

(introductory music)

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MARYN: Welcome to Indie Birth's series of podcasts here on iTunes, *Taking Back Birth*. Hi, everyone. Maryn today with another guest. Lots of guests lately on this podcast which is really fun. So here at Indie Birth, we have the privilege of hearing from lots of women all over the world that are making choices, very empowered choices, and some are having midwife-attended births. Some women are choosing free birth. And, of course, we love and support both options. So when today's guest wrote me offering to share her free birth story, I was pretty excited. I love these kind of guests and stories because I know that they are so inspiring to the women that are out there. I know because I hear back from so many of you when we do these sorts of podcasts or even feature birth stories on the site. And I think it's just so great to hear somebody live and in person share their experience.

So today's guest is a lovely woman name Siri, who had an unassisted birth two and a half years ago. That baby's name is Shade, and we're going to talk about that today. Siri is preparing for her next child this summer, and we'll hear, I guess, about how that's going as well, if we have time. So welcome, Siri. Thanks so much for joining us today.

SIRI: Thank you for having me.

MARYN: Yes. Of course. So let's see. Where shall we start? How about anything you'd like to share? Just that wasn't a very formal introduction. So anything you want to share about yourself before we kind of dive into the whole choosing a freebirth idea.

SIRI: Yeah. Well, like you said, I have a two and a half year old, and he's my first kid. And yeah. He was an unassisted birth, and I had planned for that for a really long time. I was thinking just—well sometime in the last year or two realizing what led me to all these ideas of birth and this birth that I wanted to have. And I realized that it—like all the thoughts you have that go all the way back to your childhood and all your experiences seeing births on TV and in movies and hearing other women's stories or hearing your own mom's story. And I actually grew up on a farm. I grew up on a llama farm. And so I realized I saw a ton of births just as a little kid.

MARYN: Wow. That's cool.

SIRI: And even though they weren't human—yeah. So even though they weren't human births, they were still really played a part in normalizing birth for me and making it not a huge crazy thing even though that's what I saw in the media. And I think, at

some point, my mom figured out that there were over 70 baby llamas born at our house. And so we—anytime there was a llama giving birth and we were around, my mom would be like, “Come on. Let’s go watch.” And actually, she had a daycare. And she would bring out all the kids, and we’d sit in an audience to watch this birth happen. And it was just kind of normal, and it happened a lot. And I was also remembering a funny thing that—after the baby would come out and the placenta would come out, my mom would put the placenta in a wheelbarrow. And these were big placentas for a big farm animal. And she would shovel it into a wheelbarrow, and then she’d take it to the garden. And she’d dig a hole and bury the placenta in the garden. And then we’d—and then she’d cover it up. And then we would jump on it like a trampoline like it was all—it would make the ground bouncy.

And so I was like—had forgotten about all this stuff. I realize I heard somebody say that they didn’t even know what a placenta was until they were an adult. And I was realizing I’ve known what a placenta was since I was a tiny kid and had personal experiences and a lot of just seeing it up close. So I think that really planted a seed for me of just knowing that birth, even though I didn’t see human births, that birth could be a really simple thing. So fast forward, I was 18 or 19 years old. And I got into the idea of raw foodism, and I was learning a lot about health. And I read a book called *Primal Mothering in a Modern World* and—that had to do with raw food. And that was the first time I had ever heard of a person speak of unassisted birth. The woman who wrote that book had had unassisted births, and so it was—it really clicked something in me that I wanted to learn more about that and how cool that was.

So I started reading a lot. And I found out about Laura Shanley and her book. And at one point, probably a year after that, I ordered *Unassisted Childbirth*, the book. At the time, I don’t think I could get it online. This was ten years ago or so. And I had to call her on the phone personally. And it was like—she was this big celebrity—orders a book from her. I was so excited.

MARYN: Oh, that’s cool.

SIRI: And to talk with her. So I got that book and read that and read a little bit more. But I didn’t end up actually getting pregnant for several years after that. That was probably when I was 20. And then when I was—I got pregnant at 26. So then I—yeah. Well, I started reading here and there books and just I—articles that talked about this different idea of birth. And it just didn’t seem very popular of an idea that I heard anybody else talking about. And I actually had—I had a lot of friends that were sort of into the birth scene of home birth with a midwife. And one of my best friends actually got pregnant at 19 and had her first baby at 20. And she had a home birth with a midwife. And then she got really involved in the—that scene. The home birth scene. And so I was around that a lot and around a lot of people. And there was a really cool

organization here called Bloomington Area Birth Services that provided support for pregnant women and provided just options for birth classes and options, education about all the different options. And so there is a kind of a community around educating yourself about birth. But it sort of stopped at midwife-attended birth. That was the most radical that most of the people that I knew seemed to be aware of.

MARYN: Right.

SIRI: So I felt like I had these ideas of this birth that I wanted, but I didn't feel like I could really talk about it. And any time I did try and bring it up a little bit I felt like my ideas were just shot down. And a lot of it was because I had never done it before. So that's one thing is having—talking about having an unassisted birth but already having given birth before. I feel like maybe people listen to you a little bit more because you know what is coming. But having never given birth, people just laugh at you like you don't know what you're getting into. How could you have this idea of doing it alone? So I just kind of felt like I couldn't really talk about it to many people and just had to sort of learn on my own and just be quiet about that interest.

MARYN: Now what were you seeing with your friends that were choosing other things like midwife-attended home birth or—I don't know. All other kinds of things. What specific things were you seeing that you knew you had a different vision about? Because I think that's something that people don't think about. Most women aren't having unassisted births. Even those that are having midwife-attended births often don't know what they're getting themselves into as far as risks, benefits. So what were you specifically seeing that you decided you had a different vision about?

SIRI: Midwife-attended birth seemed to be the most radical idea to some friends. And that was home birth. It's so much different than hospital birth, and they were really aware of how detrimental it could be to give birth in a hospital and just how all the interventions can lead to complications. And so it seemed like home birth was such a radical thing. But to me, it still seemed kind of medicalized. At least—and it was kind of radical. There was a lot of people I knew who had the same midwives here in our community. And their stories about people who lived way out in the woods in a tiny little cabin with no electricity and no driveway and the midwives would hike all the way out there and—it just seemed so different. And they would just with no electricity or running water help somebody give birth. But at the same time, they would also take them to the hospital at what seemed like, to me, times that didn't really seem necessary to take someone to the hospital. And so on the one hand, it seemed really natural and alternative. And then on the other hand, it seemed like it could switch really quickly into not being that. So I don't know if that answers the question very well.

MARYN: Yeah. Yeah. I think it does. I think it's just pointing out that which is home birth can often be medical. And I think it does take an astute person to see that. And like you're saying, especially when you haven't had a baby before, to see that, I think, is really amazing. That's really a gift to be able to see things more clearly. So how did you take care of yourself during your pregnancy? What was your routine? Or what did you feel like you needed to do?

SIRI: I mean I took good care of myself with diet and just focusing on how I felt and then reading a lot. Reading about if there was—I kind of didn't stress about anything being wrong unless I felt like there was something that was wrong. And I felt like it would be obvious if there was something that was wrong. So I just did a lot of research and kind of just kept an eye on anything that I read about that would come up and ate well. And also just did a lot of envisioning. I know that sounds kind of hokey. But just really focusing on what I wanted. And I think that made a huge difference just focusing on what you want and visualizing.

MARYN: Yeah. Yeah. Gosh. I love that idea. I wish more women, especially first time moms, would—yeah. Think about what they do want and not all of the things that they don't want.

SIRI: Yeah. Going back to your previous question, I was really into—as a teenager, I was really into the idea of autonomy and kind of governing yourself. And when I was in high school, I researched a lot about just alternative education and education reform. And I spent time at different alternative schools and really got inspired by the schools and the forms of education where students had a lot of power of what they learned and had a lot of autonomy. And so that became a big theme for me. And I think that became something that confused people because people saw the idea that I wanted to do something on my own and learn on it—learn about it on my own made it look like I was rejecting learning from other people or doing—or collaborating or working with a midwife. It seemed like I was pushing all that away as if it was bad. But really I was just really excited about the idea of focusing on things myself and learning myself. So I think just being—seeking solitude and being able to create a clear vision that was just mine and not influenced by a whole bunch of other people's ideas of how my birth should be was really important to me. And also why I kind of tried not to really spread my plan very far and wide because I just knew I needed to sort of create that idea for myself and sort of be protective over it. And yeah—I just—yeah.

MARYN: Yeah. That's a great tip, I think, for people listening that protecting the space is really important. As someone that attends births often, I think that's most of what we do is help women protect their space, but there is no reason that we, as the birthing woman, can't do that for ourselves as well or entirely. It's really just as important to think of it that way. And then I think just as far as criticism, were you afraid that people

would be really negative or tell you scary stories or all of the above as well if you really were open about your plans?

SIRI: Yeah. I was protective over people's fear because I knew that a lot of people would be afraid especially family members and knowing that it was my first birth. That really I felt like made people more afraid just because people had this belief of you don't know what you're doing. You've never experienced this. How can you know what you're doing? So I wanted to protect myself from people's fear and negative stories, which is why I really tried to keep my plans private. But it didn't work. Anybody I told other people, and it just spread and spread. So then I had to really try and seek more solitude and just not be around people's fear. But there was that idea that—a friend of mine, who was a really close friend and a big part of the birth community, and she was a doula. And she had had two home births. She and I had kind of an argument at one point. Or not really argument but an intense conversation. And like I was kind of being private about my plans. And for her, it was this—there's this huge community of support here. And midwives and doulas and a birth community that you could be tapping into and getting all the support and resources, but you're rejecting it. And that wasn't what I felt like I was doing. I was just doing my own thing and loving that that was there, but that this was my path. And it was a little bit different than that. So I was trying to—that's the resistance I felt I came up against was this idea of, "Oh, you're a nonconformist, and you're just doing this to be different and to say screw authority," which wasn't true at all. Or it was just a lot of fear and like, "You're crazy, and you're—this is scary. What if you hurt yourself?" So those were the things that I felt like I was butting up against a lot.

My mom was worried, of course. And if there was any way that I could just not tell anybody my plans and just do it, I wish I could have done that. But I just couldn't. So my mom was worried, and she tried to talk me out of it and tried to talk me into having a midwife like, "Just have a midwife in the next room. Have somebody in the next room just in case." And she talked to a local midwife in town because she was worried. And my in-laws were really worried, and they had a midwife friend. And they talked to her. And thank goodness, she—I'm so grateful for her because what she told them was—she's in her sixties. And she's been a midwife for over 30 years. And she told them, "I've been to—I've been a midwife for so long. And mostly what I do is just sit and watch and let the woman do all the work. And she'll probably be fine." And so that really made them calm down, so I'm really glad that she had said that. But at one point, my brother Skype called me and tried to talk me out of it and was like, "You just never know what can happen. And don't you just want to have a midwife down the road? Couldn't you set up somebody?" And all these people in my family were trying to talk me out of it and just had a lot of fear. So I was just really—that was what I was the most tired of was just—

MARYN: Yeah. I bet you were. I mean it's so fascinating, isn't it? How people think that all of these things they think to be true make birth safer or less scary. It's so fascinating to me. People don't really want to know the truth, which is that birth works almost all of the time. And they should've been, of course, so impressed with your—not just confidence. I think that's not even what we're talking about. It's not just confidence. It's a deep knowing that you and your baby were made to do this. And that this was the right choice for you. It's so fascinating that people want us to sell out to that voice.

SIRI: And I had written down a quote from you the other day. I was listening to some of the Indie Birth classes. And you said something about how it's just unfortunate that people see this kind of prenatal care and birth as irresponsible because, in reality, it's the most responsible thing that you—a woman could possibly do is educate herself and learn everything she could. Get to know herself. Get to know her baby. Get to know her body and take that responsibility and question everything. Because really it wasn't like I was just saying, "Oh, I'm just going to do this." I was spending a ton of time reading books and researching and making sure I was prepared for everything. And I actually had a conversation. It's interesting because the majority of the people I talk to were just fearful and not really supportive. But there was a handful of people that were super supportive, and I just really held on to them and held on to their support. And one was this woman in my town who had had three kids, and she had had them all unassisted. And I got to talk to her which was really special. And actually, I found out that her mom gave birth to her unassisted. And she's in her sixties now.

MARYN: Wow.

SIRI: But she told me her stories, and she completely understood the mindset and the attitudes that I was up against in our community and just with anybody who hadn't had that experience. But she said to me it's the ultimate responsibility doing it this way. And in the moment, it was kind of like—brought a lot of seriousness to—I was like yeah. I need to know what I'm doing. I need to really prepare myself, and it just brought this reality of if anything happens that is unfortunate or it could be a complication, it's up to you to know and to be responsible. And so for me, it was this really serious thing that I was like researching and preparing myself. And like you said, it is the most responsible way to do it because you have to really know. I mean you don't have to know everything. But you have to be willing to take the responsibility whereas everybody else was seeing it as irresponsible.

MARYN: Yeah. Yeah. That's so backwards. My husband and I were just saying today how we live in a society that rewards people for being irresponsible. And I think that's one of those examples. Yeah. To have it be seen completely backwards like that is—yeah. Just amazing. And to have to search harder than most women do when they're pregnant for support, I think, is just a really good reminder that that's still where we're at.

Most people might—they might say that every choice is equal or women can make the choices they want. But really that's not what we feel when we're the ones making those choices.

SIRI: Right. Yeah.

MARYN: So did you prepare in any kind of way—this is always the question we get, so I have to ask. Prepare in any kind of way for a complication or were you more of the mindset that you would just know and would seek help. I think there's lots of ways that people go about preparing so just curious.

SIRI: Yeah. Well, I knew that I—kind of the most preparation that I felt like I needed to do for complications was just knowing how to recognize that something was wrong enough that I needed outside help. So yeah. I kind of learned about what would the signs that there would be something wrong. And probably mostly just trusted—yeah. Trusted that I would know without having book knowledge. Trusting that I would feel that something was wrong.

MARYN: Right.

SIRI: And I felt like—and I actually kept—I did a lot of reading. And I kept a notebook where I took lots of notes on all the books that I read. And then just took notes about—wrote down tinctures that would help with certain things and got those tinctures. And I felt like almost everything, every complication that I had learned about, I would know how to deal with or how to recognize and probably how to deal with it at home except for, I think, cord prolapse was the one thing that I was like, "Okay. That's when I would just go to the hospital." I didn't—

MARYN: Right.

SIRI: Or do what I would need to do before—while I was getting help for that. And yeah. So I always had the idea that if something was totally wrong I would totally go to the hospital if I needed it. I'm not rejecting that option. That's there if I need it. But I'm going to trust myself to know when I'll need that and not have somebody else tell me. And I had—yeah. I had some tinctures that would help with different things. And we had gotten a birth pool, not that that would help with complications. But hoping that would help with labor.

MARYN: Right.

SIRI: And didn't end up giving birth in the pool. But had it been there to help—so had different things. And then I had a really good friend that was super supportive and actually lived right next door to me, and she was on call for any help that I might need. And she knew a lot of birth and had spent just as much time as me, pretty much,

researching birth. And I talked with her a lot. So I felt like I had some kind of back up and support pretty close to me. And I also—going back to prenatal care stuff, I forgot to mention that I did see this woman who did abdominal massage—Mayan abdominal massage and prenatal massage, and she did craniosacral therapy. And so she was just really nurturing and wise and intuitive and healing kind of woman that was really nice to see. And she did massage. And she palpated my belly a little bit and helped me confirm the position of the baby, and so I knew that he was head down. And that became really obvious at the end. But it was nice to have her—just her energy and her second opinion about that. Not that she did any kind of internal exams or any other medical kind of thing. It was just nice to have somebody else who had a lot of experience with women and reproductive health. And she mentioned that she would be on call for questions, if I had any questions I needed to ask. So that was nice to have that available.

And then I also was seeing this guy that I don't know how to explain. He's a healer. He's a healer. But I don't—he doesn't heal with any kind of physical or medical means. He just can look—like he does iridology and would look at my hands, and he looked at my tongue and then would just put his hands on my knees. And people would line up at—he would travel around the Midwest, and people would line up outside of wherever he was once a month to just come see him. And he would—he just did healing. And it was really amazing, so I just started going to him once a month when he was in town just to have him intuitively check in and see if he felt that anything was wrong. And so—and I didn't know what to think about him. A friend had told me to check him out, and I was like, "I don't know. I'll just go see." But then the first time I saw him, he just put his hands on my knees and just looked in my eyes. And then he asked me how far a long I was, and I told him. I think I was 14 weeks at the time, and I think I accidentally said, "I'm 16 weeks." And so then he was just kind of checking in with my body, or whatever he was doing. And he was like, "Well, no. You're wrong about the date. You're 14 weeks," which was actually exactly right.

MARYN: That's awesome. Who needs a midwife?

SIRI: Right. And then he was also—he asked me if I wanted to know the gender of the baby. And I was like, "Yeah. Tell me." And he said, "It's a boy." And so he had said these things that were super intuitive and how would he know that. It seemed really psychic that were all right. So it was nice to have him sort of checking in—to check in with, and he was always like, "You're doing great. Everything is fine. Baby is great." So I never had any—

MARYN: Wow. What a cool mirror.

SIRI: Yeah. Yeah.

MARYN: What a cool, cool (crosstalk).

SIRI: I never had any doing physic—yeah. There was never blood tests or blood pressure, anything like that, physically. But I had people—different people that just would sort of intuitively confirm for me that everything was good.

MARYN: Yeah. That's amazing. I love hearing that. And gosh. I think that's just so inspiring and really breaks down a lot of barriers that people have to who they think they have to see and how regimented it has to be when really each of us can create that kind of support. I mean granted some locations may be easier than others and all of those things. But it sounds to me like you were just really—you were really open to that, and you were really confident in your own knowing, so you attracted all of these cool people that were able to just support you in that.

SIRI: Yeah. Totally.

MARYN: That's really cool. So how about—I want to talk a little bit about your birth vision because I do want you to—I don't know how much of the birth story you're going to want to tell or how it will go as you tell it. But first, just tell us your vision because I think it's already really clear that that was important to you and that you held the space for manifesting that. So what did it look like before it even happened?

SIRI: Yeah. Well, I had read really early on—right when I got pregnant, I read *Childbirth Without Fear* by Grantly Dick-Read.

MARYN: Right.

SIRI: So I knew how important it was to not have fear and to feel really comfortable and really—I don't know what the opposite of fear is. But—

MARYN: Love.

SIRI: - just relaxed and comfortable about it. And so I would just—it's so different this time around. I don't really have much down time because I have a toddler now. But the first time I had so much down time. I'd come home from work, and I'd just go lay in a lawn chair and sunbathe and just relax and just envision. And so I just spent a lot of time envisioning everything going smoothly and then also spend a lot of time envisioning it being totally painless and totally easy which it totally turned out not to be. It was really intense and definitely the most painful thing I've ever experienced. So I was like, "Well, I'm sure there's a reason that it was that way and not just completely easy." But I just—yeah. I got a chance I would just kind of relax and envision it being easy. And I don't remember specifically exactly if I had certain visions. I do remember just kind of thinking about it without trying and just the image coming into my head of being—standing up when I gave birth. And it just came to me. And in the end, it turned

out that that was the position I was in. I ended up being—standing up. And so that just came at some point. And yeah. I never really intentionally thought like, “What’s the best position? Maybe I should stand up.” But that came to me when I was just letting myself think about it. So yeah. I don’t remember specific details about my vision just that everything would be smooth and everything would be good and that the baby would be healthy. And I wrote down a lot of affirmations that I would read and a lot about how my body does this really well, and this is what my body knows how to do and how I love giving birth and how the baby would be when the baby came out and how breastfeeding would be smooth and just a lot of affirmative sort of positive images.

MARYN: Yeah.

SIRI: Yeah.

MARYN: Yeah. That’s a pretty solid vision even if it’s not super detailed although, like we were talking about earlier, two and a half years is a decent amount of time especially once you have a baby in your arms. So I think a lot of the things are just meant not for us to necessarily remember every detail of. It’s just the way it goes.

SIRI: Exactly. Yeah. It’s going to be different this time. And it’s—yeah. I was just in a different space at that time.

MARYN: Yeah. Totally. Well, would you like to tell us a birth story? Or what are you feeling?

SIRI: Yeah. Yeah. I’d be happy to tell the story.

MARYN: Yeah. Please.

SIRI: Cool. So let’s see, it was Friday—Thursday night, Friday morning was when I first felt the very beginning of labor at 1:00 in the morning. So I was sleeping, and it woke me up. And it was like—it felt like a period cramp, the first contraction. And so I woke up, and I was like, “Oh wow. I think that’s probably the beginning of labor.” But I was able to go back to sleep, and I think I had a few throughout the night. And then woke up in the morning and was still having contractions. Yeah. I think I would wake up with each one. But they were only a few throughout the night. I feel like it started pretty slow.

MARYN: Right.

SIRI: And it was continuing on pretty slowly. So in the morning, I started timing them and timing the space in between just out of curiosity to see if they were getting close together or longer. And they really weren’t—it was really random. It was like this one lasted for 30 seconds, and then there was 8 minutes in between. And then the next one

would last for a minute. And there was 4 minutes in between. And then the next one would be 20 minutes, and 30 minutes. And it was just not a whole lot of regularity. So we were wondering if my husband, Willie, should go to work or not. I was like, "I don't really think anything is happening really fast. So I think you should just go to work and keep your phone right on you, and I'll call you if anything seems to be speeding up or getting intense." So he went to work. And I just hung out at home, sat on the couch, and knit. Now I feel like if I had been up and walking maybe things would have gone faster, but I really just relaxed. I went outside a little bit, but I just kind of sat and relaxed and timed them and sort of did my own thing and didn't feel like I ever had to call him until—and then he got home in the afternoon.

And then I really didn't look at a clock that much. And in the end, we ended up covering the clock so that I didn't get distracted by it. But it was sometime in the evening. Sun was starting to go down, and this is when things started to get really intense. And it was a lot harder than just sitting on the couch and feeling a contraction. It was like I had to be down on my hands and knees, sort of getting in different positions to deal with them. It was just like, "Wow. This is getting intense." And so yeah. The only reason I really knew what time it was was because my sister was going to come over to borrow our van. So she showed up, and I knew that she was going to be there at 6:00 or 7:00. So I knew it was 6:00 or 7:00 when it was getting really intense. And she came in to get the keys, and I was like—told her that I was in labor. And then she just sat with me for a couple contractions and rubbed my back. And then she left and went and borrowed the van.

And just after that, it just started to get more and more intense. And yeah. Just every contraction I was just doing whatever I could to deal with it and just trying different positions and then trying to relax as much as I could and rest in between them. And then—yeah. It's such a blur now because I have no idea it was. So my guess is that it was about midnight when my water broke. And I kept wondering, "When is my water going to break? How long is this going to go on?" And I had this idea that once my water broke everything would happen really quickly. And so my husband, Willie, was just being super awesome and just supporting me in every way that he could. And he was just right there with me which is just really what I needed with someone to be super present with me and knowing that I had somebody there that under—not that understood what was—what I was going through but that was with me. And so we were actually laying on the couch, kind of just cuddling and I—and just dealing with some intense contractions. And I was—I realized that singing was really helping, so I was just vocalizing.

And the two of us were sort of improvising this song. We were just singing about how the baby was going to slide right out. And we just kept singing the baby is going to slide right out. And then all of a sudden, there was this really loud pop like a water balloon.

And my water broke all over the couch, and it was just so sudden and loud that we both just jumped and got really startled. We were like, “Oh my gosh.” I jumped up and got up. I was like, “My water broke.” I just wasn’t expecting it in that moment, so it was exciting. And it was—and I thought, “Wow. Things are really going to happen fast now.” And then I’m pretty sure it was about midnight, and he wasn’t born until after 4:00 a.m. So after that, contractions got even more intense. And they were getting intense quicker. They would come on—the intensity would come on really quick whereas before it was really gradual. And it would just be intense, getting more intense, getting more intense, and I would just be bracing myself. But now they were getting intense right away.

And I was still able to sort of lay down and sleep a little in between them or kind of half sleep where I would just collapse into Willie’s arms and just lean on him and half sleep, and then another one would come on. And I think it was—yeah. I have no idea what time it was at this point. But I was—oh no. I was in the bathroom at some point. And just having—all of a sudden I had the urge to push. And I was like, “Wow. I really feel like I need to push.” And I tried to resist for a little while, and Willie encouraged me to resist pushing because I had heard you don’t want to exhaust yourself pushing too early. And if you cannot push and not force, then you might not tear as much. You might not exhaust yourself. So I was trying to resist for a couple urges. And then at some point, my body just took over, and I was saying to Willie, “I can’t stop it anymore. It’s just like my body is doing it. It’s not me. It’s not my mind at all. It’s just my body pushing,” which was kind of a really cool feeling. Just to see my mind saying one thing and my body doing another thing. Wow. My body really knows what it’s doing. It’s not me that needs to know. My body knows.

And so I remember holding on to—we had a really little bathroom, and I was sitting on the toilet. And the door was open. I was holding on to either side—either—my both doorknobs on either side of the door and just bracing my weight against the doorknobs and letting the pushing happen. And at some point, I guess I got up and moved to the couch for a minute. And then an urge to push came, and I pushed. And Willie was looking, and he was like, “I can see the head. I can see some hair.” The very top of the head. And I just couldn’t believe it that that had happened. And it was like about to come out. It was so shocking. And so I guess I got off the couch at that point. And I was leaning over on a glider rocking chair ottoman, footrest. And I was pushing. And Willie was watching his head bulge out and then go back in. And bulge out again and go back in. And so at one point, he suggested that I stand up.

But actually, I was going to rewind just a little bit. And while I was laying on the ottoman, I was on my hands and knees but leaning my arms onto the ottoman. I was having—I was pushing, and I having contractions. But I was able to just close my eyes and get into a half sleep state in between each contraction. And there was this moment

where I had a—I don't know if it was a dream because I don't feel like I was fully asleep or a vision. But there was this image of a rectangular frame, and then there were two circles inside of it side by side. And I knew that the one—or like a round shape. And I knew that the one round shape on the left was female, and the one on the right was male. And the one on the right was moving to the right and moving out of the rectangular frame. And I just knew that this baby was a boy even though I hadn't found out or anything for real or had it confirmed any other way.

MARYN: That's cool.

SIRI: I had this, "It's a boy. And the boy one is coming out right now." And so—and then a contraction come, and I woke back up. And I was back there pushing. And so yeah. So Willie was watching his head bulge out and go back in and just not quite coming out, and he suggested that I stand up. And he was like, "Why don't you stand up?" And so I stood up, and I sort of leaned against the side of the birth pool. And I had gotten in the birth pool a couple times throughout labor, and it didn't—I felt a little too contained and like I couldn't really find a position that I liked. So I ended up not really being in it much, but it was there. And it was blown up, and so I leaned on it. And it was just one or two pushes, and his head was out. And I'm really glad that he suggested that. He was like, "Maybe gravity would help, if you stand up." And it seemed like it really, really did help because it was pretty soon after that that his head came out.

And I think I maybe said like, "Make sure the cord isn't around his neck." And I think maybe Willie checked it, or maybe we didn't check until he came out. I can't remember. But I just remember there a few things that I really wanted to make sure were okay when it was happening. I remember being—standing up and knowing it was about to happen and just being like, "Are you ready, Willie? Are you ready to catch him? Are you sure you're ready? Are you really sure? Are you right there?" And he's like, "Yes. I'm right here." He was standing behind me or squatting on the ground behind me. I was like, "Make sure you're ready because this baby is coming out now." So his head came out. And we were just wanting to make sure that everything was okay with the baby so much because we were there by ourselves that I can't—I don't think we talked about this. I think we talked about possibly sucking out mucous from his nose and mouth if we needed to, but I don't think we talked about when we would do it. And when just his head was out, Willie reached over and sucked out mucous from his nose and his mouth when he was still half in me.

And then the next push came, and the rest of his body came out. And at this point, I kind of regret that we had done that, had sucked the mucous out so quickly because I just feel like that was probably just extra shock to the baby that we really didn't need to have there. But—and that we didn't need to do that, and that it's okay if they're not

breathing right away. But we just had this we want to make sure he's okay. We want to make sure everything is fine and that we know that we don't have to go and seek help. So he was pretty much get—breathing his first breath and crying almost before he was completely out. He was out. And as his feet came out, he was already crying. And so Willie handed up to me between my legs. And it was just like yeah. That last body coming out feeling is so amazing, and it's just like the head and the rest of him just comes out so quickly. And Willie didn't even look, I think, to see if he was a boy or girl. He just handed him up between my legs, and I looked right away. And I was like, "It's a boy." It was so exciting. And I was just so happy that he was out and that I had done it because in the most intense part of labor I was just like, "I don't know if I can do this anymore. This is so intense. This is the most intense thing I've ever done and ever experienced."

And there were moments where I had never had fear of anything being wrong, but I was just so—it was so hard that I was like, "I don't know if I can do this anymore. Why is this so hard?" And then once he was out, it was just the biggest relief in the world that it was done almost. He was here. And so—yeah. It was just super exciting. And I just sat down on the couch and took him in, and he was just super alert. And his eyes were open. He was just looking, just staring up at us and looking around at everything. And we—yeah. We sat on the couch for a few minutes. And then Willie suggested that we get in the pool just to relax, so we all got in the pool just for a little while which was nice. But I also kind of regret a little bit now because I would have rather rubbed more of his vernix into his skin than have it wash off in the water.

MARYN: Right.

SIRI: Not that that's any big deal. It didn't affect too much. But now I'm like, "Oh, we kind of lost some of his good little baby lotion in the water. I wanted to rub that on him." But it was nice to be in the pool. We didn't really use the pool for the birth itself but to use it a little bit afterwards was nice.

MARYN: Yeah. Did you birth the placenta in the pool then? Or how did you do that?

SIRI: No. So this is another just interesting thing and, I think, is kind of unique is that for being at home, not having anybody tell me what I needed to do. I expected the placenta to come right out. I had heard in hospitals and even midwife-attended home births it's within 20 minutes. And if it's not within 20 minutes, that's when you get worried and start doing things to make it come out. But I had also been on an unassisted childbirth Facebook page and different forums and heard people talking about what's normal and what is worrisome. And I heard several people say that it had been an hour or two hours or more, and it was totally fine. And that it doesn't have to be right away, and it can be okay if it's several hours. And so I wasn't worried. I just

expected it to come sooner. We went up to our bed. And I wasn't doing a lot actively to try and get the placenta out. It just wasn't coming, and it wasn't coming. And I expected the placenta to come out before we cut his cord. And so I was just—didn't cut his cord yet. And I was just carrying him around but unable to really move around a lot with carrying him.

MARYN: Right.

SIRI: And so eventually, we decided—it was two hours after the birth. And we decided to go ahead and cut the cord, so I could really try and move around more and encourage the placenta out. So his cord was already white. Everything had drained out of it, and it was cold. And so we decided that it would be okay to cut it. So we—yeah. Had some sterilized cotton yarn and tied two ties or Willie did. And he cut it. And kept walking around. And it just wasn't coming. And yeah. At one point, I didn't ever tell—call my mom to tell her I was in labor because I knew that if she knew I was in labor that she would worry.

MARYN: Right.

SIRI: So I waited until—we were actually supposed to go to something, to a meeting, with her that morning. And so I waited until about 7:00. She was going to come pick us up at 8:00 or 8:30. So at 7:00 a.m.—he was born at 4:00—4:20ish. And so at 7:00 a.m., I called her and said, “We're not coming to the meeting with you because we had the baby.” And so that was really exciting for her. And she came over. But I told her she could stop by on her way to the meeting. So she came over around 8:00, and I still hadn't—the placenta still hadn't come out.

MARYN: Oh wow.

SIRI: So he was born at 4:20. 8:00 it still wasn't out. And so she hung out for a few minutes. And then she left. And then I was just like, “Okay.” I was looking in my notebook that I had kept about tinctures. Which tinctures I should go get? And I was like just about to go get some tinctures that would really encourage the placenta to expel. And then I felt an urge to push, kind of like a much more subtle urge that I was feeling earlier. And I had felt a couple of these urges. So another detail that I just didn't mention yet is that after the baby came out, my tailbone hurt really bad. And it was really hurting. It felt like it had to be bruised. And I thought for a minute maybe I had fractured it. And then I realized I probably hadn't fractured it. It probably would have been much wouldn't, and I wouldn't be able to walk if I fractured it.

MARYN: Right.

SIRI: But just carrying him around was—that much extra weight carrying the baby was hard. It was hurting my tailbone even more. And I couldn't sit down without it hurting or lay down. So a couple urges, subtle urges, had come already but giving in to them and pushing made the tailbone hurt even more. So I wasn't giving into those urges. And so finally, I realized—I was about to go up and get tinctures. And then I felt this urge to push. And I was like okay. This is my body telling me here is the help. Go into it and push the placenta out. This is my body telling me to do that. And so I was like—even though it hurt my tailbone to push, I was like I need to just do it. So just squatted over a metal bowl and gave in to the urge to push and pushed it out. And it was so simple. But at that point, it was after 8:00. It was probably 8:20. It was four hours after the baby. So it looked totally perfect. It was the coolest placenta I had ever seen. It was this amazing tree pattern. And I was like, "This is so awesome." And so I wasn't worried at all. It looked completely whole. I wasn't worried that there was anything wrong with it. I was just like, "Wow. This,"—and everything felt complete. It came out. And I was just thinking this just is another myth busted that it really doesn't have to come out right away. Everything was fine.

MARYN: Right.

SIRI: And it was four hours. And it wasn't a huge deal. And I know there are issues that can arise with a retained placenta or a placenta that's not coming out for other reasons. But—

MARYN: Well, the difference, I think—and this is even with midwife-attended births often. If you are with someone at a birth and just leave them to their own devices, it's the same thing for women that haven't given birth or just the age old we don't see people birth anymore. There's a difference between a placenta that's just sitting in there which sounds like that's probably what you were dealing with versus some kind of pathological situation. But it's hard to tell. I mean it can be hard to tell from the outside when it's not you. So it's one of those areas of like education and identification that, I think, we're still coming back to. We're still trying to find our way sort of collectively with how that feels because there's so much fear around it, like you're saying.

SIRI: Yeah. Yeah. On the one hand, I'm like wow. I wish that it hadn't taken that long, and it was kind of worrying me. But on the other hand, I'm like kind of glad that I had that experience just so I know that—yeah. How things can go so differently for each person. And that it's not a cause to worry hugely.

MARYN: Sure. Yeah. I love that you just followed your body. I mean you may have been wondering or confused. But really it just wasn't time for you yet. And everything was fine. And I think that's how birth goes a lot of the time is if we're not looking at a

clock then we're assessing our own wellbeing and also what our bodies need. And then we just kind of weigh those things and not the clock.

SIRI: Right.

MARYN: So that's a great example of that. But really I mean the whole birth story is and is so beautiful and so impressive, I think, just to hear your strength and your connection with your body and your baby. And, of course, for the first time, that's just incredible. So thank you so much for sharing that. I just think it's amazing.

SIRI: Yeah. Well, I really appreciate you saying that because it just—it—I—yeah. I found out—I didn't find out about Indie Birth at all until after Shade was born. A couple weeks after. And I was like, "Man. I wish I had found out about this not just for the education and the knowledge but mostly for the support," because it's I—yeah. I just really appreciate you saying that because it was so the opposite of people saying for your first—like you're saying, for your first time, that's really impressive and amazing and wonderful. And most people are saying for your first time, you're crazy. And you're being irresponsible. It's just so the opposite. So it was nice to come across Indie Birth and come across people who are saying—really affirming everything I had done when I hadn't really found that—

MARYN: Yeah. Well, I mean it's definitely out there. The support, I mean. And I think you're a great example of finding that in your community even though you definitely had to protect yourself and protect your choices. You still found support, and I think the same is true just out there in the world that there are so many women like you and like me and like all of these women that we get to hear from that are so smart. And they are so smart, and they're so in tune. And they're working on those things every day. It's like nothing is taken for granted. And I think that's the key. It doesn't assure us the birth of our dreams every time. But most of the time, we can have a powerful experience sort of regardless of that.

SIRI: Yeah. Definitely.

MARYN: Yeah. Well, thanks again, Siri. We are doing lots of things over at Indie Birth, everybody, if you haven't been to the site in awhile. Tons of podcast. Our Wise Woman Circle is a great way to get to hear speakers all over the world whether you're a mom or a midwife or a doula. We actually have Laura Shanley speaking this month, which is March 2016, as well as a couple other speakers and an upcoming conference in 2017 and plenty of workshops happening as well. So check indiebirth.com for that. And thanks again for listening. Have a great day.

(closing music)