

Inquisitive Nashville teen finds her egg donor mom

Heidi Hall, The Tennessean 7:34 p.m. EDT June 5, 2014



(Photo: Gilmore family photo via The Tennessean)

NASHVILLE — Janet Schreiber read *Goodnight Moon* and *Curious George* and all the usual children's books to her daughter, a thoughtful little girl who always wanted another story (<http://www.tennessean.com/story/news/health/2014/06/05/nashville-teen-finds-egg-donor/10014929/>).

So her mother told her one, a small, simple piece at a time, about the child's unusual conception.

Sometimes mommies and daddies need help if they want to have a baby, Schreiber would say. Children are created in all different ways. One way is called in vitro fertilization.

Brittan Gilmore was about 7 when she put it all together, confronting her mother anxiously instead of climbing into bed. "Are you my real mom?" she asked.

STORY: [College females turn to egg donations to fund school \(/story/news/nation/2013/07/11/egg-donations-funding-college-payments/2509997/\)](/story/news/nation/2013/07/11/egg-donations-funding-college-payments/2509997/)

STORY: [More women seek pregnancy with donor eggs \(/story/news/nation/2013/10/17/donor-egg-pregnancy/2996959/\)](/story/news/nation/2013/10/17/donor-egg-pregnancy/2996959/)

Schreiber paused. The day was here.

"I'm your real mommy," she said. "But you have another mommy, too."

Nearly a decade later, the Nashville teen and her egg donor came together in a way as modern as her birth, after a search on an Internet database, a timid message on Facebook and, finally, a tearful introduction on Katie Couric's daytime TV talk show. The show will air June 12.

Brittan's experience getting there made her an advocate for an open system that would allow willing egg and sperm donors to connect with their offspring.

The story begins with JoLana Talbot, a 23-year-old woman married to a soldier deployed from Fort Campbell. Talbot's friend responded to a newspaper ad seeking an egg donor and shared her experience. There are so many families who need help at Nashville Fertility Clinic, she said.

Talbot's job was basically to be a human egg farm — take hormone shots to increase production, but no smoking, sex or drinking, not even coffee. She donated seven times — 348 eggs total — and earned \$1,500 per donation. Eventually she divorced, remarried and moved to outside Houston.

But she always felt an attachment to the eggs she left in Tennessee.

She called the fertility clinic every time she moved to leave her new address, in case there was ever a medical crisis someone wanted to ask her about. "It would be selfish to say, 'I don't ever want to be found or noticed,'" said Talbot.

Success on second try

Some of those eggs went to Schreiber and her husband, Jim Gilmore, who'd married 10 years earlier knowing fertility would be a challenge after Schreiber experienced early menopause.

Brittan was conceived on their second IVF try — Gilmore the biological father, Talbot the biological mother, Schreiber carrying the embryo. She was 46 when she gave birth.



Janet Schreibman, front, and her daughter Brittan Gilmore and husband Jim Gilmore look at baby photos of Brittan, who was conceived with an egg donor. The family searched to find Brittan's biological mother. (Photo: Shelley Mays, *The Tennessean*)

The decision to tell Brittan about her birth led to adolescent curiosity and then to the [Donor Sibling Registry](https://www.donorsiblingregistry.com/) (<https://www.donorsiblingregistry.com/>), the creation of Colorado mom Wendy Kramer and her son, who started it in 2000 with a [Yahoo.com group](https://groups.yahoo.com/neo/groups/DonorSiblingRegistry/info) (<https://groups.yahoo.com/neo/groups/DonorSiblingRegistry/info>). Today, more than 43,000 donors, parents and donor offspring are registered with more than 11,000 sibling and other matches.

Parents such as Gilmore and Schreibman, who are honest from the beginning, have the best relationships with their kids, Kramer said.

"We feel there's no reason to keep these people from each other," she said. "DNA does matter. If it didn't matter, we'd give birth to whatever child we gave birth to at the hospital and then just pick a baby and go home."

The identity of U.S. sperm and egg donors is protected by default. In the United Kingdom, Australia and other countries, sperm and egg donors must be willing to be contacted when their offspring turns 18, said J. Glenn Cohen (<http://www.law.harvard.edu/faculty/directory/10176/Cohen>), a Harvard University law professor who specializes in bioethics. But some birth parents still never tell because they don't want to be undermined by a second relationship, Cohen said, and it can be tough for a child to be rejected by the donor.

If the United States were to mandate more openness, Cohen said, he'd also like laws that determine how much responsibility the donor must take on.

"It sounds like the story on Katie Couric is a happy one, but in some cases, when people agree to be sperm donors or egg donors, they don't want to have a relationship with the children brought into existence," he said. "I'd rather clarify up front what people are agreeing to do."

The search begins

Brittan started her search at age 13, e-mailing the fertility clinic to ask what it could do. Nothing, the clinic answered truthfully. So she found the online registry and entered her information. By January of this year, she decided to focus solely on her sophomore year at Martin Luther King Jr. Academic Magnet and only check the registry one more time.

Her donor was there. Within minutes, she'd found Talbot's registry moniker on Pinterest, linked it to Facebook and messaged her. Schreibman asked the clinic for her donor number. Within weeks, she knew it was a match — knowledge she shared with Brittan for her 16th birthday, along with Talbot's cellphone number. Couric's show, the suggestion of a TV producer neighbor, brought them face to face in March.

They've texted or talked every day since, a testament to that DNA link that Kramer mentioned.

Schreibman says her relationship with her daughter is strong enough to accommodate a second mom, and their kinship — if not shared DNA — is apparent in the hugs and laughs and the obvious importance Brittan puts on what the woman who gave birth to her thinks.

Average donor age: 28

Infertile women who seek help: 12%

ART procedures that result in pregnancy: 36%

ART procedures that result in live birth: 29%

Source: U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

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