

In September 2017, after digging for explanations of an Ancestry.com DNA test that didn't add up, I learned that I am donor conceived. The word 'shock' can get watered down with overuse but receiving that phone call from my dad — the dad who raised me and who will always be my dad — left me stunned.

I remember vividly the sound of his shaking voice coming through the Bluetooth connection in my car. He explained the difficulty he and my mother had in conceiving naturally. Year after year with no luck. Trials of different kinds of therapy, but to no avail. "My sperm count was just too low," he explained. "But we so badly wanted to start a family, David. We wanted *you* so badly."

And despite every feat of human strength I could muster, to push back the words being driven over me, there was no longer any stopping what I'd be told next.

"We got the help of a sperm donor, honey. David, you are not my biological son."

*This doesn't happen to people like me.*

Except, it did. Or rather, it always was. And I sobbed until I had no tears left.

As the subsequent days unfolded, and the shock wore off, I was left to navigate my new normal, which was in fact quite new. I learned that I'm half-Jewish (not Italian/Irish), and I had two new half siblings, both born within 11 months of me, in the same city: Rochester, NY.

In fact, I met them both just two weeks after discovering they existed. And even with high nerves and hopes, they both exceeded my expectations. I was delighted by them both — one half-brother, one half-sister. They were both smart, warm, engaging and gentle. I loved them in an instant, knowing that regardless of what might come of our relationships in the future, I had a connection with two people that could never be matched or broken.

In so many ways, it felt like learning that I was donor conceived was a bonus to a life that was already a good one. I got two bonus siblings. And I didn't have to give up the family I was raised with to get them.

Things changed about a year later when we discovered twin sisters. In a twist of irony that hit uncomfortably close to home, they were in fact close childhood friends of the first-half sister I'd met a year prior — they lived on the same street as one another.

Two thoughts occurred to me, or rather, all of us. One — If there are five of us that we know of, it seems likely there are perhaps many more than that. And two — shouldn't there have been consideration that half-siblings might be growing up near one another without ever knowing?

Over the next two years, the number of half-siblings swelled to 12. And growing curiosities about our origins turned to downright suspicions. All our mothers had been fertility patients of the same man, Dr. Morris Wortman. And we all looked like him.

Of course, this isn't a possibility I arrived at haphazardly or without significant consideration. But it increasingly seemed not only possible, but probable.

In April 2021, with the help of DNAngels, I was given the contact information for one of Dr. Wortman's known daughters. My thinking? Reach out to her, see if she'll agree to take a DNA test, and confirm once and for all if her father is my biological father.

To my surprise, she agreed to take the test. And six weeks later, the results came in — she and I were a 99.99% match as half-siblings, thus confirming that her father, our mothers' fertility doctor, was our biological father.

I was swept up in media coverage from the *New York Times* and *Good Morning America* among others, all with a curiosity about how this happened, and how it was somehow entirely legal in our place of birth, New York state.

To explain this experience concisely and comprehensively is a challenge. It's raised questions of identity, and it's become disorienting to discover new half-siblings multiple times per year; there are 19 of us as of now.

In so many ways, I'm grateful. I'm here. I have a family who loved me and raised me and who will always be mine, and I've gained some wonderful half-siblings too. But at the same time, I *shouldn't* be here; no doctor should be permitted to use his own sperm to impregnate his patients, and certainly not without their consent.

And this is where I am now; I am eager to see the passage of fertility fraud legislation. It's the only thing I can think to dedicate my energy to that might make my experience worth something meaningful and purposeful, instead of just unusual and occasionally disorienting.

I can never undo who I am or how I got here. But I can help ensure others like me, and others in the future, will have protections that my mother didn't, and that children like me might have access to medical records and clarity that they so rightly deserve.