

Why Donald Trump and a bad divorce made me decide to become a surrogate

"I knew many friends who had struggled with infertility and could understand that pain. Knowing I could alleviate that for a family was an amazing thought."

Stéphanie Plante, as told to Kate Rae

June 15, 2018



Photo: Courtesy of Stéphanie Plante

2016 was a terrible year.

Brexit happened. **Trump happened**. Zika happened. Prince died. My husband cheated on me, my marriage imploded, and I was suddenly a single mum to my four-year-old son.

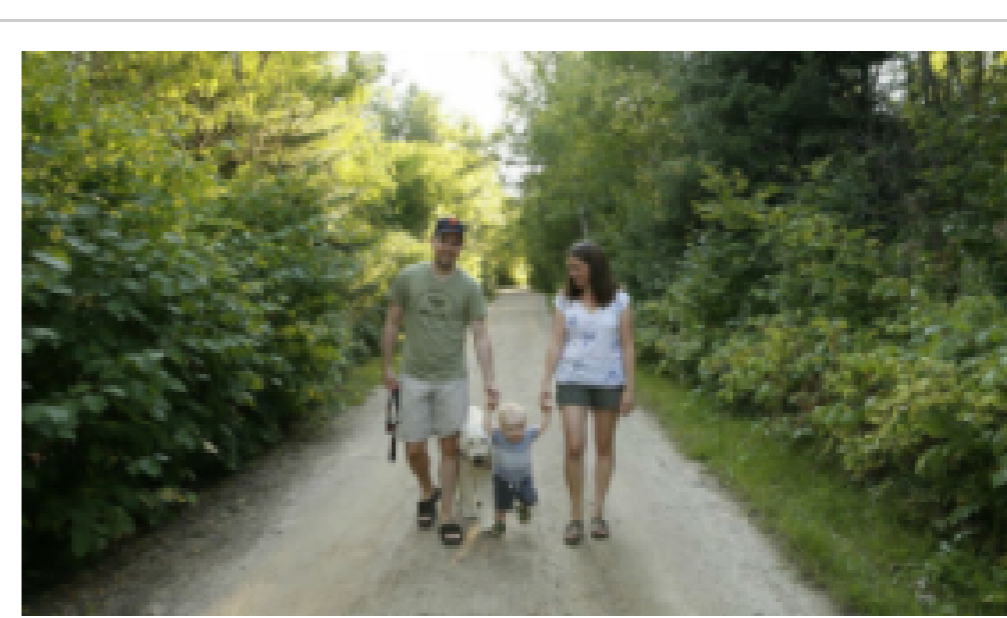
See? Terrible year.



As it drew to close, though, I started thinking about what I could do to counteract all of that terrible. I wanted to look back on that year and think, *Yeah, I put something good in the world*. As a single mom, I didn't have time to **volunteer at a food bank**, or the funds to donate pots of money anywhere. But here's what I could do: Help a couple have a child.

I'd loved everything about pregnancy. And yet, I had no desire to actually raise another child. My little family—me, my kid, our dog—felt really right. And I've always had a big-picture view of parenting: That it's not my job just to mother my own child, but to help other parents, too. It's like there's a pool of kids and we're all the lifeguards. I knew many **friends who had struggled with infertility** and could understand that pain. Knowing I could alleviate for a family that was an amazing thought.

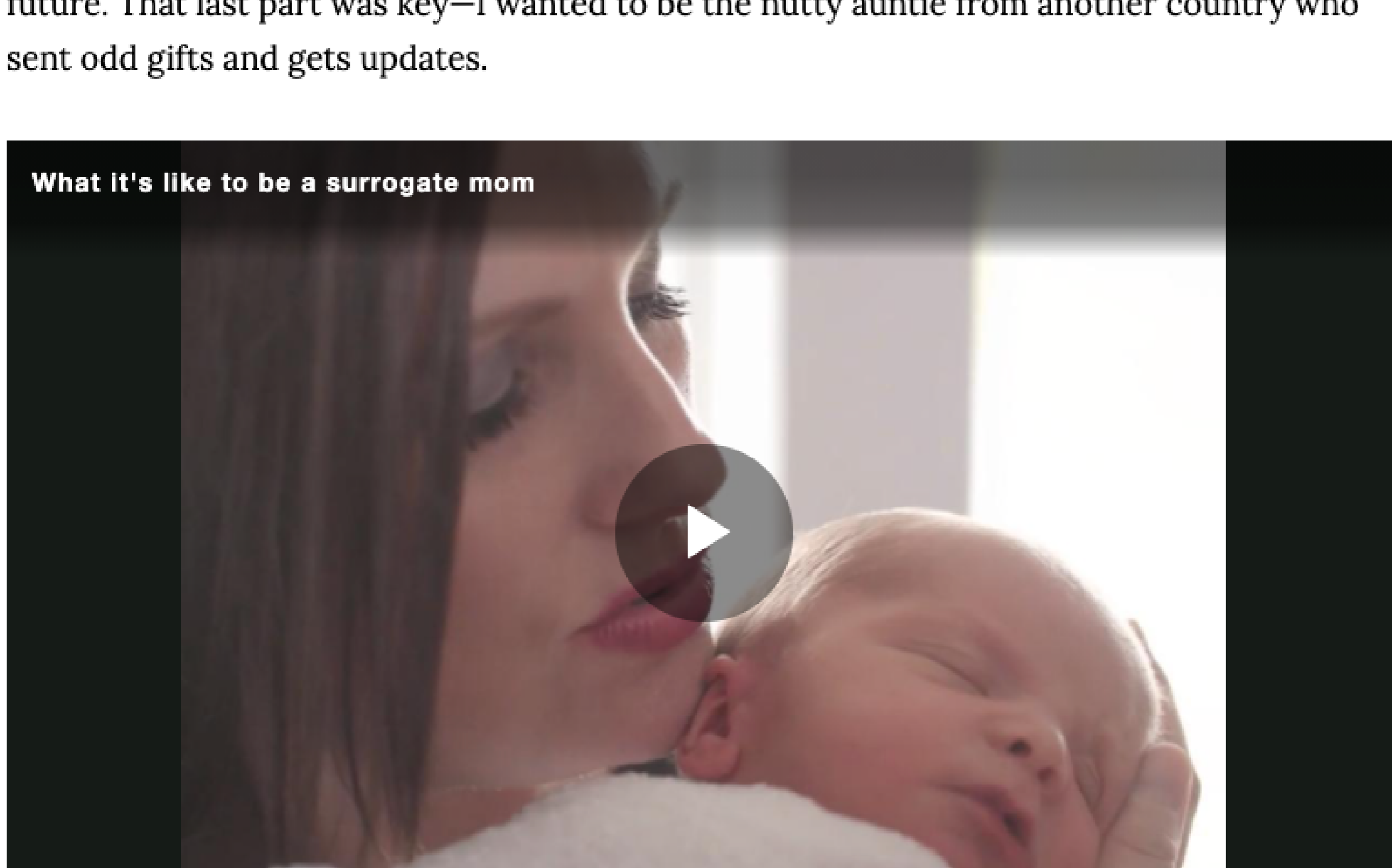
I dove into the research. There's a traditional surrogate, who uses her own eggs, and then there's a **gestational surrogate**, who uses a donor egg and basically serves as the oven. I opted for the latter. Next up: Finding an agency. (This step is optional, but I like crossing my t's and dotting my i's—this place did everything from helping draw up the contract to setting me up for psychological testing.)



I told everyone I was pregnant at just 8 weeks—and I don't regret it

Then it was finding the family, which was basically Super Weird Tinder. I knew two things: That I wanted it to be a non-traditional couple (this was important to me considering all the horrifying homophobic crap happening in the world) and that they be an international couple, as surrogacy is illegal in many parts of the world, leaving many with no way of having a baby.

The website allows you to filter your search, so mine looked like this: gay, international, together for more than five years, interested in maintaining a relationship with me in the future. That last part was key—I wanted to be the nutty auntie from another country who sent odd gifts and gets updates.



I chatted with a few couples over Skype. It wasn't long before a couple from Spain won me over with their talk of what the future might look like; we could do an exchange when my son and their child were older, they said. My boy could learn Spanish. (And, can't lie, this Ottawa girl loved the idea of having a place to visit in sunny Spain during the winter months.) When I told them that I wanted to be their surrogate, they hooted and hollered. We were all thrilled.

And so it began.

First: Fertility meds that turned my butt black and blue and caused ferocious mood swings and sweats. Next: The guys flew to Ottawa to inseminate their donor egg and it was placed hopefully in my oven. I somehow knew immediately that it was going to stick around, and I was right. Then: Barfing, showing, telling. I'd had many conversations with family and friends beforehand, and everyone was wildly supportive.

Finally, I had to tell my son.

"So, mommies have gardens and daddies have seeds. I'm going to be the garden for two daddies who don't have one, and then they'll take the baby to Spain," I explained.

He asked exactly two questions: "Will I have to share my Lego?" and "Will I have to share my puppy?" When reassured that no, he would not have to share either, he shrugged and went back to playing with his Lego and his puppy and that was that.

I took my job as a garden very seriously, making sure I was **as healthy as possible** throughout the whole pregnancy. I made good food, took naps, avoided sushi. I kept checking in with myself to make sure I was really, really OK with everything, and I was. The baby honestly never felt like mine.

Currently, all surrogacy in Canada is considered altruistic, meaning **you legally cannot be paid for it**, although your expenses can be compensated. For me, that meant maternity clothes, a special pillow allowing me to sleep comfortably, Ubers to my appointments, assistance with sending my son to summer camp when I was hugely pregnant, a private room at the hospital—I didn't want to be watching some new mom and her meemaw cooing over her baby, to be honest.

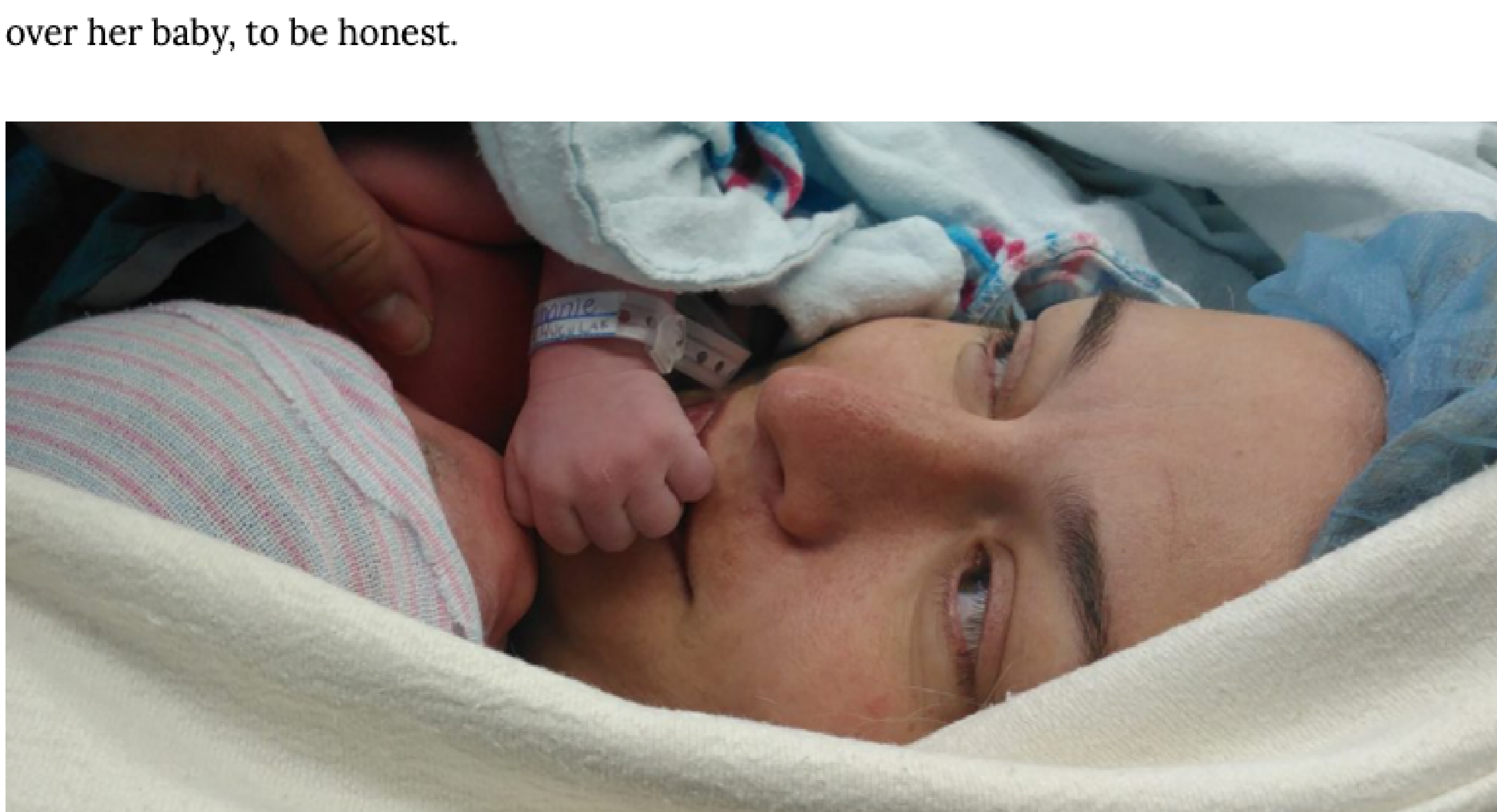


Photo: Courtesy of Stéphanie Plante

Near the end of my pregnancy, things starting going a bit south and I was **diagnosed with preeclampsia**, which meant **an emergency C-section** at 38 weeks. Fortunately the dads had just gotten off the plane. When the baby was born, she was brought to her dads and their tearful introduction was filmed for me to watch. Then she was brought to me for skin-to-skin. Holding her felt so different from holding my son. There was an intense connection, of course, but she felt like my niece, not my daughter.

The three of them had to stay in Canada for six weeks to get her paperwork. In that time, we all hung out. We went apple-picking, we had Thanksgiving dinner together, I watched as they fumbled as all new parents do, putting on her diapers backwards, falling in love. When they left, I knew it wasn't goodbye forever—we are family now. Indeed, we still talk all the time, and I get to see her life, which is divine. We have plans to go to Spain for her first birthday.

Looking back, I still can't believe I did it. I'm not what you'd call a risk-taker. But god, I'm proud of myself. I love my son so, so much. To be able to help someone else discover that kind of love is a massive honour. If I was younger, I'd do it all again.

I'm a strong believer that we don't own our kids. We birth them, and care for them, teach them and love them, and then we release them. With this girl, I just released her into the world a little sooner.

And she cracked me open, that girl. My new partner and I have just started talking about **mayyybe adding to our family**. I thought that bridge was closed for me, but now I don't know. That baby opened my eyes, and brought me over to the other side.