



Commercial surrogacy: Young women born of surrogate mothers share thoughts on intensifying debate

By Madeleine Morris

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In the wake of baby Gammy, who was abandoned by his Australian parents and is now being raised in Thailand by his surrogate mother, the debate about whether to allow commercial surrogacy is hotting up.

Currently it is illegal in Australia everywhere, bar the Northern Territory, to pay a woman to carry a child for someone else.

Critics say it can exploit vulnerable women and lead to a confused identity for the children themselves.

Advocates of commercial surrogacy say there is such a high demand that it is better to allow it in a regulated environment like Australia than force infertile couples into "cowboy" arrangements overseas.

Three young women have told the ABC's 7.30 program how they feel about commercial surrogacy, their own identity and their relationships with their parents and the women who carried them.

Morgan Rennie

Age: 17

Surrogacy: Father's sperm, egg of surrogate mother Laurie Vaughan, carried by Laurie in California. Commercial surrogacy arrangement.



[Photo: Morgan Rennie, 17, was born through a commercial surrogacy arrangement. \(ABC\)](#)

On allowing commercial surrogacy in Australia: "I don't see how a woman could go through childbirth and have to give up the baby, and know it's not theirs without putting some money into it. That's a lot of trauma. Good trauma, obviously because it's childbirth, but you're going to need some sort of pay or something for them to come out with."

Relationship with surrogate mother and parents: "I've always known Mum here as proper mum. She's the one that raised me. She's the one that's cared for me and has done everything for me. I think of Laurie as just another family member. She's a really close friend... but I've never connected that to being my mother."

On being born through commercial surrogacy: "I never felt bought. I've never even thought about it. I know how much effort my parents put into getting me. I know how much love they have for me ... It's not like I'm an accessory or anything."

Final thoughts: "I've grown up normally. Everything's been the same. It's just the beginning that's different."

Philippa Rushford

Age: 14

Surrogacy: Father's sperm, mother's egg, carried by maternal aunt. Altruistic surrogacy.



[Photo: Philippa Rushford, 14, says she has a special connection with her aunt, who carried her. \(ABC\)](#)

What she tells people: "I just say that my mum and my dad couldn't have me the way everyone else's parents do, so they borrowed my aunty's oven. It's open. Everyone knows."

On her relationship with her surrogate mother: "We definitely have a special connection. I love her. When I was little I used to say I have two mummies. I grew up thinking my cousins were my brother and sister. As I got older I understand they're not 100 per cent family, but we still all support each other."

On allowing commercial surrogacy in Australia: "I would prefer how we did it (altruistically). But if it's the last resort for someone, then go ahead. If that is the only way they can get a child and they want it that much then they should be able to do it."

On being a much longed-for baby: "I just feel really thankful that they kept on trying. They could have given up at any time. But they never did. I'm really grateful."

Alice Clark

Age: 26

Surrogacy: Mother's egg, donated sperm, carried by maternal aunt. Australia's first altruistic surrogacy.



[Photo: Alice Clark, 26, the first child born in Australia through altruistic surrogacy. \(ABC\)](#)

On growing up in the public eye: "Until I was six I thought everyone's birthdays were on the news."

On why telling the child the truth is key: "As long as you tell early, and tell often and have already constructed the narrative in a way that makes sense and makes everyone feel loved and included, then the kid is going to be fine."

On allowing commercial surrogacy in Australia: "For 26 years I thought altruistic surrogacy was the only way to go, and commercial surrogacy would lead down a dangerous path to poor women being exploited and forced to give up babies, and the abuse of people."

But then the baby Gammy thing happened and it really made me re-evaluate my stance on things, because commercial is going to happen no matter what. And we may as well have it in Australia so we can regulate it. And frankly, the woman in this situation is the one who is risking the most. And everyone else is getting paid or getting a baby, and the fact that she gets nothing seems wrong somehow."

On why surrogacy is not always the solution to infertility: "Surrogacy is not for everyone. Raising a kid who is not genetically yours is not for everyone. Giving up your own genetic material is harder for some people than others. So you just need to work that all out and you need to have rules. The woman needs to have completed her own family before becoming a surrogate, because things go wrong."