

Hello,

My name is Georgina and I am 24. I was born through altruistic traditional surrogacy in England in 1998, organised through a not for profit agency called COTS. My parents had tried for a child for many years and had completed 5 rounds of IVF, with their own gametes and with donor eggs, none of which was successful. They then joined COTS, their profile was sent to surrogates whom had also registered with the agency, and they were selected by Suzanne, my surrogate. Suzanne had one son of her own, aged 4 and had also had completed one surrogacy journey for a family in the North of England. I was conceived with ease and my parents were involved throughout the pregnancy. They formed immense trust with Suzanne and when I was born I was taken home by my parents. My first birth certificate had Suzanne and my dad on, and then, after a parental order court process, I have a second birth certificate with my mother and father on. This took over 1 year to issue, thus Suzanne was my legal mother for a whole year of my life!

I have known about my origins for as long as I can remember having been read stories such as 'my mummies tummy is broken'. I have never felt any sense of pain or grief as a result of being surrogacy born and I am confident in the role of my mum and dad as my parents. I feel a sense of warmth that I was born in a situation of love, trust and altruism where one human being did a selfless act to change the life of another human being. I see my surrogacy family a few times per year and we are looking forward to getting together at my wedding next month.

Being born through surrogacy does have its challenges though, and I would like to outline what I perceive these to be to you.

- 1) The role of the parent(s) are often undermined from birth. When I was born I went to the Neonatal Unit and my surrogate and my dad were able to visit as my legal parents. After discussion with the hospital, my surrogate was able to transfer her visiting rights to my mother. However, this undermined my mothers role as my parent from the word go and I believe this damages intended parents confidence, compounded by having often already been through heartache to achieve a pregnancy. This damage is not in the IPs best interests, nor the child's. I believe that IPs should be the legal parents from birth as the child was always intended to be theirs and this is in everyone's best interests. Surrogates do not want to be considered the mother, IPs want to be considered the parents and this is also important for the child. It is, however, important that the surrogacy is documented somehow. I believe there could be a way of documenting the surrogate's involvement on the birth certificate, not as a 'parent' but in another format. It should also be documented whether it was gestational or traditional surrogacy, and if there were any donors involved. Individuals should be allowed to see information about their surrogate and genetically related siblings.
- 2) Existing children born through surrogacy must have birth certificates issued which include their parents as their legal parents. This is imperative in the provision of emergency healthcare, child benefits and legal family security in cases such as bereavement etc.
- 3) I have been incredibly fortunate to have been afforded the right to know my parents and Suzanne (to whom I am biologically related). I am however aware that this is not always for individuals. Having the right to know and form a relationship with my surrogate (and half brothers, and wider family) has brought me a sense of completeness I have a good relationship with all my surrogate family side and this is something which my parents have encouraged. I believe that not having this is something which has been the cause of some significant hurt within other communities (such as with donor conceived individuals) and I felt this when I presented alongside them at the United Nations 30th Anniversary on the

Convention of the Rights of a Child. In the surrogacy community, on the whole, I think people are more open about a child's origins as the lack of pregnancy cannot be hidden from those around. The right to information about my surrogate and wider family has also been important in the provision of my healthcare owing to some genetic conditions within the family and is a basic human right. There should be a legal obligation for individuals to be made aware of their origins and have the right to access healthcare records in the same way as any other person could. There should also be a centralised way of recording these surrogacy births to ensure records are kept for future generations and access to information is possible if not be passed on by family.

- 4) I believe that legalising domestic altruistic surrogacy is in the best interests of all parties. This avoids the added complexities with international surrogacy such as nationality and passports. Of course through, surrogates should have all expenses covered and should never be out of pocket. This being said, all individuals born of international and commercial surrogacy must still have their rights and their legal parenthood protected.
- 5) Language around surrogacy is important to me (and from my networking is also important to surrogates and IPs). I believe the word 'mother' should not be used to describe the surrogate in any sense. Words should be thought about carefully in context of construction of law as words hold true power and meaning for people.

Many thanks for listening and I would be very happy to answer any question or expand on my experiences of being a person born through surrogacy.