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## Confessions of a Sperm Donor: Hundreds of Kids

Films 'The Switch' and 'The Kids Are Alright' Paint Pretty Picture of an Ugly Fertility Industry

By SUSAN DONALDSON JAMES

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In his days as a student at the University of Utah, Chase Kimball was known as number 007, donating his sperm at \$20 a pop to help infertile couples.

He estimates that over a seven-year period during the 1970s and 1980s, he likely sired "hundreds of children."

At one point the clinic told him, "You've got too many kids locally and we can only use your sperm if someone orders it from out of state."

"For a long time, whenever I'd see crowds of children, I would look intently and wonder if one of these children was mine," said Kimball, now a 56-year-old lawyer in Salt Lake City.

Just this week, Hollywood is rolling out another film that deals with sperm donation, ["The Switch,"](#) starring Jennifer Anniston and Jason Bateman -- a romantic comedy about a 40-year-old woman who turns to artificial insemination for a child and the donor sperm gets switched.

It comes on the heels of the critically-acclaimed, ["The Kids Are Alright,"](#) in which a sperm donor played by [Mark Ruffalo](#) nuzzles his way in and out of the lives of his two offspring and their lesbian mothers.

These films, and likely more to come, are a reflection of a new attitude of openness toward sperm donation and a movement to regulate an industry that has been cloaked in secrecy and unsafe practices. One study by the [Commission on Parenthood's Future](#), ["My Daddy's Not My Donor,"](#) surveyed 485 donor offspring and concluded they were more troubled and depression-prone than other young adults.

"We get 100 families a day signing on to our Web site," said Wendy Kramer, who conceived her son through sperm donation and founded the Web-based [Donor Sibling Registry](#) (DSR) in Colorado. It is the only registry of its type in the United States.

"There are no rules or regulations about donor identification, testing donors, monitoring numbers of children or medical records," Kramer said. "No one is watching. There are no laws."

"They recruit young college kids with no education and no counseling for the donors," she said. "They are lied to and told there will never be any more than 10 kids out there. They don't keep track."

Kimball just celebrated the fourth anniversary of meeting two of his biological offspring, full sisters who are 23 and 26, who sought him out on Kramer's DSR.

The reunion was exciting, but emotionally tricky, much like the journey of the sperm donor Paul from "The Kids Are Alright."

"I identified with him quite a bit," Kimball said of the motorcycle-riding free spirit who reconnects with his teenage offspring.

Like the film's donor-conceived children, Joni and Laser, offspring go through a variety of emotions, and reunions can be fraught with guilt and emotional upheaval.

Kimball's oldest daughter thought he was a "scam artist" with bad intentions or a "sleazoid." The youngest has struggled with the fact that he doesn't share her Mormon faith.

One divorcee contacted Kimball a year ago thinking he was the donor father of her son. After exchanging photos, they found the boy looked a lot like Kimball's father.

But the boy, who was close to his so-called "social father," never acted on the information and told his mother to "butt out," the mother explained.

Most children are never told they are the product of sperm donation, according to Kimball, "so the vast majority of my children don't even know I exist."

All donations are anonymous and sometimes even the donor doesn't know the sperm bank-assigned number. In order to find a donor, offspring have to have a birth date for the donor and try to figure it out. Only with that number can offspring definitively find their donor fathers on the DSR, and many say it takes a lot of sleuthing.

Sometimes, truth is stranger than fiction.

One donor, [Dr. Kirk Maxey](#), 52, of Michigan, said he may have sired at least 400 children after donating semen twice a week between 1980 and 1994.

"But he's nothing but another donor," said Kramer. "We have donors who have found 30-50-70 kids."

Sperm donors make about \$1,200 month, donating three times a week for many years. "But that doesn't mean there are three potential children," said Kramer. "Every sample is broken out into eight to 25 vials for 75 potential children every week he donates."

## **7,500 Sperm Donors, Half-Siblings Have Found Matches**

Maxey has called for statutory rules for genetic tests of donors to prevent passing on inheritable diseases and volunteered to be part of Harvard University's Personal Genome Project. He already has reunited with two daughters through the DSR.

FDA guidelines indicate that donated sperm cannot have any "relevant communicable disease or agent," but there is no limit on how many donations can be made by one person or any sharing of medical information between the donor and the child's family.

Maxey is also critical of the "commercialism," of sperm banks that make greater profits by dividing up a single ejaculate.

"Make sperm distribution a mandatory non-profit activity, matching the status of all other traffic in living human tissue," said Maxey. "Disclose to all women all that is actually known about their prospective donor, and maintain a strict registry so that the knowledge base will be substantial. Make the information supplied by donors to banks legally binding, and obtained under oath. Make donor records indistinguishable from other medical records, but require them to be maintained a very long time □ I suggest 100 years would be a good start. Make them discoverable and subject to HIPPA."

To date, more than 28,000 people -- donor men, parents and offspring -- have registered and more than 7,500 have found their half-siblings and biological fathers.

Now, many at the center of this storm are calling for an end to anonymous donation, hoping to model government-sponsored programs in Australia, Britain and some other European countries to identify sperm donors.

Tim Gullicksen, a 43-year-old real estate salesman from San Francisco, donated for a decade after signing up as a college student at Berkeley. He said he was promised only 10 families would get his sperm but now, "it's pretty clear there are 80 or 90 kids out there."

"These kids don't know me from Adam," he said.

The first child to contact him three years ago through DSR was a 9-year-old boy in Texas whose single mother had chosen sperm donation.

"He had five years of stuff for me when I met him and right after that everything started to snowball," said Gullicksen.

"He had been pestering his mom about where his dad was since he was a toddler," he said. "He had no father figure and he actually kept a box under his bed where he kept all his school projects and wrote 'Daddy' on the box."

Since then, Gullicksen has connected with seven children, ages 9 to 16, who hail from California, Texas, Chicago and North Carolina.

"I started to feel kind of overwhelmed," Gullicksen said. "After that burst of activity, I pondered what I could afford to do. I am not going to marry mommy and move into the house, though that goes away pretty quickly. I have a life."

"It causes a lot of conflict and angst in their lives and if there is a way I can help with that, I do," he said. "I am not just sperm or a big mystery. I am a regular guy and don't bring my agenda."

Over time, he was able to make the commitment to form an extended family, visiting each of his

donor offspring in their own homes.

As a group, the seven half-siblings go out to California for a week once a year for a group reunion of boating and hiking in the Sierras.

But those who are not so lucky to find their sperm donors say they feel lost without knowing their genetic identity.

## Woman Searches for 9 Years for Sperm Donor

Emily Silver, 30, of Bend, Oregon, has been on a "spiritual" search to locate her own sperm donor and any half-siblings. Along the way, she has helped others people find their relatives.

Now in the licensing process to be a psychotherapist for such families, she has a twin brother. It's also difficult to fully engage her parents out of respect for their feelings.

"There are a lot of unknowns," she said. "I wonder why I look the way I look. The shape and color of our eyes is not from my mom's side of the family. I know this sounds superficial, but I have always had more curiosity about people, why they are the way they are and genealogy, and I don't have answers for that."

She also is married and starting to think about having a child, but has no medical information about her paternal side.

"I think if I found him it would fill in a lot a lot of the missing pieces," she said.

Silver contacted [Oregon Health and Sciences Andrology](#), where she was conceived, and eventually four men got back to her.

For two years, she corresponded with one she thought was her donor, but when he finally unearthed his donor number, they did not match.

Silver also had a year's relationship with a woman she thought was her half-sibling, but after DNA testing, they realized they were not sisters.

"It's like opening a Pandora's box," she said. "I anticipate the worst. I feel like I am intruding on their lives. They have probably closed the door 30 years ago and they are shocked and don't want to deal with it."

Sperm donor-offspring relationships can be complicated, but some, like Chase Kimball and his daughters, have happy endings.

"I told them [I'd] be anything they wanted me to be, your father or your uncle, [to] call every year on Christmas or anything in between," he said of first meeting them in an ice cream parlor in 2006. "You have to have your boundaries."

The girls were astounded at how much their donor father looked like the older sister and they all shared a love of books.

"My elder daughter said something about she was glad I was a lawyer because she expected me to be a night manager at Burger King," he said. "They are both very smart.

"The biggest challenge is trying to figure out how to relate to my daughters as adults and not step on their toes," he said.

"They had financial struggles when they were younger and I know that was hard on them," he said. "It's really bothered me to know that I would have helped. But I didn't know them then."

Today, they are close and speak frequently.

"I am absolutely thrilled out of my skull with my daughters," he said.

Kimball always wanted children, but he never expected this.

Neither do a lot of others like him who have found myriad children, according to the DSR's founder, Kramer.

"Initially some reach out because it's ethically the right thing to do or to share medical conditions or to make themselves open to the kids," she said. "What they don't realize is that they aren't just donating a piece of genetic material, they are creating people who are their children."

"They are very surprised by the emotions that come up when kids walk and talk and think like them," she said. "There can be a profound sense of connectedness. These kids are their children."

*Learn more about the [Donor Sibling Registry](#).*

*If you have any information about sperm donations at [Oregon Health and Sciences Andrology](#), where Emily Silver was conceived, please contact Brian Sereda at 503-418-3790.*

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