Super Scar with Lauren Aboulafia

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IN THIS EPISODE

Actor, writer, producer, and animator Lauren Aboulafia talks with Dr. Elliot Berlin, DC about the traumatic first birth that left her with the vertical scar behind her animated dramedy Super Scar — and how she turned that experience into comedy, advocacy, and support for other NICU families.

About this transcript: *This transcript was created with AI-assisted transcription and reviewed by our team. It may not be 100% accurate — names, medical terms, and phrasing can occasionally be mis-transcribed. For exact wording, please listen to the episode audio.*

DR. ELLIOT BERLIN, DC: Welcome to the Informed Pregnancy and Parenting Podcast. I'm your host, pregnancy-focused chiropractor, Dr. Elliott Berlin. My guest today is an actor, writer, producer, animator, commercial real estate broker, mother, and now animated dramedy maker. Interesting, Lauren Apalofia. Welcome to the podcast.

LAUREN ABOULAFIA: Thank you so much for having me. It's so great to be here with you, you know, clothed.

DR. ELLIOT BERLIN, DC: Oh, yeah, a lot of people say that. Excellent intro. Also comedian after I left out, comedy mama. Okay, what I really want to get to is this little short animation that you made, the dramedy. And I love when somehow we take tragic things that happen and tell them over in a comedic way, I guess tragedy plus time. And yours is about your birth experience that was traumatic for you. And, spoiler alert, mommy and baby end up okay.

LAUREN ABOULAFIA: Correct.

DR. ELLIOT BERLIN, DC: We're gonna get there. But before we do, we always start at the beginning. Where are you from originally?

LAUREN ABOULAFIA: Houston, Texas.

DR. ELLIOT BERLIN, DC: It explains everything. Everything. I'm not sure. Use of hairspray? I don't know.

LAUREN ABOULAFIA: Hairspray, big energy, big personality, big accomplishments.

DR. ELLIOT BERLIN, DC: Just big. Texas is just big. Everything big. What was Houston? Was it hot? Is it muggy?

LAUREN ABOULAFIA: Wet, moist, flooding, humid, great, nice, friendly people where I was in Houston because it's pretty cosmopolitan. You know, Texas gets a bad rap, but Houston is a city.

DR. ELLIOT BERLIN, DC: Yeah, it's like a magazine. Yeah. Or a drink. And I love Texans. Yeah. I love Texans too. Most Texans. Many. Some Texans. Okay. Now, you started off as an actor. Tell me about the move into acting. Is it something you were interested in from the time you were little in big Texas?

LAUREN ABOULAFIA: Little girl, Texas. Loved, you know, putting on a show, musicals. Really, my true love was musical theater, but I discovered soon, you know, as I was applying to the best schools for college, that the dancing was a little not there.

DR. ELLIOT BERLIN, DC: Oh, did you have any formal training in dance?

LAUREN ABOULAFIA: Yeah, for sure. Just, you know, didn't want to really follow the moves.

DR. ELLIOT BERLIN, DC: Oh, you're the one hanging upside down off the bar.

LAUREN ABOULAFIA: Yeah, I just want to do my own thing.

DR. ELLIOT BERLIN, DC: Yeah, that makes sense to me. So isn't there a name for that, like modern dance or something?

LAUREN ABOULAFIA: Improvising dancer. Yeah, you have to really be really good at following like a huge dance number, kind of like after one or two times I'm showing it to you. So that really prevented kind of the dream of the Broadway in terms of the kind of dancer chorus girl thing.

DR. ELLIOT BERLIN, DC: Right. Okay. And what about singing?

LAUREN ABOULAFIA: Singing is good. Solid singer.

DR. ELLIOT BERLIN, DC: Yeah. Okay. Who are your inspirations in terms of song?

LAUREN ABOULAFIA: I mean, I have Patti LuPone, like in terms of old school. Oh, yeah. Like, give me some gypsy. Just like feel that Mama Rose, you know? God!

DR. ELLIOT BERLIN, DC: Wait, so you don't sing anymore?

LAUREN ABOULAFIA: I do. Just not as much as I like. I mean, I did quite a number of musical theater just as the character actor. Like I did Fiddler on the Roof. Who would I play? Yenta. I did it with Josh Groban, essentially. He was the tailor. Yeah. And I was Yenta.

DR. ELLIOT BERLIN, DC: You're kidding.

LAUREN ABOULAFIA: Yeah. Not one of the ingenues, you know? No. Yenta. Twice.

DR. ELLIOT BERLIN, DC: I mean, you seem like a perfect Yenta. All right. So were you always wanting to do stage, like keep it there? Or did you want to go into screen? Did you?

LAUREN ABOULAFIA: I always wanted stage, but I met a boy who was in grad school and he was older and I like him old. I don't know. I like him because I was an undergrad and he was a grad student and he was so good. And he moved to Los Angeles. And so that's why I'm in L.A. Hollywood was never really the dream. It really was Broadway. And so when I came here, it was for a man. I came here for a man. Yeah. Not with that same man.

DR. ELLIOT BERLIN, DC: Oh, not with that man anymore. Yeah. So does that mean because you do commercial real estate also. Like, I feel like a lot of the actors, I don't know, wait tables or do massage therapy, commercial real estate. I couldn't do it

LAUREN ABOULAFIA: anymore. I did a lot of serving in New York City. I said when I moved to L.A., I'm not going to do it anymore.

DR. ELLIOT BERLIN, DC: And so what do you do? There's still like gigs, right?

LAUREN ABOULAFIA: It's that feeling of the ups and downs. I don't know. I just couldn't take it anymore. Some people can take it. it. I couldn't take it. So I met a girlfriend who owned a yoga studio, moto yoga. She said, you got to meet Brad. And he owns a commercial real estate company, one of the best brokers and the rest is history. And he took a chance on me because I really didn't know anything.

DR. ELLIOT BERLIN, DC: Brad. Yeah. Such the name of a broker to write Brad the broker. But then he taught you the ropes.

LAUREN ABOULAFIA: He did. A lot of learning as you go, which could really be hard.

DR. ELLIOT BERLIN, DC: Yeah, on the job. And then did that pull you out of acting? Did

LAUREN ABOULAFIA: you leave that in your past? You know, I kind of incorporated them both, I would still audition, but I started seeing if I'm really going to be respected as a commercial real estate professional, I can't be running around doing cascade commercials and doing a TV show auditions, I'd have to kind of pick for a period of time. So I did, I kind of dove in, I kind of really got good, sold some stuff, you know, and then I started being like, oh, I'm gonna start connecting my worlds together. And so like, I made a pilot about being in commercial real estate, and, you know, started just creating my own work. And it actually felt better to me. For me, I liked being in control of my own creative process as much as you can be in control of anything.

DR. ELLIOT BERLIN, DC: Wow, I mean, commercial real estate, you could go into, hey, I don't know, Target, I have a perfect space for you guys. And then you'd be like, Oh, look, that's me on the cascade bottle. Right. There you go.

LAUREN ABOULAFIA: Multitasker.

DR. ELLIOT BERLIN, DC: Yeah, exactly. And then in the beginning, I almost had to take a breath when I was talking about all your different slashes that you do actor slash writer slash producer slash

animator. So did writing and producing come later?

LAUREN ABOULAFIA: Yeah, it did come later. Because I again, it's about, you know, empowering yourself and trying to say, all right, write for yourself, you know, write what you're feeling connected to. So I wrote a pilot and it got into festivals. And I started it. And so that's how it started of putting on these different hats and being like, Oh, my God. And then, you know, later, I wrote my animated film.

DR. ELLIOT BERLIN, DC: What was the genre of the festival piece?

LAUREN ABOULAFIA: It was a comedy. It was a sitcom. And it was about an actor acting her way through the commercial real estate world. Okay. Right. Well, you know, people, it was called broker because she was broke.

DR. ELLIOT BERLIN, DC: Ah, grab the broker.

LAUREN ABOULAFIA: Yeah. So that's how I kind of connected the worlds

DR. ELLIOT BERLIN, DC: together. I love it. Okay. And then animation is a whole different

LAUREN ABOULAFIA: art form. That one really surprised me. I was basically after some time past the traumatic birth of my first son. It was a pandemic. And my husband said, I think you should animate the story. And I said, I think you're nuts. I don't see it as funny. I don't really get it. And he says, No, no, no, I see it. And I guess I just took that as I'm going to give it a whirl. And I just kind of taught myself. And I just got better and better. But the other thing is, I have to say the actual script, I really workshopped a lot. You know, I had something first that was pretty solid in terms of the story of the traumatic birth that I had started to then find humor, started to really get it. And then I animated it. So

LAUREN ABOULAFIA: that was really the order of things. But it was my husband's idea. He was like, this is what you should do with this horrible thing.

DR. ELLIOT BERLIN, DC: Did you do the animation part of it?

LAUREN ABOULAFIA: No. So there are programs. So you still got to like make the face and like, you know, move it. But it's not like sitting there and drawing it. So I always have to distinguish that because that would be insane.

DR. ELLIOT BERLIN, DC: But even with the software, are you the one who used the software?

LAUREN ABOULAFIA: Yes. And I was obsessed. I became like a crazy mad scientist. I do three in the morning, you know, I have a kid, you know, but it gave me such life. I was like, oh, I'm in power. I don't have to wait for anyone.

DR. ELLIOT BERLIN, DC: All right. We need to find out more about your experience that led to that and the story in animation form itself. But we need to first take a commercial break. We'll be right back. four times. Welcome back. We're talking to Lauren Apaloffi. She, as you might remember, is an actor, writer, producer, animator, commercial real estate broker, mother of two, and now she has created this short animated dramedy that was triggered by a traumatic birth story, which I'm sorry that you experienced that. Let's get to how it all came about. When did you think about having kids? When

did this, like, I gotta be a mom moment?

LAUREN ABOULAFIA: Um, the moment came with a husband who was really eager to have kids. I think I would have kept pushing it along. And I already was a geriatric mom. I really-

DR. ELLIOT BERLIN, DC: For the first one?

LAUREN ABOULAFIA: For the first one. Oh, yeah.

DR. ELLIOT BERLIN, DC: How old?

LAUREN ABOULAFIA: It's a good moisturizer I'm using. I was 36 for the first one. Geriatric.

DR. ELLIOT BERLIN, DC: Oh, yeah. Way dinosaur-y.

LAUREN ABOULAFIA: Oh, yeah. Dinosaur.

DR. ELLIOT BERLIN, DC: You still seem under 35 now.

LAUREN ABOULAFIA: That's so nice. What a filter I'm using. So he really wanted it. And I also, I know about the ticking clock. I know about a geriatric pregnancy. So luckily that piece of the story was easy and I got pregnant very quickly. So it was like a boom. I really thought that when I wanted to have a baby, I wanted everything to be in order. I wanted to have the life be the way that I envisioned and then a baby. And that's just not actually, doesn't work like that always.

DR. ELLIOT BERLIN, DC: Does that ever happen?

LAUREN ABOULAFIA: No. No, but I'm just telling you, little Lauren thought that that's how it would go. But anyway, it was an encouragement and tick, tick, tick, tick. And so those two together, 36, happened quick, got pregnant. It was overall a really easy pregnancy. It really was. And until-

DR. ELLIOT BERLIN, DC: Were you surprised that you got pregnant so fast?

LAUREN ABOULAFIA: Yes.

DR. ELLIOT BERLIN, DC: How'd you find out?

LAUREN ABOULAFIA: Um, a rash on my neck.

DR. ELLIOT BERLIN, DC: Really?

LAUREN ABOULAFIA: Yes. And then we read about it.

DR. ELLIOT BERLIN, DC: I don't even know what that is.

LAUREN ABOULAFIA: Oh, well, doctor, you should look it up.

DR. ELLIOT BERLIN, DC: Oh, actor, writer, producer, animator, doctor, Lauren Aguilavia. Oh, doctor, you need to look this up. So I had a group of girls over, everyone with

LAUREN ABOULAFIA: varying degrees of where they were with their own relationship to being pregnant. And then I couldn't hold it in because I couldn't believe it. So I took a test before these

group of girls came over and I was pregnant. And my husband felt like he knew because of the- actually he's the doctor because of this rash.

DR. ELLIOT BERLIN, DC: Huh. Did you get it with your second pregnancy?

LAUREN ABOULAFIA: No.

DR. ELLIOT BERLIN, DC: Not a very reliable sign.

LAUREN ABOULAFIA: A little bit. Just saying. Okay. Moving on. You're right. I can't remember. It's all blending together. That's the thing about these kids. But I'll tell you what doesn't blend together is the story of the first kid because it's so much that it doesn't really blend. It's very clear still. And so I get pregnant very quickly. And then at 30 weeks, I just have like this most intense pain I've ever had in my whole life. And so I go to labor and delivery. I mean, do you want all these details or do you want me to-

DR. ELLIOT BERLIN, DC: Yeah, no, no. Tell us everything.

LAUREN ABOULAFIA: So I go to labor and delivery. We're here.

DR. ELLIOT BERLIN, DC: Yeah.

LAUREN ABOULAFIA: Yeah. Go to labor and delivery. Sweet woman, resident. She does all the test. She says, I think it's just gas. And here's the moment in retrospect, a little pause. That's all I wanted to say. A little pause for me to just say, oh, just gas, go home. Now, how about we just take a second? Anyway, so we go home and the night was excruciating pain, horrible. I mean, I've never felt pain like that ever. I mean, even to this day, labor is not as bad as this pain. I watched I Feel Pretty, which is bizarre. Amy Schumer's movie. I was like, this will distract me.

DR. ELLIOT BERLIN, DC: Wait, is that the one where she had hyperemesis you're talking about?

LAUREN ABOULAFIA: No, no. Can you imagine I was watching? No, this is like a light comedy.

DR. ELLIOT BERLIN, DC: Okay. I don't, I don't know anything. Yeah. And I live in the hills.

LAUREN ABOULAFIA: I like how you said, yeah. Yeah. I don't know anything. I like, yeah, you don't even know the pregnancy sign. Anyway, so we live on top of a hill. So the next day going to the doctor, because I'm still in excruciating pain going down this hill. Also, every turn was like

DR. ELLIOT BERLIN, DC: unbelievable. Where, where are you feeling this exactly? Stomach. Middle? Like belly button? Lower? Yeah. Yeah, everywhere. Everywhere in the stomach. Okay. Yeah. It sounds like you intuitively knew something was up.

LAUREN ABOULAFIA: I did. And again, in retrospect, I think that that really is one of the main lessons and why I animated the story, tell the story is I mean, it's just, you just have to be your best advocate. You know, they're not inside you. you. So anyway, go back to labor and delivery. Now it's not labor and delivery because I went to my fetal specialist, she sees something is wrong and she tells me there's a liter of blood she basically sees in my stomach. Now I'm going to the ER. I just stepped it up a level. Home for gas, ER the next day. And the ER, these sweet doctors, you know,

you get for me, I get really high on the adrenaline of it. So I became like a standup comedian. I was so sticky because I think my anxiety was so intense that I kept

LAUREN ABOULAFIA: making like these jokes. I mean, I had had heads of oncology, baby doctors, emergency doctors, trauma. I mean, I had so many doctors because no one could figure out like, how does she have a liter of blood in her stomach? What are we going to do with the kid? You know, how are we going to get the baby? What are we going to do? And so they did exploratory surgery to try to see like what was wrong. They really didn't know.

DR. ELLIOT BERLIN, DC: Like they knocked you out?

LAUREN ABOULAFIA: Knocked me out.

DR. ELLIOT BERLIN, DC: I'm just trying to wonder what was going through your mind as you're on the table getting knocked out.

LAUREN ABOULAFIA: I was very high, doctor. I remember feeling like all the doctors were moving too quickly and I told them all to stop and we needed to take a moment and come together.

DR. ELLIOT BERLIN, DC: Okay.

LAUREN ABOULAFIA: And so we did that and that felt a little better. I needed to feel like we were all together on this and I was safe. So that's the most I can say in terms of my mind. It was like very simple. We're going to have to do a team gathering. And then I was out. And then I woke up with the doctor rocking my body back and forth because then the baby's heart rate was erratic and I had to go back in, open me back up.

DR. ELLIOT BERLIN, DC: Wait, wait, wait. You woke up. Yeah, I'm just saying you woke up and the surgery was done?

LAUREN ABOULAFIA: The surgery was done. You later find out what they did, which was they think, they don't know that they saw that a fibroid ruptured, a fibroid attached to my bowel and ruptured, which is why there was a liter of blood.

DR. ELLIOT BERLIN, DC: Did you know you had fibroids before the pregnancy?

LAUREN ABOULAFIA: I did. But, you know, I was already pregnant and it depends on where they are. And I've learned a ton about fibroids. They all want to study my fibroid. They wanted to write about it in Gynecology magazine because, you know, fibroids, they've always been around, but they grow with pregnancy.

DR. ELLIOT BERLIN, DC: I've never been this close to a famous fibroid.

LAUREN ABOULAFIA: You really should. I mean, this is a big deal.

DR. ELLIOT BERLIN, DC: Autographs. This is huge. OK, so it grew with the pregnancy.

LAUREN ABOULAFIA: So it got really big. Yeah. And then it ruptured. And then, you know, the pain was blood, like a liter of blood, you know, from your bowel, from the bowel and the fibroid rupture.

DR. ELLIOT BERLIN, DC: Exploding. OK, so what did they do in the surgery?

LAUREN ABOULAFIA: Because obviously it wasn't enough. Right. So that's an awesome point, too, because they asked Seth if they should take the fibroid out or not. So they brought my husband Seth in. My belly is open because I was out and asked him what they should do. If we take it out now, she may never have a vaginal birth. If we leave it in now, she still has this fibroid. But he said she may want a vaginal birth. So leave it in. So they close me back up with the fibroid in. And then now I'm back to the point that I was before where I wake up and the doctor's rocking my scarred body back and forth saying, I don't like this, Lauren, we've got to go back in. The baby's heart rate is erratic. So I go back in. OK. Open me back up.

LAUREN ABOULAFIA: Take the baby out. Oh, really?

DR. ELLIOT BERLIN, DC: Through the same, the same incision, huge incision.

LAUREN ABOULAFIA: And it's a vertical one.

DR. ELLIOT BERLIN, DC: Oh, like all the way down to the bottom of your ribs.

LAUREN ABOULAFIA: Yeah. From like above my belly button, all the way down to my pelvis. I mean, that's why the film is called Super Scar.

DR. ELLIOT BERLIN, DC: Super scar is a pretty substantial scar. OK. So did you go back under? Yeah. Yeah. That's what I thought you said. So when you go back under, do you know that they're going to take the baby out?

LAUREN ABOULAFIA: Not sure, because she just said the baby's heart rate is erratic. Remember, these drugs are pretty powerful, right? Here's the other thing about all this. At a certain point, there's almost so much pain you can take. And so I think I also was like, please end the pain safely. But please, is there a way for this pain to stop? Because it's been a long time now.

DR. ELLIOT BERLIN, DC: I mean, aren't you anesthetized? Yeah. But you still feel the pain or just.

LAUREN ABOULAFIA: I think I'm saying to you, like, if whatever we're doing, like, I can't believe we're going back in helps the situation, like, just get it done. It was very quick, though, doctor, very quick. I mean, it was like, shake, shake, shake. Look above. Baby's heart rate is erratic. Zoom down back.

DR. ELLIOT BERLIN, DC: OK. And you're 30 weeks. 30 weeks. So you wake up. I mean, that's really early. So you wake up. And I mean, what do they tell you? Who tells you?

LAUREN ABOULAFIA: Many doctors come in, they say you're an anomaly.

DR. ELLIOT BERLIN, DC: Anomaly, how?

LAUREN ABOULAFIA: This is not normal for a fiber attached to a bowel, liter of blood, 30 weeks, like the combination of all the things which I never like to hear a doctor at Cedars-Sinai say you're an anomaly. I think the combo of the two is just like an anomaly. You know, you want to hear, like, we see this all the time.

DR. ELLIOT BERLIN, DC: Yeah, Chapter 17 in the textbook.

LAUREN ABOULAFIA: Let me so I mean especially since they delivered like 9,000 babies a year. I'm an anomaly And I have every group again of the doctors coming in checking in on me. The baby was big So that was like a blessing. He was born four pounds three ounces So he's a large baby And I just remember the resident from the night before coming in pretty in large for 30 weeks

DR. ELLIOT BERLIN, DC: I'm pretty sure my lunch was four pounds three exactly. Yeah, not a big human, right?

LAUREN ABOULAFIA: So

DR. ELLIOT BERLIN, DC: Yeah, I mean you're saying it was big or your lunch was too big Both. Okay. Great. Perfect. Just checking. Yeah, two things can be true at the same time

LAUREN ABOULAFIA: Oh, that's so deep and true. So anyway You know, that's the whole thing about this whole story. I mean, I think if it wasn't for humor I think this chapter almost killed me. I mean it did I did almost die without modern medicine for both my Baby and me, you know So the story in some ways and at this moment there's relief the baby is okay Right. The baby's big it's going to be in the nicu just using comedy to help me get through this Anyway, i'm going to continue on because in this moment Everything is okay in the story and he's in the nicu. I'm not seeing him yet Which is a hard way as a mom

DR. ELLIOT BERLIN, DC: I mean, but what about even just you in recovery from two surgeries? And with a scar going all the way up, you know, oh, yeah

LAUREN ABOULAFIA: Yeah, a lot of drugs very high had the awareness to get glam squad to come to my room

DR. ELLIOT BERLIN, DC: Really? Are you serious? I hope we have pictures of that. We do. Okay. I was like we're gonna do some stuff to this mama

LAUREN ABOULAFIA: I've just been through the War zone and I have the scars to prove it. I mean it sounds like first of all, is your husband a doctor? No

DR. ELLIOT BERLIN, DC: I didn't think so. So How does he even feel about that decision? They sort of put on him pretty heavy Pretty heavy. I mean not to say that his part in it was You know more intense than your part in it, right? But still that's like, I don't know Which decision to make holy crap I mean, it sounds like your baby's life was in danger. Your life was in danger I assume your uterus was in danger, but you still have it And wow, that's just so intense I would like to hope that if my life got that scary that I could Fall back on comedy Oh, that's beautiful. Yeah, I can't even say it was similar to that, but I had very scary time after You know covid in march 2020 when I was in the icu and we didn't know anything about covid

DR. ELLIOT BERLIN, DC: And I was really having a hard time breathing and I stopped breathing out at some point And I remember the nurse what happened she came in and she's like, oh elliot one of the things that's really Troubling us is your blood pressure is super low and normally I have kind of higher blood pressure Right. He's like and if we can't get it up We're gonna have to give you this drug

that can only be administered through an iv in the jugular vein in your neck And I was like, well i'm pretty sure you just solved the problem because I feel my blood pressure going up right now And she's like, okay I just so you know You're the only one in this unit who's still making jokes and asking for food every day because they weren't feeding

DR. ELLIOT BERLIN, DC: My god, i'm like if either of those two go away just pull the plug I mean, seriously Yeah, seriously, and then she made a joke. She said you're not on a ventilator. I'm like, that's not fun

LAUREN ABOULAFIA: Oh god so Really after I hired glam squad Beautiful flowers. I've never seen so many beautiful flower arrangements in a room, you know I mean if you want flowers go through Yeah, or die One after another more and more beautiful And really I remember feeling very sad to not see the baby at first and it was just you know on the Face time and that felt very strange, but I also was very high. I also was alive. I also Finally didn't feel that Piercing. I mean there was finally some relief so that I remember feeling that And really the nicu was okay at first. I mean, it's a very intense place There's lots of beeping everyone talks about it in the nicu and there's cords and you know

LAUREN ABOULAFIA: There's also unfortunately and I can't wait to do something about it soon There's a library at cedars that has stars on the walls with all the baby's names that didn't make it So that's where you wait to you know, you hang out So you should honor that for sure it shouldn't be in the space that you're in anyway, oh my goodness Long story short, we're finally getting into the flow of the nicu tango, which is what I call it It's a two-step forward. It's a one-step back. That's the tango But we're doing it, you know, we get it. Oh antibiotics. Oh, that's just a preventative. Okay, fine. Fine. Fine You know what? Okay. I've been here a month now. I'm gonna do the baby room. Remember, there's no baby shower

LAUREN ABOULAFIA: There's no baby room. Okay, so i'm gonna do something that feels somewhat normal So I go home To do the somewhat normal thing sort of putting the you know, there's like 25 amazon boxes. I'm opening them and all that. And I get a call from a doctor, who's not my doctor, my normal doctor. And she says, Lauren, you have to come to the NICU right now. She's very sick. And I said, I don't have a she. It doesn't matter. Your son is very sick. You need to come to the NICU right now. Oh, my gosh. I think that your son just had a stroke. Frozen. I can still see myself in my room with the phone. It's these moments that are just

DR. ELLIOT BERLIN, DC: still so crystal clear. I mean, we gave the spoiler alert. We did. You and the baby are okay. We did. I have no idea what happens next, but we need to take a quick break. And when we come back, we'll get the rest of the story. Welcome back. We are talking to Lauren Apalafia. I mean, my heart is still pounding. I know. It's like an intense story. It's pounding hard from all the emotions. I'm trying to put myself in your shoes and try to mind process everything you went through up until this point and to go home and try to make some normalcy out of life and to make your nursery and then find out that you first of all had the wrong gender for your kid, but then also a stroke. This point we don't know. I mean,

LAUREN ABOULAFIA: she says that, right? So it doesn't really know exactly, right? So that's what she says on the phone. She also calls him a girl. So that was also really disheartening. Back down that hill. And I mean, I'm slapping myself. I mean, I'm really going through an emotional world that I

don't think I will ever. I hope no one ever, I hope I never goes through. It was like almost slapping yourself to not play out the end, right? So anyway, get to the NICU. They all think I'm also pregnant. So everyone thinks that I'm going to go deliver a baby. So that's also very confusing for everyone because I'm like, no, no, no. And they're like, yeah, because I'm yelling and screaming. And so

LAUREN ABOULAFIA: they're like, oh, race her in. I'm like, no, no, no. So that's a mess. Then they're like, you know, wanting me to be quiet. So they put me in this weird little room and this doctor comes to me and she says, I think that your son had this stroke and it doesn't look good. And starts to tear up and starts to like connect with me and says, you know, I almost lost my son. And I'm thinking, this is really happening. Like, you know, I give her the benefit of the doubt. Like she's trying to connect with me and be a human and human to human. But right now I am in like, literally, I don't even understand why we're talking. Like you need to actually go to the baby and see if like that baby can like

LAUREN ABOULAFIA: continue living. So I basically saw that I'm in a wheelchair and I did, I stood up and I told her to go in there and save my son. Yeah. I just said, please just go in there, like save my son. And after like the worst 24 hours and antibiotics and a blue baby, and I sang to the baby and there was finally some sense that it will be okay. But then we still didn't know. And this is what's so hard about the NICU and why I have so much heart for everyone in the NICU and like want to give back so much is because it's a never ending roller coaster in there. I mean, not for everyone, but for most people who go in early. You get a breath and then you can't. So your nervous system just is not

LAUREN ABOULAFIA: relaxing. So I think that I'm out of it. They also first don't know what he had. They don't still know if it's a stroke or what he had. And then they finally figure out it's meningitis. And the only way to do that and figure that out is they puncture the baby. So that's intense. But meningitis might mean he might have cerebral palsy and he might never walk. So now I'm dealing with that. You know, I'm also a neurotic Jew. So I already do this already, play it the future. So now I'm like, can he not hear? Can he not see? Will he not be able to walk? And I'm going over this as the clock is ticking and I'm waiting for them to tell me anything. Cause if it got to the brain, which is the next test, it means meningitis,

LAUREN ABOULAFIA: which he did have. So anyway, now I'm thinking to what end, what of this meningitis is going to be, is the baby going to be affected by? Now you got to do an MRI to see you waited for that. Long story short, cause it's too agonizing actually to probably take everyone through all this. Let's just feel the relief. The MRI comes back and it's normal. And the amount of relief, I mean, it was like, I've screamed in the pumping room. I was just like, I cannot believe this baby is going to be okay after all this. It was just.

DR. ELLIOT BERLIN, DC: Lauren, it's not my baby. And I knew the ending and the emotions that I'm going through are so intense. I just can't even begin to imagine how a human, let alone a neurotic Jew makes it through that kind of craziness. I mean, I think every mom is a warrior and a superhero, but this is like so above and beyond. And you did it again. I know crazy. Was that like on purpose?

LAUREN ABOULAFIA: Oh, God, yes. You know, there's a feeling of wanting to retell the story to not have that be my sole experience. Yes, it was a happy ending. Yes, not everyone gets a happy ending. But I think, you know, also, I was lucky to have some feedback, not an anomaly forever. It

was like, this is what we think it is. And so I went with if it's the fibroid, let's take the fibroid out. So I did another surgery.

LAUREN ABOULAFIA: And so in doing that, I think I gave myself some peace before I got pregnant again of, okay, you know, yeah, and again, pregnant quickly, which like so it's like that piece, you know, but again, I had a weird pregnancy with the second I hurt my foot in these hills, you would think I would leave these hills for the love of God. And I went forward on my foot and I tore something called a Liz frog and I had to be on a scooter. I don't even remember I scooted into your office.

LAUREN ABOULAFIA: I remember the list for pregnant woman on a scooter. It is like the combo. You know, so I went through this intense hell. And then, you know, people would say to me like, well, you know, it might be somebody telling you like, stay put, you know, and so I understand that but it was hard at the time to hear, you know, like, we're just going to keep her safe, get her past the 30 this time, you know, you have that feel around 30. There was a moment, you know, and then 31 and then 32. And then I also was like, oh,

LAUREN ABOULAFIA: this is awful. The end of pregnancy. Oh my God, like, and I'm on a scooter. So I'm also lifting it. But like, I don't think I ever I didn't I never felt what that felt like I never made it. I made it to 40 weeks. Wow. That's 25% longer. Yeah. And it's the big 25%. Yeah. And then was it an automatic caesarean in 40 weeks? No, I'm like, boy, I'm like, Doctor,

LAUREN ABOULAFIA: no, I'm a glutton for punishment. I swear to God, you would think you did it. You're strong little warrior woman. Did you see what happened with the first kid? I'm like, no, I'm gonna have it naturally. I want to try to have it naturally. And I tried my damnedest. I had to be induced. I tried I did 36 hours. I did all the things. Fallopian, ba ba ba ba ba. Unbelievable pain the fallopian tube. Could somebody please send something else? What are we talking about? We put the balloon up your vag. Oh, the

LAUREN ABOULAFIA: holy that's not a fallopian tube. You're right. That's the thing inside yourself. And that's why I'm not a doctor. But you do recognize the pregnancy rash. All right. All right. So anyway, Los Angeles. Oh, my God. Los Angeles. So anyway, so caesarean birth. Yeah. I mean, and again, there was like a moment of like, still, like, it wasn't just easy. I got on all fours. There was an erratic heart rate. There was meconium in the belly. The whole floor came in, did some good breathing. It was nothing compared to the first.

LAUREN ABOULAFIA: And I made the decision to do the C section. Okay, I like that. You were awake, awake, awake. And like, what am I trying to prove? The baby obviously is not into this. What am I doing? I tried. I really tried. And let's do it. And I just it's not an emergency. I made the decision. And there we go. I mean, that must have been empowering, empowering, emotional. I was hysterical. But then also being aware that your baby is being born through your

LAUREN ABOULAFIA: body, belly birth, but through your body. And also no NICU. No NICU. So like instant, like, hi, I'm your mom. Very different. The whole thing is just Lauren, tell me about super scar. Yeah. So basically, during the pandemic, I just taught myself how to animate, as I said, and you know, I'd go to these like support groups like these women support groups. And I hear all these like beautiful stories of mine came out of the crashing winds and the baby just popped out of the flowing

river.

LAUREN ABOULAFIA: You know, and I just, oh, hey, you know, I don't have that. And then I would go to groups that felt like we're not talking about the real stuff. Like, we're not getting really in the real. So I thought of a mom support group where you really get real. And where it's not all good and easy. And, you know, and I animated my birth story. And, you know, I got to have fun with it. I got to have the fiber would be a monster, you know, animation takes away some of the intensity, obviously, of the reality of being in the NICU and a hospital and like,

LAUREN ABOULAFIA: it would be a totally different thing if it wasn't animated. It gives it a little bit of a distance to the intensity of the story. But still, it's there, right? I mean, you're still getting the feeling of it all easier to swallow. Yes. Easier to swallow. And with your comedic stylings. Yes. So I mean, what's your, your mission for the animation? What's your mission for them? You know, I think overall, I've kind of did what I think that piece is going to do. The story started with maternal mental health now. And so I really, really want it for them. I really want it for different NICUs if they want it. You know, I did film festivals, I did the film festival circuit with it. But it really now is a

LAUREN ABOULAFIA: springboard to me wanting to do an animated series about a mom support group. And you know, it's funny and it's really more about the background of the crazy neurotic leader of the group and really how is her family life and how is she holding it together as she leads these different moms in the group and animated and crazy and fun. And so that's really what I want the next iteration of it to be.

DR. ELLIOT BERLIN, DC: I wish you a lot of success because it's conversation that is hard to have. It's important conversation to have and I don't know your dynamic resilience, your ability to share from the heart in a way that is very passionate and dramatic, but also with a pressure valve so it doesn't take you down. It's really special.

LAUREN ABOULAFIA: Thank you.

DR. ELLIOT BERLIN, DC: And to help spread your message, we are going to put SuperScar on Informed Pregnancy Plus.

LAUREN ABOULAFIA: That's so nice.

DR. ELLIOT BERLIN, DC: Add it to our library. You know, a lot of the content on there is really a collection of pregnancy and birth and postpartum as it really is. Sometimes it's amazingly beautiful, just as planned and powerful, even if it's not just as planned. And sometimes, you know, nature is a mother and those harder things to talk about, we don't really shy away from them. So I'm grateful that you joined us here on the podcast. I'm grateful just as a human to have been able to meet you and get to work with you and know you and be inspired by you. And I was grateful to learn how to pronounce your last name.

LAUREN ABOULAFIA: Thank you so much.

DR. ELLIOT BERLIN, DC: I'm so glad that you did. Abulafia. So in addition to SuperScar being on Informed Pregnancy Plus, where can we find you online?

LAUREN ABOULAFIA: At Lauren Abulafia.

DR. ELLIOT BERLIN, DC: How do you spell it? I know how to say it.

LAUREN ABOULAFIA: So it's at Lauren, L-A-U-R-E-N, and then my last name. Ready for this? This is a little girl. A as in apple, B as in boy, O-U-L-A, F as in Frank, I-A.

DR. ELLIOT BERLIN, DC: Really good. I love that it starts with A as in apple, B as in boy. Yeah, it's really one of the best, you know. I'm going to make up my own version. That could be one of those games where you go around, you know. Right, totally. Eddie sells eagles at the edge. All right, anyway, Abulafia. Lauren, I appreciate you. To our listeners, thank you for listening to the Informed Pregnancy Podcast. If you would like more pregnancy parenting information, visit InformedPregnancy.com.

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