# Holiday Top 10 Countdown: Part I

Episode 439 · December 26, 2024 · with Rose Hart Landsberg

IN THIS EPISODE

It's a holiday countdown: Dr. Elliot Berlin, DC and producer Rose Hart Landsberg revisit picks 10 through 6 of the most popular Informed Pregnancy Podcast episodes of 2024 — a surrogate's story, a first baby after 40, all-about-VBACs, and more listener favorites. Part 1 of 2.

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**DR. ELLIOT BERLIN, DC:** Welcome to the Informed Pregnancy and Parenting podcast. I'm your host, pregnancy-focused chiropractor, Dr. Elliott Berlin, joined today by our amazing producer, Rose Hart Landsberg. Welcome.

**ROSE HART LANDSBERG:** Yay. Thank you.

**DR. ELLIOT BERLIN, DC:** It's great to have you on the other side of the mic.

**ROSE HART LANDSBERG:** Glad to be here. And at home, you've tuned into a special 2024 Top 10 Picks of the Year countdown, stories that have touched hearts, sparked dialogue, and provided valuable insights into the diverse and inspiring journeys of pregnancy, childbirth, and parenting. These picks were chosen based on a combination of audience and staff favorites. In this first installment of two, we'll revisit picks 10 through 6, highlighting some of the most powerful and memorable moments from this past year.

**DR. ELLIOT BERLIN, DC:** I love how diverse these stories are. We have a surrogate, an advanced-age first-time mom, a birth worker and podcast host, which is somehow familiar to me, a director, a mom of three with three very different experiences, a free birther, a male birth worker, which again, somehow familiar, a successful musician and actress, a birth world legend, and a longtime show favorite, actress and mother of four. So we have a lot to cover. Let's get started.

**ROSE HART LANDSBERG:** My body was reactive to just getting birth. My body started to produce milk. My hormones were fluctuating. I was having night sweats, all of these different things. My body

would wake me up because it assumed I needed to be feeding these babies that just came out of me. And I had to remind myself that they were home and that they were happy and I had to really talk myself back down. Okay, everything's good. It was an internal struggle for the first few weeks. Okay. So number 10 is episode number 391, and it's Joyce Wheeler, the gift of surrogacy.

**DR. ELLIOT BERLIN, DC:** All right. Surrogacy is becoming increasingly more popular. I used to see once in a blue moon a surrogate or somebody who was having a baby via surrogate, and now it's commonplace in the office. Yes, I really found this episode to be special, especially as someone who is

**ROSE HART LANDSBERG:** not a parent myself. I love that, you know, we got so many guests who, for one reason or another, either decided not to or not been able to carry a baby themselves. And there's always a lot of, you know, shame or just disappointment or just, you know, a lot of feelings. And I feel like this episode highlights how positive and fulfilling an experience it is for surrogates to be that person for someone. And so I just think that's an important thing for people to know is that it's not a burden at all. It's a calling and an honor for people to help others bring their kids into the world. You know, it's a really special thing.

**DR. ELLIOT BERLIN, DC:** I think that just like you said, there's various reasons why people are either unable or would struggle to carry a baby. And having this option is a huge game changer. We first had surrogates on the show. We had a guest, her name was Kalila Green, who was a surrogate. And it was really interesting sitting down and chatting with her back in episode 172 and hearing kind of all the different things that go into the arrangement between the person who's carrying the baby and the person who they're carrying the baby for. It got deeper when a patient of ours, her name was Lexi, Lexi Berry had a very difficult first birth and they told her don't carry any more babies. And she wasn't done having

**DR. ELLIOT BERLIN, DC:** a family yet with one and having the option for a surrogate really made it possible for them to continue their family growth. And she really brought us into the experience of what it was like from the other side, from the mom who was the intended mom not carrying the baby.

**ROSE HART LANDSBERG:** Yeah. I was just going to say a lot of our episodes focus on a lot of the problems with the medical industry and hospitals with very valid reason, of course. And I think this is actually an example of the absolute amazing wonder that modern science and the modern medical industry, you know, a miracle that it can give people.

**DR. ELLIOT BERLIN, DC:** Yeah, I think that everything in medical advancement has the potential to do really good and the potential to do harm. And when they're used the right way, when they're used fairly sparingly, when they're used when people want them or need them, they are invaluable and life changing in a positive way. And when they're overused or forced on people who don't want them and need them, they can be life changing in a negative way. So, you know, it's important for us here to try to highlight both, you know, the pros and cons of different things so people can make more informed choices. I really loved episode number 391, our number 10 pick with Joyce Wheeler because after having Kalila kind of talk about surrogacy from a surrogate's perspective

**DR. ELLIOT BERLIN, DC:** and Lexi talk about it from the intended mother's perspective, Joyce comes in almost with a third perspective. You know, she had babies of her own and then became a surrogate twice, but initially for a family member who was struggling. And then she became a surrogacy advocate and now works at a surrogacy clinic as a case manager. And hearing about all the different elements from that perspective was also kind of interesting and very eye-opening for anybody who might be considering surrogacy or knows somebody who's going through it and wants to know more about what the process is like without being nosy enough to ask.

**ROSE HART LANDSBERG:** Yeah, it really kind of personalized it as an industry because of course it is an industry. And like you said, it's so complicated. There are all these, you know, legal implications and just so many pieces. And so I think it's great to have someone like Joyce who can put a face and a heart to, you know, the person that you would ask those questions of who might, you know, be the one guiding you through the process.

**DR. ELLIOT BERLIN, DC:** Yeah. And I think that also Joyce really got into postpartum from the surrogate's perspective, which is really quite fascinating from both perspectives. But having that whole pregnancy and going home with no baby is a unique experience that, you know, can have a lot of challenges. And Joyce really got into that as well. So it's understandable why it's one of our top 10. And I think it's loaded with valuable information that's both educational and entertaining. And that's why it's a top pick.

**ROSE HART LANDSBERG:** Totally. Great host too.

**DR. ELLIOT BERLIN, DC:** Ah, decent, I would say. Here's a snippet from our episode with Joyce Wheeler.

**ROSE HART LANDSBERG:** The intended parents were in the room. They got to witness the moment that their babies took their first breath. They had this moment that so many wish and hope for, and I got to be front and center, literally right there to watch everything and be part of everything.

**DR. ELLIOT BERLIN, DC:** Now on to number nine.

**ROSE HART LANDSBERG:** You grieve honestly for the dreams you didn't have, the pictures in your mind that never get to go in frames, but then you find the silver lining.

**DR. ELLIOT BERLIN, DC:** Okay, it's Rachel Jirall, late motherhood and positivity. Oh my gosh, she is one of my favorite guests ever. She had a baby at 45, and I've rarely ever met somebody with that much energy in general during a pregnancy and during a pregnancy over 45. She's like a nuclear submarine. If I can attach my home generator to Rachel, we would have more energy.

**ROSE HART LANDSBERG:** I actually don't think that that's a compliment to call someone a nuclear submarine.

**DR. ELLIOT BERLIN, DC:** Well, I'm just talking about the energy perspective. If you listen, you'll know it's episodes number 396 and 397. Some of our most popular episodes in general are before and after birth stories. So we interview people during the pregnancy about the pregnancy and what they're planning for birth, and then after they have the baby and how the birth and early postpartum

are going, and Rachel's just an incredible dynamo of energy. What's interesting is we have other episodes about pregnancy over 35, actually an incredible episode with Dr. Emiliano Giviera, number 85. One of the things that he talks about that I think is really important is everybody has a clinical health profile, and there's a bunch of

**DR. ELLIOT BERLIN, DC:** data points on there. One of them is age, and you can't change that. When you're looking at somebody from a medical perspective during their pregnancy, you're looking at all these data points, you're looking at the whole clinical health profile, but sometimes we get really, really stuck on one point or another as if it defines the whole pregnancy. But when you look at someone and, okay, they're 45, but they are a healthy weight, and they are a healthy BMI, and they don't have high blood pressure, and they don't have diabetes, the whole clinical health profile starts to look different than if you're just focusing on one data point, which is the age. Rachel really exemplified that for me, like

**DR. ELLIOT BERLIN, DC:** super healthy, super positive, really wanted whatever was best for her baby, open to different types of birth, and really just had a lot of energy, I think because of her mindset, all the way through. Normally people hit 35 or 36 weeks, and it's put a fork in me, I'm all done. She could have gone on, I think, for another month or two if she had to.

**ROSE HART LANDSBERG:** Yeah, I think this episode is important for a few reasons. Like you said, she's this really kind of positive, proactive person, and she put a lot of that into her career for a long time, which is common these days. And that used to mean kind of missing your window. And that's just not true anymore that, like you said, if you're someone who is healthy, either because of genetics or because of resources and education and all of those things, that it's totally reasonable and healthy to get pregnant at 45. And again, because that's so much more common these days, and I think that kind of the culture and the lore around pregnancy is slow to catch up with the reality that we still have these labels,

**ROSE HART LANDSBERG:** like advanced maternal age that- Don't forget geriatric pregnancy. Yeah, geriatric pregnancy that aren't- I call them AARP babies. Exactly. It's a little bit outdated to be stocked or to act like that's out of the norm these days because it really isn't. Right. And I think to some degree,

**DR. ELLIOT BERLIN, DC:** medicine has a dual role here to both be cautious in the ways that are necessary, but also to be encouraging. And Rachel, again, just gives a lot of positivity and encouragement to the whole thing to anybody who's considering having a baby in the later 30s, early 40s. In addition to Pregnancy Over 35 with Dr. Shavira, we also have another episode called Pregnancy Over 40 with Michelle Johnson, who's also a podcast host. That's episode number 199. Also, Rachel, she was open to having a vaginal birth or cesarean birth, whatever was best for the baby. She was aiming for the vaginal birth and ended up towards the end realizing it was going to be a cesarean birth. And she went into the C-section and after the

**DR. ELLIOT BERLIN, DC:** C-section recovery, there were definitely some hard parts for her and she is raw and open about them, but funny as hell and positive as can be. And again, I think it's really helpful. It's easy to get into a dark mindset sometimes when things don't go exactly how you planned and it's understandable, but it's also helpful to have a positive outlook and to have some humor

infused into it. I just think it helps heal the mind, body and spirit.

**ROSE HART LANDSBERG:** It does and it's also something I often end up joking about with the moms that we talk to because often after an episode, there's some follow-up emails and whatnot. And so frequently we're working with people who have just become a mom literally within the last week. And the labor and the birth is just the first surprise out of many, many more. And so I think that's the point at which a lot of new parents are kind of realizing like, oh, it wasn't just one event and you get over that hurdle. Like that's just the first step and to have put so much import on the specifics of that first step seems almost comical when you're like,

**DR. ELLIOT BERLIN, DC:** and now we have 18 years of this. Yeah. I'm still getting surprises. My kids are currently all teenagers or older. Well, just to give you an insight of the energy that we're talking about, here's an excellent quote from Rachel Jarrell to bring us out to commercial.

**ROSE HART LANDSBERG:** Hot tip. If you have a scheduled caesarean section, they may bump your time for the emergency C-sections, which makes total sense. So if you happen to decide to be scheduled at 2 PM, you could be there till 8 o'clock starving because you don't get to eat that day.

**DR. ELLIOT BERLIN, DC:** So I took the first appointment of the day. We'll be right back. Welcome back to the podcast. It's your host, Elliot Berlin and our producer Rose, and you've tuned into the top 10 picks of the year. And we're up to number eight.

**ROSE HART LANDSBERG:** Looking back, you know, it's really hard to see like the lack of education that I gave myself, but at the same time I took it as a learning experience. It wasn't what I wanted. It wasn't what I thought I would have, but it happened. And so I had to try to pull the positive out of it and say, what can I do better next time? And number eight is Megan Heaton from

**DR. ELLIOT BERLIN, DC:** Challenge to Advocacy. Megan's an incredible resource. She's a story of someone who really was knocked down in her birth experiences. The first two really, she had two caesarean births. One of them was pretty traumatic. And then she had a vaginal birth after a caesarean afterwards. And then she founded the VBAC link, which is a platform all about educating and supporting women who are pursuing vaginal birth after caesarean or VBAC. And in the process, actually helping people avoid having a caesarean birth the first time around that they don't want or don't need. And one thing I always say about caesarean birth is that the only thing worse than somebody having a C-section pushed on them that doesn't want

**DR. ELLIOT BERLIN, DC:** it or doesn't need it is someone who doesn't need it, but doesn't have it available to them. It's an incredible tool. It's a powerful tool. It's a marvel of modern medicine, but like all the other ones used in a certain way, it's very beneficial and helpful and used another way, it can do a lot of harm. And we see all the time in our practice, people who just go in underprepared, under informed and end up having a slew of interventions that they didn't want, certainly, and arguably didn't need and end up feeling really crummy on the other side and wishing that they had done more research and self-advocacy before having their baby. Yeah, you do always say that. There are a couple of things that are

**ROSE HART LANDSBERG:** really important about this story from my point of view. And one is that it highlights the fact that the reason VBAC is such an issue is that when you have a caesarean, it keeps

affecting your birth choices down the line, even years down the line. So it's not just a one day choice, it's a major surgery and that affects your postpartum period. And then it affects your ability to have a vaginal birth after that. And the other thing that's important about this story is that over the course of three kids, we really see Megan grow as a person and find her footing and her calling and advocacy for herself and for others. And even through that, through her finding the version of birth that she wants,

**ROSE HART LANDSBERG:** she still had this pushback from other people in her life about her choices for her own labor. And that to me is crazy. Dr. Berlin knows better than most that I'm not someone who has trouble saying no to anyone about anything. But she has a number of examples in her story where she really spoke up and said what she wanted and still didn't get that. And I'm so glad that she is processing it and sharing it and using her experiences to help other people because I don't think anyone should have to deal with that.

**DR. ELLIOT BERLIN, DC:** Yeah, she's one of those people that gets knocked down and then doesn't stay down. She gets her brushes herself off and says, I'm going to help other people not get knocked down. And as a child birth educator, as a doula, as a podcast host, that's what she's really spending the rest of her whole career. That's what she's dedicated her career to. Getting knocked up, not knocked down. Oh, I'm glad you said that. Look, in my journey into prenatal care, I was really early on very confused about the whole VBAC thing because I only ever heard once a caesarian, always a caesarian. And I thought only really hardcore extremists would even try anything else. But once you start to do the research,

**DR. ELLIOT BERLIN, DC:** you realize that nothing's totally safe. There are sometimes great options in both directions. Each one has some pros and cons associated with it. And the only person who could choose which risks or cons they want to take for which benefits is the person who's going to do it. And as more and more research comes out, we realize VBAC is for most people, the risks that are involved are in line with other obstetric risks that we take all the time. And I love that there's more advocacy about it. I was touched and moved and we made the film Trial of Labor, which is all about VBAC. I think the reason the four women who are in that film share their stories is so that other people can learn from their experiences and, you know,

**DR. ELLIOT BERLIN, DC:** learn from the kind of mistakes that they feel like they made originally, and that could have been avoided had they had more information. The potential subtext of that film subtitle might be How to Have Your Second Birth the First Time Around. And a lot of people have told me after watching that film that it did empower them to take steps that improve their first-birth experience in ways that it wouldn't have been. And other feedback about that film, oddly, is sometimes partners don't understand the trauma that somebody who had a vaginal birth experiences. Not everybody experiences it, but for the people who do, it's sometimes hard for them to express why they feel traumatized.

**DR. ELLIOT BERLIN, DC:** And feedback that we've gotten is that after people watch Trial of Labor, that it's the first time their partner really understands it, watching other women talk about it and express themselves. So I think that it's a powerful film, a good adjunct to Megan's episode, which is number 399. Trial of Labor is streaming on Informed Pregnancy Plus, which you can access at

informedpregnancy.tv. And also on there is the VBAC preparation course from Mama Stay Fit, which is loaded with information for people who are considering a vaginal birth after cesare. Here's a quote from the episode with Megan, episode 399.

**ROSE HART LANDSBERG:** It was definitely a different experience. And honestly, it was my healing experience. It was my experience that I didn't want, but I made the best of it. And it made me realize that in that moment, I realized C-section doesn't have to be scary. C-section doesn't have to be traumatic. It doesn't have to be so impersonal.

**DR. ELLIOT BERLIN, DC:** All right. That concludes number eight, which means we must be up to number seven.

**ROSE HART LANDSBERG:** Fully Cardi B level was shaking my butt as hard as possible, where the whole room was trying not to giggle, I think. Mickey was like, that's good. That's good. Wow.

**DR. ELLIOT BERLIN, DC:** This is Riley Ebsen, another incredible guest, big personality, creative and resilient. She is a writer, director, and first time mom. And she is hilarious in the way that she directed her own pregnancy and birth. Yes, I love it. You know, she is literally in charge for a living. And the complete opposite of, you know, scared, timid, first timer, she made a call sheet. You know, she was on top of it. And also, you know, has the perfect personality to kind of inspire the group as a leader. But I really like that. You know, the mom's the leader, and she definitely led. I think during my years attending birth, it's always interesting to attend the birth of a career actor,

**DR. ELLIOT BERLIN, DC:** because one of the things I noticed in general is that they take direction really well. So someone's like, breathing in a way that's making them more fearful than empowered, and you just give them a little tip. Hey, try this. And sometimes they'll just do that because they're so good at taking direction and immediately implementing it. And all of a sudden there's this major change. I've never been to a birth with a director who is the exact opposite. And it's funny on its premise, but she's also hilarious. And she did a home birth. And I think one of the things about home birth is, you know, also, I'm going to say, through my 20 years doing this, I have definitely learned a lot. And I come from a very

**DR. ELLIOT BERLIN, DC:** medical background. And when I heard home birth, I was like, oh, that's only for tree hugging, Prius driving, vegan hippies. And then I realized that, like, lots of people do home birth. There's lawyers and doctors, and as it turns out, directors.

**ROSE HART LANDSBERG:** And then you realized you were time traveling to when Priuses had been invented.

**DR. ELLIOT BERLIN, DC:** Right. And I guess now they'd be Tesla driving hippies. I don't know. But she is just a great storyteller, like directors are. And she just is hilarious. And there are elements from her birth that are hilarious, too. Here's a quote from Riley.

**ROSE HART LANDSBERG:** I was empowered. I was the one informing them what my body needed, where I was going to go. I was leading this whole situation. Definitely want to check out Riley Epson's

**DR. ELLIOT BERLIN, DC:** Birth, episode 393. We're going to take a quick break and we will be right back with the rest of part one. Welcome back to the podcast. We are counting down the top 10 picks of Informed Pregnancy Podcast 2024. And we are up to number six.

**ROSE HART LANDSBERG:** So imagine like this like fancy chic hotel in the middle of West Hollywood on a Thursday, and you're rolling in at 6 a.m. so obviously in labor clutching your back. And I mean, the front desk and poor like valet guys valeting our car looked so alarmed. They were alarmed and probably like, please don't bleed all over our carpet.

**DR. ELLIOT BERLIN, DC:** Kara Sutton. Oh, my gosh. Kara Sutton is another one of those guests who has huge energy. She's very entertaining. I had the joy of working with her during the pregnancy here at our office physically, helping her get ready for the birth. And, you know, I gave up coffee on those days because after spending a half an hour with Kara, you're just buzzed from her energy. It's another episode about vaginal birth after cesarean in her case, vaginal birth after two c-sections and also a miscarriage. She had a difficult journey in her first couple of pregnancies. And it's another before and after episode where during episode three hundred and eighty eight, she's pregnant. She's had the two cesareans. She's had the miscarriage

**DR. ELLIOT BERLIN, DC:** and she's determined to have a more empowering birth experience for this third baby. And, you know, when we do these episodes, we never know how they're going to come out. We just share the story. We want to share real stories regardless of outcome, because sometimes it goes exactly as you want. Sometimes it goes complete opposite and there's

**ROSE HART LANDSBERG:** everything in between. Yeah. Well, first of all, let me just say Dr. Berlin would never give up coffee. That's a bold-faced lie. But more importantly, you know, I think these two episodes are so poignant. She's such a lovely person. And, you know, there are a couple parts that stick out to me. One is that, you know, she had these two cesarean experiences and they were traumatic. And, you know, the first one, it left a mark emotionally. And when she ended up having a miscarriage during a sort of, you know, sweet moment with her kids when they were dressed up for Halloween as Disney princesses and she was alone with her husband out of town, she had a miscarriage. And the kind of surprising outcome of that was that

**ROSE HART LANDSBERG:** it was empowering. It was something that was meant to happen to her body. And she was in charge of how it happened. And she was able to kind of sit and just be with herself and be in charge of it. And it ended up being a healing experience for her. In addition to, of course, being horribly sad. And I think that is, you know, sort of an intense way to illustrate the harm that it can do to a relationship that a woman has with her body to have medical procedures done that she doesn't want. So, yeah,

**DR. ELLIOT BERLIN, DC:** that really stuck with me. Me too. And it's interesting that what really helped her redevelop the connection with her body was the miscarriage and develop a trusting relationship that was able to bring her into wanting and executing a vaginal birth for the third go. I think that miscarriage is really under discussed. And for various reasons, people don't talk about it. And because of that, people don't realize how common it is. But it is a common part. It is almost a normal, natural part of the reproductive years. First of all, we know a lot earlier than we ever knew before that people are pregnant, so therefore those pregnancies end. I think not that far along ago,

people just wouldn't have

**DR. ELLIOT BERLIN, DC:** known that they were pregnant. So the number of miscarriages are happening is partially because we're just so much more aware of them. But they're a common part of having kids. Most people that I know that have two or three kids had a miscarriage somewhere in between. And it's part of the body's job is to kind of take that fertilization and see if it's healthy and compatible with life. If yes, nurture it. If not, reject it and start again. And if it was talked about more, especially these early miscarriages, I think it would be less startling. Otherwise it happens to you and it's like, why me? Why me? But I wonder, and we didn't talk about it in the episode, but I wonder if that's

**DR. ELLIOT BERLIN, DC:** kind of realizing that her body does know what to do and when to do it is what kind of gave them a re-empowered relationship with each other.

**ROSE HART LANDSBERG:** Yeah, I believe, you know, she just said it wasn't viable and her body knew that. And you know, what also reminds me of actually is there are a lot of discussions like, you know, surrounding orgasmic birth and just labor, you know, pain and sensation in general. And that the kind of modern idea that you want or need to jump to an epidural to stamp out any pain or any sensation to me is related to whether or not you allow yourself to kind of feel and engage with the pain and the sensation of a miscarriage, that they're both, you know, the two sides to the coin that you feel and you experience loss with life, you know, pain with pleasure. I think that's related.

**DR. ELLIOT BERLIN, DC:** I think that anybody who's experienced miscarriage or somebody who has would benefit from this episode, but also on Informed Pregnancy Plus, we have a series called You Are Not Alone, which is powerful support and conversation about miscarriage and it explores it on a mental, emotional, and physical level. And it's gotten really powerful feedback on how helpful it can be and also CARES episodes. We also have several other episodes where people have shared their miscarriage experiences. Two that pop out in my head are Kate Mara and Ashley Williams. Oh, Claire Holt. There are many, many episodes where people just talk about it. And for most of them, it's like, oh my gosh, why me?

**DR. ELLIOT BERLIN, DC:** And then you start to realize, oh, it's not just you. CARES episodes are episodes number 388 and 389, the before and after story. And it's a very powerful story with a very powerful guest. Here's a snippet from our episode with Kara Sutton.

**ROSE HART LANDSBERG:** I would take this experience over a cesarean any day. I think pushing out and getting to see my daughter come out of my body was incredible and healing and empowering, even though I hemorrhaged, even though she went to the NICU. All those things, ultimately I would still do it the way

**DR. ELLIOT BERLIN, DC:** I did it. All right. And that is the last pick in the first part of our two-part holiday countdown. Thanks for listening to the Informed Pregnancy podcast. Tune into the next episode when we count down from number five, four, three, two, and number one. For more pregnancy and parenting information just like this, visit us online at informedpregnancy.com.

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