



Saturday » March  
29 » 2008

## Registry connects children with genetic siblings

Website matches sperm, egg donors with offspring

**Jan Jarvis**

Fort Worth Star-Telegram

*Friday, March 28, 2008*

The listing reads like a personal ad: "Brown straight hair. Dark brown eyes. Light brown complexion."

But the writer isn't looking for a date -- he's searching for his half-siblings and their common sperm donor.

Since 2000, when the Donor Sibling Registry was established, 18,604 people have posted their personal information. Some are children born through in vitro fertilization -- others are parents or donors. More than 4,700 matches have been facilitated.

Wendy Kramer of Colorado created the registry with her son Ryan, who was curious about his genetic origins, yet knew little about his sperm donor.

When people go to the site, they often start out with mixed feelings about searching for a half-sibling or donor.

"They go into it thinking, 'It would be great to find out I have a brother,' " she said. "Then they discover, 'Oh my gosh, I have 22.' "

The registry is full of donors. In the early days, men -- many of them medical students -- often donated their sperm.

Later, as the science of assisted reproduction developed, women began donating their eggs. The oldest donor on the site is in his 60s.

Unlike some countries that ban anonymous donations, the United States has always protected donor information. Those who want to search for a donor or siblings have only a sperm bank number to guide them.

For decades, children conceived with a sperm or egg donation were a well-kept secret. But over the years, as their numbers grew, people realized this information needed to be shared.

"We've had lots of people on our website who met each other at a park and commented on how their kids looked so much alike," Kramer said.

"I know of siblings who were freshmen at the University of Colorado at the same time."

It's not that far-fetched when you look at the numbers, said Martin Langley, laboratory manager at the Center for Assisted Reproduction in Bedford, Texas.

Consider, for example, an egg donor who lives in the same geographic area as her recipients and donates six times over the two-year period. If each donation results in twins, that's 12 babies, all in the same age group, with the same genetic mother.

For parents, the question then arises about how much information children need. Message boards are full of parents debating whether to tell them. There are children's books and how-to manuals, but in the end, there is often hesitation.

Donors fear that if they make medical information available, they will be obligated to supply something more to their offspring.

There's also the psychological fallout of discovering dozens of such children. In one case, a match on the registry revealed that a single donor had more than 100 kids born from his sperm, Kramer said.

Parents of children conceived with donor sperm or eggs often want to protect their child from disturbing or confusing information.

But, Kramer said, none of those arguments can stand up against children's need to know, among other things, their medical history and whether they have half-siblings.

"I feel it's important to be honest from the get-go even before kids are talking, so it just becomes a part of their life," she said. "I always wanted my son to be proud of every part of himself, and part of who he is is being a sperm donor baby."

In Kramer's son's case, his curiosity was satisfied. She said they discovered that Ryan has at least nine half-siblings from the same donor.

Donor Sibling Registry website is [www.donorsiblingregistry.com](http://www.donorsiblingregistry.com)

Viewing the registry is free. Posting information and contacting others costs \$40 US.

© The Calgary Herald 2008

CLOSE WINDOW

---

Copyright © 2008 CanWest Interactive, a division of CanWest MediaWorks Publications, Inc.. All rights reserved.  
CanWest Interactive, a division of CanWest MediaWorks Publications, Inc.. All rights reserved.