

The Surrogacy Experience

Part One

An interview with Leanne

25 November 2010

LEANNE:

Surrogacy was our best option but we also knew that it wasn't something that we could go and advertise to people and say, "Hey, we need someone to carry a child."

Before we even got to the first point of undertaking any medical procedure we had to make sure we'd considered every aspect of the issue that might have occurred during the surrogacy process.

It's the long term ramifications of that relationship between all parties. They're all the things that you need to consider from day one.

And even though a lot of couples would be so desperate to have a child, and this is their only means of having a child, I think if things do go wrong they can go really wrong. So it's really important that you consider all the issues and all the situations that might occur when you are looking at surrogacy. Because if at any time you have any doubt then it would be my advice that it's probably not the right situation to be doing it.

VOICE OVER:

The Surrogacy Experience.

This is program ONE in a series of THREE podcasts about Surrogacy from the Victorian Assisted Reproductive Treatment Authority or VARTA in Victoria, Australia...at VARTA.org.au.

Important changes to legislation since 1st January 2010 mean that surrogacy is now legal in Victoria.

In this podcast we hear from a mother whose son was born through a surrogacy arrangement. Just how did she deal with the complex issues that surround the decision to use a surrogate?

LEANNE:

My name's Leanne, I'm 39 years and I have a four year old son, Kai, who I was lucky to have through a surrogate. My interests are, of course, raising him. And my husband and I have our own business and we like to keep fit and healthy and spend time with my family.

I went into kidney failure when I was 17 and was therefore required to have a kidney transplant. During my time in receiving that treatment I was advised that the likelihood of me carrying a child to a full term through a pregnancy would be very difficult and in turn put my health at risk. So I was told therefore that I would never be able to have children.

In our situation family became aware of our situation and they went away and wanted to help us and came to us and offered to do that for us.

Well we got a phone call from my cousin who was aware that we were having difficulty having a family. And she said that she had discussed it with her family and they would very much like to, if possible, carry a pregnancy for us by becoming a surrogate. We didn't know a lot about surrogacy at that time.

I think the main thing they wanted to ensure that all the people that were involved in going through this surrogacy process were doing it for the right reasons. So one that there was an established relationship with all parties. And that included my husband, myself, the surrogate, her partner. If she had children were they also aware that she was considering that she was undertaking... acting as a surrogate. And then once that had been established that, yes, that all parties were, I suppose ready to go through it, she explained that we would have to see number of specialists within different fields to ensure that we were approved for surrogacy. That included having consultations with the counsellor. It included having appointments or meetings with a psychiatrist. Having a consultation with a psychologist. And also ensuring that we were fully aware and had a full understanding of the legal ramifications that we were entering into by going ahead with the surrogacy agreement.

VO:

The further Leanne and her husband explored the surrogacy option the more complicated it seemed to become.

There were also other issues like... I suppose establishing a relationship and talking through the issues of surrogacy. And those issues included what would happen pre-pregnancy, so, making sure the surrogate had full support of family. Discussing things like costs involved with going through the surrogacy process. And secondly what costs would you become aware of once you became pregnant. That would be things like insurances both... life insurances, day to day costs.

But it was also it was stipulated that there would be no financial gain to the surrogate for undertaking that...you know.... And looking at the psychological ramifications of it, just making sure that the person acting as a surrogate, that they were doing it for the right reason, that there was some benefit to them on a personal level, by them undertaking that role and carrying the pregnancy.

There's a whole range of issues that we had to make sure occurred or that were discussed. And even things like if the surrogate did become pregnant, you know if there were issues where there was developmental problems with the foetus itself. You know, if we found out that the child had some disability who would make the decision either to carry on the pregnancy or termination of the pregnancy. If the surrogate had a high risk pregnancy and became bed-ridden is there any cost associated with that with her losing a salary or wages as a result of that.

Before we even got to the first point of undertaking any medical procedure we had to make sure we'd considered every aspect of the issue that might have occurred during that surrogacy process.

One of the most important things to me was once a child was born, if they were born and a surrogacy was successful that that child and the surrogate would have a long term relationship and that child would be very much aware of their circumstances. And that special role that person played in their life.

So that was something for me that was really important. And also having an open and honest relationship with that individual. It may be at times that you as a parent you have fears and concerns and that you can be quite open with that individual and say, "Look I'm concerned about this." And even just things like... It was very important for me that they look after themselves physically so I wanted to ensure that they had a good health record, that they didn't drink alcohol, smoked through pregnancy, that they had a similar lifestyle to me, that they looked after themselves.

I had my partner or my husband's cousin come forward initially. This person was the ideal person for us to undertake surrogacy. She had five children at that time. So it was very important to us as well, she had full support from not only her partner but from those children involved in her own family.

We were successful in the end and we were approved to undertake surrogacy. And we were able to do an embryo transfer which she became pregnant but unfortunately in the 11th week of the pregnancy she miscarried.

Now the ramifications of that were quite significant on her and her family. It had obviously been such a long drawn out process of even getting to that point of being approved. Her family was affected in the sense that she had to do a lot of travelling, had to go to a lot of meetings and things like that. And I think it took a lot out of her.

So we made the decision that it was now becoming a bit of a burden on her family to keep going through it. We made the decision that we didn't want it to go ahead any more.

So what happened, once my mother became aware, and I think Mum was sympathetic that it had already taken so long to get to that point, she then came forward and said, "Look is there an option that I would be able to act as a surrogate?"

VO:

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This has been program ONE in a series of THREE podcasts about Surrogacy from the Victorian Assisted Reproductive Treatment Authority or VARTA in Victoria, Australia at VARTA.org.au. Made possible by the Victoria Law Foundation. Our thanks to Leanne for sharing for story.

For more information surrounding assisted reproductive treatment and surrogacy go to VARTA, that's V.A.R.T.A. at varta.org.au.

The Victorian Assisted Reproductive Treatment Authority in Victoria, Australia.