

# DAD GENES



A Documentary Film by Craig Downing  
62 Minutes

**International Premiere:**



**Thessaloniki International Documentary Festival**  
7 March 2026 (Saturday)

**From \$40 donations to 60+ children:**  
*One man's sperm donor past becomes his present when  
DNA testing reveals a secret biological family*

**Full Electronic Press Kit with visual and video assets available here:**

[\*\*\*Dad Genes Electronic Press Kit\*\*\*](#)

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# **Dad Genes At A Glance**

## **LOGLINE**

*A former sperm donor's discovery that he's fathered dozens of children thrusts him into the global spotlight and transforms him from anonymous donor to unconventional family man.*

## **ABOUT THE FILM**

*Dad Genes* captures a profound life transition: as Aaron Long loses his aging mother — previously his only close family — he simultaneously gains an entirely new, unconventional family born from decades-old sperm donations. What begins as a DNA test revelation becomes an unprecedented experiment in instant fatherhood, complete with a surprising romance with the mother of one of his donor children, worldwide media attention, and an unforeseen journey into viral celebrity.

Through Aaron's story, the film explores how modern technology enables new connections between people and how families are being redefined in unexpected ways. This entertaining, emotionally rich documentary offers a fresh perspective on 21st-century parenthood, the nature vs. nurture debate, and what happens when private lives become public spectacle. *Dad Genes* will spark conversations about atypical families, the role of technology in contemporary life, and the unexpected ways we find belonging.

## **KEY FACTS**

- **60+ potential biological children** from one donor (22 known to date)
- **\$40 per donation** in the mid-1990s
- **20+ years** between donations and discovery
- **Featured in *The New York Times Modern Love*** (read by Kal Penn on podcast)
- **50+ international stories** (*NYT*, *BBC*, *Good Morning America*, *People*, *USA Today*)
- **45,000+ trailer views** driven by organic interest and earned media

## **KEY THEMES**

- The evolution of family in 21st century America
- How DNA testing technology is revealing secret biological families
- Nature vs. nurture: Meeting your biological parent years later
- Life under media scrutiny: Attention, exposure, and the loss of privacy

## Dad Genes Synopsis

For years, Aaron Long was a happily unmarried man living a single life in Seattle. He lived in a tiny room in a funky, cooperatively-run building alongside fellow artists and bohemians. When not playing ultimate frisbee or performing experimental music, he spent much of his free time caring for his aging mother.

That life changed practically overnight thanks to a 21st-century combination of old-fashioned curiosity and cutting-edge technology. Back in the mid-90s, Aaron had been a sperm donor as an easy way to make some extra cash. Two decades later, he registers with 23andMe and discovers he has several biological children (with more continuing to be discovered).

Aaron invites several of his newly discovered children to spend time with him at a "Meet My Kids" party. Not long after, an unusual household forms: two of the children, the mother (Jess) of one, and Aaron's own mother are all living in the same Seattle co-op. Even more unexpectedly, Aaron and Jess develop a romantic relationship, creating one of the most unconventional blended families imaginable.

After Aaron shares his saga in *The New York Times* Modern Love column, the unlikely clan experiences worldwide media exposure and grapples with the allure of celebrity.



*Aaron Long (right) plays a Nature vs Nurture game with biological children Bryce, Madi, and Alice (from left) at his "Meet My Kids" party in the documentary Dad Genes.*

## **Dad Genes: Why This Story Matters**

*DAD GENES* arrives at a cultural moment when traditional definitions of family are expanding and technology is revealing connections that were impossible to discover just decades ago. The film speaks to several urgent contemporary issues:

This is a new kind of story, one that could not have happened until now. Without DNA testing technology, Aaron and his offspring could never have tracked each other down. Without the distinctly 21st century phenomenon of global, almost instantaneous digital access to news and the viral nature of social media, their story might never have found a mass audience. And unlike typical media coverage that captures only moments of this story, *Dad Genes* follows Aaron and his family over years, revealing the nuances and complexities that superficial news stories miss.

### **The DNA Testing Revolution**

Nearly 30 million people have taken at-home DNA tests, and the number doubles nearly every year. Along the way, sperm donors have connected with children, adoptees have found birth families, and families have uncovered children from affairs and other surprises. Aaron's children, like so many others, enrolled in 23andMe hoping to learn more about their familial histories and ultimately, themselves — a search for identity that is universal.

### **Redefining Family**

Many of the families presented in the film are not "traditional" — single mothers who had children via donors, two mothers who had children via a donor, families of choice. The film raises profound questions: How do we define family? How do relationships between parents, children, or siblings connected by DNA but who meet later in life differ from families where children were raised together? Although Aaron creates strong, touching relationships with his biological children, they don't always consider him a "Dad" in the traditional sense.

### **The Unregulated Fertility Industry**

Aaron's story highlights the lack of regulation in the sperm donation industry. One donor potentially having 60+ offspring raises questions about genetic diversity, sibling relationships, and what donors and recipients are told about the process. DNA testing sites like 23andMe have circumvented legal barriers that existed for decades, providing access and identification of DNA relatives like never before. What does this mean for donors, families, and parents who expected discretion, privacy, and donor anonymity?

### **When Private Becomes Public**

The media attention given to this family's exceptional circumstances has exposed their private lives while also making them eager for attention. As they are featured in *The New York Times*, *Good Morning America*, and international outlets, they become enticed by prospects of fame and celebrity, and consider how they could monetize their unique family arrangement. The film captures how their intimate family experiment becomes public, and the loss of privacy that comes with telling their story to the world.

## **Dad Genes Character Bios**

### **KEY SUBJECTS**

#### **AARON LONG**

##### *The Sperm Donor*

When we meet Aaron, he is a middle-aged bachelor leading an offbeat but comfortable life in a Seattle artist co-op while caring for his aging mother, Mary, in his free time.

Signing up for 23andMe connects him to potentially dozens of biological children from his time as a sperm donor more than two decades prior. Initially amused and treating the situation lightly, Aaron embarks on a life-transforming journey that leads him to become an atypical father figure while his new family becomes the focus of international media attention.

#### **BRYCE**

##### *The Son Who Was Searching*

Aaron's biological son Bryce is in his 20s and was raised by his mother JoEllen and her female partner on Long Island, NY. He tells us that he never had a father figure or the opportunity to experience traditional father-son activities like playing baseball. As a child, he would joke with his lesbian mom about finding a man on a dating site to be his father.

Bryce has been on a long mission to find his biological father. By the time he connects with Aaron via 23andMe, he has already found and communicated with several half-siblings, including his half-sister Madi. Bryce's excitement upon receiving a message from Aaron compels him to call Aaron "Dad" immediately.

#### **MADI (MADALYN)**

##### *The Daughter Who Moved Cross-Country*

Aaron's biological daughter Madi is in her 20s and was raised by her mothers Amber and Tina in Virginia. She notes that she has never needed a father figure — her moms taught her stereotypically "masculine" tasks like using tools. By the time she encounters Aaron, she has already been in touch with and become close to her half-brother Bryce.

She believes her moms' fears about her meeting Aaron — and potentially leaving their home to be closer to him — are unfounded. However, the connection she feels with him leads to her moving to Seattle, into Aaron's building, within a matter of months.

## **ALICE**

### *The Youngest Biological Daughter*

Aaron's biological daughter Alice is 11 years old when we meet her and her mother Jess. They live in Oregon, just a few hours' drive from Aaron in Seattle. Shy and socially awkward, Alice is mildly curious about meeting Aaron and her biological half-siblings. With no expectations, her mother arranges a meeting with Aaron and the other donor kids. Alice's unease grows as Jess and Aaron begin a romantic relationship and the family attracts worldwide interest.

## **JESS (JESSICA)**

### *Alice's Mother and Aaron's Partner*

Jess, Alice's mother, was previously partnered with a woman who also had a biological child with Aaron's donor sperm. We meet Jess after she has become estranged from her former partner and their child, and is raising Alice alone.

She initially sees meeting Aaron as a curiosity and an experience her daughter may grow to appreciate in the future. Jess quickly takes the role of a surrogate mother of sorts when Aaron and his three kids all meet in Seattle and spend two weeks getting to know one another. She soon moves into Aaron's building and they begin dating.

## **MARY**

### *Aaron's Mother*

Aaron's aging mother, Mary, suffers from Alzheimer's. When we meet her, Aaron is her primary caretaker and her closest family member; she lives in an apartment in his neighborhood. Mary has always wanted grandchildren. Now that Aaron's biological children are around her, she finally has them — but her memory loss is so severe that she has no sense of who they are. Aaron's tender care for his mother shows a different side to his otherwise reserved personality. As Aaron's relationship with Jess grows and he connects more to his children, Mary's health declines. She moves into his building, and Aaron and Jess care for her together. She eventually passes away.

## **AMBER AND TINA**

### *Madi's Mothers*

Madi's moms Amber and Tina are family-oriented and care a great deal for their daughter and her well-being. The protectiveness they feel toward her is matched by their distrust of Aaron and his involvement in her life. Deeply hurt that Madi has left their hometown to move across the country to be with Aaron, they explain they never would have imagined when choosing sperm donation that it would be possible for Madi to meet and connect with the donor so easily, or that he would become so involved in her life. Their concern echoes online comments from other moms in response to the media coverage of Aaron and his growing unconventional family. When Madi's moms finally meet Aaron in person, the encounter is initially very awkward, but they begin to warm up to him.

## OTHER SUBJECTS

### **JoEllen**

JoEllen is Bryce's mom and supportive of his desire to find and meet his biological father.

### **Emily and Marcia**

Aaron's biological daughter Emily (age 12 when we meet her) and her mother Marcia, live nearby in Washington State, and meet Aaron and his family for Thanksgiving.

### **Sven**

Aaron's cousin Sven is also a former sperm donor actively connecting with a growing group of his donor kids.

### **Abbie**

Sven's biological daughter, now in her 30s. Abbie is sharp-witted and provides comedic commentary on the strange circumstances of sperm-connected families.



*Aaron Long talks with his biological daughter Madi at his "Meet My Kids" party in Dad Genes. Aaron organized the party after discovering he had donor-conceived children from sperm donations made 20 years earlier.*

## **Dad Genes Filmmaking Team Bios**

### **Craig Downing, Director**

Craig Downing has produced internationally recognized commercial films for a variety of clients. He has created documentaries for NGOs in regional hot spots, including Haiti and Central America, and commercial content for Amazon, Lonely Planet, and The Discovery Channel. Craig was the festival director for Couch Fest Films, curated films for the website Short of the Week, and served as a programmer at the Seattle International Film Festival. He was the manager of the film department at Iceland's Sagafilm, where he supported feature-length productions. *Dad Genes* is his first feature-length documentary film. Craig lives in Seattle, WA.

### **Matt Isaac, Producer**

Matt Isaac is the principal of Signal Brigade, LLC, which produces media projects, and operates Waveform Projects, LLC, which provides business development and secures funding for media productions, arts projects, and cultural organizations. He was formerly a programmer and Executive Director of Perimeter Media + Culture Projects, which produced and presented film exhibition programs (including the New York Animation Festival), media arts exhibits, education programs, and international arts exchanges. Matt has also been a film curator at Hallwalls Contemporary Art Center and a former board member of Northwest Film Forum. He lives in New York City.

### **Sara Barger, Editor**

Sara Barger is an award-winning documentary editor and filmmaker. With more than 20 years of experience in nonfiction storytelling, she has shaped compelling narratives for a wide range of projects, from Discovery Channel to USAID and Voice of America. Her editorial work spans global topics and sensitive human stories, with a strong focus on authenticity and emotional impact. Sara's short documentary *Little but Fierce* was a 2020 finalist for the Student Academy Awards and screened at film festivals nationwide. As a former President of DC's Women in Film & Video, she has also championed diverse voices in the documentary space. She lives in Washington, DC.



*Dad Genes* filmmaking team at the New York City premiere in January 2026. From left: Editor Sara Barger, Director Craig Downing, and Producer Matt Isaac.

## Prior Media Coverage

### Coverage of Dad Genes Premiere in NYC – Dances With Films: New York, January 2026

- **Deadline:** Dances With Films Sets Slate For Festival's 4th Annual New York Edition: *"Among the world premiere documentary features is Dad Genes, directed Craig Downing, in which 'a former sperm donor's discovery that he's fathered dozens of children thrusts him into the global spotlight and transforms him from anonymous donor to unconventional family man.'"*
- **Overly Honest Movie Reviews:** Redefining Fatherhood Without a Roadmap — ★★★★★☆: *"Dad Genes succeeds by knowing what kind of story it wants to be...a study of human adaptability, filtered through one man's unexpected reckoning with responsibility and connection...a thoughtful, well-crafted examination of modern family dynamics."* — Chris Jones
- **YNOT at the Movies:** *"An incredible story to tell...Engaging, intriguing...A thoughtfully crafted work that expands our understanding of what family can look like today."* — Tony An
- **Film Factual:** Interview with Director Craig Downing and Producer Matt Isaac: *"There's no playbook for this kind of situation; you can't go to Amazon and buy a handbook about how to hang out with your donor kids."* — Craig Downing  
*"Even though this is a very particular circumstance, it is a little bit universal. It goes into what a lot of people are looking for as they try to find their place in the world."* — Matt Isaac
- **First Time Go Podcast:** Interviews with Dad Genes Director Craig Downing and Editor Sara Barger: *"It shouldn't surprise you that somebody who is out looking for 'weird stories that connect and resonate' would direct Dad Genes...Craig Downing has been around the world looking for great stories and when he finds one, he sticks to it, no matter the time it takes to tell."* — Benjamin Duchek

### Previous Media Coverage of This Story

This story has already captured global public attention before the documentary's release:

#### FEATURED IN:

- **The New York Times Modern Love** Column titled "First I Met My Children, Then My Girlfriend. They're Related"
- **Modern Love book anthology and podcast** — Aaron's essay read by actor Kal Penn
- **ABC's Good Morning America** — National broadcast interview
- **ITV's Good Morning Britain** — UK television feature
- **BBC News** — multiple stories with worldwide reach
- **RTL Television (Germany)** — European broadcast
- **Métropole Television M6 (France)** — French television feature
- **50+ print and online stories worldwide** — Including *People* magazine, *USA Today*, *New York Post*, *Yahoo!*, and international outlets

#### DOCUMENTARY TEASER TRAILER PERFORMANCE:

The documentary's teaser trailer received nearly 45,000 views driven by organic interest and earned media, demonstrating strong public interest in the complete story.

## Audience Appeal

*DAD GENES* will resonate with multiple audiences and demographic groups:

- **General audiences** drawn to stories about unusual families, particularly with comedic elements (fans of *Three Identical Strangers*, *The Wolfpack*, *Marriage Story*, *The Kids Are All Right*, *Modern Family*, *This Is Us*, *Transparent*)
- **LGBTQ+ communities** and families created through donor conception
- **Adoptive families and foster parents** navigating complex family structures
- **DNA testing enthusiasts** — Nearly 30 million people have taken at-home DNA tests, with numbers doubling yearly
- **Academic and professional communities** in law, social work, bioethics, reproductive medicine, and family studies
- **Anyone interested in modern family dynamics**, parenting, the role of technology in relationships, and the search for identity



*Former sperm donor Aaron Long (right) settles into domestic life with biological daughter Alice (left) and her mother Jess (center) in Dad Genes. After connecting through 23andMe and meeting in person, Aaron and Jess became romantically involved and eventually bought a house together, forming an unconventional family.*

## **Dad Genes Media Materials**

All assets available here: [Dad Genes Electronic Press Kit](#)

**PRIVATE SCREENER** *(for press and festival review only)*

*Dad Genes Private Screener:* [link](#) password: **dadgenes**

## **HIGH-RESOLUTION STILLS / PHOTOS**

*Dad Genes High Resolution Stills:* [link](#)

5 professional stills available for publication, including:

- Aaron meets biological children for the first time
- Family gathering with Jess, Alice, Madi, Bryce, and Aaron
- "Meet My Kids" party
- Nature vs. Nurture game
- Domestic life – Aaron, Jess, and Alice raising chickens together

**High Resolution Photos of *Dad Genes* Director Craig Downing** [link](#)

**PUBLIC TRAILERS** – *Shareable trailers* – [link](#)

*Dad Genes Public Trailer* – [link](#) or [Vimeo](#) or [YouTube](#)

*Dad Genes Social Media Trailer* – 9x16 version with subtitles [link](#)

**CLIPS** – *Shareable, social media friendly trailers* – [link](#)

**MARKETING ASSETS** – *Logos and Designs* – [link](#)

## **ADDITIONAL RESOURCES**

**Official Website:** [Dad Genes](#)

**Aaron's *New York Times* Modern Love Essay:** "First I Met My Children, Then My Girlfriend. They're Related: A former sperm donor, searching online, finds both offspring and love." – [link](#)

**Social Media:**

Instagram: [@dadgenesmovie](#)

TikTok: [@dadgenesmovie](#)

## CONTACTS FOR ADDITIONAL INFORMATION / MATERIALS

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*Aaron Long (right) gets to know biological children Alice (second from left), Madi (center), and Bryce (second from right), along with Jess (left), Alice's mother, in Dad Genes.*