

"I FOUND MY SPERM DONOR DAD"

As the child of a sperm donor, Stacy Smedley, 29, was full of questions about her identity. She tells *Stylist* how meeting her donor father and brother helped her find some answers

I found out that I was a sperm donor baby when I was five. I'd just started school, when I asked my mother, "Why haven't I a dad like the other kids?" She explained that she wanted me so desperately, but hadn't met the right one, so she'd decided to go it alone. I grew up believing my dad was a special one, who'd given my mother a great gift. Then two years ago, I was at home in my little watching TV with my husband, (an, 32). A programme about anonymous sperm donation came on, telling the story of a mother who'd started a website - the Donor Sibling Registry - to connect children who share the same sperm or egg donor. My donor-conceived son had already discovered six half-sisters and now thousands of other donor children were logging on. I watched, gripped, a prickle of nervous excitement threaded through me. What if my donor father had other children too? My mother and I lived with my step-parents when I was growing up. My grandfather always fulfilled the father figure role in my life. He helped with science projects and walked down the aisle when I got married in 2003. Because of him, I had never felt like there was a void in my life. But, eventually, I did feel different from my peers growing up. Artificial insemination wasn't common for single women then, and even though I admired my mother for taking that step, I felt awkward when friends asked where my dad was. My standard response was to say he'd left when I was young so I didn't have to explain that I didn't know anything about his identity.

As I got older, even routine tasks grew up questions about where I came from. One day I was filling out paperwork at the doctor's office and I had to write 'applicable' in the father's history section. It made me curious for even a face name - anything that could provide a clue to this half of me that I had no idea about. I often found myself comparing looks and character traits with my mother, and if anything was different I would wonder if it was from my donor. So, when I turned 18, I decided to



track him down. My mum was supportive, but prepared me for the fact that he might not want to contact me. She's an only child, and one of her biggest fears is that I'll be left without any close family once she's gone. But all I had was a handwritten piece of paper from the clinic I was conceived in, with the words 'Number 46' written on it. On one side was basic facts, stating hair

"We looked so alike it was breathtaking. Hands shaking, I emailed him"

colour, eye colour and religious beliefs, and on the other was a rudimentary family tree without any names. As the law protected anonymous sperm donors, I quickly hit a brick wall so I stopped trying to trace him.

Which is why that night, I was excited to discover there was a Donor Sibling Registry and quickly signed up. The site works by collecting donor children's names and donor codes, then searches

for sibling matches. It was a new avenue to explore, but I never thought I'd find a match. Insemination was a pretty new procedure when my mum did it, and documentation was less comprehensive. I didn't hold out much hope.

Immediately the site came up with a match. When I saw Christopher Thompson's name next to 'Donor 46' my heart started pounding. He was two years younger than me and working for the Peace Corps in Togo. He'd also posted some pictures. We looked so alike it was breathtaking, everything from our smiles, our blond hair, blue eyes, even our chins were uncannily similar.

Hands shaking, I emailed him. People register on the site for different reasons and I didn't want to hope for a relationship, so my email was absurdly casual, starting: "Hey there, I think you might be my brother."

Thankfully, Chris had been on the site for a year and was equally thrilled to discover he had a sibling. But the distance meant we had to get to know

each other by email to begin with. We'd fire pages of questions back and forth, things like: do you think we sound alike; do we share similar interests?


We finally met in November 2007, three months after we started emailing. He came to visit and as he got off the train we instinctively reached out and touched each others' faces. Non-donor children have a frame of reference for where their eyes or nose comes from, but as a donor child you only have half the information. It was overwhelming to be faced with a stranger who had all these traits in common with me.

We spent hours comparing everything down to our big toes, and it turned out that we'd grown up half an hour apart in Oregon. We'd attended the same basketball matches and summer camps over the years, and both spent a year in France during college.

Although learning all these things was a touch bittersweet, I decided not to dwell on the 'what ifs' because it was such a relief to be able to say, "We inherited this from our father". It was partial closure for me.

Since that first meeting, our families have met and we've stayed in regular contact. Chris is getting married this year and I'm going to his wedding. Both of our families and mums get on well. It's fantastic I now have an extended family after being an only child.

Sperm donors at our clinic were limited to four offspring because of the odds of children living in the same town so it's possible we have another two siblings out there. I hope so, and check every month. In fact, last time I checked I got some rather exciting news. My donor father had updated his profile to say he was open to contact from offspring. The clinic is currently in the process of arranging our very first meeting.

I still cannot believe it. How can I possibly be fortunate enough to have found a brother and a donor father too? Finding Christopher had answered so many questions about my identity. Meeting my father will be the final piece of the puzzle." 

For more information visit donorsiblingregistry.com