

Episode 153: Karen gave birth in a Subaru

Most of the time, childbirth happens in a hospital. But not always.

Consider the pregnant woman in Payson, Utah, who went in to Walmart early on a Sunday morning just to pick up a few things. This was her third pregnancy, so she was familiar with what to expect.

But by the time she finished shopping and was at the register, she was on her knees and holding her stomach in serious distress. The baby was not going to wait. The manager and other employees were trying to help her, to get her to a more comfortable place with a little bit of privacy. But they were surprised when the woman insisted on paying for her items first.

The manager said, “She paid, and then she had the baby. You can’t make that up.” The employees have since named Register number 11 the “baby register”. Mother and baby were eventually brought to the hospital and were doing fine.

But that’s the way it is sometimes with babies – when the time comes, they are going to make their appearance into the world. No matter when or where that might be.

Karen knows all about that. And so does Alfred, her father-in-law.

Scott

You found out that you were pregnant on Christmas Day, 2022. Was that a surprise or were you planning that?

Karen

It was planned. We wanted to have a second child and we were trying since July of that year, but it was a surprise because we did not expect it to happen so soon. We were having problems with conceiving our first child. It took more than a year the first time. Then there's half that time, the second one. It was kind of fun because I had my fingers crossed the whole month prior because I missed my period on Thanksgiving Day. The first day of your last period is Thanksgiving day and, then, on Christmas day, I should have, but I did not. So I was able to wake up my husband like, “Look, it's a positive test. I'm pregnant.”

Scott

Can you give us a summary of how the pregnancy was going? I mean, it's a pretty hot summer in Texas.

Karen

Yes. It's miserable being pregnant in Texas during the summer because my other pregnancy was also during the summer. But she was a July baby at the beginning of July, so I didn't have to endure the hottest part of the summer. I was expecting to be pregnant all of August. Anyway, I pretty much stayed inside as often as I could. I would go out for walks between 8 or 10 in the morning and, after that, had to take shelter inside because every inch of me would be covered in sweat just by walking through the parking lot to get to Walmart or going to work. It was disgusting.

Scott

Now, as you mentioned, this was obviously not your first pregnancy. Did you feel like you kind of pretty much knew what to expect though?

Karen

Yes. I'd actually say this pregnancy was a little easier than the first one. I guess your body just figures it out. The first time, I was carrying a lot of extra fluid. Well, actually, now when I think about it, I had gestational diabetes this time. I didn't have it the first time. So, that way, it was worse. I didn't expect to have gestational diabetes. I thought I'd completely dodged that bullet, even though my mom had it and my younger sister had it.

Scott

Your first delivery was a C-section.

Karen

Not purposefully. It was originally going to be a vaginal delivery. We're hoping for it to be rather uneventful as they go but then, after so many hours of active labor and the nurse turning Ellie inside me, it ended up being an emergency C-section. The story, which is still confusing to me—like, at one point, they thought that the cord was wrapped around her. At another point, it was just because her head was stuck. I'm not sure. But at one point, they realized a C-section had to happen and they asked me if that was okay, and I said, “Yes.” Then, I pretty much passed out after that. They didn't need to knock me out with any more drugs. I was just so exhausted from pushing that I was done.

Scott

And that was your first child. As you mentioned, your daughter, her name is Ellie. And how old is she now?

Karen

She's three years old. She was born right in the middle of the lockdown before they would even talk to us pretty much. They had to check to make sure we didn't have COVID.

Scott

So now you're pregnant with your second child. Did you know the sex of the new baby ahead of time?

Karen

Yes, we did know it was going to be a boy. The sonogram technician had a very unique way of revealing that information because she asked us if we wanted it to be a surprise, and we said, “No.” We talked about how Ellie was potty training and she said, “Well, with this one, he's going to ask you to wipe his balls.” Well, that's good to know.

Scott

That seems kind of random.

Karen

Yeah. Well, we were complaining like, “Ellie doesn't like to wipe.” But I think that's just common when kids are learning how to use the potty. I don't know. I was a little taken aback by the vulgarity of it, but maybe I'm just a prude.

Scott

All right. Well, let's talk about what happened on that day. You were on your way to work. Talk about where you work and what happened.

Karen

That week, we were doing staff development all week. I work at a middle school here in Princeton. I am the library lady. I'm not officially allowed to call myself a librarian since I don't have that particular master's degree. I had been feeling Braxton Hicks - the practice labor - most of that day. It wasn't so bad in the morning. It became progressively worse. At least, in my mind, it was still practice labor. I dropped Ellie off at my in-laws for them to watch her while I was at work. We were doing staff development that particular day - I think it was supposed to be team building exercises.

My false labor or practice labors as others call it was giving me problems in participating in some of these team-building activities. In the end, I asked my principal if I could just sit out because a lot of these activities involve moving quickly because they were minute-to-win-it kind of things - running from one end of a table to another - and some of them also involved eating like gummy bears or whatever. With my gestational diabetes, I couldn't really participate in that regard either.

Scott

On this day, how far out were you from your projected delivery date?

Karen

I was 36 weeks and, I think, 5 days. I was almost 37 weeks, so that's almost full term, but not quite.

Scott

But you're getting close though.

Karen

Yeah. And I was pretty big too. A lot of my coworkers, when they saw me, they were surprised that I hadn't already gone on FMLA or had the baby. I remember, at the end of the previous school year, a lot of them were like, "Are you actually going to make it to the end of your term? Are you sure you're not going to pop any moment now"

Scott

And what made you think this was false labor and not the real thing?

Karen

I guess because, in my mind, there was absolutely no way he would be coming that early. I just didn't in my wildest dreams think that it could possibly be true labor, especially last time when I had Ellie. The pain was very intense and I could hardly move. But this- I was still able to push around the book cart, shelf books, and lift a few boxes - nothing too heavy - that I'm not supposed to lift while that pregnant. I was still really functional and upright.

Around 4 o'clock or so, I decided to leave to go get Ellie. The labor pains had gotten a little more intense but I was still determined to get things before I left for the end of the day. I think that's a big problem a lot of people have in the education field - they just can't tear themselves away

from the job. So I decided to move one last box of stuff to my car that I didn't want to leave in my office and I realized belatedly that practice labor is supposed to stop - or so they say - when you stand up or when you change positions and this wasn't.

As I was wheeling my cart outside, I felt a little better in the sun having the heat on me. But then, when I came back inside to the sheer chill of the library, it hurt a lot, and I realized that something was wrong. When I think about it now, obviously, I was going into labor. But at that point, I thought, "Oh my gosh. Maybe I'm one of those rare miscarriages that happens in the third trimester" because I have had a miscarriage before, but that was in the first trimester.

I gathered up my stuff and headed out to my car. When I sat in my car, the pain is still there. I mean, it's not consistent. It came in waves, but it was getting more and more intense. By the time I'd driven my car a couple blocks over, I called my husband and told him that something was wrong, that I was in a lot of pain, and I could hear him on the phone distracted by repairing some car. He wasn't really taking me seriously. I could just hear it in his voice. But he told me that I should call his parents and let them know that I was going to drive straight home, I wouldn't be able to pick up Ellie, that either they'd need to drop her off or I could get her later, and he advised me to call my doctor.

I managed to drive home because I told him the pain was so bad that I didn't think I'd be able to even drive over to his parents' house. Luckily, our house was pretty close to my work. So I managed to drive home. I got inside and I tried to call my doctor. I don't know what's wrong with their phones. I tried a couple of times and I just couldn't get through to them. I just kept feeling this need to push and I thought, well, maybe I'm constipated because that happens. Pregnancy does anything and everything under the sun to you.

Scott

So you were in some serious denial here at this point.

Karen

It sounds like I just could not fathom, like— there's no way I would have such a preterm baby. There's no way I could. Ellie was only a few days early from when I was supposed to be induced, but this was three or four weeks from my expected due date. So at the time, I thought it was maybe because I was constipated. So I went to the bathroom and that's not it. I called my husband back. By this time, the pain was so intense that I was almost screaming at him - there's, like, the guttural ness to my voice - and he's finally taking me seriously because I actually have a pretty high pain tolerance.

He told me that I needed to go to the hospital because I guess I was just so in denial that I didn't think I needed to go. I just needed some other solution. I don't know. Should I lay down? Should I put an ice pack on it? What? Tell me what to do. We decided I should go to the hospital but, obviously, at this point, I could not drive myself. So he asked me if his parents should come drive me.

Scott

And why wouldn't Jared just drive you there?

Karen

He works on the other side of town in Texas. Like, all these towns are just shoved together and it takes so long to get from one to the others. Even though Plano is two or three towns over and

there's a highway practically connecting us, it takes, like, an hour and a half with traffic just to get from one end to the other.

Scott

So there wasn't time for him to get there.

Karen

Not with the way that this labor was going. It did not feel like he would make it in time.

Scott

So he suggested that one of his parents could drive you to the hospital. What was your reaction to that?

Karen

I accepted the idea right away. I said, yes, that he should call them and ask one of them to drive me. But normally, I don't like accepting a whole lot of help from them because, one, I don't like to feel too indebted. I feel guilty for accepting too much generosity. But his parents also have a habit of being overly generous where it almost feels like they don't recognize that we're adults, that we're still kids and not really capable of caring for our own family.

Scott

So the fact that you agreed to that right away must've made Jared realize, "Okay, this is serious."

Karen

Yeah, it was definitely a red flag to him. We hung up and I grabbed my keys to lock the front door, and I grabbed my phone. I think the only other thing was I changed my shirt because I didn't want to, like, go to the hospital and ruin my perfectly good work shirt. When you go to the hospital like this, you pretty much expect all your clothes are going to be ruined.

Scott

They might even be cut off of you.

Karen

Yes. I waited on the patio for one of them to come drive up and get me. I was still experiencing these waves of pain and it was hard to be quiet. The pain was so bad, but I didn't want my neighbors to hear. I didn't want this to be reported on, like, our neighborhood Facebook group or something like, "Did you hear the screaming at 4.30 or so? Should we call the cops?" So I was trying to avoid any good Samaritans that might be within earshot. Then, Alfred rolled up in his Subaru Forester and he tried to help me into the car.

Scott

And this is your father in law?

Karen

Yes.

Scott

Okay. Did you know that it was him coming instead of Carolyn, your mother-in-law?

Karen

I did not. Usually, though, I see Alfred more than I see Carolyn. I don't know if they have some kind of unspoken agreement in that way. But whenever one of them's coming to pick Ellie up, it's usually him, or he's usually the first one out when I'm picking Ellie up myself. He's the one that greets me in the morning when I go to drop her off. I don't know why they arranged it that way. Maybe Carolyn doesn't like me as is the mother-in-law stereotype.

Scott

Are you okay with having that in the podcast? I mean, she's going to hear this, right?

Karen

Probably, but I don't know. Does it make for better drama for it to be included? I don't know. I feel like I try to be really honest and maybe it would be a way for us to talk about it. I think she knows I have kind of mixed feelings just because my strongest memory with her is the— I was so excited to give Ellie this Elmo doll. She was going to lose her shit. She was going to be so excited. Then, I found out Carolyn bought the same doll and Ellie opened it before the one that I had gotten her. I was just so upset. But anyway, in a nutshell, that is, like, how I feel about Carolyn.

Scott

So there's an interesting dynamic there.

Karen

I may just prepare her beforehand. Like, I'm going to be brutally honest.

Scott

So you got in the front passenger seat and buckled in.

Karen

Yeah.

Scott

He leaned the seat back a little bit. But yeah, I was in the front passenger seat.

Scott

Did Alfred seem a little nervous?

Karen

Oh, definitely. He had this look like walking on eggshells. He seemed uncertain about everything. Like, he kept looking at me, almost like looking for confirmation or something.

Scott

And this is Alfred.

Alfred

As I was helping Karen get in the car, I was feeling nervous because I'd never been nor experienced anything like this. I wanted to keep calm and get her to the hospital as quickly as I could.

Karen

I don't know how many crises he's been a part of, but he definitely didn't feel very confident. I don't know if he was to the point where he wished he were anywhere but in that car. At least he wasn't unfriendly and he wasn't overly pushy, and part of me is kind of glad that it was him. Carolyn couldn't believe it either. Jared told me that when he talked to her and told her that the baby was coming, she had told him, "No, that can't be. Tell her to stop," as if I could stop the contractions. "He's not supposed to come for a while. Tell her no. She must be mistaken. Yeah, it has to be something else." It's like, you've had three kids yourself. When have you been able to stop your contractions?

There aren't a whole lot of ways to get out of our small town. There are the back roads down Old Myrick, which are kind of bumpy and not well-maintained. Then, there's the more direct route up 380, which will take you pretty much right there to the highway. The bumpy winding roads of Old Myrick and Bridge Farmer typically see less traffic just because of, I guess, a lot of people also don't like the bumps and the windiness. 380 though is really unpredictable because it is the main way in and out of town, so it can be really backed up.

Once, it took me around 25 minutes just to go a mile. The traffic was so bad because it's also just, like, a two-lane highway. So Alfred asked me which way we should take. I didn't trust myself on the bumpy roads. I thought it would just make everything feel worse, so I told him to take 380.

Scott

And as you traveled, Jared was on the phone over the car speakers on Bluetooth.

Karen

Yes. Alfred called and had him talk to us because he was getting out of work. He scrubbed up right quick cause he's a mechanic and just covered with oil all the time. He was going to try and meet us. He said if he had taken his motorcycle, he would have definitely made it before Alex had come out, but he was in his truck, so it was going to take a little while.

Scott

So you and Alfred are racing to get to the hospital. Jared is racing also at the same time, but he was on the phone with you, so he could kind of hear what's going on.

Karen

Yes, he could hear me laboring, I guess, or he could hear me in pain. I didn't know it at the time, but he told me later that he was timing it. Like, he could hear when I would cry out and he would look at the clock and then he would wait for the next time, so he put it together before I did, or at least acknowledged it before I was willing to acknowledge that the baby was coming, that these were real contractions. They were coming regularly, not sporadically, like practice labor usually does.

My hospital— it usually takes about 30 minutes to get to because I purposely wanted that one. It has, in my mind, a better reputation than the one that was closer, but we didn't make it that far. As we're going down 380, Jared is trying to figure out where we are. Alfred is trying to tell him, but he's given him, like, weird landmark. Like, I see this old rundown shed thing or whatever, and I'm just over here puffing and screaming like, "BRIDGE FARMER! 380! WE'RE PASSING THE INTERSECTION!" So he knows where we are.

Then, we got up to the airport where we would turn off to get to the bigger highway. That would take us to Baylor Centennial. At that point, Jared asked us, "Where are you taking her?" I thought it was still understood. We were trying to go to the hospital we had planned to deliver it. Alfred said as much. Jared said like, "No, you need to take her to Medical City McKinney, which is the closer hospital," which we were about 10 or 15 minutes away from. So Alfred asked how to get there. He missed the turn and made a U-turn, which is good in my mind because, I think at the time, I don't think I would have my mental map ready to redirect us or reroute us.

When we get to airport, it's at that point that I can feel him crowning. Like, I reached down and I felt his head and I realized that I needed to get my pants off. I was able to shimmy them down to, like, around my hips and stuff, but I needed Alfred's help to get them any further. I was not going to be able to bend down enough to do that. So I told him that we needed to pull over as best I could. I wasn't exactly, like, talking as civilly as we are right now.

Scott

Yeah, you were under a little bit of stress then.

Karen

Yeah, so I screamed at him, "Pull over! I need help! I think I need to take my pants off." I think that is literally what I said at one point, "I think I need to take my pants off." So he was looking for places to pull over. I was getting a little more irritated as we kept passing all these viable spots where he could have pulled over. Finally, I started screaming at him, "HELP ME!" And he jumped the curb onto this, like, field so that he can get out of the car and help me actually get my pants off.

Scott

Of course, I had to ask Alfred what were his thoughts at that time.

Alfred

When Karen said to pull over and the baby's coming, I thought, "Holy sugar." Once I felt the curb to get off the street, I called 911. I was running around the car to open the passenger door. I was listening to the 911 operator giving instructions and asking questions. This was not exactly the situation I wanted to be in.

Karen

I guess, at some point, while I was busy asking for help, he had called 911, so I guess he's got the dispatcher on the line. He helped me with my pants and, not very long after that, it was just this one final wave of pain and then it's almost like those little water plastic thingies that you see kids playing with. I don't know. It's like some kind of science thing. I think I had to look up what the heck they were called.

Scott

Like a water weenie? Is that what they are?

Karen

Yeah. Anyway, that's what it feels like - that sensation of having it in your hands. That's what it felt like as he was coming out in this big, horribly painful gush. I've never felt anything quite like that.

911 Operator

McKinney 911. What is the address of your emergency?

Alfred

My daughter's in labor. The baby's coming out. I'm trying to get her to the hospital. (Inaudible)

(Karen screaming in the background)

911 Operator

Okay, sir. You're at Elm?

Alfred

Huh?

911 Operator

You're at Elm and where?

Karen

(Screaming inaudibly in the background)

Alfred

The baby's coming out now

911 Operator

I understand that the baby is coming right now. I need to— the baby's out?? Okay. Okay. Okay. I need to find out where exactly you are.

Alfred

I'm just off of airport.

911 Operator

Elm airport?

Alfred

Elm south.

911 Operator

Okay. Are you in a vehicle?

Alfred

Yeah, it's a white Subaru Forester.

911 Operator

White Subaru Forester. Okay, alright. How old is your daughter?

Alfred

This is my daughter-in-law. She's thirty-three.

911 Operator

Okay. I'm sending them to you right now.

Alfred

Okay, thank you.

911 Operator

Okay, hold on. We're going to stay on the line because I need to tell you exactly what to do now that the baby is out. The baby is completely out?

Alfred

Yes. Completely out and the cord is still attached.

911 Operator

Okay. Do you have a shoelace?

Alfred

It's one of those twisty ones.

911 Operator

Okay, is the baby crying or breathing?

Alfred

He was crying a second ago.

911 Operator

Does it look like he's breathing?

Karen

It feels like he's breathing.

911 Operator

Okay. Do you have any kind of clean towel or cloth?

(Baby crying in the background)

911 Operator

Okay. We need to wipe off the baby's mouth and nose. That way, we can get all of the amniotic fluid, any mucus, anything off the baby. That way, the baby can breathe. Okay? Then, we need to get a clean towel or cloth. That way, we can dry the baby off and then wrap the baby in another one. Do you have anything clean? A blanket, a towel, a cloth, anything?

Alfred

All I can do is the shirt off my back.

911 Operator

Okay. We just need to try to keep the baby comfortable and we need to try to keep the baby's face clean. That way, the baby can breathe, okay?

Alfred

Alright, I just have some Kleenex.

911 Operator

Okay. Yeah, if you have a Kleenex, you can just wipe off his mouth and nose, and then just try to clean around his head. That way, we can get any mucus or amniotic fluid off of him. If you have anything that is clean that we can wrap the baby in...

Alfred

Like I said, I mean, my shirt off my back - that's all I have.

911 Operator

Okay. Is she laying down in the backseat of the car?

Alfred

Well, in the front seat, laid back.

911 Operator

Okay. Without pulling the cord tight, we need to keep the baby down between the mother's legs, lever with her bottom, and we need to make sure the cord is not wrapped around the baby's neck. Okay?

Alfred

Okay

Karen

Should my baby face up or face down, or if he's going to be level with my bottom?

911 Operator

We need to keep him face up. Just keep him level with your bottom in between your legs, if you can. You said the cord is not wrapped around his neck, correct?

Alfred

911 is coming. Thank you.

911 Operator

Okay, alright, we're going to watch the baby closely for three minutes, and then we're going to try to find something to tie the cord with, okay? So what I just want you to do for the next three minutes is monitor the baby. Let me know. I can hear the baby calling, which is great. So we're just going to monitor the baby for the next couple of minutes. Let me know if anything looks strange, if the baby's having trouble breathing, if he's changing color, anything.

Alfred

He doesn't look like he's changing color.

911 Operator

Okay, good. We've got the paramedics almost there. They'll be with you in just a moment. Okay? You're doing great. Do you have anything to tie the umbilical cord off with?

Alfred

Not really.

911 Operator

Okay. They're almost there. So hopefully they can help you. Is it a boy or a girl?

Alfred

It's a boy.

911 Operator

Okay. You should be hearing the ambulance in just a moment. I just want to make sure that they can get to you and find you before I let you go, okay? Has your afterbirth come out yet?

Karen

I don't think so.

911 Operator

Okay, you haven't pushed anything out besides the baby, correct?

Karen

I don't think so.

911 Operator

Okay. Let me know when the paramedics are right there with you. Ma'am, is the paramedic with you? Okay, I'm going to let you go. Congratulations.

Scott

And Alfred's right there. Was there even any time for either of you to be embarrassed about having a baby and it's your father-in-law that's assisting you?

Karen

Oh, thank goodness, no. There's, like, no time.

Scott

You weren't even thinking about that.

Karen

Okay. No, like. I think I did have a moment where there were people passing us on the road. There was a brief moment where I thought, "Well, I guess they're going to get a show." I hope they can't really see me from over here because the passenger side of the car was pointed away from the road, but I don't know. His window was wide open, so I don't know if anybody could see. We had a few people ask if we needed help. One guy even pulled up on the curb next to us. I think he left by the time the EMTs arrived.

Scott

In that audio, it sounded like Alfred was talking to a few people who happened to stop by and offer help.

Karen

Yeah, I vaguely was aware of that. But once Alex was out, I was primarily focused on that - like holding him in my arms. Like, I caught him after he came out. Alfred may have touched him too. I don't even remember. I don't really remember what the heck he was doing until I became more

aware of the 911 dispatcher talking to us. Alex was in my arms and he was still in the sac. And at the time, I was thinking, I wonder if he can still breathe in that and he needs to come out. So I pinched it and just ripped it open.

Scott

This is the amniotic sac you're talking about?

Karen

That's right. Yeah. It was so slimy and just seems like something out of a horror movie almost.

Scott

So you just ripped it open?

Karen

Yes. I ripped it open and pulled it off of him. The cord was kind of snaked around him like some kind of crazy scarf, but he was breathing and he wasn't crying really. I was concerned about the cord, so I just kind of pushed that to be out of the way because it was kind of around his neck and I was concerned. I think it was around that time that I became aware of the dispatcher talking to us on the phone because she was concerned that he wasn't crying. So she told me to basically piss him off. So I held him down low until he started crying.

Scott

What did he look like at that point?

Karen

He looked slimy and covered with white specks. He had all his hair. His eyes were closed and he looked so small, I guess, because he didn't have the time in the oven to put on all the chubby baby fat. I found out later he was, like, 7 pounds, 6 ounces. When everybody saw him, they said, "He's so tiny."

Scott

He was all slimy and covered in stuff. Did you feel the need that you had to clean him up?

Karen

The dispatcher was telling us to clean him up and Alfred wanted to. He said he didn't have anything except the shirt off his back. He mentioned that a couple of times and the dispatcher obviously didn't think that was acceptable. So Alfred said, "I've got Kleenex." So I remember him going over to the driver's side and, like, wiping at Alex's face with the Kleenex as I was holding him to me.

Then, she started talking about whether we had something to cut the umbilical cord, and that's what I was really worried about because I didn't have anything to cut the umbilical. I have, like, one very dull novelty pocket knife off my keys and I didn't think that was going to be enough. I definitely wouldn't want to do what wild animals do and chew it off with their teeth. But fortunately, by that time the EMTs had started arriving. So they were the ones that cut the cord. The placenta was still inside me, so they didn't worry about that, I guess, until later where they're like, "Oh yeah, we got to do something about that."

Scott

Now during this whole thing, was Jared still on the phone with you?

Karen

No, he arrived, I think, shortly after the EMTs got there because he said he did remember seeing the inside of the car. Since Alfred was the one coherent enough to make calls, when Alfred had called 911, I guess that was when Jared was talking to his mom and telling her that the baby was coming.

Scott

But somehow he knew where you had pulled over, though.

Karen

I guess Alfred had told him where we were going to be right before he ended the call and called 911. The EMTs asked me if it was okay for the baby to go in, like, the first ambulance. They said that they were going to send another one for me to ride in. Maybe they thought that I was going to be like a grizzly bear. I was just, "No, the baby has to arrive with me. You can't have him." But I was so just worn out and just glad that he seemed to be okay. I let him go to the hospital or I didn't put up a fuss, at least. He went in the first ambulance and Jared - I can't remember that point - followed the ambulance in his truck. Then, I went in the second ambulance shortly thereafter.

Scott

And did Alfred also take his car and go to the hospital as well?

Karen

He did - unfortunately, for him, I guess, because it got to sit in the parking lot for hours in the hot sun, have all that wonderful, disgusting human fluid and blood and all that stuff just bake into his passenger seats.

Scott

Talk about your ambulance ride.

Karen

They kept asking me the same questions like my name, the baby's name, and how far along was I. At one point, somebody asked me if I was thirsty. I was like, "Yeah." I mean, it's Texas. It's summer. I was just laboring. Yes, I'm thirsty. I guess they don't have water bottles in the ambulance they could just give me, so they gave it directly to my veins. We had this, like, heavy-duty hookup with the tape that will blast past the apocalypse.

Scott

So you got an IV?

Karen

Yes, I got a hydration. We're in the ambulance. From where we were at the airport to the hospital, it's like literally five minutes. So it wasn't a very long ambulance ride.

Scott

You almost made it...

Karen

We almost made it. Instead, we arrived at their doorstep with the baby like, "Here it is. I did all the work without you." So as we're pulling up to the emergency room entrance, I feel this one final need to push and a last scream as I push out the placenta. One of the EMTs bagged it up. We got onto a gurney, I guess, and they started wheeling me into the delivery room for the doctor to inspect me and everything. One of the EMTs brings along the placenta. I don't know if he was expecting us to want to save it, I guess, for the cord blood. I heard some people eat that or something in some cultures. I don't know. One of the nurses there thought it was comedy night, I guess, or she wanted to add some brevity to the room or something. They heard that we were coming. The ambulance or the EMTs had phoned ahead or something, letting them know to expect us, so she was quick to ask me if Alfred, my father-in-law, was traumatized. She said that I owe him a stiff drink, which I still haven't given him.

Scott

So everything was good when you were examined?

Karen

Yeah. Surprisingly, when I was pregnant, my doctor had told me there was, like, a 44% chance that I would have a successful VBAC or Vaginal Birth After C-section. I guess they have some kind of formula based on my age, my weight, my gestational diabetes, and my previous C-section mystery. This was going to be a planned C-section, and it ended up being a VBAC after all, just as I was hoping for.

Scott

Because recovery is a lot quicker for what you did than a surgery.

Karen

Yeah. Not to mention you can never be sure how good the surgeon that you get. The surgeon I had for my first one was outstanding, apparently, because all the doctors that saw it were like, "Wow, she did such a good job stitching you back up. I don't see any horrible scars or whatever." I don't know. I'll take your word for it. It looks good. The doctor in the delivery room said that everything looked good. Nothing was torn. He had to torture me some more by really pushing down on there, I guess, to feel where my uterus was. I guess after he was done prodding me enough, he said everything was good to go and we could head on to a post-labor room before too long. We hung out in there for quite a while before they put us in a post-delivery room and I finally got to hold my baby right after he was born because I missed out on that with Ellie. I wasn't able to hold her for the first 48 hours.

Scott

And this happened not that long ago. How old is Alex now?

Karen

He's a month now. He's going to be two months on October 7th. When we went for our one-month checkup, he was almost 10 pounds.

Scott

Has Alfred recovered from the shock of being there when it happened?

Karen

I don't know if he'll ever fully recover from that. It's something he's never experienced before and he'll probably never experience anything quite like it ever. Maybe he'll have a nice bond with Alex when he's older and they'll be closer than they ever would have been.

Scott

You left your pants and your underwear at that passenger seat. Can you describe that?

Karen

Everything was soaked through with the amniotic fluid and the blood. And I'm told that other women will sometimes have, like, urine or whatever as well because everything wants to push, so you just empty everything. I didn't have that, thankfully, but Alfred tells me the smell was awful. I have next to no sense of smell naturally, so I don't really remember much of a smell anyway. But it soaked through all the seat warmers and everything. My husband being a mechanic and feeling guilty that I ruined his seat offered to pay for and perform the swap. So now Alfred has practically a brand-new passenger seat.

Scott

I wondered what Alfred thought when he got back home and looked at that and thought, "Okay, I got to start working on this."

Alfred

I got back home and started the process of cleaning the passenger seat of the car. What a mess and the smell. Oh my goodness. Initially, I pulled the car into the garage but, because of the odor, I backed it out, lowered all the windows, found a pair of disposable clothes, and started the cleaning process. The whole time, I was thinking, "Thank goodness tomorrow's garbage day."

Karen

I'm sure he was already thinking about selling the whole car - easier than cleaning it out.

Scott

Final question. Any advice for mothers who are currently on their second pregnancy?

Karen

Well, on the second one— I had heard this too, but I didn't give it much thought. On subsequent births, the process is usually faster. You usually don't labor as long as with the previous ones. Maybe just do some research in case you're somewhere that's not a hospital room and you might have to handle some things on your own. Even having a towel in the car probably would have been helpful - something to hold the baby in. Definitely have a backup plan in case you can't make it to your hospital.

Maybe I would have just had the baby at home if I'd known enough about how to do a home delivery because, then, we could have just had the ease of driving up to the hospital of our choice and like, "Here it is. Here's the baby." Then I would have been able to see my doctor. She didn't have the practicing rights at the hospital we ended up at, so I wasn't even able to see her at all. I got a new doctor every day when I was there.

Scott

Anything that we haven't talked about that you want to include?

Karen

I had to cancel my own C-section. For some reason, even though everyone had heard of my doctor, nobody heard of my hospital. They kept telling me they were going to tell her. Nobody told her until I had asked her after the fact, like, a lactation question and asked her about the C-section. Like, I'm still getting notices, reminders that the C-section is coming up, but I've had the baby. Do I need to call the hospital and tell them to cancel the C-section? And by then, she put two and two together and she told me she was going to cancel the C-section, obviously, because it was no longer needed. I still ended up having to do that anyway. Even on the day of, they were trying to remind me about the C-section.

Scott

It's a fun story to tell and it has a happy ending. So congratulations on number two.

Karen

Thank you.

Scott

I want to say a big thanks to Karen's step mom, Dawn – she's a What Was That Like listener, and she had the idea and suggested to Karen to get in touch with me to tell this story. So thanks Dawn!

And if you're wondering what Alfred's car seat looked like afterward, you can see pictures of it in the episode notes. And of course you can see pictures of baby Alex. That's all at WhatWasThatLike.com/153.

If you liked this episode, you might like listening to episode 91, from a couple of years ago – it's 17 different women – all of them listeners of this podcast - telling their unusual childbirth stories. That's at WhatWasThatLike.com/91.

And now I have to talk about a recent episode, and what happened afterward. A couple of shows back, my guest was Laura. The title of that one was "Laura's pain became her purpose". The topic of that show was the tragedy of children who died after being accidentally left in a hot car. Laura told the story of losing her 18-month-old son Anderson that way, and she actually lost even more than that. It's not an easy story to listen to, but it's a very important one for everyone to hear.

And after that episode came out, the listeners in the Facebook group had a lot to say. And I mean, a lot. If you're in that group, you saw it. The huge outpouring of support and love for Laura was just mind-blowing. Comment after comment about her courage in telling this story, the effect it had, just so much emotion and compassion from everyone after hearing Laura talk about what happened. One listener, Jenni, sent me this voice mail:

Jenni

Hi, Scott. This is Jenni. Laura's story was extremely heartbreaking to listen to. Just like a lot of other parents or just anybody, I used to be one of those people who could not imagine how anybody could ever leave their child in a car or forget that their child was with them. After all, that's your child. How do you forget they're in the car, right? Well, it can happen.

It happened to me. I was just one of the lucky ones where it did not end in a tragedy. It was when my son was about three years old. He went to a preschool program that was a three days

a week, 2.5 hour program, and he was quite the chatterbox at that age. So our routine was I would drive him to daycare. He would talk up a storm. Then, I would drop him off. And when I picked him up, he would talk up a storm on the way home again. The only time it was ever really silent in the car was my ride home after dropping him off.

So this one day, I dropped him off, went about my business, and then I came to pick him up. He must have been just extra tired that day. For whatever reason, that entire drive home, he did not say a word. He was completely silent. So before I knew it, my brain was automatically in drop-off mode. I didn't hear a sound, so my brain just knew, "Okay, I just dropped off my son." I pulled into our driveway at home and saw a flower delivery - just a package with flowers right outside my door - and I was so excited because it's not every day that you get flowers. I hopped out of the car. I locked the car. I ran to the door, grabbed my flowers, and went into the house.

My husband came. He had been working from home. He had sent me the flowers but hadn't noticed them yet. We went into the kitchen where I arranged the flowers and we chatted. A few minutes later, we both at the same time realized that our son wasn't there and I felt all the blood drain from my face. I ran outside and I unlocked the door, and there was my son in his car seat crying and he said, "You are supposed to hear me." And my heart broke. In that moment, I realized how quickly it can happen that you forget your child in the car. I was one of those people that could have never imagined, and here I was - just forgot my child in the car.

I was so lucky that, one, it wasn't midsummer. It was late spring. And secondly, I noticed after that about 5 minutes. It could have really easily been me that had caused a tragedy. I am, to this day, so thankful that I noticed in time and I'm feeling ashamed that I ever look down on those parents who forgot their child in the car because it does happen and, yes, it can happen to you. I want to say to Laura, "You are an amazing and strong woman and thank you for all the hard work you do."

Scott

If you haven't yet listened to Laura's story in episode 151, I encourage you to do so, and then join in the conversation in the Facebook group at [WhatWasThatLike.com/facebook](https://www.facebook.com/WhatWasThatLike.com).

If you'd like to support the show, and get extra 911 audio episodes and ALL of the episodes without any ads, it's super easy, and you can try it out for free! And a lot of listeners have already done that! On your iPhone, just go to the What Was That Like podcast feed and click on Try Free. If you're on Android, go to [WhatWasThatLike.com/plus](https://www.WhatWasThatLike.com/plus). There are 35 bonus episodes waiting for you to binge, and episode 36 will be out in just a week from now.

Graphics for this episode were created by Bob Bretz. Full episode transcription was created by James Lai.

And now, the Listener Story. We love our Listener Stories! And this is how we end every episode – with a story that was sent in by a listener. If you want to hear your voice here on this podcast, think of something that happened to you that was memorable in some way. Then record a roughly 5-10 minute story on your phone, and send it to me – Scott@WhatWasThatLike.com.

This week's story is from a friend of mine, Callista. It's about a major medical situation that happened to her at an unusually young age – and a couple of days from now, Callista will be

having her 3-year celebration. It's what she calls her Stroke-aversary. So Callista, congratulations on surviving and thriving!

Stay safe, and I'll see you here soon – a week from now we'll have Raw Audio 36, and on the same Friday, a bonus episode of What Was That Like, and it's going to be ad-free for everyone.

(Listener story)

On October 21st, 2019, I woke up feeling good. It was my favorite month. I had just quit my barista job two days before, and I had new job interviews lined up that were related to my arts management degree from College of Charleston, where I graduated from the previous May. I was still living in Charleston, South Carolina but, that day, I had to drive down to Myrtle Beach to take care of some errands with my mom. I had a nice two-hour drive.

When I arrived, we went to lunch and then went to the Sprint store as we both needed new phones. As the Sprint employee is explaining our options, I begin to feel odd. My anxiety kicks in a bit. Before I can get any more worried, I begin to see ripples in my vision. At this point, I excuse myself and go out and sit in the car. The ripples went away, but a headache settles in. I called and talked to my roommates, and they said maybe I'm just tired or dehydrated. My mom handles our phones and then drives us home.

I take an Advil and nap for a couple of hours. When I wake up, I decide I feel a bit better and I'd like to sleep in my own bed, so I get in the car and start my drive back to Charleston. Halfway through, I momentarily lose the use of my right arm and leg. I couldn't even process the way it felt. I pulled over at a Dollar General, went inside, splashed some water on my face, and bought a Gatorade. But as I'm talking to the cashier, I get the bizarre notion that the words coming out of my mouth don't really match the thoughts in my head, but I can't be sure.

So I continued driving home. Once I got home, I told my roommates I'm going to lie down again. When I woke up around 8 PM, my roommate texted me. As I replied, I couldn't quite write what I was trying to say, and the sentences I sent were incomplete or jumbled. Eventually, my sentences became more complete. I texted my best friend, Aika, and asked her if I could stay the night at her house, particularly because she had an extra bed in her room, which made me feel safer if I started to feel worse through the night. Aika picked me up. We ate dinner at her house and chit chat for a while. We agreed that it's probably just my anxiety causing all of these symptoms, and I went to sleep feeling completely normal.

The next morning, which also happened to be Aika's birthday, we woke up and she said she's going to class, but she'll be back shortly in case I'm not feeling well and would like to go get checked out by a doctor, for good measure. I tried to respond to her but realized I couldn't form a complete sentence and, when she brought me a glass of water, I couldn't lift it to my mouth without spilling it everywhere. At this point, Aika said she's taking me to the hospital now instead of later. After stumbling to the bathroom and being guided down the stairs, I tried to put my shoes on but struggled to the point that I was lying down.

Aika decided it would be too hard to get me to the hospital, so she called 911. When they arrived, they tried asking me when the symptoms started, and I responded, "Tomorrow" instead of "Yesterday". They had me take some deep breaths, took my pulse, and commented that they

just thought I was having a panic attack and that my blood pressure was normal. They have a choice between two nearby hospitals and choose one at random.

When we got there and a doctor came in, he was uncomfortably jovial and chuckled when I was unable to shake his hand because I didn't have control of mine. He runs no simple tests for someone with my symptoms and tells Aika and I that sometimes severe anxiety can cause these symptoms. They hooked me up to an IV of Ativan and told Aika I'd be fine. But luckily, she had called my mom who was on her way from Myrtle Beach by this point. When I woke up after the Ativan, I was coherent enough to read my mom's texts, but not to walk or talk. They asked if they should call me an Uber, and I expressed in my best broken sentences that my mom is on the way. They decided to wheel me into the waiting room where finally, my mom was able to find me after searching when the front desk said they were unsure where I was.

I couldn't lift my head up, say very much, or use my hand, and my mom was startled by my condition. She went back and found the doctor who refused to run any tests and assured my mom that this was just an anxiety attack. My mom took me to my apartment for about 30 minutes, but ultimately decided something wasn't right and took me to the other hospital. They immediately admitted me and ran every test possible - MRIs, heart ultrasounds, and more. Time passed. In the middle of the night, they let us know their conclusion. An ischemic stroke with a blood clot is caused by the dissection of my carotid artery. Obviously not normal for someone my age at 22 years old.

The doctors have remained undecided about the cause of the carotid artery dissection despite being tested for various genetic disorders and autoimmune diseases. So, for now, I took a daily 325 milligram aspirin and have regular checkups. It was a long road to recovery. The first few days in the hospital, it was tough to answer simple questions like what month it was and what my name was. After a couple of weeks, I was moved to a rehabilitation center to learn how to walk, talk, and write again. While I still struggled with various effects like brain fog, occasional headaches, and my hand not being able to write quite as fast as my brain wants it to, I'm lucky that my brain recovered as well as it did, and I'm able to live a great, fulfilling life thanks to the doctors, family members, and friends that took my symptoms seriously and got me the help that I needed.