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**In search of 'donor dad':
Girl's quest to find
anonymous father
highlights growing number
of ethical issues
surrounding artificial
insemination.**

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By Julie Kirkwood , Staff Writer
(<http://www.eagletribune.com>)

Hannah Dudley's biological father was a young man when he walked into a sperm bank in Georgia and made the decision to have children he would never meet.

He did it for the money, he wrote in his donor paperwork. A man could make \$50 per donation at the time, and he typically would donate once or twice a week - adding up to as much as \$5,200 a year.

"The child will hopefully never know that I exist," he wrote in his donor essay for the sperm bank, Xytex Corporation.

Yet Hannah does know he exists. Almost as soon as she could speak, her single mother said, the 10-year-old girl from Reading wanted to know more about her anonymous father, whom she refers to as "donor dad."

"I would like to meet him," Hannah said. "It would be really cool. Even if I never was able to meet him, I would like to know where he is."

Her desire is so strong that her mother, Kathy Dudley-Youngs, is going to great lengths to uncover the identity of "Donor 2598," whose sperm she chose from a catalog at a Reading fertility clinic more than a decade ago.

Dudley-Youngs was 37 and divorced with an 8-year-old adopted son when her longing for more children led her to try artificial insemination. The sperm cost about \$300 per attempt, she said. Everything else was covered by insurance.

She knew her sperm donor wished to remain anonymous, but she never thought that would be a problem, she said. Now, if she had it to do again, she would choose a donor who was willing to be contacted.

"If I could have given (Hannah) one thing, it would be that chance," Dudley-Youngs said.

Hannah is not the only child trying to unmask the identity of an anonymous sperm donor. Since commercial sperm banks opened in the 1970s, thousands and thousands of children have been born through artificial insemination. Especially in the early years, families were secretive about how these children were conceived and rarely, if ever, thought about setting up a contact between the child and donor.

Now the first donor children are reaching adulthood and increasingly asking questions and reaching out to find their anonymous parents. The trend has the nation's largest sperm banks racing to address the ethical implications, said Sheridan Rivers, sales director for Xytex.

Sperm donations have become more open as a result. Contracts are written to allow children more access to information, Rivers said. The men who donate today - typically for \$85 per sample - know the offspring may be able to track them down, even if they request anonymity.

That doesn't help children like Hannah, though. Earlier donation contracts often went so far as to stipulate the sperm bank would never contact the donor unless there was a genetic medical reason.

Xytex has assisted in reuniting some children with their sperm donor anyway, Rivers said. And they've seen firsthand that it doesn't always go well.

Unpredictable outcome

Hannah's mother said she tried to get information from Xytex about the donor dad three years ago, when her daughter had a medical problem. The sperm bank would not reveal his identity or broker contact because the condition wasn't genetic.

Now Dudley-Youngs is trying to track him down on her own.

Based on donor paperwork, she guessed what colleges in Georgia he might have attended and posted notes on their alumni message boards looking for "Donor 2598."

She also sent her own and Hannah's DNA sample to a private laboratory that registers sperm-donor children and sometimes can provide a list of the father's possible last names. In addition, she registered the man's donor number with an international organization called the Donor Sibling Registry, hoping to connect with other children born from his sperm donations.

Her efforts to date have yielded nothing, so she's contemplating a next step: a search of Federal Aviation Administration records to try to identify a plane crash which, she knows from the donor profile, killed the donor's brother at age 27.

"In some ways I'm responsible for having picked an unknown donor, but Hannah's paying the price," Dudley-Youngs said. "I feel like she has a right to know. I don't want to intrude on his life, but we want information."

It's unclear what Donor 2598 would think of being found. He went to great lengths in his sperm bank essay to say he wouldn't welcome it.

"Please remember this," he wrote. "I am just another man with good 'swimmers,' nothing more. It's up to you to be the parents, father, daddy or pops."

While Dudley-Youngs said she has never heard of a bad situation resulting from a child finding her donor dad, sperm bank workers say it's unpredictable.

"We have had some very positive situations with offspring and donors making contact and forming different types of relationships," Rivers said. "We've also had some situations where we've tried to contact donors and we got a very, very nasty response and threatened with lawsuits."

Kathy Dudley-Youngs said she feels as though she knows her donor from his written profile, and even

though he explicitly said he does not want to be contacted, she has a hunch he wouldn't mind.

"He was 18 when he signed up," Dudley-Youngs said. "The reality is, what you are at 18 and what you are at 35 are so different. I just thought maybe over time he would change his mind."

Yet Mary Hartley, who has been counseling donors at Xytex for 20 years, said donors tend to get more conservative and less open to contact with offspring as time goes by.

Hartley once tried to connect a young woman with a donor father she thought would be receptive. She tried to be discreet, sending him a certified letter and saying all his daughter wanted was to send some pictures and a thank-you note.

Unfortunately the man's wife intercepted the letter, and it was the first she had heard of the man's sperm donations. She was past her due date with their first child, and the timing couldn't have been worse. He was furious, Hartley said.

"If I was a donor and somebody said, 'I decided to try to contact you,' I would be pretty p.o.'d.," Hartley said. "It could be very intrusive, a disrespect for one's privacy."

Expectations in check

Dudley-Youngs said she's trying to be realistic with Hannah about what might happen if they even do find her father.

"We don't want to invade his privacy or disrupt his life in any way," she said. "Hannah's only 10 and I don't know if she's emotionally ready to meet her donor. But what we're afraid of is, as time elapses we could lose track of him."

Hannah said she doesn't expect her donor dad to be a father to her. She's just looking for information.

"I want to see a picture of him to see what he looks like," she said.

She also wants to know more about his sisters, she said, and to ask him why he chose to remain anonymous.

Rivers said that's typical of the offspring who seek information about their donors through her sperm bank.

"They don't want a daddy," she said. "They just want some sort of contact. ... It's not that (the donors) are going to have a lot of kids knocking on their door wanting them to pay for college."

Hannah also is searching for any other children who share her donor father. Her mother was told there was a girl born in Canada with the same donor, but they haven't been able to track her down, either.

In the meantime, Dudley-Youngs said she is trying make Hannah's donor dad part of their life based on what they know from his eight-page profile.

Dudley-Youngs has always been open with her daughter about how she was conceived, but in a general way. It wasn't until Hannah's questions got specific when she was about 7 years old that her mother

decided to get into the details.

For Father's Day that year, she made a book for Hannah called "What Makes You You," in which she explained how Hannah has characteristics from her father's family, as well as her mother's.

From her father, she said, Hannah received her blond hair, her athletic abilities and her tendency to be slow to anger. Hannah shares the same favorite color as her donor dad - blue - and they both like chicken and pasta. Hannah is petite like the women in her father's family and shares their intelligence, too.

"We both say, in a perfect world, would we love to come from a more traditional family? Yeah," Dudley-Youngs said. "But are we happy?"

"Yeah," Hannah said.

The search is only a small part of their life, her mother said. It's not an all-consuming pursuit.

Hannah said she rarely even thinks about the fact that she doesn't have a father.

"It doesn't bother me," Hannah said. "At times, like the Girl Scouts father-daughter dance, I do wish that I had a father and stuff like that, but most of the time I don't want a father. I like our family the way it is."

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Right to remain anonymous?

As the first generation of children born through artificial insemination reaches adulthood, many want to know more about how they were born. They are seeking out donors and, in many cases, finding them, often against the donor's wishes.

In one well-known case three years ago, a 15-year-old boy tracked down his biological father with nothing more than a \$289 DNA test, some public records and an Internet search. Within 10 days he had located and made contact with the man, who thought he was guaranteed anonymity.

Meanwhile, more than 9,000 people are taking a gentler approach and seeking biological matches voluntarily through the Donor Sibling Registry, which was created in 2000 by a mother whose son was born through artificial insemination. Though most of the matches are among half-siblings, some offspring have found their donor dads.

The ethical problems raised by these searches have already changed the way sperm and egg donations are collected today.

Some nations, such as Great Britain and Canada, now prohibit anonymous donations and guarantee all children the right to learn the identity of their donor's identity when they turn 18.

"There's some evidence internationally now that as countries move to prohibit anonymous donation, the donor pool decreases dramatically," said Sean Tipton, spokesman for the American Society of Reproductive Medicine.

In the United States, donors can still choose anonymity, but sperm banks increasingly encourage them to

volunteer their identities to any future offspring.

- *Julie Kirkwood*