

(introductory music)

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MARYN: Welcome to Indie Birth's series of podcasts here on iTunes, *Taking Back Birth*. Hi, everyone. Maryn here with another great interview with one of our teachers at our upcoming Indie Birth Midwifery Conference. Now if you don't already know, you can check out the details at indiebirth.com/conference, but we are holding our very first midwifery conference here in Sedona in January 2016. Now the theme is all about what we call the new midwifery. So we're saying that to us this is a blend of kind of everything that we love best about true midwifery. So we're blending science along with the sacred, the art and soul of midwifery. And the conference will focus on that, how we do that, why we do that. And definitely, the speakers we have handpicked to represent what we are trying to achieve. So without further ado, our guest today is the wonderful Gena Kirby. Welcome, Gina.

GENA: Hey, Maryn. Thanks for having me.

MARYN: Yeah. We are so excited that Gena will be attending our conference, and she will be presenting a preconference session. So a couple hours before the main conference. And she is going to do what she is probably known best for which is traveling around the country and teaching midwives and doulas alike about the rebozo. So Gena, for those of you—or for those of us rather that don't know you, how about a brief bio and just kind of how you got into birth or whatever you want to share with our listeners.

GENA: Oh sure. Yeah. I always want to know how do people get into this industry.

MARYN: I know. Me too. I know.

GENA: At our age—I mean I know our kids are probably like, "I want to be a doula," but I know when I was younger, I had no idea what the heck that was. So I love hearing all of our origin stories.

MARYN: Mm-hmm. Yes. Let's hear your origin.

GENA: How did you fall into this business? And mine started—I was in the restaurant industry for 20 years. And I was going to—that was going to be my entire life. I was going to own restaurants and just keep doing that business because I loved it until I got pregnant with my first child. And I had no idea what I was doing. I thought I was doing a good job by taking classes at the local hospital. And I had my baby at a hospital, and I remember it was like—there's a song called *Is That All There Is*. And I was just like,

"This can't be it. This can't be childbirth. This can't be like what it's supposed to be like." And it wasn't until I needed help with breastfeeding that my wonderful husband went and went to the local hospital and was like, "My hus—my wife is having trouble breastfeeding. Help. What do I do?" And they sent us to a La Leche League meeting. And thank God for the La Leche League ladies. And they taught me a lot about breastfeeding, and they taught me a lot about physiological—what normal birth is. And I was like, "Wow. I didn't have that. I want to know more about it." And I just kind of became a crazy person about educating myself about what that means and what that looks like. And I just kind of went nuts with it. And my husband was like, "Okay. You've got to stop talking about this birth business or do something about it." So I opened a maternity store years ago. Many, many moons ago in Fresno, California. And just kind of—that was the beginning of falling down the rabbit hole for me. I met this wonderful woman. Her name was Lisa Garden. She was my—we hired her to teach Lamaze. She was the only certified Lamaze instructor in Fresno. And happened to be a doula. And she happened to be a labor and delivery nurse. No. Not L&D. She was a pediatric nurse.

MARYN: Mm-hmm.

GENA: And she just started kind of opening my eyes to what birth could be like and what it was like for women. And as a feminist, I think it really just kind of irked me about what was going on in the world in birth and that women didn't know their rights. And they didn't know that they had choices. And after that, it just—she said I kind of turned into a birth monster. And I just kind of got worse and worse. And then I had a second baby. And we hired her as my doula. And I had an accidental unassisted labor and birth with her. Our midwife came about 20 minutes after Uma was born. And wow. That was crazy. That was like—it was so different from my hospital birth. Maryn, it was like—it was magic. I mean you know.

MARYN: Mm-hmm.

GENA: Just mind blowing. And I went from this person who was afraid of flying and afraid of crossing bridges—and I was afraid of a lot of things that life provided. And after her birth, I was completely transformed.

MARYN: Oh my gosh. You conquered the world.

GENA: Yeah. I became this fearless person. And even my husband said afterwards—and I don't remember this. But Craig swears I said this. That I turned to him to said, very fiercely, "I can do anything now."

MARYN: Mm-hmm. I bet you did.

GENA: And he was like, "Holy crap." Like he said he was never afraid of me in his life until that moment. He's like, "At that you were like eat me." Just pull in that moment.

MARYN: Oh my gosh. That's great.

GENA: It was her birth. And my friend, Lisa, and just a number of things that kind of turned me down this road. And I became a doula after that. And just kind of never meant to teach about the rebozo. I learned about it from this amazing, Guadalupe Traba. I always tell people everywhere I go, "If you can take her workshop, sell everything you own and go do that," because she's amazing. I don't necessarily teach what she taught—what I learned from her. What I teach is all the mistakes that I made using the rebozo. What I teach is how to introduce it to your American clients. And it's really nothing at all about what I learned from her. I think the biggest thing I got from her was the passion about it though. And that's completely a whole other deal. I think people come to my workshop expecting to learn how to turn a baby. And I think that's a very limited view of the rebozo.

MARYN: Yeah. I love that you say that because I think a lot of people have that myth in their head. I know I did before I took your class. Just that we're really going to be learning these concrete techniques to do things. And as somebody—and I know you agree because you've had these kind of births yourself. As somebody that doesn't think birth needs tons of help, it's definitely a myth. So I love that you were bringing your experience to this class, and you're using the rebozo kind of as a bridge or a tool to really communicate to birth workers the important things. That's what I got from your class anyway.

GENA: Oh, well thank you. Yeah. I think just looking at the rebozo as a way to turn a baby is a very—like I said, a limited way of looking at it when it's so much more than that. And that—and my personal belief that babies know how to be born. And I think we do, like you said, a lot of interfering. And I love sharing how to use the rebozo in a way that brings the couple closer together, that can help mom get out of her own way and allow the baby to do what baby already knows how to do. And kind of reframing how we look at birth and the rebozo. So I love it. I mean I am crazy, wicked passionate about what I share regarding it.

MARYN: Yeah. Yeah. And that's, again, why we're so excited for you to come. I think you are just one of the most perfect people to be presenting at this conference because we're witnessing—and I think we're trying to cocreate this shift. This shift in birth. This shift in midwifery where the relationship between midwives and women is changing, I think, for the positive. And so something like your workshop I think will really touch these midwives and remind them that their connection to the client both physically and emotionally is so important. That the connection between the couple is of utmost

importance. And these are things, again, I think we've just gotten away from. It's all medicalized now. And what happened to this connection and these relationships. And I think the rebozo is just such a beautiful way, and you have such a beautiful way, of using it to talk about these things.

GENA: Oh, thank you. I'm super crazy honored. I mean just that you guys asked me. I was—I told my husband—I was like, "Can you believe it?" I was so excited. So I am very honored. And I'm excited. I'm excited to get in front of more midwives. I remember the first time I had a midwife in my workshop. I was sweating, Maryn. I was freaked out that there was a midwife in my workshop. And my husband was like—I was like, "Oh my gosh. She's just going to think I'm—what do I have to teach a midwife?" And I was just weireded out. And he was like, "Do you really think that this woman is spending her hard earned midwife money to come and judge you?" And I said, "That's a really good question."

MARYN: Well, I guess there's always that chance.

GENA: (cross talk) because she wants to learn from you." And so I'm in the workshop. I still haven't ever gotten over getting in front of a room full of women. It's always a little nerve wracking for me. And so I always look for the kindest face, right? So I find this lady, who is just beaming at me the whole workshop. And so I keep looking at her. And I kind of talk towards her. And then after the workshop was over, she came over, and she was like, "I really enjoyed your workshop. It was fantastic." I'm like, "Oh, wow. That means a lot to me." I said, "Especially since I know that there's a midwife in my workshop today. And you were just the sweetest, kindest face. I was really focusing on you because I was just really worried about the midwife." And she's like, "Gena, I'm the midwife." It was just the sweetest thing. It really helped me get over myself. And, of course, she was so wonderful. She was a midwife. But it really was—it was fantastic. And it taught me a lot about—we do this to ourselves, I think, as women. And women are birth workers. Or birth professionals.

MARYN: Right.

GENA: And we kind of do this to ourselves where we have—we bring in this self doubt. And she really helped me to start on my journey to begin to understand of letting go of that stuff. And how those things don't even—they don't serve our clients either.

MARYN: Right. Right.

GENA: And so that—she was my first step on changing how I see myself and changing how I teach too. Because once I got out of my own way, then it allowed kind of for some really good stuff to come through me. It's not about me. It's not about—

sometimes it's not even about the rebozo. But you won't understand that until you take my workshop.

MARYN: Exactly. And we're not going to give away the workshop because it's way too wonderful. And there is no way we really could, so you'll just need to attend this anyway. But I totally agree. It's ego aside. I think we both, and many others of course as well, have a connection with what we all know. We're trying to find ways to illustrate the ancient knowledge that we know we all have. And I think, again, you're just a perfect example of this. Combining what we know as women, what we know in birth, and then, of course, you have the added bonus of, like you said, adding the how do we do this here in the U.S. kind of twist. Because we aren't Mexican midwives. We're here. And we're now. And we're doing this now. So it's a whole new way, I think, of presenting the rebozo than probably really had been done more traditionally. So that's cool.

GENA: Yeah. I'm not a Mexican midwife. I am a Mexican doula. I will say that.

MARYN: That's awesome. So what would you say—with every class you teach because I know every one that you do is so close to your heart—what are you hoping these midwives, in particular, will come away with?

GENA: A new view of the rebozo. They're going to look at it differently. They're definitely going to—I always say at the beginning of my workshop. If I do a good job, you're going to look at this in a whole new light. You're not going to ever look at it the way that you do now. And my other hope is that it comes out of the dark recesses of their bags. To bring it out of their tool box and kind of into their lives more. That's my goal.

MARYN: Mm-hmm. Yeah. That's a very worthy goal, of course. And so would you say that's the most important part about what you're teaching? Or if you could narrow it down?

GENA: I feel like the two things I think is, one, I really love sharing the culture behind it and how important it is to women—not just women but families in Mexico and in Central America and South America. I love sharing the history behind it. And secondly, I really just want to see them using it more in ways that they didn't know that they could use it.

MARYN: Mm-hmm. Mm-hmm. Yeah. Yeah.

GENA: Those are my two goals.

MARYN: Well, and for a lot of midwives and doulas, they've really never even used it before. So this is all together pretty—I mean I never had. I never had at all. It was completely new information. I mean, of course, I knew what it was and sort of what

people were saying. But, again, I felt like just the whole spiel, the whole class, was well beyond a rebozo.

GENA: Oh, well, that means a lot to me. Thank you. Well, people, I think, wonder—because my full workshop is six hours. They're like, "How the heck do you talk about a piece of fabric for six hours?" But there's so much that it can do. And it's really limitless once you learn the basics. And then you're like, "What? I had no idea." And that's exciting. I like hearing that a lot. It's super—it's just such a great opportunity for me. I'm always excited to share it. This is my culture too. This is something that's from my heritage. And I'm stoked to share it. I don't think that we should keep it and hide it. I think this kind of knowledge—it's important to share it. And it's disappearing in Mexico and Central America and South America. A lot of people there they don't have any idea about it. I mean Monterrey, Mexico has a 90% C-section rate.

MARYN: Oh my gosh. I know.

GENA: That's crazy town. So it is. It's disappearing. And I'm excited to help keep it alive.

MARYN: Yeah. Yeah. That's definitely kind of a subtheme of this conference too. Talking with Dr. Stu last week, of course, about the art of the disappearing vaginal breech. And we're going to have another midwife, who also has learned traditional methods from South American midwives on body work and massage. She's bringing all that to the table, and she doesn't feel like it's being recorded or saved. So you're joining those ranks too of we really have to figure out, in our generation especially, how are we going to preserve this information. It's really important.

GENA: Yeah. And it has to be handed down. It has to be shared like this. And Dr.—by the way, Dr. Stu—I'm so stoked that he's going to be there. I can't wait to see him again. This is the kind of OB he is. He took my workshop.

MARYN: Yeah. Oh, I bet he did.

GENA: Yeah. He did.

MARYN: Okay. That's the best advertisement. I hope everybody heard that. And every midwife that thought, "Oh, I don't need the rebozo, or I don't need a workshop," just heard that. And heard how an obstetrician—yeah.

GENA: Two OBs in my workshop. And they were both just like, "What?" And it was so exciting to see that. To see the wonder and the light bulbs going off. And them going, "Yeah. This is awesome." And just he's that kind of guy. He was at my Blessingway. Are you kidding me?

MARYN: Yeah. That's awesome. That's really cool. Well, I mean that's, I think, where we're at too is everybody just having to drop their egos and be humble and admit what we don't know and find other people that have the knowledge we want and just humbly accept and learn from them. I mean that's the name of the game.

GENA: Girl, if I ever have another baby and I have a midwife at my birth, I want her to be the kind of person who is like, "I can't get enough conferences." I want somebody who is always learning. I don't want a midwife that thinks they know everything. That's not who I want at my birth. So yeah. I can't wait to meet the people that are going to be at the conference because they're just going to be my kind of people. So I'm stoked.

MARYN: Yes. Exactly. Yep. The world is big, and there is lots to learn. And we are just so thrilled you will be there, and we can connect with you and learn from you. So thanks.

GENA: Well, I get to learn. That's what I'm excited about.

MARYN: Well, right. It's a bonus for everybody really. And I feel that way too. I'm like, "Oh my gosh. I get to bring all these people here and learn from them. How fabulous is that."

GENA: You are living the life. That is how you do.

MARYN: Yes. It is. It is.

GENA: That's it. And I learn every time I teach which is, I think, the great thing about teaching.

MARYN: Exactly.

GENA: That there's never a day—a workshop where I don't walk away going, "Oh wow. I'm so glad that that person brought that up." Or I'll say something and then I'll really think about it. Be mindful about what I just said and be like, "Wow. I just learned something new." So yeah. Teaching, learning. It's all good stuff. It's kind of the same thing.

MARYN: Well, and birth too. Birth is life. When do you not learn from birth or from women or from babies. I mean it just never stops. So having a dedicated weekend will be fabulous and we hope many, many likeminded ones will join us.

GENA: Yeah. Yeah. That's the best part of it.

MARYN: Yeah. For sure. Well, anything else you want to share before you arrive here in January to meet people in person? Anything we should have as parting words from you before then?

GENA: Gosh. What do I want to share? I don't know. I think the biggest thing for me—I'm excited about going back to Sedona. I have to tell you. I had a very—I don't know. This moment. It's so spiritual. I don't even know how to explain it. I've never been to Sedona before. I didn't—I was just like—I don't know. I've been to Arizona. But Sedona is different.

MARYN: Oh, it's so different.

GENA: I felt like I went to a sanctuary. Like someplace sacred. I felt like I went to this cathedral of the earth. It was so gorgeous. I wasn't expecting that. I wasn't—it was just—it was too beautiful. It was a dream that I had. And it didn't last long enough. And I didn't really get to enjoy it. And so I'm really excited to come back to just that part of the planet that I didn't know ever existed. It was just—it was gorgeous. And I really can't wait to go back and feel the vibes from the earth. And by the way, I'm not a super crunchy person. So for me to use these words is something else. But for me, I just got this vibration from the area. Or maybe it's just you, Maryn. I don't know. Maybe it's just you and your family. But I just—it felt magical. It was beautiful, and I cannot wait to go back. I am super stoked about that. I'm excited about meeting all these amazing people that are going to be drawn to you and to the area and to the spirit of what you guys are putting together. Those are the kind of—I can't wait to meet these people because I know when you go to conferences like this—I go for two things. I go to learn. And I go for community because you know you're going to walk away with at least one life time friend.

MARYN: Yes. I totally agree.

GENA: And I always do. And it's exciting. And I can't wait. Like I go going, "Who are you friend that I'm going to meet?" I can't wait. And then I meet them. And I'm like, "Oh, there you are."

MARYN: Yeah. I've known you forever. And here we are. We just met. Yeah.

GENA: I know you. That's exactly it. That's how—what it's like.

MARYN: Yeah. Yeah. Well, I totally agree. And I was thinking just that same thing yesterday about Sedona. I thought, "Is it weird if I try and communicate that somehow? Just that this place is so magnetic." And to come with an intention especially around birth and changing things in birth, it's really going to be magnified here. And that's not an exaggeration. It's not a joke. I'm not trying to be ultra New Age. It's just that how it is here. So whoever comes, whoever is drawn to come to learn from you and the others, I really think it's something that will be memorable for sure.

GENA: Yeah. I can't wait. Yeah. I'm your gal to say some crazy stuff about Sedona. That was—it's awesome. It was really just wow. Just wow. I want to bring my family there. I want to retire there. It's gorgeous.

MARYN: Yes. Well, you are welcome any time. And gosh, yeah. You need to move to Sedona then. We'll talk about that later.

GENA: Oh, there I said it. I let the cat out of the bag. My family will freak out. We just moved to Albuquerque. They'll be like, "No."

MARYN: Well, you know, give it a couple conferences. That's all. And they'll be sold.

GENA: Exactly. Yeah. I won't have to do it. I'll just let Sedona do it.

MARYN: Yeah. Sedona does do it. So anyway.

GENA: I can't wait to see you again.

MARYN: Me too. Thank you so much for doing this. I am so lucky that I get to connect with you that I have gotten to take your class that I'll get to take it again. And really and anyone listening, I think you can really feel Gena's passion and just how necessary people like this are in our world to change things in birth. And I sincerely mean that. And I feel that way about everybody that we're bringing here that these are paradigm shifters. So thanks again, Gena. I love you. And I cannot wait to see you in a couple months.

GENA: Oh, I love you too. Thank you so much. Thank you for this. And thank you for the invite. I can't wait. You guys, if you're on the fence, just come. Just listen to your heart. Follow your gut.

MARYN: Yes. Check it out. Indiebirth.com/conference. Gena, Dr. Stu, and many other amazing teachers and attendees will be there. So we'll see you there in January and thanks for listening.

(closing music)