

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

CONTACT

Voleine Amilcar, ITVS 415-356-8383 x 244
Mary Lugo 770-623-8190
Cara White 843-881-1480

voleine_amilcar@itvs.org
lugo@negia.net
cara.white@mac.com

For downloadable images, visit <http://pressroom.pbs.org>

For the program companion website, visit pbs.org/independentlens/donor-unknown

**DONOR UNKNOWN PREMIERES ON INDEPENDENT LENS
ON THURSDAY, OCTOBER 20, 2011 AT 10 PM**

Like a Real-Life The Kids Are All Right, Donor Unknown Profiles Siblings in Search of Each Other and Their Sperm Donor Father

“Nothing in the Hollywood imagination can compete with the plot of Donor Unknown.”

— Kate Spicer, *The Sunday Times of London*

(San Francisco, CA) — *Donor Unknown* is the fascinating story of JoEllen Marsh and her search for the sperm donor father she knows only as Donor 150. Raised in Pennsylvania by two mothers, JoEllen, 20, grew up with a burning curiosity to know more about her anonymous father. When she discovers an online registry that connects the children of donors, JoEllen manages to track down a half-sister in New York. And when *The New York Times* picks up the story, the circle widens, and 12 more half-siblings emerge over time. A discarded copy of the paper is also picked up in a Venice, California coffee shop by none other than Jeffrey Harrison — Donor 150 — who reads about the children he has fathered for the first time. Funny, moving, and surprising, *Donor Unknown* raises intriguing questions about parenthood and the strange power of our genetic connections. Directed by Jerry Rothwell, the film will premiere on the Emmy® Award-winning PBS series *Independent Lens*, hosted by Mary-Louise Parker, on Thursday, October 20, 2011 at 10 PM (check local listings). The film is produced by Al Morrow and Hilary Durman and is a Met Film/Redbird production.

Donor Unknown follows JoEllen’s journey from the discovery of her half-siblings to the moment Donor 150 steps forward to reveal himself and her decision to travel to meet him. Not quite the father she may have expected, Jeffrey, 52, lives alone with four dogs and a pigeon in a broken-down RV in a Venice Beach parking lot. In the 1980s, Harrison supplemented his meager income by becoming a sperm donor at California Cryobank, never knowing what the outcome of those donations would be.



--More--

Through the course of the film we meet the other siblings, each with their own unique stories, each searching for answers as to how to forge relationships in uncharted territory.

At the center of it all is Jeffrey, who prepares himself to meet the children — “angels” he calls them — to whom he gave life. His decision to relinquish his donor anonymity is a step few donors have taken.

Donor Unknown is a unique snapshot of a group of random people who are all pioneers. The parents — heterosexual, gay, single, and in couples — were determined to have children against the odds, and happened to choose the same sperm donor. Now they’re living with the unpredictable consequences of their choice. What impact will meeting this stranger — Donor 150 — have on their children? What kinds of relationships can the children build with their biological father? How will letting Donor 150 into their lives affect their relationships as a family? And how will meeting his biological children change Jeffrey’s life?

To learn more about the film, visit the *Donor Unknown* interactive companion website (www.pbs.org/independentlens/donor-unknown), which features detailed information on the film, including an interview with the filmmaker and links and resources pertaining to the film’s subject matter. The site also features a Talkback section, where viewers can share their ideas and opinions, preview clips of the film, and more.

About the Filmmaker

Jerry Rothwell (Director) is a documentary filmmaker whose work includes the award winning feature documentaries *Heavy Load*, about a group of people with learning disabilities who form a punk band; and *Deep Water* (co-directed with Louise Osmond), about Donald Crowhurst’s ill-fated voyage in the 1968 round-the-world yacht race. His past credits include *The Late George Shaw*, for Channel 4’s Art Show series, the *Modern Painters* series of short films for Channel 4, and programs for BBC, Carlton, Channel 4, Teachers TV, and the Arts Council.

Another strand of Rothwell’s work has been participatory production, working with people to tell their own stories on film. He played a lead role in developing Hi8us Projects’ improvised dramas with young people for Channel 4, in establishing First Light, the UK Film Council’s scheme for young filmmakers, and in setting up digital storytelling exchanges between marginalized communities across Europe. Current projects include *Town of Runners*, about young athletes in Ethiopia (C4 Britdoc Fund), and *How To Change the World*, about the founders of Greenpeace (UK Film Council).

About *Independent Lens*

Independent Lens is an Emmy® Award-winning weekly series airing Tuesday nights at 10 PM on PBS. The acclaimed anthology series features documentaries and a limited number of fiction films united by the creative freedom, artistic achievement, and unflinching visions of their independent producers.

Independent Lens features unforgettable stories about a unique individual, community or moment in history. Presented by the Independent Television Service (ITVS), the series is supported by interactive companion websites and national publicity and community engagement campaigns. Further information about the series is available at www.pbs.org/independentlens. *Independent Lens* is jointly curated by ITVS and PBS; it is funded by the Corporation for Public Broadcasting (CPB), a private corporation

funded by the American people, with additional funding provided by PBS and the National Endowment for the Arts. The series producer is Lois Vossen.