Arista Ilona: A Birth Story

Episode 340 · April 6, 2023 · with Arista Ilona

IN THIS EPISODE

Arista Ilona never planned on being a mother. Growing up in Los Angeles in a family shaped by her grandmother's hard road from Costa Rica, she built a fast-moving career in media — radio, Beats, Apple, Netflix — and motherhood simply wasn't part of the picture. Then an unexpected pregnancy changed everything, and the woman who swore she'd never do this found herself planning a home water birth. In this episode, host Dr. Elliot Berlin, DC talks with Arista about a three-day labor that began with a panic attack and ended somewhere she never expected, a recovery that exposed a huge gap in how mothers are cared for after birth, and the losses and hard choices that shaped her second pregnancy — and why trusting her own instincts mattered more the second time around.

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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 is a media professional and she is a mother of two and her story To pregnancy and birth is quite interesting Arista Alana, welcome to the podcast. Thank you. I'm happy to be here I'm so happy you're here and you're gonna have to listen to this episode all the way through You probably do always anyway, but we have an exciting announcement at the end of this one But before we get there, let's start at the beginning. Where are you from originally? I

ARISTA ILONA: Am a Los Angeles native born and raised Southern, California

DR. ELLIOT BERLIN, DC: How was that growing up in the city of angels?

ARISTA ILONA: You know, honestly, it was normal for me I think because it's all I've ever known but when I talk to people who have not ever been to LA and They hear my stories. I'm realizing that it was quite different and definitely not normal to be in such a fast-paced environment and Meeting, you know and seeing just random celebrities here and there as I've grown up or going to school with like so-and-so Son or daughter, you know, so that was always something that wasn't weird for me So yeah, it's I think been great and I love the Sun. I cannot stand cold weather So I am forever damaged Like now is currently Flood watches and rain and I'm just like what do I do with myself? I do not know

how to operate and

ARISTA ILONA: Anything but the Sun. I was looking at my office window today. We have a great view and The trees were all just shaking back and forth. There was a heavy downpour and it felt like I was in Miami

DR. ELLIOT BERLIN, DC: I don't know where I am. Yeah, I feel I'm like, what do I do?

ARISTA ILONA: I'm like ordering groceries to be delivered. I'm so dramatic

DR. ELLIOT BERLIN, DC: All right, so you grew up in Los Angeles and by the way My wife and I were from New York But like Staten Island not the big city and when we came here We assumed we were gonna see celebrities on every corner and the other thing is that's interesting is I'm face blind So even if I have a celebrity talking to me, I would have no idea who they are So we used to just make it up on the corner like it will be at a red light and we go look There's Britney Spears, but we're just you know, I love that. And yeah, I actually just recently found that out I never knew that about you. I had no idea. I only found out when I was 39 is when I found out

ARISTA ILONA: Also, I feel like you look different like every time I don't think it's just me like

DR. ELLIOT BERLIN, DC: Yeah Yeah, I cut my hair and then I yeah, I'm I'm so sorry. No, no, it's totally fine I wouldn't help anyway, but for you like usually I have a rough Generalized like okay. This is what this person is gonna look like. You're always like you could be a Completely different person playing a prank on me and I would have no idea

ARISTA ILONA: Whoopsie, but I am always wearing this necklace that has my name

DR. ELLIOT BERLIN, DC: Ia so that's a clue, but if you give that to somebody else Alright speaking of daughter we gotta get there. Let's just talk a little bit. We said that you were a media professional What was that trajectory like Wow? Oh, man. So let's see

ARISTA ILONA: nutshell, I always knew that I wanted to be in the entertainment industry. And my father worked at Warner Brothers for a very long time and worked his way up from being a limousine driver to a famous anchor who we all know as Dallas Reigns, who was on ABC 7 news. And funny enough, that was one of my first places I landed as an intern. And I got to actually go up to him and be like, Hey, you knew my dad, and he totally remembered. And he actually carried me as a baby. So that was super cool. I had a big love for broadcast journalism and being a news anchor, I love Lauren Sanchez. And you know, that was like my whole vibe. And so I kind of bounced around from ABC 7 to Entertainment Tonight,

ARISTA ILONA: got to help a senior producer there and really was learning the ropes. And I kind of quickly realized that it wasn't my forte in the sense that I just didn't want to know too much about celebrities in that sense, like who was dating who and all of that. I know that's something that is very interesting for some people, but it just wasn't the space that was really lighting me up. So I ended up shifting to radio. And music was my other love that got me through a lot of tough times growing up. And so I decided to dive into the music space and luckily landed an internship at Clear Channel, Kiss FM, 102.7 Kiss FM, which was LA's top 40 radio station. And then 98.7 was the rock

ARISTA ILONA: station. It still is the alternative rock. They were the best of both worlds. And that is basically like blending me in one. And I was like, this is awesome. And so I actually was there for three and a half years. I went from internship to then becoming a programming assistant, production, doing straight team. And I just worked my butt off and was going to schools, working like five jobs. Like it was a very hectic time, very LA of me to be also working at a restaurant and also at a radio station. And I just made some connections and I always stayed in touch with the head director there. Shout out to Julie Pilot. To this day, I still know her and I was like 19 when I started not to age myself, but that was definitely like 15 years ago.

ARISTA ILONA: So I can do the math, but I won't. Yes, let's not. So I landed there with her and I actually took a break briefly and moved to Oregon, southern Oregon, randomly took a break for about two years. I was burnt out. Not going to lie. I think I overdid it a bit and I need to reset and find a new inspiration. And to be honest, Oregon kind of gave me that. And I wasn't expecting it, but it also gave me like the granola phase of my life. When I look back at it, I was like the hippie girl. Oregon definitely brought that phase out of me and I suddenly became a yoga professional or something like that. And then was getting into aromatherapy, essential oils and met an amazing biodynamic farmer up there. Yeah,

ARISTA ILONA: it was like a whole other side of me. Like my very green thumb side came out at that time. And then I missed my hometown. I missed LA. And I was like, okay, I'm too young, I think, to be here. And even though I was working at a radio station there in Oregon, a very small one, I was like, this is really slow. There's no billboards. It was definitely the nurturing vibe I needed at the time and very therapeutic, but I was ready to come back. And so long story short, I came back to LA and then got back in touch with Julie and she needed an assistant at that time again, but this time for a different company called Beats Music, which it was named at the time.

ARISTA ILONA: And it was a startup and I was part of the core team there that then got bought out by Apple. And it was the biggest streaming music history deal that you've ever heard of. And I was a part of that crazy acquisition and ended up at Apple for eight years. Yeah. And then now I've been recently at Netflix, but also still doing my own business on the side. That's really catered in helping people find sacred presence on the go, which stems from motherhood, which I know we'll get into. Secret presence. Yes. Wait, but you also have Botanica. Yeah, Botanica. Yeah. So that's Alona Botanica. And that's the oils, which stemmed from like what I learned in Oregon, learning how to blend aromatherapy

ARISTA ILONA: to kind of have like a sacred presence on the go, which seems like, how is that even possible? But that's something close and dear to my heart, which is about soul. illness as a whole? And how can we integrate that presence in our life when we are moving so fast, especially as a mother and just as a woman and living in the city, these products that I make like the mist and the body oils and the bath oils is something to encourage ritual as much as possible because I know like not everyone can go to a yoga retreat in India or like, you know, even honestly, it's very difficult for me to make it to a yoga class. So I decided to create some tangible item and product that was special for me

ARISTA ILONA: that I could throw in my bag, miss myself when I'm like in the car and traffic or like, you know, just needing a quick pick me up. And that was something to like come back to myself and feel connected within and essentially feeling at home wherever I go.

DR. ELLIOT BERLIN, DC: So it's really great. And now you help other people have those same experiences on the go. Yeah, that's really cool. You have kids do unexpectedly. Well, let's talk about that. What does that mean? Because were you not like planning to be a mom?

ARISTA ILONA: No, you know, I was never really one of those girls I often hear like as a little girl, I always wanted to be a mom and you know, I'd play with dolls and I just knew that that was what I wanted. And I didn't have that. And I often felt a bit weird or like something was wrong with me that I didn't have that initial like plan, I guess, or like feeling it was never really something that crossed my mind. And I don't know if that's maybe because, you know, growing up, witnessing my grandmother having a very, very hard time coming from Costa Rica to the States and struggling very, very, very hardly, you know, grew up on food stamps and Section 8. And it just wasn't the American dream, unfortunately, that she

ARISTA ILONA: thought that it was for her in particular. And so she didn't have anybody. She was single, single mom of six, and didn't have that masculine male support in her life. So I never really saw it as being a positive of having children and getting married and trusting that whole, you know, American dream with a white picket fence, I guess, right. And then my mother also, you know, not being married to my father and splitting up when I was very young. And I guess I just never saw that model of like, Hey, this is like a great thing to experience. And I think I was very scared. Very, very scared.

DR. ELLIOT BERLIN, DC: Is your grandma from Costa Rica your mother's mother?

ARISTA ILONA: Yes.

DR. ELLIOT BERLIN, DC: Okay. So they split. So was your dad not in the picture or was he kind of?

ARISTA ILONA: Yeah, my dad was like in and out. I like to call him like a rolling stone. He loves kind of being on the road and being in the trees. That's where I get my love for like road trips and the forest and like nature is from him. So he was kind of like in and out. I remember meeting him when I was seven, but I know that he was in my life prior, but it was kind of choppy. And then once I was a teen, like 14 and up, then I remember like seeing him a lot. We went on trips and all that, but I think it was fairly hard for him to be in my life. You know, I don't know if it's because of my mom or, or what it gets complicated, but I know that he definitely tried when he could. And yeah, I guess I just never felt safe.

DR. ELLIOT BERLIN, DC: You have siblings?

ARISTA ILONA: Yeah. Half siblings from my dad's side. So like I have three sisters and two brothers.

DR. ELLIOT BERLIN, DC: Okay. That you grew up with or not really? No. Okay.

ARISTA ILONA: Like I knew them, we would talk, but it wasn't like under the same roof.

DR. ELLIOT BERLIN, DC: So where is grandma, mom and you?

ARISTA ILONA: Yeah. And then my aunts, my cousins, my oldest aunt who also came from Costa Rica, but then my grandmother passed away when I was 14. And then that was like super devastating for me. Like I had to grow up fairly quick at that age and kind of went into survival mode to be honest. So,

DR. ELLIOT BERLIN, DC: so you paint a picture in which it's like, I don't know, to me, it just seems like, you know, understandable why that wouldn't want to be, you know, having responsibility for kids and wouldn't want to be something that you would chase after.

ARISTA ILONA: Yeah. Yeah.

DR. ELLIOT BERLIN, DC: But somehow you have kids. All right, let's take a little break because I feel like the story is just warming up and I feel also compelled to remind the listener at home that we have a surprise announcement at the end of this episode with Arista Olana. We'll be right back. Welcome back. We're talking to Arista Alana. Okay, so you have this whole career thing going on, and then you go off to Oregon and then you come back semi-hipified. And then beats Apple, Netflix. Somewhere along there, you change course and you started having kids. What happened?

ARISTA ILONA: Yeah, so what happened? Yeah, what happened? I still wonder that, but in a good way. I know roughly what happened. So, yes, my oldest just turned seven. So that was about a birthday. Yeah, thank you. Seven years ago, I got pregnant, actually, right before we launched Beats One Radio, which was so crazy. It was such a crazy time. Very, very hectic. And I remember finding out and I was like, Oh, man, what am I going to do? And I remember my best friend being the one that I was just like talking to and like, what do I do? What do I do? And she was so understanding and just calmed me. And we would take walks, because she was working with me at the office. And we would take walks together on our break. And I would see like a little

ARISTA ILONA: monarch butterfly, like fly by me. And I was still in my like little hippie phase, because I was still new to coming back to LA. And I was like, it's a sign, you know, like I need to embrace motherhood. And I have to do this. And I just feel like something like this is going to transform something within me. And it's really scary. But I feel like I need to move towards it. Like I need to like, you know, be scared and do it anyway. And so I did. And it definitely was scary. And I remember calling my dad and he was very supportive. And my mom and so I was almost in shock. Like, wow, everyone is actually pretty like happy and on board. And so even though I was like, oh, I just paid my car off. And

ARISTA ILONA: it was only a two door car. And I had all these plans to maybe, you know, travel the world and do all this crazy stuff. Here is that, you know, the curve ball, but I felt like it was going to really change me for the better.

DR. ELLIOT BERLIN, DC: I have so many questions. Whichever ones you want to and not answer the ones you don't. But were you in a committed relationship?

ARISTA ILONA: Uh, it's like, what is the definition of that at that time? It probably was not considered. I'm gonna be honest. It was like, hey, oh, cool. You're attractive. I see you around. I was

going to like events that he was throwing in Venice, California, at the time and by Venice Beach. And we just were hanging out. And then after like, three months, I ended up pregnant.

DR. ELLIOT BERLIN, DC: As happens. How did you figure it out? Was it a big

ARISTA ILONA: surprise? Yes, it was a very big surprise. And I felt a lot of shame because I was somebody that was like, if that ever happened, you know, like, even though I didn't think I'd ever become a mother, the planner in me was like, well, if I did, I need to be engaged first, and we got to live together. And you know, all the like, perfect pieces that you think would make something be acceptable or okay, you know, without getting like the judgy eyes. But then I was that girl that was like, oh, no unexpected pregnancy with somebody that, you know, didn't even believe in marriage and was kind of more open with his, you know, commitment. And that was very scary to be in at the same time of embracing an unexpected pregnancy. But the one

ARISTA ILONA: thing that I do appreciate is the honesty and the transparency that he had with me in the beginning. And it was something that we talked about and that we decided to move forward, like, hey, no matter what we're going to co parent, right, we'll be like good co parents to each other and for the child. And so yeah, I just, I mean, it was like navigating deep waters that I'd never had been in.

DR. ELLIOT BERLIN, DC: Right.

ARISTA ILONA: I was always an open-minded person and kind of just flowed with things and embraced things in life that came my way because I saw it as an opportunity to grow, like on a spiritual level as a person too. And so I was like, okay, this is what was, you know, presented to me and I'm gonna take responsibility.

DR. ELLIOT BERLIN, DC: How did you, like, what was your clue?

ARISTA ILONA: The monarch butterflies.

DR. ELLIOT BERLIN, DC: Oh, the butterflies.

ARISTA ILONA: I know that sounds like so horny, but yeah, it was at that time a very symbolic animal for me, insect. And I actually have a tattoo of a monarch butterfly on my right arm, which I had a few months before I got pregnant. So it was even more of like a, hey, you know, this is my own little sign, my own little explanation for myself that once I got pregnant, I kept seeing them everywhere. And when I wasn't sure what to do and I was having a conversation with her father, he actually told me that that day prior, there was a dead monarch butterfly that was at his doorstep. And I was just kind of like, huh, that's interesting. And, you know, I just took that as like, no, I need to like move forward and step into this as a woman.

ARISTA ILONA: It's so odd to like look back at it now because at the time I couldn't put, you know, my finger on it. Obviously you don't know when you're in it until you look back and you see like, oh, wow. Yeah, like I definitely changed and that definitely helped me in my life even though it was really scary and a really hard decision to make. Looking back, like I wouldn't have it any other way. And yeah, it's just amazing when you look back at your life, especially like, you know, seven years, 10

years ago and you see how much it shaped you.

DR. ELLIOT BERLIN, DC: Do you think the change started to take place when you decided to keep the baby or when you gave birth or through the act of parenting or?

ARISTA ILONA: I think definitely when I gave birth and became like a mother. Cause like the pregnancy, I felt great and I still was doing things. It kind of hits you like overnight. So I didn't really feel different until I had the baby like in my arms, you know? And I was like, whoa, okay. This is real. Like it's real.

DR. ELLIOT BERLIN, DC: You know, they say all the time that at your first birth there's two births simultaneously, the birth of the baby and the birth of the mother. And it sounds like you really experienced that.

ARISTA ILONA: Yes, and that's a great way to put it. That's exactly what it was.

DR. ELLIOT BERLIN, DC: So speaking of birth, you know, you're keeping a baby is one thing, you know, deciding to co-parent also another thing, but then you have to get that kid out of you. As somebody who never thought about having kids, how did that thought process go?

ARISTA ILONA: I was very fascinated around the idea of a home birth. I know, I know, but for all the judges, they're losing their mind listening to this. Yeah, a home water birth. And I was fascinated with like having a midwife and a doula and I still to this day think that it's very important to, you know, have a doula, but also like have a plan B, which I did not have. So I was just very laser focused on this home water birth and I didn't want to think about anything else. And then I was definitely afraid of a C-section. So I wasn't even gonna touch that idea or think about it.

DR. ELLIOT BERLIN, DC: Who did you have to support you? Who was gonna be there?

ARISTA ILONA: So it was gonna be her father, my midwife, my doula, and like two of my friends.

DR. ELLIOT BERLIN, DC: Okay, friends who had babies?

ARISTA ILONA: Nope.

DR. ELLIOT BERLIN, DC: Okay, and where did the idea of home birth even, almost everybody gives birth at the hospital. So where did you even come to see that idea and think?

ARISTA ILONA: I guess I'm gonna just blame Oregon. I'm gonna blame the dose of hippie life where I started researching and hearing people talk about, it was Ina May.

DR. ELLIOT BERLIN, DC: Oh yeah, you know what I'm gonna say.

ARISTA ILONA: Yeah, and like, you know, I started hearing talks about that and then going down the YouTube rabbit hole of like orgasmic birthing. And I think I was just like fascinated by it. I wasn't, again, thinking of having children. I was just like, well, interesting because I was meeting a lot of families in Oregon and mothers. Yeah, so I was like, oh, well, that seems like the rebel thing to do. And that's how I live my life. Sometimes it's like, I'm gonna go the other way and try this other cool thing that's different. And so that was the plan. And that was a whole nother layer.

DR. ELLIOT BERLIN, DC: Did you do things to get sort of prepare mind and body for it or just like, yeah, we'll have a home birth, that's good.

ARISTA ILONA: Yeah, I mean, I thought that I was prepared. So I kind of was like, didn't really know what I didn't know until I was in it. And I was like, okay, I'm not ready for this. This was kind of crazy idea.

DR. ELLIOT BERLIN, DC: How did it start?

ARISTA ILONA: So I started cramping. had the good old mucus plug, just so gross. I was not prepared for that. What is this slug on my thigh? What is this?

DR. ELLIOT BERLIN, DC: Oh, giant bugger Canadian?

ARISTA ILONA: Yeah, so gross. And so at that time I was like, you know, texting my doula and I'm like, well, I think it's happening. And they're like, that's great. And, you know, I just started like taking my time and wearing like I had this like sarong, this like bright pink sarong from Hawaii wrapped around me and like all pretty in the front, but around my neck. And then a couple of hours into feeling, I guess like the slow contractions. I didn't know then, but I know now that I had a panic attack.

DR. ELLIOT BERLIN, DC: Oh yeah.

ARISTA ILONA: And I totally blacked out.

DR. ELLIOT BERLIN, DC: What?

ARISTA ILONA: Yes.

DR. ELLIOT BERLIN, DC: So had you had panic attacks before?

ARISTA ILONA: No.

DR. ELLIOT BERLIN, DC: You needed a lot of mist. You needed the mist.

ARISTA ILONA: Yes, exactly. And that's why I created them. Oh my gosh.

DR. ELLIOT BERLIN, DC: Yeah. I had no idea. So you don't remember what happened even now?

ARISTA ILONA: I barely, it's like so vague. So I remember like fragmented moments that are just kind of like in and out. I remember the sounds, like hearing things. I remember sensations and then little like blips of the entire birthing experience, which I guess I was told lasted three days. I have no idea.

DR. ELLIOT BERLIN, DC: Was there any like pictures or a video or anything that?

ARISTA ILONA: Yeah, there were, but I did not watch any video.

DR. ELLIOT BERLIN, DC: Still haven't?

ARISTA ILONA: No.

DR. ELLIOT BERLIN, DC: Oh my God. We need to watch it.

ARISTA ILONA: Oh my gosh. I know. I remember seeing.

DR. ELLIOT BERLIN, DC: Oh my God. I want to do like a video episode with you where you watch your birth and.

ARISTA ILONA: Oh my gosh. No.

DR. ELLIOT BERLIN, DC: Oh my gosh.

ARISTA ILONA: Yes.

DR. ELLIOT BERLIN, DC: Yeah, I mean.

ARISTA ILONA: You still haven't watched it? No, cause I remember when he played it once, I was like, no, no, no, no, no, turn it off. Like just like hearing me in pain. I was like, oh, I can't, I don't even know who that is. Like it was just like kind of traumatic, not gonna lie. So I mean, maybe seven years now, I'm good, you know?

DR. ELLIOT BERLIN, DC: We're just warming up in your story, but it sounds like you've come so far. Now I'm so curious. What your reaction will be if you watch it, like if things will come back to you or not, or, okay, I digress. Back to you. So you black out and on and off for three days. You can't tell us too much cause you don't remember.

ARISTA ILONA: No, and I just remember this one moment feeling in so much pain. So in the beginning, I remember feeling shortness of breath, right? When the contractions were starting and I started feeling like, oh, I can't breathe, I can't breathe. I thought it was the sarong being too tight on my neck because it was wrapped around and not in the back. And so I right away just took it off and then I was just like naked there. And I was just like, oh, and I started freaking out and I told him, I was like, I feel like, you know, I'm gonna pass out. And I just remember everything, like just the circle, like zoning in and closing. And then next thing you know, I'm like in the water tub. And then I hear my midwife and my doula

ARISTA ILONA: and my friends in the background, they're getting things prepared, but I'm like out of it. I'm like not even really present. And so I remember being in and out of the water and then them asking me to go into the shower and then going back in the water and then coming out of the water and then going on the floor and trying to do like movement and move my body. And then another part where my midwife was like, you know, you're only dilated six centimeters and I can't feel her. And she had like her hand, you know, up there like trying to feel and see where the baby is. And I started getting worried at that point. And then I had needed a catheter. And then immediately in that moment, I'm like, I'm pooping myself.

ARISTA ILONA: And I'm like, why did I have this idea of a home birth? Like in that moment, I was like, this is gross. Like I feel gross. And you know, and I'm just like, I personally was not enjoying it. And then I just felt in so much pain, like I was having back labor. And so I remember her telling me like, the baby's like flipped, you know, and I was in excruciating pain. And then my friends were there and then they started trying to like, you know, calm me by singing and playing the drum and like the

sound bowl. And I was just like overstimulated. I was like, none of this is helping me. Like I thought it would, like I had this idea of this like super, you know, calming, relaxing vibe with the candles and the dim lights and the aroma therapy

ARISTA ILONA: and everything, right? And it was just like, I don't know, I can't even focus, you know? And so it got to the point where I was on my back and I was having contractions so much to where I could barely take a breath. I couldn't count to three seconds. I was like, oh, like it was just excruciating in my lower back. And I just started crying. And I remember my midwife being like, it's okay to stop here. Like whatever you wanna do, we can go, we can try. You know, you're tired, we don't want anything to happen to the baby, you know, let's like make the call. You know, my stubbornness was like kicking and I was like, no, I don't want to give up. Like this was, you know, the dream experience birth that I really wanted to try to have.

ARISTA ILONA: But at that point, I knew like, I'm spent, like I'm exhausted. And so we decided to transfer and my doula drove us to the hospital and I remember like getting up and they're trying to like help me and I don't know, like that feeling of walking with like excruciating contractions was just horrible. And then I didn't know what day it was, I like saw the sun, but I was like, wait, but it was nighttime when I went to labor, so like what is even happening? It was just like such a weird, weird experience for me to feel so like out of touch. And then, you know, being in the car and the backseat and just every bump and every movement was just like, ah, it just was hurting even more for me.

ARISTA ILONA: Finally get to the hospital, I asked for an epidural right away, which is of course another thing that I was like, I'll never get an epidural because I knew of all chemicals and you know, and so I'd like knew too much. So that also kind of made it really hard for me to accept the decisions that had to be made at that time with urgency, because then I felt like I was hurting my baby. And so I was dealing with a lot of guilt and a lot of, you know, second guessing myself and just feeling like I gave up. But in the moment, I just needed relief. And so once they gave me the epidural, I was like, oh, there's that breath. There's that full breath and that feeling that I had been looking for.

ARISTA ILONA: And then I asked if I could try, just give us a little bit more time, use the peanut ball in between my legs to maybe see if I progress now that I had the epidural and just give my body a little bit more time now that I'm, you know, relaxed and they let me for a little bit, but then, you know, the OB came in and was like, we got it. We got to get this baby out because it's been, you know, a long time.

DR. ELLIOT BERLIN, DC: Well, you said three days already.

ARISTA ILONA: Yeah.

DR. ELLIOT BERLIN, DC: Is this an OB that you knew? Like, is this just a random?

ARISTA ILONA: Yeah. My midwife knew her. I had no idea. I've never met her before. She walked in with a leather jacket, you know, like just super like, kind of like, but I think she was from New York. So maybe it worked out, you know, but I just felt like, Oh man, this is like kind of aggressive. Not like the glowing light around, you know, like the nurturing woman vibe that I was kind of foreseeing the experience would be like, let me deliver your baby. And it's like, no, it was like, Nope, got to get her out. Let's go. And the minute she walked out of the room, after she said, we got to have a C-section,

she walked out. I just broke down like the hardest, deepest cry that I've ever experienced

ARISTA ILONA: in my life, similar to like basically when my grandmother passed away. Like I was just, I was devastated.

DR. ELLIOT BERLIN, DC: What is the source of that devastation?

ARISTA ILONA: Uh, one, I am so scared of like surgeries and hospitals, and I was just really scared to go under and I was scared of dying. Like I don't want to die.

DR. ELLIOT BERLIN, DC: But you don't have to go under.

ARISTA ILONA: Well, yeah, but you know what I mean?

DR. ELLIOT BERLIN, DC: Like just like not being in control, but you already had an epidural. I guess being cut open is yeah. Yeah.

ARISTA ILONA: It was just something I hadn't prepared for. And so I didn't really know how I would feel. And it just felt very scary.

DR. ELLIOT BERLIN, DC: So fear, but there's a lot of fear bubbling up for you. That's so interesting. Cause like, in my mind, you're like this incredible badass. I can do anything and you are. And so I don't know if you became that through this experience or.

ARISTA ILONA: Definitely. And I think that's what it, you know, earlier, like looking back to see how much this shaped me to become so much more, you know, empowered and, but I had to go through that moment to get there because I was definitely younger too, and so much happens in like seven years, you know, and especially for me, because I'm always very hard on myself, like you got to do better. You got to grow when you got to be a better than yesterday. So, you know, when they told me that I was like, dang it, you know, like again, the plan didn't go as planned and, you know, and so I was just being hit left and right with things that were these curve balls that I didn't feel ready

ARISTA ILONA: for, but it was just like, okay, well, here's the surrender plate, right? Like here it is. And the deepest of surrender that I will ever probably experience was in that moment. And so I'm under, and the lights are bright and I'm feeling a little anxious, you know, and again, I don't know what that time, what that is, but I just have the shortness of breath and I'm trying to relax and, uh, next thing you know, baby's out and she's eight pounds, three ounces and healthy. And they put her right on my chest and she latched on right away. And it was like such a beautiful experience, but I was totally out of it. Like my eyes were closed when she was on me. And so you just see like this, like slight.

ARISTA ILONA: mile of like relief, like, ah, yes, like we're there now I can heal. But I wasn't as alert as I had liked to be, right? The crying when you see your baby and you know, all the pictures that you see, I was just out of it. And so at that point, I don't know how much more you want to know, but the hospital experience was great. You know, I had a great team, baby was healthy and I was healthy. And then we get home and you know, doing the breastfeeding and tending to a C-section, which is not fun. And I realized in that time like, wow, everyone prepares you for a baby. Like they say, have the baby shower and you know, your baby registry and you've got the doula. Yeah. But then the minute that you

ARISTA ILONA: get home with your child and you become a mother, suddenly, and for me, this is the support kind of disappears. And there isn't that continued, like, okay, now is the time, right? Where you really got to like, eat well, and you got to nourish your body and your mind and your spirit and you got to not overwork yourself. And all of that, there wasn't really that reminder for me. And that was where I was like, there's something missing here. There's a big gap in postpartum time, where mothers I feel aren't getting nurtured. Because I experienced that, you know, I don't have a big family. I didn't have like, the aunts and you know, the cousins and everyone coming and rubbing my feet and doing all this. And so I had to

ARISTA ILONA: really seek that out for myself. And luckily, I found, you know, Bellybind, who Princess, who you know, and she came and helped provide that care for me, which was so amazing. And I realized in that moment, like, wow, this is like gold, you know, for someone that just got like ripped open, essentially, and like, you know, brought a child into the world. And then to be able to receive and feel that comfort was really special. And so I ended up trying to find things like that. But it wasn't until the seven week mark, with baby and being home, that I knew I needed that because my c-section got infected. Oh, no. Yeah.

DR. ELLIOT BERLIN, DC: How did that present?

ARISTA ILONA: I remember it was like a fleshy wound. I remember looking down and I had staples. So I wanted stitches and I don't know what happened there. But she ended up using staples. And I'm pretty, like, sensitive to metals. Like I know when I was younger, I used to always wear like, if I wore fake earrings or anything, or even fake bracelets, like I would freak out. And so I was like, maybe that was that. But also, you know, hospital germs, like it could be so many things. But I remember looking down and I wasn't a lot of pain. But again, I had nothing to compare it to. So I thought that pain that I was feeling every time I had to go to the bathroom was just normal and come to find it wasn't.

ARISTA ILONA: And so it was the infection that was brewing. And then it was starting to like pus. It's like super gross. But it was like, looked like my skin was eating itself like a fleshy. Yeah, it was very scary. I sent a picture to the OB. She's like, Oh, my gosh, I have to rush you right away. You need to go see the specialist. And I'm like, wait, what? Like with a seven day baby and like, recovering from surgery. We had a bikini. And so we're rushing, we don't even really have a car seat or anything. We're like, trying to figure it out, you know, because we were kind of taking our time with all the gear stuff. So we rushed to the specialist and he sees and he's like, Oh, I have to like drain this. Oh, no. Like in

ARISTA ILONA: his office. Oh, right there. Right there. And he's like, I have to take out like three of the staples on the right side. I'm like, what? And he went in for it and Oh, fat pain. Just more pain, more pain. Here we are. And so he drained it and then had to stuff it with gauze. And he's like, so you're going to heal kind of weird, like it's going to heal over the gauze. And you can always come back and like have cosmetic surgery for that area. But like, this is the best we could do. Like, yeah, he's like, you're going to have to have like a nurse come every day and stuff that area with gauze, clean it, take it out. They would like roll the gauze, you know, like really small stuff it in there in between my skin. And it was just, yeah, it was

ARISTA ILONA: terrible. So got home and then I deal with that and have nurses come every day and take care of that. And then I got mastitis like twice because you know, I was really stressed and just over exerting myself, you know, I wasn't resting because like what is rest even when you are trying to breastfeed and you're up and sleep deprived, like I couldn't sleep. So yeah, that was like really brutal.

DR. ELLIOT BERLIN, DC: Okay, so just to recap, you're like, I'm not gonna have kids. And then you get pregnant because of the butterfly. And then you're like, I'm going to do a home birth and then sort of blackout panic for three days in labor. But I will say this one word you use during that part of your story, like four or five times is excruciating. And then after that you said, and then this happened, it got more painful. I'm like, what's more painful than excruciating and then, uh, surgery, which also terrified you and then complications from surgery. So that's where we are in the story at this point in a nutshell, but the story continues because now you have another baby and we're going to get there. But let's take a quick break before we do welcome back.

DR. ELLIOT BERLIN, DC: We're talking to her. We're still on it. So yeah, we'll just recap the whole story before the break. And now things have turned again because you have a baby. So flash forward seven years. I mean, you could recap what happened there, but let's get into this most recent pregnancy and birth.

ARISTA ILONA: Yeah. So Sophia, she's nine months. She's amazing. And this pregnancy, you know, after having Aya, I was an only child and I didn't want her to be an only child. So even though it was like, okay, I don't know that I can do it again. And once she turned five, I felt like myself again, like I felt like I was coming back online, but I had gotten pregnant when she was three and unfortunately had a miscarriage six weeks and when I was three. Yes. And so I had to take a pause. Um, I was like, I need to pause here, you know? So that one was an intentional pregnancy.

DR. ELLIOT BERLIN, DC: That one was, you know, if it happens, it happens kind of thing. Oh, one of those.

ARISTA ILONA: Yeah. And so, yeah. And I was so excited about it. And I felt like so happy because I was like, Oh, three years. That's a perfect gap. And that happened like on new years.

DR. ELLIOT BERLIN, DC: So that was, oh my goodness. Uh, it's because you didn't get a butterfly.

ARISTA ILONA: Exactly. Where was my butterfly? Obviously. Oh, sorry.

DR. ELLIOT BERLIN, DC: That's so hard, especially.

ARISTA ILONA: Yeah.

DR. ELLIOT BERLIN, DC: Especially like you struggling to make the choice to get pregnant and getting pregnant and then losing it.

ARISTA ILONA: Yeah. And so, you know, I was trying to figure out what happened there. My doctor has said your progesterone levels were low. And so I was on a progesterone cream for quite some time, but also just like took a pause and took a step back and then fast forward to when I was five, got pregnant again and lost that one too.

DR. ELLIOT BERLIN, DC: Oh no.

ARISTA ILONA: Yeah. That one was at eight weeks. And I'm like, what is going on?

DR. ELLIOT BERLIN, DC: Was that another, if it happens, it happens.

ARISTA ILONA: Yes. And that one, I didn't feel very well and I don't know even how to describe it today, but I was stuck in bed for like three days. I was crying. I was depressed. I didn't feel like myself. And so I kind of had a feeling something was wrong and I just didn't know what. And then when I started getting cramping, I was out at dinner with my best friend and I was bleeding. And so I was like, Oh no, not this again, you know, cause I knew it from the first time around. And yeah, and so that was a bummer. And then Sophia came and we were actually in Hawaii and that one, you know, I think we were definitely like hoping and trying, but you know, Hawaii does that to you. If you've ever been, you feel so romantic and just lovey and

ARISTA ILONA: there's, you know, that Island is just so funny, but yeah. So we were like, okay, like we're on this Island and you know, by ourselves and so why not? And then I ended up pregnant and this time I felt great and nothing was going wrong. I had a great pregnancy towards the end. I started feeling a lot of pain and it was only like when I had to go to the bathroom, like pee and I just didn't know what that was. And I figured like, Oh, maybe it's for my C-section, like the infection and the right side's a little like weak and maybe the pressure from her is like, you know, causing this weird pain that in the middle of the night, I would wake up and have to like crutch over and walk and hold and put pressure on my stomach to like release the pee.

ARISTA ILONA: And then I would feel relief.

DR. ELLIOT BERLIN, DC: That does not sound normal at all.

ARISTA ILONA: Yeah.

DR. ELLIOT BERLIN, DC: So that was, is this something you talked to your doctor about?

ARISTA ILONA: I did. Yeah, I did. And so she didn't really say much about it. You know, she was like, Oh, well you have one ovary. You had a cyst there in the past. You know, it wasn't really like discussed in detail.

DR. ELLIOT BERLIN, DC: And that's not one of those things that you get like, Oh, it's just pregnancy. You know, that's the standard answer for most things, but that's not even one of those things that would warrant that answers does not sound like something common in pregnancy. I don't know where that's headed, but before we go down that path, did you have thoughts on how you wanted to deliver Sophia?

ARISTA ILONA: Yes. So this time, because of what I went through with Aya, I was like full on force, like hospital.

DR. ELLIOT BERLIN, DC: Okay.

ARISTA ILONA: I was like, I'm not even going to take a chance to. And like full force hospital.

DR. ELLIOT BERLIN, DC: I mean, cause that's the first choice, usually you got to think about is now, am I going to try for a vaginal birth or go for a repeat cesarean?

ARISTA ILONA: Yeah. So I did want to try VBAC, which, you know, vaginal birth after cesarean, but I told my doctor, I want to wait and see how the pregnancy progressed to see how things were going. You know, her placement and how I felt, and she said, you know, I don't want to But then as that pain was coming on around six, seven months, I started to get concerned. And that was kind of my own like mama intuition where I was like, well, I don't know that I want to wait for my water to break having this pain. Like, I just don't want to have another crazy, scary convocation issue where I rupture and you know, I don't want to wait for my water to break. Crazy, scary convocation issue where I rupture and you know, like it could be even

ARISTA ILONA: scarier, which is like, how would that even be possible from my first experience, which was already scary. So I wanted to try to dodge as much as I could from the unexpected and knowing that I've had a C-section before I knew what to expect.

DR. ELLIOT BERLIN, DC: Okay. So it wasn't that panicky.

ARISTA ILONA: Yeah, exactly.

DR. ELLIOT BERLIN, DC: And once I can't have surgery, but also just because you said, what if I rupture people are not familiar with the back because during the original caesarean, there's an incision made in the uterus itself to get the baby out and that has repaired the concern is what if during the throes of labor, the buildup of intensity during labor, that scar doesn't hold it together. It starts to separate or pop open the medical term uterine rupture. So that was on your mind as well.

ARISTA ILONA: Yeah. And I know what is it? The amount you can wait is two years is recommended, right?

DR. ELLIOT BERLIN, DC: Yeah.

ARISTA ILONA: You know, even though it was like, what? Six years, I still was like, I don't know.

DR. ELLIOT BERLIN, DC: Yeah. Seems like that should have healed by then.

ARISTA ILONA: Yeah. So because of the infection, I just was like, I don't know. It might be a little weird in there, you know, and, um, a little weird in there, but that's what was on my mind.

DR. ELLIOT BERLIN, DC: I mean, if the more topical incision didn't heal, how do we know that the one deeper down did?

ARISTA ILONA: Exactly. So I went with my gut and then I decided to choose a date, you know, uh, delivery date, which was June 22nd. And my dad was super happy because that's his birthday.

DR. ELLIOT BERLIN, DC: Oh, that's my parents' anniversary. Wait a second. So go with the delivery date for like induction or just, Oh, you made the decision. Repeat.

ARISTA ILONA: See. So finally, like, cause it was starting to get a little bit more intense, like as the pregnancy prolonged, like the heavier she would get, the more that pain was starting to feel like sharp

pains. And I just was like, ah, it just doesn't feel normal. Like I remember having to put like heating pads on it and I like rested a lot, just like, I was like, I probably shouldn't be doing too much right now. So I was almost like putting myself on bed rest to be honest, I just was kind of listening. Not kind. I was, I was listening to my body in towards the end of the pregnancy because I just didn't want anything to happen, especially because of the two previous losses.

DR. ELLIOT BERLIN, DC: Yeah.

ARISTA ILONA: So we picked a date and then the day came and I remember just feeling like I wanted to move really slow that day. And it was like thunderstorming and all of that. So I didn't get the butterfly, but I had a thunderstorms really, this is weird. It felt like I was in the desert. So we get to the hospital and we're about like 20 minutes late and we got totally like reprimanded. They were like, do you see the time? And I was like, okay, not today with your attitude.

DR. ELLIOT BERLIN, DC: Like why? Because you were 20 minutes late to your appointment.

ARISTA ILONA: Yeah, it was like this whole weird, like just not very kind and not how I want to start my day of going into a very, you know, intense surgery. I was like, Hey, good morning to you too.

DR. ELLIOT BERLIN, DC: And I get you some coffee.

ARISTA ILONA: Yeah, exactly. I was just like, okay, whatever. So get into the room. And I should, you know, clarify that this is a new partner and it's my husband and it's, you know, and he's amazing. And so like, it's not the same person as the first pregnancy. So I had split up and

DR. ELLIOT BERLIN, DC: was that the same for the two miscarriages as well?

ARISTA ILONA: Yes. I have a whole new life.

DR. ELLIOT BERLIN, DC: Oh, good support and good support then as well.

ARISTA ILONA: Yeah. So we're in the room and they're like, Oh yeah, you were having small contractions. I was like, yeah, I can feel that. So they were like putting me on the belly monitor and just waiting. And then I get a call from my OB and she's like, you're late. I can't see you, you know? And so we're going to have to schedule a different day. And I was like, Oh, they moved your birth. Yep. She was like, this is pushing all the births back and my surgeries. And I was like, all right, whatever. It's like, I didn't want to be stressed, you know? And I was like everything for a reason. And so we went home. I got sent home and I'm like, okay, cool. So my now rescheduled C-section is like three days from now, but like, what if my water

ARISTA ILONA: broke tonight or tomorrow? Like, you know what, Amy? It's like kind of one of those things where like, you'd have to be available. But so then it moved from the 22nd to the 24th, which was a Friday. And it was a way better experience, like going back, like reset. We go back and, you know, this time we're even more prepared because, you know, my husband like had his bags and everything ready, you know, like this time it's like, okay, now I really didn't forget anything because we got that.

DR. ELLIOT BERLIN, DC: Do over.

ARISTA ILONA: Yeah, exactly. So we're there and I'm, you know, still a little nervous, like to do the C-section. It's still scary, the lights and all of that, but I'm not as like scared because I knew what to expect. And I also trusted my doctor and I chose her specifically for a reason. I knew she was the best for what I was wanting. And we get there and have my husband next to me. And then all of a sudden things started to feel a little weird as we're in the operating room and it gets a little bit quiet. And I'm like, oh, what is going on and starting to feel a little like tugging and the anesthesiologist was like, are you feeling anything like do? And I'm like, like he gets hell on my face that it was uncomfortable.

ARISTA ILONA: And I was like, yeah, I'm feeling burning. And he's like, oh, like you shouldn't be feeling that. And so we like, you know, up the dose. And in that moment, I didn't know it, but they had found a ton of scar tissue that was all on my right side that had traveled up. I don't know if she, she had mentioned maybe from the infection, but the scar tissue wrapped around my uterus and bladder and twisted over towards the right.

DR. ELLIOT BERLIN, DC: Like it pulled it.

ARISTA ILONA: Yes.

DR. ELLIOT BERLIN, DC: Oh, my goodness. So that's what you were feeling when you would have to pee and things.

ARISTA ILONA: So I was like, Oh, okay. Now it makes sense. And so the scar tissue was all around. So she's like, we have to take more time. Like the C-section, you know, is there, but we need to take more time to scrape as much of this as we can out.

DR. ELLIOT BERLIN, DC: I'm glad she had time and didn't have to reschedule you to Monday.

ARISTA ILONA: And at that point, the partner that the doctor that was with her was not the one that was scheduled with her on the 22nd and she later had told me like, I'm so glad you were late because, you know, if it was that day and we opened you up, might not have been able to like really tend to you. Like we wanted to on this date with this doctor. And I was like, well, great. Everything for a reason.

DR. ELLIOT BERLIN, DC: Yeah.

ARISTA ILONA: So it all worked out and I had a great team and nurses were amazing. So they were doing that. And then she's like, you also had a window uterus, which, you know, they could see the baby through the scar.

DR. ELLIOT BERLIN, DC: You mean?

ARISTA ILONA: Yeah. Like this just clear, like she was like the minute I opened you up, I could just see her right there.

DR. ELLIOT BERLIN, DC: Wow. Okay. So that's what they're saying with the score thinned out so much, like didn't separate, but thinned out so much that you could essentially see through it.

ARISTA ILONA: Yes. Like, okay. Well, I think I dodged a bullet, right? It's like, you don't know. You'll never really know. But I'm glad that I went with a decision that I went with based off of what I was

feeling towards the end of my pregnancy. And so, yeah, she was born and she was what? Six, no, seven, one, seven pounds and one ounce. And just cried. And like, and that one, I was more alert and I immediately like cried and then she pooped on me. So that was cool.

DR. ELLIOT BERLIN, DC: Yeah.

ARISTA ILONA: And I had just like had these extensions and it was like, you know, I'm going to be like JLo and you know, having like JLo and I had just done my hair that day, took a shower. It was like, you know, going to go in all cute into surgery. Next thing you know, I'm like, I feel wet, like down my neck. And then the nurse was like, Oh, she pooped on you her first poop. And I'm like, okay, can we wipe me down? And oh, that's the, what did she say? It's some medical term, like, you know, she's like, it's a vile pooper, like it's a good poop. Like, is it healthy for you? Like, that's great. But like, I don't really need like poop body washer.

DR. ELLIOT BERLIN, DC: You never know. That's how those things started. Once again, you needed the mist.

ARISTA ILONA: Yeah.

DR. ELLIOT BERLIN, DC: It's going to come up with a line, just like baby poo lotion. Oh goodness.

ARISTA ILONA: So I guess I have that coffee that some animal, yeah, exactly. No, no, thank you. So that was hilarious. And I call her poopsie now and the anesthesiologist, he was like, can someone wipe her down? You know, like he was so concerned. It was so cute, but yeah, just all in my extension. So there went that cute planning to be cute. Just Nope. And then she right away latched on and it was beautiful. Like everything was so sweet and amazing in the hospital. I was there for like four or five days. I was recovery. Recovery was great. I was more prepared this time. I had meals prepared. You know, I had my dad's wife make me amazing. A bolognese soup from Mexico. and cocido soup, which was very, very soothing for me.

ARISTA ILONA: And we had my little food tray ready to go and we set up our guest bedroom and had just a very like womb-like, you know, experience together as a family. And I got to meet her baby sister and it was really beautiful. I felt so supported. My mother-in-law came in from Florida and I had such a different experience than the first time around. It was not traumatic.

DR. ELLIOT BERLIN, DC: Yes.

ARISTA ILONA: Yeah, and I think also, you know, cause I knew what I was getting into, but also like having a supportive partner and a family and feeling like I arrived to the point like, ah, I get it now. Like I get why this is such a sacred and beautiful mission for women and also like for men to step into the role as a father and husband and all of the things, you know, I, in that moment was like, wow, this is such a beautiful gift to be given and to take on as hard as it is, you know, there is that beauty to it. So, yeah.

DR. ELLIOT BERLIN, DC: What a journey.

ARISTA ILONA: Yeah, and it's still going, but it's great. It's like-

DR. ELLIOT BERLIN, DC: What a journey, just the whole thing from childhood on up to today. Very, very intense, powerful journey. I mean, what are your take home messages from your own experiences?

ARISTA ILONA: Honestly, I would say like looking back or just overall, like if I could tell anything to my younger self is don't be so hard on yourself. And, you know, there is no such thing as perfection. With my first pregnancy, the thing I kept telling myself was motherhood isn't about perfection, it's about transformation. And that was kind of like my own little mantra that I started repeating to myself that I still to this day do because it is so telling. I think we were very, very hard on ourselves as women to get everything right and to be the perfect mom and to not have mom guilt and to always be on and then we put ourselves last. It's just never ending. And it's really not about any of that. It's really on the deepest level of transforming

ARISTA ILONA: all of the things that you thought was how it was supposed to be and what everyone told you how to be and how to do things, transforming that into what you value and what it is that is beautiful for you and your family and how you're creating your home life. And that's okay. Like I just learned not to be so hard on myself with what everyone thought about my story, right? Because I had a lot of that shame in the beginning to really transform that into something that was my soul wellness. So, yeah.

DR. ELLIOT BERLIN, DC: Well, I think at this point, I need some of the mist too.

ARISTA ILONA: I got some for you.

DR. ELLIOT BERLIN, DC: Thank you. Okay, so we promised a little teaser at the beginning that we have a little announcement to make. And here it is. So we started this new platform, Informed Pregnancy Plus with streaming video content with the same mission as all the other Informed Pregnancy projects, which is to just expose, give you access to information, stories, anything that you can use to become more informed, more empowered and make choices and find support for the choices that you make. And Arista has agreed to do a series called Empowered Mama. And it'll be kicking off next month from the time of this recording is April, which is Caesarian Awareness Month. And Arista has a whole series of interviews with women who had Caesarian birth.

DR. ELLIOT BERLIN, DC: And that's gonna be the first month of Empowered Mama. So-

ARISTA ILONA: I'm excited. Thank you so much.

DR. ELLIOT BERLIN, DC: I am very excited. I mean, your own transformation. And then just like throw onto that your skills from all your years of radio media and entertainment. These are gonna be powerful, powerful episodes, powerful stories, and they're gonna help a lot of people. So look out for Empowered Mama with Arista Alana on Informed Pregnancy Plus, which you can access at informedpregnancy.tv or through apps on Apple, Android and Roku. Arista, I appreciate you so much on so many levels. Thank you for being here. Thank you for sharing so openly. I can't wait till we get to sit down with the team and plow through your old birth video from number one.

ARISTA ILONA: Oh my gosh. Thank you. I'm so, so honored. And I just feel so grateful to know you and all the relief that you've given me in my pregnancies and to so many women, you're amazing.

DR. ELLIOT BERLIN, DC: Well, thank you. Where can we find you online besides Informed Pregnancy Plus?

ARISTA ILONA: Yes, on Instagram, it is Ilona Botanica. So that's I-L-O-N-A. BOTANICA. And I do have a personal page, it's Arista Alana, but unfortunately I got locked out of it. So it's, that's a whole nother story. So yeah, it's just Ilona Botanica.

DR. ELLIOT BERLIN, DC: And that's all we need. I'm going to go get some mist.

ARISTA ILONA: Okay. Thank you so much for sharing my story.

DR. ELLIOT BERLIN, DC: Oh, my pleasure. And then in addition to informed pregnancy, plus you can find all of our media, the podcast, the blog, and the videos at informedpregnancy.com.

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