Anastasiya Rul - Before Birth

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IN THIS EPISODE

Belarus native Anastasiya Rul joins Dr. Elliot Berlin, DC in the final weeks of her second pregnancy to look back at her first. A former gymnast and film actor and producer who had never taken medicine or been in a hospital, she loved being pregnant — floating on endorphins, certain she wanted a home birth, and so confident she barely felt she needed a midwife at all. But she was planning that birth in her mother-in-law's house, a place that never felt like her own safe corner, and after two weeks of early labor and a full day of laboring at home, the plan unraveled into the hospital cascade she had most wanted to avoid — and a long, hard recovery she and her partner were not prepared for. This time she has her own home, a midwife and doulas she calls her village, a hospital bag she may actually pack, a plan B she can make peace with, and a plan for a home VBAC. Will this birth unfold the way she hopes — and how will she meet it if it doesn't?

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DR. ELLIOT BERLIN, DC: Welcome to the informed pregnancy and parenting podcast. I'm your host dr Elliott Berlin my guest today moved to the United States over 10 years ago and before becoming a mom She worked in the film industry as an actor and producer After moving to Los Angeles, she had her first baby But the birth was not according to plan and now she's pregnant and expecting her second baby any day Anastasia rule welcome to the podcast

ANASTASIYA RUL: Thank you. Hi everyone. Hi, dr. Berlin. Hi, it's great to talk to you. Let's start at the beginning Where are you from originally? I am originally from Belarus, which is a small country in Europe right next to Russia

DR. ELLIOT BERLIN, DC: And when did you come to the United States?

ANASTASIYA RUL: First time I came in 2009 to explore and travel and I liked it a lot So came back and moved in 2010 a year later

DR. ELLIOT BERLIN, DC: Wow, do you have any family here at all? I

ANASTASIYA RUL: Have a cousin here in Los Angeles and that's about it. Wow. So that's a big move on your own Yeah, it was

DR. ELLIOT BERLIN, DC: Alright, I mean your career is Interesting, but today we're here really to talk about your pregnancy and birth experience and your current pregnancy and what you're planning for birth Number two. So how was your first pregnancy? How are the different trimesters for you?

ANASTASIYA RUL: My first pregnancy was ecstatic. It was very happy healthy easy going and just wonderful and In the moment, I was thinking oh wow, this is what being pregnant feels like. I actually really like it I had a lot of time to devote to myself and my health and take walks on the beach and meditate and do yoga

DR. ELLIOT BERLIN, DC: Are you a health person pre-pregnancy?

ANASTASIYA RUL: Yes, I was I feel like I've been pretty healthy all my life In fact, I have never really taken any medicine or been to hospital

DR. ELLIOT BERLIN, DC: What kind of things growing up in Belarus? What kind of things did you do to maintain your health natural things?

ANASTASIYA RUL: Well, first of all, my family always grew their own food in the garden So we ate Organic pretty much fresh we picked home right around the corner in your own yard And just sports activities. I used to be a gymnast for about 13 years. So No health issues of any kind of whatsoever. I

DR. ELLIOT BERLIN, DC: Imagine a lot of exercise when you're doing gymnastics

ANASTASIYA RUL: Yeah, plus I lived in a small town where people walk everywhere Having a car is great. But it's more like a vacation You just take a walk to the store To the market to meet your friends to a cafe to the main square the castle We actually have castles over into my hometown

DR. ELLIOT BERLIN, DC: Wow, so definitely lots of exercises. It's not a problem It all kind of comes naturally with your pregnancy. Did you pre plan what you would do for? Maintaining your health during pregnancy

ANASTASIYA RUL: Yeah, I just figured I'll do the same thing I've already been doing except maybe avoiding certain foods. I stopped drinking coffee. I stopped taking certain herbs or using essential oils that would maybe trigger early contraction, but that's about it. I'm not a meat eater. I do eat seafood. So I feel like my diet stayed the same throughout the pregnancy and the weight gain was normal. I literally just had my belly in front of me, which was huge, but just the belly.

DR. ELLIOT BERLIN, DC: But you have a lot of energy. Did you have that energy also during your first pregnancy?

ANASTASIYA RUL: The first trimester was a little bit sleepy and a crazy thing happened while I got pregnant in New Orleans, where I lived for about seven, eight years. And after that happened, my partner and I decided to move to Los Angeles to be closer to his family. So the first trimester was a little bit tricky. We were literally selling everything, packing and getting ready to move and then moving across the country for five days was a little bit intense. I never had just a lot pretty much first

pregnancy or anything like that, but it was definitely challenging to drive eight hours a day. Oh, yeah. Super tired and exhausted and just wanted to go to bed.

DR. ELLIOT BERLIN, DC: So no nausea and vomiting?

ANASTASIYA RUL: No nothing like that. It was a super healthy pregnancy. Just more of it was amazing. Yeah, I think so, which is probably normal. I did feel a lot of endorphins as well throughout the whole pregnancy. I literally felt a little bit high on oxytocin.

DR. ELLIOT BERLIN, DC: Oh, wow, even just during pregnancy. What was your plan? Did you have a plan for childbirth?

ANASTASIYA RUL: Yes. So when we came to Los Angeles, we actually went to Belarus for a little bit. So by the time we came back to Los Angeles and the fires were over and I was settled more or less, we decided to hire a midwife and I was already five or six months pregnant. So it's a little bit later into the pregnancy. But we knew suddenly that we would like a home birth. That just felt so right for me and my partner because I was low risk. I had no health issues and I just felt like this is what I want and this is what I should do. It felt right. So my family and his family did not support us in that decision at all. So we kind of had secret meetings with the midwife.

DR. ELLIOT BERLIN, DC: Oh, wow. Did you have any concerns about home births or only your family did?

ANASTASIYA RUL: Only my family and his family. I actually went to that level of confidence that I didn't even want a midwife. I was so certain it could be just me and my partner in a quiet, loving space, just being all relaxed and calm. But having a midwife was reassuring and kind of gave you that little plan B at the back of your mind. But I did not have any concerns. I was just so positive and confident. I was impressed with myself that I had zero fear because it was the first time a lot of women are scared to go into birth.

DR. ELLIOT BERLIN, DC: Did you have previous exposure to birth, to childbirth? Have you seen people give birth or been around birth?

ANASTASIYA RUL: Only one in New Orleans. I was in the waiting room when my friend was having a baby and I was allowed to come in right after she delivered. But I was never present at birth. I never witnessed it. And maybe I was living in a little bit of a fantasy world, but I was also using my instincts. I feel like my intuition was always strong, especially during pregnancy, that when people look at me like, you're crazy to have a home birth. I thought that it was normal. It was right.

DR. ELLIOT BERLIN, DC: All right. So you're pregnant with your first baby. You're feeling strong, energetic, almost a little high on the oxytocin. You know that you want to give birth at home with your partner and decide to hire a midwife as well. Was there anybody else scheduled to come to the birth?

ANASTASIYA RUL: No, but we did have a difficult situation at the moment. Since we just moved to Los Angeles, my partner and I stayed with his mom for about six months. So pretty much we were always on the lookout for help, and it just didn't happen before birth. So at the last minute, I was realizing, okay, I'm going to have my baby in someone else's place. Pretty much we were looking for

a space of love to create a home right before birth. And it didn't happen on time, so I think this is where everything started going down the hill.

DR. ELLIOT BERLIN, DC: Okay, so you're planning to find your own place, but you're still living with your mother-in-law?

ANASTASIYA RUL: Yeah, well, we were in constant search, and we did not find it on time.

DR. ELLIOT BERLIN, DC: So at the end of your pregnancy, you're still living with your mother-in-law, but planning a home birth at her house?

ANASTASIYA RUL: Exactly.

DR. ELLIOT BERLIN, DC: And she wasn't a fan of home birth?

ANASTASIYA RUL: Exactly.

DR. ELLIOT BERLIN, DC: Alright, let's take a little break, and when we come back, we'll find out how your labor went. Don't go anywhere. We will be right back. Welcome back to the Informed Pregnancy Podcast, we're talking to Anastasia Ruhl, and in our story, you're planning a home birth, but you're living with your mother-in-law, who's not really into home birth, and you're not able to find your own place in time for the birth. Okay, how does your labor start?

ANASTASIYA RUL: Well, any birth practitioner would double question what happens when you're pregnant. Well, any birth practitioner would double question what happens, but I believe I was in labor for two weeks, and I felt like I was literally trying to keep the baby in my womb for the time for my mother-in-law to leave for Europe so we can have some space in her place. So I would have contractions slowly increasing over the course of two weeks, to the point that one morning, my water started breaking at 6 a.m., and this is when the midwife came over, checked my blood pressure, was low as always, she just told me to rest, try to sleep, and we labored like that at home for 24 hours, slowly progressing, very calm.

DR. ELLIOT BERLIN, DC: When you say you had like early labor for two weeks, where in relation to your due date did that start?

ANASTASIYA RUL: So I was about 38 weeks pregnant when I started feeling pressure and slowly increasing contractions over the course of two weeks. My baby always measured a week ahead, he was bigger, so I did not have any concerns that he would be premature or small, so pretty much any time at that point would be okay, except I feel I could try to keep him in my womb just to wait for my mother-in-law to leave for Europe so we can have some space in her house.

DR. ELLIOT BERLIN, DC: And then did she already leave when your water broke?

ANASTASIYA RUL: Yes, she was already gone when that started happening.

DR. ELLIOT BERLIN, DC: And then things picked up after your water broke?

ANASTASIYA RUL: Yes. My partner and I live in a home for about 24 hours, and it was pretty calm, but I wouldn't say it was so much relaxing because I constantly felt a little bit of anxiety, just somehow

sensing that it's not my safe place. I just didn't see that house as my home birthplace. To be honest, I was a little bit like a scared animal trying to find a corner. When cats have their kittens, they just go to the darkest corner where no one can find them and they stay there. And I could not find such a corner for myself. I tried everything, bedroom, couch, and bathroom. So I feel like things were progressing, but maybe slowly, not as fast as I would like them to be. So after 24 hours of laboring at home like that,

ANASTASIYA RUL: my baby passed my corneum, and it wasn't just a little bit of corneum. It was like pea soup. And I texted the picture to the midwife and she said, okay, we'll meet you at the hospital. This is when just a bell rang in my head, like, oh my God, I'm going to the hospital. I have not even packed a bag, and I was so certain I could do this at home. It was shocking, but of course we ran because we couldn't raise our baby's life. I think I should mention that I also didn't sleep for three days and two nights prior because the contractions were so intense by that point. And when we were leaving for a hospital, I started feeling a lot of pressure and what people call back pain. I don't like the word

ANASTASIYA RUL: pain because it wasn't really painful for me at any point in my labor, but I did feel a lot of pressure, which was probably a posterior position that my baby took trying to descend. Yes.

DR. ELLIOT BERLIN, DC: Another question I have for you is did you have an established backup doctor or did you just go to the hospital and, you know, whoever was there was going to deliver with you?

ANASTASIYA RUL: I was pre-registered at UCLA Santa Monica. I did not have a relationship with any other doctors because I was so fresh to the city and I just had a midwife and I was under her care. So it was whoever was working at the time on call. Yes. And actually I was admitted to the midwife unit, which was better. They let me labor for a few more hours. Although the moment I stepped into the hospital, my heart just sank down and I became scared when I was not scared at all at any point in my labor.

DR. ELLIOT BERLIN, DC: I have a question. Is hospital a scary place for you in general?

ANASTASIYA RUL: Yes.

DR. ELLIOT BERLIN, DC: Yes. Do you have any kind of history of a hospital that sort of laid the foundation for it not being

ANASTASIYA RUL: comfortable for you? You know, maybe I should work with a psychologist on this topic. I never have. When I was five or six years old, I did have a cap on my left foot. I don't remember what happened, but I remember I was in hospital for a long time and they were giving me painful injections with giant needles. And I was screaming so loud that the whole hospital knew my name and tried to bring me candy to quiet me down. I would take the candy

DR. ELLIOT BERLIN, DC: and I would still scream. Well, that seems like it can lay an early foundation for not wanting to go back. Probably, probably. I'm not a psychologist. It just doesn't sound like you had a good first experience with hospitals. Yeah. I mean, I'm from Bella Rose. Okay. So

you're in the hospital. And from the moment you walk in there, you start to feel fear. And are the midwives concerned about the pea soup looking meconium?

ANASTASIYA RUL: They didn't really express a huge concern. I was already about six centimeters dilated when I was admitted to the hospital. So they let me labor for a few more hours, but they did give me epidural and pitocin and antibiotics and IV all right away. And I was just strapped to the bed. So I felt like maybe I was in the worst condition that they were telling me, or maybe it was just a hospital protocol. That's what they do when you go there. So I don't know, but they were coming to check on me and the midwives were changing as well as the shifts were ending. So it was like two or three different ladies checking on me. Plus my midwife was there with me too. And I think the baby was getting tired

ANASTASIYA RUL: and I was getting tired. And then all of a sudden they said that I had preeclampsia, which I never had any sign or indication of high blood pressure before I got to the hospital. Literally a morning before, the midwife checked my blood pressure was always low. And then things just started happening. My baby, his vitals started dropping, my vitals started dropping, I guess because I was scared. And they just came to the room and said, we'll do a C-section. And this is when literally I felt like my soul was leaving my body. My body was shaking, it was cold. My baby pretty much was died. I was dying. So yeah, they just willed me to a surgery room and performed a C-section. And it was really hard to accept, but it was a huge lesson for me too.

DR. ELLIOT BERLIN, DC: What was the lesson for you?

ANASTASIYA RUL: That not everything is in my control. And maybe because I was trying to avoid all this hospital things and procedures, maybe instead I was actually attracting them. But yeah, I got it all. I was injected with so much medicine that I had never experienced in my life. And it was just the hardest feeling to accept that I was failing. I was failing as the mother in front of my partner's eyes because he was so believing in me for being capable to do this. And everything was just crumbling. My dream birth was crumbling right in front of my eyes. And I couldn't walk for 24 hours because it was full of magnesium sulfate with blown up legs and anesthesia. Now it's hard to talk about it. It brings back hard memories.

ANASTASIYA RUL: But definitely the biggest lesson was let it go. The birth is a process between you and your baby. It can control everything.

DR. ELLIOT BERLIN, DC: I mean, it sounds like you had sort of the opposite birth that you were planning for and that you were confident in. Like you said, you didn't even plan a hospital bag just so confident that you'd never have to leave the house. I wonder though, what was the experience like when you were able to hear your baby and hold your baby? Was that part of it positive or were you just too far gone to really appreciate it in the moment?

ANASTASIYA RUL: The nightmare continues. When they took my baby out of my womb, they didn't show him to me. Although I heard him cry, I thought I knew he was fine. And I sent my partner immediately right there in the surgery room to go and sing a song to him. I have this song, Angel Baby that was sent to the baby pretty much through the whole pregnancy. And the baby calmed down and stopped crying, it was beautiful. But they just willed him to NICU right away. I never hold my baby

right away and now I got the chance to bond. It was hard. And then they willed me to the recovery room where they monitored my blood pressure, which was eye-wrapping. Although I felt very calm at that point because there was nothing else I could do.

ANASTASIYA RUL: But my baby recovered really quick at NICU. So we had him probably after two days or so in my room.

DR. ELLIOT BERLIN, DC: Did they take your baby to the NICU because there was a particular problem? Was there a respiratory issue or?

ANASTASIYA RUL: Well, because they found some muconium perhaps in his lungs.

DR. ELLIOT BERLIN, DC: Oh, in the lungs?

ANASTASIYA RUL: Yeah. Okay. I'm not sure what the medical term is, aspiration perhaps. Yes. Yeah, so they were just keeping him there although he was so strong and he was thriving. They gave him back to me after two days or so just to be transferred to pediatrics to keep him there for a full week for a just-in-case course of antibiotics, which was horrible because I was so not in the right place emotionally and physically and I was stuck in a hospital instead of going home to recover. Plus I developed a complication, small bowel obstruction right after the surgery, the C-section, and I had to go to the emergency room while being in pediatrics with my baby and they just told me, oh, you're dehydrated, here's some IV fluid, go back, you're fine.

ANASTASIYA RUL: But I could not eat, I could not drink, even water would just come out, I would vomit it. So I had to go back to the emergency room and finally they performed full scan, full body scan and all kinds of investigation and testing and they found out that my intestines got stuck together. So I was admitted to surgery. department for a possible another surgery to go back and untie my intestines, which was horrific because for the first time in my life I just had a surgery and now I can potentially have another surgery right away. No. No thank you. So instead I tried to do my best to move around and let them put a tube through my nose, down to my throat, all the way to my stomach and just pump out all the liquid that was building up there.

ANASTASIYA RUL: I got so skinny so I never had problem losing weight after birth because the three days in that surgery department with no food, no water did it to me. But luckily everything recovered on the tone and I could go home finally. So pretty much two weeks after birth we're finally home. Just to realize that we're totally not ready for post-partum. I thought we could handle it because we were strong and why not, we're just one little human being, of course we can handle it. But after everything that happened to us, my partner had emotional crisis and PTSD. After seeing my baby's vitals dropping, literally he would recover the night and check our baby's breathing.

ANASTASIYA RUL: And yeah, we did not plan to have any help except, I guess, his mom, which was as helpful as it could be, but not quite what we needed at the moment. So yeah, it was really hard, but somehow we made it.

DR. ELLIOT BERLIN, DC: I mean, it sounds like it was very challenging for you both physically and emotionally. Yeah. The birth and all the complications, postpartum and then the recovery, I mean, it's hard enough to have the birth exactly how you want it, whatever the plan was, and then transition into

parenthood with all these complications and emotions swirling. It must have been really, really challenging for you.

ANASTASIYA RUL: Yeah, I honestly cannot believe it happened. It was a huge blessing by fate.

DR. ELLIOT BERLIN, DC: Now you're pregnant again, and you're due pretty soon, but we're going to take a little break. But when we come back, we'll find out what your plans are for this birth. We'll be right back with Anastasia Ruhl. Welcome back to the Informed Pregnancy Podcast. We are talking to Anastasia Ruhl. She is now pregnant again and due very soon. Let's talk about this. How has your second pregnancy been?

ANASTASIYA RUL: From the start, it was a very conscious conception. And literally, I knew right away that I conceived. Honestly, it was amazing from the first second of conception, because, again, I literally walked in oxytocin clouds and it was so palpable, even stronger than the first time. The first trimester, again, was a little bit sleepy tiring, but no vomiting, no toxicosis or anything like that. And then the second trimester just flew by. I guess I traveled to Belarus for about a month. Well, I have a toddler now, so this pregnancy is going by so quick that my only regret is that I just wanted to slow down so I can be more present in the moment and enjoy it. But it's been amazing as well. Also very healthy.

ANASTASIYA RUL: No challenges except maybe a little bit of a pelvic pain that is resolved now, thanks to you, Dr. Bowen.

DR. ELLIOT BERLIN, DC: Happy to help. Yeah. How many weeks are you now?

ANASTASIYA RUL: I think I'm 34 weeks now.

DR. ELLIOT BERLIN, DC: So you're getting pretty close. As you're getting closer, you know, you've had one birth, a cesarean And so your options really boil down to a repeat cesarean or a trial of labor after cesarean, hoping for a vaginal birth after cesarean. What is your plan?

ANASTASIYA RUL: My plan is feedback. And even though I'm very positive and somewhat confident about the success of the second birth, now I have plan B. I think I'm more content about going to the hospital if I have to. But so far, everything looks good. And the plan is home birth, vaginal delivery after cesarean. I have a really good team this time, a lot of support. I have my village now.

DR. ELLIOT BERLIN, DC: Who's in your village?

ANASTASIYA RUL: an amazing midwife. She just came into my life right on time when it happened and we kind of clicked immediately and we felt so strongly that she's the right choice for this birth. So I have Alex, if I see his last name right, I have Alex. I have an amazing birth doula, my friend from Moldova, Irina, and I have a different doula for postpartum. She is from Russia and her name is Alisa Matveyeva and I have my cousin, my maiden cousin, to watch my baby at birth and of course I have my partner who is up to this date supportive of me to try again. And we have our own place now so hopefully it will be nice and quiet and relaxing and calm. Oh and I have Alisa as my birth and therapist this time.

DR. ELLIOT BERLIN, DC: So you have a lot more of a team going into this one? Yes. And are you gonna

ANASTASIYA RUL: pack a bag this time just in case? I think I will just to be at peace with

DR. ELLIOT BERLIN, DC: that. How important is it to you to give birth at home and to give birth vaginally and how open are you to changes in the plan if they come up if you need to go to the hospital or if you would need to have another cesarean?

ANASTASIYA RUL: How prepared are you for that? A home birth is important to me for many reasons but not for my own pride but mostly for spiritual reasons because I truly believe that a baby who is born at home surrounded by family and friends who give you love right away who surround you with care and warmth is a happy baby. He comes out and he immediately feels being loved when in a hospital it's stressful. The lights are bright, the strangers don't quite care about you the same way. So I would love to give my baby that start in this world and of course this time I'm a little bit more flexible so if things don't go according to this plan I'll be more content going to the hospital and if I have to have another C-section then okay that's part of

DR. ELLIOT BERLIN, DC: the plan then it is a plan. Are you doing anything different to prepare your mind and body for birth this time? I mean it sounds like already very different the way you described it not having an environment where you felt safe or that was your home or that was your birthplace that seems to have changed now you do have a home that feels more like your birthplace to you before you were kind of on your own with your partner and sort of hoping for your mother-in-law to skip town and you had a midwife but now you have a team of people supporting you in mind and body. Have you done anything else to prepare for this birth? Yes I'm continuing doing a lot of

ANASTASIYA RUL: healing spiritually, emotionally, mentally, and physically throughout this pregnancy. Well first of all I'm going to you quite regularly and I'm trying to do belly dancing not maybe quite daily as recommended but I'm very aware of my tight muscles that need to be more relaxed and I also had a few interesting ceremonies with my friends, my village friends. I did a 120 day celebration for my baby soul to enter the body that felt very powerful and because we have our place now I do feel a lot more in charge a lot more powerful and grounded. I feel like I have the support I need and

DR. ELLIOT BERLIN, DC: it nourishes me, it gives me the strength. First of all I am honored to work with you and you do you kind of have an athletic sort of muscle tone where the muscles are very strong but also fairly tight and that creates a rigid environment that we've been working on loosening up and all the other things that you're doing sound really great. I love also that you are flexible and have more of an open mind and will be more prepared if you need to go down your flowchart that is your birth plan. If you need to go to a hospital or have interventions that hopefully should that happen hopefully it won't but it should that happen that it won't be as crushing of a emotional blow to you as it was last time. None of that was on your radar.

ANASTASIYA RUL: Thank you. Thank you so much for saying that. It means a lot to me.

DR. ELLIOT BERLIN, DC: Well I love working with you and I'm excited for your upcoming birth. I hope that you'll come back. I'm really grateful to you for sharing your story. It's a difficult story. for you

to tell, but you know, I know why you do it. Why most people do it is because you want to help other people hear different experiences and be more informed when they make their own plans, but I hope you'll come back very soon and share the great news of the arrival of your second baby and the story of how things went.

ANASTASIYA RUL: Ah, yeah, I hope so. Well, I'll definitely come back to finish the story. I hope people can listen to it and not feel alone if someone has a similar experience and there's always the light at the end of the tunnel.

DR. ELLIOT BERLIN, DC: That's really, really kind of you. All right, Anastasia, next time we talk to you, you will be juggling two babies on the after birth episode at home. Thanks for listening to the informed pregnancy podcast. If you like our program, share us with your friends, leave us some feedback in your podcast app or connect with us on Instagram at Dr. Berlin. That's D O C T O R B E R L I N.

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