

(introductory music)

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MARYN: Welcome to Indie Birth's series of podcasts here on iTunes, *Taking Back Birth*. I'm Maryn. And today I continue our podcast journey talking about all things birth and pregnancy related. As most of you know, I made my way through my seventh pregnancy the last couple of months through these podcasts starting at the very beginning. And now we have a beautiful seven-week-old baby this week, Miss Ever Wild. You can actually read her birth story on Indie Birth, *The Free Birth of Ever Wild*. Hopefully, you enjoy that. And sort of along those lines today I am going to talk more about free birth or unassisted birth.

There's so much to say. I honestly don't know yet how this is going to go or what I'll be focusing on. But I guess in running Indie Birth for the last couple of years, we've seen the shift and continue to see a shift amongst women that come to us for support or interested in what we have to offer. We've seen this shift from simply homebirth to women wanting to be more self sufficient in their experience in birth. So for need, for clarification, I suppose, again, the label of an unassisted birther or a freebirther is appropriate for many of these women. But that's kind of what I wanted to get into today. What does that mean? And with where birth is at really in this country, in this day and age, right now, what are the options? Is it really an unassisted birth? Whatever that means. Is it really being alone in birth? Is that what these women are after? Is that what they're doing?

Or is it having somebody there? Is it just black and white? I'm going to argue no, I think, over the next couple minutes. That times are changing. I think many of us have acknowledged at this point that birth is a medical event in the mainstream. So it's not that we see it as that. We most certainly don't here at Indie Birth. Birth is not a medical event. It is a family, private, personal, women-centered initiation for many of us. It is not a medical event. But in the mainstream, it is. And I would ask you to think about that, if some of these ideas are new to you as you come across our podcasts and our work here. That even if you're having a home birth at home, obviously, with a midwife that you may be looking at a more medical experience than you ever thought possible.

So we teach classes. We teach online birth classes as well as local birth classes. And we are privileged to work with the most amazing women. But something that regularly comes up whether it's online or in person is so many of these women are already in tune. They're already focused. They're already knowing what they want to a certain degree as far as birth. And so they're planning these wonderful home births with

midwives. However, once they go through the course, it becomes clear to them that a midwife is not a midwife is not a midwife. And a home birth is not a home birth is not a home birth. And by that, I mean what I've already said today which is in most cases birth is being treated as a medical event even by midwives. So what does this mean? This means that there are rules and regulations in place in most states that keep even the most well meaning, holistic—quote on quote holistic—midwife from really being able to practice that way.

And, again, that's aside from personality or the fact that she's smart and lovely and wonderful as most midwives are. And it's really the politics nowadays that are keeping midwives from being able to truly practice with women care. So we, as the women—the consumers really, right? We need to be aware of these things and know what we are getting. So when it comes to unassisted birth, I think is where a lot of us are getting to. Unassisted birth is such an extreme term, I think. It's not my favorite term. I do prefer free birth. And many people don't like that either. But I like that for some personal reasons. Just what it means to me.

But unassisted birth is sort of a—the more popular term. And I know the book by the same name that belongs to the wonderful Laura Shanley—she didn't even name the book, *Unassisted Childbirth*. I believe it was her publisher that did. So sort of, kind of, by accident, unassisted childbirth became this term. And we do use it. And I think we struggle sometimes to know what it means. So what does it mean? In this day and age of politics ruling birth, is this what women have to do? Do we have to engage this sort of funny term and create this idea that birth is something we do completely alone? Shut off in a dark bedroom with no one around and no help available. Certainly, there are women that prefer to birth that way. And that's absolutely nothing wrong with that.

But I think redefining the term unassisted birth or free birth is probably in order now that so many more women are looking at a self sufficient birth, which is really what it is. So, again, I think the term unassisted birth, at this point, is sort of dated. And if you don't know anything yet or you're exploring the idea, it can sound very extreme. Again, very black and white. But I talk to women every week—women here locally and women online and free consultations that we do and women in our class—and I can tell you that there is a new definition of unassisted birth that is coming forth. And I guess that's probably where I'm at today. What I want to share with you. That's a really positive thing. What is this new—sort of new—definition of unassisted birth?

Now, again, new. So much of what we do here at Indie Birth we do consider radical. But what does the word radical mean? It means going back to our roots. So it's not something we are taking credit for or we're saying we've come up with. We're simply reminding women of where they've come from. And I think this quote on quote new definition of unassisted birth that I'm seeing here is, in fact, something that we've had

around forever. Forever. So who knows? 10, 20 years ago, if people were talking about unassisted birth, it was just—to me, when I would hear the term 10 years ago, sort of this dark, closeted kind of feeling of women that couldn't find anybody to help them. Or women that were too scared to ask anybody to help them. Or women that had too many issues to want anybody there at their birth.

That was, honestly, my perception of unassisted birth 10 years ago. It's not that way anymore. At least for me I don't think. And the women that we see and the women that we hear from that unassisted birth is everything wonderful, basically, that you would want in a birth minus the politics. That's basically what it's come to mean. Is it midwife or nothing? I think that was a—that's a common perception of unassisted birth now as well as it was 10 years ago especially among midwives. There aren't too many midwives that are really accepting of unassisted birth because it means they're not needed or maybe they think they're not valued which, of course, isn't necessarily true. But is a common misconception.

So is it midwife or bust? Is that what women are doing now? And I think it's not. I think there are many, many women opting out of midwifery care, medical midwifery care, so midwifery care according to the state. But there are just as many women that are choosing to not have that but to have a really supportive environment during birth. So sorry. I'm kind of all over the place today. But it's coming back to the same thing that I just want to talk more about what unassisted birth is coming to mean right now. And I think it is a lot about women supporting women. It's not about us necessarily birthing completely alone.

I know with my unassisted births—the last two—were—for me it wasn't, again, being in a dark room, birthing alone. Nobody knew what was going on. I did have my husband and my kids around. And, eventually, a friend towards the end just to offer moral support. Friends to call even during my labor. People that I wanted to talk to, and I wanted to hear their voice. And I wanted to hear them say, "You're doing great." Just like we would centuries ago when we had our community around us perhaps when we were birthing. They weren't there for medical care, right? If we had women in our tribe or community, they weren't there to listen to our heart—our baby's heart beat or take our blood pressure. They were there to love us and encourage us and to hand us a drink and to smile at us from across the room when we felt like we couldn't do it anymore.

So that's what I mean by this is old knowledge. This is the old way of birth. This is women supporting women. And it's far from unassisted, which, again, is probably why that term isn't my favorite. It may not be assisted in the sense of, again, a medical birth. Those births can be and are very much orchestrated and assisted and induced and all these words that make us think that the women—the woman herself isn't the center of

the equation there. But in a quote on quote unassisted birth nowadays with the women I'm talking to, they're very much supported and very much loved. And they don't feel alone at all. So I think if you're one of the women that are exploring the idea of having supportive women around you during birth that there's so many ways to go with that.

I talked to several women this week who are still on the fence as far as should I hire a midwife. Should I hire somebody that's licensed and I know is going to have stipulations and rules and regs and guidelines and this and that? Should I do that? It's not really what I feel. But what is the other option? And many of these women are women that haven't birthed before. Maybe their friends haven't had babies yet. And so they are feeling very much alone. If I don't hire a midwife, what do I get? Am I just going to be alone in my house? And do I just hope I know what to do? Or any such thing. And, again, while there are women that will just simply go at it alone and be just fine, I think so many more women now are coming around to the idea that we don't have to do that.

This is—we don't have to make it so black and white. We don't have to take what the medical world has told us about birth and believe it. In other words, you either have somebody there, and it's quote on quote safe. Or you don't, and it's completely reckless. It is time for us to stop even acknowledging that because that's completely ridiculous. There are many options in between. It is not black and white. There are many shades of gray. And for these women that are having their first babies, especially, they need to know—you need to know—that there are ways to have a glorious, supportive, healthy, wonderful, safe, empowering birth without hiring a midwife. And that's the absolute truth.

And for those of you that don't know, I was trained as a midwife. If the laws weren't what they are here in the state of Arizona, I would probably still call myself a midwife. It's a wonderful term that means serving women. But, unfortunately, here and in other states, it has come to mean agent of the state, which means I serve the state in birth. I do not serve women. And so I don't do that anymore. So I won't call myself a midwife here in Arizona. But just to give you some perspective that I'm not anti midwife. I very much enjoy serving women, and I love it. And as much as I put myself out of a job on a daily basis with Indie Birth, I relish the births that I do get to witness and support women and babies and those.

But it's not my primary goal anymore because as a mother, as a woman, I have very clearly seen for myself that birth works without anybody other than what we've already got inside of us and with the support that we ask for on the outside. So I can no longer live in a world where I think I'm necessary to anybody's process. And in fact, if somebody did think that I was necessary or any midwife was an essential safety feature to their birth, I personally wouldn't be able to serve that woman. She would be better off with somebody that really felt like they were in charge of her birth and that they were

responsible. Because I am not responsible for anybody's experience other than my own. And you are not responsible for anybody's experience other than your own.

So that is my soap box, at least a little bit of it today, about how unassisted birth is changing and how as people, we as women, can make this shape into the kind of birth experience we want. We don't need to accept anymore that it's midwife or bust or alone or bust. There are many things in between. Having friends and sisters or a grandmother or an aunt or a mother, any of these roles of women in our lives, can feel perfectly wonderful at a birth. Vice versa, those roles can feel perfectly awful at a birth. It's all about what we require and what we want and understanding, if we believe this is such, that birth isn't medical and that we will learn in our prenatal period. We will learn in our pregnancy and birth. And we will find our way through if we listen to our own voice.

So no women—no woman should be without this, if she wants it. That is my goal, at least at Indie Birth, that if nothing else women in remote areas or without community have access to information and education and support even if it is virtual support or phone support. So that is definitely a major goal and something that I get up for every day so that all of us can feel that support that we don't feel like if we're choosing an unassisted birth for a million reasons—to be outside the system, or to not have politics in our bedroom—that we're not being reckless. That we are feeling informed and that we're feeling supported and guided. And it's not a choice that we make because it's the only other choice, which, of course, can happen. Many women choose extreme choices in birth and extreme choices in life, right? Because we feel like we have no other choice.

So my goal and hope is that women don't feel that way. That they choose birthing in the safety of their own homes with their own families because it is the right choice for them. And it is the most beautiful, healthy choice for them not because there's nothing else to choose. So what else do I want to say about that? Hmm. Yes. The perfect world. The perfect world of birth, which, of course, doesn't really exist is that we feel supported and that we learn what we need to learn to truly do our own prenatal care. I know I have done so many podcasts about prenatal care early on. They're not all listed on iTunes anymore for anybody that's wondering what I'm talking about. They are all listed on indiebirth.com. We have about 30 plus podcasts now.

So start at the beginning, if you're wanting to know more about how to do your own prenatal care. That sounds really extremist maybe or scary. But, again, we're not talking about medical care because pregnancy and birth generally aren't medical. And if they are, then for sure. We look to the outside. And we may get lab testing, and we may ask for consults or opinions or advice. But in the majority of cases for normal, healthy women and babies, we're not looking at prenatal care as something that's

medical. Prenatal care is just a really fancy way of saying taking care of yourself during pregnancy and paying extra attention to what that means because it's you and a baby and a body and a placenta and an emotional body and a spiritual body. And they all need to be supported.

So that is a huge subject. But I do believe the more women that we get to see that their prenatal care is their responsibility, 100 percent, 500 percent, the more women will come to this idea of birth as they create it. And, again, whether we call that unassisted birth or whether we call that free birth or—heck—whether many of these women still continue to hire midwives hardly matters. But that you're able to create this support system and this experience rather than feeling like there is only a black or white option for you. That is not true anymore.

So that is my thought—many thoughts I suppose—about birth today. Little off focus. Sorry. But, hopefully, you enjoyed hearing it. And hopefully, it will give you some things to think about. Again, so many of you are seasoned at these ideas and are already doing your prenatal care and having your amazing, wonderful free births. But, again, just as many women that I talk to every week are exploring the idea. And so I guess this is mostly for you. This is mostly for the women out there that don't want to feel crazy because they know deep in their heart, deep in their soul, deep in their bodies that this way of birth is for them. Meaning they are going to be home. They are going to be loved and supported. They are going to trust their bodies. They are going to understand the process as much as they see fit. And they know that birth works and that babies come out and that most of them—medical emergencies surrounding birth are actually created by fear. And they are created by caregivers and rules and regulations. And they are created by all of these things that really have nothing to do with what birth is really about.

So this is your encouragement today. All you lovely women especially all you lovely pregnant women especially if you are experiencing this for the first time. Or if you are experiencing the idea of free birth or family birth for the first time that this could be the inspiration and motivation to know that you are not alone. That we are here at Indie Birth, and there are so many women in our community that would love to support you. There are so many resources on our site that we hope will give you encouragement and guidance and knowledge. And that we are here, personally—Margo and I both—to chat with whoever. We do offer free consultations every week as well as longer paid consultations. We're always happy to answer emails and that kind of thing as well. So if you just have a quick question, feel free to shoot an email.

And, again, know that you are not alone. That the future of birth really is with us. It's with our generation right now. And our daughters are seeing how we act, how we birth, what we believe. And we are birthing them and raising them into this new paradigm of

birth where we are guided by love and not fear. So that is the Indie Birth version today of the new unassisted birth, which is really the old. I hope you enjoyed it. And I hope you have a fabulous day. Thanks so much for listening. Talk to you soon.

(closing music)