

(introductory music)

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MARGO: Hello and welcome to this episode of "Well, Actually...", a podcast by me, Margo Blackstone, as a project of the Indie Birth Association. This episode we're going to be talking to Julie, who is a dear friend of mine and an amazing woman, and I'll tell you a little bit more about her in a moment here. She's going to be talking with us today about the fourth trimester, the postpartum time. And she has a lot to say on this topic, and I'm so excited to get her thoughts and knowledge here for our listeners. Julie, I'm going to introduce you, if that's all right. Give a little (cross talk).

JULIE: Sure.

MARGO: All right. Julie is a doula and student of midwifery but most importantly wife to Tom for 18 years and homeschooling mother of 11 amazing children. She's had four hospital births, six free births, and one midwife-assisted home birth. She loves sharing and learning about all things pregnancy and birth and hopes to serve her community one day as a wise woman traditional birth attendant. And I'm sure she will, if I have anything to say about it at least. So, Julie, before you're going to talk about, like I said, the postpartum period with us, I'll let you say hello.

JULIE: Hello, everybody. Hello, Margo. Thank you so much for letting me share this.

MARGO: Yes. Of course. I'm so excited to finally have you on the podcast with me. So I'll ramble for a moment here just about how I care so much about this topic. I think it's really a huge deal, and it's highly neglected even in midwifery care. And it's sort of this period of time that's so forgotten especially in mainstream care. Women don't see anybody for sometimes weeks and weeks at a time. And when they do, it's only for a couple minutes, and it's just abominable. And so I'm excited to hear what you have to say about how we can do a better job for the moms that we work with or for ourselves as we're preparing for this period of time that's so sacred. So yeah. So let's dive right in, if you're ready.

JULIE: Sure.

MARGO: Yeah. So tell me how you see the state of postpartum care in the United States. And maybe share a little bit about what you know about other culture's approaches to the postpartum time as opposed to how we're doing it.

JULIE: Sure. I definitely think it's the most forgotten and unprepared for part of the pregnancy birth cycle. I think women feel they need to be given permission to take this time, to be told that they are worthy of being supported by their families and community while they focus on this precious new life they have. Every need baby has can be filled—completely filled by mama. It's the responsibility of the woman's family, community, to ensure she's unburdened and well equipped to do this. And so, of course, that's—it's a lot for someone or a group of people to do, but it's, again, so important.

MARGO: Totally.

JULIE: Other cultures have really great woman honoring traditions that serve to protect and nurture both mother and baby. We see the lack of these here in America. I believe our culture sends the opposite message. That women must give birth and get right back to the daily grind of life. And that if she needs help somehow, she is weak, which is totally not true. Some examples of other traditions would be the ayurvedic. Did I say that right, Margo?

MARGO: I think so.

JULIE: The ayurvedic tradition suggests that women stay at home for the first 22 days uneager to break the aura of peace surrounding their precious few days that they have. In Mexico, much of Latin—and much of Latin American has a 40 day La Curantena of resting while bonding with their baby. And Asians have something similar they call doing the month. And even the Bible speaks of a 40 day separate after the birth of a male and 80 days after the birth of a female.

MARGO: That's so interesting.

JULIE: Yes. It totally is. And yet, here in America, most women, again, just—they have their baby. Some take a couple weeks off work, and they get back to work. And I think it's even worse sometimes for stay-at-home moms because they're home all the time, and everyone just expects them to start cooking and cleaning and taking care of the other children right away.

MARGO: Totally. Yeah. So let's hear a little bit or a lot a bit—whatever you're feeling like sharing—about your postpartum experiences since you've had so many to draw on and probably has changed from pregnancy to pregnancy and postpartum to postpartum. So yeah. Tell us sort of what you experience in your own life.

JULIE: Sure. I'm going to sum up my postpartum births—postpartum time from babies 1 through 11. But I'm going to focus on number 10 and 11 and share a little bit more about that. So my first birth, I was 16, and I was at home with my parents. And so my

mom took care of everything. I was able to just take care of my baby and relax, and she cooked and cleaned. And I didn't have a lot of responsibility, so I was able to really focus on her. And I really needed it since she was my worst baby (cross talk) can be that. She sounds kind of a lot like Celosia actually.

MARGO: Yeah.

JULIE: So she cried a lot. A lot. A lot. And woke up a lot. And yeah. And so anyways, that was great. My second through sixth births, I lived near my mom. Very near her, and so she came over and helped quite a bit. She would cook, and she would clean. And my husband worked nights, and so that was really helpful because he was just like a zombie those days I remember. Then seventh through eighth births we lived in Alabama. Actually, seventh through ninth births we lived in Alabama. But for baby number seven and number eight, my mom came before the baby was born to help at the end of pregnancy and then stayed for two weeks afterwards. Again, cooking, cleaning, taking care of the other children. It was really great. Number ten, we still lived in Alabama, but my parents weren't able to come. Or my mom wasn't. So we—that was the birth that I had the least amount of help with, but I still had some community support, which was really great. And then tenth through eleventh, again, we had built up so much community plus my other—my children were older, so that they were able to be a huge help.

And baby number ten was where I discovered Indie Birth. I don't even remember how it happened. But I discovered the *Taking Back Birth* series, and I learned so much. Most of which was that the decisions I'd been making about my pregnancies and birth were not extreme or crazy which was so comforting. And there were others out there like me. So thank you, Maryn and Margo, for that. For all you do. But one of my favorite podcasts ever is called *The Sacred Postpartum: Creating Your Plan to Enjoy the Weeks After Birth*. In it, Maryn talks about the five, five, five rule, which I had never heard before. But it totally transformed my hectic and guilt ridden postpartum time into a restful and sacred time for both me and my baby because even though I had help I really didn't have a plan. I just kind of was winging it and doing as little as I could without feeling so guilty.

MARGO: Right.

JULIE: But the five, five, five rule works like this. Five days in the bed lying down, resting, nursing your freshly born babe. Mama and baby staying naked and skin to skin most of the time. This usually keeps the visitors to a minimum. I always tell people, "If you don't want to see me naked, then I guess you'll wait until day six onward to come see me." It allows the body to get used to the new empty space and the rearranging of the organs. It keeps you off your sensitive perineum that has stretched and might be

swollen, bruised, or even torn. And then there's five days in the bed spent sitting maybe doing a few things from your bed but focus is still on baby. Things should be brought to you, and other children cared for by someone else. And then the last five days are spent working up to standing and moving around the bed but staying in close proximity. And some time towards the end of these five days, you may feel more ready to take your family—take on your family duties. But take it slowly or things can become overwhelming quickly which I think is—you'll probably agree. Most women hit that six week mark, and then they'll call their midwife and say, "I'm bleeding. What's going on?" But it's just because they kind of went in to things a little too quickly.

MARGO: Mm-hmm. So would you say that in your pregnancies before coming across that rule and sort of some of those ideas, you were not doing—were you doing anything close to that? Or was it—were you doing a lot more?

JULIE: It was sporadic. Again, I'd feel guilty because I wasn't doing anything and then do stuff. And it wasn't necessarily because I didn't have help. As I said, my mom—she would come and help but then I would feel guilty like, "This isn't the way it's supposed to be." So yeah. And then I would feel bad, or I wouldn't stay—I think staying in my bedroom—these last two—after these last two births, I totally stayed in my bedroom, did not come out. I think I had to take number ten to the doctor in order to get the birth certificate, so I left. But besides that staying away from the rest of the house and not seeing the mess, not seeing the dishes being crazy full really totally helped with that so I wouldn't get stressed out. It was definitely more peaceful doing that.

MARGO: Mm-hmm. That's awesome. So did you notice a difference, I guess, is my next question after the births where you had more of a plan? And we'll get to what some of that planning looks like later. But did you notice a difference? And what would you tell people some of the best benefits of doing these practices are?

JULIE: Right. Yeah. It was more peaceful doing it this way and discovering and made me realize I needed to have a plan for sure. So I was able to enjoy and be more bonded with my babies, I think. Whenever you take these times—set them aside, you definitely notice some really good benefits. Some of the ones listed for taking special time apart are less reports of postpartum depression, higher success rates of breastfeeding, thoroughly bonding with their baby, and it shortens the healing time. So these are all proven to be benefits of taking a time aside, set apart, no matter—hopefully, at least for two weeks but longer would be even better if we could change that in our culture.

MARGO: Yeah. Yeah. So I guess that leads me to my next question for you which is when we're working with pregnant moms and maybe this is the first time that they're hearing anything other than the mainstream advice, which is usually, "Baby is born, take

it easy," that's about all the advice they usually get if they're going to an OB. And, "Don't have sex until six weeks." And, "See you back at your six week checkup," or sometimes they come in for a couple day checkup or they have to go see the pediatrician or—and have to is obviously the wrong phrasing of that. They're suggested that they need to go see the pediatrician. There's often this cascade of interventions even in the postpartum where that they're going to the pediatrician every day to get their baby's—sorry. I'm going off on a rant here. Get their baby's heel poked.

JULIE: Yes. No. It's a rant that needs to be said.

MARGO: Yeah. In that postpartum time when we're getting little to no advice and have probably little to nothing about it, they're not really warned about what that can look like and whether or not they should be trusting necessarily the opinions of the pediatrician too. That's maybe a topic for a separate podcast. But so what do you tell women when you first bring this topic up? How do you sort of break the ice, so to speak, and get them thinking about this in a different way when maybe so far they haven't thought about it at all? Or all they thought about was, "Oh, it's going to be so great. I'm going to have my baby, and I'm going to be changing some diapers. And I might be tired"?

JULIE: Yeah. Yeah. Because when I do bring it up, they are looking at me strangely like, "I'm just worried about the pregnancy and the birth right now." Most people are focusing on the birth. The birth. The birth. The birth. But after congratulations, usually my next words to pregnant women are, "Have you started making plans for your postpartum time?" And that might seem strange to some people, like we just said. But those first three months and often beyond can be some of the toughest times you'll ever experience. Don't get me wrong. They're also beautiful, joyful, and amazing. But boy, can they be tough if they're not planned for.

MARGO: Mm-hmm. So that's what you share with them.

JULIE: What?

MARGO: So that's what you share with them? Is just sort of this planting the seed idea?

JULIE: Yes. Yes. Because, I mean, I want them to think about it not just—like we don't want to be pushing our thoughts and opinions on women. We don't like it done to us. And so you just want to kind of see where they're coming from. And if it's something that they want to talk more about, I've definitely got suggestions. And if not, then maybe they'll think about it later.

MARGO: Totally. So then if they are curious or even if they're not, you are feeling a little like you want to give people information whether they want or not—I know I get that way at least.

JULIE: Yes.

MARGO: Send an unsolicited email or something. So what are your favorite resources to give people other than, obviously, your own vast amount of knowledge and experience to get them sort of reading or thinking or whatever it looks like as you hoped that they gain some more knowledge about this?

JULIE: Yeah. I mean if you have some good resources I would love for you to send them my way. But I haven't found a lot.

MARGO: No. I haven't either.

JULIE: But I have found some favorites online. One of the articles I just read not too long ago—of course, lots of stuff goes by on Facebook. Good and bad. But this one was great talking about not feeling normal until after baby is a year old. And it's just so true. But I highly recommend Robin Lim's book—excuse me. *After the Baby's Birth...A Woman's Way to Wellness*. And in her book, she quotes from Elizabeth Davis's book, *Energetic Pregnancy*, about three different postpartum phases. Is it okay if I read them?

MARGO: Totally.

JULIE: Okay. So phase one is called taking in. She describes the mother in this phase as a passive receiver with a profound need for sleep and food. She also recognizes the new mother's need to review the detail of her birth. "Around the third day, your awareness of the real world begins to come back. By this time, your home needs a good cleaning, and you should, by no means, be the one to do this. By the beginning of this phase, a mother's milk has come in and so has the blues, a natural emotional reaction to childbirth and becoming a mother which up to 89% of new mother's experiences. The arrival of your milk ends the blues at about the same time inspires the wise woman saying, 'Letting loose the tears helps the milk flow,' which should shed a positive light on the common experience of postpartum blues." And my own note here is boy that sure helped me to understand it. The crying. I just was—expected it around that day. Three—day three, four that I was just going to be a basket case. And I had actually let my kids and my husband know like, "If I'm weird crying or get upset about something, it's just part of the hormonal flow." So it helped me to know it was coming. It helped them to be able to be more understanding.

MARGO: Yeah.

JULIE: So then the phase two that she talks about, again, I'm going to read for her is, "Phase two is taking hold. The next phase can begin as early as day four and last through day ten. In this time, a mother and baby are establishing their breastfeeding routine, and the mother's blues are wearing off. Number three is taking charge. From about day 11 and up to 6 weeks, the new mother is in her taking charge phase during which she may be exhausted and hypercritical of herself wondering, 'Am I a good mother? Why aren't I feeling 100% back to normal? Why can't I seem to get much done?' Usually, she is not getting the help and emotional support she needs because the excitement of her birth has worn off, and friends and family have left her to fend for herself." Which is so sad.

MARGO: Yes. It is sad. Yeah. That's so sad. Yeah. I love her work, and that's such a good description of that time. And yeah. I think it definitely helps when people sort of know what to anticipate. It's such a hard balance. Sorry. Sort of going off track here again. But it's such a hard balance to help women in this time period in this culture with this because the reality of the postpartum time and pregnancy and birth and all of it can be sort of scary. If things don't go well. If we don't plan for them, if we don't prepare ourselves. So it's sort of this interesting balance of how do we share this information in a way that is not scary but scary enough that they take it seriously.

JULIE: Right.

MARGO: So it's such a fine line. And yeah. So it's—and it's hard to—I feel like a struggle is when we're working with someone who does understand this or, at least as much as they can especially before having their first baby, but then they—the support isn't there. And the community isn't there yet. So that's such a huge thing that I think you're going to talk and address some of that in the next part that we're going to talk about here in a minute. But yeah. It's such an interesting thing. I know for myself, after I had my baby, I had read a lot of material, and I sort of knew the flow of how postpartum goes. And I thought I knew what I wanted and needed, but I think—and I wrote some different blog posts people can check out if they want to read them. I think one is called *Reflections on the Fourth Trimester: Get Me Off This Yoga Ball* or something.

JULIE: Oh, that's a good one.

MARGO: Just because I just always came back to, "Oh man, if it's that hard for me as someone who has relatively good support locally and had some knowledge going into it," I can only imagine how hard it is for people who maybe don't have that support or knowledge. So yeah. It's such an important piece in figuring out how we (inaudible) about this and compare them is so crucial. I guess that leads me to my next piece here that I wanted to get the details on is how do you—when you're working with someone,

how do you help them plan for this then? And how do you—what do you suggest—some concrete suggestions because I know you have so many awesome ones? And yeah. What does that look like when someone is open to this idea and interested in planning for this time? When you throw all your best resources and tools at them, what does that look like?

JULIE: Yeah. I do have a lot to share. I do want to talk a little bit more about what you just said. You're right. It's odd sometimes—can feel odd about sharing without making someone feel so overwhelmed. "This is going to be the worst time of your life," because it truly isn't. And I say it is really hard. You still look back and go, "That was really hard. But oh my gosh, that sweet, squishy, little baby I held, it was amazing." Most people would say, "I'd do it over," maybe in three years because it was so hard or whatever. But it is amazing at the same time. But just like you said, you can't—I would think that Margo would be about as prepared as one could and seeing other women and yet, it was hard. And so you definitely need to take care of that. And I have a Facebook I created a couple of years ago focusing on crunchy and birthy things. And I had asked them what they would like me to talk about as far as for this podcast. I told them I was going to do one with you, and they were like, "The postpartum time. No one is ever prepared enough." And when it's your first baby, you definitely aren't prepared. You just don't think about that. And even women who had second, third, fourth, fifth, sixth babies hadn't heard a lot of the things that I was sharing, of course, that a lot of them I learned through Indie Birth and other resources because, like I said, there aren't a lot out there. But I think you just can't talk about it enough because so many women don't have support and community, so they need lots and lots of suggestions.

MARGO: We need to hear it a lot of times from different people to believe that, I think, too. Yeah. To make us think it's not crazy, and it's not just a few people who think this. Yeah.

JULIE: Right. Women are struggling. Yeah. It definitely helps to know that you're not alone. Again, I think that plays—our culture is such an isolationist culture where we isolate ourselves, and we're not hanging out laundry in the backyard talking to the woman next door over the fence who is also hanging out her laundry going, "Oh gosh. This has been really and really tough." So we don't get to share, and so most women just see that other women are doing it or it appears to be. And they're really struggling at home, and they have these terrible thoughts like, "Oh my gosh. Why in the world did I even have this child?" I mean people really struggle, but they don't share those dark times necessarily. But we need to hear them, and that it's normal and that you can get passed it. And maybe next time if you've already had a baby and struggled, you can do some things that might help it make it a little bit better.

MARGO: Right.

JULIE: So some of the things that I did, that I got out of hearing that five, five, five podcast, ways that I made it happen was I made some freezer meals ahead of time. Just once a week I tried to make an extra meal, double my meal even, not even a special extra meal. But double that days meal and freeze it. I've made ahead some menu plans and shopping lists for my husband and my older children, so that they could take care of that. I wouldn't have to think about it at the time because you're in that new mom brain fog usually. And so it's harder to think, so, for me, planning ahead for those meals—just some salads and sides maybe. Some fresh ingredients that they had to shop to go with my freezer meals. And, of course, one of the things that you have other children and they're kind of young and they need some direction—and so I say that it helps my children avoid being jealous of the other, I come up with 15 activities that they get to do that are special to give me some time with them. Someone else can hold the baby or while the baby sleeps we'll do this. And there's lots of suggestions on the Internet on activities you can do that are very inexpensive and would be special.

I inform my family and friends of my plans. I think that's really important so that they know whether it comes from you or maybe your husband or your mother or whoever, a close friend that you're going to need help. And you plan on taking this time away that way people can volunteer. I know a lot of people heard that I was going to be doing that and offered to bring me a meal, offered to take my kids places, so I think just putting the information out there brings awareness for you and for other women.

MARGO: Totally.

JULIE: Again, I mentioned that I don't entertain or allow guests during this first five days. There are people who did want to drop a meal off, but that's exactly what they did. They dropped a meal off, and there was no offense. They totally understood because I explained it to them. And again, I said—I made arrangements for other families to give rides to my children. We home school—or you mentioned that I home school. And so there was a couple field trips during that time with my tenth baby, and other homeschooling moms offered to take my kids which was wonderful. It gave me some quiet time, and I didn't have to worry that they were missing out because I was setting aside this time.

MARGO: Yeah. That's awesome.

JULIE: But so many women don't have the amazing internal support that I have of having teens and older children. And so the advice that I give them is make a plan. What do you need and want to guard and nurture this sacred time? Because someone's time is going to look different than mine, or my desires are different than another woman's. So think about it. What do you need in order to feel rested and peaceful and loved, to recuperate from this amazing thing you just did? And, again, I

think we can't emphasize enough how amazing and miraculous and powerful and big that it is. You gave birth to another human being here, so it's no small thing.

MARGO: Yeah.

JULIE: But so I think we need to emphasize how amazing that is. If you don't have close family and community, find community or build your own. Like I said, we moved to Alabama. And those first two births there my mom came, but the last one there I didn't have any support. Now I live in Arizona. And most all of my family lives in Florida, so there is no help there. But I started attending—actually, I created my own birth support group while I was in Yuma when we first moved to Arizona. And you can attend La Leche League meetings. You can find birth circle meetings. Like I said, if there's none in your area, start your own. There's always women who want to talk about their births or pregnancies, and it's an amazing thing that you can do. And so that gets you out into your community and making friendships. And even if not friendship friendships, it gives you acquaintances. And most moms understand what it's like to just have a baby and need a meal or a break. And I got lots of offers. More than we even accepted in that way. So definitely find community.

You can take new moms that you know a meal or offer to take their children to the park. And when you do that, reach out to other people, then people are willing to do that for you. So it's really important to do that. As you give out and are a blessing to your community, then they'll want to—blessings will come pouring back into you. You can hire a postpartum doula, which isn't in everyone's budget. But it's something you can do. You can ask around in your local home school community for a team to volunteer to help out for an hour or two a day. I actually—my daughter, my oldest daughter who is 21 right now. But when she was a teen, there was a mom who she had—I think she birthed her fifth. And her oldest was 6 or 7. I mean she had them really back to back. And so I dropped her off. She didn't drive yet, but I dropped her off for two hours a day for that first week so that she could take care of her and cook and clean and help her out with her other kids. Because I was so busy with my family that I really couldn't do a lot for her, but my oldest could. And we homeschooled. So that afforded us the time to do that. So there's many—especially, like I said, the home school community who might be willing to do that. Who has an older teen that could need some real life home ec training, and so that could be something you could look for.

MARGO: Yeah. I love the idea of getting other generations involved because I feel like that's so often the wall that gets run into is—funny enough. And I'm totally not on Facebook while we're doing our podcast. But I was looking at our notes and I had a notification pop up on my browser, just on the computer not on Facebook—I promise. And it was for a new—I think it was called a—what did she call it? A woman's gathering for—I think she—but I know specifically because I had talked to this woman. That she

has a four-month-old baby I think. And she's just desperately looking for people to get together with and talk to about this time and about being a mom and just have some time to connect with other people in that way. And so I know that I know she was trying to put something like that together. And so it just popped up during our call which is so funny. Like a mom's group that she's now put on the schedule on Facebook at least. But what I was going to say is it's so hard—because in the process of talking to this other woman, I said, "Yeah. I would totally come and be a part of that." I said, "It's so hard because people move in and out of these seasons of life especially when they're only having one or two babies."

JULIE: Right.

MARGO: Pretty fast. It's a fast season. And sometimes that desperation of needing someone else to talk to and have a play date with goes away a little bit once your kid is being slightly more manageable like Celosia's age. So I told her like, "That's awesome that you're doing this." There were some mom groups that sprouted up when Celosia was a baby, and we went to for a couple months. And then they sort of fizzled out. And so I think, what you just said made me think of that, because as the mom running the house and taking care of the kids all day or some moms are working moms and they're going off to work 40 hours a week, it's so hard to be the person who is doing that support or organizing that event as well. And so yeah. It's so exciting to think about getting youth involved and teens, and someone suggest—I think Amy, our mutual friend Amy, suggested to me (inaudible), "So what about a mother's helper? Two of my daughters are mother's helpers and are available for people to sort of hire for parts of the day." And there really wasn't anyone like that here in Sedona who was wanting to do that. And so I think that's an exciting project for whoever wants to take that on in their own community.

And then also getting older generations involved too because they're past the point in time they're taking care of their families and run around to different extracurricular activities and that sort of thing. Or they're retired. It's a lot easier for someone like that to commit to hosting a monthly group, but they're not going to fizzle out or maybe something like that. Or offer to bring a meal to someone who has just had a baby or that sort of thing. So sorry (cross talk).

JULIE: Absolutely. No. That's awesome. And I think you bring up a good point and something that I try to share. It's not just for moms who are in this season. It's for young girls. They need to grow up around not only the postpartum time, the birth period. It would be great for women to experience birth for the first time not just at their own births. But we need to share about this hard times. They see it. They'll expect it. Again, it's about not getting slapped in the face with things we never saw or experienced before our own births and postpartum times and letting another generation before see it

beforehand and help and experience it. We're doing—they're not just being a blessing to us. We're being a blessing to them by letting them see a little glimpse of it. And, of course, the older generation, who—yes. They totally—most of them have more time. More leeway to be able to do some of these things, so it's important to reach out to all of the generations. And I think, again, a lot of the older generation, I think, women that I talk to, they just plugged right through it because that's what they had to do.

MARGO: Mm-hmm.

JULIE: But a lot of them—I went to a baby shower before my last baby was born a few months back. And you see all these older women sitting around. It was a lady's group in the congregation we go to. And they were giving this young gal a baby shower. She was having her third baby. And I was just—they—oh, open of the women suggested that they all go around and give advice to this young gal. And I was just thinking—and this is terrible.

MARGO: Oh no.

JULIE: But my thought is, "Oh gosh. The advice they're going to give," because I've experience quite a bit over the years of advice from older women. And these older women were so precious. They gave the most wonderful advice I had ever heard an older woman give. It wasn't, "Well, honey, get it done." Like, "Plug right through it no matter how you feel." It was, "Take time for you." They were sharing their experiences. "I just went right back to work. And it was so hard on me and for my son," whatever it was. Some of them were like, "Don't listen to anybody if they tell you you shouldn't be breastfeeding. And do it anywhere you want, honey. And don't cover up if that's what you feel." I mean it was just the greatest thing. It was really precious. And so we need to talk to everyone about the postpartum time. It's definitely not just something that I talk to other pregnant women or trying to conceive. I talk to all the generations. And even you guys are so wonderfully offering the Indie Birth course. I've talked to everybody. I'm like, "If you will ever be in the childbearing year, in it, or have ever experienced it, this class is for you," because other women need to know and share whether they're going to have any more babies or might be awhile before they have another baby or whatever. I think you need to be experienced and knowledgeable in the birth process and then the postpartum period.

MARGO: Absolutely.

JULIE: So sorry. Went on my little personal passionate rant.

MARGO: Were there other—since I went on my side tangent, were there other pieces of your plan that you wanted to talk about? Or were you (cross talk)?

JULIE: Yeah. Yeah. Sure. Okay. So we talked about hiring a postpartum doula and how you could—ways you could do that or community—a team maybe in your community or, as you said, someone who's already out of that time. Make up freezer meals was something that I did and that you can do. The second trimester is the perfect time to do this because you start feeling better and having a little bit more energy. And then that third trimester, sometimes, can feel a little more exhausting. So that's a good time to do it. And like I said, I doubled one of my meals each week. And so if you do that during the second trimester, you could have quite a bit of meals in your freezer. Whether someone brings you food or not, you have those there for a rough day or whatever. You can also have a freezer party or a freezer meal party with friends. Some women are doing this instead of a baby shower. They're just inviting everybody they knew—know to come over and make up a bunch of freezer meals. And that's the—each person contributes a little bit to that, and so they're doing that because it's more practical especially those first few months. You really don't need a lot of the equipment and the big stuff. You just need some sanity. And so honestly, food is a huge part of a mom's life. Sometimes it's like—if we just didn't need to eat, my life would just be so much easier. So yeah. Food. And, of course, there's recipes online and plans for that. You can check Pinterest again.

And when asked at your—for your baby shower what you want, add in there gift certificates and gift cards for restaurants. Gift certificates for cleaning service or have someone—have a—someone people put a wishing well at their baby shower. And you put in money in there towards some big thing that they want. And a postpartum doula could be totally your wishing well gift. Put a friend in charge of setting up a meal train. That was something I heard Maryn say on that postpartum podcast because, again, sometimes it's hard for us to ask other people to help. I know it's hard for me even though it's something I'm passionate about and know that we need. It's not a luxury. It really is some—it's a need for sure. But it's kind of hard to really ask, "Hey, can you help me? Can you come vacuum my house?" There's so much guilt, I think, within the mommy culture that makes it hard. So ask a friend who can set up a meal train or a list of things that you'd like done and other friends and acquaintances or people in your community can sign up for. Like taking naps. Come over and hold the baby, so you can take a nap or get a shower or take your kids to their activities. Tidying the house. Doing some laundry.

So yeah. Those are some things you can do there. They can plan—you can plan special activities or outings for your other children with another trusted adult or teen volunteer. Again, there's ideas on Pinterest. My husband usually takes the first few weeks off after a birth. But he hasn't the last few. He hasn't had too thankfully. But he would always—one day each of those two weeks that he would take off, he would take the kids somewhere special, so I could have some quiet time. And I didn't feel bad

because we were all cooped up in the house. He would take the kids to an inexpensive zoo where we lived, and that was special. Or take them to Chuck E. Cheese, to the park, just to give your other children something to do, to occupy their time.

MARGO: That's awesome.

JULIE: And, again, it keeps their love tanks filled and feeling special, so they don't feel so jealous of the baby. Again, I think it really helps with that. And lastly, I like to collect special things for myself that help me relax and feel pampered for this time. And for me, those are books. Usually on midwifery or the birthing time. Pregnancy stuff. I like to have a journal, so that I can write. Adult coloring books are really popular right now. It's something I really like. Nutritious snacks. Special snacks that maybe you could splurge on just so that you don't have to bother anybody. You can have your quiet time and have your kombucha. And for me, that was some cashews, and a friend sent me some of those Justin's peanut butter cups. So that was really nice. Having some special music. That kind of thing.

MARGO: Awesome. Yeah. That time is—I don't think I completely understood how it would go, and I don't know if it's this way for everybody. But I think I had thought I would just be staring at my baby all day long or something. And my husband was so on board with how you're approaching it and that I was going to rest, and I knew he was going to be in charge of cooking and cleaning and that stuff. But that was a piece that I definitely didn't plan for. And I'm glad you said that. It's just what are you doing when you're not just staring at your baby. Because I think it—I got sort of crazy. Like, "Oh, shouldn't I just be staring at the baby?" I started feeling guilty even months and months into the postpartum. Like, "Shouldn't I be doing something?" I always had heard that funny cultural joke of, "Well, now what do I with it? It's here. What do I do with this thing? This baby. What am I supposed to do with it?" And so I actually thought—I don't know what I thought. But I definitely didn't have plans of what am I going to do when I'm sitting there and the baby is sleeping, or baby is nursing. And so I think that's really good to share with people especially the first time birth—the first time that they're doing it this way is just have some nice, relaxing activities because it doesn't—it's not all about the baby. That's kind of the overall point of this topic. Like you were saying earlier with the Robin Lim—(cross talk).

JULIE: Yeah.

MARGO: Okay. She said the excitement of the birth wears off, and people just kind of move on. And then it's all about the baby. It's like, "Oh, how is the baby doing? How much does the baby weigh? Is the baby growing? Can I buy the baby some clothes?" It's not about the mom anymore. And so I think I still had some remnants of that left over even in my sort of more holistic approach to it. I thought I'd get to rest. And that's

great. But the focus was still like, "Oh, and then I'm going to be so all about the baby." And so yeah. I think it's good to talk about that. I remember—I remember even feeling guilty about watching TV with the baby if she were awake. "The baby is awake. I can't watch TV. I'm supposed to be looking at it." So maybe that's just me because I'm a little crazy. But yeah. So—

JULIE: No. I agree with you. That's a valid point for sure is that you shouldn't feel guilty about that because even just holding a baby and staring at them is exhausting. I just really can't emphasize that enough. You don't think you're doing anything, but you are. You're giving out this emotional, hormonal cocktail of euphoria for this baby. But that's—that is exhausting. So yeah. If sitting there watching TV is how you feel, "Okay. I feel more relaxed now," or just doing nothing staring into empty space, going to sleep, whatever, you earned it just by holding the baby.

MARGO: Yeah. And that difficult push and pull of taking care of yourself and then not feeling—and then trying not to feel guilty about it. I think that's huge, and I think it's something I'm still learning even almost two years in. And I wish I had learned it sooner because I think—and I've talked about this in some of the blog posts that I've done. I had this image from—I don't even know where. The natural birth world or wherever. The postpartum would be me sitting around eating bonbons and nursing my baby, and it seemed really peaceful and relaxing just doing that. That was—you know what I mean?

JULIE: Right.

MARGO: (cross talk). And then—but it's so sorely left out. Well, you still have to make yourself lunch, if no one is around.

JULIE: Right.

MARGO: You can't sit and stare at you baby all day because, like you said, it's exhausting and boring.

JULIE: Yeah. It's true.

MARGO: They want to be doing what you're doing. And so I—I had a different sort of pregnancy too, I think, than a lot of people where it was sort of like all consuming (inaudible) problems. That's not a secret. But it was every day was about how do I get through this day. I've got my blood pressure stuff I have to take care, and I think about. I wasn't working. I was doing Indie Birth stuff. So when I was thinking about anything, it was about birth, and I was pregnant. So it was sort of like my whole life was about this baby and this pregnancy or pregnancy in general and birth. And so there was no other activity sort of.

JULIE: Right.

MARGO: And so I sort of—then in the postpartum was like, "Oh, I need to still find a way to do these things," so I slowly got back into writing blog posts when she was napping when I should have probably been napping or that sort of thing. But there was an element of like, "How will I ever get back to my life?" And so I think starting early and being like, "You know what? The baby is fine. I put her right next to me on the bed, and I'm going to color for ten minutes in my coloring book." Just setting those—

JULIE: Well, because you still need stimulation. I think so. It is. You do need that time away. You need to rest. But at the same time, you still—I mean at least for me I need some stimulation. But not overstimulation, so it has to be things that you want to do. So I always say, "If you don't 100% want to do it, that's something you're not motivated to do." Because some women are like, "Oh my gosh. I don't want to be in my bedroom for 15 days. That sounds like torture." Well, I mean if you feel like going out and taking a walk, go out and take a walk.

MARGO: Right.

JULIE: But just don't—it's giving yourself permission to do—to take care of you because if you take care of you, if others take care of you, you'll take care of this precious baby which is the motivation and the focus of it all anyway.

MARGO: Yeah. And I think it's just shifting sort of—adapting your regular life to that time, obviously, way scaled down. But if you're a social person—which I didn't really think I—I don't really think of myself as being a super social person. But I could definitely have benefitted from more adult interaction in the first couple months as well with my partner, Russell, being gone for 11 hour shifts, which (cross talk).

JULIE: Most definitely.

MARGO: Yeah. And so if you are someone who needs that being like, "Hey, if you want to hang out, you have to come to my house." And you obviously have to be careful who you invite and then say, "It's going to be probably short." I don't know. And then—and making sure that those people and, hopefully, just due to the work we're doing more of these people will appear or develop. But understand if the baby is needing a nap, you're going to have to go take care—like people who are sensitive to the time period too.

JULIE: Right.

MARGO: But yeah. In asking those people to come to you and sit for a little while and yeah. Trying to continue doing the things you enjoy doing but in a pared down kind of a way, I think, is sort of the name of the game.

JULIE: Definitely.

MARGO: So what would you—we talked a lot about how we would talk to moms about this as we're working with them. What would you say to midwives or future midwives or birth attendants or whatever we want to call them, so that they understand what we're getting at here too?

JULIE: Well, definitely I would to the midwives or future midwives who maybe listening, I would love to share a story and some advice I heard Gloria Lemay share. She had a client who she could tell was not getting the rest she needed, so she spoke very seriously with the husband that his wife needs to be in bed resting, meals delivered to her, lots of love and pampering, et cetera. You know what? He made that happen for her. I think it's so important to emphasize to the partner and close family members the importance of healing and bonding time because they will take it so much more seriously hearing it from their trusted midwife. Because I mean we're trying to change this in our culture, but there's this needing permission.

MARGO: Mm-hmm.

JULIE: And so it's like you need somebody to give you permission to do these things. And so—and looking to some other authority. While we're changing that, in the meantime, I really think it's important that if you have that position where a woman is looking to you in some way, that we pass that on to her family and take that pressure off of her by giving her permission through her family members to relax and take care of herself.

MARGO: Awesome. Well, any other thoughts that you want to share or any other final things to wrap our talk up today?

JULIE: Yeah. I think the most important thing we need to remember is most women feel that the sacred postpartum time is a luxury that they cannot afford or don't deserve. But every woman, every woman, deserves to be honored and to honor herself for this sacred journey she has just embarked on. When something is a priority, we find a way to make it happen on some level. And so everyone can take something away and make their postpartum time special.

MARGO: Yeah. And every little bit helps the individual, and I think every little bit is helping us shift our communities to on the bigger scale. So that's very inspiring. So let's see. Anything else?

JULIE: No.

MARGO: My notes are—

JULIE: That's all I've got right now. I mean, of course, I could ramble forever because it's so important. But yeah. Totally. I think, hopefully, your audience has gotten some

good tips because practical things are what we need and not just, "Hey, you need to rest. Show me how to do that." Yeah.

MARGO: So anyone who is listening you have permission to do whatever you need to do. And I think you framed it so beautifully, Julie, just whatever you need to do to feel relaxed and peaceful in this time period. And if you're not feeling relaxed and peaceful, then reach out and find some help and some tools. And we're always here at Indie Birth to take emails, and we do free consults at least once a week. I think we're opening up a second night pretty soon here. So check out our website for that information and to get our email to let you know is margo@indiebirth.com. Pretty easy to remember. And I just want to say thank you again, Julie, for being with us and sharing all your awesome knowledge and wisdom and, hopefully, we'll get you back here soon. And—

JULIE: Well, you're welcome.

MARGO: To everyone listening, hopefully, we'll see you quote on quote back here at the podcast on a future episode. Thanks, everybody.

(closing music)