

## **RICHARD HATCH and the DONOR SIBLING REGISTRY (DSR)**

Often, people say how lucky I was to have been selected to participate in the original *Survivor* series. Others claim I was even luckier to have won. But “luck” is an interesting concept. I’m unconvinced it had much to do with my winning, or even with my having been selected!

In support of my doubt, I would be hard-pressed to exaggerate the resistance I encountered when I was contemplating submitting my application. With rare exception, people poo-poo’d the idea. They said I’d be wasting my time. They thought it unlikely that regular-ol’-me would merit a second look. But the rational devil’s advocate in me chimed in immediately with a resounding, “Why not?” Why shouldn’t I be selected? After all, they had to select someone, and I’m a darn interestin’ fella.

Rather than luck, I attribute both my having been selected to participate and my eventual winning of *Survivor* to living in such a way as to wring from life all of what it has to offer... which brings me to having donated sperm during college and to the Donor Sibling Registry today.

When I first contemplated donating sperm, I took the time to consider the implications of doing so. Without knowing how my life and family might develop over the years, I imagined what it might be like to have biological offspring with whom I may never interact. I thought about the families trying, but unable to conceive on their own. I imagined what it might be like to have biological offspring who may someday seek a relationship with me. After considering all that, I made the decision to become a sperm donor. Fairfax Genetics and IVF Institute (its name then) was the sperm bank in Fairfax, Virginia, where I donated during 1986 and 1987.

My interesting and exciting life unfolded thereafter. I served in the Army and attended the United States Military Academy at West Point. I became a Big Brother and mentored a boy in my hometown. Later, I adopted a seven-year-old boy in state care and served on the Board of Directors of Adoption Rhode Island. I built a successful training and consulting firm. Eventually I went on to win the original *Survivor* series. Since then, I’ve been facing legal challenges I wouldn’t wish upon anyone... but I still anticipate the truth will eventually prevail, and I will be exonerated!

Over the years, I’d wondered what children may have been born and how their lives might be unfolding. I wrote to the Fairfax Genetics and IVF Institute saying I wanted to release them from their promise to keep my identity private. I also asked them for my donor number in the hopes of someday connecting with any of my offspring or their families who might want to know me. However to my utter dismay and distress, Fairfax Genetics and IVF Institute was adamant they would never release my identity to any offspring or recipients. They also denied me the right to know my own donor number.

I felt awful thinking that my offspring or their family members might be trying to find me. There appeared little, if anything, I could do to make myself accessible to any of them who might be searching. Then, in 2005, I found out about the Donor Sibling Registry. Even though I didn't have a donor number, I immediately registered and posted. And then I waited.

In 2010, I was in Rhode Island. I received a call from a young guy in New Jersey who'd been searching the Donor Sibling Registry. When he was 12, he'd been told his donor was Swedish and 6'5" tall, but he also, had no donor number to search with. We talked about our possible connection (I'm 6'4" tall, and one of my mom's parents had Swedish ancestry). We were both excited. He traveled by train to RI where he and I followed the instructions on a DNA test kit then mailed the swabs to the lab. Shortly thereafter, we received the results. Devin is my biological son. He's 22, and we're both open to whatever relationship might develop as a result of our being connected biologically.

In 2011, I got another call. My partner Emiliano (more accurately my spouse, since we married in Canada almost nine years ago, although our government refuses to recognize this) called to say we'd been contacted by a girl from Maine named Emily. This time we didn't need DNA testing to confirm our connection, since Emily's mom, Lisa had matched her donor's number with Devin's new-found donor number. Thanks again, Donor Sibling Registry!

Emi (short for Emiliano) and I spent last Christmas Eve with Emily's family in Maine. In January 2012, Devin, Emily, and Lisa all traveled to Newport, to meet more of my family including my son, Chris, my mom, Peggy, my sisters, Kristin and Susan, and others. Though I'd been a sperm donor in Virginia, and Emily had been raised in Maine, she'd spent the last four years at Salve Regina University, just a few hundred yards down the street from my home in Newport, RI. How crazy is that?

Our fascinating stories continue to unfold. Emily's dad passed away when she was 7 years old. Emily is interested in seeing what relationship she and I might build. Each of us have been very respectful of the lives we've so far been living, and we're interested in how things might yet unfold. We learn as we go. The future is open regarding the involvement we may play in each others lives from now on, as we go forward.

I can already "hear" people thinking how lucky I am to have connected with my now-adult children. Just as I feel about most things into which I've put significant thought, preparation and action, I'm convinced that the connections I've made are less about luck and more about having made thoughtful, intelligent choices. Each decision I took was designed to produce a desired outcome.

If you're considering joining the Donor Sibling Registry, I highly recommend you do so. Applying patience, respect and open mindedness, the connections you make will enrich your life and the lives of others with whom you may connect. The process may involve some challenges (emotional and otherwise). As someone who has been through the process, I am happy to volunteer assisting other donors, offspring, or family members who think I might help them manage expectations or contribute some insight into the process.

I wish you all, GOOD LUCK!