

Rachel Rowley-Smith , Opening Statement , 19 May 2022

My name is Rachel, and in 1987, I was born via traditional surrogacy. I have a birth mother, a mum and a dad (who is my biological father).

Surrogacy in the 1980s was still very controversial in the UK, so the process was shrouded in secrecy. So much so, I only discovered how I came in to this world three years ago. I am in touch with my birth mother, and my mum and dad have been very open with me since the discovery, and have never hidden anything, and always answered any questions they can.

I never really knew much about surrogacy; I had heard about it in the context of same sex couples having a baby, but never really in the case of a heterosexual couple here in the UK, and not at all for overseas. During my discovery, I learned that my mum (who raised me) could not have children of her own as she went through the menopause in her late 30s. My parents were so desperate to have a family of their own, they were willing to try anything. One night, my mum was watching TV and saw a segment on the Kim Cotton surrogacy story, which then helped her discover the amazing service of surrogacy and that her dreams were not dead. She contacted the agency, and their journey began.

My views on surrogacy are that surrogate mothers, be traditional or gestational, are incredible beings. Being that selfless to help bring life into the world to fulfil dreams is amazing. It is wonderful that there is another way to grow your family. The parents of a surrogate baby are incredible also, as their journey is not free from stress either. I fully support international surrogacy when domestic has not been an option, due to lack of legislation, lack of accessible information and support.

I believe that legislation is crucial to protect all parties involved for both domestic and international surrogacy, including the child born as a result of the process. There are may be potential parents out there with their mental health suffering as they think their dreams are over, and not knowing that this option is open to them, and that they *can* have a family.

Establishing legal parenthood for those children already born through domestic and international surrogacy is critical. Due to lack of this when I was born, it took 6 long years for my parents to adopt me. The stress was palpable on my parents. When this doesn't mean full legal parenthood, it is essential that this is addressed and that there is an easy to understand process and information and support readily available to avoid any future complications.

The lengths my parents went to have a child outweigh the lengths a lot of other children are born in to this world. I am so lucky to have been so wanted and born into such a safe and happy home with parents who loved me. I only wish that others were as lucky as me.

Why should surrogacy be so scandalous? These children are so wanted that parents will go to such lengths to have them.

And how lucky am I? I have two parents who raised me, a birth mother, and 4 half-siblings (through my birth mother).