Sonya Lee: Birth of a Baby and a New Career

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IN THIS EPISODE

Sonya Lee had done everything right — a business degree, a CPA career, a practical life in Los Angeles — and she was miserable doing it. Then came a Bumble match named Brandon, a decision to come off the birth control she had taken for ten years, and, just as the pandemic shut the world down, a surprise pregnancy she never saw coming. She joins Dr. Elliot Berlin, DC to tell how that pregnancy unfolded: the health changes she noticed once she stopped the pill, the early OB visits that left her feeling unheard and afraid, the mother whose own home births had quietly shaped how she thought about birth all along, and the mid-pregnancy switch to midwifery care that changed her plans entirely — plus a babymoon she was told not to take. When labor begins at 1 a.m., will the birth she has reimagined go the way she hopes — and could the experience really hand a former accountant a whole new calling?

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DR. ELLIOT BERLIN, DC: To the informed pregnancy podcast. I'm your host dr. Elliot Berlin. My guest today is a former CPA Whose own pregnancy and labor experience just a year ago led to a passionate and intentional change of career She is now a certified birth through life Sonya Lee. Welcome to the podcast. Hi, dr. Berlin Nobody at home could know how hard it was for us to arrange this recording I can only know that this is gonna be a very powerful episode because of all the effort we both put into it So let's start at the beginning. Where are you from? I am from Orange County, California the OC the OC and How is it growing up there

SONYA LEE: It is a beautiful place Super beautiful, but there's not a lot of culture. There's not a lot of diversity It's pretty plain, but it's really beautiful and there's a lot of very nice people here

DR. ELLIOT BERLIN, DC: Oh sweet. Oh, does that mean you went back to see you because you came to LA for a bit. I did

SONYA LEE: Yeah, so I went to LMU and I graduated there with a business degree and I stayed in LA for about 10 years Oh, and yeah, that's where I got pregnant and then we moved back to Orange

County. So the business degree

DR. ELLIOT BERLIN, DC: What was your plan career wise?

SONYA LEE: Yeah, so I went to college like right after the big market crash 0809 and so I really thought like I needed to do something practical and you did to do something where my degree Was gonna get me a job basically so I kind of put aside like all my fantasies of doing like Literature and art and all the humanities stuff and I went into accounting Which didn't pan out obviously

DR. ELLIOT BERLIN, DC: Yeah, I mean why accounting though, I mean even with job ability careers

SONYA LEE: Accounting is very specific. Yeah, it is. So my cousin did accounting My family was really raw raw about it and I took my first accounting class and I actually liked it in school I was actually decently good at it in school Like it's really more of like a puzzle and so I was able to kind of like I did pretty well in school It was really until I got into the job market that I realized that the work in real life is like a lot different Than school just like anything really and I just really didn't like it the hours the the culture I just it wasn't something I was passionate about I just really couldn't see myself sitting at a desk all day. You don't like puzzles that much I don't like puzzles that much

SONYA LEE: Exactly, but I learned a lot about it. I learned a lot about myself. I think in that process I really realized like I can't people please my family I love my family, but I can't do something For other people and I really learned what it's like to be just beaten down with like god. I hate my life I hate what I'm doing. I didn't feel like I was Serving anyone or like helping anybody really I was like I had no connections with the people around me or the companies And it just felt really I don't even know how to explain it I mean even talking about I'm like it was just a really not a great time of my life I just felt not who I was really and my minor was women's studies. So that was kind of my outlet it was

SONYA LEE: my way to learn and be creative and be around people I liked. But really like the message I was getting was you can't be a women's studies major. You can't graduate with that and get, you know, like a good paying job afterwards. So they weren't raw about that. Definitely not. Definitely not. But I put that in my backpack and I was like, I really like this. I love learning about history and advocacy and all of that stuff. So I took it seriously and I was like, I want the minor. I don't know why back then, but I was like, I really just feel like I want this. I want this for myself and I'm glad I did that. So now it's funny because I do feel like it's relevant in some ways with being a doula.

DR. ELLIOT BERLIN, DC: It's really interesting that you say that because I know two people, one who's a corporate lawyer, but she started as a doula and then she became a lawyer. And then I know somebody else who was a lawyer and then became a doula.

SONYA LEE: I think I listened to that episode.

DR. ELLIOT BERLIN, DC: Oh yeah.

SONYA LEE: It was Shannon McGuire. I did. Yes. And I remember seeing the label or maybe you showed it to me and I was like, Oh, like I would like this because I relate because I was in an accounting job at that time and I feel like lawyers and accountants. It's kind of like similar. Yeah.

DR. ELLIOT BERLIN, DC: So it's advocating and it's organizing and it's being there for your clients. So it kind of, it seems worlds apart, but actually in reality, there's a lot of similarities to it, especially lawyer and do well. Okay. Fine. So you're in LA for 10 years for school and then work. Yes.

SONYA LEE: And then I worked at two different firms. Yeah. After school.

DR. ELLIOT BERLIN, DC: And then you met your hubby.

SONYA LEE: And then I met the man.

DR. ELLIOT BERLIN, DC: Yeah. How'd you guys meet?

SONYA LEE: We actually met on Bumble.

DR. ELLIOT BERLIN, DC: I mean, you say actually, but like, I think like two out of five, like 20 plus percent of people are meeting that way now you met pre pandemic, right? We did. Yeah. Cause like now with the pandemic is even more online. Um, Bumble's, what was your Bumble experience like before Brandon?

SONYA LEE: Oh my gosh. Uh, not good. It is scarce out there. There's not a lot of good guys out there. Yeah. And luckily I only went on maybe like four dates before him, but poor guy. He was on it for like a year before we met. Um, yeah. And he was just like, it was bad, but yeah, it was pretty bad for me. There are some liars out there. People lied on their page and they show up and you're like, what? Who are you? Like, it was crazy. Um, but yeah, luckily like he worked out and it's so funny because he was my fifth date and I told my friends, I was like, I'm not doing this anymore. I'm done. No more online dating. This is not working out for me. And then luckily he was like my last guy and he was the one. So I got really lucky.

DR. ELLIOT BERLIN, DC: See, it's like I said, if you put in the effort and it's really challenging, but then it happens. It's a match.

SONYA LEE: It's good. It's rewarding. Yes.

DR. ELLIOT BERLIN, DC: Very rewarding. Okay. So Bumble dating is behind you. Yes.

SONYA LEE: Thank God. I'll never be on there again. Yeah.

DR. ELLIOT BERLIN, DC: Where's he from originally?

SONYA LEE: He's from Houston, but he went to UT and Austin.

DR. ELLIOT BERLIN, DC: It's hard for you to admit that he's from Houston.

SONYA LEE: I don't love the place. I'm not going to say I love it, but Austin is better. Yeah.

DR. ELLIOT BERLIN, DC: Austin's pretty cool. And he was in LA when you met.

SONYA LEE: Yeah.

DR. ELLIOT BERLIN, DC: So he had moved out to LA for work.

SONYA LEE: He's an investment banker, banking.

DR. ELLIOT BERLIN, DC: So you're all in the, like the numbers genre.

SONYA LEE: Yeah, we get each other that way, but I'm also like, I don't want to be in this world anymore. Peace out.

DR. ELLIOT BERLIN, DC: Oh my God. I don't want to be around the conversations around your household monthly budget budgeting. All right. So you guys met and you dated for a while or

SONYA LEE: we dated for about two years when I got pregnant and now we've been together almost four years.

DR. ELLIOT BERLIN, DC: When you got pregnant, it sounds like it wasn't entirely planned.

SONYA LEE: If it was not, no, we were planning on getting engaged. That was the whole, you know, story. We're like, okay, 2020, we're going to get engaged. And then I actually got knocked up like right when the pandemic started and I am convinced it was COVID that knocked me up.

DR. ELLIOT BERLIN, DC: What do you think it was Brandon?

SONYA LEE: Well, I think they colluded. It was both of them. My cycle got thrown up. I'm pretty sure I got COVID. It threw me off. Things got messed up.

DR. ELLIOT BERLIN, DC: Oh, I see what you're saying. You were off of timing.

SONYA LEE: Yes, I was.

DR. ELLIOT BERLIN, DC: Yeah.

SONYA LEE: I had timing changed on you. Yeah. Yeah. I had found out about, you know, birth control and what it does to her body long-term and I had been on it for 10 years and I was like, Oh my gosh, like learning all this stuff. Just like, I need to get off this stuff. This stuff is really bad. Like all these issues. And since getting off, I can honestly say like my health is so much better in that year. Like it took a bit of time, but oh my gosh, so many things changed for me after getting off birth control. But yeah.

DR. ELLIOT BERLIN, DC: curious, because I'm sure a lot of people are wondering right now, like, what is she talking about? Like, what kind of symptoms or things were you experiencing that went away? Yeah.

SONYA LEE: And you know, it's crazy. I think a lot of the symptoms, you don't even know you have them, especially if you've taken it for 10 years, like you don't know the things that you don't know until you get off and things that I noticed that I had experienced were major mood swings, like almost like depression, anxiety, just moodiness, general moodiness, crankiness, brain fog, stomach issues that I've healed a lot of, but I think a lot of my gut issues were from birth control, just like fatigue, all this stuff that's just like an underlying thing and you get off in and you're like, Whoa, I'm a different person now that I'm not on this stuff.

DR. ELLIOT BERLIN, DC: Well, that's powerful. Did you get off of it before you guys started dating?

SONYA LEE: No, it was after we started dating, which is not the smartest thing.

DR. ELLIOT BERLIN, DC: I was just wondering, like, did that freak either one of you out?

SONYA LEE: Um, I mean, we were being careful, but yeah, we both knew. And he, my boyfriend, my husband, he's super into health as well. And we kind of like discovered this together. We're both kind of on our health journey together. And he was like fully on board. Like, yeah, you need to get off of this. It sounds like this is similar to, you know, taking antibiotics for a long time. And I had an IUD in high school and we were kind of talking about, how should I do that? But that was really traumatizing for me. My body did not take well to bat. So we kind of just had a few months where we're like, let's try to figure this out and then unfortunately, and now I realize why people are on birth control for a long time is you get pregnant.

SONYA LEE: That's what happens when you don't have birth control. So that was our very sensitive people.

DR. ELLIOT BERLIN, DC: Well, I mean, maybe it's fortunate. I think it is, is meant to be a fully believe that. All right. Well, now I'm so curious. We're going to take a quick break, but when we come back, I'd love to find out how you found out you're pregnant, how you shared the news, what your pregnancy was like. Don't go anywhere. We'll be right back with Sonya Lee. Welcome back to the informed pregnancy podcast. We're talking to CPA turned doula certified doula CD, Sonia Lee, and it all rhymes. Okay. So, you know, you're dating, you get off the birth control for what I think is great reasons. I mean, I hear so many people talk about those same things that you just mentioned and it's unlike that.

DR. ELLIOT BERLIN, DC: I actually sometimes hear that with like anything in the body, like the IUD or even if it's not medicated or the breast implant, sometimes people have like, they'll have these. Horrible periods and they don't understand why and just for one reason or another they'll take out the implants and then boom it's gone Yeah, I've heard of that too. Yeah, so thanks for sharing that. Okay, but then you're like going With the clock you're working on the calendar trying to avoid the fertile times Exactly. Yeah, and then the pandemic hits in like February 2020 and then you Are just around each other a lot more?

SONYA LEE: Yeah, good point. Yeah, there's not a lot to do Can't leave the house

DR. ELLIOT BERLIN, DC: So the calendar gets blurry and then How did you find out that you're pregnant?

SONYA LEE: Yes, so I found out you know I was supposed to have my period and I'm very regular after I got off the pill very easy to track and I remember like Looking at my app and seeing the red dot like for instance a Wednesday and Then you know another day would go by and then that red dot kept getting pushed out and I kept looking me like I Swear that red dot was on Wednesday. Like why is it on Friday? Like how does this keep happening? And I was like, wait a minute, you know, all of a sudden you get this like shift At least that's how it was for me. I was like and like I was like my body does feel weird Like what's going on? So I took a pregnancy test and I was like, oh shit But yeah,

that's basically how I found out

SONYA LEE: I was totally oblivious for probably like three or four days and then I took the test and I was pregnant

DR. ELLIOT BERLIN, DC: Wow, and had you guys I mean not being on birth control There was always a possibility had you guys talked about like alright if it happens it happens. Was there any point?

SONYA LEE: I mean, I think we're both just like it wouldn't happen I think it's because I've personally have friends who have not been on birth control for years and they just do the pull out and then like nothing ever happened like I don't really have any friends who that happened to and I was probably just Really honestly quite dumb about it. Like I just didn't even think I mean

DR. ELLIOT BERLIN, DC: Over the years had so many pull-out babies come through the office I kind of feel like they should have a group on Facebook. We should and be like you guys

SONYA LEE: Yeah, no for you for the babies for the babies. Yeah. Yeah. No, I mean Fortunately, he's an amazing guy and he took to it when I told him I was excited about it when I told him Which I didn't even think I I don't know it was such a weird thing I had all this joy and I was like, yes This is what I'm supposed to do because backtrack a little bit before the pandemic. I was really down on my job I was like I can't do this the rest of my life. I'm miserable I really can't do this and I literally would pray to God the universe and just be like what is my next move? Like I can't be an accountant. This is so not me. It's so not in alignment with me and When this came up, I was just like, oh

SONYA LEE: Like I definitely was starting to look into like event planning and project management and all these other business type things I could do and then this came up and it kind of felt like oh Maybe this is what I should be doing So when I brought him the stick and he was so excited about it We hadn't had conversations about like what would happen if we had a baby like it wasn't even in our minds Like I was 27 at the time and yeah, like it wasn't really in my timeline at all And he was super excited. We were both like, oh crap, but it kind of just like I don't know It just fell into place and it felt right It was like oh and then the pandemic and we were like, yeah, like why not this is weirdly like good timing

DR. ELLIOT BERLIN, DC: I guess yeah, and were you still in LA at that point? Yeah, we were in Santa Monica at the time Yeah, okay. So I know I I mean it was a hard-hit city Yeah

SONYA LEE: Yeah, it was a lockdown major What made you guys move back to Orange County? We moved to Orange County in October So I was very pregnant by that point. I was like seven months in yeah

DR. ELLIOT BERLIN, DC: And did you just want to be closer to family or out of the city?

SONYA LEE: Yeah, we just realized I think the later the more pregnant I got the more I realized I needed to be closer to my mom and closer to my family And just being in such a congested city on top of each other and we lived on Main Street in Santa Monica So it's nice, but it wasn't family-friendly Yeah crowded so we just wanted to be closer to family more of a family-friendly area. Yeah of a little

space

DR. ELLIOT BERLIN, DC: Yeah, it's all about the space. All right. So, you know during your unexpected pregnancy You weren't a birth junkie yet. So what?

SONYA LEE: No

DR. ELLIOT BERLIN, DC: What were you doing to get ready for birth? What kind of plans did you have? You know, there's all those choices like home birth hospital birth midwife doctor medicated unmedicated cesarean vaginal, etc All the things where was your mind? So I'll just start with

SONYA LEE: So my mom had me and my brother at home and I didn't know this at the time, like when she would my whole life just tell us her birth stories, I didn't know that she was really shaping the way I thought about birth and the way it felt in my body, if that makes sense. I really like didn't have any feelings of like fear or even associate the hospital with birth. But naturally growing up, you know, society tells you to be scared in the epidural. And you just think going to the hospital and getting the epidural at the same time, I had this like weird dual dichotomy thing with like birth where it's like my mom is kind of like this hippie and like did, you know, home birth and supernatural. But everyone I know

SONYA LEE: and like society is like you go to the hospital. So really in my mind, I was like, oh, I'm obviously going to go to the hospital and get the epidural, like give me all the drugs. I'm definitely not doing unmedicated like absolutely no way didn't even cross my mind. So when I got pregnant, I just did what everyone does. I went to go see the OB and I just had a few instances of like, I just didn't like it. I'm going to be honest. I just didn't like it. I did not connect. Just a vibe or were there like specific things you didn't like? There were like two specific things, but also a vibe. The first thing I had some implantation bleeding maybe like week six and I called and they were like, you need to go

SONYA LEE: to the hospital right now. You're having a miscarriage. And I was like, what? Like, what do you mean? And this was COVID. So I'm like, oh my God, I have to go to the hospital. My husband couldn't come. Like it was pretty traumatizing. Everything ended up being fine. So that kind of irked me. I was just like, I feel like it just jumped to like, something's wrong immediately. So that kind of just bothered me and put a bad taste in my mouth. And then later, a couple, must've been like a few weeks later down the road, we were like, we want to go on a baby moon. We had been traveling, traveling with a huge part of our relationship. And it's just like our favorite thing to do together.

SONYA LEE: And we're like, we don't care that it's COVID. We want to go on a baby moon. This is going to be our last trip, like before we have a baby. And we brought that up to my provider and they were like, basically like, you can't go, you're putting your baby in danger. If anything happens, your baby's going to die. Like all of this stuff. And I was just like, what the, like, this is so weird. I'm trying to like share this joy and like this exciting news with you. I don't know. And it was such a weird time too. So I get that people were all on edge. It was very like, how could you travel when you're pregnant? Like all this stuff. And it was just like too much. It was like, I can't, like, I just need to block out the world in general.

SONYA LEE: I kind of did that during 2020. Like, you know, what's going on is not my problem to solve. I'm just going to live in my bubble of peace and like grow this baby with love and just calmness

and already trying to block out the world. And then having your provider, like try to burst that bubble and bring in fear. It just made me think like, what's going to happen like during birth? Like, what are you going to be saying to me? And just like down the road through appointments, I was just like, I don't really like this.

DR. ELLIOT BERLIN, DC: So did that make you think maybe another doctor is a better fit or?

SONYA LEE: Yeah, I was kind of like another doctor. And also, so I had like kind of a traumatizing experience with the IUD. I don't really feel comfortable. Like even with pap smear, I just don't like any of that stuff. And then being in the hospital, it just like brought those things up again. And I was just like, Oh, I just would like love to do this without anyone touching me. Like, I just don't like that. I'm not comfortable. I immediately tense up. My body freezes just being around by coats. I'm just like, Oh, not my thing at all.

DR. ELLIOT BERLIN, DC: Just curious, is that medicine in general or just kind of more obstetric key things

SONYA LEE: or gynecological things or touch overall? I would just say really like hospital-y stuff. Hospital-y medical-y stuff. And maybe both. Honestly, it could be both. It depends on the person. It depends on the person and their vibe. I'm very particular with who I allow in that type of way, if that makes sense. I'm just very particular. I get, yeah, there's some people where I'm just like, yeah, I don't really want you in my vibe. I don't really want you in my space. If you're touching me, that's, yeah, that's the only thing.

DR. ELLIOT BERLIN, DC: You need to connect to feel- I need to connect.

SONYA LEE: Yeah, I do. That's comfortable.

DR. ELLIOT BERLIN, DC: Yeah. So did you switch to another doctor?

SONYA LEE: So this whole process, I'm talking to my mom, obviously, just with everything that's going on. And she's like reminding me of my birth and we're like connecting on this level. And I'm starting to look into birth stuff. And she was like, you know, you could look into midwifery care. What do you think about this? And then I started looking into it. And then I just went head first and I was like, this is what I need to do.

DR. ELLIOT BERLIN, DC: Wow. Okay. I mean, it kind of makes sense because you said from the beginning, you didn't really feel fear of birth. You just-

SONYA LEE: Yeah. I'm not going to say I'm fearless. I definitely had moments of doubt. I had a lot of moments of doubt and fear, but I think- during the pregnancy during the, yeah, especially at the end, like, of course I was scared, like having a home birth. It's like, how could you not be? I mean, some people are and that's amazing, but yeah, for me, I definitely had fear for sure. Okay.

DR. ELLIOT BERLIN, DC: Let's look into that when we talk about your birth story. Cause most people have some fear wherever you're having the baby. Yeah. So, you know, kind of want to weed out fear of not being in the hospital or fear of being home or fear of birth. So once you switched to the midwives, did you end up going your baby moon?

SONYA LEE: Yeah. So we basically told the midwife, look, we have this baby moon planned. What are your thoughts? And she was like, uh, yes, like go on this baby moon. We were going to Bora Bora. Yeah. Yeah. So she's like, you should go. I want to go like anyone would say. Right. So we went to Fiji first. No, it was a straight flight from LAX to Bora Bora straight there. Well, we went to Maria first and then Bora Bora.

DR. ELLIOT BERLIN, DC: No fair.

SONYA LEE: But it was like, yeah, fairy. We did take a ferry, but it was eight hours. Like that was it.

DR. ELLIOT BERLIN, DC: Oh, cause we're in Southern California. It's longer for everybody else. Okay. So Bora Bora sounds amazing. How was it?

SONYA LEE: It was amazing. We didn't even know this, but we were there during whale season. So we ended up booking a trip to do swimming with humpback whales. And I was pregnant. We have these incredible photos of like my belly with the mama whale and the baby whale. And yeah, it's like only one of like three places in the world where you can do that. Oh my goodness. It was incredible. It was amazing. And then he proposed to me on the trip. So that was amazing. Yeah. Totally surprised me. Yeah. Yeah. I mean, I kind of thought, but he threw me off. And then at the end he did at the very end and I was like, what the heck on my toes the whole time. So yeah, very glad we switched providers and went on our baby.

DR. ELLIOT BERLIN, DC: And you didn't have to worry about getting pregnant.

SONYA LEE: Exactly. So relaxing.

DR. ELLIOT BERLIN, DC: Oh, that's an amazing trip. I'm glad you got to take it. Yeah.

SONYA LEE: It was really cool.

DR. ELLIOT BERLIN, DC: Okay. So let's take a quick break. When we come back, we'll get your worst story. Welcome back to the informed pregnancy podcast. We're talking to Sonia Lee and Sonia was all geared up for a hospital birth with medical doctors and then took a sharp turn into home birth with midwives. Okay. And so let's look at the cast of characters. It was going to be you obviously, and Brandon, and then midwife, I assume a midwife assistant or two midwives.

SONYA LEE: Yes.

DR. ELLIOT BERLIN, DC: And then Dula.

SONYA LEE: And then I Dula.

DR. ELLIOT BERLIN, DC: Yeah. Anybody from your family?

SONYA LEE: No, I didn't have my mom. Okay.

DR. ELLIOT BERLIN, DC: I didn't know. It sounds like you regret that or she regrets it.

SONYA LEE: I don't know. I think I, I'm kind of a mommy's girl. So I was like, no, you shouldn't come. Cause I might just break and I don't know. I've seen mothers with their daughters and it's really

beautiful. So maybe next time I think I could maybe have her. Okay.

DR. ELLIOT BERLIN, DC: That's cool. All right. So that's the cast of people. How did your labor start?

SONYA LEE: Yeah. So my labor started at probably like 1 a.m. in the morning. I just, yeah. Well, initially I just had this flood of emotion. They got up to go pee and I was just like, I can't, I was like, I can't do this anymore. And I just felt this wave of like adrenaline and emotions. And I was like, that's new. And then immediately, yeah, contractions just started hitting. They were like 10 minutes apart. And my Dula was like, you know, she drilled it in me. Like you need to sleep. You need to sleep. Everyone in the classes, everything was like sleep, sleep, sleep. And so I was like trying to sleep, just distracting myself. And by the morning I was like, okay, I hadn't slept. So we were like, let's get things ready. Got things ready. We chilled.

SONYA LEE: We were like, I don't remember what we were doing playing with the dog cooking, hanging out. My mom came to walk the dog. And I remember she gave me this look and she was like, you should like call the Dula. And I was like, I'm okay. Like I'm fine. And then we, yeah, we started talking to her in the morning. And I think we were just really confused. We were like, how long does this take? Like, should she come now? But I would say by 11 AM, I mean, it was like hitting hard. Brandon put me in the shower. And then from there, it was really just like a haze.

DR. ELLIOT BERLIN, DC: When you say hitting hard, like, can you describe what you were feeling?

SONYA LEE: Yeah, just, oh my gosh, it's crazy. It's been a year and my brain is like forgotten. Yeah. I mean, obviously pain, like period cramps, but more intense. But I really think like mentally I was in another place. Like you're just not there. And I'm really lucky that I was able to just kind of not black out, but like really go into that primal place where you're just in it and you're just letting your body do it. And you're not really running away from it. You're just allowing it to happen. And I feel like I did that part pretty well. Like I progressed pretty quickly in that sense. So I went in the shower, they put me in the bath and then Brandon was FaceTiming with my doula and I guess I was moaning in the bathtub,

SONYA LEE: like a cow, like I was just like in it. Yeah, and Lori was like, okay, send them in right there right now. Like she needs to be there right now. And then she started coming down to meet us and the midwife got there at, I think she got there like three or four. And I was like, I think I was like seven centimeters. So it's 14 hours into it roughly. Something like that, yeah. But I would say it didn't really get hard until like later in the morning.

DR. ELLIOT BERLIN, DC: Wait, seven centimeters, was that kind of what you expected when she checked you or?

SONYA LEE: I had no idea. I wasn't even in a place to be thinking. It was so weird. It was such a weird place. Like I was just holding on to the bathtub for dear life.

DR. ELLIOT BERLIN, DC: Was the warm water comforting to you?

SONYA LEE: Amazing, yeah, it was the best. I mean, I was probably in the water too much.

DR. ELLIOT BERLIN, DC: Oh, are you a bath person in general?

SONYA LEE: I am, yeah.

DR. ELLIOT BERLIN, DC: Okay, so it's a calming place for you. Yeah. And then were there any things that, it sounds like it was you and Brandon for a while. Any things that Brandon were able to say or do that you felt were particularly helpful?

SONYA LEE: Again, I can't even remember, but yeah, I mean, he was just so reassuring for me. Just loving on me, like telling me I was amazing. You've got this. He had no fear. I mean, honestly, by the end of it and during the birth, my husband had zero fear. He was just like, yep, you're having a baby. Like even our doula was like, you need to be the daddy doula for everyone because you just rocked it. Like he held me through fully. Anytime I had doubts or fears, like he just squashed them and was like, you're fine, you've got this, you're okay.

DR. ELLIOT BERLIN, DC: Tune into our next episode when we have a male indefinite banker who becomes a doula. Yeah, yeah. Okay, so once your labor's going on, it sounds like it was intense but tolerable.

SONYA LEE: Totally, yeah.

DR. ELLIOT BERLIN, DC: Okay, and then you're talking about how Brandon had no fear. Did you have fear?

SONYA LEE: You know, I mean, up until this point, I didn't. I don't think I had fear. I had negative thoughts come in at points.

DR. ELLIOT BERLIN, DC: Like what for example?

SONYA LEE: Just like, you know, how much more painful could this get? Like where's my team? You know, because when it hits you, then you're like, where is everyone? But like for the longest while, I was like, I'm fine. So then I was like, where is everyone? Am I gonna have this without, you know, I guess that is fear without anyone there. But I was able to squash that and I just really was like, stay focused, like stay open, like that kind of talk, kind of like coaching myself, I guess. But then transition hits and it's like super intense. And I think the biggest fear that came out verbally, cause I don't think I could talk that much until like the pushing in that phase. But up until then, I like really couldn't formalize sentences or words really.

SONYA LEE: But I do remember like the biggest fear for me was like, am I taking too long? Am I gonna have to be transferred to the hospital? And then I remembered Laurie being like, you're fine. Like, no, you're not going to the hospital. Like you're on the right track. So for me, my fear was like timing. I was like, am I gonna take too long? That type of stuff.

DR. ELLIOT BERLIN, DC: And it's also so conscious. Like it's your mind overanalyzing and thinking all the things that could go not right for you.

SONYA LEE: Exactly, yeah. So it was like really for me, like when I had that come up, like I just had to be like, nope, not allowed to do that. Like back to focusing, back to breathing. I mean, it's very much like, you know, back and forth of like trying to get your mind to just relax and like take a back seat and be in your body. And you have like a few contractions where you got that. And then, you

know, one contraction comes and it's more intense than the last. And that's when that, for me, that would like that hurt like, okay, what's going? And it brings you kind of out of it. But for me, like trying to get back into the flow and the rhythm of it, that was like my best friend during that was the only thing that kept me feeling

SONYA LEE: like I could manage, yeah.

DR. ELLIOT BERLIN, DC: Okay, so was it a long transition before you were complete?

SONYA LEE: I don't think so. But again, I don't know. I pushed for two hours and he was born at 10. So I must've been-

DR. ELLIOT BERLIN, DC: 10 PM?

SONYA LEE: Yeah, I must've been done by like eight-ish, I guess.

DR. ELLIOT BERLIN, DC: So then less than 24 hours total.

SONYA LEE: Yeah, a little bit less, yeah.

DR. ELLIOT BERLIN, DC: Okay. And then you pushed for two hours. Did you have coaching near pushing? Did you just feel ready to push and start pushing on your own? How was your pushing experience?

SONYA LEE: The pushing experience sucked and I did not prepare for that part. I feel like I prepared so much for transition and learning about that. in the stages. And then for some reason, I just thought, Oh, then you just like pushed out the baby. Like it just comes out, totally missed that part about pushing. I didn't realize that it was a lot harder than it was going to be for me. So yeah, I felt a little urgey here and there, but not much. And I was fully complete. And so I did also, they broke my water. I asked my midwife to break my water because I remember pushing and like, he was just rocking down the pelvic bone and I couldn't get him out. I was getting so tired. And I was just like, I need relief. And they were like, okay, if we break your

SONYA LEE: water, like it'll happen a lot faster and help. Cause my water bag hadn't broken at that point. I was pushing and he was fully still in his water bag. So that was kind of rough. So I mean, yeah, I wish he was born and called. That would have been pretty awesome, but I was like, I don't know how long I can do that for. So yeah, they did end up like coaching me a little bit. They did end up coaching me towards the end. And then luckily at the very end, I did feel like that. I don't know if it was the fetal ejection reflex or something, but my body fully took over like the last two contractions and just pushed them out for me. It was a blessing.

DR. ELLIOT BERLIN, DC: They do say that with the fetal ejection reflex. It's sort of like the last mile of a marathon. It kind of runs itself.

SONYA LEE: Oh my God. Yeah. And I was just like, thank the Lord. It was kind of like, and I've heard people talk about this on your podcast, like vomiting in reverse. Like that's what it felt like. It was, I took no effort. My body just did it. And I was like, thank you because I'm tapped out. Like I'm done.

DR. ELLIOT BERLIN, DC: Were you in water or on land?

SONYA LEE: I was in the water. I was in the birth pool, which I'm very happy about.

DR. ELLIOT BERLIN, DC: Yeah. And then did you kind of bring the baby out yourself?

SONYA LEE: No, my husband caught. Yeah, that was really cool. Yeah.

DR. ELLIOT BERLIN, DC: Do the banker Brandon. Yeah. Baby catcher Brandon. Yeah. That's such a sweet story. So moving forward, like the next time you accidentally get pregnant, would you do the same plan on similar plan? Oh yeah, for sure. So as intense as it was, it didn't scare you off from.

SONYA LEE: No, I mean, it was the hardest thing in my life. And I remember after I gave birth, I literally said, I was like, why did I do that? I'm never doing that again. Like I'm never doing that again. And it's crazy because I mean the, my processing of the birth has been this full year. I still processing it. And I always just come back to, but that feeling afterwards of meeting him and like fully being there present and like him being there, the first look he gave me, the way he was staring at me, the hormones you feel like the way you just feel like I just did that. Like I just freaking gave birth and I was like, this isn't happening. When it was happening, I was like, there's no way this baby

SONYA LEE: coming out. Like I was just like, I don't know how this is going to work. And that's why I was like, am I, do I need to go to the hospital? Cause there's no way this is coming out. And it's just the best feeling. It's incredible. It's really, uh, the emotions, the hormones, all of the cocktails you get, it's just unlike anything I've ever experienced. And the way that you feel like you can do anything and the confidence it brings you is just beyond what anything has ever done for me.

DR. ELLIOT BERLIN, DC: The natural cocktails that your body made.

SONYA LEE: Totally.

DR. ELLIOT BERLIN, DC: Yeah. If we can only bottle those, I feel like.

SONYA LEE: Exactly. Oh my God.

DR. ELLIOT BERLIN, DC: Yeah. Oh, so sharks. Okay. Um, now you're a doula and you support other people giving birth. How was it to be kind of on the other side of that? And is it something that you wanted to change? You weren't feeling fulfilled in accounting. Is this kind of feeling that emptiness that you were feeling?

SONYA LEE: I think so. It is. Yeah. I mean, after I had Greece and I could not stop watching birth videos. I mean, I was watching from afar. I didn't have a birth account. I wasn't interacting with people, but I just was like obsessed. And my husband was like, why are you still like watching this stuff? I'm like, nothing moves me more than watching someone give birth. It's incredible. It's like, how close to God can you get? You know what I mean? It's incredible. And yeah, I had the thought like, I really want to do this. And throughout my pregnancy, I, you know, talking with my doula, my midwives, I was just like, this is what you do. Like this seems so fun and so cool. It didn't seem like a job. I was like, we're just hanging out, chatting.

SONYA LEE: And I just couldn't stop thinking about it. And finally, my husband was like, you should do something about this. Like, I really think you should. And I just felt like I was like on the edge, right. Of a cliff. Cause it's like, I have this business background, all these thoughts, like I'm supposed to be in an office or doing this type of thing. And I was just like, screw it. Like I'm going to try this and just like jumped off like head first. And it's fun. It's like a passion. It doesn't feel like a career job, you know?

DR. ELLIOT BERLIN, DC: Well, that's amazing. It sounds like eventually that you can get both. You can get the job that earns an income and also that fills your. for supporting people and helping people and women in particular. And yeah, I mean, out of all the births I've ever been to, it never ever gets old, no matter what the setting or how they come out. Even a cesarean birth, it's incredible. It never gets old. I always get weepy. I've talked about it on the podcast before. I was like, hey, Dr. B, come and picture. And I'm like, thank goodness I don't wear mascara because it would be all over my face. All right. One more question I have for you is, what do you consider your primary role as a doula?

SONYA LEE: I think my primary role is just to support. I think it's like emotional and spiritual support for the woman. Yeah, I agree. You don't have to have an unmedicated birth or even a home birth or any of that for it to be like this magical journey. You can have a cesarean. You can have a hospital birth. You can do whatever you want. And your doula is there to just really support you emotionally and figuring out how you want to give birth. And I think the intention and having a conscious birth of like, how do you want this to go? It just changes the world, right? Like I love that saying a conscious birth is a conscious world. The more you put thought into how you're bringing forth life, just the more better experience it's going to be for you

SONYA LEE: and for your baby and just a healthier experience. And so for me as a doula, I'm just there to support you and give you the information. There's the physical part of it. But I really think the emotional part is so, so huge because this is like a once-in-a-lifetime moment in your life. In this pregnancy journey, you're so vulnerable and so raw. And it really is more than just learning about what to feed your baby and the crib and this and that and the nursery. It's like this can be about you and it can be this spiritual journey of like discovering how far you have to dig deep to like bring your baby into this world. It's really incredible. And yeah, not to get sappy or woo-woo, but I really do. That's like how it is for me.

DR. ELLIOT BERLIN, DC: Yeah. I love that we went from rah-rah to woo-woo. But I'll tell you what, sappy or not, like the passion just kind of oozes out of you. I can see it because I can see, but you can hear it in your voice. Like you could hear the smile when you're talking about it. You can hear the fulfillment when you're talking about it. And no doubt that makes you an amazing doula for people who are lucky enough to be the receiving end of your services, which brings me to this. So yeah, where can we find you on the line?

SONYA LEE: Yeah, you can find me. My website is mamaprimalbirth.com. And you can find me on Instagram at mamaprimal. And you can email me, but those are easier ways to find me.

DR. ELLIOT BERLIN, DC: Mamaprimal. I like it. Yeah. Thank you for joining us and for sharing your story. Beautiful birth story. It's very empowering and good luck with the new career.

SONYA LEE: Thank you. Thank you. I appreciate it. Thank you, Dr. Berlin.

DR. ELLIOT BERLIN, DC: My pleasure. I'm going to go check out mamaprimal on Instagram right now. And for our listeners, if you want to check us out, we are also on Instagram at Dr. Berlin, D-O-C-T-O-R-B-E-R-L-I-N.

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