



TWO OF US

STORY BY *Kimberly Gillan* | PHOTOGRAPHY BY *Wayne Taylor*

Amanda McMillan, 36, became a surrogate for her friend Michael Langtree, 39, and his partner Terry, in 2013. She's now expecting another child for the couple – and a sibling for Harper, 2. She also has two daughters of her own.

MICHAEL: Amanda and I met at work in 2004 and hit it off. She was in employee training and I worked in recruitment and we were both workaholics who would often be at the office until 11pm, talking about whatever had frustrated us that day.

Soon our relationship spilled outside of work. We were both in new relationships and my partner Terry got along with [Amanda's now-husband] Brent like a house on fire, so we would go to each other's houses for dinner parties. We all had so much in common and were at a similar stage of life, and soon we bought a training business together.

Amanda and I often talked about the fact we didn't think we would be parents – we were too committed to our business – but then she found out she was pregnant with her daughter Mia. It came as a bit of a shock.

She was a wonderful mother and seeing her as a parent made me realise, "Okay it's possible to be a business owner and a parent." Until then, I thought you had to be one or the other.

Terry and I started looking into international surrogacy options in 2011 but it was concerning.

The rules often change and there's always a small chance you won't get your child or that they'll extort money from you. If the country of origin knows that you're a gay couple, they will often try to prevent the child leaving with you.

We mentioned to friends that we were thinking about having a child. We didn't think a woman would be crazy enough to carry a baby for us, but one night we were at a friend's wedding and Amanda told us she wanted to be a surrogate for us. We were like, "We won't hold you to this because you've been drinking" but the next day she confirmed her offer. Another friend donated the egg and Amanda would carry the baby. We'd found the impossible piece of the puzzle.

It took three years of testing and counselling before we were granted approval. They basically wanted to make sure we weren't axe murderers and that Amanda was comfortable with carrying the baby and giving it to us.

We were so excited when Amanda was finally pregnant in October 2013. There were times I felt guilty about what she put her body through for us, but I realised that guilt is useless so I tried to be sympathetic instead. Terry and I

were in the room for the labour in June 2014. The epidural stopped working after about 30 minutes and she was in a lot of pain, which was awful to witness. When we heard our daughter Harper make a noise, we were blown away.

We always wanted two babies and Amanda offered to be a surrogate again. It was a much quicker process the second time and we can't wait to welcome our second baby girl in June.

Meeting Amanda was one of the best things that has happened to me. Not only do we work incredibly well together in business, but she understands me like nobody else and has given Terry and I the ultimate gifts, for which I will be forever grateful.

AMANDA: Michael and I were always so much more than colleagues and business partners. After I found out I was pregnant with my first baby, it took me six weeks of talking to him to get used to the idea; it was a really massive thing in my life because I'd always been incredibly career-focused. Little did I know then that I would end up being pregnant four times: twice with my daughters Mia and Ava, and twice for Michael and Terry.

The boys had been talking about surrogacy options for six months, when I turned to my husband Brent and said, "Let's do this surrogacy thing." He replied, "I have been wondering how long it would take you to say that." Having a family came quite easily for us and we wanted our best friends to have that opportunity.

We had to go through a lot of counselling and talk about so many things you would never usually think about when having your own baby, like, "If there is a choice between the baby dying and Amanda dying, what would you do?" or "What will happen if both the fathers died?" In most cases, Michael and Terry said, "Amanda's wishes would come first." The final step in the approval process was going before a 12-person panel and answering lots of questions until they said, "All right you're approved and good to go." Michael and Terry were the first male gay couple to go through the process in Victoria.

Michael and I were floating our company when I became pregnant with Harper, so with morning sickness it was a really stressful time.

The first three weeks after giving birth to Harper were difficult because your body thinks you are mourning the loss of a baby and I would cry at nothing. I didn't see her for a few weeks because I wanted to be right in my body and my head. I didn't know what my reaction would be and I didn't want to be overly emotional. The hard part of that was that my best friend had just had a baby and I didn't get to visit.

The boys were going to go to Thailand for their second baby, but it didn't feel right – I felt really strongly about both their babies being born in Australia – so I told them I would be surrogate again. I'm now eight months pregnant, which will definitely be the last time!

My business, which promotes wellness, and Michael's health club operate out of the same building, so we see each other every day. He gets to watch his baby grow and if she's moving a lot, I get him to feel her – it's really special.

My friendship with Michael is now so much deeper. No matter where our lives go, we will always have this tie. ■

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