

# SURROGACY: THE OTHER WOMAN

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**D**elacey Anderson's 25th birthday was a chilly day on the first day of April. She was here, at a playground, with a demeanor that looked equal parts shy and guarded, her short-sleeved black dress, long blonde hair and trailing blonde-headed daughter the stuff California ads are made of. Jacqueline Owen, quiet and looking as if she wants to fade into the choppy sea behind her, is shy too, though appearing a bit more mature, in her 30s perhaps. The two women would probably never meet but for the fact that they are both surrogate mothers working with Orange County-based West Coast Surrogacy.

Anderson and Owen are gestational surrogates, meaning that they carry the fertilized embryo of the intended parents. Their wombs are, in a sense, borrowed from women who are unable to carry their own children for a variety of reasons that could include multiple miscarriages, cancer, a hysterectomy, or more rare conditions such as lupus. It's not a job for everybody, this uterus rental. Surrogates at West Coast Surrogacy, besides already having become mothers themselves, must possess a certain generosity of spirit, a deep respect for life. They must have carried children before to know how devastating it would feel if they were never able to do it. They must want to help. "I wanted mothers that weren't able to have their own children experience the joys that I've had with mine," says Owen, who has twice been a surrogate. "There's no other feeling like it in the world."

And she's right: Carrying a child for nine months, watching it take on a life of its own at birth, and then handing it over to its parents is a series of acts that strikes many as unbelievably charitable, and others as utterly incomprehensible. Adverse reactions and negative responses come with the territory, along with distrust about the surrogate's motivations and concerns for her

health. "Surrogates get a lot of feedback that's not always positive," says Amy Kaplan, founder of West Coast Surrogacy. "Some people feel that the person carrying the baby is the mother – they think that you're actually giving up a baby." Anderson mentions that she has been surprised by how many negative reactions she's received, how many people have reacted with a look that says, "How could you do that?"

But, at least for Owen, surrogacy isn't so much about giving something up as it is about gaining a unique and profound relationship with a family you've helped build, a void you've helped fill. "It's a really positive experience," she says. "I don't feel a loss. I've formed a really strong bond and a friendship that will never go away."

There's also the undeniable pull of genetics, which Kaplan, a surrogate mother herself, feels makes surrogacy such a successful alternative for women unable to carry their own children. "Toward the end of the pregnancy, I had this really strong urge that these children needed to get back to their [biological] parents," she says. "It just became overwhelming."

So who are these women that carry other people's children? According to Kaplan, they are often mothers who tell stories about how motherhood changed their lives. They enjoy being pregnant, but don't necessarily want to have more kids of their own; simply, they want to help someone else experience the feeling of having a baby. And at a profit of anywhere from \$30,000-\$40,000 for lending her womb, the money can certainly help, though if money is their only motivation, it's not a good fit, says Kaplan. In many cases, surrogate mothers can also look forward to a relationship with the couple and with the child, though that decision is entirely at the discretion of the biological parents.

"The women who are surrogates are giving, generous women," says Kaplan. "But the women who can have another woman carry their baby are extraordinary."