

Pathways to Parenthood,
The Ultimate Guide to Surrogacy

Stacy Ziegler

*Pathways to Parenthood:
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*Dedicated to my family,
without their unconditional love and
support, none of this would have been possible.*

*To the miracle children I helped
bring into this world via surrogacy,
know that you were much loved and
cherished, even before your conception.*

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Prologue

My name is Stacy Ziegler. I am the proud mother of four boys and wife to one incredible husband. I own a small medical billing company that I run from my home in Southern California. I am also an experienced two-time gestational surrogate, and it was my passion for surrogacy that truly inspired me to write this book.

As a child, I never aspired to become an author. I have had many dreams in my life but writing a book was not one of them until a few years ago. My first set of intended parents mentioned on more than one occasion that there were not many resources available to people considering surrogacy. Towards the end of our journey together, they encouraged me to write this book. Hopefully, I will thoroughly cover the ins and outs of surrogacy and all that it entails.

My first surrogacy, via an agency, resulted in the birth of a healthy baby boy in May of 2002. The first chapter of my book covers everything having to do with that surrogacy, from the initial decision through to the baby's first birthday. I am still close with his parents and we keep in touch via email and phone calls. I was lucky enough to have them come for a visit last summer. Next summer, we are planning a family vacation together. They do not live nearby, a 5-hour plane ride, but we have done what we can to stay close. Just the other day, his mother called up and put him on the speaker phone where I was lucky enough to hear him call me Aunt Stacy. It melted my heart and reminded me why surrogacy is such a beautiful thing.

I am now very close to delivering my second baby through surrogacy. This time, I went the independent route because I had become good friends with my intended mother. I had an awesome experience through the agency and had I not had a friend who needed a surrogate, I would have gone through them again. I do not feel that I needed

their guidance but the support system the agency offered was terrific. When I told the agency director about my plans, she was more than supportive and offered to let me stay a part of the agency in the support sense. I was still welcome at the group meetings as well as staying a part of the email support group. I was very thankful for her graciousness, as I know other agencies would not look at it the same way; but then again, that's why I picked her agency to begin with.

My current surrogacy has been anything but easy. Since it was not over as of the completion of this book, I am not writing another chapter like I did for the first surrogacy, but certainly wanted to include it, so you will be getting the cliff notes version.

My intended mother and I knew each other for two years before getting started. We met on a popular surrogacy support site during my first surrogacy. We were not best friends but friends nonetheless. She would baby-sit for me and drive with me to doctor's appointments that I had in Los Angeles to keep me company; we would get together for lunch every so often and email frequently. We only lived an hour from each other so there were times we would bring the kids to her house for a BBQ.

She was in the process of trying to adopt so I was always curious as to what was new in her life. In the two years that I knew her, I watched her go through a failed adoption where she was matched with a birthmother around the fourth month and was so excited to soon be a mother. I, on the other hand, have always been leery of the adoption process because nothing is guaranteed.

She flew out to be with the birthmother for her big 20-week ultrasound and kept in daily contact with the birthmother. They had what seemed to be a really good relationship and I was starting to feel guilty for doubting the whole thing to begin with. One of her friends threw her a baby shower, which I attended, and everyone couldn't wait for her to finally become a mother. Prior to adoption, she had

spent many years and numerous cycles trying everything from IUI to IVF with donor eggs, all to no avail.

The day came for my intended mother and father to fly out to be with the birthmother for the delivery. I hadn't heard from her in a few days and I was getting anxious. Certainly if she had the baby and brought him home, she would have let me know. After a few more days had passed, I sent her an email and the response I got made my stomach drop and tears well in my eyes. I was prepared to hear the birthmother had changed her mind but that was not the case.

The birthmother had been taking Motrin throughout her pregnancy, including the last trimester when it can cause serious birth defects. No one knew this until after the baby, a boy, was born and was in such poor condition, the doctors agreed that anything they did to try and help him would just prolong his suffering. It was then that the birthmother admitted to taking Motrin even though the doctors had offered her something else that would not harm the baby. She was having really bad headaches and had apparently had them in her previous pregnancy as well. She had taken Motrin throughout that pregnancy but the baby was lucky enough to be unscathed.

After what had happened with the baby boy, my intended parents came home and mourned their loss. I thought for sure that would be the end of the adoption path but it wasn't. A few months later, my intended mother received a call from her attorney that another birthmother had chosen them. They flew the woman out to see their doctor and she tested positive for drugs, but after what they had just been through, losing the baby, they were not willing to take that chance again. They told their attorney they were not comfortable with that birthmother and the search continued.

After a few more potential birthmothers came and went, I was really losing faith in the adoption process. She had seen me have two children in the time she was trying to adopt and while I don't think she was resentful, it could not

have been easy. When I first met her, I was pregnant with my first surrogate child and when she matched with the baby boy's birthmother, I conceived my fourth son. My son was due just a few months after the baby boy was born and I can only imagine what it was like when she came to visit him when he was a few weeks old.

After the birth of my son, I really started pestering my intended mother about surrogacy. She had received donor embryos a year before so she would not need to go through finding an egg donor; she already had snow babies waiting to be given the chance at life.

In November of 2003, she called me to say she would love to try surrogacy. I was thrilled! I had been waiting for that call for some time. I just knew it would work and that would be how she would finally become a mother. We set up an appointment to meet with her reproductive endocrinologist who did not give us any hope at all that it would work. The embryos my intended mother had were frozen eight years previously and according to the doctor, they did things differently back then. The way the embryos were frozen might mean that none of them would survive the thaw. I was definitely more optimistic than she was and I kept telling her it would work and I truly believed that it would. So we started the cycle and while I was always optimistic and trying to encourage her to be as well, all she could replay in her mind were the doctor's own words, "It doesn't look good." Who could blame her after all the let-downs, failed cycles and failed placements she had been through—but I just knew it would work; we had to at least try.

The day of the transfer came and we were all sitting on pins and needles waiting to find out if the embryos survived the thaw. There were a total of seven embryos in two different vials. They thawed the first vial containing four embryos first and to everyone's surprise, all four of the embryos survived and were continuing to grow. The doctor came in and explained that while the odds of all four

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implanting were slim, we would need to sign a consent form saying we would selectively reduce if they did. Neither my intended mother nor I were OK with that and so we chose the best three and transferred them and prayed.

During the cycle, my intended mother received yet another call from her adoption attorney telling them that yet another birthmother picked them. She was not very hopeful and called up to discuss the situation with me. I was absolutely OK with her pursuing both routes at the same time because I had become very pessimistic when it comes to adoption. She had had all these other possibilities fall through, and I wasn't holding my breath for this one either. Combining that with what the doctor said about the embryos not looking good, I felt there was no harm in her pursuing both paths. The worse thing that could happen is that neither would work, and the best thing would be that they both worked. Sure, no one plans to have babies eight months apart but after trying for so long, they were not about to say no.

The birthmother flew out and stayed with my intended parents while she was waiting to deliver. This coincided with the two weeks following our transfer. I found out eight days after our transfer that it had indeed worked! My intended mother did not want to know if I had taken a home pregnancy test or not, she wanted to wait for the blood test from the doctor—but I could not restrain myself. I managed to hold out a whole two hours before breaking down and calling her to tell her the good news. I wanted her to know that even if the birthmother didn't work out, she was having a baby! Three days later, we had the blood test that confirmed the batch of home pregnancy tests that I had taken.

The birthmother thought she was due in the middle of January but it turns out, she had her dates wrong and did not actually delivery until February 10. On that day, my intended mother became a mother to a healthy little girl and even though the birthmother showed no signs of changing her mind, my intended mother was afraid to become attached at

the hospital. It wasn't until they brought the baby home from the hospital that she was able to breathe a little bit easier. As a matter of fact, I was the only person who knew what was going on. After what had happened with the baby boy, they did not tell friends or family that they had a birthmother at their house waiting to deliver. They actually told people they were going out of town so they wouldn't have unexpected visitors. I can imagine the surprise when she finally brought their daughter home and called everyone up to tell them.

I was six weeks along when their daughter was born. It was so amazing to think that after all they had been through; they were going to have two babies in the same year. Things progressed just like they should during the first trimester of my pregnancy. My intended parents showed up for all our appointments and ultrasounds and everything was looking fantastic until I was released to see my own obstetrician at 12 weeks.

My OB had told us before we cycled that he would want to keep an eye on my cervix because this would be my sixth pregnancy and I had my last son four weeks early. He thought that my cervix might just be worn out so he wanted to monitor it. Our first measurement was pretty short, shorter than normal, but he said I may just have a short cervix so he would check it again in two weeks. Two weeks went by and my cervix managed to get a little shorter. He sent me home and told me to take it easy; that if it was shorter again in one week, I was looking at spending the duration of my pregnancy on bed rest. That following week, I was told my cervix had shortened yet again and I was to do nothing but lay at home with no privileges except using the bathroom and taking a shower every other day. He also told me that if it continued to shorten, I could end up in the hospital.

Talk about having the wind knocked out of you. I had been through five completely normal pregnancies and this was a huge shock to everyone. I asked him about placing a cerclage, a stitch that holds your cervix shut, and he said there was too much conflicting data regarding cerclages and

short cervix, and he felt bed rest was better. Even with incredibly strict bed rest, my cervix kept shortening. He told me when I was twenty weeks that I should find an obstetrician closer to where I live to monitor me. I was driving two hours to see him because we had recently moved and I loved their office. At 21 weeks, I found an obstetrician who specialized in high-risk pregnancies as well as having a perinatologist on call. She seemed to be more liberal than my previous doctor and when we had my cervical length checked it was completely normal. We all started to wonder what was going on; did my other OB measure wrong? Did the new tech measure wrong? Even though the measurement was normal, she wanted me to take it easy and have weekly ultrasounds to check the length.

Well, history started repeating itself and my cervix kept getting shorter. At my 24-week measurement, it measured well below normal and my OB wanted me to see the perinatologist the following week. When I went to see him, it had managed to get even shorter, to the point that there was only 1.5 centimeters left of cervical length when it should be at least 3.5 to 4 centimeters. I was sent directly over to the hospital to have an emergency cerclage placed. I ended up staying in the hospital for two days because the cerclage placement caused me to have contractions which they were able to curb with magnesium sulfate.

I was sent home on strict bed rest for the first week. My OB told me if she could get another ten weeks out of me, she would be happy. Things have gone very well since the cerclage was placed. I haven't had any signs of infection and I have been given some of my privileges back. I can drive short distances, and go shopping if I make it quick or want to use a scooter. I am no longer flat on my back and things have certainly been looking up. When I was 20 weeks, it looked like I might not make it to fetal viability, which is 24 weeks. When 24 came, we all breathed a little easier, when 28 came, we breathed a little more and when 30 came, we all let out our breath. I am now 34 weeks and every week further I go

is like icing on the cake. I keep a website that I update frequently and since I will still be pregnant when this book is sent off for publishing, you can see how the story ends by visiting my site.¹

¹ www.surromommy.com

Chapter 1

My Story

The decision

I was lying in my hospital bed staring down at my second son, and my heart just melted. There I was, holding this precious little life, marveling over how perfect he was, when it hit me. Everyone should feel the love and joy that I was experiencing at that moment. I knew I was blessed with having two beautiful and healthy little boys and I wanted to share that blessing. I told myself right then that when the time was right, I would help an infertile couple have a baby.

That time came after the birth of my third son. While my husband and I were not done having children of our own, we were not ready to add to our family anytime in the near future. I knew the risks involved in pregnancy and childbirth and I was not only willing but also wanting to take those risks to help someone have a family. There are people who believe that unless a surrogate is done with her family, she makes a poor candidate. I do not believe this, but I was also willing to take the risk of not being able to carry any more children of my own. The way I looked at it, I was blessed with three children and I would rather help someone have one child than be selfish to ensure I would have four.

I started out by mentioning to my husband that I would like to help someone have a baby; I would like to be a gestational surrogate! He said, “Uh huh, well you let me know when you find someone to help.” That translated into: Yes dear, you and your Lucy Ricardo ideas! I knew he didn’t take me seriously. I set out on a mission to gather all of the information I could about surrogacy and everything that it involved. I was preparing myself so that when I approached him again, I would have all the information I needed to answer any questions or objections that he may have. Much to my surprise, he thought it was a wonderful idea. Don’t get me wrong, my husband is a very caring and loving man but

this is a lot to ask of someone. We sat down and made up a list of characteristics that we would like our intended parents to have. We had the “must have” list and the “should have” list. We decided that we wanted to work with a childless couple that had the same beliefs that we did. We wanted a couple that we would have been friends with under different circumstances. We also wanted a couple that shared our views on child rearing. We decided that we should try the independent route because if it were us, we probably wouldn’t be able to afford to go through an agency and knew that did not mean that we would be bad parents.

The independent route

In October of 2000, we placed an ad at a popular surrogacy website. We stated what we were looking for in a couple and what we had to offer. Many potential intended parents contacted us and it was certainly hard to narrow down the list of who to work with. I was very patient and wanted to get to know the couples before deciding anything. There were some couples that I knew would not be a good match simply based on their location, their beliefs on selective reduction, or what kind of a relationship they wanted with us.

Then one day, I received an email from a couple that lived fairly close to us. The prospective intended mother had undergone a hysterectomy due to severe endometriosis but still had her ovaries and was looking for a gestational surrogate. The couple seemed to have the same beliefs we did as well as being relatively close to us in age. They seemed like people we would have been friends with under different circumstances. We discussed fees and what-if situations. They told me they could only afford a certain amount of money per week if I were to be put on bed rest. While I knew the amount they offered would not cover my babysitting cost for three children, I was willing to accept what they offered. My heart really went out to them and I

was determined to help them become a family. We spent a lot of time emailing with them and chatting on the phone and decided it was time for us to meet and see if we really were a good match for each other. We met for dinner and it went well; we seemed to hit it off more with the potential father than the mother but that was not surprising since he was the most talkative. We anxiously went home and awaited an email from them. We had decided on the way home that they were the couple we wanted to help. The email came and they felt the same way about us! It was very exciting. They were going to call their reproductive endocrinologist in the morning to set up my screening.

The next evening, I received a call that would change everything. They had spoken to their doctor who informed them about the procedures as well as the doctor's policy of transferring three embryos. They then informed me that they did not want to have triplets and that the doctor really pushed transferring three embryos. I told them I did not have a problem transferring three but that I would not selectively reduce triplets to twins. Selective reduction is when you have more fetuses than what was wanted—usually triplets or more—and you choose to reduce, or eliminate, one or more of the fetuses. They were not willing to only transfer two because it went against their doctor's advice and they wanted the best odds possible. I informed them that I would not be willing to work with them in that situation. We parted ways and I do believe it was the best thing that could have happened to me. I realized afterwards that I had been negotiating in areas that I should not have been. It should not cost me money to have help come in and take care of my children if I were to be put on bed rest. As it was, I was not going to charge them lost wages, because I am self-employed and could continue my work from the bed if need be. Their decision on reduction put them into a category of people I did not want to work with. I do not condemn people who choose reduction, but it was a choice I was not willing to make.

The agency route

After the falling out I had with my first set of potential intended parents, we decided that an agency might best suit our needs. After investing the time and energy into searching independently only to end up back at square one, we were leery of starting the process over again. I began calling all of the agencies in my area; I live in Southern California so there were quite a few of them. Some agencies offered me a match during my first conversation with them and that scared me! I couldn't imagine what kind of an agency would do that. I had not been screened medically or psychologically, which made me wonder how much care went into choosing the couples they worked with as well. Most of the agencies that offered quick matches to couples were smaller ones that had not been around very long. With that in mind, I started talking to the larger agencies that had been in business for some time. One of the largest agencies refused to work with me right off the bat because of my beliefs regarding selective reduction. It was becoming more and more frustrating finding an agency that I felt comfortable working with. Then one day, I saw an ad in a local paper for an agency that had been in business since 1991. That agency was The Surrogacy Program, owned by Shelley Smith and based in Los Angeles. From the very beginning I could tell that they really had their act together. The ad listed their website address, so when I got home I visited the site and was thoroughly impressed with what I saw. They seemed to be in it for all the right reasons and to really cater to each person. This was one of the turn-offs of going with a larger agency: I did not want to feel like a number, but a person! I contacted the agency and after a short phone screening they sent me a packet of information along with an application.

I was overwhelmed with all of the information the director had included. There was information on the medical protocol, newspaper articles on the agency, as well as information on surrogacy and what it entailed. I filled out the

application and sent it back in. During the initial screening, I would be told that the majority of surrogates who apply are not accepted. The director keeps her program small so she can give each surrogate as well as intended parents the attention that they deserve. I was nervous when I sent in my application; I had finally found the agency that I wanted to work with and hoped they felt the same way about me. I was very touched by the director's emotional involvement and her reasons for opening an agency to begin with.

I was contacted a few days after I mailed in my application. The director thought I would be a wonderful surrogate candidate with her program. She then told me that there would be two more phone interviews, an interview at her office, and finally she would visit my family in my home. There would also be medical and psychological screenings before I would be accepted into the program. This woman was thorough! It did make me feel very comfortable with her, though, I knew she was in it for the right reasons and we really seemed to click. During the interview at her office, we discussed what kind of people I would like to work with and I told her my idea of an ideal couple. She asked if working with a couple from out of the state was a problem and I said not as long as they were willing to be as involved as possible. She told me then she might have a couple in mind for me, but left it that.

When she came to my home on December 31, 2000, she asked if I wanted to work with her as I had passed all of her screenings. I was ecstatic! I still had to pass the psychological test as well as the physical one, but in my mind, I had made it through the hardest part. I felt very honored that she wanted me in her program even though she said it was the other way around, that she felt lucky that I would let her be a part of such a wonderful thing.

I was set up with an appointment to complete my psychological testing. I have to say I was nervous about meeting with the psychologist. What if I was crazy? OK, what if I was too crazy? I completed several different

personality tests along with a marriage satisfaction questionnaire. The questions on the personality tests all seemed to be the same, just worded differently. After I completed the tests, my husband and I met with the psychologist to go over them. She was wonderful and provided a lot of insight into my desire to be a surrogate as well as pointing out some character traits that may make me vulnerable as well. It was a very enlightening session and at the end I was told, “You can tell the director you are just as crazy as the rest of us!” Yes! I was cleared!

Mr. and Mrs. Right

The director contacted me the next day and said she was sending me profiles of potential intended parents for my review. Thank goodness she sent them overnight, I was dying to get a peek at them. I received the packet during the second week of January. There were three profiles, with one of the profiles being that of the couple the director had briefly told me about a few weeks back. I put that profile last because I did not want to have a biased view towards any of them. I read the three profiles and then had my husband read them all. I did not tell him which one I was leaning towards because I wanted his unbiased opinion. The first couple seemed nice enough but they were not people we would have been friends with under different circumstances. The second couple was also nice but they lived on the other side of the country and I just didn't feel a connection with them. The third couple was the couple the director said she had in mind for me when I met with her at her office. They fit exactly what I was looking for. The one downfall was that they did not live locally, but they stated in their profile they would be as active as possible in the pregnancy. Their profile also stated that they were looking for a surrogate who would become an extended part of their family and that was something that was really important to me. They needed a surrogate because the intended mother had lost her uterus to

cervical cancer years before though she still had her ovaries. This was the couple that I wanted to help make a family. After reading all three profiles, my husband also picked the third couple. It really seemed like a given as they were everything we were looking for. I contacted the director to let her know that we were interested in working with this couple. She said she was going to set up a date for the five of us to talk on the phone.

The following week, the director, my husband, both intended parents and myself had a five-way conference call. My husband and I were both really nervous but we had the director to lead the conversation and we were grateful for that. I remember my intended father made a comment that day that really hit home. He said he had been stressed at work about an upcoming merger but he was more nervous about our telephone conversation. It really put me at ease to know that they were just as nervous as we were. The call itself went great and after ten minutes or so we all started to loosen up. It was more of a generic get-to-know-you phone conversation where we learned the basics about each other and what our expectations and reasonings were. The call itself lasted about an hour and at the end we were all pretty confident that we wanted to work together. Arrangements were then made for them to fly out here and meet with us to make the final decision.

On February 9, 2001, we met with our potential couple at the director's office. To say that we were nervous would be a huge understatement! They were already there when we arrived and I could tell it was them based on the pictures I had previously seen. My potential intended father shook my husband's hand and gave me a hug, I hugged my potential intended mother, as did my husband. We all sat down and chatted with the director for awhile and then we went out to dinner. That night we learned even more about them and what kind of people they were. We felt very comfortable with them and knew that they were the ones for us. We made arrangements for them to come our house and

meet our children the next day. Our children really liked them right from the beginning; I took that as a good sign. Children just seem to be able to pick up on what kind of character people have. It was settled, they were going to be parents and we were going to be the ones to help them achieve that.

Making it happen

The next few months were terribly busy. We had our contracts done, our medical testing done, our intended parents had their testing done, and we were ready to get down to business. I started medications on March 23, and we were set for a transfer on April 20. My intended mother began seeing the doctor where she lived and started her medications as well. Based on her preliminary testing, there was no reason to believe that she would not be able to use her own eggs. Things were going smoothly and I was scheduled for a mock transfer on April 13; that same day my intended mother was to have a follicle check as well. When I got to the doctor's office, I was told I had responded wonderfully and had a textbook uterine lining. On my way out, I was called into the nurse's office to go over the results. She informed me that while everything was great on my part, my intended mother had just called and informed them that she did not produce any eggs this cycle. We were devastated! As stated before, we had no reasons to think she would not respond well to the medications. The doctors all seemed to be puzzled as well, and just chalked it up to her being a poor responder to the medications. The cycle was dropped, the doctor changed the medications around for my intended mother and told her that if the medications did not prove to be successful the second time around she would need to use donor eggs.

The next cycle began May 1. It was a very nerve-racking time for all of us. The Lupron that the RE (reproductive endocrinologist) put me on to shut down my

own hormones was not treating me very nice. I had been having terrible headaches; all of that improved once I started taking estrogen, though. We were all holding out hope that it would really pay off this time. We were set to transfer on May 21 as long as things were going well with my intended mother's eggs. The different medications proved to be successful but not by much. My intended mother had a scan before she was to fly out here for the transfer. The scan showed six follicles but only two of them were the right size, with the others being too small. It was agreed upon that two was better than none and they flew out for the transfer on May 20. The retrieval was three days later and resulted in four follicles and only two eggs. One of the eggs was immature and the other one, according to the RE, didn't look so hot. The embryologist performed an ICSI, which is an abbreviation for IntraCytoplasmic Sperm Injection. In this procedure a sperm is injected directly into the egg to improve the chances of fertilization. They also performed assisted hatching, a procedure where the outer part of the shell of the egg is partially dissolved, enabling it to better implant. On the day of the transfer, three days after the retrieval, we had one five-celled slightly fragmented embryo. The doctor said he would leave the decision to transfer up to us but he probably wouldn't do it if he were in our situation. We had all put so much into the last few months that it was not even a question in my mind. This was my intended mother's last chance of having a biological child. It seemed ludicrous to work as hard as we had just to get to the end and stand in front of the finish line. I believe it also offered closure to my intended mother. If it didn't work and she had to use donor eggs, at least she would know she really gave it all she had before getting to that point. On May 26, we decided to take our chances and transfer the one embryo that we had.

The next ten days seemed to drag on and on. Our RE required five days of bed rest after a transfer, three days of strict flat-on-your-back bed rest with the other two days