal to take drug prescriptions written for someone else isn't it? After the egg retrieval their attitude towards me changed. They did not want anything more to do with me, especially when I had complications. I became an annoyance. During the whole process I had some eye problems. My vision was a little blurry and my eyes ability to focus changed. My eyes returned to normal about six months later, but when I asked the fertility doctor about it he told me that he never heard of that happening. I later researched it and discovered that the FDA lists it as a side effect of the drugs I was given.

Immediately after the retrieval, I had a lot of bleeding and discomfort. I became severely depressed to the point where I needed antidepressants but my mental health continued to decline. My periods stopped. My hair became dry and brittle. My skin changed and I got a lot of acne. I gained weight at an alarming rate but my diet did not change. Driving over bumps, jumping, or any type of rough movement was a little painful for months after my donation. I kept calling the clinic with my concerns but each time I was told my side effects were normal and would get better. Six months without a period was normal? The side effects did not get better.

Finally I went to see my doctor who ran tests and found that my hormone levels were "all over the place." He referred me to a specialist who told me I had what seemed like PCOS and then I was referred to an endocrinologist. I will be on drugs to control my hormones for the rest of my life. I still go months without a period. My mental health continues to be an issue and is very much

linked to my hormones. My ovaries have remained enlarged and I will most likely never be able to conceive naturally, if at all.

My friends promised me I could have the remaining embryos, but they have since changed their minds. They've changed their minds about a lot of things.

My friends have decided that I am no longer part of their family. She cannot handle that her son looks exactly like me. She is devastated that her son has no genetic link to her. She wishes he had come out looking like her husband because I remind her that he's not hers. I'm not sure what she expected when she took my DNA. I'm no longer part of my "nephew's" life after loving him for over two years; I have to stalk the father's blog to watch him grow up. I would have never given them my eggs had I thought I would not be a part of the child's life.

Despite my gift and sacrifices for the people I love, they have abandoned me. My devastation and drastic mood swings became too much for me and I attempted to end my life. This was a scary blessing. Antidepressants didn't work well for me so the psychiatrists ran tests and found the right medications to balance my hormone levels and I feel so much better and a lot more stable. I donated my eggs out of a desire to mend the broken hearts of people that I love and my own. What I got in return was a hormonal disorder, major depression, infertility, and another family abandoning me for reasons I do not understand. I wish I could go back in time and spare my body, fertility, mind, and my heart.

Egg donation is NOT harmless like I was led to believe. It has seriously affected every part of my life. I often cry about the loss of my friends, my family, the little person with half my DNA and my ability to have my own genetic children someday. If you're thinking about donating your eggs for ANY reason--DON'T. It's not worth it.