

“MEET THE INCREDIBLE WOMAN WHO HAD MY BABIES FOR ME”

Surrogacy is still relatively rare in the UK and a number of laws remain in place that make it difficult for childless couples to go down that route to starting a family. Thanks to the help of the British Surrogacy Centre, Omar and Harneeta Hilal have successfully used a surrogate to have children. *William Taylor* reports.

Omar and Harneeta Hilal are just like any other first-time parents with their adorable twins, Max and Lena.

Like many, they're learning as they go and will no doubt have their ups and downs, but quite naturally, they love their children more than anything else in the world.

They're two hard-working professionals, working in London, while the six-month old babies couldn't possibly be any cuter.

Harneeta (32), a fashion designer, met Omar (39), a merchandiser, some eight years ago, and they've been happily married since 2010.

It sounds a romantic, albeit completely ordinary, story of love, marriage and starting a family together.

But their journey to starting that very family turned out to be anything but ordinary.



“Ever since I was little, I’d dreamt of having a big family,” explained Harneeta. “But when I was 16, I was diagnosed with Mayer-Rokitansky-Küster-Hauser Syndrome, which means I have ovaries, but my womb isn’t fully formed and I can’t get pregnant.

“The doctor said surrogacy and adoption were my only options. I was devastated, but as the years passed, I learnt to accept the situation.”

Surrogacy is still seen by many in the UK to be controversial, and aspects of it still remain shrouded in bureaucratic red tape.

Indeed, laws in this country still state that it is illegal to advertise for a surrogate and receiving payment to carry someone else’s baby is totally out of the question.

In 2012, Harneeta and Omar got in touch with the British Surrogacy Centre (BSC), an organisation based in Maldon, Essex, set-up by the UK’s first same sex couple to be named on the birth certificate of their children, Barrie and Tony Drewitt-Barlow.

Using a surrogate is not illegal in the UK, so providing strict regulations are followed, it is possible for childless couples to have babies.

Harneeta said: “The British Surrogacy Centre were able to match surrogates with potential parents, as well as sorting out the paperwork and legal side of things.

“It was £5,000 to sign up, plus we had to pay the cost of IVF and the surrogate’s expenses, such as loss of earnings.”

The process is long and complicated, taking, in many cases, over a year from start to finish, but Harneeta felt the support she received from the BSC really helped to make the process easier.

“Weirdly, it felt like online dating,” she explained.

“The first step was writing a profile, so we said we were an easy-going couple looking for a surrogate who wanted to be in our child’s life.

“Two months later, in June 2012, the agency said a woman called Roselle was interested in helping as.

“A week later, we met up at the

“My biggest fear was not bonding with the twins, but I fell in love with them instantly.”

- Harneeta Hilal

British Surrogacy Centre offices in Maldon.”

Harneeta admitted that her and Omar were extremely nervous about meeting their new surrogate, but also hugely excited.

Roselle Moss (33) was a mother of two who hadn’t been a surrogate before, but had always wanted to help another woman to have a family.

Having already had her children, Roselle admitted she had no desire to have anymore, despite having enjoyed being pregnant.

She recalled: “In May 2012, I saw a post on a friend’s Facebook page about the British Surrogacy Centre.

“I’d never thought about surrogacy before, but something just clicked and I had an overwhelming urge to help.”

Roselle, from Braintree, Essex, lives with her husband Ken (74) and their two sons, Rowan (10) and Dylan (4).

“From the outset, Ken was really supportive. He’s such a nice guy, always going out of his way to help other people, so he understood.

“Of course he was worried about the physical toll, but I’d always breezed through pregnancy.”

In the following months, Harneeta donated eggs and Omar donated sperm, while a number of stringent medical tests were carried out.

Using the egg and sperm, two embryos were created and implanted into Roselle.

“The waiting was agony,” Harneeta said, “but two weeks later, a blood test confirmed she was pregnant.

“We were ecstatic – even more so six weeks later, when a scan revealed she was carrying twins.”

The relationship between an intended parent, such as Harneeta, and the surrogate is an extremely unique one.

In many cases, the intended parent will have known the surrogate for years and could even be a sister.

For Harneeta and Roselle, it was different. This was the beginning of what was to be a great friendship.

Harneeta added: “Ros kept me so involved and we spoke on the phone or texted each day as she updated me about every tiny kick she was feeling.

“It was bitter-sweet – I wished I was carrying our babies, but I focussed on the positives.

“I trusted Ros so completely, I never worried she’d refuse to hand them over at birth.

“Family and friends were delighted for us and I made no secret of the surrogacy, even telling shop assistants when we were buying cots.”

Thankfully everything went to plan and on



May 17, 2013, Ros gave birth to two twins; Max, who weighed 6lb 2oz and Lena, 6lb 4oz.

The birth was carried out by a planned C-section, and Harnaeta and Omar were there to witness it.

Harnaeta said: "It was such an incredible moment when our babies were lifted out of Ros and handed straight to us.

"Omar and I cut their cords and after a quick cuddle, we showed them to Ros.

"My biggest fear was not bonding with the twins, but I fell in love with them instantly."

Roselle admitted that she didn't find giving up the twins difficult at all as she'd worked hard not to let herself get emotionally attached.

She said: "Their birth was an amazing experience. We were all so nervous and when we heard the babies cry, I was filled with relief.

"The look of complete joy on Harnaeta and Omar's faces made it all so worthwhile.

"Giving up the twins wasn't difficult. Genetically the babies weren't mine, so I wasn't emotionally

***"Giving up
the twins
wasn't difficult.
Genetically
the babies
weren't mine
so I wasn't
emotionally
attached."***

- Roselle Moss

attached. Now I'm like their auntie.

"Harnaeta sends me photos and videos of them and I feel very proud."

Roselle now says it's important that the issue of surrogacy is talked about more openly.

"There's nothing taboo about it," she said. "We're normal, grounded people who wanted to help another couple have the family they longed for. How can that be a bad thing?"

Since opening in the UK in 2011, the British Surrogacy have helped to bring over 300 babies into the world.

They work with both heterosexual and same-sex couples where surrogacy is the only option.

To find out more about the work of the BSC, visit their website:

www.britishsurrogacycentre.com, or give one of their team a call on 01621 878650.



PHOTOGRAPHY: www.studio1.pro