

(introductory music)

**DISCLAIMER:** *Taking Back Birth* is a production of the Indie Birth Association and indiebirth.com. No material on this podcast should be considered medical advice. Birth is not a medical event.

**MARYN:** Welcome to Indie Birth's series of podcasts here on iTunes, *Taking Back Birth*. So today I have a very special quest as always. My friend, Sarah, who recently had a free birth of her very first baby. Sarah is going to give an intro, but I just wanted to start off by saying that Sarah and I met online in anticipation of her joining our Indie Birth class. And from our very first phone conversation, I was so amazed with her confidence and intelligence before she had even birthed. So when she was willing to talk to you all on this podcast now, nine months after birth, I am just so thrilled to have her. She is such a great influence and so inspirational for all of us. So take it away, Sarah. Tell us a little bit about you to get started please.

**SARAH:** Well, thank you, Maryn. That's so sweet. I feel—I'm blushing right now. Oh, that's so sweet. I am—yeah. I contacted you because I didn't—I didn't have that confidence in myself in the beginning. That's—it's amazing how your perception of it is so different than my own. A huge lesson that I learned during the birthing process and through pregnancy was how to find confidence in myself. So—but I'll get to that later. But I'm Sarah. I gave birth to my beautiful daughter, Maya, nine months ago on June the 12<sup>th</sup> in 2014 in our home in Savannah, Georgia in the bathtub with just my partner—my wonderful, incredible, grounding, helpful partner, Ash. And just the two of us in the bathroom in the morning around 9:20. And yeah. It was really incredible. It was magical. And it was a lot of things that I was expecting. Things that I wasn't expecting. And it was just—it was such a journey to get to that place having learned so much about the births and the politics around birth and how other people will get to that place. So we lived in Asheville before—when I got pregnant with Maya.

And we went to a birthing center for maybe a few—maybe four or five months. And so we—in the place that we were living, we knew we were going to not be there when we had the baby because we knew that we needed some place where we had—we were more—we were less isolated. In that we had more support and more friends around and that we didn't have to drive 20 minutes into town. So I started at a birth center thinking—my only experiences with birth were hearing my mom's stories, which were, "You were breech. You were—you got stuck. It was all your fault. I had to have a C-section," kind of thing. "And you got stuck under my ribs." So that really stuck with me.

**MARYN:** Wow. That was your birth story? I had no idea.

**SARAH:** Yeah. Well, my mom also had some other health issues, and I was born 1985. And she had—I was—yeah. Upside down. So her—but she went into labor. I

think she went almost to 42 weeks. And then they—she went into labor, and they were like, “Okay. Got to have surgery because that’s what—that’s the way that it works.” And so I had that in my head, and I knew that that wasn’t what I wanted. And so I had already started a path of moving away from the allopathic system and questioning why I go to the doctor and how I interpret health and what I do for my health. And so I had already been on this long journey of eating healthfully and growing food and just learning about what our bodies need. So it was really natural for me just to question pregnancy and to question what the norms or the routines of pregnancy. So I was already in that mode of, “Do I really need to get 400 ultrasounds?”

**MARYN:** Right. Right.

**SARAH:** So we went to the birth center, and we—this is Maya joining me right now too. So you might hear some squeals. And I just—I guess I felt disconnected because they—the options were have a birth at the hospital with a midwife or have a birth at home. And there were so many—I felt like there were a lot of limiting factors. So things like you can’t go over—I think it was 41 weeks and 4 days. No breech babies. No high risk. High blood pressure. Things like that. And so I—every time that I went—even from the first appointment, it just didn’t feel right to me. I didn’t feel like I was in the right place. And I felt like I could get through it if I just kept going to these appointments. And they checked my pee and weighed me and asked me if I was eating healthy foods and what I was feeling and stuff. And it just—that never felt right to me.

So from the very beginning, I was doing a lot of questioning and listening to myself. And it was—the pregnancy, itself, was somewhat difficult for me. I—there was a lot of transitions. There was moving to a different state. Several deaths in the family and just a lot of emotional heaviness was happening during that time. So I did a lot of heart work. And I lost—my grandmother passed away on the solstice in 2013. And she had Alzheimer’s, so I’m not sure she really comprehended that I was having a baby or not. So just a lot of things. I also have some trouble with my back from an injury when I was a teenager and was having—had a lot of back pain from the beginning. So we decided that we were going to continue to go to the birth center, but we were going to start looking for other options. That wasn’t going to be the way to go.

My friend—a good friend of mine, who lives in Asheville who has two beautiful babies, she was describing her experience with her son. They were in a—in this cabin together, and they had a really intense emotional connection. Her and her partner. And their birth was so beautiful. So I started asking her questions like well, what did you do with—what did you do with the placenta? And what if the cord was wrapped around the neck? Or what if these things?

**MARYN:** All the good questions, right?

**SARAH:** Yeah. And I said oh, what about prenatal care? And how did you know that the baby was okay? So she just helped to ground me and said, “You’ll know if the baby is okay. The heart rate is great. You can use a fetoscope, and there are other ways to find out what that is. You don’t have to get ultrasounds.” I wasn’t interested in ultrasounds early on.

**MARYN:** Did you just know intuitively or had you researched things like that? Or was it—was it just a heartfelt feeling?

**SARAH:** It just didn’t—yeah. It didn’t feel right. I didn’t want to know the sex. But I also know that X-rays are really powerful. And if I can’t go into a X-ray machine and get a X-ray when you’re pregnant, I feel like there’s got to be something there. So I haven’t done the research that I’ve done now. But I knew that there was something a little bit off. So she actually sent me the link to Indie Birth and said, “You should check out this group.” And I think the next day I called you. And I felt so comfortable with you and felt like your purpose was not to (inaudible)—was not to tell women what to do necessarily. Or, “Okay. This is how you have this kind of birth,” but it was just so empowering. You supported me. You didn’t even know me. And you’re like, “You rock. You can do whatever you want. We support you. This is a really great group of women.” And that’s what felt good. My heart said yes. I was sitting in my bedroom. My heart was pounding. This is amazing. This woman—I’m in love with her.

**MARYN:** Isn’t it so different though to start to consider pregnancy and birth from that place? From not just your head but your heart and to have that feeling of connection with other women and with, of course, this deep, deep knowledge that we all have. And it just gets sparked by that connection, I think.

**SARAH:** Yeah. Yeah. It’s something. It’s falling in love with something. Or feeling a connection or feeling heard. I guess that’s a big part. I didn’t really feel heard when I went to the midwife center. And I’ve never felt heard when I go to a doctor or to a typical hospital. I always felt like—

**MARYN:** Well, it’s not really the set up.

**SARAH:** Yeah. That’s not, I guess, the purpose. You’re sort of a number. And so I felt heard by you. And I just decided that that was—the class would be really wonderful. But more because I really wanted a group of people that I was supported by. And that changed my world. It just—I was already on the path of I know that this isn’t—something doesn’t feel right, but I’m not sure why. And I learned so many wonderful things. I learned about the cord. I didn’t even know that a cord around the baby’s neck a year and a half ago was not a problematic and was not a life or death situation. And—because I’ve heard so many stories. And I just think, “Oh god. That sounds awful.”

**MARYN:** Right. Right. And to turn it around too and take a lot of these things that we have myths about and are so fearful about and to find the positive truth in it. And the cord is one of those things. How smart? How self protective is that of a baby? It's really, really smart physiology.

**SARAH:** It makes so much sense. The more you think about it. I think with all fears the more you really look at how things work and feel into yourself and let your intuition come out the more you realize that, for me at least, fear is—there's no place for it. And all it does is create unnecessary worry for things that aren't real. So then I kind of thought, "Okay. Well,"—and would I have a home birth. I looked into it at the midwife center. And I thought, "Well, maybe I'll,"—we're also—it was stressful because we weren't sure if we were going to move to Louisiana or Georgia.

**MARYN:** Oh wow.

**SARAH:** And we didn't figure that out until a few months—well, not even a few months. Like a month before we moved. And Ash and I are very transitional, kind of un—not ungrounded. But we're just—we like to move around a lot. And we travelled all over the place. And we've never really been in one place for a long time. So we decided wherever we go we need to set up a home base. And so anyway, we decided to come to Savannah. And I—and part of me was still kind of thinking I want a midwife at the birth because I think that or I want something else because I'm not actually sure of myself. Or that I wouldn't be able to handle it. But I think the more and more that I researched it—every day I had a new fear. So I'd have a fear of oh my god. What if I bleed to death or something? And so then I would research it. And I would squash that fear. I'd be like, "Okay, fear. See you later. No more fear." This is how I handle these kinds of things.

And through education and through learning and reaching out to other women, I was able to get through thousands of them. Thousands of fears. And so the more I looked into midwives—so it was like if I were to have a home birth, it would be several thousand dollars. The insurance that I have—which is state insurance—wouldn't cover it. And, honestly, I didn't want anyone touching me. I knew from listening to podcasts and just listening to other women's experiences and having them talk about how they felt taken advantage of or they felt hurt or they felt like they didn't have a voice—I just knew that I didn't want anyone there touching me. So I was like why do I even want a midwife. Why do I want—and I started to learn about a midwife is not a midwife is not a midwife.

**MARYN:** Right.

**SARAH:** And that is—that's a lot of things. No, baby. That is a danger. Just one second.

**MARYN:** Yeah. Sure.

**SARAH:** She wants to eat some screws. Just a second.

**MARYN:** Maya.

**SARAH:** Let's play over here. Sorry.

**MARYN:** Yeah. No. It's fine.

**SARAH:** Those are tiny.

**MARYN:** In those moments when you thought you wanted someone there, what do you think that was about?

**SARAH:** I think it was about doubting myself and the—doubting the process in that someone would save me. And in some ways, it felt easier for me to say, “Please save me and please help me,” than it was to learn and become educated and help myself. And so the more and more fears I started to get rid of the more I realized that I really just—I really want to be—I really want to be alone. I really want it to go a certain way, and that way isn't having someone stick their hand up inside of me to see how open I am or constantly be checking or having to go through a process of timing everything and writing everything down just to submit to the state because that's where the connection lies. And that was just really hard for me to comprehend because I'm like that doesn't feel sacred. That feels. It feels like I turn into a liability even when it's a midwife even with someone who says that they're trying to help you to have the most—the birth that you want and to be the most empowered. I didn't feel like that would be empowering to me.

**MARYN:** Yeah. That just wasn't the right thing for you.

**SARAH:** Right. But even up until the day that I had Maya, with all the things that I learned, I still had—I would have a doubt every day. And I would have to squash it. So I'd say—and by squash it, I mean it would come up. And I would look at it, and I would sit on—think on it and say, “Well, that's not really—that's something that is just a fear that's coming.” And so I spent—I did a lot of work. Ash and I went to a meditation retreat, and we spent 10 days in silence meditating. And that really helped a lot. It helped me to get through and to be comfortable with my body and be comfortable with silence. And it was also physically challenging to get through 10 days, 10 hours a day meditating in silence. And getting through that really helped me to see that yeah. I can do a lot. I'm a lot more amazing than sometimes I like to—than I think that I am. So then it just became a no brainer. This is how it's going to be. We moved to Savannah. I had prepared. We had plans on having a water birth because that felt really natural

too. I was at the beach about a month before she was born, in May, and I was sitting in the water and just realizing like I have to be in the water because this feels incredible.

**MARYN:** Yeah. It's amazing.

**SARAH:** There's no other way.

**MARYN:** Yeah. Some people just totally identify with the water in labor. I love it.

**SARAH:** Yeah. And I think if you don't, then that's fine. But I just—I went by listening to myself. And I had gone through all of the fears that I had like hemorrhaging or long—what would I do if I had long labor? Or if I tore? Or if the baby had a—was breech? Or if the baby had a nuchal cord or nuchal hand or something? Or meconium? I went through all these things, and I really learned that—what I kept learning was that the majority of the time when there is an issue it's because there's an intervention and because the birth is not unhindered. That there are things that are happening.

**MARYN:** Yeah. It's a simple truth really. I mean not that birth is always simple or always perfect. But I think you're right in the most simplest way. Learning how to leave it alone can solve lots of problems that we have fears about.

**SARAH:** Exactly. It's like your baby is going to—if your baby is in distress, then they pass meconium before the waters break. But the only reason that your baby would really be in distress before your waters are breaking is if somebody was really messing with you or if you weren't feeling safe. So my goal was to be as healthy as possible and to feel as safe as possible and create a really safe environment. And that's what we did. We ordered—so we ordered a birth pool, and it hadn't come in the mail yet. Because she was born at 38 weeks and 3 days. 4 days. So she was born before my estimated due date. And we had—I had set up an altar and just made a lot of affirmations for myself and written a lot of affirmations down when I was journaling every day and really focusing inward. And so I did a lot of work.

**MARYN:** Did she talk to you at all?

**SARAH:** She did. She talked to me as a boy.

**MARYN:** Really cool.

**SARAH:** I thought she was a boy. And she told me—so I had a dream four years ago before I met Ash that I was going through kind of a difficult time in my life. And I dreamt that I was in an old Victorian house in a ceramic bathtub and that I gave birth to a baby boy. And I was holding the boy. The placenta was—or not placenta but the umbilical cord was still attached. I hadn't passed the placenta, and I'm in this tub naked holding this boy in front of me and thinking, "This is the—he's so healthy and happy and

beautiful.” And it felt really strong. I felt so strong and connected to that dream. And I’ve always remember it. And so our plan was to have her in the tub, but she came before—I didn’t order the pool early enough. And so it ended up happening that way. And we live in this Victorian house in Savannah. And it was me and Ash. So it’s kind of interesting that it came in the dream except that she’s a girl and not a boy. We were so surprised by that.

**MARYN:** Yeah. I bet. That’s so cool. I mean I love how that’s such an integral part of our journeys obviously. We’re not pregnant alone. We’ve got these souls. And I think if people took it more seriously, I guess, in a sense that that connection can get us through, that connection can help us work out fears, that these babies, these souls, are so wise and—I don’t know. For me, that’s been a way that I’ve conquered fears besides learning just that connection of knowing that this baby is fine or this baby says this or this is how this baby wants it to look. It’s a really, really valid point of view, I think.

**SARAH:** It feels—it just—it was so beautiful to have these dreams about her. And I had other dreams where she would say, as a boy, that she loved us, and she was excited to meet us. And she would—I would have dreams about breastfeeding. I had dreams about watching her grow up as—some of those dreams were more neutral. So there was no gender attached to them. But it did. It really—I felt so connected to her through my dreams and just through movement. And we—when I was at the (inaudible), the meditation center, that was the first time I heard—I felt her kick. And she would kick, and then I would—I’d poke her. Like tap my belly. And she would tap me back the same number of times that I would tap. So we did a lot of connecting just really intentional, emotional connecting. And I felt like that was much more important to me than having someone else tell me, “Oh, you’re healthy. Or your baby is good.” And I just knew she was healthy. I knew that she was feeling good and that I was prepared to and happy to welcome her for whoever she was. Boy or girl. Or big baby, small baby.

**MARYN:** Sure. Sure.

**SARAH:** Maybe she only had eight fingers. Like whatever. I was going to love the baby and be happy and just—because there was such a strong connection. And I had—I watched your podcast or your recording about listening to the heartbeat with the fetoscope.

**MARYN:** Oh, right. Uh-huh.

**SARAH:** And I taught myself how to do that. And that was a really sweet connection too because she would tap the fetoscope whenever I would push it in. And I would be in the wrong spot. She would start kicking it.

**MARYN:** That connection is so important. I think not everybody is going to free birth obviously. I mean there are so many variations on what women will do. But if nothing else, don't you agree just establishing this connection and not letting someone on the outside tell you, "Oh, your baby looks fine. Oh, your baby sounds fine. Oh, your baby is this way or that way"? What if we're the ones to get that information? How that changes our experience so much.

**SARAH:** Mm-hmm. It absolutely does. It brought me a lot of confidence. I mean I still felt unconfident when I would read a story or—but I always felt like I was able to read a birth story that didn't go exactly the way it was planned and pick out the parts where I saw intervention happening that I didn't want to happen. So I was like, "Okay. Maybe I won't do this. Or okay. I'm not going to do this. I'm going to,"—so I set up a really strong plan. And so our plan was not to say contractions or to say pain and to use the word waves or just really use positive words. And that wasn't at all my experience. It was more—it was a lot more intense and more—I think difficult than I thought it would be because I had prepared. Meditation and all these techniques for managing it. And (inaudible)—

**MARYN:** Well, the lessons are so many. I don't care how many babies you've had. I mean certainly the first time I don't—I wouldn't expect that anybody had full confidence. How can we when it's just the great unknown?

**SARAH:** I know. It's beautiful and so exciting because you're like it could be anything. And it could happen in hour. It could be 70 hours. You just—there's no really no knowing. And I had really prepared for a long labor, so I had food stocked up and was like early labor I'm going to sleep. I'm going to take some skullcap, or you're going to massage me. And I had these plans. I was like, "Okay, Ash. You massage me when I'm in early labor because I've got to sleep because I've heard all these stories about people getting,"—women get really excited and then they lose their energy. And so I had a lot of plans. I had some—lots of essential oils. I guess more tinctures. I had a lot of tinctures too for different things like lots of motherwort I had been taking.

**MARYN:** Yeah. So you were looking at the long haul as your labor—

**SARAH:** Yeah. So I was looking at the long haul because I was—a lot of first time moms have really long labors. And it's usually the second or subsequent child that's—after that's shorter. And my labor from when I recognized that I was in labor to when she came out of my body was about 4 and—between 4 and 4 ½ hours.

**MARYN:** Yeah. That's really fast. That's really fast for a first time labor. Oh my gosh. It must have felt like a train was going through you.



**SARAH:** It did. And it's funny that you say train because I was dreaming of a train when I woke up and was like, "Holy shit. This is intense. I can't—I'm up." Hey, baby. It's okay. I dreamt that. So the night before, I had—I wasn't feeling well. And this is on the 11<sup>th</sup> of June. Wasn't feeling good. I had been cleaning, and my back was really hurting which it didn't—it had done. And so I was kind of used to back pain. So I may have been in labor then, but I didn't recognize it because it was just—

**MARYN:** Right. Well, and you didn't expect it probably, right? Two weeks or so before.

**SARAH:** Right. And I didn't have Braxton-Hicks contractions either. At least not that I was able to recognize. Not like other people had described. So I was like, "What's going on with my uterus? It's not even preparing. What's—what are you doing? This is what all the ladies—all the women talk about." And my uterus wasn't doing that. I had been taking—I was drinking lots of red raspberry leaf tea. It was very hot in Savannah, so it was easy to drink lots of tea. But I went to lay down, and I started losing my mucous plug the night before. And—or the afternoon before. But I didn't put much stock into that because I know that it can be weeks. So I just said, "Okay. Not getting excited. I'm going to rest." I helped myself rest.

And I went out to dinner with my mom that night and had some Thai food, which not sound very good, but I'm really hungry and craving super salty like rich foods. So I ate a lot. And then I came home. And I still wasn't feeling good. It was—hanging out with some Ash. And then I had a glass of wine and then went to bed. Are you going to be okay, baby? Sorry. Okay. And then what happened?

**MARYN:** Yeah. No worries.

**SARAH:** Okay. So then it's like—it's around midnight. And I wake up because I had a really bad cramp. And all my contractions felt like cramps. They didn't really feel like—

**MARYN:** Like menstrual cramp kind of things?

**SARAH:** Like a menstrual cramp. Like a very sharp concentrated in one area menstrual cramp. And so I woke up with that. And I went to the bathroom. And I guess I had—was losing my mucous plug. Because I usually—I was sleeping naked. And so there was—I was like dripping blood and all that stuff. And my mucous plug came out. And then I was like, "Okay. I'm going to go back to sleep. I'm going to try to go back to sleep." I was just feeling really uncomfortable like lots of cramping back pain. And for whatever reason, I was—I have this feeling that it—we really needed to have sex. So I was like, "I really want to make love right now." So we did. And I went to sleep. And it really—it helped me sleep really well. So I slept for maybe four hours.

**MARYN:** That's amazing.

**SARAH:** Yeah. And it was just instinctual. My body was not feeling good. But for some reason, I said, “Let’s—okay.” So I was like initiating it. Hi. Here. And I had a dream that I was waiting on a train. And as the train was approaching the tracks, I could feel a train physically moving through my body. Like the force of the train moving through my body. And I woke up around 5:00 that morning. And really, really intense pain. Like sharp pain in my stomach and my lower abdomen. And I was expecting these rolling contractions. And they would—my whole uterus would squeeze. I didn’t feel that at all. And I—

**MARYN:** Maya was in a hurry.

**SARAH:** She was.

**MARYN:** She’s a little energetic train. I can hear her being her super determined self there.

**SARAH:** Mm-hmm. She’s got the ear phone back in her mouth now. Yeah. So yeah. I got up, and I had some—I had some diarrhea. And just like things were coming out. It was like my body was like we’re getting—this baby is coming out.

**MARYN:** Sure. And did you realize it at that moment? Were you like, “Oh my gosh. This baby is coming probably pretty soon”?

**SARAH:** No.

**MARYN:** No. You were just in another space entirely.

**SARAH:** Right. I was just trying to get through each of the feelings of the sensations of discomfort. And I went—I thought I would just go back to bed. And I laid in bed, and I said, “I can’t sleep through this anymore. It’s really intense.” And it was a cramp that would last a minute. Then it would stop. And it was in my back too, so I had a really sharp pain in my back like someone was stabbing me with a knife.

**MARYN:** Oh my gosh.

**SARAH:** And I don’t like to say pain. But at the same time, it was more difficult than I was thinking it would be.

**MARYN:** Sure. Well, you know that’s the—I mean that’s the sort of general feeling when things do happen pretty fast is that they can be sort of magnified or intensified. And, of course, you didn’t have anything to compare it to, but it sounds pretty—yeah. Pretty intense to have things move that fast the first time.

**SARAH:** Yeah. I was just thinking—it was like a pinched nerves and like getting stabbed in the back. And it was just—a lot of sharp feelings. And I went to try and lay back down in bed, and my water broke. And it was just—

**MARYN:** Was that like a big sensation or just—

**SARAH:** I could feel her—I felt like she did it. I think she did it on purpose. Like I felt—because I was feeling her little fingers poking my cervix. Or what it felt like little tiny cervical punches is what I call them. And I felt something like that as if I was hit or she punched me really hard and broke it.

**MARYN:** I totally understand that. Ever did the same thing. I swear she took her nails, and I could like literally feel her just like scratch it. It's crazy.

**SARAH:** Oh my god. It's such an—it's hard to describe because it's inside like on top of your uterus—on top of your cervix. But it's—that's exactly what it felt like. She just punched it, and then it burst. And it was—yeah. It was pretty undeniable that it was happening. So I got on the floor, and it—oh, sorry. Go ahead. What were you saying?

**MARYN:** No. No. Go ahead. Go ahead.

**SARAH:** Oh, I went and squatted on the floor and just like let it all go. And so I went into—I went into the bathroom and knew that I really just wanted some hot water on my back because my back was hurting so much. Every time I would get it—some contractions I would—it was just—it was mostly in my back. They were really sharp, so I went and got in the shower and put the yoga ball in the shower. We have a pretty big walk in shower. And I laid on the ball. And Ash started timing me on the other side of the shower. And they were between four and five minutes apart and lasting about a minute long. And so during that shower time, it was like, “Okay. The pasasana. Nothing is permanent.” And then I did that for a few minutes. And then like, “Oh my god. No. No. No. This is hard. That's not working.” And then I thought, “Okay. Just exhale really big and try to push the muscles the other way when you're contracting or when you're having these really intense cramps.” That wasn't working.

**MARYN:** And that's how you know it's for real, right? When you just start picking things out of the sky to try because that's what labor requires is just who knows what.

**SARAH:** Right. I didn't—that's the thing. I didn't even know it was for real. That was the scary part for me was that I was doing those things, and it was still—it was just like being squeezed. So it got to a point where I felt like something was squeezing me, but it felt like a cramp. So it was a sharp pain. It was really tight. My back got really tight. My muscles just seized up in my back and just lots of tightness and lots of sharp pain. And then they started lasting like a minute and a half. And then I—yeah. I think I went

into the bedroom because the water got cold, and I got upset that it was cold. And Ash was like, “They’re really—they’re getting closer. They went from five—almost five minutes to just less than four minutes and about 4 to 5 minutes apart.”

And we’re in bed, and he’s trying to massage me. And immediately, I just looked at him like I can’t talk to you. I can’t—I need some space. I got to go in. And I can’t talk anymore. And so I started squeezing his hand every time that would happen. He could just tell. It was pretty obvious at that point. And I remember thinking, “If this is what women go through for 20 hours, there’s no way. I must be the weakest woman in the whole world because this is so freaking intense.” And so in my head, I kept thinking like, “Oh my god. I’m going to do this for 20 hours.” I’m so glad I told Ash I didn’t want to know what time it was, and so he hid—made sure that I wasn’t going to see any clock or any—

**MARYN:** Yeah. That’s really smart though.

**SARAH:** - any time. Mm-hmm.

**MARYN:** You don’t put yourself on a timer.

**SARAH:** That was so helpful because I was sort of feeling like how long has it lasted. Has it been five—and I didn’t really think. It was just—I started to go inside. And then I got on the floor, and they were getting even stronger. And I started shaking as if I was really flushed. And so my body was shaking. I started having—not convulsing. But really trembling uncontrollably. And I held onto the bed, and I was flushed. Just a lot of redness and heat in my face and in my body. And I started crying. And I said, “I don’t think I can do this.” I said, “Women do this for 20 hours, and I don’t know how they do—like I’m not strong enough.” And I said things like that. I can’t. I can’t. And he didn’t say anything to me. He just—he went downstairs and turned the water on in the tub. And I did that for awhile. And I just—I would close my eyes. I would—I actually stopped—I started holding my breath which is really counterintuitive. And that’s not what everyone says. You’re supposed to breathe.

But that didn’t feel good to me. Breathing. It felt like—it was like tenseness. Holding my breath. And then I get through a minute, a minute and a half of the—of this pain. And then I was able to breathe out and relax for a minute until another one came. And then I went—I waited in between the contractions to start walking. And I went downstairs. And while I was walking downstairs, I had another one. And that was the worst while I was standing. That did not feel good. The ones—I had been squatting previously. Like lots of squatting. And so I get in the tub, and I put my face under the water except for my mouth and nose. And he left. I’m in there by myself and just going through them.

So every time I would have one, I'd hold on to the tub. And I—I remember I started pulling my hair at one point because it was so intense. And he came back in. And I said again, "I can't do this." And this is now about—this is like 8:00 in the morning. And so about—what? Three hours passed. I'm just like, "I can't do it. I can't do it." And I was just like—he said—he's like, "Look,"—he said, "I know that,"—and I said, "I want—I need drugs." And I kept saying drugs. I wasn't saying epidural. I just said, "I want drugs." And he said, "You know, if you get in the car and you go to the hospital, it's going to feel a lot worse for you than it does right now. So just—let's just stay here for a little bit." He's like, "You're doing great."

**MARYN:** What a great support. That's the perfect thing to say, right? Just be in the moment. Yep.

**SARAH:** Yeah. It was perfect and created such a great space. And it was beautiful. The light came in. It was early morning. And I was under this really pretty cherry tree in the water. And so after that, I kind of just started to surrender more. And I was like, "There is no way I'm getting out of this tub at all even if I'm here for 20 hours. Somehow I'm going to be here for 20 hours."

**MARYN:** Right. Your mind—your rational mind just leaves the building anyway. Yeah.

**SARAH:** Yeah. It does. And I don't even know why I was. It was like—I felt like everyone was talking to me as in the earth, the moon. All the elements were talking to me and—they were holding me. And I felt so connected to something bigger than me at that time. Everything was in the room watching me.

**MARYN:** Yeah. I was going to ask you did you feel fear at any moment just because it was moving so fast and you were finding your way through really without any outside anything other than kind words and water and all that. Like did you have a moment of panic like just wondering what was going on or when this would happen?

**SARAH:** In the tub, I did because I just felt like how—I don't—I can't do it. I just kept saying that to myself. I can't, can't, can't. And I wasn't being very positive. I was just—it was really overwhelming. And it hit me so hard. I just kept—every time I'd have a contraction, I would feel like I can't do this again. And then I'd do it again. And then I would say to myself, "Oh god. I can't do that again." And then I'd do it again. So it was kind of like that when you say you can't do something, but at the same time, you're—

**MARYN:** But you know you can.

**SARAH:** - you're in the middle of it. But you know you can, so it was accepting.

**MARYN:** I think that's part of labor though. I mean—I don't know. It has been for me. It's like this self test especially with the free births I've had. I thought maybe that meant

I wouldn't have those moments, those couple minutes of being like, "I can't do this." But it didn't mean that at all. It was just I was the one to say, "Yes. You can." So strange.

**SARAH:** Wow. Yeah. It's—I just love how—I can—everyone is different. And every birth experience is different even though birth is—it's the same kind of physiology. But it's—I started to think about this. I stated saying, "Okay. My experience is going to be different than anyone else, and that's okay. Don't worry. It's going to be okay." And then I sunk into the water, and I kept—I was still pulling my hair and gritting my teeth—

**MARYN:** Sure. You do what you got to do.

**SARAH:** - thinking, "Holy shit. This is hard." And then I started to feel like the pressure on my butt.

**MARYN:** Yep. That's a wonderful feeling.

**SARAH:** I'm like, "Oh my god. This is happening. There's a baby coming." I knew that it would feel that way, so I wasn't thinking, "Oh god. I have to poop," because I knew I had already done all that before. There's no poop in there or even if there is—

**MARYN:** It's like the turnaround moment. I think starting to feel that is like so many women just get all of their confidence and all their exuberance and all their determination just comes back into the room when they start feeling that. It's a beautiful thing.

**SARAH:** So good. And I felt like I'm—she's moving. And it wasn't—and some of my contractions slowed down. And that wasn't painful for me. The part where she was coming down. That was just intense. And it required lots of yelling and lots of noise, and so I was grunting and just making loud moans and things in order to move through that. Yeah. And so I did that. And then at one point, I remember putting my hand in—just barely inside of myself. And I could feel her head. And I freaked out. This is maybe a freak out moment. I freak out because I thought to myself, "There's no way in hell that my cervix has already opened all the way up enough that there's a baby's head that's really coming out of my vagina. That is impossible."

**MARYN:** Hey, that's the best sort of freak out moment to have, I think, huh?

**SARAH:** I know. I thought she was pushing through the wall of my vagina, and it was going to rip the wall open. I'd never have a vagina again.

**MARYN:** The things that go through our heads in labor. Oh my god.

**SARAH:** I know. It was so absurd to think. And then it took me a minute to figure out, "How am I going to tell if it's really her head or if it's the wall of my vagina?" And so I tried to look. And I couldn't see around my giant belly. And then we—I asked Ash to

get a mirror, but we don't have any small mirrors. We just—so he grabbed a DVD. And I couldn't even see. So he could sort of see her. But he was like, "I can't really tell what I'm looking at." So I went down. I grabbed her hair. I was like, "Okay. She's—the baby has got to have hair." So I went to pinch. And sure enough, there was hair in my hands.

**MARYN:** Oh, that moment. That's amazing.

**SARAH:** Yeah. I was so—it just changed my feeling about the whole thing. It was like it doesn't matter how long I've been here. That shocked part of me went away. And then—

**MARYN:** Yeah. That connection. That connection brought you back.

**SARAH:** Yeah. Like here it is. Here's—here we are together. And it was so awesome and just beautiful and wonderful. And I was so—such in myself. I didn't even think about listening to her heart beat or checking her tones to see if she was—how she was doing.

**MARYN:** Yeah. You just knew. You just knew.

**SARAH:** I just knew it was okay. And I'm sure they were changing. And I'm sure they were crazy because it was happening so fast. But I just knew that it was okay. And then the contractions—maybe ten of them—the really intense of ones. But it just—her moving through, but it felt really awesome because I felt all those movements.

**MARYN:** Yeah. And did you feel like you were pushing? What was your experience? Was your body just—did your body just take over with that? Moving her down?

**SARAH:** It did. It was incomplete involuntary experience. I just held on to the tub and let my body do it. It was just like throwing up where it's involuntary. It's like once it starts it just goes until it's out. It's the same—I feel like it's a similar reflex. I didn't push at all.

**MARYN:** I love people to hear that. What an amazing—I mean I know it was so intense. And it's not meant to diminish any of the super hard work, but when you allow it to happen that way your body really does just complete it. And that's what most people don't know. They're going to actively push. That's appropriate for some births, but it wasn't for yours.

**SARAH:** Right. I mean I think that—I mean I even tried to push when I didn't have a contraction just to see. I got to a place where I was experimenting. I'm like, "What will this feel like?"

**MARYN:** Yeah. That's really cool.

**SARAH:** I tried that. It didn't—I didn't do anything. It just—nothing happened. And when I got to the place where I felt like she was starting to—oh, no. No. No. It's okay. When she was starting to crown, I felt so in control of my body. Hey, sweetie. Okay. Just a second. Hey.

**MARYN:** Oh, that's fine. Maya is probably getting a little impatient with us retelling her story that she knows oh so well.

**SARAH:** She's like, "Oh mom. I've heard this one so many times."

**MARYN:** She's like, "I just came out. What's the big deal?" So did you catch her? Did you guys both receive her? What was—what did you—

**SARAH:** We both—we both did because at that point when I was—when she was moving down, I felt more comfortable. I wasn't in the same headspace as I was before. I kind of went into a more protective like the—I just felt good. All of the happy hormones were kicking in. And it was great to be able to feel the different hormones. So she started to come out, and I was able to slow it down because I felt like it would help if I was able to breathe through it. And I could breathe through it great, so I was breathing through her coming out. And then her head came out, and it looked like she—well, she had the cord wrapped around her neck. She was face down. And we were—Ash was behind me and kind of had his hands like next to me and just waiting for her to come out. And her—I felt her kicking inside of me.

**MARYN:** That's awesome.

**SARAH:** It stimulated a little contraction. And she came out, and we both picked her up. And I held her, and Ash moved the cord. And she wasn't breathing right away. Of course. But she just had these giant eyes and was looking up at us. And I was like, "Oh my god. This is,"—it was the most amazing thing. She stared up at us, and Ash moved the cord from around her neck. And she started coughing and breathing. It was so incredible. And I just was in so much shock like, "I got through this experience I didn't think in a million years I would ever be able to do." And I—and then Ash told me what time it was. I was like, "How—I didn't,"—I felt like taken back like I didn't have any preparation. It just happened. Like I woke up, and she's coming out. It was really intense. In hindsight, I feel like if I had thought more about the fact that a lot of women—some women give birth really quickly that could have been in my scope of thinking, but it wasn't.

**MARYN:** Right. Right. Do you think that ultimately helped you though? How do you feel now that you're looking back? Do you—I don't know. Do you wish you had been more aware or was it just perfect the way it happened? What do you think?



**SARAH:** I think it was perfect the way it happened because it—I don't want to—there would be no—nothing I would change whatsoever. I think that if I had thought, "Well, it could be really quick," then maybe it would have been longer. And it would have been more difficult. Or it could have been—it would have been a whole different set of emotions. I felt like it's—it's just to me one of the lessons—the big lesson I learned was that I can trust myself. I can let go and trust my body. It's going to do what it needs to do to heal, to take care of me, to have a baby, to—and so it's helped me since then to just—to allow it to heal. And I feel like I'm better equipped to take care of myself through that.

**MARYN:** And her which is the beautiful part. She taught you much of that I'm sure throughout the whole experience.

**SARAH:** Yeah. And through the baby experience, I'm learning about patience and—

**MARYN:** Yeah. For sure. For sure. So what would your words of wisdom be then? I mean just for women listening that maybe they've had a baby before. Maybe they're like you were a year ago. What's your best—not advice—but just like share your wisdom because you have so much of it. And you really, really got to know yourself and made choices from your heart, which I think we can never go wrong with not matter what we ultimately choose, if that's the place we come from. So what does your heart say? What does it want to tell these women that are pregnant?

**SARAH:** Hmm. Well, my heart says that yeah. You've got every—every woman is incredible and that I'm so excited that you're listening to this. And just listening to your heart. I think that, for me, the easiest way that I found to listen to myself is to be silent and to be—to take some time—to take some space from people and to just learn how to feel. And also that surrendering of not knowing but it's okay. When you're not knowing, you're just feeling. And it's surrendering to not—no expectations. I think I had some expectations that it would be long, and that affected me. But I think not having expectations during the pregnancy was something that I worked on every single day. And something that was just really helpful to be able to say my birth is going to be different than anyone else's. And it doesn't have to feel like anyone else's. And even without expectations, I still was a little surprised. But I think just spending that time during your pregnancy, getting to know yourself and your feelings and your heart and checking in, has—was really helpful for me. And I'm just so thankful that I was able to do that, and I have the support to do that. And I was around other people that supported that way of thinking that weren't like, "What do you mean? You need to get to the emergency room."

**MARYN:** Yeah. That's a huge part. That's a huge part.

**SARAH:** Really happy with the support that I had. And that's huge too. I think another piece of wisdom is that your birth support, your birth team, the people with you. I think you need to be very—you need to be on the same place with you about what your expectations are and what your—or just what your wishes are and how you feel about it and can support you no matter what their feelings are about it. That's very important.

**MARYN:** Yeah. Yeah. Well, that's wonderful. I think that's obviously very wise words. And I so appreciate you sharing your story.

**SARAH:** Absolutely. Thank you for having me.

**MARYN:** Oh, you're so welcome. It is such an honor. I mean I just can't tell you how amazing you are. We just don't live in a time and place now where women having their first baby have very much confidence. And I hope that—I know that this story will give at least a few women the confidence to start figuring out what they really want. And I am just so grateful to you, Sarah.

**SARAH:** Well, thank you.

**MARYN:** So congratulations nine months later. And yeah. Thanks for sharing. And that little girl grows up with quite a story and even a podcast about her so how cool is that.

**SARAH:** Yay. You have a podcast. Well, thank you for being so amazing and creating the space for women to come together and to support each other. Because without that, I would have felt so lonely in this process and don't know if I would have been able to build the confidence. And I really feel like through support from all of you that it was really—I was able to get to that place because you're right. Sometimes we are rare and few and far between. Those of us who decide to question the norms—

**MARYN:** The authority.

**SARAH:** The authority.

**MARYN:** Yeah. No. It's good hearing that. I mean I think ideally we're in the same place. We would love, all of us, to have actual women living and breathing in our communities. But most of us don't have that. We only have a few, if that. And so as cold as online things may feel at first to some people, this is where a lot of women are finding what they need. So we thank you for being part of this community that we can now say to other women—so much for listening today. Sarah is an amazing person, and I know she is available for questions should anybody have them. And thanks so much, everybody, for your support for Indie Birth and for helping babies come into this world in a beautiful way like Maya did. So thanks again for listening. And take care, everybody.

(closing music)