

(introductory music)

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MARYN: Welcome to Indie Birth's series of podcasts here on iTunes, *Taking Back Birth*. Today we have a very special guest. We love to have women on to chat with, so that everybody can hear their story. And this is my friend, Paala, from California. She recently had her third baby as a free birth, unassisted. And she's just here this morning to share her wisdom and talk with you, talk with me. We both have babies on our laps, so we'll do the best we can. And take it away, Paala. Just tell us a little bit about yourself.

PAALA: Hi. I'm Paala. Yeah. I don't really know what to say when people ask me that question. I am a stay-at-home mom of my three kids now. And I spend my not so free time blogging and writing up my birth stories and things. I don't know.

MARYN: We do know. We're—there's a lot of people listening, I'm sure, that are exactly the same. And yeah. No pressure. It's not meant to mean you have to have some big resume to share. Being a mom is enough. And having three kids is enough. And we can just kind of get right to it and hear more about your births. I know you just published your birth story, or it has been published for a few weeks probably of the third baby. So if you don't mind, we'll probably link to that from the podcast. So you can share whatever you want, but we'll link the story so you don't feel like you have to go into great detail. But why don't you tell us a little bit about your first birth or two? Just so people have a basis for where you were coming from before you had your unassisted birth.

PAALA: Sure. Well, my first birth was pretty typical. I went the normal hospital route. I didn't have any crunchy friends, who told me I should consider a birth center or even home birth. So I just went with my HMO. Showed up at my appointments. I wasn't happy with my care provider, but I didn't feel like changing. Didn't seem like—it didn't seem like that they were working for me so much. It's just that I was just doing the—doing what I was supposed to do. Show up. Pee in a cup. Leave.

MARYN: Yeah. Pretty much.

PAALA: And then when my baby showed up breech, sort of one of the later ultrasounds—because there were a million because I didn't know any better. She scheduled—she wanted to schedule my ultrasound. And I started to get really worried because I did not want to—she wanted to schedule my C-section. Pardon. And I didn't want to have a C-section. I was planning on going all natural. I didn't really prep very

well for that, I guess. And in my second version attempt, they found I was in labor which I still doubt. They said I was having regular contractions, and I was 1 centimeter dilated. And if I wanted to have a C-section right then, that would be great. Or I could come in later that day and have an emergency C-section is what they told me.

MARYN: Oh my gosh.

PAALA: So I really felt like those were my only options. And I wish I had someone I could have called that would have told me, "Oh no. No. No. Just wait."

MARYN: Run. Get out.

PAALA: Yeah. Instead of running, I felt really sad. And just said, "Okay. Well, I guess we'll do this now." And so I kind of left in a shock. I didn't realize I was a mother. I didn't feel—I never felt labor. Didn't feel the birth. So I was pretty—I don't know. Messed up after that birth. It was kind of traumatic for me.

MARYN: Oh, I'm sure. And how old is that daughter? It's a daughter, right?

PAALA: Yeah. She is four and a half.

MARYN: Oh wow. It wasn't that long ago.

PAALA: No. No. 2009. And then for my next one, I decided that I was going to hire a midwife to help me navigate birth this time. And try and keep me out of the hospital. And that was wonderful. I found a wonderful midwife that I really connected with, and she just—we'd come over and chat for an hour. And she wouldn't have me do all the standard things. And I was thinking about birthing unassisted, at that point, but I wasn't quite sure about—sure of myself at that point. So I called her when I was—already had been laboring for about ten hours, I guess. And she showed up about three hours before birth. It was an 18-hour labor. And gave birth on my bed in my own house. And it was so wonderful. And I have just very minimal regrets about that birth. So when I thought about—when I got pregnant for the third time, I thought about that birth and what I wanted to change or have be the same. And so then on to my third birth. You want me to just keep talking?

MARYN: Yeah. No. That's great. I have a few questions. So how did you prepare for your second birth? We just did this two-hour class on C-sections and VBAC women. And I don't know. Share some wisdom about how you came into wanting a home birth and how you got your vaginal birth after such a traumatic experience.

PAALA: I can't even remember now because it seems so long ago that I was prepping for that birth.

MARYN: Right. I know.

PAALA: I'm trying to think who I met beforehand who got me thinking about home birth. Or if it just came to me during my research after—trying to figure out what went wrong and why I didn't stand up for myself after my first birth. So I don't know. It just—I just knew I had to pay for a home birth out of pocket. And that's just what I was going to do. Insurance be darned. And it was kind of a big deal. We could not afford the fee at all. My husband was laid off. And we're just like, "Yikes."

MARYN: Well, that's really important to share though. I mean I know I run into that all the time as somebody that goes to births is just people not understanding what it means when you choose your insurance as a priority. It often leads you into a situation that you regret unfortunately.

PAALA: Yeah. Totally. That's what I feel. Like my first daughter cost me \$100. Total. For all prenatal. \$5 copays. And no copay for the birth. Amazing. \$100. And then my second one was \$4,000. And my third one was free.

MARYN: Well, gee. Who won on that one? It's true though. Even with the insurance situation. I mean I think it's obvious. But you pay in other ways. So that's always a way to explain it to people. Although if they're not there—if they're not seeing it yet—and I was the same way for my first birth. I mean insurance and hospital and all that. Eventually, sometimes the light bulb goes off, hopefully, for later births. But not always. It's just not something you can force somebody to see, I guess.

PAALA: Yeah. I don't know if I had been told during my first birth like, "You need to think about other things. Are you sure you're happy with where this is going?" If I would have listened, I might have just brushed them off. I might have just needed that awful experience to get (inaudible), unfortunately. I think about it. I'm still angry. Very angry about it. But maybe that's what I needed to get where I am now.

MARYN: Mm-hmm.

PAALA: I'm so—I'm not jealous. But just in awe of women who know that they want a home birth from the get go.

MARYN: Oh I know. I know.

PAALA: Oh, I wish I could have a—three beautiful births.

MARYN: No. I know. I really, really marvel at the first time moms that choose that and/or choose a free birth right off the bat. I wasn't there either. And it took me a bunch of kids to get to that point, so I know. I totally honor that. But like you said, we're all on our journey. And I mean we learn what we need to learn along the way. That's for sure.

PAALA: Yeah.

MARYN: So let me ask you. When you were going into your second birth, again, did you have issues with worrying about if your body could do it? Or was that not an issue just because of the first being breech and immediate? It's not that you went into labor necessarily the first time.

PAALA: I did have concerns because my body hadn't felt labor. And I had no idea what to expect except for what I was asking friends and my midwife. And what is this going to feel like? I just could—was telling myself that I could handle it and had all these things that I could, hopefully, rely on for pain relief in my hypnosis—self hypnosis type things.

MARYN: Sure. Sure.

PAALA: But in reality, I don't know. I just—mmm. Just did it.

MARYN: Yeah. Yeah. And you found a midwife, obviously, that was supportive of having had a C-section and patient with you—it sounds like—in labor. And it sounds wonderful.

PAALA: Yeah. I was really looking for a midwife that would support a VBAC and would know what signs to look for if there was any rupture happening. Because I was—that's what everyone tells you to be worried about. Of course, that's very rare and didn't happen to me. So didn't have to worry about it. And so yeah. I made it through. And then I felt healed. Like my body could do this. And then I thought, "Well, I want to do this again. By myself without having to ask, 'Am I 10 centimeters? Can I start pushing?'"

MARYN: Sure. Yeah. yeah. Did you feel like you asked for permission in that birth to do certain things especially since you hadn't been in labor before?

PAALA: Oh yeah. Unfortunately, that is kind of what happened. When she arrived. When I did the first—I don't know—15 hours or so by myself and just with my husband I just did what came naturally, instinctually. And then as soon as she got there, I kind of was like, "I don't want to be checked, but I want to know where I'm at." So I had my first check. And I had—I was only at a six or something ridiculous. And I felt so sad that I thought I might have hours and hours and hours to go. And then—but she was wonderful as well. With the warm compresses and soothing words and whispering and that was so nice. But then, again, when I felt like pushing, I asked for her to check me because I wanted to push. But I needed to know—needed to know I was a 10. And so I regret asking. Asking someone else, "Can I push," because I felt like pushing.

MARYN: Yeah. You knew. You knew deep down. Yeah. So coming into this third birth, obviously, you took these experiences and created a different one. How—I mean

it's just—it's such a big question. I don't even know if you can answer it. But it's like how did you get there? How did you just come to the place where you didn't want to ask permission anymore and where you completely trusted your body?

PAALA: Well, I just feel like it came slowly through the first two births. And then when I became pregnant, I immediately had a discussion with my husband about what I felt I needed to do for this birth. And he was totally onboard except for that I thought he wanted me to have a backup. So for three months, I was stressed out looking for someone who would be on call for an home birth backup.

MARYN: Sure.

PAALA: But when we cleared the air on that, I found out no. He was okay. But it was good that I had—kind of pushed me to search for people who would be available and relied on my other unassisted mama friends here in town who would—who said that they would be available on the phone or they could drive over, if I needed them. But it was so fast. I wouldn't have been—no one would have been able to come anyway.

MARYN: Yeah. That's amazing. That's amazing. I mean I don't doubt, of course—I'm sure you don't either—that it was so fast because you didn't have to wait for anybody or ask for permission. So in the pregnancy, did you consult with anybody or see anybody? Did you do your own quote on quote care? What did you do to take care of yourself?

PAALA: Well, I mean I just started doing my own care, I suppose. Sort of informally. Just honoring the changes that were going on in my body and noticing my breast tenderness while nursing my older two and starting to eat a little better, making sure I was having salads every day, that kind of stuff.

MARYN: Yeah. The greens are the hardest.

PAALA: What?

MARYN: I always think the greens are the hardest especially in some pregnancies. I don't know why.

PAALA: Yeah. I was having a salad kick for the first half of it, and I was so proud of myself. And then it went to milkshakes.

MARYN: Yeah. Yeah. So you didn't see anybody then? You just took care of yourself?

PAALA: No. I didn't see anyone. My midwife moved away. A couple hours out of the area. And she was the only person that I would want to see. And I'm kind of—this sounds weird I'm sure. I'm on a podcast. But I'm a private person in my real life. And I felt it hard to make friends with her. Like such that close connection like a lifelong

memory and person that will be in my memory forever. And I didn't want to do that for another person. And invite them into my home to witness me birth. So I just decided to skip the midwife and doula route altogether. And do my own prenatal care. Of course, I felt sort of an odd connection. A wonderful connection to you because I listen to your podcast the whole time. I think we're—my son and Ever are only a week or two apart. So we were like right on when I was listening to your podcast.

MARYN: Yeah. Yeah. It was really special.

PAALA: It was nice to go through our pregnancies together. And I'm sure lots of ladies—

MARYN: Yeah. There definitely have been. And I think that's one of the reasons, obviously, for doing these and continuing to do them and to talk to women like you is so many women don't really have the support system in their local town. And the reasons you're mentioned are actually mine as well, I mean, believe it or not. I'm a private person too in my life. And I didn't want to invite some of our past midwives in even though it would have been easy to do. And one, in particular, would call every now and then and say, "Oh, I want to come and visit." And I would always have to come up with a reason that I just didn't want to see her. And it wasn't personal. I just didn't want her to say anything at all about my pregnancy. Anything. I didn't want to hear, "Oh, your belly looks big or it looks small." I didn't want to hear anything at all. I just wanted to completely rely on what was coming from me and my baby. So I don't know if you felt that way. But I think it's common, in a sense. Women, like us, to not want to get outside influence.

PAALA: Yeah. I only saw my midwife twice during my pregnancy. Just ran into her at a store once. And we shared part of our—she had her son in November, and I had my son February. So she was pregnant, and I was pregnant. Actually, I saw her three times because I went to her blessing way.

MARYN: Oh, that's sweet.

PAALA: And it was so nice that I copied her blessing way as much as I could a few months later. And then she came up for mine. But she was so sweet. She didn't make any of those comments. And such a soothing personality that it was just—I just absorbed her warmth, but—

MARYN: That's really sweet. And yeah. It certainly isn't across the board. And I think what I hear you saying more is that she was just a support and a friend, which is what we all need when we're pregnant. No matter what form it comes in. Whether it's a midwife or whether it's our partner or best friend. Just to have that really support. To know that you're loved. I mean what else is there. So I am pretty passionate about just

prenatal care, in particular. I love hearing what people do, and I love for—when I talk with people, if they'll share just a little bit more because, again, you know. So many women think that they have to go somewhere every month and let someone do stuff to them to see if their baby is healthy. So it's really mind boggling to most people that you didn't do that. That you just took care of yourself. Did you do anything sort of clinical? Did you listen to your baby's heartbeat? Did you—I don't know—take your own blood pressure? Any of that?

PAALA: Well, I did—I do have a stethoscope, so we listened a few times just because it was exciting to hear. I think that by that point he was already kicking, so I already knew everything was fine. But I just wanted to hear the sound. And—but no. I didn't do any measuring. Just casually noticed that my fundus was growing and belly got bigger. And I think it was about the half way mark, I was like, "Oh, that's the belly button," but I didn't have this set thing I was doing every week. And I certainly did not want to see anyone that would ask me to do any of the standard stuff. Because I was too stressed out. The first time—ugh. Second time I wish I would have denied even more of the things because I had a few false positives that had me stressing until the next visit. Or there was one time she couldn't find the heartbeat. And I knew that my daughter had been kicking all day and was fine. But it's just like, "I can't find the heartbeat. Well, I'm going to come back tomorrow, and I'll check again." And it's like, "Okay." Unnecessary stress.

MARYN: Yeah. No. That's a really good point. That's a really good point. Just experiencing other people's needs and wants on your pregnancy. But your experience sounds blissful. It sounds like you had a really relaxed—at least in that regard. Of course, I don't know what else was going on, but it sounds like pregnancy wise it was really easy and simple for you.

PAALA: Yeah. It was so nice. It was like—I wish every woman could feel that relaxed about everything and not feel like she was being poked and prodded and needed to make sure that someone else is telling her that the pregnancy was going all right and having ultrasounds every couple weeks it seems.

MARYN: Yeah. Me too. Me too. That would be wonderful if women could just enjoy their pregnancies and eat good food and hang out with their friends and know that everything was most likely just perfect. So we'll link to your birth story. But anything you want to share about it? It sounds like it was pretty quick and pretty easy. Anything you did to prepare even? Sometimes people like to hear about that. Did you do a water birth? What did you do?

PAALA: Well, I was considering water birth. But I set up a pool last time and only labored in it for a few hours. So I didn't bother buying the fishy pool this time. I sort of

made my birth kit box that I had available and printed out emergency birth guide for my husband and put them on the fridge in case he—he wanted all these things. He wanted me to write down the emergency birth contacts and the closest hospitals, so he would have it. I needed to soothe him a little bit.

MARYN: And did you teach him anything? Was he interested in learning about how to handle complications? Or was he just kind of relying on you? What did you guys work out?

PAALA: Well, he did all of the reading of the emergency guides. And he watched the videos with me on how to handle neonatal CPR and all that stuff. But I don't know. In the end, he just wanted to have it printed out in case we both lost our minds and needed to do something.

MARYN: That is such—that is a very male thing to do in anticipation of labor. That's for sure.

PAALA: I need to go grab my little one real quick.

MARYN: Yeah. Sure. Pausing a moment here. Thanks for listening everybody especially with babies on the lap. But that's what we're all about here. Kids are close and nearby and very much a part of our lives as we work. Oh, there he is. Too bad not everybody can see him. He's beautiful.

PAALA: I wasn't sure if we were doing a video, for some reason, because Skype always seems like it would be a video call.

MARYN: Yeah. Right. Nope. The podcasts are just audio. So, unfortunately, no one can see your adorable baby. But they can go look at the pictures on your birth story. He's super cute. He's a pretty big baby, huh?

PAALA: Yeah. We didn't measure him for over a week after birth. But he was nine six and then nine four. So we just said nine four.

MARYN: Yeah. That's a decent size baby. Pretty awesome.

PAALA: He felt so heavy the last week of my pregnancy like he was just right there at the bottom going to fall out at any moment.

MARYN: Oh my gosh. Were your girls the same size? Or were they different?

PAALA: They were smaller. But my first one, she was born at 39. And with C-section, I don't know if she would have gone another week or two. She was only six and a half or so. And then my second one was seven and a half. And this guy nine.

MARYN: Wow. That's awesome. Yeah. So for anybody that thinks a nine-pound baby is big or you can't have a baby that's three pounds bigger than your first one, here is Paala to tell you you can. And sounds like your easiest birth ever, huh?

PAALA: Yes. It was a whirlwind. And I am so thankful that it happened the way it did. I wouldn't change a single thing about the birth or how he made his entrance. He just—he chose it. It was totally all him. No matter where I would have been he would have just come.

MARYN: Wow. And, obviously, I'm guessing that you do credit being—I don't want to say being alone. But being with your husband, not having somebody else poking and prodding that made it at least partly so quick. I would think.

PAALA: Yeah. I mean I think so at the end. When I sent everyone away about an hour before I gave birth—when I was completely alone is when everything sped up, and I realized that this baby was coming right now.

MARYN: Yeah. That's amazing. That is the beauty of the process when we're not being observed and timed and talked to. So that's amazing. So I'm sure that you were on top of the world after his birth.

PAALA: Yes. I was just reading—rereading my birth story last night to jog my memory about everything. And I was just sort of laughing as I was reading because I was clearly euphoric.

MARYN: Yeah. I can't imagine. And like I said, we'll link to it. It's a really beautiful story. Margo and I both—I reread it this week. And Margo had found it and didn't even know that you and I knew each other and was just—sent it to me, in fact. Was like, "This is the kind of birth that I want. This is amazing." So thank you for that. And any last any things you want to share with women either considering having a free birth or their own prenatal care? What would you say to them after your three experiences?

PAALA: Hmm. Do as much listening to other women who have had natural, normal, physiological births? So listening to all your podcasts from the beginning to end. And hmm. I don't know what to say. I mean I guess I get asked this all the time. What would you say?

MARYN: What would I say? Hmm. Yeah. I think I would say just tuning in is always helpful. Not everybody—everybody is at a different point on their path, so it's not about, for me, getting everybody to have a free birth. It's just along the way if we can find more wisdom in ourselves because we all have it. It's in there. It's just—like you had your three births, and they kind of step stoned. And so did mine. And it's just every time you get more confident and maybe you learn more about the process. And you find support

in different ways. And you know that you can do it because that's what we're made to do. I really do believe that.

PAALA: Yeah. I totally agree. If we could all just learn to trust ourselves, that would be the best.

MARYN: It would be. I know. Is there—we need to come up with a magic formula. Not that I have it. But there is a certain deal of trust you do have to have to birth without an attendant or whatever. So yeah. Women—helping women find that is certainly part of our mission. And we're so grateful to women like you that are part of our Indie Birth community. And I mean kind of keep in touch during their pregnancies. I was so excited for you to have your baby just knowing that he was coming shortly after. So that was just fun to be part of that experience and now to get to talk with you and share that with other women. So thank you so much. It has been so great having this. And I know people will just absolutely love hearing your story.

PAALA: Thank you so much for having me on here to share my story. And thank you for being part of my support system over the Internet.

MARYN: Yeah. The virtual world we live in, huh?

PAALA: Yes.

MARYN: Yeah. It's mutual. Well, thanks everybody for listening. That was my chat with Paala, and we will link to her birth story because it really is wonderful and fabulous. And it can be your daily dose of inspiration for today. So thanks again. And we'll talk soon.

(closing music)