

Family Ties - Part One

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A few weeks ago, I took a trip out to Los Angeles to a convention for healthcare journalists. Thank goodness I took my camcorder along; you never know where you'll find a story.

This one starts with a teenager, the product of his mother and a "thus-far" anonymous sperm donor. Today the two are taking what they've learned on their journey and are helping re-shape the look and the dynamic of the American family.

"I started asking at age two. My exact quote was did my Dad die, or what?" says Ryan Kramer.

Kramer is somewhat of a boy genius. He graduated high school three years early and at age 16 is studying Aerospace Engineering at the University of Colorado. Despite all his knowledge, there's one question he has yet to find an answer to, who is his father?

Ryan's mom Wendy doesn't personally know the father either. But what they do know is that the teen has an extended family of half-siblings, all fathered by sperm donor number 1058.

"I know there is a bare minimum of nine, but the reality is that there's probably closer to 20 or so," Ryan says.

About four years ago, Ryan and Wendy started a website called The Donor Sibling Registry, a place for half siblings and sperm donors to find each other. Ryan's met one half-sibling and has learned of another with striking similarities.

"Ryan graduated four years early and went into aerospace engineering. This little girl was about to graduate at 15, three years early, and went into nuclear engineering. So, it was pretty astounding," says Wendy.

Now about 8,000 people in ten different countries are connecting, often with no idea how they'll proceed.

"Hi, you know, I'm your sister and donor 150 is our father. Hi, I'm donor 150. And then all of a sudden these people are left with now what do we do? Who are we to each other? Are we family or are we strangers or both, and yet where do we go with this?" Wendy says. "It's not like they're looking to have their college education paid for or have a football thrown around; they want to know where they came from. They want to look into the face of their genetic parent."

But for Ryan and thousands of others, the Donor Sibling Registry is bringing families together. Maybe someday his dad will log on and see his own face looking back at him.

Imagine "if" you know that donor number, whether you're a donor or a child, do you log on and look? Ryan and Wendy look often and probably will for the rest of their lives.

Now many donors are anonymous, but some are open and agree to be contacted. Other anonymous donors change their minds and look for children, same with kids. If they have the donor number or enough information and put themselves out there, they're often surprised at what they may find.