

Blue eyes run in the family

Kevin C Moore

On a hot day this past December in central Florida, I accompanied my mother to her bank. There, folded and tucked away in our safe deposit box, was a sheet of paper that was twenty-four years old. Upon it, written in my mother's neat hand, was the donor identity number and bank from which originated the sperm that was used in my conception.

I was probably around seven or eight when my parents told me about my donor insemination origins. We must have been on a family vacation as I can vaguely remember sitting across from them on a double bed and the dim, cheap lighting. They asked me if I knew how babies were made and then to explain it. I cannot actually remember how I learned the particulars but I suppose I managed to explain things well enough, because they then explained how the process for me was different. My older brother is biologically from both my mother and father. However when they were trying to have a second child, some medication my father was taking required them to use donated sperm. They said they tried several times before switching donors and becoming successful.

My parents' attitude towards the situation directly shaped my attitude. After finally conceiving and giving birth to me, they began to consider the issue of telling me. There wasn't any information available at the time from the point of view of DI offspring, so instead they consulted a friend who worked with adoption. She suggested telling me at a young age, so that I could grow up with it as a part of my identity. They explained things earnestly, and quite frankly it was never a big deal for any of us.

At the time the entire process seemed quite distant, that it had more to do with my parents than me. At least there wasn't any effort required on my part. However, from time to time, I would tell a friend about it – they found it interesting enough. I came from a traditionally 'normal' family, and it was never an issue for my parents, so it never really made any difference to me. My father was still my father; nothing of consequence had changed.

As a teenager I became somewhat more conscious of the situation and curious about my donor. When I developed irritable bowel syndrome my parents and I initially discussed the possibility of having inherited lactose intolerance from the donor. My mother and father are

both medical professionals, so these types of conversations are quite normal to me. Occasionally I would fantasise about the donor's profession, and whether or not that would in any way influence mine.

In my first year at university I met a girl who was also a 'sperm donor baby.' Neither one of us had ever met another person of DI origins, though we both made light of the situation and joked that we could be siblings.

Sometime last November ('08) I found out about the website Donor Sibling Registry www.donorsiblingregistry.com. It was then that I realized that although I would not know the identity of my donor, there was still a number associated with him, and a specific bank from which his sperm came. I had previously never thought about the existence of this information and knowing my mother, I was sure she had written it down and saved it somewhere.

My parents are rather wise and logical people. When I requested the information on my donor from them my father pre-empted me by saying I didn't need to explain my reasons to him, that he understood that it wasn't about him. Similarly, when I told my parents I was gay they responded by telling me it didn't change anything between us. If only everyone were so perceptive.

Deep in the vault, behind a door that weighed at least two tons, my mother and I pored over the paper. There wasn't much there: his birth date, hair colour, eye colour, body type, ethnicity. He went to Law school and liked athletics, writing and music.

"My only requirement was that he should have blue eyes," my mother explained. "All of us have blue eyes, they run in the family." The thought of my mother and father trying to choose a donor from a selection of descriptions amused me. My mother would have fussed over the particulars – this single criterion seemed more reasonable.

I sat on the information for about a week. It was around

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Kevin Moore, conceived through Donor Insemination.

midnight on a Sunday that I decided to make a search on the Donor Sibling Registry. At first I was confused by the format of the donor number, but when I tried again I was startled to see what looked like a match. It said I had a half-sister; the information she posted matched exactly what my mother had written. But it was too easy, and I doubted that it was right.

I joined the site, posted my own information and the match was confirmed. I sent a hesitant email, explaining the details. The following morning, I awoke to an excited response from my new half-sister. We continued to exchange lengthy emails introducing ourselves and explaining our own stories. I found out she is two years older than me and expecting twins from an IVF pregnancy; we were both quite open and welcoming to the situation. We quickly became friends on Facebook and she saw photos of my life as an MA student in London while I got to see her family and wedding. My parents were intrigued by the discovery of my half-sister, and impressed by the facilitation of it through the Internet. Later, I heard my mom sharing the story with a few of her best friends over the phone.

In January, when I returned to the UK, I approached the London Women's Clinic to understand the motives of men wanting to become sperm donors. This is something I've wanted to do since I was at least twelve and I am glad that they have encouraged my participation in their work.

How do sperm donors feel about the lives of their potential children? As I see it, whoever is willing to go through the process of DI truly desires to have that child. I can't think of a better situation in which to bring a person into the world. I feel lucky to have grown up confident in the love and support of my parents. Regardless of hereditary biology, I remain my mother and father's child – the rest is simply trivia. ○

Kevin C Moore was conceived through donor insemination and he was born and raised in Lakeland, Florida. He now lives in London where he is developing a photographic project based on family history and his experience of DI conception.