

Episode 177: Laura was pregnant with twins

Our story today has to do with making decisions.

As a child, most of the time, life is pretty easy because you don't have to make any decisions. Everything in your life is decided for you – what clothes you wear each day, where you sleep, what you eat, everything.

But as an adult, all of that changes. You take on responsibilities, and you have to make decisions. What to do for work, who you want to spend the rest of your life with (if anyone), which house to buy – it seems like we spend much of our life trying to make the right choices. And sometimes, that can be really difficult.

My guest today is Laura. She and her husband, Dan, were parents to their little boy, Louie. Then, they found out they were pregnant again – this time, with twins.

And Laura was soon faced with making a decision that she never would have imagined having to make.

This episode discusses topics that may be upsetting for some listeners. Please consult the episode notes for content warnings.

Scott

Was there anything complicated about your first pregnancy?

Laura

Probably. Well, about a month before I became pregnant with my first son, Louie, I did have a chemical pregnancy where it's just like a really early miscarriage. But other than that, a month later, I became pregnant with my son, Louie.

Scott

And for what we're talking about today, that happened about a year and a half ago. Who was your family at the time?

Laura

So I have my husband, Dan, and then our first son, Louie. He was about 18 months old at the time.

Scott

And so you decided to have another baby. What did you expect when you made that decision? Did you think it was going to take a while? What did you think?

Laura

Yeah, it had taken a while for me with my first. I had some sort of hormonal issues in the past, so I just thought it was going to take several months or six months. So I was surprised when I got pregnant, like, right away.

Scott

Were you happy about that?

Laura

Oh yeah. I mean, I was super excited. I think it was just sort of a strange time to find out you're pregnant. So I actually found out I was pregnant the day before the country shut down in March of 2020. So it was kind of an unusual time, obviously, just feeling very excited and, then, the next day being, like, "Oh my God, what's happening? What is this going to look like?"

Scott

What's going on in the world? Now you're going to have a baby.

Laura

Mmhmm.

Scott

Your first appointment was in April and you had to go alone.

Laura

Yeah. I went to that first appointment around six weeks pregnant, obviously in a mask, by myself. They were going to send me somewhere else to have that first ultrasound but my doctor, I guess, had a bunch of cancellations that day. I think people who didn't have to be seen weren't coming in. So she was kind of like, "Let's go for a walk down the hallway." It was, like, in a hospital. She said, "Let's just take a look at this baby." So I was kind of excited. "Oh, I didn't think I was going to get to see anything today."

So we went and did the ultrasound, and she immediately said something like, "Oh girl." And I was like, "Oh my God, it's a girl." And she said, "No." She spun the screen around and she said, "There's two." I just remember being in, like, complete shock. I was so surprised. I don't think I've been more surprised in my entire life. We hadn't done any kind of fertility treatments and twins don't run in our families. So I was just like, "What?" And very emotional. Like I started sobbing right away, and just immediately feeling overwhelmed, panicked, and scared.

Scott

I got to ask you about that. What were you scared of with having twins?

Laura

I mean, I think you'd always kind of joke with your first, "Oh my God, wouldn't that be cool to have twins?" and then you sort of forget about it. So we had our first and then you just don't really think of that scenario happening with your second baby. So, I was just like, "Oh my God."

There was sort of stuff going on with my work at the time and I was, like, losing some of my hours. So, I think I just went into an immediate panic. We lived in a townhouse at the time. So I was like, "Oh my God, how are we going to have three babies? I'm going to have to quit my job and we're going to have to move and we're going to have to buy a minivan." I just immediately started thinking of everything and panicking.

I was supposed to go to work that day because I work in home health care - we were all still working through COVID and everything - but I couldn't pull myself together, so I texted my

husband - he was working from home - and I said, "I need you to take a break from work. I'm coming home." So I'm sure he was like, "Oh my God, what's going on?"

So when I burst in the door and I just was, like, sobbing, he just immediately hugged me and was saying, "I'm so sorry." And then I was like, "Oh my God, he thinks I lost this pregnancy." So I was like, "Oh no, everything's fine." And he's looking at me like, "Well, why are you crying?"

And I'm like, "It's twins. We're having twins." And he was just, like, dumbfounded. But then, he was immediately so happy and excited and, like, almost giddy and, "This is amazing." But I was, like, not having that reaction at the time. I think it kind of helped a little bit because I'm like, "Oh my God, he's excited." I thought he was going to freak out as much as I was freaking out.

Scott

It's funny. His reaction was like the opposite of yours. He's excited and you're like, "Oh man, we have to buy a minivan." I thought that was the funniest thing when you wrote that.

Laura

That's just like me. I like overthinking everything. And yeah, I'm immediately like, "Oh my God, we have to tell our parents." I'm a horrible secret keeper.

Scott

What did they think?

Laura

They were just like, "That's crazy." And yeah, I'm very much like my mom. My mom was sort of spiraling like I was, and my husband's family is just, "That's so cool." But then I think my attitude started to change. Like, even just that first week or two, I think I started to just sort of embrace it and get excited. I told a couple of best friends about it and they sort of just made me get more excited.

Scott

So let's talk about the pregnancy. I know you told me that around the 10-week mark, you started telling people, even some of your neighbors. How did that go?

Laura

Yeah. So we told our close friends, I think with it being, like, our second child - well, children - I think I was just like— normally, I would have waited a little longer but I think I can't keep this to myself. So we told our closest friends - we went to a little neighborhood barbecue actually - and everyone's excited. Then, I remember kind of at the end of the barbecue, one of our neighbors was like, "Oh yeah, my first child actually were twins and one of them vanished." And I'm like, "What?" And he's like, "Yeah, it's called vanishing twin syndrome." And I'm like, "I had never heard of this before."

So my heart kind of sank and then I was, like, Googling on my phone, "What's Vanishing Twin Syndrome?" And it's a real thing and that just made me so nervous and anxious. I was like, "What if we made a mistake? Maybe we shouldn't have told people before my 12-week appointment." So that was a little nerve-racking.

Scott

You mentioned earlier that you're kind of an overthinker on some things. It seems like that was the worst thing to even bring up.

Laura

Yeah, definitely the wrong thing to say for anyone. If they're ever in that situation, don't say that. So 12 weeks came. Like, lots of anxiety building up. They were sending me to see a maternal fetal medicine specialist. They started the ultrasound and I was so relieved when I saw two babies on the screen. They're moving around. I immediately texted my mom and said, "They're here. They're both there. They're both okay." But I didn't realize that I was speaking too soon. The ultrasound tech wasn't saying anything. Then, the doctor came in and said, "I'm a little concerned. I'm very confused. One twin is two weeks behind in growth." To me, on the screen, they didn't look that much different and I didn't think that sounded like a lot. She explained that that was a pretty big difference.

Scott

A two-week difference at the 12-week point does seem pretty substantial.

Laura

Yeah. I just don't think it really hit me. Again, I was alone at this appointment and she said, "We're going to need to do some tests and I want to send you down to Philadelphia." We live in the suburbs and she wanted to have me go for this special test. It was called a CVS where they take, like, a placenta biopsy and see what's going on. She basically kind of said, "It could be nothing, but I think it's something." So I was already kind of nervous about what was to come. That was probably, like, maybe 14 weeks actually. So I had to go down to the city for that.

My father-in-law— my mom actually wanted to drive me cause nobody could come in with me and my husband was really busy with work and they weren't going to let me bring him anyway. So again, I went to that alone. They had me meet with this genetic counselor and I think I sort of still had some hope that maybe it was something like dwarfism in my family. So I thought maybe one baby is a dwarf or something. She explained that that was highly unlikely just from a genetic standpoint.

Then, they had me see a new male doctor whom I'd never met before and he was going to do the CVS. He was just very cold and he didn't have a good bedside manner at all. He attempted to do this placenta biopsy on the smaller twin but he couldn't get a good sample because the placenta was so small. He said, "If I do it, I might cause harm," But he did explain that he saw the baby had a large head and a smaller body. So, he suspected that the baby had what's called triploidy, which is where the baby has three sets of chromosomes and it's very rare and they don't typically make it past the first trimester. If the baby does survive till delivery, which is rare, it only lives for minutes or hours.

So he said all this and then he immediately was just like, "Do you want me to reduce the pregnancy today?" And I was like, "What is this man talking about? I don't even know what that means or why is he saying it so nonchalantly."

Scott

Yeah, you just got news that just rocked your whole world.

Laura

Yeah. I was just taken back and I was immediately like, "Absolutely not. We don't even know what's wrong. I mean, this is your suspicion, but we don't know that for sure." He didn't really do a very good job explaining it anyway. So I immediately just felt uncomfortable with him as a doctor.

Scott

Did you tell any of your friends or family about this situation at the time after you left that appointment?

Laura

I think it was right after that, that I did share my pregnancy on, like, my social media because I had started showing when I was 11 weeks. I was very much clearly pregnant and I think I felt so isolated at the time that I just sort of was like, "Okay, I'm going to share that I'm pregnant and kind of what's going on," and that I really don't know what's going to happen. But I think it actually felt kind of good to sort of have that little support network and people praying for me and thinking about me and it was rough.

Scott

Was the overall pregnancy itself— were you having any difficulties during that period?

Laura

Oh yeah, I think.

Scott

Commonly nausea, fatigue, and things like that, right?

Laura

Oh yeah, I think just the whole thing was a difficult pregnancy physically and emotionally. I mean, I had nausea. I was working kind of, like, half days at the time because my hours were reduced with COVID. So I was, like, seeing some patients in the morning and then coming home just taking a nap. I had this, like, ligament pain and I was seeing a chiropractor at the time and she was just so wonderful to me. I just remember her, like, giving me these belly rubs and it was three free therapies. I was sort of, like, trauma dumping on her and crying and she would give me these long hugs - nobody was hugging each other at the time - and I just remember that really being a big help to me there at that time.

So, at 16 weeks, they sent me for an early anatomy scan and an amniocentesis, which is where they take a biopsy or a sample of the amniotic fluid and test the genetics of the baby. So, I had to wait a few weeks for that. They attempted that procedure as well but there wasn't enough amniotic fluid to take a sample and, again, not do any harm. So, that was disappointing because I just really wanted to know what was going on. This was a different doctor who I was pretty comfortable with, and she actually suspected the same disorder - triploidy - as the other doctor.

But then, because of the way the baby— like, I could see the baby on the screen and it was just facing the back of me and you could see that larger head size, smaller body, and it hardly had any fluid around it. I mean, seeing that— up until that point, I hadn't really been able to see just how different that it looked from the other baby and we didn't know if it was a boy or girl either because it was two to three weeks behind where we were able to confirm that the other twin was genetically normal and a boy. And yeah, that was just hard not really like having any answers.

Then, that's when they presented me with some options and my doctor at the time said, "At this point, it's very clear that this baby is not normal. It's not going to make it to delivery. It's got such little amniotic fluid that there's just no way that it will survive," but we don't know how long it could hang on for. You can do nothing and your risks go up for having a preterm labor and, I guess, around that 18-week mark is when your risk factors really go up in this kind of scenario. So she said, "Do nothing," or I could go in for what's called a selective reduction, which is basically a different word for aborting one baby, where they inject a chemical into the heart. They stop the heart and, in this situation, I wouldn't miscarry because I'm still pregnant. So you just remain with both fetuses there. So that was just a lot to take in.

Scott

Yeah, man. It just seems almost overwhelming because - you referred to them as twin A and twin B - twin A completely healthy and normal, but twin B is the one with all the complications.

Laura

Yeah. So it just felt like an impossible decision. I mean, my husband's on FaceTime with me and he's just sort of like, "Do whatever you want to do." And I felt like I wasn't ready to for sure make that decision that day, so I asked, "Can I wait another week and see if this twin B passes on its own? Then, I don't have to make the choice because I just really didn't want it to come down to me."

Scott

And were they okay with you waiting another week?

Laura

Yeah. We just didn't really know what was going to happen. She really couldn't say how long that twin could survive, but I think also it was just such a rare thing to occur. I mean, I think it's less than 1% chance that a baby with triploidy lives into the second trimester, and then to have it be part of a twin pregnancy. I even did my own research and I found, like, an article that was based on three cases total and, obviously, the abnormal twin didn't survive, but some of the women did have selective reductions and their other twin did survive. So I asked my doctor, "If it was you, what would you do?" And she said, "I would reduce the pregnancy to give the healthy, genetically normal twin the best outcomes of having a full-term birth."

Scott

And also it would be safer for you.

Laura

Yeah. I also said it was a risk for me as well. There are different things that can happen that just put the mother more at risk as well.

Scott

So had you made that decision at that point or you wanted to wait a little bit?

Laura

I just said I wanted to wait a week and come back for a heartbeat check. They said that was fine. So I did that and, at 17 weeks, there were still two heartbeats. I have a hard time talking about that appointment just because it was a weird feeling to almost be disappointed because

there were still two heartbeats. I think I wanted to know if the other twin passed on its own and it didn't come down to my choice.

Scott

Yeah, such an odd situation to hear two heartbeats and have that feeling of disappointment because now you do have to make that decision.

Laura

Yeah. So we decided to have that selective reduction.

Scott

So you had to go to Philadelphia for this procedure, but you were on a video call before that.

Laura

Yeah. In Pennsylvania, 24 hours before any type of abortion, you have to have some counseling with your doctor where, basically, they go through what's going to happen, and that was over video with this doctor. They have to read you this paragraph by law and it's all about things like you can give your baby up for adoption and things like that. Before the doctor read it to me, she said, "This doesn't apply to you. I have to read this to you by law but just please know that this does not apply to your situation." She read this paragraph to me and I just sobbed the whole time because I felt like just a horrible person for doing this, and I knew that it didn't apply to me, but it was still like, "Why do I have to sit here and listen to this?"

Scott

Yeah, it's just simply nothing more than a legal requirement.

Laura

Yeah. It seems so traumatic. You can know consciously that it doesn't apply to you but, still, you're hearing those words. How far along were you when you went in for the procedure?

Laura

It was right before I hit that 18-week mark - I guess probably, like, 17.5. I kind of ended up falling nicely right before I was to go on this family vacation to the beach with my side of the family and my husband, and I sort of felt, "Okay, I'm going to do this and then I can have some time off of work and be with my family." So I went down to Philadelphia and my doctor was so good to us. She actually called me on her cell phone and was like, "I'm going to come meet you down at the security desk because they're going to give your husband some problems."

Scott

Right. Because during COVID, they weren't allowing people in, right?

Laura

Yeah. So we're at security and they're saying he can't come. She quickly showed up and just looked them right in the face and was like, "I'm their doctor. He's coming. This is a life or death procedure and he's coming." And then that was kind of it. They were like, "Oh, okay. It's the doctor. She's here." So they let us go. So that was amazing. I can't thank her enough for that. Then, she kind of just snuck us up this back hallway so no one else would see him in the waiting room and kind of be like, "Why is this person allowed to bring their spouse?"

Scott

It seems like that would make all the difference in the world to have a doctor like that who is so caring.

Laura

Yeah, she really was probably the best one that I interacted with. She was just so kind, gentle, and nurturing with me. She obviously explained what was going to happen and she was kind enough to, like, turn off the monitor when she actually went to do the procedure, and it's not a pleasant experience at all. It was very painful - just like a large needle going into your belly and it actually hurts more coming out than it did going in. That was just an awful experience, I mean, she gave us a little time together alone right before she did it and we just kind of said goodbye, and it was hard. I wanted to give the baby a name because I didn't want to refer to it as an it because we didn't know if it was a boy or girl. We didn't know if it was a boy or a girl. My husband was okay with that. So I was like, "Can we call the baby Charlie?" So we called the baby Charlie and just said, "We wish we could have met you and we're sorry." And that was it.

Afterward, she just kind of checks to make sure that twin still has a heartbeat, and she kind of said to me— I remember. I'll never forget. She said something like, "Our short-term goal at this point is to get to 27 weeks." And I was like, "27 weeks?" And she's like, "That's our short-term goal. We just want to get this baby to 27 weeks, which is one of the earliest times that you can deliver a baby and they have a better chance at survival." And so I think her saying that just scared me to death. "Are you saying that there's still this risk?" And I think just because it's such a rare situation, they just really don't know what can happen.

I mean, I had to be monitored pretty closely for the rest of the pregnancy, do stress tests, and go back to maternal fetal medicine a lot. They would check and see where the other fetus was, and that was really hard. I just would always look away when they were doing that. They really don't know in these kinds of situations. There's not a lot of research. So they just had to keep monitoring things and everything was looking great. I mean, they even say that, as you go on, that other fetus almost starts to become absorbed in some ways. Like, the placenta will be absorbed by the other placenta and that was just weird to think about.

It was just an uncomfortable pregnancy. I think I always just felt horrible physically and I felt horrible emotionally and was trying to feel some sort of excitement about the other baby and just, like, trying my best to sort of move forward but it was just so weird when people would ask questions like, "How are you feeling? What are you having?" And I would change my responses depending on who it was.

Scott

Really? That's interesting. So you went into the details with some people and, for others, it's like, "Well, everything's good." How did you decide that?

Laura

I would kind of just decide it right on the spot because I think, like, before I had the procedure and people would ask, if it's someone I felt comfortable with, I'd be like, "Well, I'm pregnant with twins, but I don't think one's going to make it." Then, other times, before the procedure, I would just say, "Oh, I think I'm having a boy because that was the truth." I mean, I knew I was having one boy but I didn't know what was going to happen. Then, after their procedure, I just started saying, "Oh, I'm having a boy" but it felt really weird to know that here I was with one living twin and one deceased twin in my belly and I knew that. I would have to see it all the time.

Scott

Can you talk about the process that you guys decided on to say goodbye to Charlie?

Laura

We ended up going on my family vacation the next day after my procedure, which actually was just like a godsend that I could just go and relax and try to forget and just enjoy my family. It was really nice to get away. Before we left for that vacation, I kind of just felt like I needed to almost just kind of memorialize what was. I found, like, a shell and I told my husband, "I would love to just write on the shell and maybe we'll throw it in the bay or something." So I think we wrote something like, "Little baby Charlie, 2020." And on the back, we just said, "We wish we could have met you - love, Mom and Dad." And we threw it in the bay.

I feel like those moments really did bring us closer together. I think we were both sort of grieving it in different ways. Of course, I was going through it more just as a woman and actually having both those babies inside of me. Even a few years after that, we would go back to that same vacation spot and I almost kind of felt like that's where Charlie was buried, so I sort of saw it in that way and it was kind of a pretty view and just a nice place to come back to.

Scott

Yeah, it's good to have a place like that where you can go and it holds that memory for you. As you were going through this, obviously you're the one that is dealing with it directly, but I'm sure Dan was empathetic and trying to be supportive. But did you ever have thoughts like, "Man, he has no idea"?

Laura

A little bit. I mean, I could definitely tell it was like an emotional roller coaster for him too, and probably more just emotional for him watching me go through it. But obviously, I don't think he had those same attachments and retraumatization that I was having, like, every two weeks. I think it was just a hard thing to explain, to also be having that physical pain as part of it as well.

Scott

The rest of the pregnancy— how did that go?

Laura

I feel like it started to get a little easier, but I was just so anxious the whole time that something was going to happen, but I really had a strong support system. A lot of friends were just, like, so thoughtful and kind to us, checking in on us, and sending flowers or little gifts and things. That was really sweet because we didn't get to see friends and family a lot during that time. So that was super helpful.

Scott

Was it maybe kind of a blessing in disguise that everyone was staying away from each other? Does that mean you had less explaining to do because you just weren't seeing people?

Laura

Yeah, I guess, in a way. I think it was also that I was, like, half as busy with my job. So I had the time to just be sad, take naps, and go to all these appointments. So I think that all sort of worked out the way it was supposed to, in a sense. They actually were going to induce the pregnancy at 39 weeks. They always just kind of say that, when you have an abnormal pregnancy, nothing good ever happens after 39 weeks. So, I had that scheduled but I was dilated for a while and I

had seen my doctor the day before and they were like, "This baby's coming early." I wasn't even really in active labor the next day but I just knew, like, something was up. I think as women, we just have this intuition that I'm like, "This baby is coming." So I had my parents come and I called the doctor and I was like, "I'm not in active labor, but some things don't feel right."

Scott

That's just fascinating to me. So you didn't have any physical symptoms. You just felt this in some way but it was strong enough that you had your parents come and you started making plans.

Laura

Yeah. I mean, I knew they were either going to take me the following day if it was nothing, but I was like— I don't know, I just knew. So they said, "Well, I don't want you to have a parking lot baby, so just come in."

Scott

We have covered stories like that here too. No, we don't want that.

Laura

So I went in and it was so bizarre. They hooked me up to the monitor. As soon as they have me hooked up, we just hear, like, a pop. I looked at my husband and I was like, "Oh my God, my water just broke on its own." So I was like, "How bizarre is that? I just knew this was coming." It was just like a very fast delivery. My first was not like that at all. It was very slow and agonizing. This one was— I got that epidural right away and my doctor actually was delivering. I think he delivered three babies that night in 45 minutes and I was the second. So he delivered one baby and I had to wait for him to deliver that baby, but I was doing fine. I was texting friends. Even when I left the house that night, our neighbors were having a friends-giving and they all came outside and they were cheering me on as I was leaving the house. So, that was really cool.

Then, he came in and I delivered my baby. We had two names picked out ahead of time. I said, "If he's blonde, we'll name him this. If he has brown hair, we'll name him Milo." So we named him Milo and he was a big baby, so I was surprised. It was a weird feeling and I didn't really see what happened after Milo came out, but my husband later told me that he did. And he's like, "You don't want to know what the other baby looked like." So he never really shared anything with me, but he did see what twin B looked like. I was just trying to focus on Milo and just loving him.

But when he came out, I was scared to death for a second. He came out completely, like, blue and purple and his cord was wrapped around his neck twice and he wasn't making any noise. The doctor looked panicked and, like, trying to unwrap the cord, and my immediate reaction was just, like, fear, but also I was so angry for those 30 seconds. That was, like, the longest 30 seconds of my life and I was like mad at the world. I was like, "Did you really just put me through all this for nothing?!" Cause I thought that he was gone. So that was awful. And then he cried and I was like, "Oh my God, thank the Lord." And he was okay.

Scott

That's got to be the best sound you could have heard.

Laura

Yeah.

Scott

How old are your kids now?

Laura

Milo is three and a half and Louie is five and a half.

Scott

Both healthy and happy little boys?

Laura

Yeah, they're both very happy and healthy and they're best buddies, but they couldn't look or act differently. So they're very different but they get along great.

Scott

Thinking back on this, a couple of things that you wrote when we were speaking, it seems like you would have such conflicting emotions since you were aware you're carrying life and you're carrying death at the same time and you really couldn't do anything. You just had to wait. How do you get through that?

Laura

I think that was the hardest part because I was grieving and I was also trying to be hopeful and excited. I almost felt guilty at times. Do you know how many women out there have miscarriages and then they have nothing? And here you are. You have this baby to look forward to and almost, like, telling myself to stop it. "Get it together. It could be worse." So I think what was hard too was sort of trying to ignore the pain I was feeling and focus on Milo. At times, I would be like, "What did I do to deserve this?" And then I was kind of beating myself up a little bit.

Scott

You didn't do anything. I mean, there's nothing you could have done from the start to avoid this situation.

Laura

And that's what a lot of the doctors that were kind reassured me of. I wasn't really making the choice to end a life. They were just saying that this baby wasn't going to make it and I had to focus on my health and the health of the other baby, and the choice was already kind of made for me and not to feel like I was doing something wrong. So I really tried to lean into what they were saying and view it in that way, but it was tough.

Scott

And then the other interesting aspect of this is saying goodbye to something you never had. That's really unusual.

Laura

Yeah, it was. Cause I even have friends now who have lost their newborn babies that they got to hold, and it's just a different type of grief because I never got to hold or know that baby. It's just a bizarre type of grief and it's hard to explain unless it happened to you. While my situation might have been a little unique, I think a lot of women who have had miscarriages probably understand what it feels like to have this vision of what your life's going to look like and just have it be ripped away from you.

Scott

Was therapy ever brought up either during the pregnancy or after?

Laura

No. I actually found it kind of disappointing that while I had some good doctors, no one ever really— I mean, they would say, “How are you doing and how are you coping?” But no one ever really said much about that or offered up any resources. Looking back, I’m sort of like, “That’s odd because you see me obviously struggling during a really awful time in the world in general.” And no, I never did anything like that but I almost kind of feel like the little bit that I did kind of share on my social media about what was going on and kind of what I’m doing now is like a little therapeutic.

Scott

Yeah, it does help just to talk about it even though it’s not like you’re looking for a solution to fix it. You just got to, you just got to get it out. Have you considered having another baby?

Laura

No. I decided very quickly after Milo was born that it was time to be done. Oddly enough, we kind of went through some other things as a couple, me and my husband, that sort of helped make that decision a little bit easier. I don’t know if I shared this but, when Milo was about to turn one, my husband actually was diagnosed with testicular cancer and he had surgery and we just kind of decided to call it. I said, “Can you get a vasectomy while you’re there?”

Scott

So no more babies for you.

Laura

No. When you know you’re done, you know. So I think it was traumatizing and I’d never want to do it again. People ask that all the time, “Oh, are you going to try for a girl?” And I’m just like, “No. What makes you think that’s a good question to ask?”

Scott

And that’s what I want to talk to you about too. I want to ask you about this, just the nature of your pregnancy and how everything went. It seems like you would be continually bombarded with awkward questions and situations. If someone has a friend who they know just got pregnant or is pregnant, how can you avoid those awkward situations?

Laura

Oh, I do feel like that’s a tough topic because I think there are a lot of people out there and they might be just asking very harmless questions, but you really don’t know what someone’s going through. So it is really hard to ask too much to pregnant women. I think I even shared that a simple question like “What are you having?” was tough for me to answer. Whereas most times, you wouldn’t think that is at all a question you shouldn’t ask but I don’t know. I don’t really know what advice to give other than just, if you’re not a good friend of the person, you’re better off just not to ask too many questions.

Scott

Yeah, because you really have no idea. And maybe three times out of four, it's fine. People just answer and everything's good, but just don't know. What message do you want to put out there by telling your story?

Laura

I've thought about that a lot and I think— I mean, I obviously went through kind of a rare unique pregnancy but I think a lot of women can probably just relate to the feelings and emotions of loss, whether that's a miscarriage or a stillbirth or whatever the situation might be, and I think it's okay to share that. I think women of the past held it very close to them and held it to themselves and maybe that wasn't the best thing. Sometimes, sharing can be therapeutic and I think there's some things in life that change you and make you who you are. I think that this was definitely one for me that just changed my perspective a lot.

I think I mentioned to you before, not to get too political but I was always pro-choice before, but it even made me more so now. I think everyone has their opinions about abortions, especially with what's been going on lately in the past couple of years with abortion laws and whatnot. I think everyone who has ever experienced one has such a different story - and this was mine - it's not so black and white and I was lucky to be able to make a decision with my doctor in the state that I live in. I think that most people in my situation probably would have made the same choice, but I just think that abortion isn't such a narrow thing that you can really look at when there are so many different possibilities of why someone might have one.

Scott

Yeah, every story is different. In the episode notes, we'll have some resources. There are some Facebook groups that talk about vanishing twin syndrome. People have lost babies. There may not be a group that's specific to your situation, but people can check that and see if there's something there that they can find helpful.

Laura

One more thing I just wanted to add is, in a tough time, I think I'll never forget the family, the friends, the neighbors, the doctors, and even just strangers who were just very supportive of me and just being there for your loved ones. That really changed everything for me.

Scott

That's a good rule to live by. Pregnancy or not, just treat people nicely.

Laura

Yeah.

Scott

In the episode notes, you can see a picture of Laura with her two sons, Louie and Milo. And on that same page, you can see some resources that might be of help. There's a link to a podcast about grief, which is hosted by one of Laura's friends. And there are some Facebook groups related to what we talked about today. All of that is at WhatWasThatLike.com/177.

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

And if you're a regular listener to this show, you know this is where we usually have the Listener Story. And that's kind of what we're doing, but this one is a little different.

One of the podcasts I listen to regularly is called Big Lash Energy. It's hosted by my friend Jayna. She was actually a guest here on What Was That Like back on episode 128, which is titled "Jayna's hotel was a crime scene". My audience heard that story and just fell in love with Jayna because she's just so happy and fun to listen to.

Well, she put out an episode of her podcast not too long ago, and it's like nothing I've heard her do before. Jayna got very vulnerable with her listeners as she told a recent personal story. And as I was hearing her tell that incredible story, I was thinking, "My listeners have to hear this". So I contacted Jayna and asked if I could play this story for you, and of course she said yes because she's just an amazing person.

So you're about to hear that episode of her show – and it's just 18 minutes long. If you've ever struggled with self-esteem or self-acceptance, I hope you find this valuable. Again, her show is called Big Lash Energy and it's available anywhere, or you can check out her website at HelloJayna.com – and Jayna is J A Y N A – hellojayna.com.

Stay safe, and I'll see you next time.

Jayna

Do you ever feel ugly? Cause some days I do, and I'm not just talking "not cute", but I feel ugly. It's like I'm looking into a fun-house mirror thinking I should stay inside or I might scare small children. Can you relate? A recent study by the Board of Mental Health found that 29 percent of women felt disgusting at least once in the past year, and that's what we're talking about in today's episode - those ugly days.

Hello and welcome to Big Lash Energy. I'm your host, Jayna Marie. Before we get started, I just wanted to take a second to share some exciting news. You, my friend, are officially listening to an Ambie-nominated podcast.

Oh my God, no way. I love this for you. What are the Ambies?

The Ambies are basically the Academy Awards of podcasting. They include shows from all over the world. And this year, your girl was nominated as one of the seven best relationship and wellness podcasts. What's really cool about it is that we were the only Canadian show in our category as well as the only independent show, meaning all of the other nominated podcasts are made by production companies, including one by CNN. So considering everything here at Big Lush Energy is done by just me and Tim, it really is an honor just to be nominated. In two weeks, I'm going to be making my way to Los Angeles for the awards ceremony, and I'd be lying if I said that my competitive ass didn't care if I won. But either way, it's something to celebrate. So if you could do me a huge favor and cross all your fingers and toes for me for the next two weeks, I'd really appreciate it.

Thanks.

Are they still crossed?

Perfect.

Anyways, back to being ugly. I actually had a completely different episode planned for this week, but something happened to me a couple of days ago that made me feel like this was a message that somebody had to hear. I'm a little nervous about this one because it's really personal. As somebody who prides myself on being a really confident person, I really don't love talking about my insecurities, but it's all in the name of BLE and, here, I'm all about sharing my most vulnerable parts so that, maybe, if you're going through the same thing, you won't feel alone.

Like I said, I have a feeling that what I went through last week might help someone, and who knows? Maybe it's you. Maybe it's you. So if you're feeling like your self-esteem is at an all-time low, then listen up because today's episode is all about those times when we look in the mirror and say, "Ugh, gross. Let's go."

(Music)

Narrator

Welcome to Big Lash Energy, dedicated to helping you navigate life's hurdles with your head held high. We're celebrating wins, learning from our losses, and laughing at ourselves along the way. Now here's your favorite hype woman, Jayna Marie.

Jayna

First of all, let me start off by saying that there is a difference between being confident in who we are versus how we look. I can say that, personally, I'm almost always confident in who I am, but that hasn't always been the case. I guess that, through the years, I've been through enough to know that, at this point, I could probably get through anything when it comes to how I look, I'm confident most of the time. I contribute the confidence that I do have to growing up, being taught that God doesn't make mistakes, that he's the perfect artist and I'm one of his creations. So who am I to criticize his work?

Sometimes, I've even wished I could dislike myself enough to be motivated to make the changes necessary to look better, if that makes sense. Like, I know of women going through extreme measures to try and look even marginally better and I'm over here. I mean, sure, I'd love to be a little bit smaller, but God loves me the way I am. So, can you pass me another Oreo?

Of course, there were also those times when I squeezed my fluffy belly into a super flattering pair of 200 yoga pants, caught a glimpse of myself in the mirror, and thought, "Damn, I look good as long as I stay wearing these pants. I don't really need to spend the afternoon on a stair climber." The majority of the time I'm sure of myself and I embrace my own unique beauty, and I know not to compare myself with anyone, but there are still some days when I wake up feeling like a stumpy ass, fat-faced, puffy-eyed, scraggly haired garden gnome. There have even been moments when I've avoided looking at myself in the mirror, times when it's gotten so bad that I've even resorted to doing my makeup in the dark. I've worked with women long enough to know that some of us feel this way most of the time and that breaks my heart.

In my case, I've noticed that those icky feelings tend to be triggered when someone takes a really unflattering photo of me or I catch myself in the mirror in some awkward position. But I've noticed that the times I feel the most despicable are the times when I'm unable to do the things that I need to for myself - the times when I put my needs on the back burner. In those times,

seeing greasy hair or the few pounds I've put on is a reminder of how I've neglected me - the work that I'm not doing - and, most importantly, the time that I don't have for myself.

Even if you can't relate, Rihanna can. She told Star Magazine, "I have an ugly day once a month, pimples on my face, I'm fat and in a bad mood. It's more like an ugly week."

Have you ever had one of those ugly weeks? My guess is it was most likely hormonal, or maybe it was one of those times where everything else took precedence over your you time. Washing your hair was a luxury you just didn't have time for, and the thought of making it into a gym was laughable. I mean, even if you had the time, you didn't have the energy. All of your meals were eaten on the go, in the car, or whatever you could find, and that's exactly how I found myself just a couple of days ago, as I talked about in last week's episode.

I was just recently in Atlanta, but my flight going home got moved to the next day. So that meant that I was only going to be home for two days before leaving again for Cancun to work. The to-do list was super long and I only had 48 hours to get it all done. In the time I was home, I needed to unpack the professional/cold-weather clothes from Atlanta, do laundry, repack beachy options for Mexico, buy some of the supplies that I'd run out of, wash brushes, pack my professional makeup kit, and clean my house. So it was ready for the woman who was going to be watching Arzo, then take Arzo shopping to get groceries and snacks for school, catch up on emails and so much more. Washing my hair had been on the agenda, but the other things just didn't.

Then I stayed up all night packing, threw on a hat, drove to the airport at 5 AM, landed in Cancun in the early evening, made my way to my room to set up for the hair and makeup appointment I had the next day, and passed out early because I knew that my bride was going to be in my room at 6 o'clock in the morning. It was 3 AM my time. Over the course of the next 24 hours, I did three full glam hair and makeup looks for her and, in between, whenever I wasn't doing hair and makeup, I was washing my brushes, resetting for the next glam session, and trying to pull that week's episode together. I recorded until two o'clock in the morning one night and then I had to pack up all the makeup and hair gear and make my way to the bride's room for 4 AM.

At around 8.30 in the morning, I was finally done with the majority of the hair and makeup work. Once I knew that my client was happy with everything, I went back to my room feeling accomplished. She loved all of her looks. The podcast audio was finally done being recorded. I'd helped Arzo with her homework over FaceTime, all of my responsibilities had been taken care of. Check, check, and check.

However In the process, I hadn't had time to eat properly, wash my hair, shave my legs, or do any of the other things that helped me to feel like my best self. It was finally time I stepped out of the clothes that had been hiding my body and suddenly caught a glimpse of myself in the hotel room mirror. Maybe it was the bad lighting. Maybe it was the exhaustion, but I took one look at myself and was immediately disgusted.

Sure, I'd already felt gross, but now that I was looking in the mirror, I realized I looked even worse. The bags under my eyes were bagging, the overhead light had everything else looking like it was either bloated or sagging, and that's when a voice inside - likely myself saboteur - said, "Ugh, look at you. You're disgusting. You've put on weight. Your hair's a mess. Your ass is deflated. Do you remember when it used to look great? Your face only looks decent from one

angle and only in good lighting. Ugh. Do you see the fat collecting around your knees? You used to be pretty. Now, who would ever love that?" I fought tears as that horrible voice continued, "You're getting older. It's only going to get worse." And with that, I took a one way ticket to a dark place.

I think I felt so defeated for two reasons. One, I felt hopeless. I knew what I had to do to take care of myself, but I didn't have the time. And I felt unlovable. If people knew how I really looked naked like this, they wouldn't love me. On top of that, everything's going to keep going downhill. So it's only going to get worse. Who's going to listen to me, respect me, or love me if I stay looking like this or when it inevitably gets worse? As women, so much of our power and relevance comes from being attractive. We learn it as soon as we see the difference between getting an oil change and no makeup and sweats versus getting an oil change. When you're looking cute, you get better service. Men are more polite and kinder. So the thought of our look slowly fading away with age can be terrifying.

Anyways, I finally stepped inside the shower. It was so needed that it almost felt like therapy. I washed my hair, put in some deep conditioner, let it sit while I shaved my legs, exfoliated everything, rinsed the conditioner, and then just stood there, letting the water run over me. I took a deep breath. Wow, I needed this. Something as simple as a shower. A moment to myself for myself. I stepped out of the running water, feeling refreshed, but still chunky.

The hotel bathroom had an obscene amount of mirrors. I tried my best to avoid looking into them, but there I was, face to face with my naked body. In my shame, I tried to look away but, of course, there was a mirror or some kind of reflection anywhere I turned. So of course, as I dried myself off, I ended up making eye contact with myself. This time, a different voice spoke up and said, "Stop criticizing yourself. Beautiful flowers don't come from ugly trees." I know it sounds a little bit cheesy, but it hit me right in the feels. Then the voice said, "Stand tall and proud." So I did.

I stood taller in the mirror, completely naked. It said "Taller, like the confident woman that you are." So I stretched my arms straight up above my head. Suddenly, in my mind's eye, my feet had become roots planted firmly into the ground. My legs, my stomach, my back, my chest, and my neck all formed the trunk of a strong and powerful tree. My outstretched arms were now branches that extended all the way to my fingertips. I spread my fingers all the way out.

As I slowly lowered my arms, I imagined leaves and flowers all around me, like a tree covered in cherry blossoms. Each delicate flower represents something beautiful I've created in this world. One for each of the smiles I'd put on my clients' faces, the pride I'd put in my parents' eyes, the safe and loving home I'd created for Arzo, almost 100 episodes of a podcast focused on self-love and encouragement, the beautiful hairstyles, the makeups, the way that I've decorated my condo, how I show love to the people around me— every act of love, every beautiful thing I'd created resulted in a flower. And in my imagination, the flowers were all around me.

I was no longer focused on the little things I perceived as imperfections in my body. Now my focus was on all the beauty that surrounded me, what I'd created with my own hands, manifestations of the love and beauty that I had in my heart, and I stood even taller. If what I'm creating is love and beauty, then I must be lovable and beautiful too.

Strangely enough, as corny as it might have sounded, it worked. I took a deep breath. It was a powerful and wonderful reminder that I'm so much more than flesh on bones, so much more

than how photogenic I am. I represent so much more than fat on my knees. If anyone saw my leaves, the flowers, the beauty I've created, they'd think I was beautiful too.

I wrapped myself in a robe and took a seat on one of the beds. As I considered this shift in perspective, I suddenly thought of you. On the days when you're not feeling your best, the times when you're feeling neglected, when you don't have the time to show yourself the love that you need and deserve, I thought maybe I should tell my BLE bestie about the trees. Think about the love and light you bring into this world, whether it be as simple as the loving gesture of packing a lunch for your kids, the smiles you put on your friend's faces, the way you show love to the people around you, the care and attention you put into your work, the way you set the table at night, the thoughtful touches you put into the gifts that you give. Maybe, if you thought of all of these things, you'd show yourself some grace too.

Today, Arzo asked me what I was working on for this week's episode and I told her, "I'm talking about the days when we feel ugly." I happen to think she's one of the most beautiful humans I've ever seen, so I asked her, "Do you ever feel ugly?" She said, "Yes, whenever I haven't had a shower." So maybe there's power in that too. Try to remember that everyone - even the women you think are the most beautiful - have ugly days, days where they criticize themselves.

Scarlett Johansson said, "I don't walk around feeling sensual. I'm a girl. Aren't we all like that? When we wake up in the morning and go, 'Oh God, what changed as I slept?'"

Megan Fox has been quoted as saying, "I don't ever see myself the way other people see me. There's never been a point in my life where I loved my body. Never, ever."

Isn't that sad?

So in times when you're feeling ugly, stand tall, think of all the beauty you create, take a shower, and remember, just because you think something doesn't mean it's true. You've been wrong before. I mean, chances are you used to believe that having a tan was good for you, that tweezed eyebrows were goals, and layering tank tops was cute. One thing you're not going to do is go through life seeing beauty in everyone else but you.

I appreciate you pressing play today. I really needed to get this off my chest because I've got an award show to go to in two weeks and I can't be over here feeling gross. Oh, hell no. If you know someone who could use this little reminder or someone who could use a little BLE in their life, could you pretty please share this show with them? I hear. Every time you do, someone hearing that voice saying that they're ugly stands taller and says, "Fuck you." It's true.

Thanks again for listening. Until next week, please go be your most fabulous self and don't forget to spread that bad-ass Big Lash Energy everywhere you go. Thanks, Beautiful.

Goodbye.