

"I'm an only child but I have 5 brothers and sisters": the children of sperm donors seeking their roots on the internet

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- August 2, 2016

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Image copyright: WENDY KRAMER

Image caption: Wendy's husband could not have children and decided to resort to a sperm bank donation: his son Ryan was born in 1990. The couple divorced the following year. (Pictured. Ryan and Wendy Kramer).

At just 2 years old, Ryan Kramer asked his mother if his father had died or what had happened to him.

Wendy Kramer, who lives in Colorado, USA, did not want to shirk responsibility and tried to explain to her small child, with the simplicity required by his age, who had been conceived with sperm from a donor.

"By the time he was 6," Kramer tells the BBC, "**Ryan had decided that he wanted to meet his biological father**".

"I thought 'oh dear!', But I brought him into the world in these particular circumstances and therefore owed him all the help to find answers to his questions."

Thus was born the Donor Sibling Registry (DSR), a website in which the children of sperm donors can contact their donor siblings (half-brothers/sisters) and even their biological parents.



Image copyright: THINKSTOCK

Image caption: The DSR was founded in 2000 to help individuals conceived by donor sperm, eggs or embryos seeking to establish contact by mutual consent with others with whom they share genetic ties.

It started as a small group created by Kramer on Yahoo; now **has more than 51,000 members and is present in 105 countries** .

"The core value of this initiative is honesty," says Kramer, who is convinced that people have a fundamental right to information about their biological origins and identity.

Only child with 5 siblings

Fiona is a 9 year old girl who lives with her mother in Australia.

When the school asked if she has brothers or sisters, she replies, "I'm an only child with five brothers and sisters."

She also knew as early as Ryan. From 2 years old she knew that she was conceived by donor sperm in Los Angeles, California.

Her mother, Alison, tells the BBC that the girl speaks with great maturity about being a daughter of a sperm donor.

"I'm a **single mother by choice** and I spent a long time with multiple fertilization treatments until finally I succeeded," explained Alison to BBC Mundo.



Image copyright: ALISON

Image caption: Fiona and Lorna are only one year apart in age.

"Throughout the experience, I had counselling in clinics and read lots of information online," she says.

"All this convinced me that **telling my daughter the story of her conception from birth would be best for her emotionally and psychologically**".

Alison enrolled in the DSR and also posted in the sibling registry at the sperm bank where her donor had made his donations.

Since being entered in the registry founded by Wendy Kramer, Fiona has been found to **have at least 5 siblings**, but only has details of two of them, Lorna and Trent.

"Lorna was born just on the first birthday of my daughter. I have a lot of contact with her mom," she says.

"The other mother joined the DSR shortly after the birth of her son Trent. He is eight months younger than my daughter and is also from the same donor. We exchanged photos but his mom, at this time, not so close a relationship so contact is less frequent," she adds.

"My daughter has pictures of the two children in her room and calls them brother and sister. **She does not like to say half-brother/sister as for other children it is confusing and too difficult to explain, she also considers them her brother and sister.**"

Confidentiality restrictions

Banks sperm donation usually includes guarantees of anonymity and confidentiality, especially while children under 18 years.



Image copyright: GETTY IMAGES

Image caption: The donation banks have strict conditions for disclosure of user data.

Wendy Kramer, pretend guarantee of anonymity makes no sense, especially in the age of DNA testing and the resources available on the Internet.

On the website of the DSR is a **list of hundreds of clinics, institutions, doctors and donation banks**. Anyone interested in connecting with potential siblings or with their biological father posts their information; if you have a donor number the search is easier.

"Many people do not have a donor number," says Kramer. "But there are two very important sources of information: when was the birth and where."

"With these two facts there are many people who have found their relatives. From there, people make contact, share pictures, stories and medical information."

We believe that establishing contact should be the decision of the donor, children and parents, not the donation banks".

Wendy Kramer, founder of the DSR

Getty image (missing)

So far it has managed to establish 13,500 connections, not only among siblings but also between biological parents and children.

"We believe that establishing contact must be decision of the donor, children and parents, not the donation banks. I do not think we need an intermediary who says. 'You have to have 18 years to do this' it is an arbitrary age," says Kramer.

However, donation banks continue to set the requirement of 18 years to disclose information, as communicated by the **California Cryobank** to BBC Mundo.

"At 18 or more, any child from a donor can request contact with their anonymous donor. If both parties agree, the contact can be made as they decide."

Sisters' holiday

In the case of Alison and Fiona, they will not try to contact the biological father out of respect for the mother of Trent, who wants to wait until the child is 18 years.



Image copyright: ALISON

Image caption: Young Lorna and Fiona love each other like sisters.

"Not being able to meet my sperm donor until age 18 years, is disappointing. Of course **I would like to have contact with him now**, it would be very good," says the little girl.

But her mother did enable her to meet her sister Lorna.

"When my daughter was 3½ years old, we went on holiday to the US to visit relatives in Los Angeles and also went to the east coast to visit her sister, who was 2 ½ years old, and her mother," says Alison.

"Girls handled it well. The meeting made the other person much more real for my daughter. **I would say that the relationship is very similar to the one with her cousins living in Scotland**".



Image copyright: ALISON

Image caption: Fiona has frequent contact with Lorna and has pictures of her in her room.

"Last year we learned from the sperm bank there are 3 other siblings out there in the world, not registered in the DSR. Two boys, one only five weeks younger than my daughter, and a younger girl. We have no contact with them."

And what happened to Ryan and search for its origins?

"My son located his donor when he was 15 years old. He has an amazing and wonderful relationship with his biological father and grandparents," says Kramer.

"Just spent the weekend in San Francisco with the family of his father and with my mother, it was fantastic," he says.

"Ryan spent seven years enrolled in the DSR to find his first half-sister and the following year he met another two. He knows that there must be at least 10, but **could be 20 or 30!**".

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Translated from original article in Spanish.