



By Caryn Sullivan

## Octuplets

### It's Not Too Late for One Unselfish Choice

St. Paul Pioneer Press

February 15, 2009

My husband and I watched the primetime television debut of Nadya Suleman, “the most sought-after mother in the world.” The 33-year-old mother of six used in-vitro fertilization to implant six embryos last spring in the hopes of having one more baby, but delivered octuplets instead. Apparently, she was determined to compensate for a lonely childhood without siblings by having a large family without a husband.

At the conclusion of “Dateline NBC,” we learned we could make donations on a website if we wanted to help the family. Our reactions were diametrically opposed – “absolutely!” and “absolutely not!” Our conflicting reactions underscore the dilemma generated by Suleman’s choices. If a natural disaster occurs, Americans unquestionably aid the victims. But what should we do when a woman makes a calculated choice to implant six embryos when she already has six children under age seven living in her mother’s three-bedroom home, has no income, and owes \$50,000 in student loans? If we make a donation, are we supporting Suleman’s reckless decision – or are we helping her children, the innocent victims of her choices, to avoid the consequences?

According to her publicist, Suleman has been inundated with offers for book deals and business proposals. Nevertheless, if she peddles her story to pay for Pampers, she may be disappointed with the response, given the growing public backlash that caused her to go into hiding. People now know that while she was warned about serious medical risks (physical and mental) to her and the babies, Suleman was nevertheless “willing to take the gamble.” Suleman was well aware that children could have developmental challenges, as she has one child with autism, another with ADHD and a third with speech delay and possibly autism. She dismissed the gravity of developmental delays by saying a child’s disability is “an added challenge and an added blessing.” Agreed, but addressing it properly requires time, energy, patience and resources.

Along with snuggles, children need structure, routine, discipline and quiet time, especially kids with autism and ADHD. So, who will fulfill this multi-faceted role for a family the size of a hockey team? Suleman said she would feed the children, love them unconditionally, and rely upon volunteers, friends, and God, who “will provide in his own way.” Is it unconditional love to raise 14 children without a father, income, or a suitable home, expecting that others will pitch in with time or money? I think not.

Although she believes that children need a father, Suleman did not actually want one around. Before undergoing IVF, she confirmed the sperm donor (a platonic friend) had no legal rights or responsibilities. She now says that while he is “shocked” by the octuplets, she hopes the donor dad may be open to knowing the children in the future.

If she expects her parents to compensate for the childhood she claims was dysfunctional by operating a daycare for her, she may feel cheated — again. The weary grandmother, who cared for the grandchildren while Suleman slept through her bed rest, told reporters her daughter “has no idea what she is doing to her children – and to me” and said she will be gone when her daughter returns. Despite Suleman’s contention that the children always have a grandpa if the donor is not interested in being a daddy, her father has remained virtually out of sight, so it is difficult to know what role he will play.

Apparently, Suleman’s older children foresee the future. When asked how they felt about the babies, they responded, “Mom will be stressed out” and there will be “lots of babies crying.” They sense the irony that escapes their mother — there is no way she can give her 14 children the attention she claims she lacked as an only child.

Suleman has made one irrational decision after another. Hopefully, when reality sets in, she will not fall apart, but will recognize that by trying to compensate for her disappointing childhood, she guaranteed that her children will suffer in ways that are impossible to predict but certain to occur. Sadly, I cannot think of a happy ending to this story. It is too late to put the sperm back into the test tube. Regardless of her publicist’s efforts, millions from donations or book deals would not make an irrational woman rational or give the children what they need.

Having created the situation through her selfish choices, Suleman should act selflessly now. If she truly wants her children to experience the emotional connection she lacked as a child, then she should take down her website and do the hardest thing imaginable. She should allow some of the children to be adopted by families who would love and nurture them in the way they deserve. That would be unconditional love. If she cannot bring herself to do so, then the authorities should intervene on behalf of the children. If there was ever a time for a nanny state, it is now.

Caryn Sullivan, of Mendota Heights, is a writer ([www.carynsullivanscribe.com](http://www.carynsullivanscribe.com)) whose columns appear frequently on these pages. Her e-mail address is [carynsullivan@comcast.net](mailto:carynsullivan@comcast.net).