

## 14. Donor Babies

Marissa Alaya was born on April 3, 1990 to the Alaya family, which included two parents, a brother, Airon, age 20, and a sister, Anissa, age 19, who was dying of leukemia. This kind of cancer kills 80-90% of patients within 5 years, and 20-25% of bone marrow recipients (which is the recommended treatment) die from infection or rejection. Marissa was conceived to be a bone marrow match and eventual donor for her sister when she reached 14 months. The Alaya family was one of few families to publicly announce their decision to conceive with the intent of having a donor baby.<sup>1</sup>

Between 1985-1990, 40 families publicly announced their conceptions of donor babies. Doctors and ethicists believe that many more conceived with similar intentions but did not announce their decisions. In these cases, doctors typically perform amniocentesis to determine if the fetus is a match. If the answer is no, the mother can then elect to have an abortion. If the answer is yes, as it was for the Alaya family, the mother can then elect to have the baby, with the aim of eventually drawing marrow out of her through a medical procedure involving long needles.

Advocates of donor babies claim that families love and cherish donor babies just as much as other babies. They also reason that most people have at least some selfish reason for having a baby, and that, from the perspective of the baby, it is better to come into existence in part to help someone else than to not come into existence at all. However, critics worry that the practice of conceiving donor babies will cheapen the perceived value of human life. If parents have a donor baby, they will see that baby as a means to an end, and donor baby might one day see themselves the same way. Thus, critics argue, we should not bring a child into existence for any reason other than to love and cherish them for their own sake.

### Study Questions:

1. Is it morally permissible to bring a person into existence in part so that they can donate tissue to somebody else?
2. If people do bring a person into existence as a donor baby, should they tell their child later in life? Why or why not?
3. What, if anything, depends on how painful or risky the surgical procedure is, and why?

1. <http://www.nytimes.com/1991/06/04/health/more-babies-being-born-to-be-donors-of-tissue.html>