

**00:00:00 Liisa L:**

Um, I, um, remember I was super pregnant, super tired, but I was still only 35 weeks. And I woke up in the middle of the night to, um, my water breaking and I was in such, um, I was in such denial that I was having a baby, cuz I remember, um, he was also a, [laughter] you know, unplanned baby who I, I, you know, had been on birth control. That took away my period, so I didn't know I was pregnant until about 13 weeks. I missed the first trimester. [wow] So everything about this birth was, um, surprising and, and like, too fast [laughter] and so quick, you know, like, it was, it was a, a whirlwind. So, uh, my water broke and I remember thinking, oh, I, it's too early. They're probably gonna put me on bedrest. Maybe I'll get admitted to wait in the hospital.

**00:01:02 Liisa L:**

Um, and it's just a little leak, it was a gross rupture of membranes, it was intense. And I was like, they'll probably just, you know, I can still gestate stay for longer. I just need to, my husband was like, should we bring the hospital bag? I was like, no. Like, I literally said no to the hospital bag. He snuck, he wasn't my husband at the time, he was my boyfriend. So he, he snuck the camera into, um, into like, he like snuck it along with him just in case, and it ended up being the only thing we brought for this birth [laughter]. So when I got to the hospital, um, I was put in triage. We had also planned to, um, birth at the Walnut Creek location. This is kind of, um, common white lady behavior in Oakland to go to the fancy hospital for your actual delivery.

**00:01:45 Liisa L:**

That was about 45 minutes away, but we didn't have time to do that so I was at Oakland and um, I was in triage and I remember being told by the nurse, um, I remember the nurse had been born at 35 weeks and she was fine. And I was like, okay. And she's like, "of course that's totally anecdotal, bu- anecdotal," like, I'm, you know, I was like, okay, yeah, I get it. It was middle of the night. I remember, um, I was just gushing water. And um, it wasn't until a nurse was like, oh, you're being admitted, you're having the baby, that I really got, that we were doing labor and delivery and that it was all going to happen. We had a, a doula who was a student, um, and her name was Elizabeth Brownley and she came right away. Um, they put me on, um, you know, they just started hydrating, gave me IV hydration, which stopped all labor.

**00:02:52 Liisa L:**

Like it was just, I just was stalled out. And I had had a plan to, um, have a unmedicated childbirth. Um, and I went for a long time just kind of waiting for labor to start. At, um, at 24 hours in I was still, you know, gushing water. And at that point it was, I was told it wasn't safe to continue trying to kickstart labor. So they put me on Pitocin. Um, the Pitocin was intense. God, it was awful. And, um, this whole time I remember, I remember that I had been very worried about my, my then boyfriend, now husband, about his ability to like, um, be with me. Like his ability to support me through this. Like, it was the hardest thing we had ever been through. And I just remember he showed up so like, so well, like, so intensely. There were things I needed, like I needed someone to push on my, on my thigh muscles, like I needed like pressure and, and he would just do it like no questions asked. And he was there like the whole time. It was like romantic when I look back on it. Oh, that makes me teary.

**00:04:22 Liisa L:**

Um, so after 24 hours they put me on the pit. I'm doing unmedicated pit contractions, which, rough man

**00:04:30 Speaker 2:**

Rough. Those are rough. Yeah. They are not fooling around.

**00:04:35 Liisa L:**

they're not, they're not like a regular contraction, which I had had some, and I've had them since. You know, it's not fun, but it's a wave that comes and goes and pit contractions to me [S2 affirmative] felt like, it just felt like boom boom boom boom boom boom boom - like it was, it was, there was no break. But I did them for a while. I'm not entirely sure of the timeline 'cause I was on another planet, but, um, we were far into labor [laughter] um, when I, we had a code word for if I wanted, um, a epidural. It was Hobby Lobby [S2 affirmative] cuz there was a Hobby Lobby commercial, oh, this whole time Cosby Show reruns are playing on the TV in the room. Don't know why. But they were [laughter]. We were in that room for a really long time before I was struggling, like the waiting for labor to start, like, I was trying to walk, I was pinching my nipples.

**00:05:29 Liisa L:**

like I was trying to make things start. Um, now I'm kind of going back in time, sorry. But like, uh, we were playing with like [that's ok] the spotlights these big spotlights. I still have pictures of me, like with the big, um, you know, like OB spotlight on my face [laughter]. I remember one of the, the one of the, um, like high risk OBs coming in and being like, none of this stuff you're doing is gonna start labor. Like, you can't do it like this. And he pointed to the bag of, um, pit on the IV. He's like, this is what gets it going. Like. And I remember being like [laughter], nice bedside manner, [nice bedside manner] this 75 year old guy. It was just like, how many babies have you had bra'? Like, I remember being annoyed with him, but I was also, oh God, I was so vulnerable. I was like a pit, like vulnerable.

**00:06:24 Liisa L:**

So anyway, we're, we're going, going, going. Um, the pit gets cranked up. I finally ask for, um, the epidural. Um, I still remember his name was Dr. Eric Hart, I remember him with like light around his he-, he must have been looking at, must have been back lit 'cause he literally looked like, I remember being, he was like, and I remember he was so gentle. He was like, "did you want me to explain to you the risks and benefits or would you like me to just do it?" And I was like, please just do it. And at this point I was, I had been, um, on pit contractions for about like eight hours. Like I had been going long and that was after 24 hours of wait. Like it was, I'd been, I felt like I'd been there forever, [longer] than eight hours. I don't know.

**00:07:10 Liisa L:**

Um, so he gave me the epidural. That was the only time, you know, Rich got me through getting the epidural, but he's the one who like saw the needle go in and stuff. And he was like, I'm gonna need to sit down for a second. And so he went outside and sat down for a second after the needle. [S2 affirmative]. And immediately, I just remember they gave me a heavy dose. I think they

knew I was struggling. And as soon as they did, they also cranked the pit up to the max without telling me. But they wanted the baby out. Like, I get it, but also, really, anyway, but I felt, so I remember I had a drip for it, which I don't think is typical, but I, um, I was zonked. I couldn't walk for hours after, um, I could feel pressure, but nothing else.

**00:07:56 Liisa L:**

And it was such a relief. I remember I always say I've had un- because my other two were unmedicated and it, there's room for all births and this is a birth where I needed that epidural. I couldn't have made it, like I couldn't do it. [S2 affirmative] So, um, I remember making, I remember feeling so relieved. I took a nap. I was asking the nurses if they, um, needed a snack, if they were taking care of themselves. Like, I was like, you know what I mean? Like, [laughter] I remember being very like, you know, and then, um [S2 affirmative], that's all so blurry. They also gave me a fentanyl, but before the epidural, I remember they tried to do that while they were waiting for the, um, [S2 affirmative] anesthesia team to come. And it was awful. Everything still hurt. But I was just very stoned.

**00:08:52 Liisa L:**

Like, it was just not fun. It was really bad. I can't remember how it became clear. There were lots of cervical checks. God, there was always someone up there. And so they told me when it was time, they told me [laughter] when it was time. And I, um, I remember, um, I didn't have to push for a really long time. I can't remember if I could f-, I remember when Anna was born being surprised by how, um, pushing felt, um, um, inescapable. Like I wasn't even doing it. My body was just doing it. Like, I didn't know that. So during Charlie's [S2 affirmative] I remember being instructed to push [S2 affirmative]. And, um, I remember feeling like I was very good at pushing. Like, I remember feeling really strong. I had the doula on one leg, my husband on the other leg, the doula had the camera.

**00:09:51 Liisa L:**

We have all the pictures. All the pictures. Which every once in a while I'm like, whoa, [whoa]. You know, like it's pretty wild. [laughter], um, I was 28 and on another planet. I just remember that it's all these beautiful pictures of this birth. And, you know, my fantasy of these pictures was that I would have this like strong, like, you know, like, yes. But instead I'm making my like headshot face. I'm like, but I look crazy, 'cause I have makeup all over my face. And, um, I just look, I, I, I am birth [giving birth] [laughter]. I look insane. So the pictures are, they tell the story is what I always say. They tell [laughter], I'm like, um, I remember they kept wanting me to wear the hospital gown and I was like, I need, can we just be naked please? Like please can I just be naked?

**00:10:38 Liisa L:**

I was so hot and I just didn't want clothes on me. I knew I wanted the [S2 affirmative], you know, baby on my body, [S2 affirmative] like all that kind of stuff. So I'm pushing, pushing. It's really like four or five pushes. And um, and he came out and I remember, um, I had never seen a newborn baby before. And I had never seen [Oh really?] a baby this little. I had never, I was the first of my siblings to, you know what I mean? Like, it was the first [S2 affirmative] um, I had seen newborns like out with their moms, but I was the first of my friends, the first of everybody,

and I had never seen one fresh out of the oven like that. And I remember being like, oh my God, is he, you know, he's a little, he was blue and pale and wrinkly and covered with stu- and you know what I mean?

**00:11:28 Liisa L:**

Like, I just didn't know what to make of this. I remember being like, what? And um, I remember he, [laughter] you know, he'd been upside down and I remember, so his cheeks were very like high. Um, I also remember his voice was very quiet. And I, to this day I am like, Charlie, you were just like "meow." Like you just were like a little "meow," you know, quiet little voice. Um, he had kind of long fingernails I remember, which is weird considering how early he was. And, um [S2 affirmative], I remember saying, my baby, my baby. But also just being like, what has happened? Like what has happened? I was so, um, bo- like bowled over, um, and I was holding him. I remember I had asked for all the lights to be dimmed during the birth because, um, for the baby, I didn't want this like blast of light, you know what I mean, first thing.

**00:12:25 Liisa L:**

So they had all the lights dim [S2 affirmative], and as I'm pushing, I realized they have the big spotlight just right, you know what I mean? Like, I can have the lights dimmed, but the baby can't [laughter]. And I remember being like, oh no. Oh no. It's gonna be too bright. But it was too, there was, you know, it was already happening. Um, I vaguely remember the person who caught him. She was like a, you know, I, I didn't see her until she swooped in. She was just, the nurses were helping me. And, um, she just swooped in, caught the baby, and then went to another room. [S2 affirmative] I don't know her name or anything like that. Um, [wow]

**00:13:02 S2:**

Was she, she was an OB?

**00:13:03 Liisa L:**

Yeah. She must have been like a resident, like an OB, like I don't, she was an OB. [S2 affirmative] Um, and, um, she was just the on-duty OB. [S2 affirmative] Um, none of my children were delivered by someone I knew well, but I knew them after, you know what I mean? [laughter] Like I, you know, speaking of Cosby show, right? 'Cause he was an OB and he would get the call that his patient is going into labor and that's just not, that's just not the way anymore. So, for me, you know, in this hospital in California. So I, um, I remember being surprised that I had to deliver the placenta. I don't think I knew that that was something that happens. I don't think I had like, thought it through. [interesting] I remember being like, what's happening? [laughter]? And they're like, you're, you're gonna deliver the after birth. And I'm like, oh God, okay. And I remember, um, asking to see it and they showed me the placenta and I thought that was cool.

**00:14:00 Liisa L:**

I remember the nurse saying, that is a nice healthy looking placenta. And I was like, oh good. She's like, you should see. She told me, she was like, when smokers come in, like it's a really different looking placenta. And I was like, oh. [laughter] So I remember it took me a long time to, um, walk. I couldn't walk for a long time 'cause I had really maxed myself out on the

epidural. They kept expecting me to be able to walk and I couldn't. Um [S2 affirmative], they all, I also did have a tear. They, um, I had stitches. I don't remember that at all. Um, but I know it's true. And they, um, this hospital, there was a delivery room and then there was a recovery room. And so somehow we made our way up to the recovery floor. And I had a roommate and I remember the roommate was, it was also her first baby.

**00:14:56 Liisa L:**

And she had all this family, she had her boyfriend there. They were there all the time. They were watching some kind of beauty pageant like all night. It was really terrible. I didn't know. I couldn't get any quiet. And Rich was like, "what do I, should I tell them to stop?" And I was like, I don't know. Like, I felt like frozen in inability to kind of care for myself. Um, and so we were in room [S2 affirmative] with Charlie, who didn't have a name yet. Um, I knew it was Charlie, but I was second guessing myself. And um, I remember, um, Rich was doing all the diaper changes. I was trying to learn how to breastfeed. We did not, it was hard. He was so sleepy 'cause he was just early enough. He didn't go to NICU, he didn't need help breathing, but he was sleepy. He just wasn't quite ready. Um [S2 affirmative] to figure it out. [S2 affirmative] And we ended up learning how to feed him through a little, um, syringe at the hospital. I remember Rich was feeding him with a syringe with like a latex glove on. And um, you know, we were putting on gloves to handle him [laughter]. And the nurse was like, "this is your baby, you can touch him. Like, you don't need to wear gloves. We wear gloves, [laughter], he's your baby." And there was a lot of this like,

**00:16:20 Liisa L:**

So sweet when I think about it. We also had a like, um, you know, we'd write down every time he ate, every time he peed and pooped. I, I remember not being able to figure out how much he ate. They're like, how much did he eat? I'm like, I'm breastfeeding. I don't know. You know, like, I don't know.

**00:16:33 S2:**

Right? I can remember that too.

**00:16:34 Liisa L:**

We had a, I don't know, how would I know? They're like, well, did he latch properly? I'm like, I don't know, [laughter]. I don't know. And um, he um, I remember I pumped some colostrum and they put it in formula. And when the lactation fi- consultant finally came, she was like, you are never to mix this with formula. And I was like, okay. She's like, give him all the colostrum [S2 affirmative] Form- like formula, fine, whatever. But we're not gonna mix it with formula and waste, you know, waste it.

**00:17051 Liisa L:**

And I was like, okay. Got it. [S2 affirmative] Um, and she helped a lot. I remember. She was great. She would, she would just get in there. She had like a hand on my boob and she's showing me how like, you know, it was the kind of help I needed. [S2 affirmative] My parents had just flown from Connecticut. And I remember my dad sitting in there and the lactation consultant comes, or maybe even it was just a doctor, I don't know. But I remember my dad could not

handle, um, seeing me breastfeed. He was like almost offended. I remember he was like, “well this is private so we're gonna go.” And I was like, I couldn't even deal with that. I was like, okay, bye! Like I just had a fucking baby. Um, and I remember, um, my dad and Rich went to Target to buy a car seat ‘cause we didn't have a car seat.

**00:17:50 Liisa L:**

We didn't have diapers, we didn't have an outfit for him to come home in. I remember my mom had gone to my house and gotten some of the clothes from my, um, work baby shower, ‘cause I had him before my friend's baby shower. So this was, uh, it was clothes that people from work had given me. And it was like a little, it was a girl outfit, not a boy outfit. And we were being like, well, okay. And, um, there was a lot of just like, um, resources. Like we just had to go get all this stuff. The same time Charlie had, um, he was jaundiced, so he had that little billy blanket with the light. [S2 affirmative] We were there for about three days. I think I was there for four days total. Um [S2 affirmative] and then, um, they had to do a lot of, he was six pounds, 14 ounces, which is not, you know, not, it's a pretty normal birth weight, especially for someone five weeks early. And they did a lot of, um, oh, there was one thing they, when she gave him a bath, this is before we came up to the recovery unit, she gave him a bath. And I remember she, the nurse was giving him a bath and washing his little hair and she bonked his head on the faucet, and she looks over and she goes, “sorry.” And like, keeps washing the [fucking hair] [laughter].

**00:19:12 Liisa L:**

And I remember being like, that it was in every birth plan since then that no one washes the baby. Like, just don't wash the baby, don't wash the baby. You don't need to. I'm OK with you not watching the baby. You,

**00:19:26 S2:**

You definitely don't need to for any reason. For any reason.

**00:19:27 Liisa L:**

definitely, for any reason. And there was so much, I just, um, I remember feeling, even though I wasn't like tragically young or anything, I remember feeling, it took me a while to feel powerful enough during birth. It was probably my third one where I was like able to really kind of be advocate for myself without just feeling terrified, you know? And when I think of people who have one experience, I'm like, how could you, it is almost impossible I think, in my experience for me, to advocate for yourself when you are in so much pain with so much uncertainty and such high stakes.

**00:20:05 Liisa L:**

So I remember that feeling [S2 affirmative] and watching this woman like bonk my baby's head and be like, and me be like, “it's okay!” Like just, you know what I mean? Just like [laughter], like just trying to keep it, keep it nice, you know, the whole time. So [S2 affirmative] I remember doing the car seat test for him. He had, they had to put him in the car seat and monitor his vitals so we could take him home just ‘cause he was early. And um, and then that's it. We were driving home in my Volkswagen Golf, we got home, my mom had made us a quiche. She said, it's probably terrible, just throw it away ‘cause that's what she says about things. And, um, that was

it. Then, then begins the whole next part of the story, which is the first like six weeks of just insane, you know, um, newborn parenting.

**00:20:55 Liisa L:**

But I feel like that's a different, um, different story than the actual birth. I do remember some things, like, I remember having dermaplast spray. It was like burn spray and I would spray it on my, um, my business. And it was the only thing, it was the only thing that gave me any, um, relief. Um, I remember being super horny like immediately, like as soon as we got home. And I was like, there's, we can't do anything about this. But [laughter] I remember the hormones being overwhelming, like just overwhelming and like wild. And, um, in both directions. I remember crying and being like, what have I done to myself? And also being like, oh my God, I made a person, there's so much like love in my world that hasn't, that wasn't there before. Like it just happened. I remember while I was pregnant with Anna, taking Charlie to the Domino Farms petting zoo, and there was a big pregnant like cow.

**00:21:56 Liisa L:**

And I remember being like, look, it's just like mommy. And as I'm looking at this cow, it was laying there. It was like [ugh] it was so tired and hairy. And I was like, oh god. And I remember feeling like, this is as close as I'll get to feeling like a beast. Like a beast of burden, like animal. [yeah] You know what I mean? Like, this is,

**00:22:14 S2:**

That's so interesting.

**00: 22:15 Liisa L:**

Yeah, this is like, this is like life paired down to like, the very most basic thing you need to be able to do is reproduce. You know what I mean? Oh. And as far as pooping goes, I remember being like, Rich, I don't think I pooped. And he's like, [laughter], "sure." And I'm like, wait, what? [laughter]

**00:22:36 S2:**

You didn't. [laughter]

**00: 22:39 Liisa L:**

And he's like, oh girl, you did. [I love it] Like they just kinda picked it up and took it away. And I was like, oh, [laughter].

**00:22:48 S2:**

All right. Well thank you so much.