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.

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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.

David V.
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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 hours 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.