

I wrote a piece in December 2010, about my experience of learning that I had donor offspring. Recently, I wrote a follow-up (again per the advice of my wonderful therapist!), which is attached below. I hope this is even half as helpful to others as so many of the other Yahoogroup postings have been for me.

Artificial Insemination from the Donor's Perspective (After the Meeting, October 2011)

Last year, after learning that I had a teenage donor-daughter, I wrote a piece about my experience (see below). Since that writing, I met my donor-child and her mother. I wrote this piece to help round-up my feelings, but it ultimately became an article of advice for other donors. I believe the most important information I can offer to donors is (1) your only entitlement is to pass-on knowledge regarding paternal lineage, (2) you must be completely honest and forthcoming with your offspring, and (3) you must respect parental boundaries. Donors are in a thankless position, but one which we all incidentally agreed to years ago.

I am a consent/open donor (18-year-old offspring automatically receive my information), so I was faced with whether to make contact with my donor-child prematurely. It took me a long time, and many conversations with friends, family and my amazing therapist, to decide to respond to my donor-daughter's posting on the DSR (my offspring posted on the DSR directly, as opposed to her parents doing so). I reached out to her parents, after networking to them through my offspring's Face Book page. After receiving separate approval from her parents (they live apart), I responded directly with my donor daughter. I was overly cautious because this was new territory for me; but, I believe that had my first-contact been with my donor daughter, it could have been perceived as a disrespect of proper parental boundaries. This could have created a justified trust barrier. In addition, as questions came up about providing information to my offspring, I occasionally checked with her parents for permission. It's very possible that one of her parents could have refused consent, but that was something that I didn't have to deal with, luckily.

After I received her parents' permission, my donor-daughter and I began a lengthy conversation. I took the position from the start that this connection was for her benefit, not for mine, and that I couldn't allow my ego to get in the way. I needed to be completely forthcoming with my strengths and flaws, my history, and avoid any attachments (which could inadvertently lead to concealing or dyeing dirty laundry). But, somewhere in the first 100 pages of letter writing, I found myself becoming very fond of this clever, creative, and fun person. And she seemed a genuinely good person – that person I imagine others use as a moral compass. The more I cared what she thought of me, the less

comfortable I became with being so forthright. I've had to remind myself of the above-mentioned obligations over and over again in order to maintain transparency and honesty.

During the struggle to be so open, however, I believe I failed to temper some information to make it more age-appropriate. Despite my donor-child's perceived maturity (and proficient use of expletives), there still needed to be some censuring. Don't get me wrong, it was nothing grossly inappropriate, but, in the end, there were some items I would rather have not shared.

After meeting with my donor child and her mother early this year, communication dwindled and quickly stopped. Likely, my donor-daughter simply satisfied her desire at that time to learn more about me, and so contact ceased. Secretly, I grew to hope for ongoing communication; but, I also knew my outcome was typical and most likely. I worried that there was something else that led to the conclusion of communication, however. I worried that perhaps complete, up-front honesty had been the culprit. But, eventually I reached a point where I achieved peace... that I did the right thing by giving my donor daughter a complete picture of who I am, and an end to her search for donor information.

Two months ago, my donor-daughter again made contact, and I'm back to the daily struggle. Again I toil over how to maintain boundaries regarding attachments and expectations, while providing limitless information and candor, and getting to know this wonderful, genetically-related young person. It's a difficult position to be in, and few people seem to have any insight. Hopefully, with all the media exposure this issue has gained in the past few years, more donors will post their experiences, and collectively we can create the best approaches for this unique situation.

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Artificial Insemination From the Donor's Perspective
December 2010

When I was in my twenties, I became a sperm donor. I can't remember if someone introduced me to the idea, or if perhaps I saw an ad in a newspaper or magazine. But, I remember discussing the idea with my family, a few of my female friends and with my live-in girlfriend. Everyone posed the same argumentative question: "but, you could have a child one day from this! What about that?!" I didn't really address that issue at the time. But, now I have to confront it because I learned (on www.donorsiblingregistry.com) there's a beautiful young girl that I've never met, conceived partially with my DNA. After much reflection, I've decided not to be hard on my younger self because even with years of growth since then, I'm still emotionally confused about this issue.

Embarrassingly, I admit that I started the donor process with thoughts of financial benefits. I was in graduate school, a suburban kid living in a cramped Manhattan studio, amassing a frightening amount of debt. One of my friends lightheartedly referred to me as a "spermatozoa salesman" back then, and frankly, I didn't think of myself as much more. But, some time early down that path, my participation changed from a simple financial transaction to something more significant.

Financial compensation didn't persist very long as a motivator for me. At the time I donated, the lab issued checks monthly, and these included only twenty-five dollars per usable (contained a high enough sperm count) sample. Another twenty-five dollars was issued 6-months after viable samples left quarantine. In order to increase the chance of a good sample count, all donors must sexually abstain for 48 hours prior to a visit. But, sexual intimacy was intensely comforting to me back then, especially with the stressors of graduate school. In addition, I commuted round-trip almost 1 hour on the subway to and from the lab. With all of these obstacles, I usually made it to the lab only once per week, and when classes (or my girlfriend's libido) were particularly demanding, I missed several weeks at a time.

The discomforts of the process also made the financial compensation less attractive. First was the feeling of inadvertently being on display at the lab. In a small waiting room of mainly female couples, and some single older women, I was quite obviously a sperm donor. And if they had any doubt, the reasonably perceptive women would have figured out that only the donors didn't get called in by their first or last names. Despite the apparent, I still pretended that I wasn't on a first-name basis with all the nurses and medical staff, and sometimes ridiculously asked for directions down the hall. In response to my situation, I felt the need to be well groomed and dress fashionably, keep a close shave, and stay outside as much as possible to keep whatever tan could be maintained on someone of naturally pale Eastern European descent. I always made sure to bring something to read (to divert my eyes), sat up straight, and wore matching socks.

I was embarrassed to be a donor in a lab staffed by mostly women. During the application process, an attractive female showed me the small selection of pornographic material, the comfy leather chair, and where to find the soap and paper towels to clean up. I never used the porn for the same reason; namely, the knowledge that couples and nurses were right outside the door. Somehow, donating without that material also felt less grimy and more pure. When I finished, it was a female that received my cup, while trying her best to remain expressionless. Most people have experienced the awkwardness of handing a clear cup of urine to a nurse- now imagine that it's your sex juices.

I guess that for a single, extremely confident (or oblivious) male, who has lots of time and lives close to an IV lab, donating sperm might be a decent financial

deal. But, this wasn't the case for me. You may be wondering why I kept going when there was no legally binding commitment. There are a bunch of little reasons, including pressured calls from the lab to come more often. Most important, though, was the feeling that I was actually doing some good, combined with some unconscious ego-stroking. Whether I fully recognized it back then, I was proud that the lab chose me, and excited that someone might choose my profile one day. When I found out that someone did, the news came as a huge compliment. Despite the many 6'2" brown hair, green-eyed poets/competitive skiers/physics-music double majors (no joke, check out the DSR website), this typical Jewish boy was chosen.

When I was twenty-four, my good-feelings about helping others were relatively shallow, and of course mixed with narcissistic motives. At that age, males are always seeking experiences that fondle their ego in some fashion. Being a sperm donor added to my identity of being a good person, and this continued as a motivator for me. Similarly, I loved that I could distinguish myself as a pro-animal rights, pro-LGBT (lesbian, gay, bi-sexual, transgender) rights environmentalist. Anything that bolstered my liberal self-image was worth it at the time. Adding sperm donor to my silhouette made me feel even more open-minded, helpful and generally a better person. But, mixed with all that stupid image stuff eventually emerged a thought-out position that donating was a worthy act.

A bit aside, every sperm donor actually has something to feel a bit special about: they made the physiological cut. Only 10%, approximately, of the entire male population has a high enough sperm count to donate. In addition, the sperm must be hardy enough to withstand the freezing and thawing process. Donors have to be free of major psychiatric disorders and STDs, and I've read they now have to be 5'11" or above. My lab's contracted psychologist told me unofficially that they also weed out the weird and the ugly. I've read that only about 5% of applicants are eventually chosen to become donors. I'm of average height and average to high-average intelligence, but most donors I ran into were taller than me, read law/engineering/medical texts in the waiting room, and some were a lot more handsome. I can't tell you how my semen compared.

So, now I have a daughter. In order to get my emotional footing, I had to figure out the right terminology. I felt uncomfortable with the term "daughter." Daughters and sons usually have meaningful attachments with their parents. And hopefully these attachments are formed and maintained by healthy and secure support from their parents. I'm a child-advocate attorney, involved in child-protection cases, and I infrequently encounter "fathers" professionally. Often, when the typical male comes to child-protection court (family court), he's had limited to no contact with his children. These males are sometimes pejoratively referred to as "sperm donors" by some court staff and lawyers. These men planted their seeds, knowing full well they would pay little child support (if any) and their children would grow up with little or no knowledge of

them. The biological mothers sometimes don't even know the full names of these males. In court, some mothers only know these men by nicknames (we've had "Butter", "Chicken Little" and "Worm," to name a few). Similarly, the mothers of my offspring know me only by a number. I don't pay child support; I've had no contact; and I never expected to have any relationship with my offspring. From a child's perspective, is there really any difference between me and these dead-beat dads? Like these absent fathers that I meet in court, I have no right to call my newly discovered offspring "daughter." But, the term "offspring" also sounded equally ridiculous when I wrote this paragraph. So, I settled on donor-conceived (or just "donor") child.

But, unlike most of the dead-beat dads I encounter, the biological connection I have with this child is meaningful to me. I care that she's given all the details she wishes to know of her paternal line. I'm going to write a letter to her, care of her parents, also with hope that one day I may have more contact, or meet her. I've read that donor children crave knowledge of their paternal roots. Obviously, my letter can only be an introduction as I really don't know what parts of me she wishes to learn about, and because I'm just a part of these roots. The real pressure is trying to put my best foot forward, just in case she and/or her mothers wish to have contact with me one day. So, I'm leaving out anything about tweezing my eyebrows and my childish love of the Harry Potter series. And I'm sticking to the basics. I'm going to write a short letter, with simple updates regarding my medical and social information in the past 16 years. And, perhaps I'll include a few pictures.

I feel grossly unprepared, by the way, and anxious about having contact with this donor child and her parents. Even though I'm naturally introverted, I've acquired skills to help me embrace new people. In my work, I meet with many children, parents and caregivers, and service providers, and speak publicly in court almost daily. Yet, I ruminate about the expectations, pressures and nuances of having contact with this girl and her parents. In the front line will be two protective mothers, equipped with critical eyes, and figurative bright lights and sharp scalpels. And I'm sure they've seen the recent movie, *The Kids are All Right*, about a narcissistic sperm donor that disrespects the boundaries of a family by taking all sorts of liberties with his donor-conceived children. Not only will they likely be suspicious of me, but perhaps judge me harshly, as well.

Behind these strong mothers will be a teen, potentially looking to me for some identity answers, and also super critical. I'm not generally an insecure person, but I'm realistic about the fact that family can hurt you emotionally, more than anyone else. The few times I thought my son was disappointed in me, I was devastated. I can't consider this donor child to be my daughter, but, I believe her impression of me could be nearly as important. If she likes me overall, that would be quite a boost; but, if she's disillusioned, that could have an equally strong impact.

Despite my anxiety and reservations, I desire to meet this donor child one day. The truth is, I'm projecting some connection toward her, even though I've never met her. And, in my line of work, where I often argue the strength of emotional ties and parenting over shared genetics, I'm frankly surprised by my yearning. I want to know if she shares any of my quirks, any of my facial expressions, my love of Chubby Hubby (Ben & Jerry's), if she's a cat or a dog person, if she loves Anne Rice as much as I do, how she relates to her siblings, and if she's also an introvert who's trying in her teens to perform as an extrovert. The bottom line is that I want to get to know her, and form whatever relationship she desires, and her parents allow. I also wish to meet and get to know her biological mothers, in order to know which parts of her are genetically from them, and how she has incorporated her environmental influences.

So, if it's not occurred to you yet, this news has impacted me in a profound way. I've thoroughly re-explored my motives for donating, downloaded articles about donor children, embarrassingly downloaded pictures of my donor child from the internet, and painstakingly deliberated about whether to make contact before she turns 18. My wife has been wonderful throughout this process, thankfully, and is the best support I could ask for. So, I'll send out that letter, without any expectation of personal contact, knowing that it may be helpful to her and her parents. And, if no contact ever occurs, or no meaningful connection is ever made, I hope I can still accept this experience as deeply meaningful and instructional.