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FATHERS IN THE MAKING

Ready to be dads, but they're going to need help

For a baby of their own, David and Chad will have to draw on science, the law, their families -- and most of all, each other.

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FAIRFAX, Va. — Chad Hodge liked #694. She was a 21-year-old college student, 5-feet-5, 135 pounds, with straight brown hair, blue eyes and a narrow nose. She had won 16 awards in high school for academics and music, and scored a 1210 on the SAT. She was outgoing, intelligent, responsible and friendly, or at least she said she was.

Chad wanted her to be the mother of his children.

But David Craig, Chad's partner of seven years, had his heart set on #685. She was a teacher, 23, 5-feet-2, with wavy blond hair and light blue eyes. She wore a size 0. She had been a varsity tennis player in high school, a ballerina and a classical pianist.

For two hours on that day in early 2004, Chad and David sat in a small office at Genetics & IVF Institute, a fertility clinic in northern Virginia, and sifted through the dossiers of prospective egg donors. It felt more like catalog shopping than human reproduction.

The previous fall, they had decided to have a child through a gestational surrogacy arrangement. They would pay one woman to provide her eggs and then, after fertilizing them in vitro with their sperm, pay another woman to carry the resulting embryos to term.

It was a quest that would take them to the frontiers of medicine, bioethics, technology and the law, as well as to the front lines of the culture wars.

They had considered adoption, but Chad, 33, and David, 35, wanted to participate more fully in the process of bringing a child into the world. They longed to see the first ultrasonic images of a tiny pumping heart and even to provide coaching in the maternity ward, just like straight fathers.

They also hoped to exert some control over their child's genetic makeup, and to create a biological link across the generations. Over the last decade, science and society had conspired to make it all possible.

Rather than creating a life in the privacy of a bedroom, Chad and David would plot this conception in law offices, doctors' suites and Internet chat rooms. It would take a village to manufacture their child.

A weak link at any point — the egg donor, the surrogate, the lawyers, doctors or embryologists — could mean emotional devastation, at considerable expense. Chad and David were braced to spend upwards of \$100,000, much of it borrowed, with no assurance of success. In the young field of in vitro fertilization, which had produced its first baby only in 1978, heartbreak often preceded happiness.

Hoping to keep the genetics within their families, Chad and David had first approached their sisters about donating eggs. But Chad's sister and her husband had not wanted to interrupt their own baby-making timetable. And tests suggested that David's 37-year-old sister, at three years past the usual age limit for egg donors, might be a risky bet.

That left few options but to shop the open market for half of the genetic material that would determine their child's appearance, aptitude and health. All they would have to go on would be the responses to a 10-page questionnaire, a couple of pictures and a brief audiotape.

The egg donors in the clinic's database commanded a \$5,000 fee, the maximum recommended by the American Society for Reproductive Medicine. Because state laws barred the sale of human tissue, contracts would assert that the donor was being paid not for her eggs, but for her time and trouble, including weeks of daily hormone injections.

The parties would remain anonymous to each other, minimizing any risk that the egg donor might someday stake a claim to the child. Though that anonymity would afford Chad and David a measure of protection, it also meant there would be little way to verify the donor's representations, from her genetic history to her SAT scores.

David shook his head as he turned the pages. "This is so 'Twilight Zone,' " he said. "I mean, these are people. This isn't what shirt am I going to buy."

"We're not doing this because we want to," Chad said. "Our options are limited."

In their profiles, egg donors had been asked to describe every imaginable trait, down to the contour of their hairlines (straight, slight curve, or widow's peak) and the flare of their nostrils (small, average or wide). Medical histories, from heart disease to handedness, were required going back three generations. Did anyone in the family have clubfoot? How about psoriasis? The donors were even asked their favorite colors, movies and songs.

Chad and David had ideas about what they wanted. For weeks, they had evaluated virtually any woman who entered their field of view. One night, when David met friends at a Georgetown bar, a striking woman with olive skin and dark eyes asked him to dance. When he later told Chad how flattering it had been, Chad could only ask: "Do you think she would be our egg donor?"

If possible, Chad and David wanted their child to resemble them — white, with blue or green eyes and blond or light brown hair — so that regardless of which was the biological father, the child might seem a mixture of both. They flipped past the portfolios of black and Asian women, and crossed off anyone with a family history of significant genetic disease.

Among those remaining, they looked for educational achievement and an outgoing personality. They scribbled notes on yellow Post-its about whether the women had donated previously and whether a pregnancy had resulted.

Each file included a baby picture. Once Chad and David narrowed their choices to six, they were allowed to view adult photographs. They didn't want to consider appearance at the exclusion of all else, but they couldn't deny, in the privacy of that room, that it mattered.

"You can't ignore it," David said. "I mean, who wants an ugly child?"

"David, some people would be happy with that," Chad scolded.

"But I mean, if you get to pick, what would be the best-case scenario? We're not a normal couple, so, yeah, we would be happy with anything we get. But when you get to choose ... "

It was the adult photo that sealed the deal for #685. They listed her first, followed by #694 and #662.

The clinic then informed them that all three donors had a waiting list. It could be months before any of their choices became available.

Yearning for fatherhood

When Chad came of age and grudgingly accepted that he wasn't like other boys in his south Georgia town, one regret stood out among others: In the 1980s, it was all but inconceivable that homosexual couples could have children. Not only was it biologically implausible, but to folks in Valdosta the very notion would have seemed as appropriate as wearing a bathrobe to the First Baptist Church.

Slightly built and short for his age, Chad had always had a way with children. He doted on his

younger sister, braiding her hair and playing with her Barbies. His mother's friends competed for his baby-sitting services, impressed that he organized parties for their kids when simply tucking them in would have sufficed. He had always assumed he would have children of his own.

"It was a life I had always been told I would have," Chad said. "I loved being around kids. I loved it. And I didn't think I could have kids at all, unless I pretended I was straight and got married, just for the sake of having kids."

Once he came out, while attending the University of Georgia, his mother wrote him a series of tormented letters. She had convinced herself that he would die of AIDS, and that he would burn in hell. She told him it was as if he had died.

Debbie Young, who had divorced Chad's father when he was 6, now says she didn't mean that literally. "But my expectations, or what I wanted — him being married and having a family — that had died," she said. "I had to go back and rebuild something else. And I really didn't have an easy time of it until he met David."

Chad was introduced to David Craig, a gregarious and self-possessed North Carolinian, on April 25, 1997, at a gay bar in Atlanta. Both were living there at the time, with Chad working as a software engineer and David selling carpet while trying to build an interior design business.

They took to the dance floor that night as if in a bubble, then moved to the parking lot for a more private conversation. When Chad's roommate interrupted to announce he was ready to leave, David tossed him a pack of cigarettes. "Here," he said, "go somewhere and smoke these." The roommate complied.

Five years later, turned out in tuxedos and surrounded by beaming relatives, the two men pledged their devotion to each other in a civil union ceremony at an elegant resort in Vermont.



By the time they met, Chad had learned that lesbians — and a smaller number of gay men — were starting to adopt. "Maybe I could do that," he thought, and shared his hopes with David.

But for gay men, adopting domestically often meant accepting the most traumatized children

available. International adoptions often required trips to Asia or Latin America, mounds of intrusive paperwork, and a measure of deceit about sexual orientation. Chad and David felt strongly that the process of having a child should publicly affirm their love for each other, not closet it.

Chad was intrigued, therefore, when he discovered surrogacy on the Internet. He liked that creating their own child would give them more control. They could handpick their children's DNA and insist on high standards of prenatal care. They could aim for twins by transferring more than one embryo, perhaps completing their family in a single transaction.

Chad also learned that the process was prohibitively expensive, almost twice as much as the typical adoption. It required carefully drawn contracts to guarantee that neither the egg donor nor the surrogate could claim parental rights. After birth, the biological father's partner would have to petition the courts for shared parental rights through a filing known as a second-parent adoption.

"You have to really want a baby very badly to do it this way," Chad said.

His first challenge would be convincing David to join him.

David had long held a theoretical interest in fatherhood. Like Chad, his parents had divorced when he was young and he had been raised primarily by his mother. His father, an insurance salesman who traveled frequently, tended to cancel visitation dates at the last minute.

Once David accepted that he was gay, he realized he would never have the chance to be the kind of father he wished he'd had himself.

"It was sad, but the only option was to live a lie," he said. "And I kind of went back and forth. Could I be abstinent? Could I change? If somebody said I could take a pill that would make me straight, would I? Those first couple of years I would have taken a whole bottle."

Yet David felt he could live without children if he had to, finding contentment in work and travel and relationships. And belongings.

By the time he was a teenager, David had developed an eye for fine things and an acquisitive streak that bordered on conspicuous consumption. Even then, his tastes ran to designer labels and rich fabrics, the forebears of the Armani suits and cashmere coats that would later line his closet. His best friend in high school, Evin Somerstein, recalled that while he wanted an Atari video game for his 16th birthday, "David wanted an armoire."

David's materialism made friends roll their eyes. But beneath the Neiman Marcus veneer they found a razor intellect, a generous heart, an optimistic spirit, and an almost effortless charm. By the time David came to grips with his sexuality, a lacerating tongue had mellowed into a quick and often wickedly entertaining wit.

From the outset, Chad and David seemed perfect complements. David grounded Chad, and made him more secure. Chad softened David, and made him more sensitive.

Straight friends found their emerging relationship a revelation. "It was the first time they realized that homosexuality was not just about sex," Somerstein said, "that these were two guys who loved each other."

Assisted reproduction

It wasn't until Chad and David went to couples counseling in 2001 that David revealed he had serious reservations about being a parent. He liked their life as it was, he said, and he wasn't convinced he was the nurturing kind.

He worried that having two good fathers might, in the end, be just as unfair as having one inadequate one. And he questioned the wisdom of doing this in the South. Would their children get picked on? Would they forever resent their gay fathers?

"We want the life experience of having kids," he told Chad, "but are we going to deny them the life experience of having a mother?"

Chad agreed that their children would have a different upbringing. "But will it be bad, or will they suffer because of it?" he asked. "I think absolutely not." He let David know how important this was to him. "Your relationship with a child is unlike anything you'll ever have with any other person," he said. "I just can't imagine dying without having the experience."

The therapist told David that the research to date had found little evidence that children of gay parents faced particular adjustment problems. In their case, she said, there would be loving grandmothers and aunts to serve as female role models.

David's concerns gradually melted away. "I just decided they could do a hell of a lot worse," he said. "A lot of people in much worse environments raise children and they don't all turn out to be ax murderers."

Chad knew their motives might be seen as self-indulgent. But that didn't make them bad people, he argued, or devalue the love they would give their children.

Unlike the hundreds of thousands of unwanted children conceived each year by straight couples, theirs would be the product of planning and intent. Now that the technology existed, they asked themselves, why shouldn't gay men have the same right as straight people to produce a genetic heir? All they lacked were eggs and a womb. As it turned out, they could buy the first and lease the second.

Their financial condition improved markedly when Chad took a series of high-paying jobs related to a military software contract in 2002 and 2003, prompting them to move to Washington, D.C. David decided to make a go of it as a full-time designer.

They settled in to an elegant center-hall colonial in northwest Washington. As David appointed the house with European antiques, Chad began stacking textbooks about in vitro fertilization on his bedside table. He became a regular reader of Surrogate Mothers Online, a website with a lively forum for gay and lesbian families. He kept the television tuned to the Discovery Health channel for shows like "Babies: Special Delivery."

Chad learned that the \$3-billion fertility industry now accounted for 1 of every 100 births in America. The number of assisted reproductive technology cycles performed in the U.S. had more than doubled since 1995, according to the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

Infertile heterosexual couples had been using surrogates since shortly after England's Louise Brown became the world's first test-tube baby in 1978. Most of the early pregnancies were so-called "traditional surrogacies," in which a woman, using her own eggs, was inseminated and delivered a baby on behalf of the biological father and his wife.

But a series of sensational custody battles, starting with the 1988 Baby M case in New Jersey, exposed the legal risks inherent when the carrier was also the genetic mother. That led many lawyers to encourage their clients to pursue gestational surrogacy instead.

In those arrangements, the egg donor would never have a chance to bond with the child in utero. Indeed, the donor and the parents need never even know each other's names. The surrogate, meanwhile, could make no claim of a biological relationship with the child she had carried.

There were still substantial obstacles for gay men. More than half of all fertility clinics refused to take them as patients, according to a recent study, though the vast majority did accept lesbians. Four states — Florida, Michigan, Mississippi and Utah — either explicitly or effectively banned adoption by gay couples, and similar proposals were under consideration elsewhere.

In most states, however, surrogacy arrangements involving gays existed in a legal Wild West where reproductive technology was rapidly outpacing the law. There were few definitive court rulings establishing parental rights. Judicial precedents varied not only state to state, but county to county. Time and again, judges had been asked to make Solomonic custody decisions, often redefining parenthood in the process.

There is no census of how many children gay men have produced this way. But surrogacy businesses around the country report that their gay clientele has grown exponentially over the last five years.

One of them, Los Angeles-based Growing Generations, is celebrating its 10th anniversary as the first agency dedicated exclusively to matching gays and lesbians with egg donors and surrogates. The firm, which attracts 15 to 20 new clients a month, has engineered the delivery of more than 300 babies, at prices that can reach \$120,000, according to Stuart Miller, its chief executive. Increasingly, he said, the parents of gay men are helping to foot the bill, investing in grandchildren they'd assumed they would never have.

Finding a surrogate

One of those who recognized the market potential of gay men and surrogacy was Diane S. Hinson, a Harvard-educated lawyer in northern Virginia. When Hinson founded Creative Family Connections in 2002 as a one-stop shop for assisted reproduction, she promoted her services assiduously to gay men.

She filled her brochures with pictures of men bottle-feeding babies and walking their children to

school, and highlighted the firm's founding principle that "everyone can build a family." Her firm specialized in customized searches for egg donors and surrogates, but also monitored medical procedures and crafted contracts to ensure that "the most important thing you have ever created — your child — is fully protected."

Late in 2003, Chad and David hired Hinson's firm to help them navigate the surrogacy process. She warned them it would feel at times like a roller-coaster ride, and that it would not be cheap. The going rate for a surrogate was \$20,000 to carry a singleton, and \$5,000 more for twins. Legal fees, doctor bills and fertility drugs would run into the tens of thousands. There also would be incidental expenses, like a \$500 maternity clothing allowance for the surrogate.

Throughout the winter and spring of 2004, Hinson and her law partner, Linda C. ReVeal, placed a series of classified ads in weekly newspapers that circulated in suburban Maryland.

"Surrogate Needed: Help Us Start a Family," read the headline. "We have been a devoted couple for seven years and now we're ready to start a family. But we need a surrogate to carry our baby.... Could you be that special person? If you are in excellent health, not a smoker or drug user, and have completed your family, call our attorney. COMPENSATION \$20,000 + ALL EXPENSES."

The traits Chad and David wanted in a surrogate were different from those they sought in an egg donor. Appearance and genetic background would count for little. What mattered most — along with good health and a proven ability to bear children — would be stability, reliability, and compatibility on an array of highly charged issues.

Chad and David were acutely aware that once a surrogate got pregnant with their child, her body was hers to control. They could not force her to selectively reduce in the event she carried multiple fetuses. They could not force her to abort if tests detected a terrible abnormality. It was important, therefore, to make their views plain from the start, to find a surrogate who would defer to their wishes, and to write their agreement into a contract.

Responding to a questionnaire from Hinson, Chad and David wrote that they "would love to have twins" and "would happily accept triplets." They said they would "accept fetal reduction for triplets at the surrogate's discretion," but would "ask for fetal reduction for any amount greater than three."

As for abortion, they wrote: "If the pregnancy became life-threatening for the surrogate, we would consider therapeutic abortion. We would request to terminate the pregnancy if there was a significant possibility that the baby would not survive the birth or would suffer significantly after the birth because of a genetic abnormality."

The questionnaire asked whether they preferred one gender over the other, because some clinics employed sperm-sorting techniques that could increase the odds. "We would be happy with either a boy or a girl," they answered, "or both."

Hinson and ReVeal targeted Maryland for their search because the state had no laws regulating surrogacy. For several years, judges in friendly jurisdictions like Baltimore had been granting second-parent adoptions to non-biological parents in gay relationships. (Surrogacy for pay was

illegal in the District of Columbia, where Chad and David lived, and in several other states.)

When their first ad did not generate much response, Hinson and ReVeal tweaked the copy, with one version imploring: "HELP US BECOME DADS." Some surrogates, they had learned, preferred working with gay men rather than infertile women, who might carry the baggage of past failures. Womb envy, it was called.

The lawyers never knew quite what to expect when they visited the homes of the women who responded to their ads. While ReVeal sized up a prospect's reliability to keep appointments and take medications, Hinson would excuse herself to the restroom, surreptitiously inspecting it for grime and other signs of dereliction.

"Are you prepared for this commitment?" ReVeal would ask. "This is more important for these parents than anything they've ever done. You're changing somebody's life profoundly, fundamentally, for good."

Some candidates lost interest; others were quickly jettisoned for failing a criminal background check or for being obese, a risk factor for pregnancy complications. In some cases, religious views might make it difficult to reach agreements on abortion, or messy personal lives might pose other concerns.

"We try to avoid situations that are too complicated," ReVeal explained. "It's always a red flag if there's three or four or five children by different fathers. It's not a moral judgment. There are just too many details."

In checking out one respondent to the ad for Chad and David, Hinson and ReVeal found themselves on a front porch in a tough Baltimore neighborhood. There was a large poster of a glowering gun barrel in the window. "If you come here tonight," it warned, "you won't be here tomorrow morning!" After repeated knocking, a woman came to the door with a baby and asked to reschedule because she had spent the night in the emergency room. They told her thanks, but no thanks.

A biological question

At Hinson's request, Chad and David had been working diligently on a "Dear Potential Surrogate" letter. When candidates responded to her advertisements, she liked to reel them in with a direct appeal from the intended parents.

They wrote from the heart about their Southern upbringings, their contrasting personalities, their common values. They described Chad as "a loving person who expresses himself more softly and empathetically," and David as "a firestorm of confidence and humor, tempered with a trusting soul and an honest heart."

"Through grace we found each other and have forged a wonderful life together," they wrote, "but the challenge of building a family still stands before us.... We will make good parents because we have abundant love and dedication ready to give our child. We have a real view of the world and we know there will be good times, great times, and hard times all wrapped up into the raising of a child. We want the fullness of the experience."

As Hinson and ReVeal screened respondents, Chad and David made other preparations for parenthood. They signed up for a "Maybe Baby" class for gay men. Chad filed papers to take David's surname, despite being the last male Hodge in his line. They opened negotiations over first names, jotting down dozens of combinations.

They also began tackling a more awkward decision: Which of them would be the genetic contributor?

Both had donated sperm — David in November, when it seemed that Chad's sister might be their egg donor, and Chad in December, when it seemed that the donor might be David's sister. Their samples remained frozen at the Fairfax Cryobank.

In their earliest discussions, Chad had volunteered David for the job. "You're cuter," he had said. "You don't wear glasses and you come from a real creative family."

But the two men also had another imperative. Chad and David wanted to do anything they could to make sure that both fathers would be viewed equally as parents. And they thought that might only be feasible if they kept the identity of the biological father a mystery.

Chad said it didn't really reflect any internal insecurity. "In my heart, I will know that whether or not I am the biological contributor to these children, I will be a complete and whole parent," he said. "I can say to them without a doubt that they would not be here if it weren't for my efforts to create them."

The issue had more to do with how they would be perceived by a world that might not know what to make of their family. They knew that friends and strangers would ask who the father was, and that they would find the question offensive.

In particular, they did not want one of their families to feel more invested than the other because of genetics. They decided the safest course would be to keep the secret even from themselves.

"In the ambiguity of paternity, I think there's an implication of equality," Chad said. "We'll both equally be fathers in the eyes of whoever we're talking to because we can't give them a definitive answer."

"The best answer," David said, "would be, 'Well, your guess is as good as ours.'"

David reasoned that in an ideal world they would both have an equal chance at being the biological contributor. Maybe their sperm could be mixed before fertilization. Clinics in California had been doing that.

Hinson had heard of yet another approach, also from California, known as dual embryo transfer. Egg donors, after being shot full of hormones, typically produced 10 to 20 eggs rather than one. If they fertilized half the eggs with Chad's sperm and half with David's, and kept the batches separate, they could transfer one embryo from each. They might get twins, each with the same genetic mother and a different biological father. If only one embryo took, paternity would be unknowable without DNA testing.

In late April 2004, the fertility clinic contacted Chad and David to let them know their third-ranked egg donor had become available. Lacking a surrogate, they had to pass — another letdown.

But the next week, they received a flurry of e-mails from Hinson. She and ReVeal had checked out a promising surrogate candidate, a college student from Frederick, Md. Her name was Whitney Crucey, and she was waiting tables while studying to be a teacher. She had responded to an ad for another gay client, but he had already found a surrogate.

Whitney, who had just turned 25, was the single mother of a 2-year-old girl, and thus a proven carrier. After a three-year marital separation, her divorce was nearly final, and she had a boyfriend who supported her interest in surrogacy. Relatives and co-workers described her as determined and responsible, a good mother with a healthy vegetarian lifestyle.

Hinson e-mailed Chad and David that she had sent Whitney their letter. "She said you sound just wonderful and that she would love to help you by carrying your child!" Hinson wrote. "She is very sweet and we think you will be a really good match. She is definitely more like Chad than David, in that she is more on the quiet side."

Studying Whitney's profile, Chad and David sensed they would line up on the major issues. She had written that she would rather not abort in cases of birth defects or multiples, but would defer to the parents. Not only would she be comfortable with their active involvement, she would expect it. After the birth, she would appreciate an occasional card or picture, but would be fine without additional contact.

"As much as this baby might become part of my body, it would not be mine," she wrote.

A few days later, Hinson had other news. She had been getting so many responses to ads for egg donors that she had decided to create a pool for the ones she could not immediately match. If Chad and David wanted to pick from that pool, she could shave a few thousand dollars off her fee.

They asked Hinson to send them profiles.

The egg hunt

On a Monday morning in November 2003, a pretty young office manager named Jessica had been riding Washington's Metro from the Pentagon station to McPherson Square. As she flipped through the Washington Post Express, a free tabloid for commuters, her eyes fixed on an advertisement: "Help Me Become A Dad: Special Egg Donor Needed." It had been placed by Hinson and ReVeal for a well-to-do gay client named Scott, who was offering \$10,000, double the going rate.

Jessica normally didn't pay attention to ads. But on each successive commute that week, she found herself drawn to the illustration of a man tossing a child in the air. It touched her that some man wanted a baby so badly he would offer \$10,000 just for a chance. "I've now noticed this ad

five days in a row," she told herself. "Maybe I should act on it."

She sent Hinson an e-mail. "Good afternoon. My name is Jessica, and I am a 24 year old professional Caucasian (sic) female. I am in excellent health, as is my family. In fact, several of my family members have lived to be older than 95! I am a petite 5'5, 120 pounds with blond hair and green eyes. I am well educated, intelligent and very athletic ... Though I have never donated an egg before, I think helping someone have a child is a wonderful gesture, and would love to help your client produce the child he so longs to have."

Jessica hadn't known for sure that Scott was gay until ReVeal wrote her back. It only mattered to her because her boyfriend was on the conservative side and might be more supportive if she donated for a straight couple.

The lawyers met with her over lunch and liked her instantly. "She is easygoing, humorous and very self-assured," they wrote in their file notes. "She is the sort of person you would hire on the spot in a job interview."

When Scott picked someone else, Jessica wound up in the agency's pool of unmatched donors. It didn't bother her that her fee might be smaller. She made a good living — \$60,000 a year — and the money was somewhat incidental.

In May, Hinson sent three egg donor profiles to Chad and David, saving her highest praise for Jessica. The men were impressed that there was virtually no history of disease in her family. David thought her picture made her look a bit like his sister. And when he read that she considered herself a perfectionist, and that her closets were "extremely organized," he felt the beginnings of kinship.

Hinson, assuming the role of 21st century matchmaker, also sent Jessica the letter from Chad and David. It made Jessica appreciate just how dependent they were on others to fulfill their dreams. "Please let them know that I would love to meet them in person," she wrote back.

For clients who were interested, and many were, Creative Family Connections would arrange a semi-anonymous meeting — first names only — between intended parents and a prospective egg donor. In an arrangement where so much depended on trust, even a fleeting introduction could provide comfort that couldn't be mined from a database.

Hinson set up an early lunch one Thursday at a Thai restaurant, far enough from Jessica's office that she would not be recognized. Chad and David felt excited, but anxious. After a long wait, they might be meeting their children's genetic mother for the first time, and for the last. Would they like her? Would she like them? Chad had already warned David to keep his foot out of his mouth. Please, he begged, no clever asides about how they planned to beat the children.

They were waiting on the sidewalk when they saw her coming, striding toward them in a gray pinstriped pantsuit. The photograph had undersold. Her hair was longer and pulled back, her eyes greener, her smile more radiant, and there was a confidence the camera hadn't captured.

As Hinson made introductions, David couldn't contain himself: "Oh, you're even prettier than your picture." Chad hoped it hadn't sounded like a left-handed compliment.

They asked for a private table. It was awkward getting started. How do you negotiate with a stranger for an egg? There was some chitchat about movies and home repairs. David was talking a mile a minute, as he was prone to do when excited.

Hinson encouraged Jessica to talk about herself. She said she had enjoyed a conventional childhood in Southern California but had been exposed there to many nontraditional families. She talked about coming east for college, and deciding to stay when she landed a job with a national trade association.

She pulled out baby pictures of herself as an adorable towhead. Chad and David asked about personality traits, whether there was mental illness or addiction in her family (no and no), even her favorite foods. Ice cream, she said, and broccoli and lasagna.

As she spoke, David couldn't stop smiling inside. It might as well have been Julia Roberts sitting across the table. "This is so perfect," he thought. "How in the world did this end up happening this way?"

David asked Jessica why she wanted to do this, and she told them about the ad. "I want to help someone," she said. "I've got these eggs. I don't need them. I've taken good care of myself for 25 years. Someone should get the benefit."

David blurted out that Chad's sister had once joked that a woman's unused eggs just got flushed down the toilet anyway. He thought it would get a laugh. Instead, the table grew quiet.

"My feeling about it is very different," Jessica said. "I'm not just giving you this because it's something I'm not going to use. I'm purposefully giving this to someone because I want to help them fulfill the dream of having a family." She was making unwavering eye contact, almost staring them down. "I would never want the child to think that part of their genetics came to be just because somebody didn't need it, or needed money."

Now Jessica had a question for them. They had written in their letter that they felt they had to prove they deserved a child. She didn't understand why.

"Some people think that as gay men we need to justify why we would succeed as parents," David said. "Perhaps our approval of you is perceived to be the more important aspect, but it's also important that you feel good about the couple you're going to help."

"It's not my place to judge whether someone would be a good parent," she said.

"We wouldn't consider it a judgment on your part," David said, "but rather a choice and a willingness to be a biological contributor to the right couple. In the end, you should have the right to decide who receives your gift."

"I'd be happy to help the two of you," she said, smiling.

Jessica had to get back to work. David gave her cab fare, and they shook hands goodbye. The men were giddy all the way home. "She was an absolute gem," David said. "We could never

have asked for a better egg."

A team assembled

The next day, Hinson had arranged for them to meet Whitney outside a coffee shop in a Bethesda mall. Whitney would be bringing her daughter, Claudia, and Hinson had coached Chad and David that surrogates sometimes judged potential parents by the way they treated children. They arrived early enough for David to duck into Nordstrom and buy Claudia a stuffed bear.

Chad and David were still buzzing from their blind date with Jessica, and Hinson had to scale back their expectations. Whitney was reserved, and could be tough to draw out. Remember, she said, they were looking for something different here — a carrier, not an egg.

Whitney arrived in a black tank top that exposed the tattoo on her shoulder. As she introduced herself, Chad caught a glimpse of the silver stud in her tongue. Claudia clung to her side, and seemed unsure when David offered her the bear.

At Hinson's urging, Whitney summarized her life in terse snippets — her childhood in an Appalachian coal town, her broken marriage to a Mexican immigrant, her pregnancy by a co-worker at the restaurant. She explained that her flirtation with surrogacy had begun during conversations with her manager, whose wife had miscarried several times. Claudia had brought so much meaning to her life, and she wanted others to experience it.

Whitney wasn't desperate. She cleared \$400 or \$500 a week at the restaurant, and shared her \$860 rent with her boyfriend, Cory. But a \$20,000 fee would nearly double her income for the year, and she had student loans to repay. She had heard arguments about surrogacy and class exploitation, from her mother among others. She didn't see it that way. "To an extent, it's like renting your body out," she said, "but it's not like I'm being forced to do so. I'm not in a position where I need that money in order to eat. There probably are people like that, but we live in a capitalist society and this is the way things work."

Hinson guided Chad, David and Whitney through a discussion of the difficult choices they might face.

Whitney seemed relieved by the men's assurances that they would not terminate a pregnancy just because tests revealed Down's syndrome or some other disability. On the other hand, they said, if doctors forecast great suffering and a brief life, they would want to consider abortion. Whitney agreed it should be situational and that she would defer to them. She agreed to carry twins if necessary, and triplets so long as doctors approved.

Whitney did not ask a single question about money. But she repeatedly assured Chad and David she would not get attached to their child.

"I'm looking at it like I'm helping watch someone else's kid for a few months," she said. "I know I'm going to have a connection with this child, but the day it's born that's going to have to change. I'll have nine months to talk myself into it."

Whitney liked the way Chad and David interacted with Claudia, and with each other. Her gut

told her they would be loving parents. While it was the money that had turned her head, she could feel herself wanting to be a part of their project.

"They are so committed to this and so excited about it," she told herself, "and it has been so long since I've been excited about anything."

Chad and David didn't think they would ever bond with Whitney the way they had with Jessica. But she seemed sweet and compliant and trustworthy, and that was what mattered most.

Hinson set Jessica and Whitney up for medical and psychological screening. She also began drafting contracts that would regulate virtually every aspect of their lives, from what they could drink to when they could have sex.

After nearly a year's effort, Chad and David had assembled their team. With a little luck, they thought, they could start decorating the nursery within months.



Before the procedure, gestational surrogate Whitney Cruey, left, signs legal papers with the Craigs' attorney, Diane Hinson, and David and Chad.

Next: Chad, David and the team try to make a baby.

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