

TOP NEWS
NEWS

A.V. woman helps couples become parents via surrogates

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Amy Kaplan at her West Coast Surrogacy office in Aliso Viejo. Behind are photos of her daughter as well as the babies she helped bring into this world as a surrogate and an egg donor.

ALISO VIEJO – Amy Kaplan had no problem giving up the twin babies she gave birth to in 2006. She felt no maternal instinct toward them and was happy to see them go home with another couple. She wasn't a bad mother. Or greedy for the money she was receiving. Kaplan carried the babies as a surrogate mother and was

thrilled to help out another family.

"The experience of carrying someone else's babies is almost indescribable," said Kaplan, who has a son and a daughter of her own. "The connection you have with the family is huge."

Kaplan knows plenty about starting families.

The Aliso Viejo resident's experience with the reproductive field began when she was still in her 20s and got a job as a receptionist at a fertility center. By then she already had a son and pretty quickly became eager to help other couples by donating her own eggs. Three times.

"When I became an egg donor and I saw how I could impact a family, that was tremendous for me," she said. "It becomes somewhat addicting."

Although most egg donations are anonymous, the family Kaplan was helping decided to stay in touch. Their daughter, Wynden Rogers, is now 19 years old and from time to time calls Kaplan for help with researching family history. Their relationship is strictly non-parental.

"She's very clear on who her mom is and I don't play that role," Kaplan said. "There's a familiarity there, yet I don't have any maternal instincts. There's definitely a sense of responsibility as if she was a niece or a family member."

Rogers said Kaplan has always been a part of her life, but it wasn't until she was 7 or 8 that her parents explained their genetic connection. She said it's never changed her relationship with her parents.

"It's just a part of who I am. I just embrace it," she said. "I think it makes me more unique."

Rogers said she is grateful to know the truth.

"I thought it was great," Rogers said. "It's like having another person in your family that loves and cares about you."

Years after donating her eggs, Kaplan had a daughter and while she was done having kids of her own, she was up for another pregnancy. This time, as a surrogate. Her husband and children supported the decision that would affect the entire family for nine months.

Support, Kaplan says, is critical in the process.

"It's important that the family makes the decision together," Kaplan's husband Jon said. "My first thought was 'that's amazing that she'd be willing to do that.' I just think I was naïveté about the impact on our family."

When Kaplan had complications during her pregnancy, her husband stepped in to help with the couple's children and taking care of their house. They both said it was well worth it.

"It filled my family with so much love," Kaplan said. "That was the reward that we had, the emotional fulfillment that we had helping the other family."

All the professional and personal experience with fertility eventually led Kaplan to open her own agency, West Coast Surrogacy, in Aliso Viejo. She helps about 10 to 20 families a year and says that sharing her own story helps her connect with the clients.

"It's a tremendous effort from lots of parties involved and at the end, it's this incredible experience that's bigger than all of us," she said.

The process is complex and expensive. Women who are interested in becoming surrogates must go through a variety of tests and evaluations, prove that they have had a successful pregnancy in the past, lead healthy lifestyles and have a proper support network. Prospective parents pay anywhere from \$70,000 to \$120,000, which includes medical and legal fees, and a base pay for the surrogate of about \$24,000, as well as monthly and clothes allowances.

While many people think surrogates are motivated by money, Kaplan says it's just a common misconception.

"It's definitely something that's much bigger than whatever the financial reward they're getting," she said.

Another misconception she'd like to clarify is that it's difficult for a surrogate to hand over the baby.

Kaplan uses gestational surrogates, which means they don't donate their own eggs and have no biological ties to the baby. They enter the process with the state of mind that it's not their baby and don't form a desire to keep him or her.

"It's not her genetics," she said. "Legally she has nothing to do with the child."

That's exactly how DeLacey Andersen felt when she carried a baby for another couple last year. The 27-year-old Tustin resident, who worked with West Coast Surrogacy, gave birth in November.

"It felt like their baby the whole time," she said.

Andersen, who has a 9-year-old son and a 6-year-old daughter, said she loves being pregnant so much that she is looking to help another couple.

For more information on West Coast Surrogacy, go to: www.westcoastsurrogacy.com.