

## Family starts on-line chat group for sperm donor offspring

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created: **November 13, 2002 - 2:30 AM**  
updated: **November 14, 2002 - 11:35 PM**

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Ryan Kramer knows his blonde hair did not come from his mother. The sandy and chubby cheeks are traits from a stranger - sperm donor number 1058.

"There's a whole half of me I don't know," says Ryan, of his father, a supplier to California Cryobank, which contracts with Conceptions Reproductive Associates in Colorado.

Ryan's mother Wendy contacted Conceptions nearly 13 years ago. Today, the result - 12-year-old Ryan - is now mastering college algebra. "My father was an engineer, he was very math oriented," he says. Ryan knows that information, from data provided in the donor profile which stated his father is 6 feet tall, and a mechanical engineer.

Ryan has done the math himself, and estimates he may have between 10 and 30 siblings, all products of sperm donor 1058. His mother has been able to confirm a handful. "I know for a fact - the sperm bank kind of told me - that there's a minimum of three other half siblings of Ryan," says Wendy.

"When I mentioned that to California Cryobank - they laughed and said, 'Well there's a lot more than that!'" While Ryan is happy to know he has siblings, he's frustrated because there is no vehicle for the donor children, to contact each other. Technically, such offspring are half-brothers and sisters.

"From what we know, I'm one of the oldest of my brothers and sisters," says Ryan.

On their own, Ryan and his mother have found another way to do their research. "The sperm banks won't facilitate that mutual consent," says Wendy. "So we're all fleeing to the Internet and finding other ways to network."

The Kramers have started their own sibling registry message board on the Internet. (Click the link above to visit the board on Yahoo.com)

"All of our donations are anonymous, and if we allowed siblings to contact each other, then that would violate our patient and donor's anonymity," says Betsy Cairo, owner of Cryogam in Loveland.

Her company is also a supplier of sperm to Conceptions. "It's not our story to tell. We are very strict about confidentiality on both ends. We provide a service, and people should feel safe coming here, that if they want to remain unknown, they know that we will stand by that."

"I think artificial insemination is a great idea but the whole system needs to be worked on a little bit," says Wendy, who realizes why the Cryobank does not allow her to contact the



12-year-old Ryan Kramer

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father. She wishes though, that the organization would, "at least carry on messages to him."

Wendy has found some donors online who have said, "Wow, I would love to know who my offspring are, maybe not to be a father to them but to know them on some level." She does however, also understand why many donors would never want any contact.

"One thing we counsel them on, when they come for consults, is that this is a totally anonymous program," says Kathi Matson of Conceptions. "We've never talked about looking up siblings. To be honest, this is the first case that I'm aware of."

The Society for Reproductive Medicine (ASRM) does have published psychological guidelines for gamete and embryo donation, stating that counseling should address the impact of successful treatment, including "positive and negative aspects of disclosure and nondisclosure with offspring... and non-biological parenting issues."

"Now that I am aware patients are inquiring about siblings," says Matson, "I will probably now counsel them about the fact this is something that they are not able to find out. At some point the donors have to be protected."

"Basically they are taking the choice from us, from the kids, from the donors, from the parents," says Wendy. She feels the sperm banks and clinics are saying, "We know what's best for your kids."

Ryan has accepted the realization that no matter how hard he pursues information about his blood relatives, answers may never come. "I might never know my father but I have an excellent mother."

**Jessica Roe of 9News contributed to this story.**

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