Stephanie Danler & Midwife Jessica Diggs - After Birth

Episode 195 · October 1, 2020 · with Stephanie Danler and Jessica Diggs

IN THIS EPISODE

Author and screenwriter Stephanie Danler returns to join Dr. Elliot Berlin, DC — this time together with her midwife Jessica Diggs, who was her doula for her first birth — to tell the after story of her second baby. Stephanie recaps a first hospital birth that left her feeling dropped off a cliff, and the self-doubt she carried into planning a home birth; Jessica shares her own path from pre-med to doula work to midwifery school. Then comes the birth itself: a slow, stop-and-start Sunday of pancakes and park trips that turns fast — very fast — once their toddler leaves the house. It is a funny, vivid home-birth story told from both sides of the room.

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DR. ELLIOT BERLIN, DC: Welcome to the informed pregnancy and parenting podcast. I'm your host. Dr. Elliott Berlin today We get to hear the after story of a birth journey from two perspectives My first guest was imminently due with her second baby and planning a home birth Well, we spoke to her last and we're joined by her doula turned midwife She was her doula for the first birth and midwife for the second Stephanie damler and midwife Jessica Diggs. Welcome to the podcast

STEPHANIE DANLER: Thanks for having me so much. Yeah, this is fantastic

DR. ELLIOT BERLIN, DC: Through the magic of zoom. We're all together and all apart

STEPHANIE DANLER: Since we wish I was pregnant again. Oh really? Yes. I could hang out with you guys. Oh

JESSICA DIGGS: See my face I'm like

DR. ELLIOT BERLIN, DC: But I'm ready for another baby if you are

STEPHANIE DANLER: Never go ahead

DR. ELLIOT BERLIN, DC: All right last time, you know, we talked a little bit about your son's birth Julian You want to just recap that in the small recap? Oh

STEPHANIE DANLER: yeah, I had Julian at the hospital and I delivered vaginally with just by my side in a very kind of crowded hospital room with my sister my best friend and my husband My doctor and no nurse. We don't know where the nurse was On certain nights at the hospital, I'm sure and I Had really wanted to have an unmedicated birth and as soon as we got to the hospital I was Not able to maintain that goal. I kind of fell apart from like the second we got into the car everything Amplified for me and I was medicated and that was fine, but I was left at the end of it feeling I told you this and the podcast like I had failed at something or I didn't get my Euphoria I actually felt dropped off a cliff, but that's a separate

STEPHANIE DANLER: that wasn't because of the epidural per se and When I found out that I was pregnant again, which was a huge surprise I called Jeff immediately and I knew that this was if I was ever gonna have a home birth This was my chance my last chance for my last child

DR. ELLIOT BERLIN, DC: When you say your last child it could be defined as this past child Yes Paloma my daughter this past child, but not necessarily with finality Anyway, what I can't just leave hanging is where you said you felt like you were dropped off a cliff What was that about?

STEPHANIE DANLER: You know that was a little bit about the birth experience kind of going another direction that I hadn't wanted Feeling a loss of control and then the cliff is becoming a parent That's becoming a mother and during like half of it was physical like just recovering but the other half of it was Existential for lack of a better word Just not knowing who I was mourning my life, which I liked I liked my childless life. I like did whatever I wanted. I mostly had enough money. I was pretty happy

DR. ELLIOT BERLIN, DC: morning that life the yeah pre-motherhood freedom yes of course and

STEPHANIE DANLER: then also feeling so vulnerable by how much I loved my son like I'd never felt that vulnerable I still these children just like opened me up I have no defenses and it was very scary the first three months were very scary I

DR. ELLIOT BERLIN, DC: don't know if you've so this is Jessica or not but I know you told me in confidence which I'll just share with everybody listening that Jessica was the most useful person professional at your first birth

STEPHANIE DANLER: oh I said yeah and smartest yeah the smart she was like holding the fetal heartbeat monitor and we're just kind of looking around like I wonder if

JESSICA DIGGS: anyone's gonna come back in here I was for sure thinking they have to be seeing this outside they have to so I'm just gonna hold it that make sure

DR. ELLIOT BERLIN, DC: they get a clear strip oh good for you it must be hard I want to introduce you in just a minute and find out all about you but since we're already here it must be hard to watch Stephanie go through that you know unraveling of her birth plan and not being happy with that I think processing the

JESSICA DIGGS: unexpected outcome of her birth is it gets easier to unravel and process people it's not a new story that portion of it but I think the part that was the hardest specifically for her birth and I think I actually just realized is probably the hardest birth I had been at in the limbo phase of being a student midwife and not being able to utilize the medical skill set that I had in the moment because I wasn't licensed but I think the whole trajectory of her journey and the dive into through matressence and that transition into motherhood is not unusual and more people just don't talk about it for new moms to be prepared for it yeah I think that's a great

DR. ELLIOT BERLIN, DC: point and can't be understated but I've talked about this on the podcast for so much emphasis on like how we're gonna get this baby out of me and what kind of gear do we need and then all of a sudden you have a kid and there's you know I waited when my first born came out you know it wasn't just the baby like 15 minutes later the placenta came out and then I kept waiting for the owner's manual and also the warranty like if you don't like it we'll take it back nothing else came out we just went home and felt like oh wow they gave us a child we have no idea what to do with it and my wife was I shouldn't say we she like intuitively knew exactly what to do always and whenever she was there I was just in full panic

DR. ELLIOT BERLIN, DC: mode now he's 16 and I'm starting to get the hang of it he actually just passed his driving test yesterday congrats to him you're in big trouble I know seriously on the way home I was like let's go to Costco and see if they sell Zoloft in Costco's eyes because I'm gonna need that they don't anyway it's really challenging but when your birth plan I think when you don't go into it with like a flowchart kind of approach where yeah I'm aiming for this like but it's very possible to go here it'll go there and if I want or need this intervention of that intervention I'll get it did you not

STEPHANIE DANLER: have any of that mindset going to your first birth no I did and I you know a lot of it was lip service and I would say yeah but however a healthy baby comes out I think what I was responding to was the shift I had labored at home for quite a while I had started laboring at 2 a.m. just got there for the first birth at like 9 or 10 and I was doing it and I had this sense of being able to kind of keep my head above water and then I said this in the last podcast by the time we got to the hospital I was just like hysterically screaming like not in the zone anymore and then when a nurse told me that I was only four centimeters I mean this is part of what Jess is referring to because just said I wish I could check you I know you're not

STEPHANIE DANLER: forcing meters but once I heard that news my mind shut off and that's not really about like flow charts and interventions and am I gonna get pitocin or not it was personal and emotional and that's the part I regretted I could have had a c-section and felt better about it than I did about the

DR. ELLIOT BERLIN, DC: way that worked if that makes sense it don't any sense I just you see it all the time people laboring at home just great and then all of a sudden you get to the hospital it's not like they've necessarily even do anything sometimes you just get there and I don't know, your adrenaline kicks in or fear kicks in. It almost reminds me of this little cat video that I once saw on YouTube. You can hear her meowing in the closet giving birth to her kittens and the pet owner is so excited that he gets his video camera and he goes in there and as soon as the light hits the cat you can almost see her cervix lock shut. And there's a kitten halfway out of her and she just gets up and she starts

DR. ELLIOT BERLIN, DC: doing a different meow, walking, pacing back and forth and then eventually she goes under the bed where it's dark and you hear her birth meowing again, giving birth to her next kitten or two. So it's almost like that's what's in my mind when we're laboring at home and it's great and you're in your own room, you're in your own bed, your own toilet, your own snacks, your own everything and then all of a sudden you get into a hospital. For some people it's really reassuring but for a lot of people it just makes everything tense up and then when they you know they start doing their things it's almost like you check some of your autonomy at the door and now you're playing by their rules and I think your nervous system knows

DR. ELLIOT BERLIN, DC: that. So maybe that's what happened. I don't know. I wasn't there. I was not invited to the party.

JESSICA DIGGS: I think you're spot on Berlin. I also know that I'm pretty sure I was like I need them to check you again and then you were six, not long after that initial check maybe within an hour or two so also that's a lot of change but first time mom in a short period of time and no one reassured her of that during that immediate check like during a check even if you're four I'm describing other things I'm feeling like you're stretchy for this this means this you know versus just hearing you're four after all the work you put in is defeating. It literally deflates every aspect of strength you have in your body temporarily but it is the momentary

DR. ELLIOT BERLIN, DC: sense of defeat. Yeah I mean four to six is that's like just bigger than a Ritz cracker to almost the size of the diameter of a can of beer. That's a lot of change. Wow. Wow. I mean just imagine how many more carbohydrates you were

STEPHANIE DANLER: at six than you were at four. This is a powerful analogy that they need to start using in birth education.

JESSICA DIGGS: Dr. Berlin's snack chart of dilation.

DR. ELLIOT BERLIN, DC: Carbohydrate dilation. My kids sometimes call me when I'm out of birth like dad you almost done I'm like yeah we're between the Ritz cracker and the beer. They'll call you when we're almost at the donut just before the bagel. Anyway Jess where are you from and how did you end up in LA? I remember meeting you a long time ago you had like this crazy energy and passion you're like I'm gonna deliver babies and I think you said you were gonna be in OB-GYN which is like I don't know it's because you weren't even in medical school yet then a lot of times people go through all the medical school and they and it's not until they're exposed to all the different specialties till they pick some that you were like driven to this field.

JESSICA DIGGS: Yeah so I'm like nine. I'm what? I said you were like nine years old at

DR. ELLIOT BERLIN, DC: the time. You were so young I mean I'm just

JESSICA DIGGS: still a baby. Yeah um but yeah I am originally from North Carolina and I heard about birth work and doula work at 19 so I was a baby. How? So I was in college and was fascinated mostly from reproductive and sexual health like I was I could not understand why my friends didn't know more about their bodies so I was always the girlfriend when there was a bump on their butt or a something or false pregnancy or scare I was the person they talked to it about so I loved learning all

the things and was really confused why most people didn't know more about their bodies so when I started studying that childbirth got included and I also realized that that lack of knowledge transferred into childbirth and birthing people still didn't know

JESSICA DIGGS: anything about their bodies or the process including their options from where to deliver to all their interventions and I wanted to be the person to educate them so I got into it from education space I don't have kids of my own and wanted to make sure people knew what was available to them and I thought I also wanted to be an option so maybe I'll just be an OB because in North Carolina the laws for midwifery are too restrictive for me and my personality I knew I didn't want to be a nurse let alone a nurse midwife just in terms of the supervision clause I don't play nice with authority in that way so I was like I don't want to do that I'd rather be the OB in the room and the OB that could back the local midwives because I

JESSICA DIGGS: knew that was a struggle in the state and still is

DR. ELLIOT BERLIN, DC: yeah so powerful from a young age I'm stubborn I don't know if it's powerful I think it's power inspiring to me

JESSICA DIGGS: well thank you but yes I went to school my background is biology anthro and I was pre-med Super nerdy, I hide it well, my charming personality, but at the end of the day, I'm a real nerd. And I moved to LA because I interviewed at UCLA and Charles Drew, which is a historically black college in Compton, I think it's in Compton or maybe Linwood. But they had a small program with UCLA where 25 students could serve the underserved areas of Los Angeles instead of do just the UCLA rotation. And I wanted that program. So I was waitlisted and decided I'll move to LA if I don't get in. I'll live here for a year because I didn't know what urban health care meant anyway because

JESSICA DIGGS: I was from North Carolina and we have urban areas but not really like our cities are not cities. So I was like, I'll move and work in the area to learn it better so I can serve it best whenever that time came. When I reapplied, I would have been in LA for a year and a half. I was well connected in the birth community at that time, had been to a few home births and birth center births and realized I lived in a different state that had a different licensure for midwifery and I didn't have to spend 120 grand to do what I wanted to do and to avoid doing what I did want to do because I never wanted to do surgery. I have a bad past with a little mice and I won't stay what I used to do them

JESSICA DIGGS: for PETA reasons but I don't want to do surgery on people so I was just like, I know I don't want to do that. Why am I going through this schooling to do only half of that work and I realized that midwifery school was an option and so I literally left my interview and enrolled in midwifery school.

DR. ELLIOT BERLIN, DC: That's, I mean, that's a big transformation. I want to find out the rest of the journey because you had steps to becoming where you are now. Let's take a quick break because I have a question for you about a bump I have on my body. We'll be right back with Jessica Diggs and Stephanie Dany. Well, welcome back to the Informed Pregnancy Podcast. We're talking to Stephanie Danler and midwife Jessica Diggs. So that's a big journey, I didn't realize. Like I knew and I was already inspired when you wanted to be an OB so you could sort of go against the system, you know, and to work with the midwives and the people who wanted to be more holistic in their approach

to pregnancy and birth.

DR. ELLIOT BERLIN, DC: And then it makes total sense why, you know, once you're in California, which is a totally different set of midwifery rules, that you switch gears for midwifery school. But before you became a midwife, you were an insanely popular. doula. So first of all, how was midwifery school and how was doula training, like being that busy as a doula and unpredictable while you're in midwifery training, share with the group?

JESSICA DIGGS: It was an insane few years. I have a couple dozen pounds of weight to prove it, which I'm fine with, but it was an insane few years. Typically as a full-time doula, which I've always been since moving to LA and loved doing. I attended two to four births a month, and then once I got into midwifery school and more of the clinical phase, I was probably going to an additional two to five births a month, depending on where I was working. Yeah, so I started out at a busy birth center, and then I did two small home birth practices, which was nice, but one was in Ventura. So my tailbone, I saw you a lot during that time. My tailbone was bothering me from driving in the car so much. And then I finished up at

JESSICA DIGGS: another busy birth center where I was with the birth center. We were saying four to eight people a month on top of my two to three to pay the bills. I mean, it would be a lot of

DR. ELLIOT BERLIN, DC: time, even if it was scheduled, but the fact that you never get to know or choose when it's going to happen and how long it's going to take. I don't think people realize sometimes how crazy

JESSICA DIGGS: that is on your mind and body. I mean, it's crazy. And I have found that I loved this season of life that I don't have kids and I didn't have a partner. Like I, for my friends who went through this and had that, I don't know how they did it because I came home to my very expensive weighted blanket and I can always sleep. There's no one to come home to. So actually I can't even say it was hard, but I'm like, but I also went through school with the person who had their third baby while we were doing that. So I'm like, it was not that

DR. ELLIOT BERLIN, DC: hard. We did an episode about that on the real midwives of Los Angeles. Yeah. I had been

JESSICA DIGGS: doing this lifestyle for almost four and a half years before I started midwifery school. So I just kept doing a lifestyle. I also have great boundaries when I'm off call and I'm not an overly anxious person. So I don't feel the stress of people being in labor like at all. They're just in labor. So I think it was, it was okay.

DR. ELLIOT BERLIN, DC: And that's so calming to the people who are in labor. The fact that you don't get all stressed out about it. I would think we can ask Stephanie.

JESSICA DIGGS: I hope so.

DR. ELLIOT BERLIN, DC: I've never seen labor in your presence. Well, that brings us back to Stephanie accidentally getting knocked up when her kid was like, what, how old was Julian? 30 days old?

STEPHANIE DANLER: I'm like terrified that this will happen again. But we're only, we're only seven

DR. ELLIOT BERLIN, DC: weeks in, so I'm not scared. That's almost two months. And last time it was like, what,

STEPHANIE DANLER: seriously? It was almost 10 months. Okay. So nine months here,

DR. ELLIOT BERLIN, DC: you're only seven months away from it possibly accidentally happening again. I was just saying, did you not know that you could get pregnant or was it the Rosé speaking?

STEPHANIE DANLER: I did know I'd had two periods and I was tracking them with a very popular app on my phone that still to this day says I was not ovulating or close to ovulating on the day that I conceived my daughter. I was misinformed and I wrote a letter.

DR. ELLIOT BERLIN, DC: With a picture. They probably have a lot of pictures. There's probably nothing.

STEPHANIE DANLER: I will say, I know just like pictures of positive pregnancy.

DR. ELLIOT BERLIN, DC: Not ovulating, huh?

STEPHANIE DANLER: But I think looking back, I had just stopped breastfeeding. It was my first ovulation post breastfeeding. So I should have known that my cycle was going to adjust afterwards.

DR. ELLIOT BERLIN, DC: But she was meant to be here.

STEPHANIE DANLER: And she was meant to be here and my family's complete and she's the best.

DR. ELLIOT BERLIN, DC: Oh, that's really sweet. No, I want to find out more about how she got here. I know that you planned a home birth for your second one. And then conveniently, Jessica finished her midwifery and got all licensed for you. And I also know like in the office, we had some moments, you know, some intense moments. And I think at least one time you said to me, like, am I going to be able to do this? Am I going to do this? And so where was that coming from? Did you really wonder? Like, did you have a lot of self-doubt about it?

STEPHANIE DANLER: Oh, yeah. I had a ton of self-doubt. And it was almost like I was performing a woman who is confidently about to give birth or a woman who's excited because I wasn't ready for it. But I was like, this is gonna go all wrong. The pain is gonna be too intense. I'm gonna fall apart. We're gonna be in an ambulance. I'm gonna have one contraction and I'm gonna call Jess and I'm gonna be like, I'm already at the hospital. Sorry, I can't do it. But working with you, talking to friends who had had home births and just having so much contact with Jess, it's just like constant affirmation that this is the path I'm going down. It's just trying to normalize it, right? Like talking to as many people as possible who see birth on a regular basis

STEPHANIE DANLER: and see women who aren't particularly tough. Like I'm tough emotionally, but I'm not tough physically. And I would always ask Jess, I'm like, did a regular person just do this? Just like a regular person just gave birth in a tub in their living room. And she's like, yay, yeah, anyone can do it. And so that was all really helpful. Even the day before I was talking to my friend Ruby who had had a home birth and she was so excited. And I thought you're a psychopath that you're so excited

that I'm about to go through this pain. Like you have full blown amnesia. I wasn't excited. I was like, I'm gonna live through it. That was my goal, to live through it.

DR. ELLIOT BERLIN, DC: I sort of feel like, look, you know you the best, but I work with like 15 pregnant people a day. I feel like you are physically very tough.

STEPHANIE DANLER: I meant like, I don't love pain. I like, I used to be an athlete and I can run a lot of miles in a decent amount of time, but I'm not, and I guess I have tattoos, but other than that, I love painkillers. Love, I love drugs, anything to like take me away. I love wine. Anything that like gives you a little bit of a buffer. So I don't think of myself as particularly tough.

DR. ELLIOT BERLIN, DC: Again, I'm just comparing it to the several thousand other people that I work with. I feel like you can take it. Most people don't like it, even if they can take it. But I feel like you can take the heat. You're pretty strong. And my impression of you is that you're like 99.5% what's going on in your mind. Like if you feel safe and relaxed and confident, I feel like there's nothing you can't breathe through and surrender to if you know you're safe. But if you don't feel safe, I feel like you fight yourself. It's natural instinct, right? We all, if we don't feel safe and we feel intensity, we're supposed to try to protect ourselves and survive. And you're just a really strong fighter. You're a very solid opponent for yourself.

DR. ELLIOT BERLIN, DC: I mean, it's the ultimate UFC match of Stephanie versus Stephanie. And as interesting as that would be to watch, it probably isn't that fun to feel.

STEPHANIE DANLER: No. Free therapy with Dr. Brillen, everyone.

JESSICA DIGGS: Go get your adjustment.

STEPHANIE DANLER: I think that Jess would agree with you. And we talked about the mental aspects. That was definitely going into it. That was where I knew it could be tricky.

DR. ELLIOT BERLIN, DC: Who was?

STEPHANIE DANLER: It's funny that it just ended up being a non-issue. I'll get into that when I tell the story.

DR. ELLIOT BERLIN, DC: We'll get there. Before we take one more break, who was supposed to be there? Who was supposed to be at your birth? What was the plan?

STEPHANIE DANLER: Well, no one because of COVID, but Jess, an assistant and my husband. I mean, in another world, I had a vision in my head that my sister would be there. My best friend would be there. And I'd be in a tub in the center of my living room and there would be candles lit. And I see these birds on Instagram all the time. Like the woman is just kind of like, through her contractions and the baby pops out into the water. Yes. And so I was going to have one of those birds.

DR. ELLIOT BERLIN, DC: Yeah.

JESSICA DIGGS: No.

DR. ELLIOT BERLIN, DC: Well, I have no idea. For the record, I have no idea how your birth actually went. I just know the baby's here. And we specifically didn't talk about it so I can hear it for the first time. We're all gonna just have a quick glass of wine and we'll be right back for the big story. Don't go anywhere. Welcome back to the Informed Pregnancy podcast. We're talking to Stephanie and Jessica. All right, how'd this thing start?

STEPHANIE DANLER: Well, Dr. Berlin texted me Sunday morning to see if I wanted to come in because I had been trying to get an appointment with him all week, but he was too busy. And I thought, I don't want to turn down this opportunity, but I think... I might be in labor, which is partially how it started. But really, Dr. Billy, before you texted me, I had woken up at four and had like cramps, really strong cramps. And I thought to myself, I'm ready. I'm three days before my due date. Let's get this show on the road. Woke my husband up with sex, which is supposed to help, which Jess had told me. I was like, Jess, if I start to feel these cramps, what should I do? She said, have an orgasm. And I was like, oh God, disgusting.

DR. ELLIOT BERLIN, DC: But okay.

JESSICA DIGGS: You didn't need Matt for that though.

STEPHANIE DANLER: It's true. I was being kind to him. And after that, they turned into contractions and I could definitely talk through them. And that's when Dr. Berlin texted and I was like, oh God, if I don't go into labor, I definitely need to see him. Like I'm gonna need help, but I might actually be in labor. So let's see how this Sunday unfolds.

DR. ELLIOT BERLIN, DC: I get that a lot. People are always like, let me try this orgasm first. And if that doesn't work, then I'll come see you.

STEPHANIE DANLER: You probably do get that a lot actually, unfortunately.

DR. ELLIOT BERLIN, DC: More often than I know.

STEPHANIE DANLER: And eventually, probably at like 9 a.m., we're like gonna text Jess and she happens to be in the neighborhood and she has our tub and she comes over and we're making pancakes, which we do every Sunday for my son. When I had one child, we did fun things like making pancakes. Now we eat off the floor like animals. Jess, you stayed. We all had pancakes together. She watched Winnie the Pooh with my son and had some pancakes and touched my stomach when I was having my little baby contractions. And it was like a beautiful, beautiful morning.

DR. ELLIOT BERLIN, DC: You already got accomplished more in that morning than I can usually get done in a whole day.

STEPHANIE DANLER: Well, you know.

JESSICA DIGGS: It was a lovely home. Yeah, her husband's cooking. I'm like, it smells good. It's fresh fruit. There's a cute kid watching a show. I haven't seen him forever. It was lovely. It was nice. All in a day's work.

DR. ELLIOT BERLIN, DC: So Jessica, did you hang out because you thought things were heating up or you're just hanging out?

JESSICA DIGGS: Because they were feeding me.

DR. ELLIOT BERLIN, DC: Oh, okay. Now I know the secret.

JESSICA DIGGS: Yeah, looking at her, I'm like, yeah, no, I'm gonna go home. I'm gonna drop this tub off. But then they offered pancakes and I was like, oh, stay right there.

DR. ELLIOT BERLIN, DC: Ah, so you went to bring the tub.

JESSICA DIGGS: Yeah. While I was there, things did pick up, but that's usually what happens in my presence. I might bring on the contractions. But yeah, I definitely knew it was early and it was just normal. Just to eat some breakfast with them.

DR. ELLIOT BERLIN, DC: What happened from there?

STEPHANIE DANLER: Well, I was talking through them. One thing Jess said, because we were on the fence about calling my in-laws. They live three and a half hours away to take care of Julian. And she's like, get Julian out of the house. Get Julian out and things will start to speed up because we're talking about, first of all, inconsistent and then 15 minutes, 12 minutes, 20 minutes, 11 minutes. They were all over the place and not concentrating. So while we waited for my in-laws, I took Julian to the park and he decided that this was a great day to be a effing nightmare. And he's just like laying in the dirt, screaming. He doesn't want to ride his scooter. He doesn't want to fly his kite. He doesn't want to play with his truck.

STEPHANIE DANLER: And I was looking at my husband like, he's gotta go because my contractions have stopped. I'm sweating and they completely stopped. I was on a walk with my screaming toddler and gone. I got home, I laid down for a nap. Nothing happened for like an hour and a half. My in-laws came and I'm waiting. They take the child away and Matt and I look at each other and we're like, wait, why didn't we do this earlier? We had never been away from Julian for a night. The house was so quiet. I cannot describe the bliss and sunshine and freedom that I felt in those hours. We opened a bottle of wine. We sat on the couch. We watched a movie. We went for a big walk and it was the loveliest afternoon of my life without my child with a lot of time ahead of me.

STEPHANIE DANLER: And my contractions start again as Jess predicted, but they're not consolidating. They're still kind of erratic and I'm not having anything less than 10 minutes apart. And we're on this walk and I'm doing the curb stepping walk and it's starting to get dark. And I think to myself, Dr. Berlin told me. me it was going to be quick. And Jess told me it was going to be quick. And this isn't very quick. I have been laboring since 4 a.m. and now it's almost 6.30. So I texted Jess and I said, I'm going to lay down because I know what's going to happen. This is going to pick up at 2 a.m. and I'm going to be screwed for the entire time because I'll have been up since 4. So I lay down and I got into this like side lying

STEPHANIE DANLER: position that I had been reading about in this funny Bradley Method book that I had. But like I was like all propped on pillows and as soon as I lay down my contractions

intensified. Like they turned into the kind that start in your lower back and kind of wrap around your hips and then you can't talk. You're just kind of like frozen in them. They hold. They're gripping your body. And as soon as I lay down I thought oh that's a real contraction. That is really painful. The earlier ones you kind of can just like you could stretch a little bit and your eyes can focus. And so I laid there in the dark. I did some meditations. I did the breath work thing that loom loom and breath work did a series of breathing exercises. I did those and

STEPHANIE DANLER: I'm timing my own contractions and they are exactly 10 minutes apart. Not 9, not 11, 10 minutes apart. And this goes on for three hours. And I can't sleep because oh people lied. We're getting to that part where I realized that I have been tricked. Three hours and I'm fairly relaxed. I'm feeling in my zone. They're not so painful. They're not breaking me. I'm really kind of on top of them. And every single time I'm like the next one's going to be nine. The next one's going to be eight minutes. The next one's going to be seven. And they just stay at 10. And Jess and I had set up a call at like 10 p.m. for us to talk before she went to bed and just have a check in. And I was like I don't know what to do. I don't know if I

STEPHANIE DANLER: should take a bath and try to slow this down and go to sleep or if I should start pacing the halls and try to speed it up. And eventually at 10.30 I texted Jess and she has the time stamp. So it might have been 10.20. But I was like I'm going to get up. I'm going to go to the front of the house and get on the birth ball. At this point Matt's asleep next to me. It's dark. I've been laying there doing these like funny moany breaths for hours. And I was like I'll just go stretch and bounce around. My house is quite small. It's a thousand square feet. I walked from the back of it to the front of it. And the very first contraction threw me to the ground. And the next one was two minutes right after it. And the one after that was 90 seconds. And

STEPHANIE DANLER: the one after that was two minutes. And I was on my hands and knees in the living room. And I thought I think I need to call Jess back. We just talked and I was like nothing's happening. Everyone's a liar. This is longer than my first labor. I also was kind of excited. That was the moment where I was like oh wow. This is happening right now. So we texted a little bit. But then either she told me or I think she did. She was like wake up Matt. I was like oh yeah my husband. So I get Matt and I wake him up and it's 11pm. And I'm losing control of my limbs at this point. My arms are flailing. I can't stand on my legs anymore. And I'm starting to scream. Like there's no breath work. There's no moaning. I am screaming. And Matt is

STEPHANIE DANLER: running around half asleep. Like what's happening? What do I do? What's going on? And he gets in contact with Jess and Jess is on her way.

JESSICA DIGGS: I just want to add timing to all of this. So she was still texting me. I'm coherent in between about to wake up Matt 1057. Matt texts me. I'm taking over updates. Steph is puking, diarrhea, intense contractions, moaning at 1107. and 10 minutes later, he's taken over.

DR. ELLIOT BERLIN, DC: Oh wow.

JESSICA DIGGS: And I was like, oh, okay.

STEPHANIE DANLER: Yeah, I did, I texted you, I'm coherent in between, like everything's fine, they're just coming really fast and I wake up Matt and I get into the bathroom and I am pooping, I am

puking into a trash can in my lap, and I have totally lost control. I'm covered in sweat. And so Jess, what time did you arrive?

JESSICA DIGGS: I arrived at 1130.

DR. ELLIOT BERLIN, DC: Oh, pretty fast.

STEPHANIE DANLER: Yeah. She lives pretty close. She gets there and I am just like, Jessica, I'm not doing this. And she said, you're not gonna be doing this much longer. And I said, how do you know? And she said, it's a look. And yeah.

JESSICA DIGGS: You just knew, everything about it was like, this is the shift we've been waiting for all day. And this is the part that is fast to clarify.

DR. ELLIOT BERLIN, DC: That part where you're like embedded

JESSICA DIGGS: with nothing happening, I don't think that counts. Yeah, I just knew.

STEPHANIE DANLER: And we get, oh, this is it. She sends Matt to go fill up the tub and the tub is like filling up slick with a trickle of water.

DR. ELLIOT BERLIN, DC: It takes time.

STEPHANIE DANLER: Yeah, it takes a lot of time. But Matt is like out in the front, focused on the tub. And I get into my tiny tub, which I told in my last podcast, I was like, my tub is terrible for birth. Like it's too small. I can't straighten my legs. I get into my tiny tub and I'm miserable. I get out immediately. And I'm sitting on the toilet and I'm having contractions holding on to Jess. And at the end of one, I like grunted and we like looked at each other and I was like, I think I pushed. She's like, I think you pushed too. She's been in the house like 10 minutes, maybe. The assistant hasn't made it there yet. And she said, do you want me to check you? And I was like, yes. So I laid down on my bed, which Matt had made with the terrible sheets

STEPHANIE DANLER: and the plastic sheets.

DR. ELLIOT BERLIN, DC: On purpose.

STEPHANIE DANLER: Yeah, on purpose. And Jess checks me.

JESSICA DIGGS: I go get my glove because nothing's in the bathroom. So I get there, Matt's doing the tub thing. And I was just like, he's like, should I do? I was like, I'm just gonna leave you to do this. And I go to Steph in the bathroom, which the way the house is set up, it's a thousand square feet, but it's long. So I go all the way to the back and sit on the floor in the bathroom. And I'm just watching like, ah, we're gonna get close. So I have to go get everything in the front of the house because I didn't have it with me. So I drag my kit all the way to the back. And I like look at Matt, I was like, you need to abandon the tub.

DR. ELLIOT BERLIN, DC: Abandon the tub.

JESSICA DIGGS: It's not gonna happen. He's like, oh, okay. And so then we gather everything to check her on her bed. And you can take it over from here.

STEPHANIE DANLER: Well, shocking to everyone, I am 10 centimeters and the head is coming out.

DR. ELLIOT BERLIN, DC: Oh my goodness.

STEPHANIE DANLER: And she said, you're ready to push. And so I like hop onto all fours on my bed and I'm like, everyone says, and all those IMA books, they're like pushing feels incredible. Oh, when it came time to push, it felt so good. Even Dr. Berlin is telling me like orgasmic birth. So I am like prepped for some pleasure. And the first push, I was like, oh, hell no. I am not doing this. I had the thought, like the animal panic. I thought, I'm gonna suck her back in and stop the labor because I'm definitely not gonna push like this. I also started pooping. And I just like, I turned to Jess and I said, I can't poop in my bed. I just, I don't wanna poop in my bed. And she said, let's go back to the toilet. And I mean, at this point,

STEPHANIE DANLER: Matt comes back into the bathroom because we are like at the pushing stage and he's on one side of me and Jess is on the other. And I gave a couple pushes. I wasn't trying that hard because it hurt too badly. And the like wise inner voice was like, you are fighting this and you have to go through it. You have to go through it to get to the other side. So then I started pushing for reals. And baby girl was in the sack.

DR. ELLIOT BERLIN, DC: Oh, really? Baby came out on the call?

STEPHANIE DANLER: No. Not totally, no.

JESSICA DIGGS: But like, head was out and then. a nice pop over the toilet.

DR. ELLIOT BERLIN, DC: Oh, nice. I mean, that's good placement for easy cleanup.

STEPHANIE DANLER: And Jess was like, she's in the sack. And I was thinking to myself, that's why it hurts so badly. It's not her little head. It's this balloon I'm trying to push through my vagina. And head came out, burst, body. Jess, what do you think, like eight pushes total?

JESSICA DIGGS: I mean, it was like two contractions.

STEPHANIE DANLER: Yeah. Also, the assistant showed up five minutes before, and she popped her head in. She's like, hi, I'm Julia. You're doing great.

JESSICA DIGGS: It wasn't even five minutes before. I was trying to run to make sure she got in and not missed the birth. So in between moving to the toilet and the next contraction, I ran to the door to holler out onto her street just so Julia can follow my voice to get to the house. And then I ran back. Oh my goodness. She made it in. She got there. She got there for the water breaking, which was a minute before the baby was born. So she was there for like three minutes.

DR. ELLIOT BERLIN, DC: Can you imagine if it was a 2,000 square foot house? I know.

JESSICA DIGGS: She wouldn't have made it.

DR. ELLIOT BERLIN, DC: Nobody would have made it, all that running back and forth. Wow.

STEPHANIE DANLER: What we're talking about is Jess got there at 1130, and Paloma was born at 1209. And I got up from bed at 1030. So it was an hour and a half of labor.

DR. ELLIOT BERLIN, DC: Solid labor. Yeah. So we didn't lie to you.

STEPHANIE DANLER: No. No. You guys were right. No. You were right. Yeah.

DR. ELLIOT BERLIN, DC: And obviously, your pelvis was open nicely.

STEPHANIE DANLER: Obviously, I had been adjusted to perfection to deliver the baby came out like butter.

DR. ELLIOT BERLIN, DC: You could probably would have. I don't know if you could have done it without me. What was that moment when you just, I mean, the baby was out. Sometimes when that happens, it's so quick. It's just like, like you didn't even have time to get out of your mind. You were still thinking about everything consciously. I mean, just the way you describe it. Most people don't even remember that much detail because. Yeah. Because.

STEPHANIE DANLER: When I said earlier that you can't think, what I meant was that I thought that I would be in my head thinking about my options. Like, oh, I can go to the hospital. Oh, I don't like this. I like. You can't think outside of the next contraction. All the things that I thought would be really difficult for me, I didn't think about once. I didn't think about the hospital. I didn't think about getting epidural. I didn't think that I was in danger. The baby was in danger. Like I had no conscious thoughts about that. But I was recording my story because I'm a writer and that's just what I do.

DR. ELLIOT BERLIN, DC: And you're a great storyteller, too. I sort of picture one woman's show in your future.

STEPHANIE DANLER: Next stand up, I'll be a guest.

JESSICA DIGGS: I just tell her stories.

DR. ELLIOT BERLIN, DC: Yeah, as soon as this pandemic's over and we can get back into small rooms and make people cough up aerosol because that's what we try to do. The more aerosol the better in a comedy club. I do have a couple of questions. How was recovery physically and emotionally compared first, birth and second?

STEPHANIE DANLER: No comparison. I think the greatest part of a home birth is being in your home afterwards and the level of care and quiet and peace that you feel, especially if you kick your toddler out of the house. I had like the most blissful 24 hours after Paloma was born. It was really special and sweet. To your earlier question, it happened so quickly and you can't catch up to the fact that that moment that she came out, I was still fighting for my life. Do you know what I mean? I wasn't like, oh, my baby's here. I'm like, what do you mean my baby's here? What are you talking about?

JESSICA DIGGS: Even looking in on that moment, you're not here and Matt has taken it all in of how awesome you were, the fact that y'all's child was just born and you were physically and mentally not present. It was like holding her but kind of glossed over.

STEPHANIE DANLER: Totally.

JESSICA DIGGS: It looks totally different on both parents.

STEPHANIE DANLER: But during that sort of you and Julia were there for an hour and a half afterwards, everything went really slowly in like a beautiful way as far as just like the placenta and Julia made me a snack and cutting the umbilical cord and it felt like we had all the time in the world and it was during that time that I started to absorb what had just happened. And that is like such a graceful period that you don't really get in the hospital at all. The baby is weighed, taken from you. Even if you ask for delayed cord clen- being they delay like 30 seconds it's just so so so different and then the rest of the recovery I mean I didn't tear I don't know how I just just how how did I not tear I tore the first time and

JESSICA DIGGS: I felt the body's done this before and I was supporting her perineum I felt her like be birthed into my hand I was there toilets are my favorite I just stuck my hand in between her legs and just held my hand there until the kid came out people think it's crazy as I've been

STEPHANIE DANLER: telling this story I think they envision all home birth happens in a tub and the toilet seems like

JESSICA DIGGS: the best spot to me it's my favorite spot personally just observation of a male doula

DR. ELLIOT BERLIN, DC: when someone sits on the toilet it's just I think a little pavlovian that everything just kind of opens up on there in that neighborhood and so you do see people just like go on there to pee for a minute and then stay there for three hours because it's just such a comfortable spot for them to do what they animalistically do anyway yeah and I think for Steph if she was

JESSICA DIGGS: in her head on the bed around pooping on her bed and so to get literally like people won't push their babies out they don't feel safe or comfortable and that can be as simple as I won't poop in my bed or something more drastic but when she got out of the toilet she could like release and relax and get the job done amazing what a beautiful birth story thank you

STEPHANIE DANLER: so much for sharing yeah it was really incredible and not in the tub surrounded by people listening to music you could hear me down the street according to Jess and the assistant

JESSICA DIGGS: yeah but I did it but I did it so funny though because like your birth was exactly what I imagined for you but you had a different picture of it like I didn't expect you to be silent in a tub completely just chill like your relaxation is a very active process just in the few years I've known you like you work to get to a peace of mind it's not just like a tranquil and so you did that entire labor and that's like you birth how you live and that's beautiful to me not the blissed out quiet home birth sometimes you got to roar your kid out over the toilet screaming I'm dying I'm dying and I'm just looking at like this is what I envisioned

STEPHANIE DANLER: this is perfect it was though it was god I'm so fortunate it was it was beautiful

DR. ELLIOT BERLIN, DC: I love both of you and I can talk to you forever and I don't know I do think we should do a new podcast the no TMI podcast we're working on a concept here I really appreciate both of you being here and just sharing your expertise Stephanie's telling your personal story I do have a question where can we find both of you guys online Jessica where's your

JESSICA DIGGS: midwifery info my website is my name jessica digs.com I'm also on Instagram just at jessica a digs

DR. ELLIOT BERLIN, DC: Jessica a digs I'll be following closely and uh Stephanie where do you find you in your

STEPHANIE DANLER: magical writings my website has links to most things that I've written Stephanie Danler.com but I am on Instagram I think Twitter is weird and dark so mostly on Instagram

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