

INCONCEIVABLE

THE SECRET BUSINESS OF BREEDING HUMANS



ABC
COMMERCIAL

WHAT IS THE TRUTH BEHIND THE SECRETIVE FERTILITY INDUSTRY?

In this intensely personal film, award-winning investigative journalist Sarah Dingle takes us on a remarkable journey as she fights to uncover the truth about who made her, and how.

At the age of 27, Sarah finds out in a casual conversation that the man who brought her up, and whom she loved dearly, was not her biological father. Her parents were unable to conceive and her mother was artificially inseminated with anonymous donor sperm. At the time, there were zero laws governing the Australian fertility industry.

Digging through hospital files, chasing leads and finally uncovering her biological origins, she is not prepared for what she finds.

The deeper she delves, the more disturbing her discoveries – and the more determined she becomes to tell the real story behind a powerful multi-million dollar industry that trades on emotion but that is built on secrets and lies.

Sarah is forced to confront her deepest fears about what she is uncovering – who really is her father, why were the records of her conception deliberately destroyed, and just how many siblings could she have?

HD 1 x 60'
SAM Content

Sarah Dingle is a dual Walkley Award-winning investigative ABC reporter and presenter, as well as an author. In 2021 she released her first book, *Brave New Humans: The Dirty Reality of Donor Conception*.

In 2019 she addressed the United Nations in Geneva on biotechnology and the rights of the child.

'I am an only child who probably has more siblings than anyone else I know. I will never know how many half siblings I have. Could be dozens. Could be hundreds. Could even be four thousand at the upper limit.'

– Sarah Dingle



KEY QUOTES FROM THE FILM

'I'm a bit overwhelmed by the numbers. I try not to think about them. Just the sheer scale of it is it was more than I imagined at the time.'

– **'Steven', Sarah's biological father**

'My first thoughts went to my goodness, how many of us are there?'

– **Rebecca Ronan, Sarah's half-sister**

'I was absolutely disgusted. I trusted him. I felt violated. How could this happen? How could this be? How many other women like me did he treat this way?'

– **'Catherine', inseminated by her own doctor without her knowledge**

'The phrase 'accidental incest' makes me feel sick to the pit of my stomach. Never had I anticipated a number like that. How many more kids aren't on our list? I just find it frightening.'

– **Shannon Ashton, same sex mother of five whose children have multiple siblings**

'Even to this day, people from my era, the vast majority do not know they're donor conceived.'

– **Damian Adams, discovered his biological father after a 30-year search**



SOCIAL MEDIA RESPONSES DONOR-CONCEIVED INDIVIDUALS

These are social media responses in reply to Sarah Dingle's questions to donor conceived people around the world about what happened to their records.

- My birth father's social kids destroyed the records from his practice when he took his life. He had pictures of the babies with their birthdates on the wall. They went in the bin too
South Africa
- Destroyed. Doctor was quoted in his biography as saying that he took days to destroy the records on his retirement
UK
- There was a 'fire' in the records room when the clinic was being investigated for fraud. I was conceived in LA in 1978
USA
- Told my records were destroyed by a flood and placed in a tip
UK
- I was born in 1962 in Detroit. Neither of my parents knew donor sperm was involved. They thought they were having THEIR baby!
USA
- My parents were told their records were destroyed in a fire. None were kept for me. Two different drs offices in New Jersey. I'm guessing the fire was just made up.
USA
- I was told the clinic destroyed all documents when it closed down. Who knows the validity of that though?
USA
- He admitted to burning most of the files in his fireplace
- The clinic mixed up the information concerning my birth and that of my mom's pregnancy with a different donor. They treated my information like trash. They withheld my father's ethnicity from me.
- My mom's OB/gyn was a friend of my donors. He just asked him to donate and kept no records
- The wife of the fertility doctor destroyed the files after he retired, she burned them
- Doctor X has burnt the files in the fireplace, together with his son, a brain researcher in the eighties after terminating his private practice

LIST OF INTERVIEWEES



SARAH DINGLE

As an award-winning ABC investigative journalist, Sarah has told many stories, but investigating her own truth turns out to be the best story of all – and the most challenging. As she battles her own family and a lucrative industry that's extremely reluctant to give up its secrets, she eventually realizes why. There's a lot to hide.

REBECCA RONAN

Rebecca grows up the adored only child of devoted parents, until the age of ten, when in the wake of a bitter divorce, she finds out from a friend that her beloved father is not, in fact, her father. Many years later, as an adult, she comes across an article about Sarah and reaches out – they become close friends, band together to search for their biological fathers, and then have the sweetest discovery of all – a chance in a million that turns out to be a true story that sounds like fiction.

DAMIAN ADAMS

Damian grew up in 1970s Adelaide. His mother and paraplegic father never hid the fact that he is donor conceived. As she investigates her own story and struggles to get information from the clinic where she was conceived, Sarah seeks him out as someone who has been on the same journey for much longer.

Over the years, the clinic where he was conceived tells Damian many different stories about the records of his conception, but ultimately they all turn out to be lies. Sarah and Damian reach out on social media to other donor conceived people in Australia and around the world and uncover a pattern of deliberate destruction of medical records. After searching for 30 years, Damian and his biological father are eventually united.

Image: Sarah Dingle as a child with her mother and father

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HELEN EDEL

Helen and her twin sister Anne were conceived at Balmain hospital in 1959 after their mother sought help from the fledgling fertility industry – her husband was infertile. For years the twins had no idea of the true situation, until their step-father broke the news when they were aged 20. They spent decades looking for the man who gave his sperm – and then through a letter their mother's doctor had written years earlier, they eventually discovered that in fact, the doctor who offered to 'help' their mother was their biological father – unbeknownst to her.

When Sarah hears Helen's story, she realises that the seemingly modern and 'regulated' industry that created her decades later was founded on lies and secrets.

SHANNON ASHTON

As Sarah looks into the dangers of what is commonly referred to as 'accidental incest', she comes across the story of Shannon, a same sex mother of five. Shannon used the same anonymous donor for all her children, starting in 2003. After a casual conversation with her family daycare provider, Shannon realises that one of the other children there has the same biological father and she discovers that there are dozens of others, all conceived at the same clinic. Her story illustrates the dangers of accidental incest, as many of the families move in the same circles but would not be aware that they share a father.

After she contacts the clinic, they provide a non-identifying list of the other 43 children with the same sperm donor, however Shannon later discovers yet another child who was born two years earlier at the same clinic, from the same donor, who is not on the list, leading her to question the lack of regulation and transparency.



Image: Helen and Anne Edel

LIST OF INTERVIEWEES

HEATHER WATKINS

Sarah contacts Heather after she comes up as a distant relative on Sarah's DNA results, and she turns out to be a super sleuth who helps Sarah in her search for her biological father.

Heather has an uncanny understanding of family trees and the links and markers that the results from consumer DNA kits yield. Putting it all together is a gargantuan task but Heather is up to the challenge, and Sarah finally find out the answers to her questions.

'STEVEN'

'Steven', who wants to remain anonymous, is Sarah's biological father. He's gay man who no longer lives in Sydney but for a couple of years in the 1980s he donated sperm twice a week at the hospital where Sarah was conceived (as well as at other Sydney clinics). He says he thought of it at the time as being like giving blood and it was only many years later that he realised the significance of what he'd done.

Sarah, an only child who always wanted siblings, discovers the overwhelming truth.



Image: Sarah Dingle interviews 'Steven', her biological father

CREATIVE TEAM

SARAH DINGLE

Key talent, journalist & subject

Sarah Dingle is a dual Walkley Award-winning investigative ABC reporter and presenter, as well as an author. In 2021 she released her first book, *Brave New Humans: The Dirty Reality of Donor Conception*. In 2019 she addressed the United Nations in Geneva on biotechnology and the rights of the child.

At the ABC she works across radio and TV current affairs. She has investigated everything from Indigenous affairs and human rights to defence and sport. Her work has also won the Walkley Foundation's Our Watch award for reporting on violence against women and children, UN Media Peace Prizes, Amnesty Media Prizes, the Voiceless Media Prize, and the Australian College of Educators Media prize. Her radio documentaries for the ABC's Background Briefing have been recognised by the Australian Human Rights Commission, the Australian Sports Commission Awards and the National Press Club. In 2019 she was a recipient of an East-West Center Fellowship. In 2010 she was the ABC's Andrew Olle Scholar.



SALLY AITKEN

Director, producer & writer

Sally Aitken is a twice-Emmy® nominated director and writer and showrunner of multiple international series. Known for visually arresting work characterised by compassion, and humour, she delights in unknown stories and the world's complexities. Her most recent film is the Sundance Film Festival hit, *Playing with Sharks*, the remarkable story of maverick conservationist Valerie Taylor and her love affair with the ocean's most terrifying predator.

Sally's debut feature, *A Cinematic Life* appeared in official competition at the Cannes Film Festival in 2017 where Sally was also nominated for the Camera d'Or. Other major works include *The Pacific in the Wake of Captain Cook* with Sam Neill and *Getting Frank Gehry*.



CREATIVE TEAM

ALINE JACQUES

Producer

Aline Jacques has developed and produced acclaimed films across a wide range of genres for many of the world's major broadcasters and distributors. Bringing passion, creativity and strategic smarts to every project, Aline has helmed numerous international co-productions, collaborated with many of Australia's finest writers, directors and crew, and delivered programs to the ABC, BBC, Nat Geo, Arte, Discovery, Curiosity Stream, PBS, NOVA, Madman and Universal Pictures.

Her slate is diverse, ranging from multiplatform stories at the cutting edge of scientific research with *Living Universe*, unique and insightful perspectives on history in *The Pacific in the Wake of Cook*, and a beloved musical documentary in *Slim and I*.



MARIANNE LEITCH

Writer & producer

Marianne Leitch has been a journalist for more than 40 years, a filmmaker for 25 years and a storyteller all her life. She grew up in country NSW, has worked all over the world and has conceived and brought to fruition many multi-layered broadcast and digital stories.

She was a founding producer of the ABC's *Foreign Correspondent* program, where she produced many award-winning films, and between 2015 and 2019 she was the show's Executive Producer.

