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Their surrogate story

Gay couple's road to parenthood part of small but growing trend

By [Leonor Vivanco](#) | RedEye
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John Powers and William Rossi are working double daddy duty as proud parents of identical twin girls.

"We're going to give these two girls the best life possible," said Powers, 34, a sales rep who works in the Chicago area.

On a recent Saturday, eight days before their first [Father's Day](#), the gay couple laughed at their initiation into parenthood: sleep deprivation because the girls are up every three hours, discovery that noise from a vacuum quiets the babies during their "bewitching" hours, and the misfortune of getting peed on during a diaper change.

But it doesn't seem to bother the doting dads.

"Gabby threw up all over Bill the other day, but it was probably one of the funniest things I ever saw 'cause it almost went in his mouth," Powers said.

This particular Saturday was a family reunion—of sorts. Gabby and her twin, nicknamed Drea, slept peacefully in their matching pink and purple frilly dresses and tiny, white lace-trimmed socks. They were waiting to see Audrey Bellot, the woman who carried them for 33 weeks until their premature births on March 22.

After Bellot arrived at the couple's home with her two daughters and husband, she cooed and gushed over the babies, seeing them for the first time since she gave birth. She gently held the two girls, before touring their [Winnie the Pooh](#)-themed nursery.

Powers and Rossi worked with Bellot, 31, of Springfield to become parents through gestational surrogacy. A first-time surrogate, Bellot carried the babies after in-vitro fertilization using Rossi's sperm and eggs donated by a friend of the couple. Powers, Rossi's partner of eight years, plans to legally become the twins' parent through co-parent adoption next week.

Surrogacy has emerged as a trend among a small but growing segment of same-sex couples. More gay couples are choosing surrogacy because at least one partner can be genetically related to the child, said Nancy Block, founder of the [Northbrook](#)-based Center for Egg Options, which facilitated the surrogacy arrangement for Powers and Rossi.

Bellot said she didn't worry when she was pregnant about whether she'd want to relinquish the twins.

"A lot of people have said, 'Well, can you give the babies up?' And I thought, I'm not giving up anything. I'm giving it back to where it belongs," she said. She specifically asked to work with a same-sex couple "because I feel that their options for becoming parents are so limited," Bellot said.

Powers and Rossi want the girls to grow up knowing Bellot and the egg donor, the two people who made their life possible. "I couldn't imagine not having them now," Rossi, now 35, said of his daughters. Pictures of the girls hang on the walls of their home, and ultrasound images have been placed in a special keepsake folder.

The Center for Egg Options, which opened in 2000 to match infertile patients with egg donors and surrogates, worked with its first same-sex couple three years ago. More than 10 gay couples have followed, including Powers and Rossi, said Block, who was at their home for the recent reunion of all parties.

"Simply more people are contacting us, or me in particular, and asking about availability of surrogates and each year it really does increase," Block said.

What helps is acceptance of assisted reproductive technology and a progressive law in Illinois that allows gay couples to become parents through gestational surrogacy, she said.

Block said she has noticed more surrogates asking to carry babies for same-sex couples rather than heterosexual couples, for reasons ranging from being in support of gay rights to avoiding dealing with envious feelings by the intended mother who can't carry the baby. Even though they are compensated with at least \$25,000, most women choose to be surrogates because they enjoy feeling needed, Block said.

"They're doing this because they want to make someone else as happy as they are with their own children," she said. "They're doing this for someone, and the money is secondary."

Not everyone supports gay couples becoming parents.

"To be quite blunt about it, we think it's quite selfish that gay people or homosexuals would intentionally put a child into a motherless or fatherless home," said [David Smith](#), executive director of the Illinois Family Institute, a Christian nonprofit organization. "They're not thinking about the best needs of the child, but what needs and voids they fill in their own lives."

Even though an American Academy of Pediatrics report said there is no evidence that suggests any risk to children who grow up with gay parents, Smith claims that social science research shows a child thrives in a home with a married mother and father.

Powers and Rossi are aware that some people don't approve of their situation. They hope their girls will be strong enough to withstand any teasing.

"You can't predict the future, but the thing that I say is, 'Raise them to be very confident girls believing in themselves and they're not going to care what anybody else has to say,' " Rossi said.

And despite any parenting pains, Powers said, the best part of fatherhood is "just being blessed by the

fact that we have these two precious girls and that we have a family, that we can say that we honestly have a family now."

Adoption options

In addition to surrogacy, gays and lesbians also can become parents through adoption in more than 20 states, including Illinois.

Adoption has increased among gay and lesbian couples, said Adam Pertman, executive director of the Evan B. Donaldson Adoption Institute, based in New York.

A study released in 2003 by the institute found 60 percent of adoption agencies accept applications from homosexuals, and 40 percent of all agencies already have placed children with gay or lesbian parents.

But adoption still has its roadblocks, Pertman said.

"The biggest obstacle was and continues to be attitudes," he said. If agencies responsible for placing children in homes and their employees are biased or homophobic, that cuts down the pool of potential parents, he said.

Other barriers, he said, include the perception that hopeful parents can't get through the process, laws that make adoption illegal or difficult for gay people, and agencies' uncertainties about how to recruit parents from the gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender community.

Adoptions by gay and lesbian individuals as well as same-sex couples are legal in 22 states and the District of Columbia, and in some instances only in certain counties in some of those states, according to the Human Rights Campaign, a national GLBT civil rights organization based in Washington, D.C.

Surrogacy costs

Costs add up for a gay couple using a surrogate, and the terms are drafted into a contract.

John Powers and William Rossi estimated they spent \$50,000 to \$75,000 for their surrogacy process. They chose surrogacy because they wanted the children to be genetically related to one of them, they said. Here are some typical costs:

The surrogate, between 21 and 37 years old who recently had a normal pregnancy, is typically paid at least \$25,000, said Nancy Block, founder of the Center for Egg Options in Illinois. The price could increase if the woman is carrying more than one baby, having a high-risk pregnancy or needs insurance with maternity coverage. Plus, there can be incidentals such as bed rest and loss of wages.

An agency fee in the Chicago area to administer the surrogacy process generally ranges from \$10,000 to \$15,000, she said.

Added to that is \$4,000 in legal costs.

If a couple needs an egg donor, they'll pay \$7,000 to the donor, plus \$5,000 to \$6,000 in fees to the egg donor agency. Then, they need to tack on roughly \$15,000 per cycle for clinical procedures and

medication to develop the embryos and transfer them to become pregnant.

Surrogacy laws

Surrogacy laws vary by state. Some states have no legal provisions that deal with the issue of surrogacy, others prohibit it and a few allow surrogacy agreements with certain conditions—such as for married couples only.

Illinois' Gestational Surrogacy Act, passed in 2005, allows couples (not excluding same-sex couples), to enter into a binding contract with surrogates to have children.

Gestational surrogates carry babies but are not genetically related to them. The surrogate becomes pregnant through in-vitro fertilization, using someone else's egg and sperm. Gestational surrogacy differs from traditional surrogacy, in which the surrogate uses her egg and is artificially inseminated with sperm from a donor or intended father.

According to the gestational surrogacy act, the intended parent, whose sperm or egg resulted in an embryo to be carried by the surrogate, becomes the legal parent upon birth of the child. In the case of same-sex couples, the partner of the biological parent must adopt in order to become the child's legal parent.

The surrogate doesn't have legal rights to the child, and the biological parent's name is placed on the birth certificate, said Nidhi Desai, a partner of the law firm Ballard, Desai, Bush-Joseph & Horwich in the Loop, who helped draft the act. The egg donor agrees to give up rights for the child before the embryo transfer, she said.