

seed

Donor White Meets His Daughter

Fifteen months ago, *Slate* helped a mother search for the Nobel Prize sperm bank's "Donor White"—the genetic father of her daughter. We just found him.

By David Plotz

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In February 2001, *Slate* launched "Seed," a three-month series about the Repository for Germinal Choice, the "Nobel Prize" sperm bank that was started by California industrialist Robert Graham in 1980 and closed in 1999. *Slate* searched for the 200-odd children conceived through the "genius sperm bank," their parents, and the men who donated the sperm for them. (At the bottom of the page, you'll find links to the 13 other articles in the Seed series, including the [introduction](#) explaining the project.)

The article that generated by far the most reader response chronicled the hunt for Donor White. The piece, which you can read [here](#), recounted the story of "Beth" and her now 11-year-old daughter, "Joy." Beth, whose husband had had a vasectomy, conceived Joy using sperm from the repository donor identified as "White # 6." According to the [description](#) in the repository catalog, Donor White was an accomplished scientist born in the 1930s who liked running and gardening. Employees at the repository told Beth that other mothers who used Donor White had "happy babies." That's what Beth got: a happy, blond infant, who has grown up into a happy, blond, ballet-dancing, Harry Potter-loving, horseback-riding little girl.

Beth wanted to thank the man who gave her this gift, so when Joy was 7 months old, Beth arranged to leave the baby at the repository's Escondido, Calif., office for a few hours. Beth, who then lived nearby, dropped Joy off with the office manager, Dora Vaux. Vaux immediately called Donor White, who also lived in Southern California. The donor and his wife rushed over to meet his baby daughter. They brought Joy a Fisher-Price doll. When the visit ended, he told Vaux he "would live on that moment for the rest of his life."

As Joy grew up, Beth sent photographs of her to the repository, always enclosing an extra copy for Donor White. In 1995, Donor White responded by writing Joy a birthday card, in care of the repository. The repository covered up his signature but forwarded the card to Beth. Soon Beth and Donor White were corresponding regularly through the repository. (Beth, understandably, didn't tell 5-year-old Joy about it.) Beth sent the donor a Father's Day card. He mailed back a poem he wrote about Joy, "A Figure of Red on a Field of White." He said that he hoped Joy would follow him into science since he and his wife had no children of their own. He and his wife signed their letters "your adoptive grandparents." In one Christmastime note, he told Beth that he hoped he might someday, somehow meet his daughter.

Then, in early 1997, the letters stopped. Dora Vaux had left the sperm bank. A new manager and the board of directors worried that the correspondence violated the repository's confidentiality rules. The repository wrote a note to Beth: "We simply cannot continue to share Joy with the donor."

Beth was devastated. She and Joy were alone in the world. She had divorced from Joy's "social" father, and she had no other children. In 2000, when Joy was 9, Beth finally told her about her genetic father. She read Joy one of Donor White's letters and gave her the Fisher-Price doll she had kept for all those years. Joy told Beth that she thought of Donor White "as being like Professor Dumbledore in the Harry Potter books." Joy said she wanted to meet him.

When Beth saw Seed, she called *Slate*. She knew that Donor White wanted to find her as much as she

wanted to find him, and she thought *Slate*'s articles—and our offer to be a conduit—were her only chance. "A Mother Searches for 'Donor White' " appeared on Feb. 27, 2001, inviting Donor White to contact me confidentially. Beth and I got our hopes up. Scores of readers wrote to sympathize with Beth and Joy. Dozens of offspring from other sperm banks e-mailed me to ask *Slate* to find their donor fathers. But not a word came from Donor White.

Three TV newsmagazines contacted *Slate* wanting to interview Beth and Joy. Beth, protective of her family's privacy and Joy's innocence, agonized about the offers and eventually refused. Beth and I kept corresponding. "I can't believe that he knows about us and is choosing not to contact Joy. You will see from the letter how warm and unguarded he was," she wrote. "I can imagine him, a 70-year-old man, with no children to call his own, looking at these pictures of Joy and just being overcome with all kinds of emotions. I wish he could see them."

Then, on June 12, 2002, a long e-mail appeared in my inbox. It began, "This is Donor White ..."

Donor White, it seems, isn't much of an Internet user, and he had never heard of *Slate*. But on June 11, he had used a search engine for the first time. He typed "genius sperm bank" into alltheweb.com. It pulled up "A Mother Searches for 'Donor White.' " He was stunned.

In his initial e-mail, which you can read [here](#), Donor White offered details to verify his identity. He described how he had been recruited into the repository in 1984, when he was working in a California high-tech company. He gave a careful account of the visit he had with Joy in 1991. He mentioned that he'd fathered 11 boys and eight girls through the repository. He described how Dora Vaux inadvertently let him learn the identities of two other children—a brother and sister—and that for years he ran by their house so he could watch them grow up. He ended the note like this:

"I cannot imagine that some of the donors contacted have said that they rarely think about their children, because I think of mine very often. Indeed, I expect that they will be included among my last conscious thoughts on this sweet earth."

Donor White asked me to forward the e-mail to Beth, but before I would, I needed to verify his identity. Every corroborating fact he gave about the repository could have been gathered from press reports. So I quizzed him about details of his family history that he revealed in his earlier letters to Beth, letters that she had passed on to me. (I asked him where his ancestors were from, how old his mother was, how one of his grandfathers died, and what Beth's and Joy's real first names were.) He nailed the answers.

So who is Donor White—no, not his name—and why was he involved in the "Nobel Prize" sperm bank? Read about him [here](#).

The night I got Donor White's answers, I called Beth and forwarded his first e-mail to her. I included Donor White's e-mail address so she could write him directly. Beth was ecstatic and wrote back instantly. Donor White received her e-mail on Father's Day. They immediately struck up a giddy, loving correspondence. He traced his family tree for Beth, described his mother and father, told family stories, and sent a poem that his mother had written. Donor White charmed Beth with his straightforward warmth. "I am so emotional I am having a hard time concentrating," she wrote me in a late June e-mail.

Beth kept the news from Joy for three weeks. "I needed time to settle down, I was on an emotional high. ... I just wanted to tell her in the best way possible." When Beth told Joy that she'd found Donor White, her daughter asked, "When can I meet him!?"

On July Fourth, Joy wrote her first e-mail to Donor White. Since then, Joy and Donor White have been messaging each other two or three times a week. She writes to him about school, dance, track, her summer

vacation. Joy advised him to see the *Harry Potter* movie before reading the book. Donor White talked about his pets and favorite books and passed on stories about their ancestors. Joy asked what she should call Donor White and his wife, and they decided to use first names. They sent each other photographs. Writes Donor White, "I was most highly pleased with Joy, and my photo was not so bad that it caused her to change her mind about a visit with us."

At the end of August, Beth and Joy will travel to California to spend a few days with Donor White and his wife. He is going to take them to a favorite garden, for a walk on the beach, and to see a museum that might interest Joy. "Mostly, though, I think that we will visit in our home, as I have a good many things to show Joy that I believe will be of interest to her, including photographs of several of her half-siblings."

And so there is a happy ending, or, rather, a happy beginning.

It is a beginning that could foreshadow many more. Approximately 30,000 children per year are born from anonymous sperm donations—probably half a million kids in the two decades the practice has flourished. But when Donor White and Joy see each other in a few weeks, it will be one of the first times in history that an anonymous sperm donor has met his child—and the only time a donor and child have met without the help of the sperm bank. (There has been one published case of a bank helping a child [meet](#) her donor. But sperm bank experts I contacted have not heard about any other encounters between a child and an anonymous donor. Some American sperm banks are experimenting with "identity-release" programs that will allow kids to meet donors after they turn 18. Read about them [here](#).)

Was it wrong for *Slate* to break the confidentiality the repository required? Read a [discussion](#) about this.

America appears on the cusp of a revolution in the relationship between donors and offspring. In the last few decades, the United States has been astonished by the vigorous campaign of adoptees to break open adoption records. A similar movement among sperm bank children seems inevitable. This is an age of genetic determinism. People increasingly demand to know their genetic heritage. Sperm bank kids are missing half of their genetic history, and they want to know it. A California court recently ordered a sperm bank to reveal the identity of a donor to his offspring when it turned out the donor had failed to mention a rare gene-linked illness in his medical history.

The wall of secrecy around sperm banks is cracking. In the past, families always hid their use of donor sperm in order to protect fathers. But more and more sperm bank customers are single women and lesbians, who don't need to pretend.

The result of these changes: Sperm bank kids will soon be demanding names. The first large cohort of sperm bank kids is now in its late teens. Unlike donor offspring of the '50s and '60s, many of them know their parents used a bank. As they enter adulthood and start their own families—which is the time people get curious about their past—they may start insisting that sperm banks open their sealed records. (Seed suggests that the Web could be another mechanism for donors and children to find each other. The Single Mothers by Choice [Web site](#), for example, has a "sibling registry" where sperm bank moms can look for other kids from their donor.) The sperm bank kids may not succeed in opening records: The law isn't on their side. But Americans changed their minds about the rights of adoptees, and adoption records are easier and easier to open. Will they change their mind again if thousands of donor offspring demand to know their origins?

What will happen if donors and children do start finding each other? In some respects, donor offspring are like adoptees: They have a genetic parental relationship that challenges a social parental relationship. Adoptees and their birth parents don't necessarily find happiness when they meet, and there's no reason to assume that donors and their children will have it easy. But unlike adoptees, donor offspring are unlikely to be troubled by feelings of abandonment.

Donor White and Joy seem likely to avoid many of the emotional conflicts that others might face. Donor White is too old to be Joy's father, so their relationship already resembles a grandparent-grandchild bond more than a parental one. Joy's social father, while not enthusiastic about the reunion, isn't trying to prevent it. Donor White has no children of his own, so he doesn't have to worry about hurting the feelings of his own kids when he pays attention to Joy. Still, who knows how it will turn out in reality? *Slate* will keep in touch with Donor White, Beth, and Joy to discover what happens in their new family.

The original idea of Seed was to see what became of the children born from the "Nobel Prize" sperm bank. We were happily surprised when it turned out that people were just as interested in lost families as in genius babies—and that *Slate*, purely by accident, had become a tool for helping donors and repository families find each other.

This is a task we welcome. I've heard from several other repository donors who would like to meet their children and from several other repository mothers who would like to meet their donors or have their children meet unknown siblings. (*Slate* has introduced two half-siblings from one donor and plans to introduce several others to each other in coming weeks.)

Beth and Donor White hope their story will inspire other Donor White families to seek them out. Beth would like siblings for Joy. Donor White would love to know more about his other, lost family.

To other parents who conceived children using Donor White's sperm: If you would like to be in touch with Donor White or with your child's half-sister, Joy, and Joy's mom, Beth, please e-mail me at plotzd@slate.com or call me at (202) 261-1370. All contacts will be considered confidential.

*If you are a parent, child, or donor who wants to find lost repository relatives, **Slate** wants to hear from you and to help you find them. Please e-mail me at plotzd@slate.com or call me at (202) 261-1370. All contacts will be considered confidential.*

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Dear Mr. Plotz:

This is Donor White and, even though some 15 months late, I hope that you will be so kind as to pass on this note and my e-mail address to Beth about whom you wrote in your article regarding the Repository of Germinal Choice (RGC).

I am sorry to be so late in responding, but some allowances should be made for lack of knowledge about the type of Internet search engines that finally led me to your article, considering that I was one of those who went to a college specializing in engineering in the days when students wore their foot-long slide rules dangling from their belts and tied to one leg like a gun fighter in the Old West. Later, when introduced to computers, I carried a foot-long tray of punched cards into a room about the size of a basketball court, all of which was required to hold a single computer. Those of my generation can never compete in cyberspace with younger people who grew up using modern computers.

So that you and Beth might know that I am who I claim to be, please allow me to tell you a little bit about how I became involved with the RGC. In about 1984, I received a call from the receptionist at the high-tech company where I worked telling me that I had two visitors. I assumed that they would be visiting scientists

with whom I often dealt, but instead I found two older women unknown to me, one of whom was Dora Vaux mentioned in your article.

They received visitors badges and I escorted them to my office, but I soon excused myself long enough to close the open office door after being told of recommendations from two different persons saying that I might be a suitable candidate to be a donor at a sperm bank they represented. I listened, without saying much, mainly because of being virtually speechless. I would never have thought about such a thing in my entire lifetime and had no idea that I would wind up becoming involved. However, not wishing to be rude, I told them that I would need to think about this myself for some time and then speak to my wife before getting back to them in case there might be any chance of going forward.

In fact, I had already written this off as a strange experience and had no intention of any additional discussions. Over fully the next three months, almost every week, I received a copy of a letter from a grateful recipient, a copy of a magazine article, or a videotape about the RGC. None of this made much difference but might have worked subconsciously because then came the dream that changed everything.

I had also been doing some research on family history and had been thinking about my grandfather who was only 6 months old when his father left for the Civil War, never to return. My grandfather lost contact with his father's family and always regretting not knowing more about them.

The combinations of these things, perhaps, led to a dream in which I was sitting on the edge of an open field with my back against the trunk of a giant oak tree. It was a beautiful day and monarch butterflies were flitting about all around me, when some distance away the outline of a man could be seen coming out of the field toward me. There was a bright light at his back that blinded me until he came close enough to fall within the shade of the tree, at which time I immediately knew who he was before a single word was said. While no photograph of him existed, I knew that this poorly dressed man was my great-grandfather from the Civil War, because he looked exactly like a composite of my father and grandfather.

Without any introduction, he spoke to me as follows: Most of my friends volunteered at the first opportunity to enter the war. I was newly married and waited until there was danger of being conscripted before joining up. Because of that I had a son that I was never really able to know, which is the only reason that you and all of those known to you having my name ever had a chance at life. You now have that same opportunity.

I had never had a dream of such clarity, and there is no doubt that this caused me to agree to an evaluation, which I never expected to lead to anything because I had been told that even many of those with high sperm counts produced samples that did not freeze well. Well, there were a few more delays here and there, but if Joy has a desire to be a part of a large family she would be highly pleased if all of her half-siblings could be rounded up. At the last accounting that I had, there were 19, 11 boys and eight girls. I have seen very pleasing photographs of 11 of these and, in addition to the short visit with Joy of which mom Beth wrote, I have had the opportunity to watch two of the children grow into their teenage years.

As for my wonderful visit with Joy, she was being held by Dora when my wife and I walked up to them, and Joy immediately held out her arms to me to be taken. I held and admired her for perhaps 30 minutes during which time she was perfectly happy. Then she began to want to get down on the carpeted floor, where she quickly scooted over to a stroller that her mom had left and pulled herself up and began to try to step up over the side and get into the stroller seat. I lifted her up and sat her into the stroller, which caused the first hint of unhappiness that we had noticed. I then lifted her out and let her struggle until she was able to get into the stroller by herself, at 7 months of age.

I then turned to my wife and said to her: "We really have ourselves something special here." The smart one in my family, by a wide margin, has been my much younger sister. At a very early age she began to speak,

not just in words but in complete sentences. She was so remarkable that almost every one who was around her said that she was the smartest child that they had ever seen. However, she could not tolerate being helped and wanted to do everything for herself. I could see that exact same behavior in baby Joy, and my guess is that this never changed. My sister lived up to her early potential, as several textbooks that she has written are used at colleges all across the country. The only reason for me to think that I might be even halfway suitable as a donor is because I had the same potential for inheritance at birth as did my sister.

We are not quite done with my Civil War ancestor yet. Beth has been extremely kind to show her appreciation in numerous ways, as she has said. After hearing of the story about my dream from Dora, Beth carried Joy to the re-enactment of a Civil War battle and found a man fully dressed in a fine soldier's uniform. I have no idea whether he was found at random or how this came about, but somehow a photograph came to be made with this Civil War soldier holding Joy (maybe 2 years old) in his lap. I do not exaggerate when I tell you that the hair stood up on the back of my neck and I felt a tingling all over as I saw how much that soldier looked like the man in my dream. Say what you will about this being a coincidence, but to me it was a sign that my great-grandfather would have been pleased that I had taken his advice given under the shade of that oak tree.

In regard to the two children that I have been able to watch grow up, the kindly Dora Vaux always gave me a bit more information on the White-6 children than the RGC management would have liked. She sent me a picture on one occasion of one of the earlier children, a little boy with his slightly unusual double given name written on the back. Then, about two years later, she told me the birth date of his sister. A few days later, by pure chance, I happened to notice a tiny item in our local newspaper about the announcement from proud parents of a new baby girl having that same birthday, with an anxiously awaiting brother at home with the same double name that I knew. There was no doubt in my mind that these were White-6 children.

I was able to learn from the phone book that their parents lived only about a mile and a half from my house, and over the years the end of their dead-end street has been a perfect place for me to turn around while doing my daily three-mile run. I always make it a point to go by on Christmas morning and on their birthdays, where the garage door is always decorated with happy birthday signs and a party is often in progress....

Not yours, but many articles have been written trying to paint Dr. Graham and my good friend Dora Vaux as villains of some kind, when they had only the best of intentions in their wish to help others. I attended the funeral of Dr. Graham and happened to sit next to an elderly gentleman who asked me if I had known Dr. Graham for long. After telling him that I had not, he told me that he had known him from the early days. He said that while he did not have to, Dr. Graham had given him (and several others who had worked with him on developing his patents for plastic eyeglass lens) a small part of his company and that this had allowed him to have a comfortable retirement. Despite his great success in scientific work and in business, it would be my guess that Dr. Graham would have considered his greatest legacy to have been his establishment of and work at the RGC.

In some respects, Dr. Graham was his own worst enemy, because he went on nationwide TV programs in which he knew that there would be an agenda to make him look bad. This was all done for the good of the work at the RGC. In regard to the repository, Dr. Graham knew one thing that was very important—any publicity, bad or good, benefited his work. After such an appearance in which he might have been asked if he would like to clone Adolph Hitler, or some such thing, there was a flood of mail from those wishing to be recipients, because even in the most adversarial of programs there was usually an occasion in which the camera panned over a wall covered with the most appealing of children. These pictures of the children trumped anything bad that was said. The bottleneck in RGC operations was always a shortage of donors, as there were more recipient applications than could be handled.

I would not wish to end this message before telling Joy how pleased and proud I was to read of her many accomplishments and activities, but I have known that this was likely to happen ever since that day when I saw her work so hard to get into her stroller without any help. I cannot imagine that some of the donors contacted have said that they rarely think about their children, because I think of mine very often. Indeed, I expect that they will be included among my last conscious thoughts on this sweet earth.

My thanks and best regards,
Donor White

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The description of Donor White No. 6 in the Repository for Germinal Choice's catalog is spare and clinical. He's described as a "scientist involved in sophisticated research. Many highly technical publications." His IQ is "Not tested—but very high." His hobbies are "running, gardening, reading history." He "excelled in basketball and track." He's reported to be brown-haired, blue-eyed, medium-complexioned. His blood type is 0+, and he's myopic. One line breaks the chill. Under personality, it reads: "Very engaging, warm, friendly."

The Repository for Germinal Choice styled itself the "Nobel Prize" sperm bank. But like [all](#) its successful donors, Donor White hasn't won the Nobel Prize. Now retired from science, he describes himself as having had a "solid, but not outstanding, career in technical work, with scores of publications and a good number of patents, some with military applications." He still doesn't know why repository founder Robert Graham recruited him. He suspects that a former colleague, who may have himself been a repository donor, tipped Graham to him, and he guesses Graham liked that he was both a successful scientist and a decent athlete.

When two repository staffers approached him in 1984, Donor White was noncommittal. He and his wife couldn't have their own children, but the sperm bank didn't really interest him. Three months of steady requests didn't change his mind. Then he had a vivid dream about his great-grandfather, a soldier who enlisted in the Confederate Army only after his son was born, and then died in battle. In the dream, his great-grandfather told him that he too had an opportunity to give others the chance at life.

That inspired Donor White to sign up, and he soon became a stalwart contributor to the bank. He was older than most donors—around 50 when he started giving—but age didn't weaken his fertility. He fathered 19 children, more than any other donor I've heard about. (This large number of offspring raises [questions](#) about the repository's practices.)

Donor White soon knew more about his "kids" than he was supposed to. Most repository donors either had children of their own or chose to not have them. They tend to be less interested in their bank offspring than Donor White, who *wanted* to have his own kids but couldn't. (This is one reason Beth [trusted](#) him.)

The repository guaranteed anonymity, so how did Donor White learn about his kids? He seems an exceptionally warm and friendly man, he lived near the repository's office, and repository employees, particularly Dora Vaux, were soon confiding in him. Vaux, who more or less ran the repository, was looser with her tongue than she should have been. (She divulged the *full name* of a donor to at least one mother—not something a confidential sperm bank should ever let slip.) Vaux told Donor White the birthdays of all his kids and gave him baby pictures of 11 of them. She allowed him to meet infant Joy and correspond with Beth. She also accidentally revealed the identity of two children, a brother and sister.

Donor White became an enthusiast for the repository. In 1991, he published an article in a local women's magazine praising the bank. ("And Now a Word from a [Sperm Bank] Father" appeared under the pseudonym "R. White.") In the late '90s, Donor White asked the repository to let him study its birth records. He hoped to learn if sperm banks confirmed the finding in nature that couples in which the biological father is much older than the mother tend to disproportionately have boys. The repository never responded.

Of all his repository children, Joy was dearest to Donor White. She was the only one he met, and Beth was the only mother Donor White corresponded with. (Beth, who heard from Dora Vaux about Donor White's Confederate dream, even sent him a photograph of Joy with a Confederate soldier at a Civil War re-enactment. "I felt a tingling all over as I saw how much that soldier looked like the man in my dream," says Donor White.)

When the repository stopped their letters, he was heartbroken. Donor White made his own desperate, fruitless search for Beth and Joy. He had figured out what state they lived in (one picture of Joy bore the address of a photography studio) and guessed at their last name based on a few clues in a letter. He wrote a cryptic note to the only person in the state with that name in hopes that she would reply. He guessed wrong. He longed to meet Joy again and assumed he never would.

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American doctors started using sperm donors regularly in the 1950s, and from the beginning, anonymity was the rule. For decades, doctors didn't even keep records about who gave what to whom. Parents didn't want to know, because almost every family pretended the "social" father was the biological father. The rise of sperm banks in the '80s created a market for donors, as banks sought the smartest, healthiest, sportiest, tallest men they could find, and eagerly advertised their talents. (Click [here](#) to read a story about how finding sperm donors has become like shopping for a car.) The sperm banks continued to insist on absolute donor anonymity.

But no law mandates anonymity, and about 20 years ago, the progressive Sperm Bank of California pioneered an "identity-release" program. When they gave sperm, donors could agree to be identified when their children turned 18, if the children were curious. The first "ID-release" kids turned 18 last fall, but so far none has contacted a donor. Other small sperm banks are experimenting with similar programs, but none has advanced as far as the Sperm Bank of California's. Sweden, New Zealand, and parts of Australia have passed laws allowing donors to be identified, though no children have reached adulthood since those laws passed.

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The repository, like all sperm banks, imposed double anonymity for legitimate reasons. It hid the identity of the donor so that parents didn't make financial or emotional demands on him. Many donors don't want to know their sperm bank offspring, and the bank has an obligation to protect their privacy. And the bank kept

the identity of parents secret to protect the family. A couple might want to pretend the social father was the biological father, and the bank had no business interfering with that.

Slate wanted to tell the story of the repository, but without violating the privacy of families and donors. So we made it an all-volunteer series: Because the sperm bank was so private, we only wrote about people who *wanted* to tell their stories. And *Slate* would not violate the confidentiality of donors who don't want to be found. There are repository donors I have talked to who don't want to hear from offspring, and *Slate* won't help the families that want to get in touch with them. We did *not* impose on Beth or Donor White. They came to us on their own. If Donor White didn't want to be found, he didn't have to contact us. Donor White made a decision that the happiness he could receive from getting to know Joy and Beth outweighed the risks of ending his anonymity.

Beth's family is slightly trickier. Beth decided on behalf of her daughter that they should know the donor. Beth is a mother and has the parent's right to make decisions for her child. But the case of Joy's social father is more complicated. He did not have a say about whether to contact Donor White. According to Beth, Joy's social father was surprised but "not angry," that Beth made contact with the donor. He told Beth, "I have always been her father and always will be. Make sure she knows that."

Donor White and Beth decided that knowing each other was more important than the repository's confidentiality rules, and accepted that their decision could create turmoil for Joy's social father. *Slate* decided that these were not its secrets to keep.

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Like most sperm banks, the repository limited the number of children a donor could father. In theory, the repository sent a donor into retirement after 10 children, making exceptions only to allow a family to have a sibling using the same donor. But in practice, repository policy may have been a bit looser, since Robert Graham did not have an easy time recruiting star donors. Several donors seem to have fathered many more than 10 children in more than 10 families. Since many of the repository's customers lived in Southern California, there is a remote but real possibility that half-siblings could meet each other (and who knows what else) without knowing it.

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Beth writes: "I knew enough about the donor from Dora Vaux not to be threatened by him. I knew that he was happily married for many years, but had no children of his own, despite having wanted them. I ... was disarmed by his warmth and openness. We received a letter from him in 1995 and he referred to himself and his wife as 'Honorary Grandparents' and he just felt like family. If the donor was a young unmarried college student or a man with children of his own, we might not have sought out contact, and I certainly would never have pursued him if I thought he wasn't willing to make contact. The circumstances in this particular case make contact a pleasant reality."

*David Plotz is **Slate**'s deputy editor. He is the author of [The Genius Factory: The Curious History of the Nobel Prize Sperm Bank](#). You can e-mail him at dplotz@slate.com.*

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