



Sperm or Egg Donors Who Wish to Remain Anonymous Just Shouldn't Donate

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Letter to Editor

My son Ryan and I were contacted by Family Tree DNA in 2004, as they thought that their new commercial DNA testing capabilities might be useful to my son Ryan, and to the others in our community of donor conceived people at the Donor Sibling Registry. At that time we thought it might be possible to find out more about one's ancestry and countries of origin. Ryan was excited to learn more about his ancestry, so he quickly agreed to swab his cheek, send in his sample and see what he might learn. He became the one of the first donor-conceived persons to throw his DNA into a public DNA database, making himself available to connect with previously unknown genetic relatives.

At first, he did learn a bit more about his paternal ancestry, specifically about countries of origin. He learned that he was mostly English, with some Irish and even a bit of Icelandic (which he thought was pretty cool). He also matched with people on his 12 and 25 Y Chromosome DNA markers, which meant that common ancestors related them from hundreds or even thousands of years ago. For 9 months we were content with that little bit of information.

Nine months after submitting his DNA, he had his first matches on the 37 Y-DNA marker. He matched with two men with the same last name who didn't know one another, but who had determined that they had a common ancestor who lived in the 1600's. Because Ryan matched with both these men, as they matched with each other, it was determined that Ryan also had the same relative from the 1600's. The two men and this common ancestor all had the same last name. Using the last name, a birthdate from the donor profile, Google and a public records database, my son determined within days the identity of his biological father. When our formerly anonymous donor was given the opportunity to know my son, he gladly accepted. Many donors since then have also connected with offspring on DNA sites, as well as on the Donor Sibling Registry.

With the increasing number of people submitting their DNA into databases now, there is a good probability that donor conceived individuals will connect with distant or even close relatives including half siblings, biological mothers or fathers, sons or daughters. Donor offspring have the right to search for and to try to make connections with relatives as long as they respect the boundaries, wishes and privacy of those to whom they reach out.

For decades, the rights of donors to remain anonymous have been first and foremost. It's now time that the rights of donor conceived people to be curious about, search for, and connect with their first degree genetic relatives are acknowledged. In this day and age of commercial DNA testing, here's my advice for prospective sperm (and egg) donors: if you don't want to be known to your offspring, just don't become a donor. Because even if donors don't submit their own DNA, chances are that some known, or distant unknown relatives of theirs, have spit or swabbed, and this makes donors very findable. My son may have been the first to locate his donor with this new methodology, but he certainly won't be the last.

If you are a former donor and think you'll never be found, it might be time to start educating yourself about what donor conceived offspring are looking for when reaching out to their genetic mothers and fathers. We have heard from thousands of them, on the DSR (Donor Sibling Registry is a website and non-profit US organization which serves donors) and through research projects, and we know that they are not looking to invade or disrupt your life. They are not looking for an active parent. They are not looking for money. They just want to know where they come from-their genetic and medical history, along with their ancestry. Some offspring do long to meet and get to know their genetic parents, and if the relationships evolve after making the initial connection, then that's icing on the cake for all involved.