

00:00:00 Speaker 1:

Okay. So you mentioned that it was an unplanned pregnancy, and I'm just wondering if you can talk a little about how it felt to learn that you were pregnant, like how that felt for you.

00:00:12 Liisa L:

Um, it was really a wild, wild, wild, wild time. I had, um, I remember being like, oh, this is what denial is like. 'Cause I remember being in a restaurant and, um, getting so dizzy all of a sudden and like, ugh. I remember feeling like my body was different. Like I remember feeling, um, you know, like, what is happening to me, you know? Um, and then I, the first pregnancy test I took was, um, negative and I was like, well, of course, 'cause I had just, I think what I had done was switched from like a pill to the NuvaRing or something like that. [S1 affirmative] This was all, um, a little, um, caused by, let's see, um, my doctor told me after, she was like, well, in, in the future if you want to plan, you should only take three days of placebo.

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And I was like, if I want to plan, like, I thought I was planning and, you know, I weighed probably about like 215 pounds and it was, you know, all birth control at that point, and I don't know currently too, had been tested on women weighing like 125. [interesting] So I was like, um, they were like, well, yeah, you know, and I was like, that could have been told to me when I started. I don't know. And then the Nuvaring is not like one that you can miss a dose of, [right, right,] so I don't know if it was the cha- I don't know exact, I, I don't know exactly where the whatever gap in coverage was or if there was one. Like, you know, I don't know. Finding out I was pregnant when I took a pregnancy test again, I remember calling my, um, you know, boyfriend at work at the lab and being like, "Buddy, it's positive. Like it's positive." And I took like three in a row. We went to the Safeway and bought Cool Ranch Doritos and more pregnancy tests [laughter]. And I said, why don't, why don't

00:02:30 S1:

A little testing combo.

00:02:32 Liisa L:

Exactly. I was like, these should be in the same aisle. And I remember, you know, we were, um, not, we were, I was 26, he was 25. No, I was 27 and he was 26. And, um, you know, we had had a conversation early on in our marriage that, not in our marriage, in our relationship, that if there was an accidental pregnancy, we would probably, that we were both comfortable with seeking an abortion. But I remember this so clearly, we were driving back from Safeway to our apartment with the pregnancy tests and the Doritos and the song came on the radio, um, [singing "I won't hesitate, ul-life, it is short]. And I remember being like, I'm gonna have a baby. Like, I remember being like, it's happening. Like, I remember all of a sudden feeling this rush of emotion and like the panic subsided. And I was like, I think I think I'm gonna do this.

00:03:31:

And I remember, um, I didn't tell Rich yet, that I felt that way. I talked to my therapist and I was like, I'm pregnant. And she was like, "yes, you are." Like, she's like, that's what's been bubbling. She was very like, this is San Francisco psychotherapy. It's a whole different ballgame. She's like, I think we've felt this coming. Like, I think this is it. And I was like, I kind of think so too.

And I was like, do I get married? Like, what do I do? And she was like, this is how families have been made forever, and ever. Like it's all, it's all gravy. Like, you know, we were in a very yes-and kind of mode. Um, I remember I told my one friend I was pregnant and she was like, uhhhhh, I think it's congratulations, right? [laughter] And I was like, yeah, I think so.

00:04:27:

And it was, um, exciting. And then I remember I told Rich, I was like, so Bud, I think I'm, I know we have options here, but I'm thinking at some point we went to, 'cause the real, the real zinger was going into, um, an OB appointment with my OB who I didn't know super w-, she was just my OB and back then, I don't know what I, I probably went for like a yearly pap smear and that's fi-, that's it, it's not like I had a relationship with her. [yeah] But we did an ultrasound, and she was like, oh, she said, we're moving right along here. And that I was 12 weeks [S1 affirmative] and I was like, holy shit. We saw a heartbeat that day. Everything. [wow, wow] This is 48 hours after finding out I was pregnant right. And like, I had missed like so much you, like, I had just, I just, I hadn't known. And then there was things like, you know, it had been 12 weeks during which I had been, um, like drinking, [right, right] um, continuing to be on birth control. [right] You know? [right] And I wasn't, you know, we were in li- I was in like wifey phase. Like I, we weren't like partying, but I was having a glass of wine and, um, you know, on hormonal birth control. And I was terrified about that.

00:05:54:

Um, all the OBs I saw were like, you're fine. They're like, it's not a thing. Like, it's just not a thing. [wow] And they were like, the drinking, like, um, even if it is a thing, nothing we can do now. Like, um, and also kind of interesting reassurance, they were like fyi, there wasn't that long ago that we didn't know that alcohol affected a fetus. Like, you know what I mean? [sure] Like, and I remember I had gone off coffee. I remember being like, oh, coffee gives me the, like blah, and I had not had a taste for alcohol either. I was ordering sparkling waters and stuff like that.

00:06:36 S1:

I'm impressed. I feel like your body was really helping you out there.

00:06:40 Liisa L:

No, and I,

00:06:41 S1:

and that specific to like, things you really shouldn't be doing [laughter].

00:06:44 Liisa L:

It was, I remember ordering this club soda and I remember finding out I was pregnant and being like, it's really weird that I was drinking club soda at a bar. Like, not only is that not characteristic of me in my twenties, [laughter] it is, um, you know what I mean? [yeah, yeah] And like not having coffee, you know what I mean? [yeah] Um, this whole time I worked, I was a drama therapist at an inpatient psychiatric unit and, um, there was a lot of like parenting and birth trauma around me all the time. [S1 affirmative] People with terrible PTSD from their childhoods, people who were not organized enough to prevent pregnancy and who were homeless and constantly pregnant and losing these children and like, you know, just a lot of that around me. [S1 affirmative] And I remember being like, whoa. It was a very interesting place to

experience a pregnancy. [S1 affirmative] Um, but I remember telling Rich, um, listen, we had, we knew that we were walking towards getting married. Like when we moved in together, I was like, fyi, this is like, we're talking about this as we're probably gonna get married. Right?

00:08:00:

And he was like, yeah. And I was like, okay. Um, so I, um, went to, I remember telling him that, um, he didn't have to do it with me if he didn't want to, but that I would love to if he wanted in, then I, I was down and I wanted to be, I remember I said engaged by, um, Thanksgiving is what I would like. Like I, I wanna get married and have this baby. [S1 affirmative] And he was like, I remember that he was, he's like, he's like, part of me feels like I can't really say anything else 'cause if this baby is like, you know what I mean? [S1 affirmative] I remember it wasn't easy for him, [S1 affirmative] um, but he's always been one to kind of like, he has a lot of trust in me and he just jumped in, you know.

00:08:59 S1:

Yeah

00:09:00 Liisa L:

And his friends were all like, if anyone was gonna like, have a baby and settle down right now, it would be you. Like you've been like, it would be you. Like makes sense. His, uh, friends threw an awful accident-baby themed baby shower. It was rude and [wow] painful and bad. [wow] It turned out to be like my only baby shower. Well I had one at work too, but you know, Charlie came before my, my friend's baby shower. [S1 affirmative] which would not have been so

00:09:30 S1:

Literally themed.

00:09:31 Liisa L:

literally rude and like yeah, um, and so yeah finding out I was pregnant and just being like, oh my god. And then it jumped pretty quick into like, I remember telling my parents and my mom who, you know, my parents are very conservative and I was worried [S1 affirmative] they, I remember being a kid and them telling me having a baby without being married would be so sad. Like, it would be so sad. [wow] And I remem- I was like, you know, since then they're like, why didn't you tell us right away? 'Cause I waited like another two weeks or something to tell them. And I was like, why do you think? like, oh God. But, um, my mom was, it was the first grandchild on both sides. Everyone was extremely excited and happy. Um, I think when Charlie was born is when my parents met my in-laws. They went to like a pirate night at a bar accidentally and had pirate night [laughter] and um, you know, everyone was down. They did want us to get married before the baby came out, but I didn't want to do that, so we did not.

00:10:51 S1:

So help me with the timeline a little. So you, because I don't know when Charlie was born [ok] so you would've found out when?

00:10:59 Liisa L:

Um,

00:11:01 S1:

Like just a general sense of time of year.

00:11:03 Liisa L:

So Charlie's born February, he was due March 26th. So, I must have found out in the f-, late summer.

00:11:18 S1:

So I'm just thinking about that, that idea that you'd be engaged by Thanksgiving. Was that a month away? Was that, you know, I guess, I guess it's less about the time and more like, was it an a thing that you needed in place? Like did you feel like you needed it in place to move forward, you know, feeling confident you were getting married? Or was it like, look, we have some time to figure this out, I need to know by this time kind of thing,

00:11:44 Liisa L:

I think I wanted to be engaged before we went to family gatherings.

00:11:49 S1:

Oh, okay.

00:11:50 Liisa L:

Um, I think we both wanted to be married if we were gonna like make a life.

00:12:03 S1:

[S1 affirmative]

00:12:05 Liisa L:

Um. God, it's really funny. I don't, I remember when Rich told his like extended family, he was like, this is what's going on. They all email. It's really bizarre. But this was an email to like the family list. [oh wow] And um, he's like, Liisa says there's gotta be a ring on it by Thanksgiving. So like, you know, here we go. And everyone was like, does that mean married or engaged or what? And da da da. And um, and I know I said by Thanksgiving, but I honestly can't tell you why. 'Cause I was, I was pretty pregnant by then. Um, and I held tight. I don't know if like, I didn't know that until like third baby. I was like just fucking pregnant every place. [laughter], but [laughter].

00:12:56 S1:

Well, each one gets a little bit

00:12:58 Liisa L:

gets a little bit,

00:12:58 S1:

It's a little harder to hold of it. Yeah.

00:13:01 Liisa L:

But first baby at like 26, like, oh my God, it was like bing, like [yeah] you know? [yeah] Like wild. So yeah, it, I think it was about heading into holidays and knowing we were gonna see our whole family and me wanting to present a, um, united front. It's kind of interesting. So, because of the way everything happened, a couple things happened that might not have happened otherwise. I don't think we would've gotten married that quickly. I don't think that I would've changed my last name, which I did. But it felt very important to me. I remember being like, oh, I get it. Like, this baby is so obviously mine. [S1 affirmative] And we give our babies the men's names so that they can claim them too. Like, I remember being like,

00:13:50 S1:

Oh, interesting.

00:13:52 Liisa L:

Do you know what I mean? [yeah] I was like, I felt very strongly that I wanted to have this man's name on this baby 'cause I needed him to feel a claim the way I felt.

00:14:04 S1:

Interesting. So for you it was a sh- sort of a sharing of parenting towards Rich.

00:14:13 Liisa L:

Yeah.

00:14:13 S1:

By sharing that name.

00:14:14 Liisa L:

Well, you know, we weren't married. My name was Liisa Britt, and when he came out and he hadn't been named yet, it was Baby Boy Britt. And I was like, that's not his name. I remember being like, this is baby boy Lusk. And they were like, [interesting] we'll get to that but right now it's baby boy Britt. And I remember feeling like, um, like I later also, I didn't wanna be the only one without the family name too, you know what I mean? [S1 affirmative] But he could have stayed baby boy Britt. Like he could have,

00:14:42 S1:

Yeah, he could.

00:14:43 Liisa L:

We both could have, [yeah] like it's, I always think it's interesting that babies of course have the husband and I, I I get it. I I feel like I got it. I was like, we all have to have the same name, or at least you two do because everyone can see that you came out of me like [S1 affirmative] you're still part of my body. [S1 affirmative] There's no denying me, but you have to get claimed by this, it was, I remember being like, wow. There is generosity there and wanting to bring him in. But I think there was also like, what happens to me if I shut him out or something. Like there was, 'cause it cemented our partnership, you know what I mean? [S1 affirmative] I was like, we're putting your, like, there was love there. And I remember feeling like this was, or I think I said before, it was romantic.

00:15:39:

Rich, like I wanted to be together and all three of us to be together. But there was a-, I sometimes think I'm like, was there fear there too? [S1 affirmative] That if I don't write this, if I write down baby boy Britt, what does that mean about me? [S1 affirmative] Am I all of a sudden an unwed mother with, you know what I mean? [S1 affirmative] Like, I had my own messages around what that is and blah, blah, blah. [S1 affirmative] So I think there's both. Um, but it's, it is interesting to like, you know, the Lusks have this like family heritage that's so different from mine. And, you know, my children are like Lusk children, you know what I mean? [S1 affirmative] kind of wild.

00:16:24 S1:

Interesting. So you've mentioned a couple of times about the, the marriage piece as makes sense [yeah]. How big do you think that was for you at the time?

00:16:34 Liisa L:

Uh, not very.

00:16:34 S1:

That you were unmarried when you had your baby.

00:16:36 Liisa L:

I remember, um, I did not want to get married super pregnant. I didn't want it to be like, I'm getting married because I'm pregnant. [S1 affirmative] And I wanted it to be, I wanted our choice to have a baby and parent this baby together to be different than our choice to get married. [S1 affirmative] And, um, and it was. I also wanted to get, I mean, we had a couple logistical, I needed insurance, we needed, you know what I mean? Like [yeah] there was a couple logistical things going on there and um, I was big into like, I wanted the ritual of commitment to each other. [S1 affirmative] And so that was big to me in terms of like relationally with Rich. And I think it was to him too. We both, um, have parents with like 50 year marriages now, you know what I mean? [S1 affirmative] Like, we kinda come from it. And so it felt natural.

00:17:40:

Um, both of our parents wanted us to get married very fast. They wanted us to get married like now and then throw a party later. And I was like, mm-mm (negative). [S1 affirmative] I wanted like an honest ritual and gathering and celebration and blahdy, blahdy, blah. But I also remember

being like, we're having a baby. That in itself is a commitment to be together in some capacity forever. [S1 affirmative] Like I remember the wedding paled in comparison and it's not like I was like daily planning a wedding. I was breastfeeding at my dress fitting, you know what I mean? Like [yeah] like, and my dress came from like, Nordstrom. It was like \$200, like it, you know what I mean? Like, we had a cheap wedding, perfect wedding, perfect wedding, but it was like a in, a garden around the corner from our apartment.

00:18:33:

And um, it was one of the most relaxed weddings I've ever been to in my entire life.

00:18:40 S1:

Nice.

00:18:42 LiisaL:

And I remember it was that way because I felt like we had already, I was kinda like, we've already done it people. This part is important too to me, and it's important to mark, that's what it was about, it was about marking it, you know? And like, but it's not, um, I feel like I got saved from whatever, 26-year-old wedding kind of, you know what I mean?

00:19:07 S1:

Kind of bridezilla nightmare.

00:19:09 Liisa L:

Not that, I mean, I dunno, I feel

00:19:10 S1:

I can't imagine you going that way.

00:19:12 Liisa L:

Neither can I. And the thing is, my sister kind of did not really, not like in a, you know, but she waited a long time to get married and she really wanted to be married. And I just remember her wedding was like, well, we have to have the first dance. We have to have this, this, like, everything she'd been like wanting to have. And mine was like, I remember we didn't pick a song to dance to the first time we had hired a band off of Craigslist and they started doing a cover of Ripple by the Grateful Dead. And we started dancing and that was our first dance. And now it's like our song, even though it's like, what? Like, you know what I mean?

00:19:47 S1:

That is not what I would've imagined for you.

00:19:49 Liisa L:

No. Can you believe it? That our first song is Grateful Dead. [no] And um, I remember his like deadhead great aunt was like, [laughter] and um, that was our song, which is just so funny, right? Like the whole thing was so sweet and tender and like, I remember really giving it up and being like, yep. Like we're doing a, we're having a wedding. My mother-in-law made my cake. She's English. It was a fruit cake. It was terrible. It was terr-i-ble. But it was all part of the like, you know what I mean? Like, it was a homegrown garden wedding. It was...

00:20:27

at the same time that Charlie was born, my, Rich's cousin and her husband, who we we're pretty close to were going through simultaneous fertility treatments and adoption process. And they had found out that they had been, um, they had found out that they had been on a short list as potential parents for a mom, a, pregnant teenager. Um, they ended up getting a call in the middle of the night being like, the baby's here, it's in the NICU, they picked you, are you in? And they said, yes. [wow]. So we have these, and they brought her, her birthday is May 1st. So Charlie's February 26th. February 24th. And this baby's May 1st. And they were both there at this wedding and it was like these two surprise babies, you know? [yes, yes] Babies outta nowhere, [laughter] just falling in your lap. [ta-da] And I remember one of my col- one of my, at my practicums, someone was like, babies come when babies come. And I'm like, yep. I guess they do.

00:21:35 S1:

So true. [um] So how old was Charlie when you guys got married?

00:21:37 Liisa L:

He was six months old. So we got married August 28th. I remember my, I think my mom like walked him down the, um, we didn't really have an aisle. We kind of entered from these two different, like, paths through the garden or whatever. And my mom and my mother-in-law kind of carried Charlie. And, um, then Rich has one brother, I have one sister. They kind of were our, like whatever, stood with us. And then, um, Rich and I walked in ourselves and we had this very bonkers California officiant.

00:22:14 S1:

So can we talk a little about how it felt to be pregnant in this environment that you've described at your work, right? Where you're surrounded by different experiences with that right. Different approaches to it, different conceptions of it. Um, how did that feel for you?

00:22:34 Liisa L:

I mean, the nature of this population was that some people were very, very focused on my pregnancy either, [S1 affirmative] um, wanting, um, just to talk about it and be close to me, um, someone I remember wanted to take my baby. They were like, I think I should take your baby. Like, it was like, they were like, I feel called, you know, little scary, but also [S1 affirmative] I didn't feel, the only couple times I felt unsafe is when I had to do like, um, there was a couple times I had to do confrontation. Someone had stolen scissors from the art room or something and I had to go find them. And I remember being like, can you come with me? You know,

00:23:18 S1:

Because I have this

00:22:19 Liisa L:

because I'm pregnant

00:23:20 S1:

and they have scissors, [laughter].

00:23:21 Liisa L:

It's also, I remember at work I, um, there was a huge Nigerian population of mental health workers and nurses [S1 affirmative] um, at this hospital, like really quite large. And boy did they love a baby coming. Like, I felt like there was just a, you know, 'cause there was, I had interesting, there was shame around pregnancy, both not knowing I was pregnant, both feeling like, um, feeling like knocked up [S1 affirmative] you know what I mean? [S1 affirmative] Like, and I remember feeling like, whoa, my body, it felt like the changes happened so fast [S1 affirmative], so fast. But I also remember there was very much like at work, a culture of like, "yay!" And people would bring me plates of food and um, like I just got a lot of like, you know, the staff at work was super just supportive and amazing. And then there were also clients, I remember this one guy was very focused on celibacy as like a, um, part of his meditation practice, and he was just a very, he was like talking about how celibacy is just so important. And I remember I was like out to here and I was like, what's, um, what's it like to you to talk like that? To, to tell this to a pregnant person? [S1 affirmative] And he's like, he like, just not [laughter]

00:24:42 S1:

Not even registered.

00:24:44 Liisa L:

He was very sweet actually. He told me, he was like, I just really hope, later he when I was leaving for my maternity leave, he was like, I hope that you bring an enlightened soul onto this planet, and like, you know, so sweet. [yeah] We named a cat after him. I can't tell you, I can't tell you which one I think 'cause of HIPAA. But, um, then I also remember, um, I mean there was a lot around taking maternity leave, especially since some of the folks here were there before I left and there when I got back [S1 affirmative] like, I was gone for six months and, um, they were still institutionalized. There was a lot of, you know, I was working in therapeutic relationships with people [S1 affirmative] it was complicated coming back. [sure] I remember the first day I got back, I had to hand someone their notice. It was a black and white emailed picture of their child and their parental rights had been terminated. And I had to hand it to her like [wow], just wild. You know what I mean?

00:25:39 S1:

Yeah. So how did that feel for you? I mean, you were a new mom. [yep] You know, that's a, a precarious time in, in all circumstances. [yeah] Of feeling confident, feeling capable, feeling rested.

00:25:54 Liisa L:

I was also in a pretty serious place, especially going back to work with, um, postpartum depression, possibly uncovering like kind of a chronic low-grade depression for most of my adult life that kind of exploded onto the scene. [ok] In particular with the breach of going back to work. [S1 affirmative] I remember going back to work hurt me a lot. I didn't wanna do it. [S1 affirmative]

00:26:16 S1:

And do you think that was around leaving baby or do you think that was around returning to that particular environment or a combination of both?

00:26:23 Liisa L:

Um, I mean that environment was awful and it was trenches, mental health care. [S1 affirmative] Nothing was ever, um, you know, nothing we could was good enough. You know, like it was, it was a rough job. [S1 affirmative] Even though I had colleagues I enjoyed and you know what I mean? Like, we had fun sometimes and I was lucky that I got to be the fun person there [S1 affirmative] like at least I didn't have to, whatever, but it was a lot of crisis and a lot of hardship and, you know, trenches work and I remember, I mean, I'll never have a job like that again, ever period. [S1 affirmative] So it was partly that the job itself, absent of anything, going back to it after these like long sweet afternoons with my baby and I also, I remember pumping being really distressing.

00:27:23:

I would watch videos of Charlie to get my boobs going and [S1 affirmative] pumping at work and I would be in my, off- my boss's office. And I remember it feeling, um, oh God, I remember it being very depressing. I felt very isolated and [S1 affirmative] um, I didn't like it. Um, I forgot to mention everyone's favorite part of me being pregnant at work was I was in charge of the, um, the sex packets. So clients were there for a long time and they were allowed to have sex, but they had to, I mean, allowed to have se- you know what I mean? Like, we asked that they would undergo a sex assessment so they could be assessed for ability to consent [S1 affirmative] and to make safe choices and stuff like that. [S1 affirmative] Part of this, this is like a mental health rehabilitation, like [S1 affirmative] you know, and my job was to make and pass around the safe sex packets, which had like condoms, dental dams, instructions, fact sheet, whatever [S1 affirmative] and I, I remember walking around with this big box of them and like this huge pregnant belly. [laughter] Oh God. [laughter] The joke of the department was like, oh, safe sex time.

00:28:50:

Have you considered safe sex? Yeah. It was just very, very good. [yeah] Um, I remember about going back to, because the other thing that happened is my mom and dad moved to California from Connecticut. They had just retired. They rented an apartment around the corner from ours and they stayed with Charlie while I went back to work.

00:29:13 S1:

Oh wow, okay.

00:29:14 Liisa L:

Yeah. My and which was kind of wild and amazing and generous of them too. Um,

00:29:21 S1:

And that was something that felt supportive to you?

00:29:24 Liisa L:

Yep, absolutely. [S1 affirmative] And it was actually a really nice time. You know, I moved away, I moved to the west coast fast after college, you know what I mean? [S1 affirmative] And so it was really nice to have my parents get to know me and Rich. To get to know, we lived in Oakland, California. Like my parents moved to like barely gentrified, hipster paradise, you know what I mean? [laughter]. And it's so funny. I, it's, I feel really lucky that we had that time together. I don't remember anything about them telling me they were gonna do that. I do remember feeling intense relief. I did not, like we looked at daycares and I was upset about daycares. I didn't like it. [S1 affirmative] Um, it's not something I like, that's like a private thing, right. Cause I don't wanna, like, people depend on daycare and I don't wanna do anything to fuck with that. But I remember touring them and being like, I can't, like I can't do this. And having my mom come meant I didn't have to, we also saved so much money, like it, you know what I mean? Like, it just helped us out a lot. And then when they moved, they moved when Rich finished his PhD and then we moved to Ann Arbor when Charlie was about one.

00:30:50 S1:

And where did your parents go then? They stayed there?

00:30:53 Liisa L:

They retired to, no, they retired. They live in North Carolina. So they bought a house in North Carolina.

00:30:58 S1:

Just a whole new place.

00:30:59 Liisa L:

A whole new place. Well, my dad's sister lives there and other family lives there. And basically my dad was like, I'm done with snow. I'm never doing snow again.

00:31:08 S1:

So, so how did you, what kind of support did you have then in addition to your parents for that, that postpartum period and any sort of depression you would've been experiencing? I mean, it sounds like you were very aware of mental health issues, very self-aware of where you were at. I expect that you, I mean, I presume you would be pretty proactive about finding some support.

00:31:29 Liisa L:

Yeah, I, uh, I remember calling, um, my doctor and they said, okay, what you're gonna do is call psych emergency. And I wasn't suicidal. I wasn't, I was incredibly anxious. I couldn't sleep. I couldn't stop, I couldn't turn my brain off. And I was just, all the time I couldn't stop. And, um, I, um, I remember, I don't, I, I remember I called a psych emergency kind of hotline, but I don't think I went to like a psych emergency room. I think what they did was made me a next day appointment with a psychiatrist [S1 affirmative]. And, um, and I still had my longtime therapist. I, I, you know, part of therapy school is going to a therapist. We, we were probably together for,

um, three or four years, so I still had her [S1 affirmative] and, and then I started on, um, some kind of antidepressant right then.

00:32:33:

And that helped a great deal. Um, so did just kind of the explosion of like, I remember being like, oh my God, like this is actually not just normal. Like this is not okay. [S1 affirmative] And kind of owning that, and actually like blah, like, like, you know, getting it out. That, that helped a lot and knowing that I was like taking steps helped, um, yeah. It was hard times man. [S1 affirmative] Like there was a whole baby there when, a year before there, like, you know what I mean? [yeah] Like, I remember my, my lesbian friend who had a baby at the same time, and you know, you don't have accidental babies as a lesbian. That's just not a thing that happens. And like, I cannot wrap my mind around having a baby by accident. They had all these plans for like, you know, her wife was Jewish and she was like, neopagan, so they had this plan for the spiritual development of their child, whereas I was flying by the seat of my pants the whole time. Right. You know what I mean? It was

00:33:37 S1:

Right. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. Did you, um, I know we're focused on Charlie's birth, but did you have postpartum as well with, in subsequent deliveries?

00:33:47 Liisa L:

I actually, I to this day am on that same antidepressant. Um, and while there were definitely hormonal dips, there was never an emergency again. And I stayed on it for my pregnancies. Like I didn't, um, now I remember with Charlie going to a perinatal depression support group while I was still pregnant. I can't remember how that came about. But I did go and I remember being like, someone had a little tiny baby and I remember being like, can I hold your baby? And I had been just so scared that I would just bust up a newborn that I would break it, right? [S1 affirmative] You know what I mean? [S1 affirmative] It just felt too scary. And I remember holding her baby and being like, oh, it's just a baby. Like, it's just a baby, my body knows what to do. You know what I mean? [laughter] I was like, I can hold a baby. Like, I needed like a little like cognitive. I also remember looking around in that group and being like, it's possible that these women are much more depressed or impacted than I am. [S1 affirmative] I was like, I think what I am is extraordinarily nervous and scared and, you know, then that was, it felt different than the postpartum depression.

00:35:05 S1:

Sure. I mean, that's such a hard piece to tease out, especially with first babies, especially with unexpected or unplanned first babies, is there's a, there's a healthy rational amount of anxiety about that, you know what I mean? Like, and so I think especially these days and, and obviously Charlie's, you know, not a newborn anymore, [yeah] but, but these days especially there is, um, like this need to sort of name so many things that we get to like over, almost over naming what are really rational responses [yes] to really disruptive events in our lives [yes] And disruption can be a positive thing, but it's still disruptive.

00:35:43 Liisa L:

It's still disruptive and it still requires, you know, those shifts are not painless.

00:35:53 S1:

Right.

00:35:53 Liisa L:

You know, and just 'cause it's not painless doesn't mean it is pathology like.

00:36:00 S1:

Right. Very good point.

00:36:01 Liisa L:

That's, uh, that, you know, this is what we're working on with the way my kids fight is like, just 'cause you're upset doesn't mean someone wronged you. Um, so I don't remember. And I also remember, um, feeling really with my subsequent babies feeling very released from the fear. Each one there was just so much less fear. Um, I remember feeling more and more confident. I remember feeling, um, and then, you know what I was thinking about after we talked, I was like, I can't believe I picked Charlie's birth. And I, I really, 'cause Anna's birth was, um, like magic perfect tub. I caught her myself. Like it was really incredible. It was [S1 affirmative] peak moment of my life. And I remember feeling so, um, the bliss of that carried through into her, um, newborn stage. Like I felt very like connected,

00:37:06 S1:

[S1 affirmative]

00:37:08 Liisa L:

present. Whereas, um, Charlie's birth wasn't traumatic, but it was different. It was hard and it was filled with, there were negative parts of the experience, [S1 affirmative] like rude doctors and the roommate and whatever. So I remember being like, oh, a good birth. You know, like something to be said for protecting birth.

00:37:29 S1:

Okay. So I am really, I love that you used the word romantic about Rich's support during the labor. [yeah] And I wonder if you can help me, tell me a little more about that. Because romantic is a very specific word. It's a very intimate, interpersonal word that has, um, it's not generalizable. Right. You like, yeah. Your parents aren't romantic towards you, right? [Liisa L negative] So I'm wondering if you can tell me, and if, if it's just what came out and that's what came out, it's fine.

00:38:00 Liisa L:

No, I've used that word specifically many times to talk about this sometimes to like first time pregnant people. And I also remember telling my doctor that like, it is something kind of defining and you know, part of it was that we didn't, I'm gonna cry, we didn't know each other very well. Like, it was the first adversity that we faced. The first like, scary thing that we faced together. And I remember we had hired this, um, student doula and I felt, I remember thinking, well, I need to make someone's there who can help me, [S1 affirmative] because Rich, you

know, he's [unknown] and like, is he gonna be able to really hang? [S1 affirmative] And I remember, um, a couple things. I remember being really giddy with him in this period after my water broke, before labor started, where I was just, we were just kind of giddy.

00:39:00:

Like, we just felt a little punch drunk and it was so exciting, you know? [S1 affirmative] Um, and we were like playing around and having fun. And then I remember when, you know, the shit was really in the fan. Like he was just right there the whole time. And I remember feeling, um, heard and seen. I remember saying, I need this. I remember specifically it was, I needed pushing on my thigh muscles. And he's like, yep. Like no questions. No- we had gone to this birth class where the dad in the video kept saying, "good girl!" to his birthing partner and [laughter], it was so gross. And I remember being like, oh my God, if you ever, and I remember he was like, should I call you a bad girl while you're Oh, like,

00:39:47 S1:

You shouldn't call me a girl while I'm having a child.

00:39:49 Liisa L:

Don't call me a girl while I'm pushing out a baby. And I just remember part of me had been really scared that he was gonna do something, um, cringy awful, that it would feel ruined. That, you know what I mean? Like, these were my concerns. [yeah] Or that I would feel dropped, like that I would feel on my own. [S1 affirmative] And I just, I just really didn't. Um, and that felt, it felt romantic to me. It felt, um, when it was over I remember feeling like we did this to like, we didn't do all of it together, but I remember being like, you, you were there the whole time, like the whole time you didn't eat for as long as I didn't eat like you saw- scared. Like, you know? Since then I've had two, um, well, two more babies and also two back surgeries. And for most of those I'm on another planet. Either for the back surgeries I was on literal like morphine and like, like crazy drugs. And for the babies I'm just on another planet. And sometimes I think to myself, like he really saw, he saw my body, he saw the actual like process that was happening. I never saw the needle for the epidural, but he did. He saw it go in. [S1 affirmative] Like, he kind of like sat in the reality while I was in like whatever part, whatever process I was in.

00:41:34:

And that felt, sometimes I remember that and I'm like, you know, when shit got hard he stayed there. And maybe that's a low bar for romance, but it, um, I remember feeling like, who needs a wedding? Like, that's romantic. Like being in, in fit together like that. [S1 affirmative] This is good for me to talk about 'cause we just had a little fight about something and I'm like, oh my buddy, like [laughter]. And I remember it also being pretty sweet 'cause when Anna was born, I remember Rich went right to the same thing, I remember he tried to push on my thighs and I was like, [different kid] I was like, I'm glad you remembered, but that's not what's happening this time. You know what I mean? Like, I remember, um, that I remember, um, in the, when Charlie was born on the whiteboard, it said, um, there was a place on the whiteboard, it said Mom and Dad, you know [S1 affirmative] and I was like, okay, well my mom is Lana Britt, uh, I remember being like, they need my parents' information? That's so weird [so weird]. But ok. And I was like, it's me, like I'm the mom. I remember being like, wow, that's intense.

00:42:48:

Yeah. No, Rich was, um, a pretty rad birth partner. In fact, we didn't, with my other two babies, we were working with the midwives, which maybe if we had been working with him more classic OB, we would've had a doula. But we actually didn't hire another doula. [S1 affirmative] I felt like, um, she was great. And I remember her being there. She was a picture of like being present. I remember that she was really holding a lot of the like, awe, you know what I mean? [S1 affirmative] She was holding a lot of the like, stillness. And so I remember being super grateful for that. Charlie's birth in particular was so, so, so, so, so medicalized. Like there was so much monitoring and like I wasn't allowed to get up. I, and I had this epidural, like it was just the most medical of births and I felt like having a doula there made room. And, and she later told me that, um, she felt guilt about not trying to change my mind more about the epidural.

00:43:48 S1:

[S1 affirmative]

00:43:50 Liisa L:

And I mean, I probably opened this process by being like, what surprised you? Is there anything you think about still, you know, again, therapy school, recent graduate [laughter]. Um, and I remember being like, oh, I absolve you of that. Like, I was suffering, like the epidural, like the way that birth went, I couldn't have done it anymore. Like I couldn't have [S1 affirmative] And, um, when Anna was born without an epidural, I remember being like, that was so fucking amazing. [S1 affirmative] And I had a moment of like, should I, did I want that with Charlie? And I was like, no, it was already not there with Charlie. [S1 affirmative] Like, Charlie's wouldn't have been that way 'cause I was so like bedrugged, you know what I mean? So [S1 affirmative]

00:44:41 S1:

[S1 affirmative]

00:44:43 Liisa L:

Um, I remember being like, I remember thinking she was, she was a student. We were finishing out her certification or something like that [S1 affirmative], we were part of her student clients. And I remember being like, I remember telling her, nope, I don't regret any of my choices and I don't regret, I do remember one, one part she said, I said something like, okay guys, tell me the reasons not to get an epidural. Like, tell me, to Rich this doula [S1 affirmative], and she said something like, "well, it is safer for the baby," or something like that. And I remember being like, oh, I don't care about the baby [laughter] [laughter]. And um, she was a little bit like, [ert] like you could tell that that was not something she expected me to say. And I was a little bit like Liisa, that wasn't [laughter]. Like, that wasn't nice, but I didn't, you know what I mean? I needed to like,

00:45:38 S1:

No, birth is full of honest moments. Like that is an honest moment.

00:45:43 Liisa L:

Yes. And it was true. It was hard to care about anything other than, you know, pain is panicky. Like it was,

00:45:50 S1:

Of course, our bodies are designed for that.

00:45:53 Liisa L:

Yes. That's on purpose. Yes. So, [yeah] yeah.

00:45:58 S1:

Okay. The last thing that I was hoping we could just revisit a little is, you mentioned in the first interview that you think it took till your third birth to really be an advocate for yourself. And I'm, I'm wondering if we can think a little about like, like why that happened or like what, like, are there things that happened that pushed you that way? Were there things that you just got more comfortable with? Or also like what did it change once you became the advocate? You know, like how did it change the experience for you?

00:46:27 Liisa L:

So I think part of it is that I just, you know, my data set grew and I learned more what I needed. Like I remember with Anna, I remember being really with Charlie, they were doing these cervical checks all the time. And it was always disappointing because I was never as far as long as I wanted to be, it was like such a blow each time. [S1 affirmative] And with Anna, I was like, no cervical checks unless there's an emergency. Like [S1 affirmative], period, the end. And then with Anna, of course I had no idea baby was about to come out until I was literally pushing, you know what I mean? [S1 affirmative] And I was like, okay, so what I actually want is limited, you know what I mean?

00:47:10 S1:

Overcorrection. [laughter]

00:47:11 Liisa L:

Literally like, rrrerr-rrr, like I want to be able to request a cervical check. I want a doctor to be able to say I'd like to do a cervical check 'cause I think you might be, um, about to transition or whatever. You know what I mean? Like

00:47:26 S1:

Right, right. Give you some context for it.

00:47:28 Liisa L:

Yeah. Not just the every hour on the hour, what's going on up there kind of thing. [S1 affirmative] Um, I also felt like as a first time mom, I felt like the people around me had a very, and this was also, you know, this was that doctor who was like, well you're never gonna start labor that way. Like, I felt like everyone was like, well, look at you, you little young thing. Like I

felt there was a very paternalistic, um, “these poor women just dunno how to do this without our help” kind of vibe.

00:48:01:

[S1 affirmative] It was just a very old-fashioned model [S1 affirmative] of a hospital. Um, with moving to the midwives and just like a different model of care, I remember being like, you know, I get very annoyed by the whole why make a birth plan? Like, you can't control what's gonna happen. And it's like I can state my preferences [yeah] And I can ask people, um, not to, um, you know, I didn't want to be offered an epidural, you know what I mean? [S1 affirmative] I actually asked them to refuse me one, but they're like, we can't do that. [laughter]. I was like, argh

00:48:40 S1:

No, they can't, they can't do that. [laughter].

00:48:43 Liisa L:

Um, and it, but it just felt like I, um, learned more each time. And like with Anna, I remember learning that it was important to me that telling me the pain was almost over, could help me make it through [S1 affirmative]

00:48:58:

and that's what the cervical checks getting a, you're at nine centimeters was like, okay, I can do this. [S1 affirmative] And with George, I remember being like, Rich knew to say it's almost over. [S1 affirmative] It's so close. You're almost done. Even if it wasn't true, it turned out to be true. But like, that was the message I needed to hear. [S1 affirmative] Not, you can do this or breathe through it or whatever. It, it's almost over. [S1 affirmative] It'll end. You know, and I, I, I learned, I learned that that was, I knew that for George. If I was gonna have a fourth baby, I would know a couple other things. One that I can't not ask for an epidural when I'm in pain [S1 affirmative], so, but I also know that recovering from an epidural was pretty brutal, was the hardest part.

00:49:47:

I had such an easier recovery with George and Anna and I also, the, the thrill of, there's a, there's like a, the, there's a very, I found it very thrilling to feel everything. And I would want, if I was gonna have another baby, which I'm not, I would want that again. And I would not wanna accidentally request an epidural and get it and miss it. So I think the next birth would be at home. I think there would be, um, a tub somewhere. Like, I think it would be that, or some kind of whatever, Amish birthing center. I don't know. Like I would wanna go someplace. Where, do I have proximity to emergency care? Yes. But there is not, um, a pager connected to an epidural. So, and it's just kind of like learning more about it each time. And also, there's a certain, um, with each baby, I don't know if this is true or not about labor and delivery nurses, but I felt like as a second time mom, and certainly as a third time mom, I had some cred [S1 affirmative]

00:50:51:

And, um, they knew that I knew what I was talking about. If I said, don't wash the baby, I didn't get any, like, well, you know, he's gonna be really sticky. No. With Anna, I remember they left her naked on me. She was pooping all over me and I was like, I'm good [laughter]. And they were like, she's good. Like, they didn't try to talk me outta anything. [S1 affirmative] I don't

know how much of that was a cultural thing, um, between, uh, midwife care and OB care or if it was a Michigan, it doesn't seem right that California would be less progressive on that, but it felt like there was a certain, it's not her first rodeo. Um, I also felt a little more, um, educated and also, I mean, my second baby was planned from the get go [S1 affirmative] right? [S1 affirmative] Like I had time to consider and think. And, um, you know,

00:51:48 S1:

And I think too, sometimes what happens in that circumstance is like, you know, when you, when you're pla- when babies are pregnancies are planned, you're kind of like, you're, there's a sense of being in charge of it. I mean, you're definitely not, but there's a sense of it, right? [yeah] When you have an unexpected pregnancy, it's like you're always catching up to something your body like went on and did without you [yeah] and that you're like catching up to it. And I think that that can overflow into birth as well of like almost putting yourself in the backseat to your bo- your own body. Like, whoa

00:52:20 Liisa L:

That's how- and like, it was also the way I woke up to my water breaking and I didn't understand that that meant the baby was gonna come out like [S1 affirmative], I truly felt like I was playing catch up the whole time. And Anna's labor, Anna's water didn't break until I was fully in labor. And I, it was like a slow, it's a good story if you need more stories. This Charlie birth was chaotic the whole time.

00:52:47 S1:

And I think that's what interested me about you mentioning that you became more of an advocate because there's this piece of becoming more comfortable yourself, feeling more knowledgeable, yourself, feeling more capable yourself. And then there's this piece of like, how does that self interact in the birth setting? Right? [yeah] Do how much of my, how much of my comfort can I just feel inside? And how much of it do I need to display or perform [yeah] in a way that makes other people like you say, take me more seriously or give me more information, or present me with more options. Um,

00:53:21 Liisa L:

Or let me do what I, like George was born, um, and he, um, had a little trouble breathing. Right? He went to the Nest, not the NICU, but the Nest. [S1 affirmative] And um, I remember I got down there, I 'cause I, they always think I'm hemorrhaging and I'm always not. That's another, you just learn, you know what I mean? They're like, oh, I think we might have to do whatever the medicine that goes up your ass. I don't remember what it is, but I was like, I was like, just gimme 10 minutes. Okay. Like it'll stop. It all comes out and then it stops. Like, just gimme a second. You know? [S1 affirmative] And they're like, okay. And it, it was fine. And then when I got down to George, they're like, oh, um, you should feed him. Let me get you a consultant and a, and a pillow.

00:54:01:

And by the time she's done talking he's latched cause [S1 affirmative] and also then his breathing, you know, he regulated [S1 affirmative] right then [S1 affirmative], I don't blame anybody, but I'm kind of like, maybe they should have tried that first in the room before [S1

affirmative], you know what I mean? [S1 affirmative] I remember the difference between being a first time breast feeder and like an old freaking pro. Like, I remember being like, I got this, you know, [laughter]. [yeah] Um, and I remember, um, I knew, um, little things. I knew what to have in my bag. I knew, um, what I would want after, you know. I knew, um, everyone always tried to give me, um, like, you know, custom made like gowns, you know, people sell on Etsy, like [S1 affirmative] delivery gowns or whatever. And I was like, Nope, I be nakes. Like, I'm not interested in that [laughter], like just knowing a little bit more [S1 affirmative] and just honestly knowing what was gonna happen.

00:55:09 S1:

So. So tell me how much you knew about birth for your first birth. I mean, how much did you know about the stages of labor or what to look for or what the process that was going to happen?

00:55:20 Liisa L:

So like, we took a class [S1 affirmative] and we had, um, we had the, Our bodies Ourselves Pregnancy and Childbirth, which I still probably have somewhere. [S1 affirmative] Um, we had, um, stuff like that. I don't think though that I, I it's not like I could tell you right now what the stages of labor are. Yeah. I mean from books [S1 affirmative] but I had never seen a birth. [S1 affirmative] My mother never really talked about childbirth.

00:55:56 S1:

No. She never talked about your birth.

00:55:58 Liisa L:

Nope. No. Um, well she would say a couple things like, um, both her and my mother-in-law were like, you need the drugs. Like the drugs make it possible for you to enjoy the birth. Um, and I know they both had a lot of like, panic about pain. [S1 affirmative] Um, and my mother-in-law was like, none of that stuff works. Like, Lamaze doesn't work, none of it works. You need the drugs. But that was stuff they were telling me while I was pregnant. I don't think that as a young adult or as a child, I ever saw any depiction of birth that wasn't like, um, in a movie, like water breaking, rushed to the hospital, Father of the Bride type stuff. [S1 affirmative] Um, like Knocked Up is probably like the most, um, like I just didn't have any, I was the first of my friends to have a baby, the first in my family generation to have a baby. And, um, birthing was also like private in my family, [S1 affirmative] like, it wasn't something that was, um, uh, like conversational, [S1 affirmative] I guess [S1 affirmative]. So no, I don't feel like, like there were things I didn't know. I must have known it. Um, I knew that I was gonna deliver a placenta.

00:57:31:

I did not know that it would feel like a little mini birth. [S1 affirmative] I knew that my, I knew it would hurt. I didn't know how it would hurt. Like there's just some stuff you can't know about it without doing it. So I guess that's kind of the, like, the knowledge I feel like I gain-. There was a lot of silly stuff with Charlie. Like, we wrote down every poop, every feed. We wrote them down for months and months. I remember going to his pediatrician appointment with our like notebook and the pediatrician was like, [laughter] "what's this?" We had like, um, you know, we didn't wanna use wipes, so I had, I had made little flannel cloths and we had a warm pump pot of warm water and like everything was to the nines, which is very cute and sweet, you know what I mean?

00:58:30:

But like since then, you know,

00:58:34 S1:

You've used a few baby wipes?

00:58:35 Liisa L:

Oh yeah. [laughter]. I still use baby wipes for dusting inside my car and [laughter]. But I remember this kind of, it was an anxious thing though, like that's what it was, was I'm gonna hurt this baby. [S1 affirmative] And I need to monitor him. We had, we bought a scale, we weighed him all the time. Like, you know, Rich is into data, so we had a lot of data [laughter], we had a lot of data. I think that even in this like, of my births, the most medical and the most uncomfortable and the most scary, that there's still so much, um, like love and awe and like just wonder. And that's what I remember about each birth most is how amazing it is that this is how we do it. That this is how life starts and that like, this is how people come out.

00:59:33:

I had a professor in grad school who would refer to us all as professional ex-babies. Like we're all just professional ex-babies. [laughter]. This is how we all, it's like, this is where it all comes [laughter].

00:59:47 S1:

I like that.

00:59:48 Liisa L:

Yeah. I like it too. And I, I like looking at my son, teenager and being like, I dunno, you're looking like a professional ex-baby to me. You know? Um, I'll also say that it feels, um, lovely to have an opportunity to like talk about, I will always, like, whenever someone has a baby back when, like, my friends were having babies all the time, which has tapered off a little bit. Like, I love sitting and hearing the story. I love telling my story. I love, like, I love the, like, well, first this happened and then this happened, and then this happened. Like, I love it.

01:00:25:

[S1 affirmative] Um, so I'm thankful for the opportunity to do that and also for this opportunity that like, yes, these are stories that should be told. I remember bringing Charlie back to our apartment and we had these two landlords. They saw me be pregnant and then I remember walking into the elevator with a baby and a carrier and the look on his face, he was like, and I remember being like, yep, it came out. And I was like,

01:00:45 S1:

What did you think was gonna happen here? [laughter],

01:00:48 Liisa L:

what's gonna happen? I said, I said, it's your new tenant, you know? And he was like [--] so yeah. I, I, um, it feels like the more birth stories that go out there, the more people can kind of be like, oh yes, birth [yes] how fucking cool.