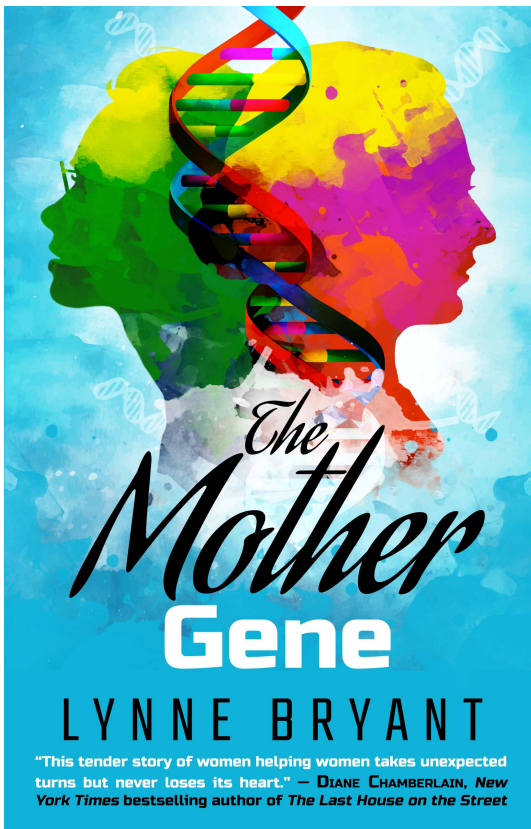




From LYNNE BRYANT

My writing journey, interesting snippets from my research, books I'm reading, and other stuff that makes me think.



***NOW AVAILABLE in
paperback or e-book!***

***Three generations of women
struggle with the intertwined
choices of sex, love, pregnancy,
and motherhood.***

Thank you to everyone who has
bought or ordered my novel!

I'm also pleased to announce that
The Mother Gene is available at
[Poor Richard's Bookstore!](#)

320 N. Tejon St., Colorado Springs

**For online purchases see links
below:**

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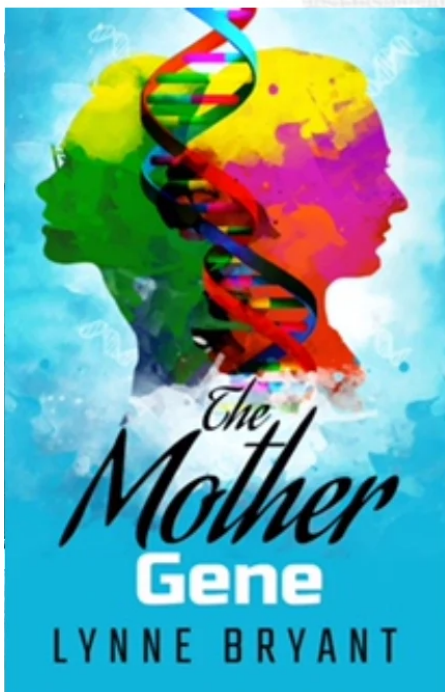
**Please join me for a reading and book
signing to celebrate the publication of**

The Mother Gene!

Tattered Cover Bo &

LYNNE BRYANT
BOOK SIGNING!

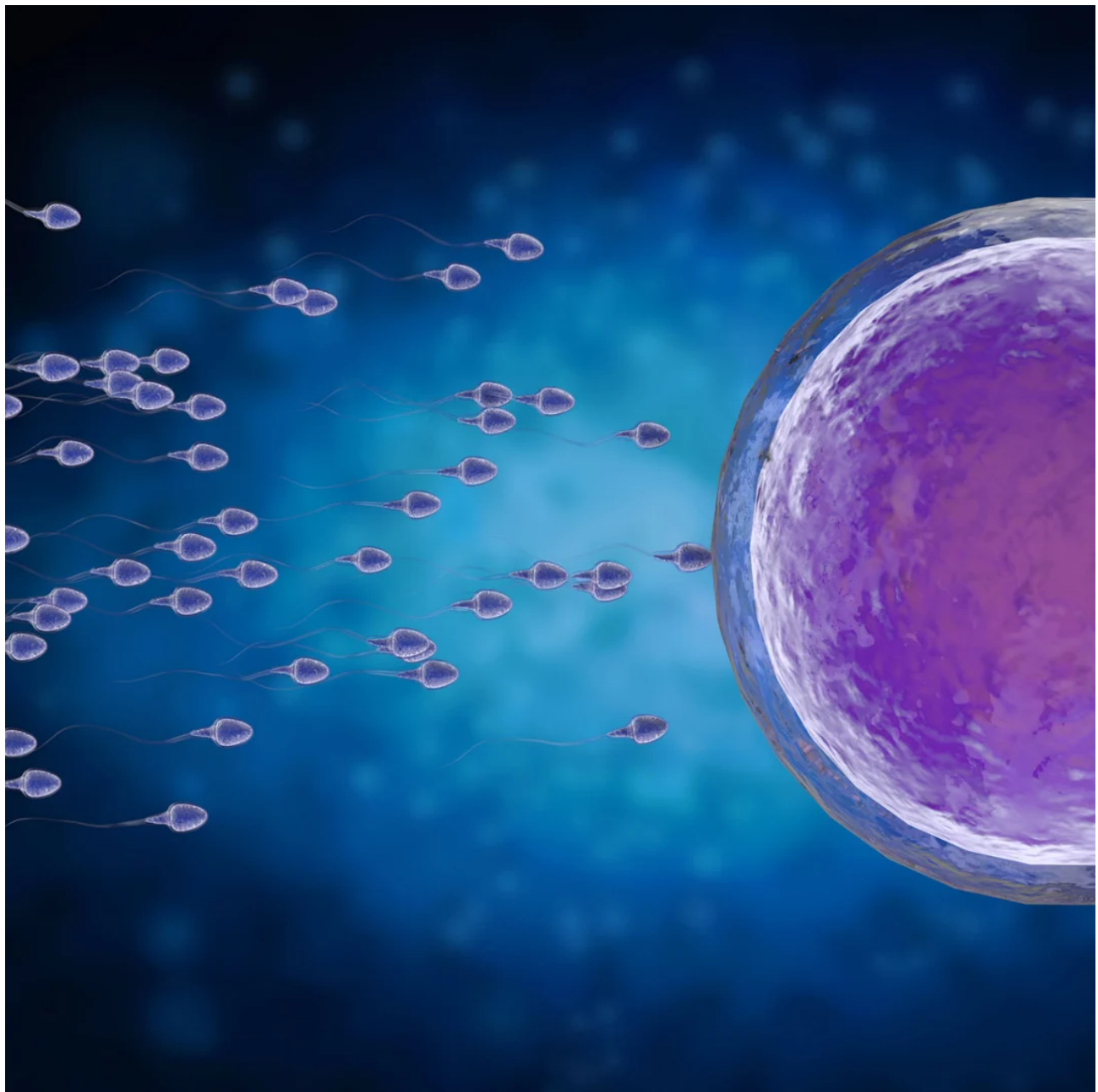
*112 N. Tejon Street
Colorado Springs
Thursday, April 6th, 6:00 pm*



"Join Tattered Cover as we welcome Lynne Bryant to our Colorado Springs location on April 6th at 6pm! She will be reading from and signing her book [The Mother Gene](#)! This event is free and open to the public. You can purchase a copy below or in store at the event!"

[Click for link to event](#)

"Getting Pregnant:" A brief history of donor insemination...



Women in *The Mother Gene* approach the phenomenon of “getting pregnant” in a myriad of ways. Miriam—the main character—has spent her whole career as a gynecologist helping women navigate the reproductive years. She has had her own first-hand experience with unexpected pregnancy. And now, her daughter is exploring donor insemination.

Here’s a snippet from *The Mother Gene* of Miriam’s response when she finds out her lesbian daughter, Olivia, wants to have a baby:

“What about a donor?” Miriam asked.

“Oh. I’m going to use a sperm bank.” Olivia was maddeningly nonchalant.

Now, here was a way for her to help. “No, no,” Miriam said before she could stop herself. She had to be more reserved, or she was going to push Olivia away.

“Mom, I...”

Miriam jumped in and tried to redeem herself. “You can’t trust some anonymous retail business for a father for your child.”

“I’m not looking for a ‘father for my child,’ Mom.”

Miriam sputtered. “You know I meant donor. Don’t split hairs.” The protectiveness toward her daughter was visceral. She had actually felt her gut tighten. Stories of male doctors impregnating women with their own sperm rattled through her mind. “Don’t you know anyone? Let me help you find someone,” she coaxed. “I have medical students. We could vet them, have them tested.” Surely, Olivia could see the logic in this?

“Um...” Background noise and voices. “Mom, I’m sorry, I have to go. Amy’s home. I’ll call you next week.”

Although two of my three children were conceived by donor insemination—one carried by me, another by a different woman—I’ve never really researched the history of what has, over the years, been called artificial impregnation, artificial insemination, donor insemination, intrauterine insemination, or assisted reproduction.

Turns out, human donor insemination goes pretty far back. There are stories that Henry IV, known as “The Impotent,” might have had his physicians attempt it, after years of no success at impregnating his wife.

Back then—the 1400s—they believed that any problems conceiving always rested with the woman. Their understanding was that the male planted his seed (like a plant) in the female and her job was to grow it into a baby. In 1779, an Italian priest/physiologist figured out that there actually had to be contact between the sperm and the egg—in other words, the sperm and egg both participate in conception. His successful insemination experiments with dogs, frogs, and fish later led to a boom in livestock insemination. Fast forward to 1790, a Scottish anatomist/surgeon inseminated a man's wife with her husband's sperm (husband had hypospadias and couldn't "deposit" correctly). This, insemination, according to what I found, did lead to pregnancy.

Then, things went silent for a hundred years or so.

The most interesting—and disturbing—story, the one that violated all of my feminist sensibilities, was the story of the first known successful donor insemination in the United States.

The insemination took place in 1884 and was kept as a carefully guarded secret for the next twenty-five years. The story was finally made public in 1909, when one of the witnesses to the insemination—you won't believe this; his name was Dr. Addison **Hard**—wrote a letter to the editor of a doctor's publication called *The Medical World*, in which he revealed the secret. I found the original letter in an online repository of the journal.

An infertile Philadelphia couple came to a physician named Dr. Pancoast seeking help. They had been trying to have a child for years and no baby. The woman was examined and deemed to be healthy—gynecologically speaking. The man, who was ten years older, was found to be sterile, probably due to gonorrhea in his younger years. So, when one of the medical students exclaimed, "time to bring in the hired man," Dr. Pancoast was inspired.

The woman was brought in for "one more examination." She was put to sleep with chloroform. The doctor and his students proceeded to choose the "handsomest" from among their group and sent him somewhere nearby (I'm imagining a closet or behind a curtain) to produce the necessary semen. The doctor then used a hard rubber syringe and injected the medical student's semen through the woman's cervix into her uterus and capped off her cervix with a bit of gauze. Nine months later, the couple were thrilled when she delivered a baby boy.

Here's the catch: neither the man, nor his wife, knew this was done. The doctor eventually relented, years later, and told the husband, who was pleased. However, Dr. Pancoast and the husband agreed NEVER to tell

the wife. The disturbing aspect of this story was this woman's complete loss of control—first of all, of her consciousness—having been chloroformed. Then, further, she was not engaged as a willing participant for her body to be used as a human petri dish.

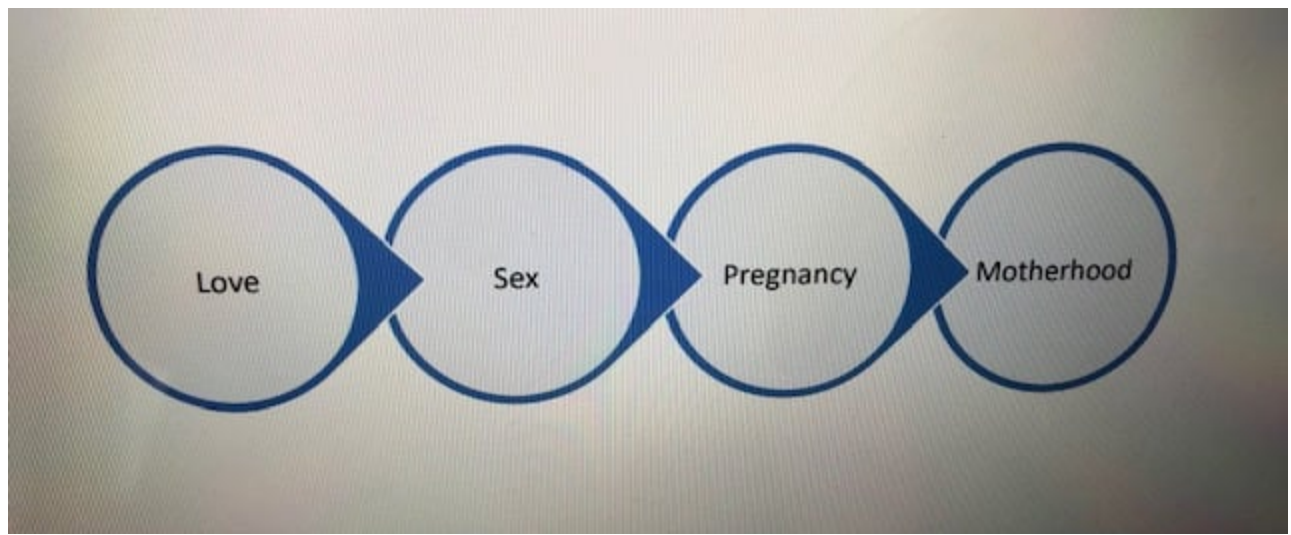
Before writing this article, I had always thought of donor insemination as a way for a woman to take control of her body. To make a deliberate choice for a child—whether she was married or not, straight or not. How naïve I can be! History, legislation, and the stories of our lives tell us differently about the control we, as women, have over our bodies.

Insemination is an ethically fraught issue. I don't pretend to have all the answers. But what I **do** know is that women ***will take risks***; we risk our bodies, our hearts, and our futures each time we get pregnant—planned or unplanned, wanted or unwanted, donated, inseminated, or implanted. Shouldn't we be the ones to make the choice about that risk?

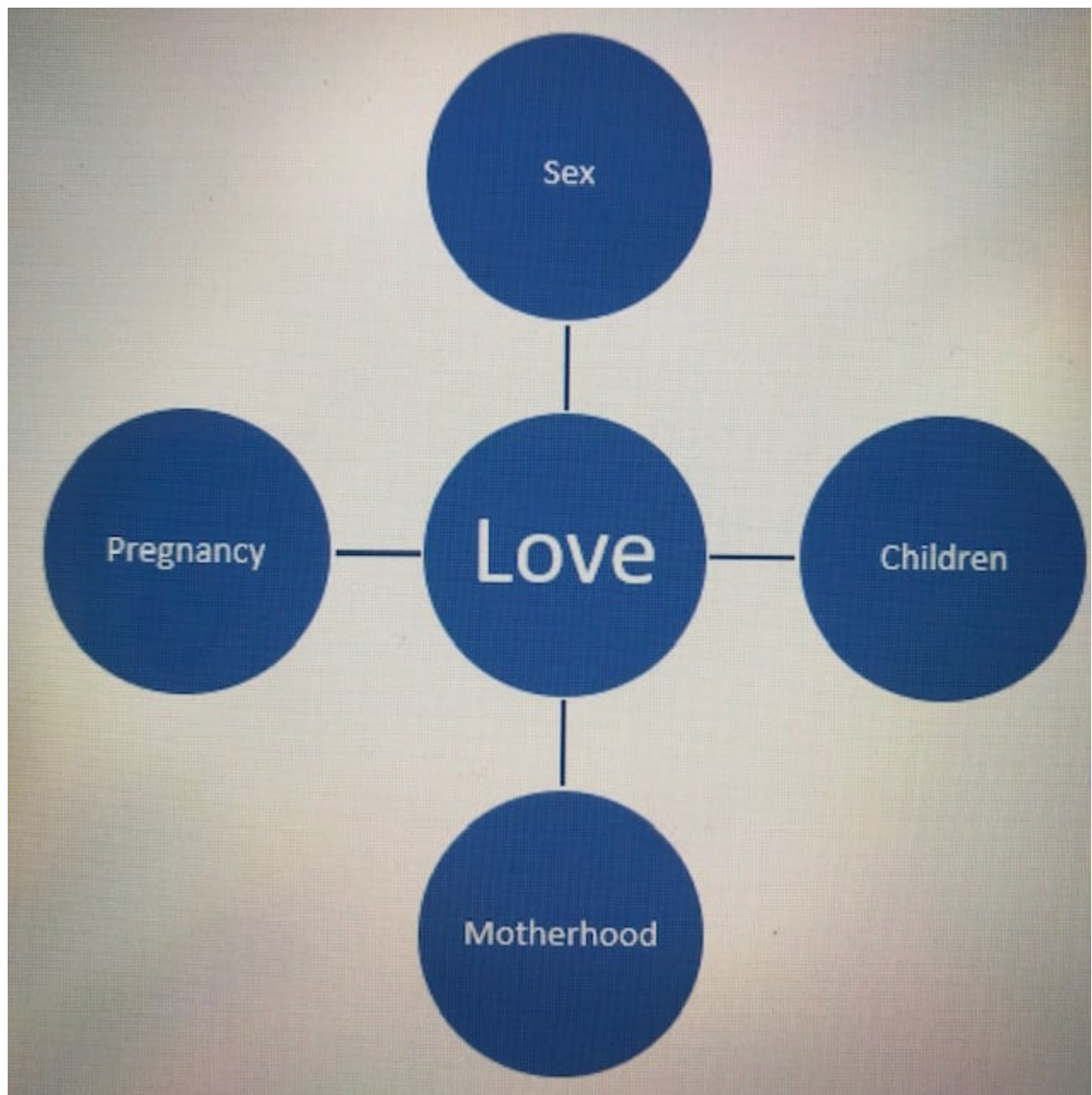
The paradox for me—and I do love paradox—is how this *clinical* procedure that began with a woman whose choice was taken away, became an opportunity for deliberate choice for women who want to "get pregnant" for lots of reasons. Maybe they want a child, but can't get sperm from the man they love. Or, maybe they don't have access to sperm because they don't want to have sex with a man to get it. Or maybe they're willing to carry a child conceived from someone else's sperm and/or egg.

It can boggle the mind to think of separating the act of sex from the possibility of pregnancy. And where do you place love in the whole equation? We all know that not all pregnancies start with love. *The Mother Gene* explores multiple ways in which this separation between love, sex, and pregnancy can happen.

As I began to unravel the *linear* perspective of love, sex, pregnancy, and motherhood, the whole thing went from looking like this:



To something like this:



What would your diagram look like?

Links to check out

If you're interested in the whole donor insemination thing, here are a couple of great links I found;

[California Cryobank History of DI and Sperm Banking](#)

[Article from Psychology Today: A Brief History of Donor Conception](#)

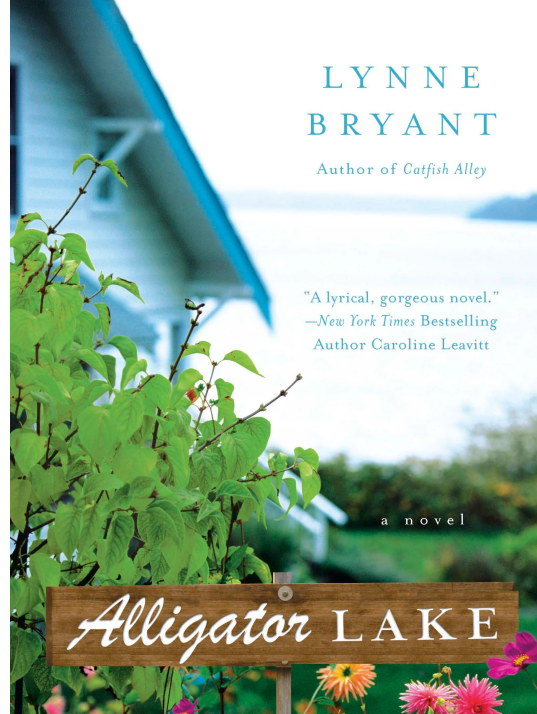
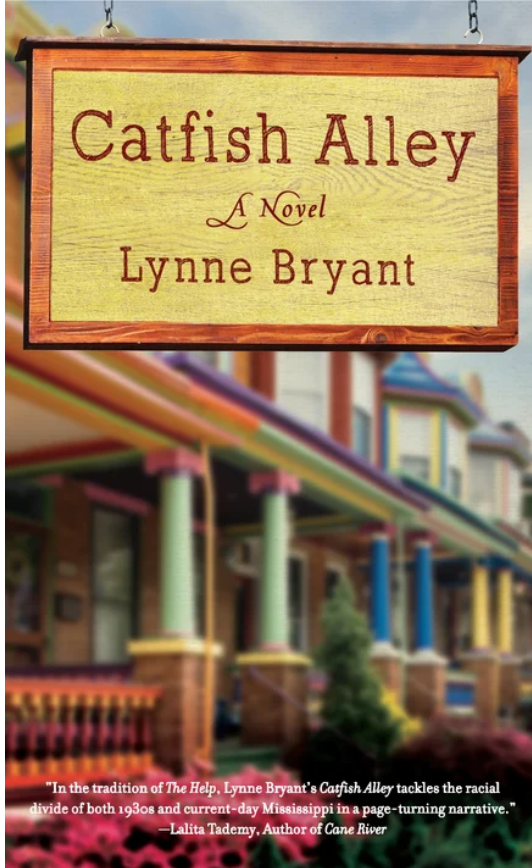


In this month's blog, I explore my own process with donor insemination. Click here to read "Pregnant lesbians and other non sequiturs..."

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Thank you!

Lynne



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