



Two Dads, Two Daughters, Two Periods

Two dads who have never experienced menstruation and their teen daughters, Ceci and Liv, talk about how their family dealt with first periods.

Ceci Eisenhardt: When I first got my period...it was inconvenient. And, I ruined my favorite pair of underwear. I was mad. And then, I was also like, “How do I put a tampon in?” Friends had tried to help me. Like, nothing. So, I YouTubed it. Right in. I remember being so proud about that. I was like, “Oh my gosh! I got a tampon in! Yay!”

Narration: That’s Ceci Eisenhardt. She uses she/her pronouns. And she was 13 when she first started menstruating.

Welcome to Feeling My Flo...a podcast where we see menstruation as an event that happens to all types of bodies. I’m Kamilah Kashanie...my pronouns are she and her.

On this episode, we’re exploring the different ways menstruation makes people feel, and we’re hearing about those emotions through the experience of one family. But, before we dive in, first we’re going to go back in time to *before* Ceci Eisenhardt was born to get to know her parents.

Erik Kulleseid: My name is Erik Kulleseid. I’m 55.

Mark Eisenhardt: Um, I’m Mark Eisenhardt, I’m 58.

Narration: Those are Ceci’s dads, Mark and Erik. They both use he/him pronouns.

Mark and Erik first met in 1989 when they were living in New York City. And, they were together for 10 years before they started making plans to have kids.

At the time, they were some of the first gay men to have children through traditional surrogacy. That means that instead of adopting a kid, they found a woman to carry their baby to term. And, *she's* the reason Mark and Erik started to learn more about periods.

Erik: She treats menses as one of the universe's great gifts to women, right? It is the thing that makes them able to bear children. So, that was actually a big part of our introduction to menses, because everything we did was timed by it.

Narration: Now, three people were getting together to bring a baby into the world. Mark, Erik, and their surrogate were trying to get pregnant through artificial insemination, the introduction of sperm into the cervix without intercourse.

During that time, they talked to their surrogate constantly, and when she got her period, they were really disappointed, because it meant she wasn't pregnant. It was an intense and emotional process. And on top of the waiting, they had other things on their mind. Like all new parents, they had certain expectations.

Mark: Uh, we wanted boys. Because that was familiar territory.

Erik: I felt like having a boy. You knew what to do, right?

Mark: And, I think that, you know, the whole thing about girls and their period, and development. And we were, I guess, fish out of water.

Narration: When Ceci was just one year and seven months, her little sister Liv was born.

With Ceci *and* Liv, Mark and Erik now had *two* kids under the age of two.

Mark: It was awful. [Laughs.] I mean, it had its wonderful points too, but it's relentless. That's the thing: it's relentless. There's never a time when you can relax, except when they're sleeping. And you know, we knew at the time that it was hard. But, we also knew that they were going to be really good buddies.

And we always said, "No matter what else is going on in your life, your relationship with your sister is the most important thing, because your life will always be better if your relationship is good."

Narration: And today, Ceci and Liv *are* really close.

Ceci: We're sisters and we are nineteen months apart.

Liv: Yes, as she always likes to remind me.

Ceci: I'm older.

Liv: [Laughs.]

Narration: As the sisters grew up, their parents were definitely aware of what other people thought of them, especially as two dads raising two daughters.

Erik: You know, there's always in the back of your mind, a little bit, you know, here we are, two men raising two girls, and, you know, what kind of role model is that? What I think we heard people say was, "Kids need a mother."

Mark: But, then we also consciously chose to have many women in their lives. So, we were conscious of that. We really were.

Narration: As a parent, it can hit you hard when you realize your kid is going through a change. This is a really common experience for any parent, and it happens all the time as your kid is growing up. Mark remembers feeling like this when Liv was just a baby.

Mark: When she stopped needing me to hold the bottle, it was really, really emotional, 'cause I just loved that so much. And, it was sad. I remember I came out of the room, putting Liv to sleep, and realized that that time was coming to a close.

Narration: And when it came to periods, Mark and Erik didn't *exactly* have a plan about how to talk to Ceci and Liv. But luckily for them, the girls' school was prepared. When each girl reached the fourth grade, they attended a "body basics class." Students and their parents were invited.

Ceci: What I remember most was walking in, and, like, the room had red and white checkered floor pattern.

Liv: And they had this, like, table set up with a cup of water. And a pad, a Tampon, but it was like all the parents were along the edges of the room...

Ceci: And we had to sit at the desks?

Liv: Yeah.

Ceci: I remember that it was awkward.

Liv: The whole thing has this sort of, like, dreamlike quality to it where I'm, like, still not sure it actually happened, 'cause it was a little bit strange.

Narration: Each dad took his turn going with each daughter.

Mark: That took a lot of pressure off actually.

Erik: It did. Knowing that that was coming, I think we really relied on that as the trigger for having those conversations, and both of us wanted to do it, right? I mean, I think that...

Mark: Yeah.

Erik: ...it was a privilege to be able to go to that thing.

Mark: Yeah.

Erik: But, it's just funny because I'm the only man in the room, right? You know. Everyone...the instructor's a woman, everyone's a woman, and then there's me. With Ceci. [Laughs.]

Mark: [Laughs.]

Erik: But we saw the diagrams and the charts, and I think they sent us home with a pad, right?

Mark: Ceci was so adorable. Because she had the whole kit. And she came upstairs like she had learned this big secret. She's putting it away and she was like, "Daddy, you know what this is?" And I was like, "A pad?" She goes, "Yeah, that's right!" [Laughs.] She was so surprised I knew the answers.

Narration: So, even if it was a little awkward, the "body basics class" was pretty helpful to get the whole family talking about periods. And, as the girls learned more about menstruation, their dads were along for the ride.

Mark: It was the year she was going to be twelve. And I said, "Ceci, are you prepared in case your period starts at camp? We should go to Target to get some stuff." And so, Ceci and I went to the feminine products aisle. And I was just blown away. I was not prepared for all the color. It was two full rows, I mean, on each side of the aisle.

And Ceci and I were just like, "I...I...What do we get? I mean, are you a heavy flow?" Because she hasn't started her period yet. [Laughs.]

Narration: Mark isn't the only one who's wondered about heavy flow. During a typical period, a person usually bleeds up to six tablespoons of menstrual fluid. Anything more than that can qualify as "heavy flow."

Mark: And so I said, "What are—what are butterflies? Or flaps? Or whatever? With flaps, without flaps?" And we were having this conversation, the two of us, and I was just conscious of the fact that here's dad having this conversation with his daughter, and thinking about who in Target is listening to this conversation and just going, "Oh my God, this is priceless."

Narration: From the "body basics talk" to the trips to Target, all that preparation came in handy on one summer day when Ceci was 13.

Ceci: When I first got my period, I woke up and I went to the bathroom. And Daddy was like, “Oh, there’s blood on the bed.” And I was like, “Oh. No.” And so *he*...

Liv: [Laughs.]

Ceci: ...noticed that I got my period before *I* did.

Narration: The thing is, Ceci’s period wasn’t totally unexpected because of her age, but *no one* was ready when Liv got *her* first period.

Liv: I went to the bathroom and looked down and I saw blood and I was like...I wasn’t expecting it.

Narration: But even though her period took her by surprise, Liv had someone to turn to: her sister.

Liv: We’re so close that I don’t feel uncomfortable asking you for help.

Ceci: I do think it’s been good that we’re so close, because it’s nice to have a female companion to confide in.

Liv: That’s for sure. Yeah.

Ceci: Because you’re my sister, it’s easier to tell you about things that are more private and personal.

Narration: That summer was really eventful for the whole family. First, Ceci started *her* period. Then, Liv started *her* period just a few months after. The fast pace of it all was really hard for their parents. It was another one of those moments when seeing the girls go through a change really hit them.

Erik: When Liv got her first period later that summer, we were destroyed...

Mark: Oh my god, we were devastated. [Laughs.]

Erik: And I guess it was also, we weren’t ready for our second kid to become mature that fast.

Mark: Not even a little ready. You know, we didn’t have a little girl anymore...

Erik: Yeah.

Mark: ...and you know, even though they haven’t changed at all from one day to the next, it’s still...it’s a big deal.

Narration: It's been about five years since the girls started menstruating. Now they're in their late teens. Ceci's in college, and Liv's getting ready to graduate from high school. And when they sat down for this interview, they ended up reflecting on how much they appreciated their dads.

Liv: They make it seem to us as though they take everything in stride. Even though, afterwards, they tell us, "I was freaking out at that moment," which is really comforting, because if I'm freaking out, I don't want them to freak out too.

Narration: As the sisters take their steps into adulthood, their dads will be proudly watching from the sidelines.

Ceci: I think because we had two dads, I have no shame about talking about my periods in front of anybody...

Liv: I don't think, like...I never really recognized the lack of, like, a mom.

Ceci: I've never known anything else. Yeah.

Liv: Yeah.

Ceci: That's my...

Liv: That's my go-to phrase.

Ceci: Typical answer. I think they've done a good job.

Liv: They're wonderful parents.

Narration: Shout out to our advisory board for weighing in on earlier drafts of this episode. Feeling My Flo is a resource to help you start important conversations at critical moments, like when you're figuring out what type of flow you have.

We're here to inform, entertain, and empower. Visit us at feelingmyflo.com and follow us on Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram to join the conversation.

Thanks for listening. Feeling My Flo is produced by Mia Warren, and this episode was co-produced by Madison Mullen. Our sound engineer is Carolina Rodriguez. Our intern is Emma Forbes. We're a production of Lantigua Williams & Co. I'm your host, Kamilah Kashanie.

CITATION

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