

## It's a boy! The Star's surrogacy series wraps up with the birth of baby Noah

Spanish couple's dream of becoming parents is realized when Canadian surrogate gives birth to a nine-pound, two-ounce bundle of joy. Last in the Star's Made in Canada series.



On January 3 at 10:02 a.m., after years of planning, determination and the extraordinary kindness of a stranger, baby Noah came into the lives of proud parents Michael Serwa, left, and Jordi Piqueras. (Michael Serwa Photo)

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It took a year of searching for a surrogate, \$40,000 for eggs from an anonymous Ontario donor, IVF and expenses, \$23,000 in travel and legal fees, dozens of long-distance video chats, countless sleepless nights and a unique Spanish-Canadian connection.

The result: a baby.

It's been a dizzying two months for Spanish couple Michael Serwa and Jordi Piqueras.

The pair left their home in Barcelona on Christmas morning for Victoria, B.C., to await the arrival of their baby carried by social worker Chantelle McCallum.

On January 3 at 10:02 a.m., their dream was realized when McCallum delivered a nine-pound, two-ounce bundle of joy.

"It's really hard to explain," says Serwa about the moment he officially became a dad. "Even though you think you feel you're a parent when the baby is still in the womb, it all changes when the baby comes out. There are so many feelings just rushing out. It's the feeling of being a parent."

The couple enjoyed a remarkably smooth and, by surrogacy standards, low-cost surrogacy birth — an illustration of Canada's growing appeal to intended parents internationally.

"Chantelle is great. She makes having a baby look really easy," says Serwa. "Twenty minutes after (labour) she was sitting down, texting on her phone as if nothing happened."

But there was one last surprise that introduced Serwa and Piqueras to the unpredictability of parenthood.



Baby Noah is blissfully unaware of the extraordinary circumstances of his conception and birth. (Submitted)

Despite two 3D ultrasounds in addition to the usual routine pregnancy imaging scans — all of which assured them they were having a little girl — the trio was shocked to find out that baby Noah is, in fact, a boy.

“We bought everything pink,” laughs Serwa, whose sperm was used to create the couple’s embryos. “It was a pleasant surprise though. We still see ourselves with a Noah — boy or girl. We love him the way he is.”

Since the Star launched its [Made in Canada](#) surrogacy series in June 2016, there have been a number of policy shifts at both the federal and provincial levels regarding surrogacy. For example, under Ontario’s All Families Are Equal Act, parents who use assisted reproduction no longer have to apply to adopt their child.

But there remain mixed messages in Canada’s laws that reveal a political system seemingly at odds with itself as it grapples to catch up to the realities of the new world of reproduction and family building.

One of the stickiest issues: payments to surrogates. Under existing law, they can’t be paid. Their motivation has to be [altruistic](#), not economic.

Intended parents can cover pregnancy-related expenses as long as they are submitted with a receipt. In theory this appears black and white, in practise it has proved difficult to define.

“There is still no clear outline on expenses,” says Sally Rhoads-Heinrich, owner of [Surrogacy in Canada Online](#). “Many are not following the legislation either and we still have the common practice (of paying above what’s legal).”

The potential punishment for intended parents who pay or reimburse without receipts is stiffer than sentences for some violent crimes: 10 years in prison and up to \$500,000 in fines.

Confusion over expense reimbursement remains the leading source of stress for surrogacy consultants, lawyers, intended parents and surrogates.

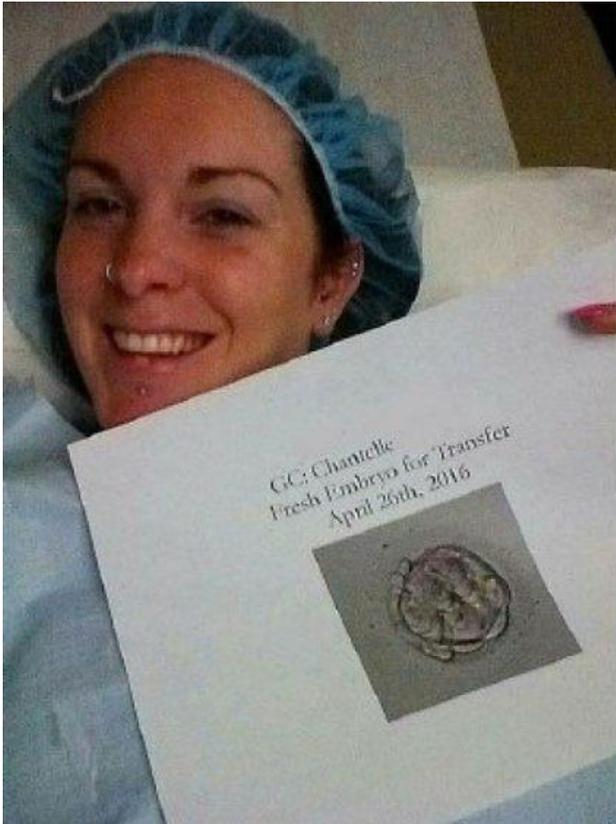
That “tension,” says Toronto fertility lawyer Sara Cohen, “is academically interesting but practically very problematic.”

Having been through the process, Serwa believes surrogates should be paid.

“Not such a big amount that it makes it a business, but just something,” he says. “There are a lot of things Chantelle has to go through being pregnant that we can’t really help with because of the regulations on allowances.”

Surrogate forums are filled with questions about money: Can intended parents cover the cost of cleaning services if the surrogate needs help? Can extra groceries during pregnancy be expensed? How do you submit receipts for a babysitter paid in cash to watch the surrogate’s children when she is at an appointment?

Current rules can be interpreted to allow intended parents to compensate surrogates for lost wages due to the pregnancy. But it’s not always clear.



Chantelle McCallum was the surrogate mother for Michael Serwa and Jordi Piqueras. The photo at left was taken after the successful embryo transfer. The photo at right was how she informed them the pregnancy test was positive. (Submitted)

For a casual worker like McCallum, who works on an on-call basis, it was difficult to assess how much she lost toward the end of the pregnancy. She was getting called less — due in part, she suspects, to the pregnancy and her inability to work evenings and overnights because she was caring for her own children. Could potential lost shifts be claimed?

At eight months pregnant, McCallum tried to find a second job to make ends meet.

“It is a large portion of my life that I am giving up for the good of someone else. And after doing it once, it feels hard to justify doing it again without better compensation,” says McCallum. “A surrogacy should not cost you anything out of pocket, but if your intended parents actually follow the laws and rules around surrogacy in Canada, you may be out some money in the end.”



Finding out Noah was a boy — despite several ultrasounds assuring them they were having a little girl — was "a pleasant surprise," says Michael Serwa, left, with partner Jordi Piqueras. (Coastal Lifestyles Photography)

During the 10 months the Star spent following surrogate journeys, it became clear Canada's system is far from ideal. But it stands as one of the better models internationally. And foreign interest is growing.

"Because of what's happening in the U.S. with political upheaval and a fear that reproductive freedoms are being threatened, more and more eyes are turning to Canada, and I believe they will continue to do so," says Cohen.

Cohen's observations about a growing "Trump effect" on Canada's surrogacy market is reflected in the numbers.

American surrogates, who can be paid, are reportedly being offered as much as \$60,000 U.S. — on top of medical fees.

One Canadian consulting agency says of the 101 intended parents enrolled in its program as of February 2017, just over half are international, with one in six from the U.S.

Baby Noah is blissfully unaware of the extraordinary circumstances of his conception and birth. And looking at Noah you wouldn't know the cuddly infant was the result of years of planning, determination and the extraordinary kindness of a stranger.

His parents, however, know they owe a debt to many people; the egg donor, McCallum, surrogacy consultants and fertility lawyers.

In February, Serwa, Piqueras and Noah made the 18-hour flight back to Spain.

The couple won't be able to secure Spanish citizenship for Noah until well after their return so Noah flew back on a Canadian passport — a souvenir of the citizenship he will carry for life.

Life is returning to normal for McCallum, too.

Federal law allows surrogates 15 weeks of maternity leave and she will continue to receive top-up payments from Serwa and Piqueras until her return to work.

“It brought two families together that otherwise would never have met,” says McCallum. “I feel proud.”

McCallum, Serwa and Piqueras are confident about remaining friends and perhaps, one day, reuniting to build a sibling for Noah.

“You have to be really patient,” says Serwa of the odyssey to parenthood. “It takes a whole village to make a baby. It’s a lot of pressure, a lot of frustration, but at the end it’s all worth it.”