

The American Family Update

FROM ADOPTIONS TO SURROGACIES, THE PATH TO CREATING A FAMILY LOOKS NOTHING LIKE IT DID IN THE '50S.

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In the best of circumstances, deciding to be a parent is a huge decision. For Nathan Lair, it was an even bigger decision than that.

See, Lair is a single dad—and that was by choice. What's more, he had his son via surrogacy.

"What really made me take the jump was meeting Heartland Surrogacy and meeting my surrogate. Their support made me brave enough to start down the path," Lair said.

Lair began to research surrogacy in 2010 after worrying about fertility issues and revisited the idea in 2018 when he was ready to become a single parent. Heartland Surrogacy met with Lair to discuss the legal and financial process. From there, Lair went through medical and psychological testing, home tests, and finally was matched with a surrogate carrier. Lair was able to start the family he's always wanted in a way he'd never thought was possible.

"I had wanted to start one traditionally with extensive genetic testing due to my risks, but life never worked out that way," he said. "Dating with fertility issues wasn't easy and was not an easy conversation when I felt it appropriate to share because it also came with telling someone I had a chronic life-long disease."

He isn't alone. In fact, he and his son are just one of an ever-growing legion of non-traditional American families. It's been ages since the average American household has consisted of a husband, wife, two kids, and a picket fence—if it ever existed in the first place. In the last 50 years, American families have transformed.

More and more families are starting in non-traditional ways. One out of every 25 families in the U.S. has at least one adopted child and nearly 140,000 were adopted last year according to the US Adoption Network. A significant change in legislation has caused large increases in these numbers since 2000. It's not just adoption either, surrogacy numbers are rising too. In 2004, there were 738 births via surrogate compared to 2,807 in 2015.

These numbers show a dramatic increase in families beginning under non-traditional circumstances. According to fertility specialist Dr. David Harari, "The traditional American couple is no longer written the way it was in the past." His

clients include straight couples, gay or lesbian couples, and single people. Harari also helps patients who have problems conceiving and matches them with surrogates or other gestational services they may need. "The one thing I think that's a universal characteristic in all people is the desire to have a family at some point in their lives," Harari said.

Even so, there's still a stigma around surrogacy and adoption. Blame it on a hangover from the 1950s ideal of the nuclear family. Americans still love a minivan of kids conceived the old-fashioned way. But Harari believes that with more people achieving their dreams of having a family by whatever means, the concept of the nuclear family has changed, and the taint of surrogacy has vanished.

"I think the stigma of surrogacy has been lifted," he said. "There's a lot more transparency with discussing how children came into the world, and it's created a healthy environment of openness."

Starting a family is one of the most precious things someone can do, and Harari believes no one should be judged for how they came into the world.

Pushback on family situations is nothing new. Studies from the Healthy Place Index show that raising a family is easier with two parents, but the task is not impossible with one parent, especially when only one child is involved. The concept of the nuclear family in America still exists but is steadily changing. Some adopted children don't look like their parents. Many families have parents of the same gender. Single parenting is expanding because of relaxed legislation. These increased rates of adoption and surrogacy prove people still want the family lifestyle but are also exploring other ways to find their family.

"I love being a dad, and I do enjoy the sole authority of being a single dad. I thought I may date after [Paxton] was born, but I've really fallen into a nice routine and am just happy. He loves his grandparents, and they spoil him every day," Lair said. He really enjoys being a dad and wouldn't trade it for the world. Paxton, his two-year-old son, loves to play outside and help his father with chores. Just like many other children, he has a good relationship with his grandparents, and the family is happy. Lair has no plans to carry out another surrogacy in the future and is completely focused on raising his son and being the best father possible.

