Title
Angel For Hire

Permalink
https://escholarship.org/uc/item/8mh845dj

Authors
Goodby, Nina M.D.
Flynn, Mary K

Publication Date
2011-05-07

Supplemental Material
https://escholarship.org/uc/item/8mh845dj#supplemental
ANGEL FOR HIRE
Directed & Produced by Mary Flynn and Nina Goodby

Abstract:
Angel For Hire is a 26-minute documentary that explores the power of the contract in surrogate motherhood arrangements, and the implications of signing away rights to your body in order to bear a child for a stranger.

The film follows Angel Patwell through the final weeks of her second surrogate pregnancy as she struggles to turn a breach baby and faces the possibility of a contract-mandated caesarian section against her wishes.

Angel and her ‘Intended Parents,’ Scott Schlichter and Deborah Grimes, all live in California, the premiere location of third-party reproduction for infertile couples around the world. Despite the industry’s success in California, the legal protections around surrogacy remain largely unregulated. It is her contract that will ultimately determine the circumstances under which Angel will deliver the child she carries.

Interwoven with verité footage of Angel, Deb and Scott, is the story of Noel Keane, a pioneering and controversial lawyer from Dearborn, Michigan who created the first contract for surrogate pregnancy in the late 1970s. Keane was approached by a couple and asked to find a woman to be inseminated with the husband’s sperm, bear a child, and hand it over to them. At the time, the concept seemed outrageous, yet Keane took a chance and drew up the first “commercial” surrogacy agreement.

Keane would become the most visible middleman in the world of surrogate parenting. He received much criticism for problem cases in several states, the most notorious of which was the 1986 Baby M case in New Jersey. The story of Baby M shocked the nation, hurrying into the national conversation the legal, moral and ethical issues involved with the practice of surrogacy. Despite the heated debate, Keane embraced the media as a way to advertise his unique field of law.

We are currently in final month of editing, and the film is set to premiere in May 2011 at UC Berkeley’s Graduate School of Journalism. The historical portion of the film is for the most part told through archival television footage, and securing the rights and licensing for such footage, especially from major networks, becomes costly very quickly. As we approach completion of the film, we need $5000 to help us obtain rights to archival footage that will bring Noel Keane and the history of contracted surrogacy to life onscreen. We hope to show the film in festivals and on public television.

By revisiting the nascent beginnings of this new field of law - surrogate parenting - we want viewers to walk away understanding how drastically the legal landscape has shifted towards making surrogacy available, and yet, how difficult it is to pin down a process where emotions are entwined with legal commitments.

As Angel says, “You read the contract, but you never think all the things in it are a possibility, that they could happen to you.”