

Family of dead Israeli soldier can use his sperm

Court grants parents the right to impregnate stranger with son's sperm

Keivan Cohen, 20, was shot dead in 2002 by a Palestinian sniper in the Gaza Strip. He was single and left no will. But at the urging of his parents, a sample of his sperm was taken two hours after his death and has been stored in a hospital since.

When the family tried to gain access to the sperm, however, the hospital refused, on the ground that only a spouse could make such a request. Arguing that their son yearned to raise a family, his parents challenged that decision in court. And on Jan. 15, after a four-year legal battle, a Tel Aviv court granted the family's wish and ruled that the sperm could be injected into a woman selected by Cohen's family.

The ruling also ordered the Ministry of Interior to register any children born as a result of the insemination as children of the deceased.

"On the one hand I'm terribly sad that I don't have my boy; it's a terrible loss," Rachel Cohen said in an interview in Monday's Chicago Tribune. "But I'm also happy that I succeeded in carrying out my son's will." . . .

Precedent-setting decision

Irit Rosenblum, a family rights advocate who represented the Cohen family, said the ruling was significant because it set a precedent for those seeking to continue bloodlines after death.

At the trial, Rosenblum presented testimony, including video recordings, in which Cohen expressed his desire to have children.

"He always said he wanted children," she told The Associated Press. "But there were no regulations in the law that deals with using sperm from dead people."

Rosenblum said soldiers increasingly have been leaving sperm samples, or explicit instructions on post-mortem extraction, before heading to battle.

She said she knew of more than 100 cases of Israeli soldiers who, before last summer's war with Lebanese guerillas, asked to have their sperm saved if they were killed. American soldiers have also begun donating sperm before heading to Iraq, she said.

"I think it is a human revolution," Rosenblum said. "Ten years ago, who would believe that a human being can continue after he has died. I think it is great for humanity."

Rosenblum said the woman who is to act as surrogate mother has requested to remain anonymous.

"She's like family to us," Rachel Cohen told the Tribune. "Cruel and good fate brought us together."

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