How a gestational surrogate allowed us to have a family

People may believe that compensation somehow taints the situation. Not so. She is part of our family.

By Trisha Ciro

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PHOTO PROVIDED BY TRISHA CIRO "The past three and a half years have been quite a journey for me and my husband, Dan," writes Trisha Ciro. "We are now proud parents, blessed with a beautiful daughter named Phoebe, who was born in June 2015."

As the Minnesota Legislature continues to consider whether to ban compensated surrogacy in our state (as reported by the Star Tribune on Jan. 29), I feel the need to speak out. I want to be a voice for all those people who, like me, don't have any options other than surrogacy to have a biological child.

The past three and a half years have been quite a journey for me and my husband, Dan. We are now proud parents, blessed with a beautiful daughter named Phoebe, who was born in June 2015. But there was a time in our life when we didn't know if we would be able to have the child we desperately wanted.
Because of a congenital heart defect that has required five open-heart surgeries, pregnancy is extremely risky for me. In fact, my cardiologist discouraged it, explaining that pregnancy could result in a stroke, another heart surgery, or other severe complications. So even though I longed to carry a pregnancy, safely under my heart, I knew I had to find another option. Surrogacy was a gift for me and Dan. We are forever grateful that this was an option for us here in Minnesota.

Not only do we have our precious daughter, who is our world now, but we also have an incredible relationship with our gestational carrier, or surrogate. She is absolutely amazing and has become part of our family.

People often get confused about the term “compensated gestational surrogacy” and believe compensating a woman to carry a baby that is not genetically linked to her, makes the situation somehow tainted. From our surrogate’s perspective, it hasn’t been about the money. She wanted to help a loving family like ours grow. All she asked was that all medical bills and expenses from the pregnancy be covered, as well as any lost wages, and we chose to also compensate her for her time. She did something amazing for us and we gladly wanted to compensate her. Having a baby is hard work!

To reinforce how positive my husband and I feel about surrogacy, we are already making plans to tell Phoebe about her surrogate. We have bought surrogacy-specific books for her to read, and we are building a scrapbook for both her and our surrogate. Since our surrogate is actively involved in our life, she will also be available to proudly tell my daughter about her role in our daughter’s birth.

If Minnesota were to ban compensated surrogacy arrangements, it would be the first state in more than a generation to enact restrictions on residents who need reproductive help to have a biological child.

I urge you to write to your legislator to convey your support for keeping compensated gestational surrogacy available so families like ours can have the children they have always dreamed of having.

Trisha Ciro lives in East Bethel.
Counterpoint: You can't take a broad brush to surrogacy

Those of us who do it have profound, and diverse, reasons. The end result is a healthy child who is deeply loved and truly wanted.

By Kathryn Tabke

FEBRUARY 3, 2017 — 8:10PM

Two years ago, I delivered twin boys; they were full-term, healthy, and welcomed into the world by loving intended parents. This year, I am carrying another child for a wonderful intended parent.

Not long after my second daughter was born, I longed to return to work part time. I teach at my local high school; I have a master's degree in education and am in the processes of working on my second master's. I wanted to work part time to engage with a career I love while also pursuing my education and caring for my children in the manner I felt was best for me.

But working part time also means we are not making as much money as we might like. We have a retirement plan, good health care, and can even afford camping vacations and the occasional splurges. But we also have hopes and goals that surrogacy has helped us realize.
As a compensated surrogate, my ability to carry a child for a deserving family is also serving to support my goals of starting college funds for my children, as well as paying for my coursework.

I have been blessed with many things in my life, but one of those quiet blessings is my ability to carry children. My two pregnancies with my daughters had been extremely uneventful — both girls carried to term (actually, both were over a week past term), and I had no issues with my health. I have also been graced with a generous husband, in addition to two lovely girls; they are full of compassion and caring, and are my greatest support system.

When I broached the idea of surrogacy with my husband, there were many aspects we discussed. We talked about the use of my body to carry another child, we discussed the potential challenges of raising our two girls while pregnant again, we reflected on the fact that two children completed our family dynamic, but also on how my pregnancies had been so good to me. We discussed the emotional and physical toll, as well as how we felt about compensation.

Ultimately, my husband supported my decision to become a surrogate. I did my research and found an agency that I liked, and began the application process.

Now in my second journey, I have no regrets about my choices (“Rein in surrogacy”; “How a surrogate allowed us to have a family,” Feb. 1).

When talking about the surrogacy with friends, students, or community members, I have often equated the process of carrying to that of the most glorified daycare. My body serves as a safe place for a child to grow and develop during the most important months of development. And just as a daycare provider offers sustenance, safety, and care, I offer the same to a child entrusted to my care. I am not selling my womb — I am renting it out to a deserving and vulnerable tenant. I am still the landlord of my choice and my body.

Make no mistake, no woman who goes into the act of surrogacy enters the decision lightly. Nor should they. I know I didn’t. Any inclination to paint all surrogates as victims or prey is nothing less than repugnant. I wholly agree that the act of surrogacy should work to avoid exploitation of women — and this is where agencies can be vital advocates for all the people they serve.

My agency has treated me with care, and with respect for my personal morals and humanity. I was never pressured to bend to the will of an intended parent, and I’ve been often given a place to voice concerns and have open discussion. I was allowed to express my views on abortion, multiple embryos, the families I would be willing to carry for, and the depth of relationship I wanted with the intended parents.

Families and healthy children are built by a range of circumstances. Adoption and foster parenting provide one route, biological children another, and surrogacy is an equally wonderful option. Children born of surrogacy are born with what all children who enter this world should enjoy — a world of hope and love.

*Kathryn Tabke, of Shakopee, is an English teacher.*
Thousands of Minnesota families wanting to have a baby are thwarted by infertility. Gestational surrogacy is one of the ways an infertile couple can overcome this problem. Although this approach has been working well for both intended parents and the women who serve as surrogates in Minnesota, there are currently no state standards for surrogacy. In this regard, Minnesota is an outlier among neighboring states. Clear standards for both intended parents and potential surrogates are needed to ensure that the practice in Minnesota continues to work well for couples with infertility who wish to start or grow their family ("New push to rein in surrogacy," Jan. 29).

The recent Legislative Commission on Surrogacy highlighted some differences of opinion regarding how to approach this issue, but there are several steps that all agree should and could be taken this legislative session. These include mental health screenings and independent legal counsel for all parties, physical exams for potential surrogates, and clarification of parentage in state law so that parents having a baby via surrogacy no longer have to pay thousands of dollars in legal fees to adopt their own biological child. I encourage the Legislature to enact these initial steps now to help maintain surrogacy as a safe and reliable option for our patients struggling with infertility.

Dr. Douglas J. Creedon, Rochester

*The writer is chair of the Minnesota section of the American Congress of Obstetricians and Gynecologists.*