Episode 195: Jessica left the hospital without her baby

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Having your first baby is exciting.

Your life is changing because you're gonna be bringing this new little human into your home and into your family. The whole dynamic will change. Your focus will change.

But having that first baby can also be a little scary. You've never done this before. You don't really know what to expect exactly. You might even wonder if you're doing it right.

Today you're going to hear from Jessica. She and Cody were looking forward to the birth of their first child, their little girl named Hayden. But things didn't happen as they expected.

Scott
You and your husband, Cody. Did you actually plan on having a baby?

Jessica
We did. As soon as Cody and I met, we pretty much agreed that we wanted 5-ish kids.

Scott
And what does 5-ish mean? Four or six or?

Jessica
I don't know. My husband always would say the ish at the end. I think it was more of a, "Let's have one and see what we can do after that."

Scott
And you talked about trying right away, but you were discouraged from doing that. Can you talk about that? What happened then?

Jessica
We actually did not have a standard run-of-the-mill wedding. We eloped and got married in Mexico. I've always been the type of person that likes to prepare before I do something, so I had an appointment with my gynecologist and she warned me about the Zika virus and the possibility of it causing any issues in pregnancy and mentioned that we should probably wait at least six months before trying after getting back from Mexico.

Scott
Okay. And that's something that I assume is predominantly in Mexico. I was not familiar with the Zika virus.

Jessica
I think so. I'm not entirely sure, to be honest with you. I know that it is in Mexico, but I'm not sure if it's anywhere else really.

Scott
Okay. So your OB told you to wait six months after traveling.

Jessica
Yup.

Scott
Okay. So then it was open season after that?

Jessica
Yeah. We waited the long, hard six months. Felt like an eternity.

Scott
Once you started trying, how quick was it?

Jessica
We actually got pregnant the first month. We got very lucky. Just a few weeks after trying and tracking, we got a positive pregnancy test. I am so impatient. I have always said that I am the type of person that likes to try and peek at my Christmas presents before Christmas. So I was like, “Heck!” I mean, I know people have gotten positive pregnancy tests before their missed period, so I decided to start testing five days before and lo and behold, it was the faintest little tiny positive I think I've ever seen. It was barely there.

Scott
You really wanted to see that line, right?

Jessica
I really needed to see the line. I needed to see it, yeah.

Scott
Was that good enough for you? Did you take another?

Jessica
I took 500 more (Giggled). I think I took a couple at home - just the couple that we had - and it was right before work. So on the way to work, I actually was panicking and stopped at a Rite Aid and got more pregnancy tests. I took more in the bathroom at work and those ones were much more positive than the first ones. Then, I just continued to take them until my period was gone, until my period was missed.

Scott
When you're at work, at that point, you were fairly confident that you were actually pregnant. How do you keep a straight face all day and not tell anyone?

Jessica
I couldn't. I actually worked with my best friend at the time and I had to tell her right away. There was no way I could keep that in. I probably would have exploded if I kept it in at some point.

Scott
I think people were probably saying, “Jessica's in a good mood today. I wonder what's going on.”

Jessica

Yeah. I worked with the public, so I'm sure my regular customers probably knew something was happening.

Scott
How did you tell Cody?

Jessica
I decided I actually was able to wait all day. I somehow managed to wait that full eight hours of work. On the way home, I stopped at Ross and I got just a little basic onesie and I put the pregnancy tests and a onesie in a box. When I got home, I gave it to him. He opened it up and I don't think he was actually surprised. He probably knew that something was going on because I think I ignored him most of the day because I didn't want to tell him over text.

Scott
Yeah. That's not a text message announcement.

Jessica
No, it's not. It's not.

Scott
What were you thinking? You had all kinds of planning to do. You've already said you're a planner. What did you start working on?

Jessica
First thing I did was make an appointment. I think I called my OB/GYN the next day and she got me in for some blood tests and got me in for my first appointment, which was, It was like eight weeks away, so I just waited in denial that it was actually happening until my appointment.

They did the blood draw, and once I got the confirmation with the blood draws that I was pregnant and that it was, my HCG was increasing, then I was like, “Okay, let's get this party started.”

Scott
It's really happening.

Jessica
Yeah. It's real. It's not a dream.

Scott
Did you start researching things like breastfeeding and we got to get a car seat and all this other stuff?

Jessica
I think I had already done that ahead of time already, but no. I think the only thing I really truly researched while I was waiting other than just looking at names and dreaming of nurseries was what doctor I was going to see because my gynecologist actually had just stepped away from delivering babies. So, I had to do some research on what I was going to do about that and if I was going to go, like, the OB route or if I was going to do a midwife, what kind of birth I wanted, that kind of stuff.

Scott

Did you tell family?

Jessica
I can't remember exactly when we told family. I think I called my mom at some point that week and told her. I know I told my sister-in-law fairly early because I'm very close with her, but we told family within a couple of weeks of getting the blood results and the confirmation that I was pregnant.

Scott
And for your mom, you had to do that by phone because she doesn't live local to you.

Jessica
Correct, yeah. It was hard. I did FaceTime her so I could at least see the face of excitement but most people were told by phone because we don't have much family in town. Before I even had my ultrasound, morning sickness set in and it wasn't even just morning sickness, it was all day, 24/7. I couldn't keep anything down. It felt like I had the stomach flu for the first half of the pregnancy, really. I mean, I had ended up in the hospital a couple of times for fluids and anti-nausea medicine and stuff. Once I got past the morning sickness, things felt great. I felt good. I had my energy back. I started feeling kicks. We landed on a name. Then, it started to get real. We started to look for a bigger place to live. Everything was going really good.

Scott
One thing that you said in what you sent me, you said, “I was sick, but I was so happy.”

Jessica
I mean, I was sick and miserable, but the excitement and the happiness of finally getting to create a little tiny human with my husband was kind of overriding that. It was my motivation to keep going and deal with the morning sickness, and not that I had any control over the morning sickness. The happiness was just unreal. We were so excited to be parents.

Scott
The payoff is big.

Jessica
Yeah.

Scott
You had mentioned that you were told by someone that a rough pregnancy meant a healthy baby.

Jessica
Yeah, everybody always used– I mean, there were so many people that would tell me nausea means a healthy baby, sickness means that baby is growing really good and strong.

Scott
Is there any science behind that?

Jessica
I don't think so. I think it could be an old wives tale but I think it's truly just people trying to make you feel better. I mean, I was so sick that I didn't have any color in my face for the first four months of the pregnancy.

Scott
So, you had the 12 week scan. How did that look?

Jessica
The 12 week scan went really good. They did some testing to make sure the baby is healthy, make sure there's no signs of Down syndrome or any kind of genetic issues and it went great. The baby looked healthy. We wanted to find out the gender but they couldn't tell us quite yet but, yeah, all of our ultrasounds always looked really great.

Scott
And then 18 weeks, you wanted to know if it was a boy or a girl. You said you went to a private company for this. Why a private company?

Jessica
Mostly because we couldn't wait any longer. I think we wanted to make it a little bit more special than just going to the doctor, essentially. Here in Oregon, they no longer do private ultrasounds outside of doctors offices, so we had to drive up to Washington and we went to this really cute little private ultrasound place. I mean, it's all decorated, all cute, and you get a little gift basket when they tell you the gender and they do 3D ultrasounds and stuff and it was exciting. We made a big day out of it.

Scott
Yeah, all that extra stuff. They want to make sure you feel like you're getting what you're paying. Yeah.

Jessica
Yeah, exactly. Yeah, because it's not cheap. I think it was close to 200.

Scott
Just to find out boy or girl.

Jessica
Yeah, but they make it special. I mean, they do give you a little USB thing that has, like, videos of the baby moving around and they kind of show you all over and let you watch the baby more. The doctor's office ultrasounds are like, “Okay, this is the length of the legs. This is the length of the arms.” Kind of more medical.

Scott
Yeah, more clinical. You wanted that excitement.

Jessica
I wanted the excitement.

Scott
But you took that flash drive home and watched it many times.

Jessica
Oh, yeah. I held it close to my heart, that's for sure.

Scott

So what was the plan to tell family?

Jessica
What we did was, after we had found out what we were having, we went shopping. Since it was close to the holidays, I had the idea of doing it in a little box and putting either pink or boy stuff in it. Since family was coming to town, it just felt perfect. So we got little socks that were the correct color and gave it to two of the most important people in our lives and had them open it, and we were surprised. They had no idea that they were going to find out the gender. We had lied to them and told them that we weren't going to find out for another few weeks, which was really hard to keep a secret.

Scott
And who were those people?

Jessica
My mom and then my mother-in-law. So, first thing was the 20-week ultrasound, which is always very scary. They call it the anatomy ultrasound because you find out the gender, but they go through and measure everything. I mean, they look at everything from the baby, the size, your fluid levels, the size of your belly. They do all kinds of testing and do a bunch of blood work. Everything looked great. The pregnancy was going really good. Then, I started to get some swelling right around the 26-27 weeks mark and kind of started to not feel very good, but the doctor and everybody was like, “Well, it's pregnancy. You're getting almost to the third trimester. That's when it kind of sets in and your body's tired.”

Then, I went to my 28-week appointment and that actually was not with my midwife. It was with an on-call doctor because my midwife was gone and I had some high blood pressure, but my blood results and everything else looked really normal and fine. They were a little bit concerned about preeclampsia because of the swelling and my high blood pressure, but she told me, “Talk to your midwife about it at your 30-week appointment and come up with a plan.”

Scott
And you had also found out that you had an anterior placenta. Is that common? Can you describe that?

Jessica
We actually found out a couple different things about the placenta, but they weren't concerned. We found out it was an anterior placenta, which is very common. All it means is that, instead of the placenta being essentially in the back of your stomach, it's in the front. Really, mostly, the only thing that it really does is it just cushions the movement, so you don't feel movements as often. You don't feel kicks. They're not as strong.

Scott
Were you feeling kicks and movement as well though?

Jessica
I was, yeah. She wasn't a very active baby though, but my doctor was never concerned because of the anterior placenta and because I was a first-time mom, I didn't really know what to feel for. I mean, she moved but it was nothing compared to what I thought it would've been. The other thing they found out with the placenta was we also had a Circumvallate placenta, which was part of the placenta was folding in on itself, but it was such a small piece that they weren't concerned it was gonna cause any issues. I was followed by a high-risk doctor for two of

my ultrasounds, and they read the rest of my ultrasounds, but it was never really a big concern for them for some reason.

Scott
The fact that they weren't concerned, did that kind of mean you weren't really concerned or how worried were you about these things?

Jessica
Google was my friend and my enemy at the same time. At one point, I remember Googling Circumvallate placenta and preeclampsia after my 28-week appointment, and it told me the chances of having a placental abruption or something happening to the baby was, like, 1% or less than 2%. I think the mix between that and the doctors made me feel better. I think just being a naive first-time mom thinking, “Okay, I'm in the third trimester. That means everything's perfect. The baby will be great. We're almost there.”

Scott
Yeah. Even if you deliver early, there's still a good chance.

Jessica
Yeah. My worst-case scenario was NICU time.

Scott
Okay. Your 30-week appointment– you'd already found a new home and you were creating the baby's room and all that stuff, right?

Jessica
Yeah, we hadn't moved yet, but we found the perfect new home. We were going to move. We finally got to moving day. I was really swollen and I did not feel good. I was just tired. Everything hurts. I had a headache, but I thought it was just because I was 30-weeks and I was moving. I had spent the last four or five days packing up our entire house a lot by myself because Cody worked so many hours. That's really all I thought it was. I thought the swelling was just because I was on my feet all day long.

Scott
And you wanted to talk to the doctor about preeclampsia.

Jessica
Yeah, that was the plan. In fact, I had actually sent her a message via the doctor’s MyChart thing and told her that I wanted to talk about that and see about getting extra testing done and just make sure everything's okay. We were only two days into our new house and I woke up in the middle of the night - it was probably midnight, 1 AM - in the most pain I think I've ever experienced in my entire life. I thought I was in labor. I thought I was having contractions, but I didn't know what contractions felt like, so I didn't know what to do. So I had gone into the living room so that I wouldn't wake Cody up because he's a truck driver, so he needs his sleep. I am in the living room. I took some Tylenol because it's the only pain medication you can take when you're pregnant. I'm bouncing on my yoga ball. I decided to try and take a warm shower. I kept feeling like I needed to poop.

My stomach hurt so bad and I had so much pain in my lower back, so I decided to call the doctor - it's an OB office, so they have doctors on call 2/7 - and they told me that it sounded like kidney stones, which I guess is really common in pregnancy. So, they told me, “Take this much

Tylenol. Drink a bunch of water. Take a warm bath. You can use a heating pad on your back to help with the kidney stones. Your appointment is in the morning. Let's get you to your appointment." So, I did that. I took her advice. I took some more Tylenol. I woke Cody up because I was just in so much pain that, at that point, I didn't want to be alone. I was very scared. I didn't think anything was wrong with the baby, but It was still scary because it was unknown what was going on. So I woke Cody up and he decided to go to the store and he came home with a Twinkie for me. I don't know why I remember that one single detail.

Scott
Well, there wasn't much he could do. He just wanted to do something, right?

Jessica
I know he just wanted to make me feel better, and he's like, "She's eating sugar this whole pregnancy. Let's get her some Twinkies." We kind of hung out. I did my best. I kept taking hot showers. At this point, I wasn't feeling her move. I thought it was because I was in so much pain that I was focused on that. Then, it got to the point where it was so painful that, probably an hour or two later, I called the doctor again and I said, "I think something's wrong. I don't think this is kidney stones. I think I need to come in." So she said, "Okay, make your way to the hospital. Go up into labor and delivery and we'll make sure everything's okay." Cody drove me to the hospital. Yep. It was about 3 AM.

Scott
So they were expecting you.

Jessica
Yeah. When we showed up to the hospital, because it was the middle of the night, we had to go through emergency. Of course, the emergency department doesn't know that I'm coming in. It's just labor and delivery that knows that I'm coming in. And because I was so big with Hayden, I think they all thought I was full term and I was in labor, so they got me a wheelchair and wheeled me up to labor and delivery and took us into the triage room, got my blood pressure, did all the normal stuff, how far along are you, what are your symptoms, all that kind of information. Just general things.

Scott
Your blood pressure and vital signs, were they normal at that point?

Jessica
They were not. I had a very high heart rate - I imagine because of the pain I was in - and my blood pressure was very high. I don't remember exactly what it was, but it was very high, especially for me. I've always naturally had low blood pressure, so it was very much not normal.

Scott
I assume they hooked up a monitor to check the baby.

Jessica
After all of just the general information, they hook up two monitors to your belly when you go into triage as a pregnant woman. The first one is to monitor your contractions or to see if you're contracting, and the second one is for the baby's heart rate. They hooked up the first one for the contractions and they did see that I was having contractions - very regular contractions. So, at that point, I was like, okay, "I'm in labor. She's going to the NICU."

Scott
Were you surprised to find that you were having contractions when you didn't realize you were just by your own feelings?

Jessica
Yes and no. I think I was surprised more because I thought contractions would go away. I thought it was more of a come and go - like you'd have a contraction for a couple minutes and then it would go away for five minutes - whereas the pain I was experiencing did not go away. Nothing was making it ease up.

They couldn't find her heart rate. The nurse or the medical assistant, now that I look back on it, she was frantically trying to find her heart rate with the little monitor and she kept explaining to me, “Maybe she's in a weird position. Maybe it's because of the anterior placenta. So I'm going to get the doctor, the hospitalist to come in and just do a quick bedside ultrasound so we can find out what position she's in and where we can find her heart rate.” Waiting for that hospitalist to come in was the longest. It was probably only five minutes, but it felt like the longest time of my life.

Scott
You had to have so many confusing thoughts in your head then.

Jessica
Yeah, and it's crazy because the one thought that was not going through my mind was that she was dead. Never in my wildest dreams did I think that could happen. (Sniffle) So sorry.

Scott
No, you just want to keep thinking the best, right? It's going to be okay.

Jessica
Yeah. I'm a first time mom. I'm so close to the finish line. There's nothing going on. I have my appointment this morning at 9 o'clock. I'm going to make it to that doctor's appointment. She comes in. The hospitalist was so rude. I remember her walking in and I was just thinking she was so rude and didn't have any bedside manner. She sat down and didn't show us the ultrasound screen and I really truly think that they already knew before she did the ultrasound. We heard those words, “I'm sorry, there's no heartbeat.” And that's kind of when it all started.

Scott
How do you even respond to that?

Jessica
I don't think I did. Cody immediately was a mess, crying, yelling, holding my hand and hugging me, and I just laid there. I don't think I even cried for the first five hours that we were at the hospital because I could not wrap my mind around the fact that she's dead before we even get to meet her. I don't even know if it was truly even denial. I think I was so shocked. I couldn't process it truly. I could not process it for a long time. I don't think it really hit me until she was actually born that she was dead and she was not coming back.

Scott
How did the medical staff handle this once you had gotten that news?

Jessica

We didn't see that hospitalist again. We ended up seeing the on-call doctor that was from my doctor's office. She came in and she was very, I don't want to say cold, but it was very medical for her, very disconnected, which I do understand. I'm sure that, in order to keep her sanity, she has to disconnect from it. She just kept calling our daughter a fetal demise rather than calling her by her name. But the nurses and the medical assistants that we had were wonderful. I could not have asked for better nurses and more caring people to take care of us.

Scott
So once you got that news, did they let you have some time on your own? What's the process?

Jessica
After that, the first thing they needed to do was get an actual ultrasound tech up to the triage room to do a full ultrasound. They needed to make sure that there was nothing wrong with me that was going to cause any kind of emergency C-section or anything like that. So, we did have to wait a while for the ultrasound tech. So, we did have some time together, just us in the room. We called our moms. I called my boss to let him know that I would not be returning because I was in management. I was a lead, essentially, so I needed to let him know right away.

Scott
How much do you tell your employer about what's happening? Just that you're not coming in? You don't want to tell that whole story on the phone, right?

Jessica
It was very brief. By that time, it was probably, I want to say 5-6 o'clock in the morning, so I knew that he was going to be awake. I was actually very close with my manager. I had worked for him for 6 years at this point. So, I just called him and told him, “She died. I'm going to have to be induced or give birth somehow. I'm not going to be making it in, but I will keep you updated.” That was really the gist of it. I asked him to let the coworkers know because I didn't want to have to tell everybody myself.

Scott
To me, it seems like it would have been so difficult. I mean, you just got this information and now you're having to relay that information when you still can hardly believe it's true yourself.

Jessica
Yeah, that was. I think I was still so in shock at this point that even just saying the words or hearing them come out of my mouth or, like, hearing Cody call his mom and sob on the phone saying she's dead, yeah. I still could not wrap my mind around it. There's no way babies don't die, right? Babies don't die.

Scott
That happens to other people.

Jessica
Yeah.

Scott
Were you still in pain?

Jessica

I was. I was still in a lot of pain, but I think the shock of her dying was kind of taking me away from it. They finally did come in and give me some strong pain medication after they did actual ultrasound. They essentially had to find out what was going on and make sure that she was actually dead before they could decide what kind of medication they were going to give me.

Scott
When did you get an answer about what had actually happened?

Jessica
They kind of gave us a little bit of a brief like, “We think it's an abruption, we aren't sure” in the triage room where they did the ultrasound. But once we actually got into the labor and delivery room where I would be staying for the hospital stay, after they did blood work and everything, that was when we got more of an answer of, “You have preeclampsia. It's very severe. You're very sick. You had a placental abruption. This is what a placental abruption is, and this is what we're gonna do.” So it was a while. It was probably seven or eight hours into the actual hospital stay before we got any kind of really real true answer as to what was happening.

Scott
I did a little bit of research on this condition and what I read is that preeclampsia is a common cause of hypertension, which makes sense because you had high blood pressure. The arteries in the uterus that supply blood to the placenta are diseased and those arteries can become fibrous and narrow, which means reduced blood to the placenta and the vascular structures that connect the uterine lining to the placenta tear away. So that's an abruption and the placenta tears away from the uterine wall. How much did you know about what a placental abruption is?

Jessica
I didn't really know much of anything about it. The only thing I knew was that little piece that I had Googled that said there was, like, a 1% chance of it happening. That was really truly all I knew. I didn't really even know what it was. I knew what the placenta was and I know what abruption is, but I really truly did not know anything else than that.

Scott
When did you find out what is going to happen next?

Jessica
The nurses and the on-call doctor kind of explained to us what was going to happen. I remember asking, “Do I have to give birth? What happens after this?” I couldn't wrap my mind around giving birth to a dead baby. I didn't know. I was like, “Can you just go put me in surgery and just cut her out?” They did explain that you will have to deliver one way or another, either vaginally or by C-section. They were going to give me more pain medication because I was in so much pain. It turns out the pain that I was experiencing was from the abruption. They gave me the option for an epidural. They were going to do blood work because it was preeclampsia and I was so sick. They had to put me on magnesium, basically, to keep me from having seizures.

Scott
Did you opt for the epidural?

Jessica: I did. I asked for an epidural right away. I remember thinking, if I'm going through this mental pain, there's no way possible I can physically deal with this pain. I probably would have had more of a mental breakdown if I didn't get an epidural.

Scott
So how long did that take?

Jessica: I mean, it felt like an eternity but, in reality, they did it fairly quickly because I was in so much pain and just because of everything going on. There were a lot of people in and out of the room. God, I had three IVs in my arms to draw blood for emergencies just in case I needed to go under in general anesthesia for if there's an emergency C-section that's needed. They did the epidural almost right away, which brought me so much relief. But then after getting the relief, I sat there and thought, “I think I deserve the pain. I did something wrong.”

Scott
Let's explore that for a minute. What would cause you to think that you made a mistake?

Jessica
Because I remember thinking back about, like, over all the ultrasounds and the blood work, everything was fine. Was it my fault because I did too much while we were moving? Was it my fault because I was working too hard and I didn't ever stop to sit down? Was it my fault for not realizing that she had stopped moving? I thought maybe if I knew something was wrong, if I had known that she was not moving, maybe I could have tried to save her somehow when, in reality, that's not the case.

Scott
I know people are listening to this right now - people who have given birth - and they're saying, “Jessica, you're a first time mom. You weren't supposed to know any of this. This couldn't have been your fault.” And you know that now.

Jessica
I struggle with that. I still struggle with it. Even years later and many therapy appointments later, I still struggle with the guilt and it's probably something I will deal with for the rest of my life even though I do understand that there's very unlikely that there was anything I could have done. It's not my fault that my body decided to get preeclampsia essentially.

Scott
So you guys, at this point, are just waiting.

Jessica
Yeah.

Scott
What do you do during all that time?

Jessica
We waited for the doctor. My mom was on her way to town. She caught the first bus to Portland to come there, to be there for me. My mother-in-law got there. Basically, we were waiting for the doctor to come in and break my water. We knew that I would have to initiate labor more than what my body was already doing. My body knew that something was wrong, so I was already a couple centimeters dilated. My midwife came in and broke my water and she told me that if my water is bloody, we have to do a C-section immediately. If my water is clear, I can labor naturally and deliver vaginally. So she broke my water and thank God it was clear. That meant that I was not having any internal bleeding and that, although I was sick, I was safe for the time

being from having to get any blood transfusions or any surgery. So they started the Pitocin. They did a Foley bulb to help with the dilation and we sat around.

A lot of crying. Cody sat by my side and didn't leave. He was my rock through the whole thing, just trying to bring up happy thoughts and talk about her and what she would have been like. I remember at one point while we were waiting, I asked the doctor, “Is she going to be cold when she comes out? Can I hold her?” There was just so much crying. Every time I tried to get some sleep, I would wake up with nightmares. There were a couple of times where I guess I was talking in my sleep and whining and crying in my sleep. It was the longest - I don't know how long. I was in labor for eight or nine hours. It's just the longest day of my life.

The doctor, the midwife had explained that I'll know when it's time when I feel a lot of pressure, but I think I had pressed the button on the epidural so many times that I didn't feel a single thing until she was, like, essentially almost out. So we pressed the button around 9.30 or so. Doctor came in and she's like, “Yeah, she's already–” Because she was so small, her head was already partially trying to come out on its own. So they got us set up and they walked me through pushing. I think I only pushed one or two times before she came out because, again, she was so small because I was only almost 31 weeks and she was born at 9.59 PM on February 13th.

Scott
What were your first thoughts when you saw her?

Jessica
Please start crying. (Sniffle) I don't think it really set in that it was real that she was dead until she was born and they put her on my chest and I was just like, “Please cry. Please make a noise.” She was so cute and so small and she had the cutest little nose. I remember just sitting there in shock that it was her. I don't want to say it was weird, but it was weird that she was born. I think I was just in denial that whole time that I was in labor.

Scott
And this is supposed to be the happiest moment of your life. Did you notice any resemblance of Hayden between you and Cody?

Jessica
She looked exactly like Cody. My first thought was, “Oh my God, she's got Cody's flat feet and his legs. She had my button nose, my little tiny nose, and the rest of her was Cody.”

Scott
You're holding her. I would think you guys would just sit and stare at her.

Jessica
Yeah. And that's really what we did. I think the only sound in the whole room was the nurses taking pictures for us - just the click of the buttons of the photos and the videos that they were taking for us. Lots of crying. I held her for a little bit and then Cody held her while they got the placenta out. Then, my mom held her because Cody and my mom were in the room while I delivered her, which I was very thankful for. I could not have done it without them. It's so hard to see your partner walk around with your dead baby. He was rocking her in the rocking chair. He was talking to her like she was alive. I just kept thinking he would have been the best dad in the world and I just felt so bad.

Scott

Everything seems like it's almost a normal new birth except for the silence.

Jessica
Yeah, that's exactly what it is. It's a normal, standard, vaginal birth. There's just no crying when the baby's born. You still go through all the same stuff that any other mom does, whether the baby's dead or alive.

Scott
nurses get trained for medical stuff primarily, but it seems like, in your case, they were there almost as much for emotional support as anything else. Did you notice that?

Jessica
Oh, yeah. We had one nurse in the room with us. I mean, most of the time that I was in the hospital, she was there in the room with us just giving support, doing everything she could. She was taking pictures. She was making sure that I was doing everything I could, getting ice water all the time, making sure I was comfortable. She was providing support and ways of looking up funeral homes and looking up all that kind of stuff that I couldn't even process that we had to do. I wish I remembered her name. I think her name was Stephanie, but I could be wrong. Although I feel like there was some medical negligence with my midwife and things were overlooked, my midwife was also very emotionally supportive during the time. I don't think she left the hospital at all while we were there, which is amazing because I was in the hospital for almost a full week.

Scott
So eventually they took Hayden and you stayed in the hospital because you were still pretty sick.

Jessica
Yes, they actually do not allow Hayden or any other baby that has died to leave the hospital until the mother is discharged. So she was taken to the morgue and they kept her there. We were allowed to see her whenever we wanted. They'd bring her back up as we wanted, mostly because they didn't have a cuddle cot or anything to preserve her body. So I was there for five and a half days because I was so sick with preeclampsia and I couldn't get my blood pressure controlled.

Scott
Can you talk about when you left the hospital and that drive home?

Jessica
By far, one of the hardest days of my life. When you're in the hospital, there's a company of volunteers called “Now I Lay Me Down to Sleep”, something along those lines, that takes photos. They take casts of the hands and the feet of the baby, and the hospital provides a box. You get a snippet of their hair. There's a little quote in there. There's a matching necklace and bracelet for the baby and the mom. So I was wheeled out of the hospital with a box of my baby's stuff rather than my actual baby. The drive home felt like it was 5 hours long. It was completely quiet other than just the crying. I have never felt so empty in my entire life. I mean, I've had a baby growing in my belly for the last 6-7 months and now I don't get to take her home. Now I have to go home and face the reality of “I have to go to the funeral home the next day to go plan my baby's funeral” and “Where she's going to be buried or if she's going to be cremated”. Very, unfair.

Scott

You've had some more babies since then. That's the happy part of the story, right?

Jessica
Yes.

Scott
Tell us about your other kids.

Jessica
We have two other kids. Lucas was born almost exactly two years after Hayden was born. He is now three and a half and such a three year old. It's not even funny.

Scott
In what ways?

Jessica
Oh gosh, he's wild. He is such a great kid, but he is a wild boy. Then, we have Ayla who was born almost exactly two years after Lucas. She's one and a half now and she's definitely the baby of the family, but she resembles Hayden so much.

Scott
It's been five years. When you think about Hayden now, what are your thoughts?

Jessica
That's probably one of the hardest parts about Hayden being dead. All I can think about is what her personality would have been like. I feel like she would have been so sassy like Ayla - what she would have looked like, she'd be in school. When I was pregnant with Hayden, I was actually pregnant with a coworker. She was due just a month or so after me. So seeing her son grow up and be almost the exact same age as what Hayden would be is hard, but it's also very comforting in a way to see him grow up and what he's doing with his little life.

Scott
When you meet someone and they ask you, “How many kids do you have? Do you struggle with that answer? How do you handle that?”

Jessica
Every single time, I have struggled with that for the last five years, and I think every lost parent struggles with that. It really depends on the situation and the person - how I answer it and how I go about it. Sometimes I say two, sometimes I say three, and I leave it at that. Sometimes I say two on earth, one in heaven. It really just depends.

Scott
Yeah, it's not necessarily a story you want to tell every time, especially just to someone casually.

Jessica
Yeah, there's been times where I've had conversations with people where I have felt mentally and emotionally strong enough that day if somebody mentions something to me or asks, majority of the time, I just say 2. Sometimes, it's just too hard to have that conversation in passing.

Scott
You've mentioned if anyone wants to contact you, the best way is on Instagram.

Jessica
Yes.

Scott
Where they can also see pictures of your kids, including Hayden–

Jessica
I share a lot about Hayden on there.

Scott
And we'll have a link to that in the episode notes. What's your message to someone listening who might be pregnant for the first time?

Jessica
Educate yourself. For some reason, providers don't seem to be talking about preeclampsia and how serious it can be. If you have high blood pressure or you're having abnormal swelling, or you feel like something is just off, don't let your doctor just pass it off as nothing. Talk about it. You can push for things. You're the one that's hiring your doctor. They're not hiring you. Do your baby kick counts every night. The first part of an indication of something being wrong is slower and less movements.

Scott
What does that look like? I had not heard the phrase kick counts before. How do you measure that?

Jessica
Most doctors do talk to pregnant patients about it but I also think there's a lot of doctors that say that they're not needed if it's a healthy pregnancy. Essentially what you do is you want to lay down in a quiet room by yourself at the same time every day and track your baby's movements within a certain time period. So I would do 10 minutes with my other kids, with Lucas and Ayla. I would do it every single night, 7 PM, 10 minutes. Every single kick or movement, you track it. There are so many apps for it. All of the pregnancy apps have a kick counter. There are actual apps that are just specifically for kick counts. Your babies have a routine. Babies have routines in the womb and out of the womb. If it's out of routine, call. Don't be scared if something feels wrong. Just call. That's what they're there for.

Scott
Be your own advocate.

Jessica
Yeah.

Scott
Jessica, thanks for sharing your story.

Jessica
Thanks for having me here. I hope I can touch even one person's life, especially those new moms.

Scott
If you want to contact Jessica, the best way is through her Instagram. There's a link to that, as well as pictures of Jessica and Cody and their kids, in the episode notes at WhatWasThatLike.com/195.

Also, Jessica is in the Facebook group. Obviously I don't require the guests on the podcast to join that group, but a lot of them are there. So if you have a question you want to ask, maybe one that I didn't think of during our conversation, you can ask them directly right there. And of course we talk about a LOT of other things in that group. When you're part of a group of over 8000 people, it's no surprise that we have some pretty amazing discussions. So come on over and join us at WhatWasThatLike.com/facebook.

A listener named Shelley heard the last episode, titled Chris Survived a Home Invasion, and in particular she was intrigued by the Listener Story at the end of that episode.

Shelley
Hi Scott. My name is Shelley. I'm just sending this in as a comment after hearing episode 194. This is regarding the listener story. I didn't hear the lady's name - I don't think it was said, but it was about the mystery of what was happening to her chair at work. I found this extremely disturbing. I was very saddened at the end that she didn't have more support, especially from other women who kind of trivialize what she went through instead of supporting her. Instead, they chose to put their jealousies forward. I thought that was very odd and sad.

But I'm actually, just leaving this message because when the story started and I heard her say that there was something on her chair when she got there at work in the morning, my ears perked up because, about a month ago, this happened to me where I got to work and there was something on my chair and I didn't know what it was. I did the same thing. I put a barrier between myself and the chair. I figured and I still do think that it was probably the cleaning staff who maybe spilled something on my chair, but I left a note on my desk cause I was disturbed and I just said, "Please advise what was spilled on my chair." When I got there the next day, the note was gone and the stain on my chair was cleaned. I couldn't see any outline of it any longer. But it disturbed me that there was no answer to my question. Thank you for cleaning it, but I really wanted to know what was on there. Same thing. There was no order or anything but I'm just really hoping it only happened to me the one time and I'm just hoping that my story doesn't end up any more similar to that lady's story. Anyways, my heart goes out to her and thank you so much for all the wonderful podcasts, Scott. Thanks.

Scott
I also wanted to give you an update because of the recent weather situation here in Florida. I live in the Tampa Bay area. A couple of weeks ago, we saw that Hurricane Milton was coming across the Gulf of Mexico, and it looked like it was going to be a direct hit right here where we are. And that's actually pretty rare – the last one was in 1921. But this one was coming right at us.

I had a trip planned to New York City that week, but my flight got cancelled because the Tampa airport closed because of the hurricane. So we decided to leave this area. The concern was not just for flooding, but also for the damage that comes with high winds. Our travel group would include my wife and I and our two Yorkies, Lille and Fenway. And we would be joined by our son David, and his large dog Maple. Maple is a mix that kind of looks like a pit bull and she has a heart of gold.

So we were 3 adults and 3 dogs all in one car, and we were headed to a hotel in Jacksonville that is pet friendly. This is normally about a 4 hour drive. But all of the roads heading north out of Florida were moving at a crawl because everyone had the same idea – to get out. We knew of people who had already started traveling this direction and it was taking like twice as long as usual. So we made a plan to leave around midnight, figuring there would be less traffic because most people will want to travel during the day. And that plan worked like a charm. Had almost no traffic at all.

So we stayed in this hotel from Tuesday that week. The hurricane came ashore just slightly south of Tampa on Wednesday night into Thursday morning. We checked out and drove back home Friday, not really knowing what we would find. Fortunately for us, we had no damage and no flooding. Our electricity even came back on before we got home. The biggest inconvenience was that we were without internet for about a week.

Others nearby were not as lucky. Many cases of trees falling on houses, and there was one local apartment complex that flooded – this meant that about 500 people lost their homes and even their cars.

I had a lot of listeners reach out to see how we came through the storm and I appreciate that. Hurricanes are just part of summertime in Florida. Although more recently, there seem to be more of them.

Graphics for this episode were created by Bob Bretz. Full episode transcription was created by James Lai.
And here we are again – about to hear this week's Listener Story. If you have a story you can share in 5-10 minutes, find a quiet place and record it on your phone, and email it to Scott@WhatWasThatLike.com. We really do want to hear your story!

This week's story is from Lillian, who had a scary situation at work.

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

(Listener Story)

Back in 2019, I was on a London ferry and I took a certified nursing assistant course at a local career center where I first stayed, as well as infant and adult CPR. I didn't continue down that career path but it still stuck with me. I had a few jobs at the high school and I currently work at the housekeeping department at our local hotel. I'm a lobby attendant and I'm the only person in the housekeeping department at night. I take care of the public areas as well as the public restrooms. On December 27th, 2022, at 2.30 PM, I got a call from the front desk asking me to check on Rusty, our head of maintenance. His wife was talking to him on the phone and he suddenly stopped talking. Worried, her granddaughter convinced her to call the hotel and have him checked on.

He answered back over the radio that I could head down and check on him. I then walked down to the maintenance department. I walked into the room. It's a larger room with a smaller room inside, and that smaller room is Rusty's office. I called his name as I walked in and I got an answer. I walked in further and I found him slumped over his desk, blue and not breathing. I ran

down to the front desk and had the front desk attendant call 911. Then, I ran back. In hindsight, I should've used my radio to call but, in a panic, I ran instead.

I lifted him up and I got him onto the ground. Then, I called the front desk to send me somebody else who knew CPR just in case I had to stop. Then, I started. I don't know if anybody listening has ever performed CPR, but it's horrific. It's graphic. The noises that come from a person's chest as you're pressing your body weight on their rib cage is terrible, but I did it and I continue to do it. The paramedics walked in and they talked to me as I was doing CPR. Then, as they were, when they finished getting their stuff ready, I stopped CPR. They pulled him from the room into the larger room to work on him. I stood up in shock and I just watched as the paramedics started administering drugs and continuing CPR.

Then, I heard screaming and it snapped me out of it. It was his granddaughter who I found out later I knew personally from high school. She was coming in and out of the room, screaming and crying. They wanted to shut the door so they could work on him in peace. So, I picked up his belongings and I left their room, and they shut the door behind me.

I made my way down to the laundry where I had a bit of a breakdown. I was coming down from the adrenaline and I was shaking uncontrollably. So, I called my sister and she talked me through it. Then, I had to go about the rest of my night as normal. I worked till 11 o'clock that night, so I still had a couple of hours left. I took his stuff to security, filled out an incident report, and finished my shift.

The next morning, I was awoken by a call from his daughter who got my number from our boss. She called me and thanked me. Sorry if I get a little emotional. She called me and thanked me and let me know that I broke his sternum, that the doctors said I did amazing CPR and that, without me, he wouldn't have made it. I think about that a lot - how he could have just passed alone. I did get to meet his wife. We had a little get-together. The news was there. Friends and family and coworkers all gathered at the hotel to listen to the story. That's where I met his daughter in person and his wife and his son. I met his son and realized I knew him. I served him previously at my old job.

They set it up for me. They got the community to donate things to me as a thank you, but I would have been happy with just their personal thank yous. I do think everybody should know CPR. Everybody should know how to spot the signs of a heart attack or a stroke. Everybody should know the Heimlich maneuver. Everybody should be teaching their children that these classes are inexpensive and the Good Samaritan laws exist for a reason. Yeah, I broke a bone. I broke the bones in his chest, but he's still alive and he's thankful he's still alive, and I'm thankful he's still alive.

I got to save a father, a brother, a husband, a grandfather. I got to save him. I had the privilege of using my skills to bring this man back to life, and I'm thankful for it every day. I see him all the time at work. He thanks me all the time. Every time somebody new starts in the maintenance department, he always introduces me as the girl who saved his life. We make lots of jokes about me being his guardian angel. You can be like me. You don't have to be this huge, selfless person to save somebody. I barely even remembered how to do CPR - I learned it three years earlier - but I saw him on the floor, laying there, and it just clicked for me. Everything came rushing back and it's great. I'm happy he's still here. I'm gonna include the news clip from our little gathering just so you can see Rusty and his beautiful family, and thanks for the privilege of letting me tell my story.