

Happy Father's Day, Donor 3066

in OBSERVATIONS by Les Sillars — June 19, 2010 at 12:14 pm | 3 comments



To Allyson's biological father

I think you'd have liked her.

Allyson is a slim girl of 11, with braces, blonde hair and pretty blue eyes. She lives here in Winchester. She's a little shy around strangers but she shakes hands very politely and seems, sitting next to her mother, Dawn, at the north-side IHOP, to be the kind of daughter from whom any dad would love to get a Father's Day card.

But you won't be getting one from her this year. Dawn knows how to find you, but Allyson doesn't actually want to meet you. I asked. So I thought you might like a quick update.

You've heard that Allyson is one of at least 13 children—most in California but a few out East—who were born as a result of sperm provided by you, Donor 3066, to

the California Cryobank. There are about 150 donor clinics around the country, a \$3.3 billion industry that generates perhaps 30,000-60,000 new births annually. Some estimate that about a million Americans are, like Allyson, donor-conceived. Allyson may be one of dozens, perhaps hundreds, of donor-conceived people living in Winchester and Frederick County.

Dawn's ex-husband was unable to have children, so in about 1995 her fertility doctor (she was living in Gettysburg at the time) recommended artificial insemination. "It made perfect sense to me," she said last week. "I could just never imagine myself not being a mother. If I'd never found anybody to marry, I'd have done it anyway."

After the first two attempts ended in miscarriages, Dawn turned to the California Cryobank, whose descriptions of the donors seemed more complete than the ones her doctor's supplier was offering. She found you: blonde and blue-eyed, like herself, with a BA in theater/voice, German/Norwegian, a six-footer but still trim at 162 pounds, speaks Spanish, likes to bike, swim, work out. Catholic. Dimples, even. "It's kind of like picking from a menu," Dawn said.

The clincher was your number: 3066. Dawn was then 30 years old and born in 1966. "Here's somebody who matches myself and here's this number that kind of corresponds to my life. It made sense."

Dawn found the process of artificial insemination tedious, between the test-induced cramping, the fertility drugs, and the daily visits to the doctor's office for blood work and hormone monitoring. But in the end, there was Allyson.

Dawn and Allyson moved from Pennsylvania to Taneytown, Md., in 2005. While there Dawn saw a story on the Today Show about how donorsiblingregistry.com was putting donor siblings in touch with each other. She signed up and within 24 hours had heard from two other moms who had picked you out of a line-up, so to speak.

Speaking of donorsiblingregistry, someone wrote there that you donated sperm for eight years, from 1995 to 2003. Man, that could be a LOT of sperm. Could you have more than 13 kids out there? These sperm banks say they limit how many offspring you'll have, but some sibling groups on the registry have over 50 members, and that's just the people who signed up.

How much did they pay you, anyway? These days you could make "up to \$100 per donation and up to \$1200 a month by donating 3 times a week. We periodically offer incentives such as movie tickets or gift certificates for extra time and effort expended by participating sperm donors," according to the company website. Wow. Gotta love those incentives. By the way, the IRS classifies you as an "independent contractor."

Dawn and Allyson were at first very excited to meet her half-siblings. "It was cool," Allyson said. "I've always wanted brothers and sisters." So they took some trips out to California to meet some of them, and they still get together with a few, sometimes. The kids look a lot alike, apparently.

But as the group grew their enthusiasm waned. They're settling into Winchester. Dawn, a counselor, is getting married again soon. She's been telling Allyson what happened since she was old enough to understand. "I can't imagine not having her know that," Dawn said. "That's not information that you keep from somebody."

But many people don't tell their offspring, according to a big new study out from the Institute for American Values called "My Daddy's Name is Donor." It's online. In general, donor offspring aged 18-45 are a bit more likely to feel confused and isolated than those who were adopted or come from biological families, and are a little more likely to suffer depression, delinquency and substance abuse. Nearly half are disturbed that money was involved in their conception.

More than half say that when they see someone who resembles them they wonder if they are related. Some worry about unknowingly getting intimate with a half-sibling.

Other studies have found that donor-conceived people told later in life often don't take the news well. Comes as a shock, apparently.

But I don't want to worry you. Allyson seems just fine with it. Dawn calls it a "blessing" that this option was available.

Still, you should be aware that many donor-conceived people feel a real need to know where they came from. And despite the Cryobank's promise of anonymity, any one of your offspring could track you down—oh, wait, I forgot! One already did.



Donorsiblingregistry.com founder Wendy Kramer with donor-conceived son Ryan

"There's no such thing as anonymity anymore, not with Google and [DNA testing]," donorsiblingregistry.com founder Wendy Kramer told me recently. One of your children's moms started with a mail-order DNA testing company called Family Tree DNA, matched up some genetic markers and started making phone calls.

"The [sperm banks] all say they're self-regulating, but there's really no regulation," Kramer added.

"So far the industry has moved forward only considering the rights of the industry, the rights of parents, and the donors' right to be anonymous. But what's in the best interest of the child?"