

# Orlando Sentinel

GUEST COMMENTARY

## Our LGBTQ surrogate pregnancy keeps family bond | Commentary

By Liz Cardona

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When my cousin Dusty met Bobby, it was love at first sight in 2009. They're perfect for each other in every way. Two super nice guys who are also nervous wrecks and who thrive living and working on a small farm outside of Orlando.

I love them dearly. They wanted children right away, but they had no clue about how to go about having them. These two beautiful souls just couldn't wait to share their idyllic life with cows, chickens and goats and just be "those dads" that give their kids the best life. So they began researching online: "How do two dads have a baby?" They figured the rest would fall into place just as easily as their happy romance.



*Liz Cardona of Orlando is a 30-year-old mother, fiancé, surrogate and entrepreneur.  
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Little did they know the complications that would come with the process of having a gestational surrogate carry their baby until birth. It takes time to be matched with a surrogate, then you have lengthy legal surrogacy and egg donor paperwork, in addition to the time you spend trying to find a surrogate you want to carry your baby — much more so than for heterosexual couples. They went through the whole process of picking an egg donor and felt they were on a dating site. Worse, their first choice for a surrogate fell through when the woman backed out of the arrangement at the last minute, devastating them both.

Lesbian couples don't have it easy, but gay men face an especially tough road ahead of them with family-building. In some states, like Michigan, surrogacy is illegal. Fertility equality is a hot topic in an already fraught conversation for those desperate to have a family. Luckily, here in Florida, surrogacy is permitted for married couples, including same-sex male couples — but they must be married. They are named Parent and Parent on their baby's birth certificate.

For Dusty and Bobby, the answer was right in front of their eyes, in their own family — me! Their aunt, my mother, works at Brown Fertility in Orlando, and we were all at family dinner when they started again on their favorite topic of having kids. My name came up as a possibility to be their surrogate. As a lesbian woman, I completely understand the obstacles and the struggles LGBTQ couples encounter when trying to grow their families. I had already told my mom I would do it before they asked. The telepathy must have carried through, because the night before we met, both Dusty

and Bobby dreamed that I would be their surrogate. And frankly, it was crazy to me that they were considering a stranger. A stranger could run off with your baby if they're not mentally stable or change their minds.

As the mother to two other kids, I feel so grateful to be able to give back to my family and help this couple have this child they have longed for. The moment we came together and made this decision was unforgettable. We all cried. As a lesbian I have known the same struggles and felt different and left out, especially when it comes to family-building. I received death threats when pregnant the first time, when I was 21. You never know what kind of reaction you're going to get once people find out. During this latest pregnancy checkup, OBGYN doctors only wanted to see the "mom," when I insisted on having both dads join. It takes people a minute to switch their mindset because our situation is not super "normal."

We were lucky to have so much support from my mom and from Brown Fertility and for the delivery at Winnie Palmer Hospital, where they went out of their way to make us comfortable. And my cousin (by marriage) Bobby and I have gotten especially close through this. We have had lunch after doctor appointments and talked about childhood traumas, from being LGBTQ. It has grown our bond even stronger.

The best thing about it: We just welcomed Kohler Michael to the world. He's the most perfect baby in every way. He is also already loving being spoiled and loved on by so many. And yes, we are planning the second one in a few years. We look forward to keeping it in this LGBTQ family.

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