



INDEPENDENT

UK's first surrogate mother on carrying someone else's baby and how the law must change

When Kim Cotton agreed to carry a child for an anonymous couple from the US in 1984, she didn't realise she was the UK's first surrogate and couldn't have predicted the storm that followed

[Kashmira Gander](#) / [@kashmiragander](#) / Thursday 23 March 2017 12:30 GMT



Kim Cotton have birth to the UK's first surrogate child in 1985

When Kim Cotton agreed to [carry](#) and give birth to a child for an [infertile](#) couple from the US, she didn't know she going to become the UK's first surrogate mother. She also couldn't predict the pain and scrutiny she would suffer as a result of the messy process that followed.

Cotton first heard about surrogacy on breakfast TV and a BBC Panorama documentary in the mid-1980s, which she watched with her husband in the home they shared with their two young children.

“That started me thinking about it. And then I wrote to an American agency. A year later it all sort of happened,” she recalls to *The Independent*. Cotton agreed to carry a baby for an anonymous couple in exchange for £6,500. “I’ve always said that it was a two-fold thing,” she adds. “The money they were offering helped. I was a stay at home mum in those days, and we took on quite a big project in doing up our house and I thought that might help with the cost.



Cotton says she wasn't prepared for the furore that would be caused by her surrogacy (I.T.N./REX/Shutterstock)

"But I also couldn't imagine not being able to have children," she adds. "I met my husband when I was 15-years-old. We got engaged at 18, married at 19 and I had our first baby at 20. I took it for granted. I never thought that people had trouble conceiving. My children are my life and if you're lucky enough to be able to give birth and have a child, you should share your fertility."

But as her's was the first paid surrogacy case in the UK, the law surrounding the process was a minefield. After appearing anonymously on Panorama to speak about her experiences, Cotton was soon outed in the press.

When the baby was born, it became a ward of court and was kept in a hospital for a week while a juvenile court decided whether Cotton or the intended parents should care for her.

“The headlines were terrible. ‘Born to be sold’, ‘No better than prostitution’, ‘Sold for carpets and curtains’,” she says.

“I wasn’t ready for it. I seriously thought this was something I could do quietly and I didn’t know it would cause a furor. If I’d known I might have thought twice,” adds Cotton.

“I always think about her on her birthday, January 4th. And then I close the door because it’s quite painful when you open it up.” Cotton never saw the child dubbed Baby Cotton again, nor met the adoptive parents.

However, she stresses that she has no regrets. “The only regret I have is not meeting the couple. I have no regrets because I still helped a couple to become a family.”

"But I was so alone, so alone. I never wanted anyone to feel like I did."



Kim Cotton with COTs' 1000th surrogate baby

So in 1988, Cotton established Childlessness Overcome Through Surrogacy, or COTs. "I'm still on the frontline," she says. "We've come a long way in 30 years but there is still along way to go." In September 2016, the service had its 1000th surrogate baby.

Three years after setting up COTs, Cotton volunteered to be a surrogate for a couple who were her friends. This experience couldn't have been more different than her ordeal with Baby Cotton.

"I was able to share it directly with the intended parents. They were at the birth. One baby was handed to each parent and it was fantastic," she recalls.

Cotton's first experience is a world away from that of fellow surrogate Caroline Evans. Like Cotton, the 35-year-old care assistant from Chester learned about surrogacy from a documentary about infertility.

"It planted the seed in my mind that it was something I really wanted to do once I had my own child. I joined Surrogacy UK in 2013 and never looked back," she tells *The Independent*.

Last week, she had her second surrogate child, Alexandra, in Warrington. Her first was Alice in 2014. She says, like the vast majority of surrogates, she has never wanted to keep the child halfway through the pregnancy.

"Apart from having my own daughter, being a surrogate is the best thing I have ever done. It is scary, exciting, fulfilling, wonderful, and life-changing."

While attitudes have transformed since Cotton was publicly vilified, Evans says the stigma still sticks to an extent. "People have the misconception that you must get attached to the baby and have to 'give it away' at the end. But as knowledge of surrogacy grows, that view is diminishing. When I explain to people what I do, reaction is generally positive, one of admiration, and the expression that it is something 'they could never do!'"

She too has never felt regret, or secretly longed to keep her surrogate baby. "You go through with the intended parents is based on trust, friendship, honesty, and from the very beginning, even months before conception, you are making plans to carry a child for someone else, so you never think of it as your child. It is completely different to being pregnant with your own child."

However, both women feel that surrogacy laws are not up to scratch.

Currently, the surrogate and her partner go on the initial birth certificate. The intended parents then apply for a Parental Order, which can take 6 months, or even longer to be rubber-stamped. "This is a long wait for a child, the surrogate and the parents to be in limbo, and wholly unfair on all involved," says Evans. "The Parental Order should be granted and implemented at birth so that surrogate children are not born into uncertainty."

To ensure this process is as seamless as possible, organisations including COTs and Surrogacy UK advocate altruistic, rather than paid for, surrogacy. Cotton adds that she believes compensation should be paid to surrogates.

"It is a real team effort to bring the child into the world, and the friendships created last forever. The parents are grateful to the surrogate for what she has done, and the surrogate is equally grateful to the parents for trusting her to carry their child," says Evans, adding: "Done with the right mindset and intentions, surrogacy is a wonderful, life-changing experience for all involved."