

Part 2. Our Stories of Infertility and Pregnancy Loss with Diana Hill, Alexis Bachik and Anne Cushman

Alexis Bachik: [00:00:00]

it's complicated. Fertility is complicated. And one of the biggest lessons I've learned is that you never know, you don't necessarily get all the answers. I'm a curious person. I want to know why, why did it fail? Why did I lose this baby? Why am I having a hard time with this? You're listening to Dr. Alexis, Kara Spacek on psychologist off the clock.

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Yael Schonbrun: We are four[clinical psychologists here to bring you cutting edge and science-based ideas from psychology to help you flourish in your relationships, work and health.

I'm Dr. Debbie Sorenson, practicing in mile high Denver, Colorado, and coauthor of act daily journal.

I'm Dr. Diana Hill coauthor with Debbie on act daily journal and practicing in seaside, Santa Barbara, California.

From coast to coast, am doctor yells shown. a Boston based clinical psychologist and assistant professor at Brown university.

And from sunny San Diego, I'm Dr. Jill Stoddard author of be mighty and the big book of act metaphors[00:01:00]

we hope you take what you learned here to build a rich and meaningful life

Thank you for listening to psychologists off the clock.

Diana Hill: Many of us are feeling exhausted, anxious, stressed, or burned out yet. Feel like we still need to work harder and achieve more. I have gathered a number of leading experts in the field of compassion, habit, change, parenting mindfulness, and social change that have strategies to help an October 15th and 16th.

I am co-hosting the, from striving to thriving online summit with mindful communications and mindful that org I'll be interviewing eight thought leaders,

including Jed brewer on the neuroscience of craving Kristin Neff on self-care and Rick Hanson.

Unhealthy striving. This summit is a powerful and personal one and there's no cost to attend. I really hope you can join me. My co-sponsor mindful communications is also hosting a free three-day virtual summit titled healing healthcare, a global mindfulness summit on February 8th through 10th, 2022 that you won't want to miss.

It's bringing together leading experts, healthcare executives, and thousands of frontline healthcare [00:02:00] professionals to explore both individual and system level approaches to support wellbeing. You can learn more by checking out the link in our show notes, or by registering from striving to thriving.com.

That's from striving to thriving.com. Psychologist off the clock is happy to be partnered with Praxis, continuing education with practice you can really transform your client's lives by learning how to effectively promote lasting change with evidence-based training. And they're really the premier provider in continuing education for clinical professionals.

Jill Stoddard: practice has both on demand courses as well as live online courses. They have beginner offerings, like ACT 1 with Matt Boone or more advanced offers. Things like act immersion with Steve Hayes. Some of their live online courses include classes in dialectical behavior therapy, superhero therapy. And act with parents.

Diana Hill: You can get a coupon code for Praxis, continuing education on our website, off the clock, psych.com for some of their live offerings. [00:03:00] And we can really attest to the quality of practice we've both participated in, in ourselves

and have seen its benefits in our clinical

Jill Stoddard: so visit our offersPage@offtheclocksite.com.

Diana Hill: Hi, this is Diana here, and this is a two-part series on pregnancy loss and infertility. In the first part of the series we heard from Dr. Sunita Osborne about strategies for reproductive trauma.

And today Dr. Alexis, Cara Spacek, myself and Anne Cushman are going to be sharing our personal stories of loss. And in fertility, if you are sensitive to this topic and it isn't a good time for you to listen, please take care of yourself because we do talk about uncomfortable details in these stories, but we thought it was really important not to censor and to share our honest experience.

I'm going to begin by talking with Dr. Bacik, who is probably one of my best friends in the world, and also happens to be a professor of positive psychology. She went to University of Colorado at Boulder and completed her doctoral internship at UC, California, Santa Cruz. And now she's a full professor at Metro State Denver, where she [00:04:00] teaches positive psychology classes, but there's another side to Alexis that she may not share a lot in her public life, which is she's experienced ongoing trauma associated with infertility and pregnancy.

Alexis. And I are going to begin this podcast by sharing our stories. And I'll be sharing my story about having a stillbirth as well as our relationship along the way. At the end of the podcast, we'll be hearing from Anne Cushman and Cushman is a leading national pioneer in the integration of mindfulness and bodied meditation and creative expression.

Her essays and spiritual practice and daily life have appeared in the New York Times. Yoga Journal. On the Oprah Magazine, Lion's Roar, Tricycle, and many other publications.

Today she's going to be reading a passage from her book, the Mama Sutra about her experience of having a stillborn. I hope you find this episode helpful. If you're a mental health professional, if you personally have experienced reproductive trauma, or if you're supporting a loved one, and please do share it with those that you think that may find it helpful.

so I'm [00:05:00] here with Dr. Alexis, Kara Spacek and Alexis. And I share in a lot of things we share in being psychologists. We met in graduate school together. We're also friends and mothers and. We share in pregnancy loss, our stories are really different and I thought it would be helpful to have her come on and share her story in combination with me sharing my story.

not only to talk about what happened to us, but also within the context of psychology and our perspectives from ACT and positive psychology. So it's good to be here, Alexa.

Alexis Bachik: Thank you for having me.

Diana Hill: Taking a bit of a deep breath here, because this is totally new for both of us sharing in this way.

**pregnancy-loss-with-alexis_recording-1_2021-09-26--t07-09-48pm--guest71
0423--alexis:** It really is. Um, and I think you're going to begin with your story, right?

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92d67ef001400e81b--diana_hill: Yeah.

So here it goes.

When I had a toddler, I got pregnant again, and I was really excited. I had always planned on having two children and that [00:06:00] pregnancy ended up being completely the opposite of whatever I expected. I was actually really deep into act at the time. And I think in some ways it was preparing me for that experience because I early, early on in the pregnancy, about two months in, I started bleeding and I was diagnosed with having a hemorrhage in my uterus that didn't impact the baby, but resulted in me regularly bleeding during the pregnancy and having to go to the ER .

And because I was practicing act at the time, I actually entered into that whole experience with a stance of, I am going to be open to this experience. I'm going to be present in it. I'm going to be psychologically flexible. I'm going to bond with this baby. And I actually think I did pretty well for the first part of it, despite it taking up so much of my life.

Right. So I'm a practicing therapist. I was an early career therapist getting my practice going here in Santa Barbara. I was a [00:07:00] mom to a toddler and navigating that. And then here I was also with this really unstable pregnancy. When one of my memories of that time actually was when I was going to take my licensing exam and

I drove two hours to go take the exam and two hours back. And it was pretty stressful, but I also remember the sense of accomplishment on the way back. If I had just taken my last test, I would ever have to take in the field of psychology and then getting back and having another bleed. And that experience actually was when I started to go downhill a little bit, because I started to also blame myself for the bleeding.

Um, I think that's a really common experience for people that have infertility or pregnancy loss to go into a little bit of that shame and blame.

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0423--alexis:** Sure. So you were feeling like somehow pushing it too hard, studying putting your body somehow it triggered another bleed, [00:08:00] which we know is not at all because, but at the same time you can't help go there.

Right? I mean,

**pregnancy-loss-with-alexis_recording-1_2021-09-26--t07-09-48pm--5e17ee8
92d67ef001400e81b--diana_hill:** Yeah. And I think I have a tendency towards internal locus of control,

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0423--alexis:

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[pregnancy-loss-with-alexis_recording-1_2021-09-26--t07-09-48pm--5e17ee8](#)
[92d67ef001400e81b--diana_hill:](#) which does me well, in some situations like I've got this, I'm in charge of this, I'm in control of it. But, and then other situations like this that are unpredictable and out of your control, having an internal locus of control can be problematic.

Um, yeah. So that was part of it. And is this, my fault is something that I've heard from other folks that are struggling with infertility or loss or grief. I've heard that in lots of different ways.

But ended up carrying the baby for quite a while. And that just became part of my life of having to go to the ER. I ended up having to tell my clients that I was pregnant because I was showing, and that was also part of this sort of.

As a therapist, your, your personal world is often kind of left out of the therapy room to the best of your ability, but even something [00:09:00] like telling , your clients that you're pregnant, it brings your personal role in. But I also knew I was bringing in the possibility that I would have to tell them if I lost the baby and I ended up going into labor.

Um, my water broke early in the morning when I was a little over five months. And I knew that the baby wasn't going to make it. And my husband and I went to the hospital and after getting cleared in the ER, it was clear that he hadn't made it I remember being wheeled up into the hospital, into the elevator.

And when I was there, um, someone congratulating me for having this baby cause I was in labor and delivery and then taking me in and it was actually one of most spiritual experiences I've ever had was delivering this baby again, it was some of these psychological flexibility processes that I was, that I was really embodying because I knew that I wanted to stay [00:10:00] present in this moment with my husband.

And, um, it felt really important. To, to be there for my baby, I'd actually really bonded with him. And when the nurses asked me whether or not we wanted to see him and hold him afterwards, it was that same psychological flexibility that allowed me to say yes, it was like a momentous moment to say yes to that question and to hold him and look at him And the closeness that I felt, the intimacy that I felt with my husband at that point in time, that sort of values and pain to it being two sides of the same point.

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0423--alexis: In that moment, Diana, where your water has broken and you know that this baby is not going to make it. Can you describe for a moment what happened for you in that moment, but what was, what was going on in your mind, had you prepared for that?

[pregnancy-loss-with-alexis_recording-1_2021-09-26--t07-09-48pm--5e17ee892d67ef001400e81b--diana_hill](#): I knew when I went into labor, like I was laboring [00:11:00] that this was not, it was over, I knew he wouldn't be able to make it.

I think like anyone that's experiencing something really traumatic. It's almost like you're just going through the motions of it. I mean, I don't think my frontal lobe or thinking I wasn't doing a lot of thinking. I was just being through that time.

I do think that one of the things that I really was successful at was around just letting go and being on the way. And part of that I think had to do with my relationship with my partner and the closeness that we have. I think part of it also had to do with the, the community of support of the nurses that were there.

And I feel like labor and delivery nurses see a lot of the same, more than anyone could humanly see, and that was actually really. Powerful for me to be held by them. I actually think about, you know, women birthing for, for [00:12:00] hundreds and thousands of years in circles with other women. And reflecting back, I I've read the reading and rereading this book by Francis Weller called the wild edge of.

And in it, he talks about the five gates of grief. And I feel like I experienced all five of those in that hospital room that day. So the first gate being that everything you love, you will lose the second gate, uh, being the grief around the parts of you that have not known love.

So things like shame, and also the sorrows of the world, that feeling of, I am among many women that have lost in this way. I wasn't alone in that. And then the fourth gate is.

you expected, but you didn't receive. And so I didn't expect it to be this way and I didn't get what I was hoping for. And then finally, that fifth gate being ancestral grief that not only was it the loss, my loss, but [00:13:00] also my mom had a miscarriage. I imagine her mom had had a miscarriage and sort of all of that kind of flooding in this.

So that part of the story actually feel like I was super psychologically flexible and Alexis, I feel really proud

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0423--alexis: yeah.

pregnancy-loss-with-alexis_recording-1_2021-09-26--t07-09-48pm--5e17ee892d67ef001400e81b--diana_hill: how I showed up.

pregnancy-loss-with-alexis_recording-1_2021-09-26--t07-09-48pm--guest71
0423--alexis: As you should. It's amazing to have that in that moment, in that critical moment.

pregnancy-loss-with-alexis_recording-1_2021-09-26--t07-09-48pm--5e17ee892d67ef001400e81b--diana_hill: Yeah, it's, it's the, it's the second half of the story that I don't feel so proud of, which was what happened next. And I, so after you deliver a baby, but they don't tell you when leave the hospitals that your milk is going to come in and you're going to wake up in the middle of night, looking for that baby.

And you are going to have the strongest urge you've ever had in your life. To have another baby. It was the most intense feeling like I was on a mission. That was the, and I know you can relate to this Alexis, you'll talk about this in the story.

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0423--alexis: many women can.

pregnancy-loss-with-alexis_recording-1_2021-09-26--t07-09-48pm--5e17ee892d67ef001400e81b--diana_hill: Yeah. So it was like, I was on a mission to have this baby. I went against doctor's orders.

I got pregnant [00:14:00] again right away. My body. Fully recovered from the delivery or from the pregnancy. And I got pregnant again. And when I got pregnant, I could not bond. I hadn't grieved and I couldn't bond. And then I had this whole other thing happening where I had to tell all my clients that I had lost this baby.

And then I was pregnant again. And that experience as a therapist is so. Difficult because it was, you know, you have a caseload of 12, 15 clients. I don't remember how many had client after client. I had to go through that conversation with

pregnancy-loss-with-alexis_recording-1_2021-09-26--t07-09-48pm--guest71
0423--alexis: And what did, what did that look like? Diana? I mean, even just the process of telling some of your clients that you're pregnant to begin with

and then telling them that it didn't mean.

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92d67ef001400e81b--diana_hill: I think this is really hard because in other settings, You could break down, you could make it about you. You could have them come in for a hug, right? This is their therapy space. I didn't want to take up their therapy [00:15:00] space with my stuff. And that is really challenging. I didn't want my client to have to comfort me yet. They also were questioning, you know, I had taken some time off. I was pregnant, then I wasn't pregnant. Right. And so I actually think that was also part of the, um, the shield. No Joseph's wrote, you talks about selfish shield or self as prize. I think I did a lot of shielding during that time of not letting the grief and because it was too intense, it was too intense.

It was such a delayed grief so I didn't, I didn't really bond with the pregnancy. I was like, I'm not singing this one. I'm not, you know, I'm just going to go about my life because I don't know if I'm going to lose this one too.

**pregnancy-loss-with-alexis_recording-1_2021-09-26--t07-09-48pm--guest71
0423--alexis:** when you were scared to get emotionally connected, right?

**pregnancy-loss-with-alexis_recording-1_2021-09-26--t07-09-48pm--5e17ee8
92d67ef001400e81b--diana_hill:** And when he came out, my, my, my little guy that I have now, he came out screaming. He had colic. And so that was just insult to [00:16:00] injury because he's screened and there was no way I could Sue him. So then it became this next level of emotional avoidance around that. Right. And I think that my, my experiential avoidance around that was now, I'm going now.

I have another thing to fix, and it became all about that. Like fixing his colic, doing everything I possibly could controlling, and, you know, I'm really into this concept of striving Alexis. Like what was my striving?

**pregnancy-loss-with-alexis_recording-1_2021-09-26--t07-09-48pm--guest71
0423--alexis:** you are a striver

**pregnancy-loss-with-alexis_recording-1_2021-09-26--t07-09-48pm--5e17ee8
92d67ef001400e81b--diana_hill:** I'm a striver. so I turned it into that and it really wasn't until, um, I remember like four months, he was like four months old and looking at him and seeing his little face looking at me.

And I was like, oh my gosh, I haven't taken the time to love this baby. And it's because I haven't taken the time to grieve my other baby. And so it was all wrapped up in one that I needed to grieve and I needed to love and letting [00:17:00] go of trying to fix. Grieving feeling fully and loving all at the same time.

And I just felt this massive exhale of acceptance. And then it, it didn't shift his screaming . So he kept on screaming. He just had to work through that, whatever it was developmentally, but it changed my relationship with him, changed my

relationship with grief and I was able to bond with him. And now, I mean, we have a super special relationship.

Um, Super special relationship as you know, Alexis. Um, so that is sort of how it progressed and sort of the, the, the act being useful to me. And then also at times, not able to pick it up and to use it, even though it was available to me.

[**pregnancy-loss-with-alexis_recording-1_2021-09-26-t07-09-48pm--guest71**](#)

0423--alexis: How did you get through the grief? Diana? I'm having a hard time picturing. A working mom, toddler, infant, and you know, home life, everything, all these balls that you [00:18:00] have in the air with clients and so forth. How, how did you process your grief?

Like how did, how did that happen? What were, what were the stages to it or.

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92d67ef001400e81b--diana_hill: Yeah. I mean, I don't know if there was stages as much as. The first word that comes to mind or words that come to mind are Kristin Neff's compassionate mess. Like I let myself just be a bit of a mess or. And that meant just really kind of being a mess, like not doing, not striving, not being the perfectionist in every single domain of my life.

Uh, I really honored him and I talk later about this with Samita, but creating sort of some rituals in our household of putting his things out. Um, acknowledging him as part of our family in the sense that, um, I remember, I think about him and started allowing myself to think about him. And there [00:19:00] was this association between him and my, my, um, youngest child.

Right. So I couldn't think about my youngest child without thinking about him. They were, they were so each other and that's very active, right? Like if you can't think about this without thinking about that, then you try not to think about any of it. So I allowed myself to think about it and I allowed myself to talk about it.

And I also started sharing more. With, uh, with my friends. So I think it was just more of an allowing him to be part of my experience rather than shutting him out. That was the real key. And then allowing myself to just be a little messy and not have it all too.

[**pregnancy-loss-with-alexis_recording-1_2021-09-26-t07-09-48pm--guest71**](#)

0423--alexis: And to have had such a spiritual moment through one of the most difficult moments of your life. Do you think that there's something to that, that through such a tragedy and so much pain and so much struggle that you were able to have almost like a peak experience [00:20:00] in the law?

And a bonding experience and that may be even it connected you and your

partner even made you even closer together because you've been through such a loss.

pregnancy-loss-with-alexis_recording-1_2021-09-26--t07-09-48pm--5e17ee892d67ef001400e81b--diana_hill: Yeah, I think he just nailed it. It was such a positive psychologist.

pregnancy-loss-with-alexis_recording-1_2021-09-26--t07-09-48pm--guest710423--alexis: know. I'm just, certainly not the case, right? Like, so there are plenty of people who go through infertility and it. Partnership apart. They're not able to get through the loss or the difficulty. They're not grieving in the same ways. They don't have the same goals or their goals change.

And so, um, I'm struck by how having a stillbirth, you, it was one of your peak spiritual moments for you and your, and your husband together. And I just imagined. Um, I, I dunno how you get that? How do you achieve that?

pregnancy-loss-with-alexis_recording-1_2021-09-26--t07-09-48pm--5e17ee892d67ef001400e81b--diana_hill: Yeah, I think [00:21:00] it definitely takes being fully present and opening your heart to the experience that full acceptance, the full, um, compassion. And what's interesting is that I actually see now how that experience has prepared us for what we face now in our relationship. And then what we face now in our relationship is going to prepare us for what we're going to face next.

You know? So I think that actually seeing it as the opportunity to step through, um, you know, Gottman's, uh, sliding door moments. Like you have them, you have the option to step through or not. And we chose to step through. And I think that every time I chosen to step through, into closer intimacy or vulnerability, it strengthens me and it strengthens her.

pregnancy-loss-with-alexis_recording-1_2021-09-26--t07-09-48pm--guest710423--alexis: If you were to take two things away from your experience, what would that, those two things be and what would you want others to.[00:22:00]

pregnancy-loss-with-alexis_recording-1_2021-09-26--t07-09-48pm--5e17ee892d67ef001400e81b--diana_hill: So I think the first thing is you hurt because you care, which is a Stephen Hayes quote that we've used a lot on this. Podcasts, but has rung true to me in so many times in my life. And when I hurt really intensely, it's so helpful to remember. There's something that I really care about here. And how can I turn to what I care about?

I remember when they took the footprints of his feet, I ended up going to a Steve Hayes workshop, not long after that. And I emailed those footprints to him. Two things.

To thank him for his teachings, because we have many teachers that come into our life that don't know that they offer us like these profound principles that change our life for the good. So we hurt because we care and we can turn towards care. And then I think the second, um, really simple one [00:23:00] is just, um, to be gentle with yourself.

And I wish I had been, I always wish I had been more gentle with myself. I just need to continue to learn that lesson of just be gentle, just be gentle. And how can you be even a little bit more gentle? Because when, when we were gentle, where that are able to move through really painful experiences. So those would be the two,

[pregnancy-loss-with-alexis_recording-1_2021-09-26--t07-09-48pm--guest71](#)
0423--alexis: and Diana, how does striving fit into this?

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92d67ef001400e81b--diana_hill: um, You know, these days, I'm just interested in a different kind of striving. Striving has taken me down in so many different ways in my life. It can take me down in relationship to parenting or work or, and how do I actually put my whole heart into something and have it not be contracted or feel like I'm being pushed,

and that's a different kind of striving. Maybe it's a skillful, striving, or a healthy striving, or a [00:24:00] compassionate striving. I haven't quite landed on what the words are yet, but, um, I'm interested in transforming that and I hope that women who are in their reproductive years and feel this pressure. I mean, this intense pressure, you have like a clock that is literally getting, , because it can become another type of striving for us.

Uh that's. So I support and want to encourage them. And that feel that clock ticking to maybe take a look at the pressure and how can they practice more compassion towards themselves around that.

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0423--alexis: And I think you and I share this in common. Like we wanted, we wanted our babies, right. We wanted our children and that was first and foremost on our minds. And, and yet, sometimes what we wish for isn't, isn't what we expected to. You know, um, in my positive psychology classes, I hear from students all the time saying, I'll be happy when blank, I'll be happy when this, and in my own life, I felt the [00:25:00] same way.

I'll be happy when I finished my doctorate. I'll be happy when I pass the triple P I'll be happy when I get my first job or my first clients, or when I get married, when I have my first baby. And I've surprised myself by having some goals where

it just didn't pan out, like. I wished for something wanted something worked so hard for it and it wasn't what I expected it to be.

, do you think that there's some truth to that for women who are striving for a child , and maybe don't get it, or the people out there who want a family want to grow their family and it just doesn't work.

[pregnancy-loss-with-alexis_recording-1_2021-09-26--t07-09-48pm--5e17ee8](#)

92d67ef001400e81b--diana_hill: Yeah. You know, having my son that I have now, I love him. I adore him. He's a blessing and he didn't solve all my. So, yes, the I'll be happy when oftentimes when we get that, when the goalpost just moves further out to the next one, and that I really find that [00:26:00] the true satisfaction in life is, is if we can be in the present moment with ourselves, whatever that moment is, whatever it is.

And in every moment there is sweetness and there is sadness. There will always be both. Sometimes we're so taken by the sadness. We can't see this. Or we're blocking off the sadness and we can't see the sweetness,

okay. Alexis, I need to turn the tables on you. My girlfriend

I want to hear your story. It's so different. It's so different. And also so similar.

[pregnancy-loss-with-alexis_recording-1_2021-09-26--t07-09-48pm--guest71](#)

0423--alexis: So my story began after I got married to my husband. We both want to children and we got pregnant right away. And I, we were both just so excited that it happened so quickly and I was about eight or nine weeks along. When we saw that it was not going to work out. The baby was not viable and [00:27:00] you know, it was just such a shock.

I just didn't expect it to go that way. This is the first time I was pregnant at the same time. My older brother had had his first child. This was the first grand baby in our family. He and his wife had asked if I would be the godmother. So I. Excitedly said yes. Flew out back east for this really grand celebratory joyous baptism.

And in the Greek Orthodox tradition, you were white. So I had this beautiful white dress. Um, my cute nephew, who was just a baby. He was in my arms. He was wearing white and I'm surrounded by my family and loved ones. And in front of the alter. We're baptizing my nephew and I am bleeding underneath my white dress.

I am bleeding because I'm miscarrying and I am not telling anybody that I'm

miscarrying because who wants to hear that? [00:28:00] And I didn't even tell anybody that I was pregnant because I didn't want to steal the limelight. So that was a real low moment. From there. You know, all innocence was lost, like all the pictures of a happy choice kind of pregnancy.

Now, now there was just anxiety and what's going to happen and what happens next and I'm still bleeding and nothing's happening. And five.

weeks later, I had a DNC to remove the particles of conception and my body. I now know just does not release pregnancies. So if I get pregnant, um, I do not miscarry naturally. I need, , I need surgeries to help with that. I kind of figured from there that the, that was it. That was my last, you know, I'm a numbers person.

And so I thought lots of women have have loss. And that was my, that was my blip. And it's going to be smooth sailing from here. But, [00:29:00] um, especially when we had my first, our first child, right after that he was born, he was healthy. I thought, you know what? Like, life is good. Everything's working. When we went for our second, I got pregnant pretty quickly.

And once again, we were so excited and thrilled and quickly learned that the baby's heart beat, uh, just was never going above a hundred and the baby was not going to make it. And so it was summertime taking care of a toddler, working as a professor, Socializing and I'm visibly showing my belly is protruded and I am doing all the things you're supposed to do when you're pregnant.

And yet I'm knowing that I'm just waiting for this baby's heart beat to stop.

[**pregnancy-loss-with-alexis_recording-1_2021-09-26--t07-09-48pm--5e17ee892d67ef001400e81b--diana_hill**](#): What is that like Alexis? When you have this whole in our world happening that other people don't know about in [00:30:00] terms of, um, being able to connect or function or, you know, feel like you're a part of the world around you when you have this full inner experience that nobody knows about.

[**pregnancy-loss-with-alexis_recording-1_2021-09-26--t07-09-48pm--guest710423--alexis**](#): Yeah, I mean, And I think you, you know exactly what it feels like. It feels very lonely and you feel, um, sadness and shame questioning what you did wrong. What's wrong with your body. Why is it failing you in this way? Questioning every little decision, comparing it to your first child that was born and healthy and now wondering what the difference.

Uh, you feel lonely, it's hard to get excited. It's hard to feel like the positive psychologist. You don't want to get up in front of people and talk about happiness research when you're going through loss, it's just elusive to you. And so then you

feel even worse about that because here you're supposed to be preaching it.

You're supposed to be an acting it and, [00:31:00] and, and you want nothing to do with it.

[pregnancy-loss-with-alexis_recording-1_2021-09-26--t07-09-48pm--5e17ee892d67ef001400e81b--diana_hill](#): Positive psychology is not helping you out

right

[pregnancy-loss-with-alexis_recording-1_2021-09-26--t07-09-48pm--guest710423--alexis](#):

No, it's not serving me in any sort of way. I just wanna, I just want to be with the loss and I want to be with the process of it. And that's my way through it, you know, to sit in the, sit in the muck, so to speak for just a little period of time.

Alexis Bachik: It was, it was too much. So, you know, for, for those years, teaching abnormal psychology was actually more like in my heart.

Diana Hill: validating the abnormal psychology class when you're having it. When you're having a hard time. I remember that about grad school. I was like, oh, I can relate to this stuff.

Alexis Bachik: Yeah. So I was like, I like this stuff a little bit better now I can relate to it. Some things from positive psychology that served me well in those years. And I would say some of them was truly using my strengths, curiosity and perseverance to kind of go through each of the sequence of events, each process.

Diana Hill: and those strengths. I remember when I [00:32:00] did an interview with you back in the day, back to like 54 or something like that, you gave us a link to a strengths inventory. So we'll put that in the show notes for this, because I feel like that strengths inventory is a helpful one to identify what are your strengths that you may be able to lean on?

Alexis Bachik: Yeah. And then both setting, I think that really helped me, get through the pain of it, all the suffering of it all. It just helped me keep oriented towards that goal.

I worked with a specialist. I worked with an amazing therapist that was able to process grief and loss with me because people experience it differently. And my husband was experiencing the losses and the grief very differently than me.

And so having someone just in my corner, It was extremely helpful. And nowadays there are many more resources available for women to feel connected

in what they're going through.

And at this point in time, I'm part of different, [00:33:00] uh, groups where we can support one another. , In our journeys and in our loss of this, and that's a really valuable place to be.

pregnancy-loss-with-alexis_recording-1_2021-09-26--t07-09-48pm--guest71

0423--alexis: And hopefully you have someone else in your corner who understands that and gets that, um, Diana, you were one of those people for me.

I don't know what I would've done without you.

pregnancy-loss-with-alexis_recording-1_2021-09-26--t07-09-48pm--5e17ee8

92d67ef001400e81b--diana_hill: How excruciating that was and how hard it was on you to be in that waiting game. Like your life was on hold. I just remember that. if By then I had already had. My youngest child. And so that kind of complicates things too, like when, when I'm trying to support you through something, but then I have sort of what you want.

And, and, and it was really hard for me to, um, you know, share my celebrations with you around that, because I didn't want to hurt you. Uh, what was helpful from folks during that time?

pregnancy-loss-with-alexis_recording-1_2021-09-26--t07-09-48pm--guest71

0423--alexis: I mean, I think for me, one of the biggest things was that it just, you know, I remember you checking in all the time and just [00:34:00] seeing how I was doing, and that was the biggest thing too. Just checking in, how are you doing? And, and being in my corner for whatever my goals were in that moment, you know, I'm not pushing an agenda, but just, okay.

We're waiting for, you know, we're waiting for the baby's heart to die, like, so we can move on from this and try again. Okay. Feeling like. Someone understands, understands the process has taken the time to understand what loss looks like. And even if they don't know from their own personal experience, just the willingness to be curious and to ask, I found it hurtful when friends or family members would not take an interest in, would not ask

so I just think, um, the willingness to be in the muck with me. So extremely helpful. And of course the people that were better equipped to do that, or, you know, therapists obviously, and people who had also [00:35:00] experienced similar loss, um, it helped me keep my hope. And so using my curiosity and my perseverance, which our top strengths, a mind blessing and a curse after that loss, I had to have two DNC surgeries, and I was like enough of this.

I don't want to suffer anymore. There's reproductive technology that I can take

advantage of. And my husband and I were privileged enough to have the means to be able to explore some of those opportunities. And so we did that. Workup. We went through two rounds of IVF and that didn't work. So again, more heartbreak and loss.

We had more pregnancies and losses. I was told that my embryos are just not good enough, no bueno. And so basically I was told to, if you want to have a baby of your own, you're going to need [00:36:00] to have some donor.

pregnancy-loss-with-alexis_recording-1_2021-09-26--t07-09-48pm--5e17ee892d67ef001400e81b--diana_hill: Wait, pause there. Cause you said the word not good enough. Like. It, you as a woman, like your, your embryos. Aren't good enough. Your eggs. Aren't good enough.

Wow.

pregnancy-loss-with-alexis_recording-1_2021-09-26--t07-09-48pm--guest710423--alexis: yeah, and, and they, they say that to you. So there's almost no way to not feel that like somehow your age and the statistics and you ha went through two rounds of IVF and they failed. There's a problem with you essentially. And if you want to ha carry and have your own child in that way, then you're going to have to turn to a younger woman's ex. It was, it was a huge loss and especially having had a child already. That was my genetics, my biology, who in our eyes is just perfect. The idea of having. Someone else's, [00:37:00] uh, biology and contribution. It felt both like a gift like, Wow.

this is amazing that someone else would be willing to, to donate their eggs.

So that we can create and build our family. And at the same time, it was also just this, well, it worked once before. Why isn't it not going to work again? And then this feeling of failure, I come from a long history of women who had a lot of children.

Um, on my father's side, he was one of five. My mom. Tell stories of getting pregnant easily. I didn't hear, even though it probably did happen. I, in my immediate motherhood, my mom and my mom's parents, um, my dad's parents said, I didn't hear those stories of loss. I didn't know any

pregnancy-loss-with-alexis_recording-1_2021-09-26--t07-09-48pm--5e17ee892d67ef001400e81b--diana_hill: If you could go back and talk to that version of you, that was getting that information, that your eggs aren't good enough that you translate of course, into, like I'm not good enough, or [00:38:00] my body's not good enough. And you could tell her. Something. And I'm just thinking about you telling it to her, but also telling it to the women that are listening to this episode.

what would you tell them and what would you tell.

[**pregnancy-loss-with-alexis_recording-1_2021-09-26-t07-09-48pm--guest71**](#)

0423--alexis: That

Alexis Bachik: it's complicated. Fertility is complicated. And one of the biggest lessons I've learned is that you never know, you don't necessarily get all the answers. I'm a curious person. I want to know why, why did it fail? Why did I lose this baby? Why am I having a hard time with this?

[**pregnancy-loss-with-alexis_recording-1_2021-09-26-t07-09-48pm--guest71**](#)

0423--alexis: And you know, we're not where we need to be with science to be able to kind of figure.

It doesn't matter how much money you throw at the problem. It doesn't matter how many different experts you visit, how many different tests you've run. It's tricky.

When you over-utilize your strengths like curiosity or perseverance, it just can bring you down a path that's long and dark and, and may not result in an answers. It underserved. You've overextended your strengths. And that [00:39:00] certainly was the case for me. I mean, I took it so far that we did do the donor embryos.

We did try that we had multiple pregnancies from that, that failed. Uh, I ended up having endometriosis and endometriosis surgery and learned so much about myself, but ultimately I didn't end. Getting a baby. And at this point we were five years into secondary infertility and my husband and I had a concrete decided, agreed upon a concrete timeline.

I probably would have kept going, but this was our agreed upon stop point. And I was so angry that we had reached that mark and it left us with. Uh, baby. So to the women, I would say, I would say, you know, you don't always get the answers. you don't always know why, and you have to let go of holding on to an outcome and you have to [00:40:00] let go to wondering why it didn't work out.

And it doesn't necessarily have to do with us. It's not necessarily our bodies or our bodies failing us. Sometimes it's the environment. And there's this, this Jenna Sacoa right about, uh, babies. They're magic. Why do they happen? I don't know. And now I feel like I hold more of a space for, um, spirituality or magic or just the wonder of it.

All of why, why it doesn't work out sometimes and why sometimes it doesn't. Um, I wish I could gift all the women that sense of peace. That is it's not as, not necessarily about, about us.

pregnancy-loss-with-alexis_recording-1_2021-09-26--t07-09-48pm--5e17ee8

92d67ef001400e81b--diana_hill: So you hit that five-year point. Well, I really remember having a conversation with you. It was actually with our group of psychologists, friends that gathers every once in a while. And you really clearly saying I'm done, I'm letting this [00:41:00] go. What happened?

pregnancy-loss-with-alexis_recording-1_2021-09-26--t07-09-48pm--guest71

0423--alexis: I was filled with anger. I was so angry that the process didn't work. I had always been at the mindset that effort equals results. And here I had tried and tried and tried and tried, and it didn't work. Um, I was so consumed with anger and then set moments of sadness. I remember being in the shower and just crying and aching and feeling like it just doesn't seem right.

I can't believe this happened?

Like we don't have our second child. I felt this void and. I got rid of all the remaining baby things that I had in my house. I just wanted them out of the house immediately discarded everything, cribs, special blankets. Um, I just wanted rid of all of it. We went to Greece, we went on vacation.

We had fun. I drank alcohol. I mean, I [00:42:00] resumed life as a, you know, a mom of. And I try to embrace and think of all the wonderful things that I was going to be able to do all the wonderful opportunities that I was going to be able to provide for our son, that I wouldn't have been able to provide. If we had been a family of four and then I got pregnant and it was six months later and this by now was my seventh pregnancy and I was completely.

I was annoyed almost. I was frustrated. I was rather stoic about it in disbelief. Thought that, oh my gosh, I can't believe I'm going to have another loss. This is the last thing I want. I was hesitant to tell my husband and I only started to really embrace that I was pregnant and start to bomb. After the major milestones, the 12 week checkup, the 20 week checkup.[00:43:00]

And then at 35 weeks, I remember feeling this is really going to happen and, or this may really have. And then when it was the moment of him coming and him arriving, I was just in so much joy. Diana. I was just in bliss. I was almost like in disbelief, like, oh my gosh, she's here. Like he, here he is. He's, he's literally here somehow.

I didn't think it was really gonna happen. Um, and now he's two years old, a little walking piece of magic. And I still look at him in wonder and think, I can't believe you're here a little. How did you get here? And it's almost like sometimes he comforts me. It's the strangest thing. It's almost like he knows how hard I tried and how much he was wanted.

Um, sometimes he takes this little hand and he pats me on the shoulder with it, like this reassuring, knowing this, like he was, I was waiting for him in some sort of way.[00:44:00]

Diana Hill: So if there were two

**pregnancy-loss-with-alexis_recording-1_2021-09-26--t07-09-48pm--5e17ee8
92d67ef001400e81b--diana_hill:** takeaways, Alexis, you asked this question of me and I asked that question of you. If there were two takeaways from your experience and. You can put on your S your positive psychology hat for this answer. I would appreciate that too. Um, personal perspective and positive psychologists, what would they be?

**pregnancy-loss-with-alexis_recording-1_2021-09-26--t07-09-48pm--guest71
0423--alexis:** I would say to be patient. Uh, working through infertility, working through loss. It's a process. There's no guarantee. There's no one right answer. There are no choices that are made easily or quickly. And so to allow a room for patients is one of them. And that you're allowed to have all the feelings, anger, joy, sadness, hope you're allowed to change your mind.

You're allowed to change your address. That there's a flexibility in, in what we want and that we're not defined by it either. You know, we're not [00:45:00] defined by whether or not we're mothers or not, or whether or not we have our own children, there's way more going on. We're more than just that. So to hold ourselves patiently, lovingly being very present with all the emotions and realizing that.

There's way more to us. Our worth is not defined by whether or not we're mothers.

**pregnancy-loss-with-alexis_recording-1_2021-09-26--t07-09-48pm--5e17ee8
92d67ef001400e81b--diana_hill:** Thank you, Alexis for sharing your story and taking this time with us. It's always wonderful to spend time with you in this way, this vulnerable on its way. I really appreciate it. And I hope it benefits.

**pregnancy-loss-with-alexis_recording-1_2021-09-26--t07-09-48pm--guest71
0423--alexis:** I love it too. Diana, thank you for having me.

Anne Cushman: Excerpt from the mama Sutra three weeks after Sierra died. I did yoga on our patio again, above my mat. Two wrens were pecking in the bird feeder. I'm in the [00:46:00] branches of our apple tree, a hummingbird darted in and out of the bottle, bro. I made my way slowly through the poses as if I were

walking through an earthquake damaged house lovingly assessing the damage afterwards, I lay on my back and corpse pose, watching a blue spray, a shower of seeds to the ground, looking at the beauty around me.

I felt as if I were picnicking on the edge of an oven. And to which every now and then someone I loved would silently tumble lying there. I saw that I had two possible responses to Sierra's death. One was to contract and terror to try to clean more closely to what is precious. Wrap my hand tight around it.

Never let it go. And ultimately futile gesture, since it would all inevitably slip away. [00:47:00] The other response would be to cherish what was precious breath by breath with an open hand, knowing it could be snatched away at any moment and that it would ultimately be gone forever to cherish each moment, knowing that every day is a gift and a blessing that it may be the last, the world is impermanent, but the world is also a sacred place.

To hold both of those truths in our hearts at the same time is the Razor's edge of practice. There is tremendous grief in Sierra's law. I will never stop missing her. I will carry her and my heart for the rest of my life. But despite all the sorrow, what I have ultimately been left with is a sense of joy of the precious miracle of incarnation of the way.

Love is not bound by time and [00:48:00] space of how the value of a life has nothing to do with how long it lasts. And of how the rippling effect of one life goes on and on long after a person has gone,

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