

Children should have a say in sperm donor debate

By Margery Eagan | Tuesday, October 6, 2009 | <http://www.bostonherald.com> | Columnists

If you plowed through comments on yesterday's Herald story - "(Jane) Doe spells out daddy issues" - you found lot of hostility toward this single mother of two sick 8-year-olds who hoped courts would force the release of their sperm donor "dad's" name and medical history.

Tough luck, Jane, readers basically said. You signed on the dotted line.

Yet the push to end donor anonymity is coming nonetheless, and not just from mothers like "Jane." It's coming from their 20- and 30-something children.

These kids signed nothing.

They had no vote.

They want some rights, and they should have them.

"My son was 2 when he said, 'So, did my dad die or what?'" So says Wendy Kramer, mother of Ryan, 19, who wants to find his biological dad.

"Ryan started college at 14," Kramer said yesterday. "He graduated at 18 with a degree in aerospace engineering - you know, rocket science. Oh my god, I don't have that kind of brain."

To help her still-young son, Kramer co-founded the Donor Sibling Registry, a Web site for children seeking half-brothers and sisters. Ryan's was the first post. Finally, in 2007, he became the 2,910th child to find a sibling: his half-sister, Anna, 13; then two more half-sisters living near Boston. He knows of three other half-siblings. Wendy suspects there are 20 more.

But about Ryan's prolific donor dad, they still know almost nothing.

Scott Brown of California Cyrobank, the nation's largest sperm bank, typically sees just two or three out of hundreds of donors volunteer to meet offspring; few even consider contact when the child reaches 18.

Not surprisingly, Brown's against the trend in Europe to ban anonymous donation that's all but eliminated it. Great Britain banned it in 2005. Now women are waiting up to two years for donor sperm.

Newton reproductive law specialist Susan L. Crockin, however, says donorship is growing less secretive, particularly among female egg donors. Almost half the women she sees consider a future meeting with a child and "virtually 100 percent" agree to provide any medical history when a child is seriously ill.

But the Herald's much-maligned Jane Doe can't get even that, a situation Wendy Kramer finds unconscionable. "We worry about the best interests of sperm banks and donors and recipients," she says.

"But what about the child's?"

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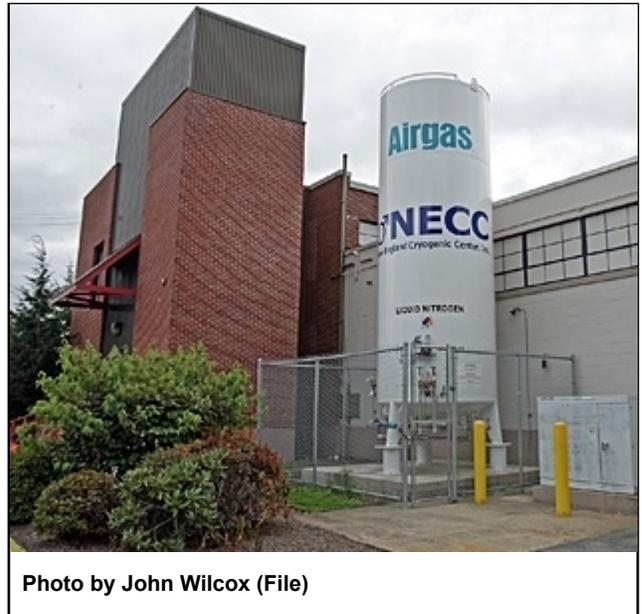


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