

WE R FMLI

MARGARET MOONEY AND MEG GAINES

Margaret: We met playing bridge. Who knew game night could set such monumental gears in motion? Things progressed at the first GALVAnize (Gay and Lesbian Visibility Alliance) march that Meg co-organized during the spring of 1989. By the end of the next year, we were living together.

As it turns out, that first evening learning to play bridge was layered with foreshadowing. Our mutual friend Leah had invited us over to learn the game from her master bridge-playing mom. Down the line, Leah would wind up being our kids' aunt, and her brother would become "Daddy David." We didn't realize Leah's mom had schemed up the evening in part because she hoped Leah might start dating one of us. She later confessed her disappointment when she saw sparks flying between Meg and me instead. And the rest, as they say, is herstory. Or rather, our story.

Part of our mutual attraction was the fact that we both wanted children, which wasn't that common for lesbians in the 1980s. Since Meg was a few years older, she would go first. In fact, she had several things figured out before we even met.



Meg: I always knew I wanted to have children, but I knew being a lesbian would make that more complicated. I remember hearing about the California Cryobank and assumed I would reach out to them when the time was right. I had done some divorce work in my early years out of law school, and I knew that I didn't want any man to have legal rights to my kids that could disrupt my own. But that all changed one lazy afternoon when I was sitting on my sofa listening to show tunes and daydreaming, literally. The dream opened with a child, probably eight years old or so, whose legs

were dangling over the couch next to mine. I had just explained the whole sperm bank origin story to them. “So, let me get this straight,” the child responded. “You didn’t get a custody battle, and I didn’t get a dad.” I startled awake, feeling as if the wind had been knocked out of me, and I knew from then on that I was going to find a dad.

In an instant, all the men I knew became potential donors. Smarts, looks, emotional intelligence, financial and relationship stability—all became factors in the search. Margaret and I had just begun dating, and though we were truly smitten, it was too early to expect her to share the risks of this decision with me. I settled on asking a gay male couple, Mark and Charley, artist friends who lived in San Francisco whom I had met through my mother’s college roommate several years earlier. I wrote to them and asked if they would both consider being sperm donors and helping me have a child. After reading my letter they called and said, “After we picked ourselves up off the floor . . .” and then, “Yes!”

Choosing gay men as donors minimized the likelihood of a messy custody battle. In those days, a lesbian mother had little chance of holding on to custody of her child if, say, a straight, married man pursued custody and the court saw that the child could be raised in a “normal” household. I reasoned that a mature gay couple who had not sought to have children on their own would be less likely to want custody of a child, and less formidable if they did try to secure it for themselves.

Still, there were so many details to consider before entering this extraordinary new relationship. Would Mark and Charley have any financial obligation to the child? Would they have the right to see the child? We talked through and drafted an agreement—a contract—that laid out our basic understanding: that regardless of what sort of contact or relationship they had with any child, they would have “no rights and no responsibilities.” The process turned out to be more important than the contract itself because it gave us the chance to share our hopes and fears and to understand what each of us needed in order to create a trusting relationship. We were advised that such a contract, unheard of in the law at that time, was likely unenforceable, but we signed it anyway. We haven’t pulled the contract out of the dusty file drawer in the

basement since it went in there more than thirty-four years ago, and it seems utterly unimportant now. Children have a way of opening hearts, and our son, Reed (and later our daughter, Grace) managed to pull us all into a wonderful—if then unusual—new kind of family. Charley and Mark have been remarkable, generous, kind, and trustworthy men in both our children's lives, even designating Reed and Grace as equal beneficiaries in their wills.

The terms of our contract called for fresh sperm that was provided “to a doctor for insemination of a woman other than the donor's wife.” This language came from the part of the Uniform Parentage Act (UPA) that governs artificial insemination. We decided to use it to help ensure that legal paternity was severed, even though it wasn't clear whether the UPA would even be relevant to a future court addressing this issue. Wisconsin (where we lived) never adopted the UPA, but California (where Charley and Mark lived and where we inseminated) did. We hoped the issue of paternity would never arise and had no idea which jurisdiction's laws would govern it if it did, but we thought it couldn't hurt to comply with the UPA just in case.

I started taking my temperature each day to track my ovulation cycle. Once we knew when I would ovulate, Margaret and I flew to San Francisco for the insemination. Charley and Mark had a doctor friend who agreed to help us with the handoff. We went to the doctor friend's house, where Charley and Mark handed over a Tupperware container of fresh sperm, then the doctor friend took the container and handed it to me. Margaret and I used a plastic syringe to inseminate me. We were thrilled in April 1990 when I got pregnant on the second try.

Our relationship progressed, and Margaret and I moved into our first house together in October 1990, about a year after we started dating, when I was six months pregnant. We cleaned, painted, set up a nursery, and waited . . .



Margaret: We were blessed with Reed in January 1991. Everything about him was pure joy. Sure, we had less sleep, but there were also magical naps on the couch with baby Reed on our chests!

And then there were those curly blond locks, his bubbly laughter, uber intelligence, and general *joie de vivre*. We discovered a new dimension of love with Reed in our lives.

One early stress, however, was the anxiety I experienced around missing work to be at Reed's birth. Where most colleagues stand ready to fill in for new parents, my coworkers at the National Weather Service did not know that I was a lesbian or that I was expecting a baby with my new partner. They thought Meg and I were roommates. The NWS in Madison had a small office where everyone worked rotating shifts. If one person called in sick, two other people had to work twelve-hour shifts. Calling in sick just wasn't done. But that was my plan. I wasn't out at work and had no legal protections that would justify attending my "roommate's" birth. In the end, fortunately, Meg was scheduled to be induced on my weekend off!

Other challenges for our unique family in those early years stemmed from the fact that Reed had only one legal parent—for example, it meant we had to carry two health insurance policies since neither Meg nor I was allowed to insure the other person or the child that person gave birth to. As most same-sex parents from that time have experienced, one adult had to take the risk of loving a baby without the legal protections that most heterosexual couples enjoy. But overall, we were simply overjoyed.

After Reed's first birthday, we started planning for Baby #2, knowing that I wanted to give birth to our next family member. Because Reed had known dads, we felt his sibling should, too. Easier said than done! The first person I asked, a smart and kind friend from college, had already had a vasectomy. The next two declined. The fourth person said yes but only if we conceived by traditional sexual intercourse—ew! Not only would that have been awkward but it could also establish paternity.

I was getting discouraged and depressed until one day at the Willy Street Fair when a friend handed me her baby to hold. As soon as I put that child on my hip, I knew I would have a baby of my own. Sure enough, when I got home that very same day, there was a message on our answering machine (remember those?) from our friend Leah saying that she wanted to talk to me.