

washingtonpost.com

Multiple Single Moms, One Nameless Donor

By Lois Romano
 Washington Post Staff Writer
 Monday, February 27, 2006; A02

Single mom Leann Mischel wanted her son to have a sibling -- a full-blooded sibling. But it wasn't looking good. The boy's father was out of the picture, so to speak. In fact, Mischel was just one of many women waiting on him. The Pennsylvania college professor reluctantly settled for her second choice.

And then Carla Schouten from San Jose had the gift of a lifetime for Mischel, 41 -- an extra vial of the father's sperm chilling in her doctor's refrigerator. Schouten's son was fathered by the same donor. The two women met on the Internet and bonded.

Some women have their book clubs, and others belong to professional groups. Some connect in therapy and others through sororities. But here is a relatively new connection: a group of 11 sharp, educated and independent women brought together by one man's sperm.

Not one of them has met the donor -- his identity is kept secret by Fairfax Cryobank in Virginia. He has fathered all of their children -- 11 so far, and Mischel's second child on the way.

"It's an emotional connection. We have a common base," explained Schouten, who adds that the women have less interest in knowing the donor than they do one another. "Most of us are single. We all desired children, and we were all attracted to the same donor."

There is much happening in world of sperm banks these days. On the Web site for Fairfax Cryobank -- one of the largest in the country -- a sperm shopper can browse the catalogue for Mr. Right Donor. Free of charge, she can find a staff assessment of the man, as well as all sorts of preferred paternal criteria: eye and hair color, nationality, blood type, height and profession. (For PhD, MD and attorney sperm, there is premium charge of \$425 a sample.) Donors make a six-month commitment and are paid \$900 to \$1,500 a month.

There's also much more detail available for various fees: baby pictures, an audiotape and extensive medical history. Most everybody buys everything; the donor's name, birth date, address and other specific identifying information are not available.

But recently a clever 15-year-old boy figured out how to piece together his biological father's identity. The world of anonymous sperm donors gasped -- and administrators took a second look at policies.

"There is a group women out there who wanted to be able to tell their offspring who the donor was," said William Jaeger, vice president and chief operating officer of Fairfax Cryobank in explaining why Fairfax began offering a new category last month: donors who voluntarily agree to allow the sperm bank to reveal their identity to offspring once they turn 18. "The market demanded it," Jaeger said.

So far only a few men have signed up for this option -- and their sperm also carries a premium cost, of \$445. Donor 401 -- as he is known to the above-mentioned 11 women -- is not one of those who wants

Advertisement



**Martin's Chase and
Broad Creek Hollow**



**NOW
SELLING**

Visit kbhome.com to find your new home.

to be identified.

As best can be determined by the birth dates of the 11 babies, 401 got into the baby business at Fairfax Cryobank about six years ago -- and what a popular fellow he turned out to be. Here's what we know about him: There is a good chance he lives in the Washington metropolitan area; he is 6-foot-4, of German heritage, has a master's degree, is athletic and is very close to his mother. "A ray of light," he called her in his personal essay.

It was one of those sweet details about a man that most women couldn't walk away from. "Such a nice guy," said Schouten, 43.

"He was tall and so am I," explained Carolyn George, 34, of Oklahoma, whose youngest child, Connor, 2, is the biological son of 401. "He seemed likable."

Around the same time that 401 was getting into the donating business, a woman who had no connection to donor 401 developed a Web site, DonorSiblingRegistry.com, and set out to see if she could locate the sperm donor for her son, 9 at the time.

Wendy Kramer was not successful in her search, but her Web site is booming. Through word of mouth and publicity, it has more than 6,000 members. In addition to the 401 moms who met on the site, an additional 22 women connected to another single donor also found one another.

The 401 mothers want to make it very clear that in signing up on the site, they were not looking for a husband or a relationship -- and they are not romanticizing about the donor. They acknowledged that their children might one day be curious, but for now, they are satisfied with not knowing him and having one another.

"I think it would be a little bit weird to meet him now," George said.

"Some doors are better left closed," said Louisa Weix, 43, who has twin girls by 401. "All of us get a little queasy about the idea of invading someone's privacy."

Weix, a lawyer who is gay, said she always knew she wanted children and finally decided to go it alone a few years ago. She was attracted to 401 because of his genetic health, athletic ability (college football star) and because he tanned well. "Athleticism was more important to me than intelligence," she said. "All of the happiest times in my life came from being outdoors, not from being smart."

The 11 women are in touch regularly by phone and e-mail and hope to have a grand reunion someday with all the siblings. They post baby pictures on a private message board, and recently have begun posting health developments and histories of the kids for reference. They seem tickled about all the half-siblings their children have.

Mr. 401 has retired for now. But his recipients are certain that there are many more 401 moms out there whom they haven't met. After all, there is still a waiting list for the sperm of 401.

© 2006 The Washington Post Company

Ads by Google

Egg Donation

Women 21-32 apply online. Eligible candidates-\$8,000 compensation.
www.rmanj.com

Sperm Donation

The Spot To Find It! It Is All Here.
espermdonation.com

Indian Egg Donors

Immediate Availability - MD Managed Internationally Renowned Program
www.indianeggdonors.com