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Sperm Donor Father Ends His Anonymity



Monica Almeida/The New York Times

Jeffrey Harrison, once a highly requested sperm donor, with a biological daughter, Ryann M., in Los Angeles, and two of his dogs.

By AMY HARMON Published: February 14, 2007

There is no established ritual for how an anonymous sperm donor should contact his genetic children. But for Jeffrey Harrison, Valentine's Day seemed as good an occasion as any.

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"It's a short life," he said, "and these children need to have some kind of resolution. I thought I could send a little valentine, kind of, to everyone, just saying hello."

Mr. Harrison had been thinking about getting in touch since reading in an article in The New York Times 15 months ago that two teenagers whose mothers had used his sperm to conceive were looking for him. The headline, "Hello, I'm Your Sister, Our Father Is Donor 150," made him choke on his coffee, said Mr. Harrison, who made \$400 a month donating sperm under that number twice-weekly during the late 1980s.

But California Cryobank, the sperm bank that had promised anonymity to its customers and to Mr. Harrison, proved unresponsive to his repeated requests for assistance. Besides, he had misgivings. What if the girls were disappointed by his humble circumstances?

Once one of the sperm bank's most-requested donors, with a profile that described him as 6 foot and blue-eyed with interests in philosophy, music and drama, Mr. Harrison, 50, lives with his four dogs in a recreational vehicle near the Venice section of Los

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“I make a meager living,” Mr. Harrison said, taking care of dogs and doing other odd jobs.

Still, he said he thought he could explain to the girls why he had taken an unconventional life-path. Their grandfather was an [Ivy League](#)-educated retired financial executive, he would tell them; their grandmother was a former volunteer president for the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals.

Six weeks ago, Mr. Harrison logged on to the Donor Sibling Registry, the Web site devoted to facilitating connections between donor-conceived offspring, where the two girls, Danielle P. and JoEllen M. had initially found each other. Four more teenagers from his sperm samples had since surfaced, he saw on the logs.

How many could he handle, he wondered?

As Valentine’s Day approached, though, Mr. Harrison resolved to get in touch with them all.

Last Saturday night, Mr. Harrison e-mailed a picture of his birth certificate to Wendy Kramer, the founder of the sibling registry, to confirm his identity. Several dozen donors have contacted offspring on the registry, Ms. Kramer said, but none have been brave enough to come forward with such a large group of teenagers.

“You don’t know what to expect,” Ms. Kramer said. “How do we define this family, and what are we to each other?”

Danielle and JoEllen called Mr. Harrison together the next day. The moment that had preoccupied their fantasies for years began in a more prosaic fashion than they had anticipated. But they said they were not disappointed.

“The first thing he said was, ‘Holy moly,’ ” said Danielle, 17, who has spent several hours on the phone with Mr. Harrison in the last three days. “He’s sort of a free spirit, and I don’t care what career he has. I got to talk to his dogs.”

Mr. Harrison met a third daughter, Ryann M., in Los Angeles yesterday afternoon. His other newfound offspring, who live in Colorado, Florida, New York and Pennsylvania, are busy marveling over their shared love of animals and the distinctive forehead evident in the pictures he has e-mailed.

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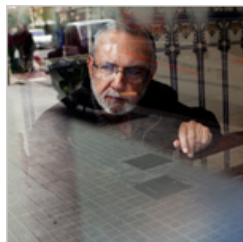


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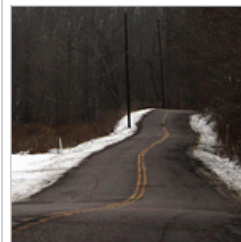
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