

The Surrogacy Experience

Part Three

An interview with Leanne and Antoinette

25 November 2010

VOICE OVER:

The Surrogacy Experience.

This is program THREE in a series of THREE podcasts about Surrogacy - presented by 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 program we hear from Leanne and her mother, Antoinette. Antoinette acted as Leanne's surrogate giving birth to Leanne's son. Building the right relationships early has been one of the successful lessons learned by Leanne and her family. Everyone was determined to be clear about their role in the surrogacy situation.

ANTOINETTE:

As a grandmother, Nonna. Being Italian I wanted to make sure that he called me Nonna. It is just that relationship, not any closer. In fact my husband has a closer relationship with him than me. And I'm happy with that. And I don't feel like he's anything but my grandson.

LEANNE:

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.

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There's another thing that you have got an emotional and vested interest in that child even though you might not be carrying it, it's still your child. You know, making sure it's an open relationship that you can be involved in the whole process of that pregnancy. Going to doctor's visits. Being well aware if there's anything happening where the surrogate becomes unwell or they're not coping. Looking at getting them psychological support if they need it.

Looking at things like the long term relationship with that person. Is it something... You've got to make that decision is it something that you want that child to have a long term relationship with that surrogate. And if so what are the boundaries of that relationship. You want to ensure that you are the mother and the father of that child and that they still a close family friend, they are a sister, they are a cousin. That, that relationship is going to maintain at the end of it. It may be a closer relationship, but those lines aren't going to be blurred where they start having an influence on that child's life in the sense that they want to have a say and start probably them going into... becoming the mother or things like that.

Then there's the worst case scenario and the don't want to give up the child. They don't want to have an emotional bond with that child. So making sure that the surrogate has completed having their family. They don't want any more children. And I think the most important thing is that they are doing it for the right reasons. That their whole intention is to help you as a couple to achieve a pregnancy. And then in turn have a child. That's the biggest thing I'd say, you've got to look at all those things.

VO:

Even after all the issues surrounding the surrogacy appeared to have been dealt with there are always a few surprises.

ANTOINETTE:

If you're thinking of surrogacy the end result is the most fantastic experience that you've ever had. I had no problems being pregnant. At times I used to feel a little bit embarrassed, and I would tell people it wasn't mine. Because of my age, walking in and getting maternity clothes or anything like that. But it is a wonderful experience.

LEANNE:

You need to discuss those things prior to the pregnancy happening. The other thing we also made the decision, as soon as Kai was old enough we wanted to make him aware of his circumstances and how he came into this world. And to me I'm really proud of that, I wanted him to know how special his grandmother is. What a huge role she played in his being born and coming into our lives. Pretty much Kai does not know any different. If you asked Kai today how he came into the world he would say he's made from his Mummy and Daddy and that his Grandmother was the oven that grew him in her belly. So he's watched the video of Mum pregnant. My way of approaching it is that I didn't want to it when he's 10 years old we'd sit down and explain the situation. I just wanted to have it that he knew nothing different. As soon as he could comprehend and start asking questions he'd be aware of his situation. And as I said, I'm really proud of it.

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And I told him that it took three people to bring him into the world because he was so wanted so he thinks he's pretty special

When I made them aware, they were also aware of my struggles with having a family. So when I made those people aware that this is the way we were going we had nothing but support. Everyone was so positive, I don't think I've had one negative comment given to me.

But I always remember my first mother's group when you get referred to your local council for some mothers. Kai was probably around nine weeks old and we were sitting there before the nurse came in and I had a mother next to me and she was saying "I've had so much problem breastfeeding, how are you going breastfeeding?" And I'm going, "well I'm not actually breastfeeding". So I pretty much had to make this huge announcement in front of this group of mothers to say look you're asking to have discuss issues to do with pregnancy, and breastfeeding and post pregnancy care and all these type of things. And I don't have these issues but when I made them aware of my history they welcomed me with open arms and I still see those mothers today, I've still got those network of friends. I'm just upfront and open about it.

ANTOINETTE:

It's a journey of life, you've given birth to someone that's not yours. And I've never looked at it in any other way than it being my daughter's and her husband's baby. But watching him grow, getting the love from him. The love that I see through his mother and father. And you can see that he is really grateful because he's been told at such an early age as well, that it's just a great feeling.

I'm not sorry for one minute that I went through with it. I would have like to have done it again but I think age and my medical history we might have been pushing our luck. And he's a miracle.

VO:

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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.