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## Sperm donor mum tracks down her son's 'global family' as she goes online to find six-year-old's 11 lookalike siblings

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With their similarly shaped faces and shared blond hair and blue eyes, it's easy to guess that the three boys are brothers.

But Max Silverwood and half-brothers Liam and Grant come from three different families – and have nine other siblings around the world.

Their remarkable global 'family' has emerged after six-year-old Max's mother Ellie Silverwood tracked down the other offspring of the sperm donor she used.



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**Brothers in arms: Six-year-old Max Silverwood (right) with half-siblings Grant (left) and Liam (centre)**

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The only information she had for the anonymous man was that he is Danish and had the donor alias 'Dane 1421'.

Miss Silverwood, from Oxford, conceived Max with a donor because her now ex-husband was unable to have children. As her son grew, she began to wonder more and more about what Max's siblings might look like if he had any.

She joined the Donor Sibling Registry, a US-based website which allows families of donor children to locate each other, registering her interest in contacting anyone related to Dane 1421.

In the next two years, she received messages from nine families, who between them had eight boys – including Grant, four, and Liam, five – and three girls, all conceived by the Dane. They live as far afield as the US and Australia. Max is the oldest; the youngest is four.

'One of the first people to contact me was Liam's mother, Mary,' said Miss Silverwood, a retail buyer. 'She emailed me a picture of Liam and I burst into tears when I saw it. He was the spitting image of Max. I was really happy and excited.'

The first face-to-face meeting came when she and Max flew to Texas to spend Christmas with Grant and Liam, who have different mothers.



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**Elie Silverwood and her son Max, age 6, from Abingdon. Elie conceived via sperm donor and she has tracked down 12 half siblings to her own son**

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Miss Silverwood said: 'It was hugely emotional for myself and Grant's and Liam's families to see the boys together.

'The similarities are uncanny. They all share what must be their father's hair, distinctive shaped eyes, eye colour, head shape and noses. They also have the same outgoing sparky characters – and they all loved playing Angry Birds.

'Us mothers became quite emotional thinking about the man responsible for giving us our wonderful children. All I could think was surely he would be bursting with pride if he could see them.'

She chose a donor from Denmark because far more information is given there about fathers than in the UK, where it is limited to height, hair and eye colour.

As well as a full family medical history going back two generations, information on personality was also available.

She found Dane 1421 via a New York-based agency called Scandinavian Cryobank. He stood out on their list of 30 possible donors: he is 6ft, blond, blue-eyed, speaks four languages, has two degrees and plays the saxophone – and she also learned his favourite car is an Aston Martin Vantage V8.

She said: 'But what really set him apart was he'd written how he and his wife made the decision for him to donate because his own two sons were such a joy.

'He described his love for his wife, and referred to his children as "his treasures" which I thought was wonderful.

'I liked the fact this was an educated man who had come to a decision with his wife to help childless couples.' With the help of a fertility clinic, she imported the sperm under licence from regulator, the Human Fertilisation and Embryology Authority.

## SITE THAT BROUGHT THEM TOGETHER

**FOUNDED** in 2000, the Donor Sibling Registry lists fertility clinics worldwide which use donor insemination.

Members who join for £50 (\$75) can post details on where and when treatment was given, and as many details as they can about the donor.

It has nearly 40,000 members, including in Britain, and has matched hundreds of siblings. In 2011, a US mother learned her donor had fathered at least 150 children. The

case raised concerns about the spread of genetic diseases.

Britain has a legal limit of ten families per donor, but in the US there is no such restriction.

Here in the UK, any child conceived by donor since 2005 can trace their father when they reach 18, but donors cannot trace children. In Denmark, donors can choose whether they wish to be traceable. Dane 1421 chose to stay anonymous.



**Elle Silverwood conceived Max with a donor as her (now ex-) husband was unable to have children**





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**Max's brothers and sisters live as far apart as the U.S. and Australia**

Miss Silverwood – who was married at the time of Max's birth – said: 'As he started to grow up and his personality started to come through, I found myself wondering about the donor more, particularly his two children.'

'I used to wonder if his sons looked like Max, and whether they were sporty and bright and funny like Max.' In 2008, she paid to register with the Donor Sibling Registry. 'Max had always wanted a brother or sister, and talked about it from as soon as he could speak,' she said. 'I would have loved to have another child from the same donor, but Dane 1421 was no longer donating.'

Max has spoken on the phone with two other half-brothers, Tristan in California and Nicholas in New York. Miss Silverwood hopes all 12 will get together soon, possibly in Disneyland.

She said: 'Max knows a special man in Denmark with the help of special doctors helped his mummy and these other mummies have their lovely children. Finding them has been a fantastic adventure for both of us.'

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