

(introductory music)

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MARGO: Hi, everyone. And welcome to this episode of *"Well, Actually..."*, a podcast by me, Margo Blackstone, and today we have another fabulous guest here with us. A friend of mind at least on the interweb. Haven't met in person yet but perhaps someday. And her name is Maria Mengel. So welcome, Maria.

MARIA: Hi. Thanks for having me.

MARGO: Sure. So I'm going to read a little bit of Maria's bio to just give you a sense of her background and what she's all about. And then we're going to talk about her birth experiences today because she has some great experiences to share and some wise words for all the Indie Birthers out there. So here's a little bit about her. Maria is a mother of two, wife, music teacher, doula, childbirth educator, placenta specialist, and owner of the newly launched Thrive Birth Services of Delmarva. She began her professional career as a musician at West Virginia University. After college, she spent five years teaching music education in public schools. Following her first birth, life completely changed. She continued teaching French horn lessons privately but devoted the rest of her life to her family and to birth work and study.

It was only after her second birth, on year ago today—so exciting—that she learned the true meaning of power. Self power, the power of birth, and the power of listening to one's self and letting go. Maria is committed to creating a local birth community on the eastern shore of Maryland where women can guide each other in finding their own power together. She finds joy in sharing the influential lessons she learned in her two birth experiences with others hoping that they too will find joy in sharing theirs. What an excellent bio. I just love—

MARIA: Thank you.

MARGO: I just love what you wrote and shared with me and now what you're going to be sharing with us today here on the podcast. So let's start with—it's quite an epic entry into this podcast. So I'm trying to think of an epic way to start. But maybe let's start simple, kind of at the beginning, and tell me a little bit about your first pregnancy and where you were at, who you had helping you, walking along your journey with you, what that was like, and sort of what you were hoping for with that first pregnancy and birth experience.

MARIA: Yeah. Sure. I'm really excited to share these because I haven't actually shared my birth experiences in detail with anyone yet. And one of them was a year ago today, and the other was almost three years ago. So I'm—they're long overdue.

MARGO: It's time.

MARIA: Yeah. It's time. So with my first birth, I came from a place of friends and family only having mainstream, conventional choices. Birth in a hospital. All of those normal things. Well, what we consider normal.

MARGO: Right.

MARIA: So my first birth, I started from that place but seemingly made unconventional choices for that birth especially for the geographic area that I live in and my family. My birth center, which is where I chose to birth for that first birth, was nearly two hours away. I hired a doula, was planning a water birth. I was having totally midwifery care. And so all of those things were kind of what people would consider unconventional even though I ended up straying even further from that at the time I had my second baby. But yeah. I had a pretty uneventful pregnancy. Occasionally, I had some pushback from my midwives at my birth center whenever I wanted to decline testing or routine procedures or even, to be honest, ask questions about them.

And I still felt like it was the right place for me at the time to birth, but I was really caught off guard by the lack of women centered care, holistic care, that I was expecting. And I felt like I was promised by, you know? By my midwives and my birth center. So whenever I first met my doula, I was only about nine weeks pregnant in that interview. And whenever she asked me in that interview, she said, "What is your ideal birth experience? Or what is your—whenever you're visualizing your birth, what are you seeing?" And I said immediately, "I want a home birth. That's what I envision." But unfortunately, at this point—or fortunately perhaps, CPMs aren't regulated in my state. And so the legal system scared me away from a home birth, and I just kind of assumed that that wasn't an option for me even though deep down I think that's what I wanted. So I chose this birthing center. And I'm really glad about the choices that I made even though I didn't make them the second time. So yeah. That's kind of where I—that's where I started in that pregnancy.

MARGO: And I'm super curious just hearing you talk a little bit about this and meeting you after you'd had your second birth, which we're going to just talk about in a little bit—I'm curious how you—with a family and friend situation where most people were choosing the mainstream things, how did you even sort of get to the point of making that alternative of choices? I'm just curious like was it upbringing or was it just your inherent personality. Or what do you think made you be the sort of person to make choices that were sort of outside the box from your first baby since that's not always the case.

MARIA: True. Yeah. No. You're right. I think that it was about a year or two before I even became pregnant for the first time that I saw the documentary, *The Business of Being Born*. That's where it really opened my eyes to the maternity care system in the United States. But that and my husband and I, after we got married, kind of started making more alternative health choices in our lives. And they kind of just all led me really just kind of believe that that what I wanted was what was right and healthy and safe for me. And it just kind of felt right to be birthing with midwives and to be birthing in

an environment that feels more comfortable. And it just felt safe and right for me. And so I went with it.

MARGO: Cool. So you're—you said your pregnancy was pretty uneventful. You got the pushback. And I think we talk a lot about the work we do at Indie Birth—just sort of the way that that looks for a lot of women. I don't know if you wanted to say any more about that. Or if you wanted to jump in talking more about the actual labor and birth. But I thought I would open that up.

MARIA: Yeah. Sure. I mean some of the pushback that I was getting wasn't necessarily like bullying or traumatic as I've heard other stories. But more about just kind of made me question what I felt was right for myself, and I didn't think that that was fair to me. Simple things like I just didn't really feel like what was right for me was doing some routine procedures in pregnancy or some routine testing. And I had done the research about them, and I'm a super research oriented person. And so I had done all the research but, ultimately, made those decisions because I felt like it was right. And whenever I was questioned about it or made to feel like I needed to be defensive about my choice, it ultimately made me feel like perhaps I wasn't making the right choice when just five minutes ago I felt so strongly about it.

MARGO: Yes.

MARIA: And so it was kind of just little things like that that go on your psyche.

MARGO: Totally.

MARIA: But regardless, I went into this birth totally prepared with no fears, no worries, no concerns. I mean only peace. I studied Hypnobabies to prepare for the labor and birth, so I mostly got into that and studied that at the—not at the request but at the recommendation of my doula because I had this two-hour long drive that I knew I was going to be driving in labor. And so I thought, "Well, I've got to be able to do something in the car." So especially if I wasn't going to be able to moving or up and moving around, and so I studied Hypnobabies. And whenever I entered my birthing time, I really was completely at peace. It was a long and slow labor. But it really was just completely comfortable and beautiful. I feel like I had this stereotypical hypnosis birth. I mean very little pain, really gentle, calm, quiet, dark. If I wasn't even having a baby and then all of a sudden a baby came out. That's kind of just what it felt like. Like out of body experience. You know what I mean?

MARGO: Mm-hmm.

MARIA: So it was the most amazing and beautiful birth. It happened slowly, but I was totally okay with that. And whenever I look back on it, I look back on—really, really fondly. I mean it was comfortable and peaceful. My daughter was born quietly. She didn't ever cry, and I thought that was just the most beautiful and amazing thing that she just felt comfortable in my arms and looking into my eyes. And the birth itself, honestly,

went exactly as I had imagined it. Whenever I was visualizing the process, it went exactly how I imagined it which I—everyone says like, "It won't go how you picture it." But it totally did. And the birthing center us home after a few hours. And so I was able to come home and rest and take a good nap in my own bed. That was really nice. And to be honest during the most of the time that I was there, which was about three hours before she was born, I was left alone for most of the time. I felt really good about that. That's kind of how I wanted to be. I wanted to be alone and quiet and without people and observed and stuff like that. So yeah. For the most part, it was the most beautiful and calm and amazing birth.

MARGO: Awesome. That's a beautiful story.

MARIA: Yeah. I love sharing that story with other people. And I love sharing it with my daughter too.

MARGO: Yeah. And how is she now you said?

MARIA: She is about to be 32 months. So she'll be three in a few months.

MARGO: Cool. That's great. So then after that birth experience, you took some time and then got pregnant again which we're going to talk—

MARIA: Yeah. Fast forward.

MARGO: What happened between—what happened after your first daughter was born? did you become interested in doing birth work at that point? Did you—

MARIA: Yeah.

MARGO: What did you—how did that affect you in the coming months and years?

MARIA: Well, I started a doula training about three months after she was born. My doula is a doula trainer and offered a training series about three months after she was born. Invited me to do that. And I was hesitant because I had a three month old, but I'm so, so glad I did it. I actually had my little baby nursing with me during the trainings and stuff, which was really sweet that she got to go through that experience with me. And we got to learn together. But part of the reason why I was so interested in doing that is because mostly from my doula, who really had a big impact on my birth—and the funny thing is during the birth itself, I mean she did almost what—from a fly on the wall would think she did almost nothing. But to me, she did everything. I mean just protecting the space around me and turning the lights off and recognizing my needs and desires and being there for me and validating me the entire time. So I knew that I wanted to be—do that for other people. Yeah.

MARGO: That's awesome.

MARIA: But in the meantime, on the way home the next morning after I birthed my first daughter, even though I had this amazing, beautiful birth experience, 95% of it really was perfect. I was driving home with my new baby, and I'm sitting in the backseat with her on the two-hour drive home. And I knew for certain that no matter what I knew that home birth was right for me in the future which is funny to even be thinking about future births six hours after you've birth your first baby. But I just knew that it was—I knew that that's what I needed because there were—even though 95% of my story was beautiful and amazing, there were some things that really left me feeling disempowered after that birth story. And I knew that if I had been birthing on my own terms that they wouldn't—that wouldn't be. Do you know what I mean?

MARGO: Sure. What were some of those things? Not to dwell on the (inaudible), of course.

MARIA: No. That's okay. No. They're important. So whenever I arrived at the birthing center, I assumed that I was going to decline vaginal exams. My midwife assumed that I was going to consent. And whenever you're 9 centimeters and you're like completely in the throes of labor having a discussion about defending my choice, it just really didn't feel right. I didn't want to go through that. And so I had the vaginal exam. It wasn't completely traumatic or anything, but it was something that I look back on wishing I kind of hadn't done. And some other little things like whenever I was pushing intuitively, my midwife asked to check me again. I declined that time. But she threw in a little, "Well, if you push too early, you could push on a swollen cervix, and I really don't want you to have to worry about that." That type of thing.

MARGO: Right.

MARIA: And then some other things like I'm a really super independent person. And physical touch isn't something that I appreciate without consent. And so whenever I was birthing my baby and my baby was crowning, she had her hand on my baby's head and on my perineum the entire time and didn't ask. But I also was not really in a space to ask her not to do it. Do you know what I mean?

MARGO: Totally.

MARIA: So out of my very, very comfortable, amazing, peaceful birth experience, that, by far, was the most uncomfortable part was her hand there.

MARGO: Sure.

MARIA: And—yeah. And I think if she had known that, I think she probably would have been like, "All right. Cool. I'll stop." But it was just whenever you're in that space, it's just really difficult to express those things. You just aren't thinking in that way, and your mind isn't in a place to be using the English language.

MARGO: Right.

MARIA: So I didn't ever do that. And then what perhaps was the—my biggest regret, I guess, looking back is that I didn't make it very clear to my midwife that I wanted to deliver my placenta on my own and that I wanted my baby's cord to be connected to my placenta. And I really was really adamant and felt strongly about deciding when that separation would occur.

MARGO: Right.

MARIA: But it just kind of didn't happen that way. It happened really quickly. She kind of ushered me out of the birth pool quickly and was kind of feeling around on my belly and then said, "Okay. We're going to clamp and cut this cord now." And I mean baby was connected for a few minutes, but it just didn't feel right. It didn't feel like the right time, and she kind of just pushed my placenta out for me. And I just didn't feel like much of a participant at all. I was kind of laying in a bed and staring at my new baby at the time. And I kind of, a little bit, used language there. Like kind of said, "No. Wait. I think—was the cord done pulsing?" And she was like, "Well, your placenta is coming out now, so we're going to have to cut it."

MARGO: Right.

MARIA: And kind of just pushed my concerns aside which really didn't feel right to me. And looking back on it kind of gives me a little—I don't know. Tingle of unhappiness.

MARGO: Totally.

MARIA: You know what I mean?

MARGO: Yeah. Absolutely. And I feel like that's a big topic again that we talk about, and we have—

MARIA: In itself.

MARGO: Yeah. And it's something I feel really strongly about. And when we teach classes, it's something we spend a lot of time on, and a lot of times it's the first time people have ever thought about that.

MARIA: Definitely.

MARGO: Like, "I should be in charge of that part too?" Like, "Isn't that gross and weird? And shouldn't,"—

MARIA: Yeah. We never talk about that part. Yeah. I've met people who didn't even know that part was going to happen.

MARGO: Right. Exactly.

MARIA: Yeah. Like, "Wait. What is this other organ coming out of me? I don't know." But we should totally know about that.

MARGO: We should totally know about that. And I would just be curious as someone who experienced that and you wanted it a certain way, what do you think could—how can we make sure as doulas or midwives that we help people sort of think through that part? And how do we help them—once they do know what they want, how do we help them get it? Because I don't think most midwives are having that conversation because if your midwife had asked you ahead of time maybe then she wouldn't have done it.

MARIA: Yeah. I totally would have been able—yeah.

MARGO: Right. So I don't know what your thoughts are on that.

MARIA: Well, I guess it just kind of starts with education in the beginning. I mean if you don't even know that that's about to happen then perhaps you won't have much of an opinion on it. But just education in the beginning and letting people know the reason why this happens and the reasons why it's important and the reasons why it happens in the time it does and the importance of your baby getting all of his blood and what to expect and then asking them in the birthing experience. I mean I know it sometimes can be difficult to be talking to a woman who has just birthed a baby, but I feel like if she had just asked me, "Are you okay with cutting the cord now," I would have very easily been able to say no. Or I would have very easily been able to say, "Let's wait a little bit more," or, "Give me a minute," or something like that. And I feel like I just wasn't asked for consent at that time. And I don't really feel like that was fair to me. But—so—yeah. That's a good lesson to have learned.

MARGO: Totally. And I definitely—I mean even with other pieces of the birth, the little that I've definitely seen that in different scenarios especially in the hospital or birth centers. And just depending on the midwife, (cross talk) question is, "Oh, okay. Time to do this." And I think that's an important lesson for us to take away even just any sort of birth worker (cross talk).

MARIA: Yeah. Not making assumptions.

MARGO: Yeah. You should ask—you should frame it as a question even things that we think might be more (inaudible) because I'm sure some midwives—especially the ones that have been practicing a really long time or whatever who have it the way that they do—it's, "Oh, we clamp and cut at five minutes," or whatever. And they don't think it's a big deal.

MARIA: Right.

MARGO: It's important for us to always—yeah. Not make assumptions. And framing it as a question especially a yes or no, simple question.

MARIA: Yeah. I was totally capable of saying yes or no. Yeah. I mean I held—I, truthfully, held some contempt. I mean—for that midwife for awhile afterward. But I've really let go of it. Lately, I've considered it—I mean I totally was responsible for making the choice to birth in a place where there are rules and policies and regulations. And I mean I knew I wouldn't know my midwife very well because it was an on call schedule. And I knew that she wouldn't know me and my needs and desires. And so I take responsibility for putting myself in that situation although I do wish that anyone who is a birth worker would assume that asking for permission is just the right thing to do.

MARGO: In any situation. Totally.

MARIA: In any circumstance. Yeah.

MARGO: That's cool. That's a great, great insight that you have, and I'm glad you shared that part of your story for sure.

MARIA: Yeah. Thank you.

MARGO: So you went to your doula training. And then what happened?

MARIA: Well, I became a birth worker. I attended a few births and then got pregnant again. And so took a break from birth work for awhile although I was still researching and studying birth all the time because, yet again, I was pregnant and here I am planning another birth. But I will say that I learned through my first birth that the lessons that I learned were being a rule follower or being a good girl as I was raised to be was—doesn't always make me necessarily a good person. And I'm like—I was always the straight A student, and I wanted to always please everyone. And I learned through my first birth that following the rules doesn't always work. And it doesn't always make me happy either. And so I just kind of realized that no one else deserves that authority over me. And I felt good about the beginning of my motherhood, and I knew that that were was something more in my future birth experiences.

So the moment I knew I was pregnant with my second daughter—well, I didn't know she was a daughter at that time—I was really determined to not invite anyone into that space who would give me advice of any kind or assume power over me or my experience in any way. And I knew that I wanted people for my birth. I just didn't want an authority figure at my birth, and I feel like my last midwife felt like she was an authority figure in that circumstance. And I didn't feel good about that. So I knew that—I just decided then and there that I was going to have a family birth or what—an unassisted birth where I wasn't about to hire anyone. And I know that the care provider who doesn't give—excuse me. The care provider who doesn't really give advice just didn't really exist where I live. And I just I knew that because I was a birth worker, and I was kind of aware of what was available to me and what not. And so I felt like what was right for me was to be home on our own with my family. I mean that isn't to say though that hospital isn't—the hospital birth isn't the right model for some people. Or I—

MARGO: Totally.

MARIA: I guess I want to make it clear that I'm not anti establishment or anti medical model of birth or whatever. And so I mean I attended my first cesarean this past week, and it really was the most beautiful experience. And I had a great time. And so I just knew that for me that the only person who could acknowledge my needs was me for this time. So yeah. That's where we started. And I don't know. That pregnancy was also a piece of cake. It was as easy as it could be. I mean I didn't have any appointments, no testing, no worries, no complications. I had some anxiety about rearing two children as I think is probably normal. We had—yeah. We have a busy lifestyle, and I was worried about that. And I had those fears crop up like every pregnant woman does, and I'm a doula and have tons of resources and knowledge about birth. And so I would deal with those fears by researching usually and coming up to—coming to my own little conclusion about dealing with the—my fears that I had.

MARGO: Yeah. Awesome. Sounds like a great pregnancy.

MARIA: Yeah. It was really great. It was super—it was super great.

MARGO: Did you find support from other moms making similar choices at all online? Or did you sort of fly solo? What was your—

MARIA: Not particularly. I joined a few Facebook free birth groups. And I just—I mean not that there's anything wrong with those because I knew that there were a lot of other women in those spaces that were finding amazing support and answers. And I didn't feel right there. I didn't feel—yeah. I felt like sometimes they—hearing other people's fears would trigger fears for me.

MARGO: Sure.

MARIA: Or other people's experiences. And I kind of just wanted to—not wing it because I don't want to make it sound like I went into it without any knowledge or experience. But I wanted to just kind of put my trust in listening to my body and my baby.

MARGO: Yeah. That makes sense to me. For sure. Well, excellent. So then how did the labor and birth go?

MARIA: Well, I had—everything really went without a hitch. I assumed that my birth would—or—yeah. I assumed that I would go past 40 weeks as I did with my first daughter. On my—on 41 weeks exactly, my waters opened. I was laying in bed with my daughter, who was still night waking frequently. And it was 4:00 a.m. And I felt it happen, and I remembered that familiar feeling from my first labor. And it was 4:00 in the morning, and it was no big deal. And so I just promptly went back to bed and assumed that that's what had happened but didn't tell anybody. Kind of just went to

sleep. The next day, as I woke up, I was super excited assuming that I would go into labor very soon. There was butterflies in my stomach. I picked up my sister from the airport who lives 1,000 miles away from me because she was coming and planned this trip to visit me assuming that I will—would have already birthed my baby. And she thought, "Well, hey, I'll go in there." And she was going to be my postpartum doula. Help me with meals and my other daughter.

So we planned this trip assuming that she would get here. Now with the knowledge that it might not happen. So I picked up my sister. I told her. We figured it out. We knew it was definitely my waters. I did a little pH test. And the familiar smell of amniotic fluid. I guess because I'm a doula, I recognize that pretty—so—and I was just slowly leaking throughout the day. So it wasn't like this big gush. But contractions really did start that very day. They weren't consistent or regular. But they were intense as in an early labor contraction would be. So I thought, "Well, this is great. I mean X amount of women,"—what is it? Like 90% of women go into labor within 24 hours. "I'll probably have a baby tonight." So I was so excited, and my sister was excited to be there to witness that experience too. She had no previous experience or knowledge about birth really, so she was just kind of there to be a witness. And I know we were both excited about that.

So fast forward to the next morning, I woke up past the 24 hours. And I was like, "What the hell? I still don't have a baby." I did my research, and I know I have to be in that 90%. But I wasn't. So I was a little—not frustrated. But maybe confused. I did my research that very morning as my doula would do. And I found that 24—up to 72 hours without induction is totally evidence based. And so I felt comfortable with that. I thought, "Great. If I get to that 72 hours, I'll surely accept medical care," thinking it wouldn't happen because it was so unlikely because that's what the research said.

MARGO: Right.

MARIA: So I thought, "All right. Well, this is a nice space to be in. I'm just patiently waiting for my baby." And so my sister and my daughter and I, we did some fun things and took some walks around the neighborhood and played with the sprinklers outside. And I was just trying to be very patient and patiently wait for my baby and trust that she would know when it was time. So fast forward to day 3, my 72 hours was getting very close. So I was starting to get really nervous. I was trying to gently tell my baby, "Baby, I'm ready to meet you," and trying not to get worked up but just trying to be patient. But that became increasingly hard by day 3. So day 4 came, and I woke up past the 72 hours. I had been up all night with my daughter, who still was not a very good sleeper. So I was emotionally exhausted, completely exhausted. My research and doula brain made this really, really hard for me. I was this complete roller coaster for 4 days, meanwhile, contracting for 4 days.

And I was just really emotionally and physically tired. So I did some rebozo sifting with my husband that night. And I have some rebozo knowledge from my doula training. And so I thought, "Well, I don't know what's going on here. Why am I having these contractions and nothing is happening? And I'm starting to get worried." But I knew

deep down that nothing was wrong. And I knew what the signs and symptoms were of infection and what not. And so I was being careful and looking out for myself. But I knew deep down that nothing was wrong, but I didn't know why nothing was happening. And it just became—it became harder as time went on to trust that this was what needed to happen. And that this was my baby's story. You know what I mean?

MARGO: Right. Totally.

MARIA: Yeah. So—go ahead.

MARGO: So what were your contractions like? You said that they were pretty intense earlyish and just like random.

MARIA: Yeah. Completely random. Completely random. I mean I would have three in one hour and then none for three hours. So it was just completely random. They were intense enough to make me kind of stop and rock my hips and—you know what I mean? So I was putting focus into them. So it wasn't like I was just walking and talking around although I was just doing my normal, daily stuff. But I knew that they weren't just your regular Braxton-Hicks anymore. So I was starting to feel like, "Okay. What's going on here?" And I was trying to evaluate it from my doula brain instead of just kind of being in my space of being patient. But that evening on day 4, my husband and I did some—I taught him how to do the little rebozo thing. And I stood up after my rebozo sifting, and I just felt better. I mean I felt like—I felt like my baby kind of fall into place. And everything about my abdomen and uterus just felt right as if there was a weird positioning thing, or—I don't even know what it was to be honest, Margo. It just felt better.

And so I thought to myself, "All right." Well, I didn't sleep at all. I was going on 24 hours without sleep because my daughter had been up all night. And so I thought, "Well, all right. I will—I'm totally giving in to this experience, and I'm letting go. And I'm going to go to sleep and, hopefully, get a great night sleep." My husband had promised to be on baby duty that next night. And I thought, "I'm going to wake up, and I'll bet I'll go into labor tomorrow." But just a couple hours later, I was in active labor without sleep. So—yeah. Darn. So that kind of happened. That was a very exhausting experience. Yeah. I mean I'm really glad that I continued to trust that intuition. And even though I birthed my baby five days after my water started leaking, it really was a really fast six-hour active labor. And it was so hard. I had this perception of all labor and birth that was undisturbed being like my beautiful first birth. My calm and peaceful like, "Oh, I just pushed a baby out birth." So I thought, "Oh, well duh. That's how I'm going to birth the second time."

MARGO: Sure.

MARIA: Well, I was really wrong. So that caught me off guard. It was a million times harder than that first birth. But it really, truly was really healing. And my sister was there who had never seen a birth before and had no knowledge of the birth process.

And I thought going into it like, "Hmm. Maybe this isn't the best idea to have her here because I don't know what her reaction will be. I don't know how she will—she might be fearful."

MARGO: Sure.

MARIA: As it turns out, she was the best doula of all of the untrained and uneducated doulas that ever existed. She did exactly what I needed. I mean she just held my hand. And she kept her voice calm and steady and happy. And she totally let me take the lead, and my husband was there, of course, too. And they both were just amazing witnesses and gave me what I needed which ultimately, at this time, was just somebody's hand to hold. And it was amazing. So yeah. No one was giving me advice or touching me unless I asked them too. I didn't feel nearly as observed as I did the first time. The first time I literally had a flashlight pointing down into a mirror in the water, which was pointing back up at the reflection of my baby crowning. Which I know why they do that, but I mean it just felt kind of awkward that everyone was looking at my vulva with a flashlight except me. It just felt really weird.

But this time none of that was happening. It was dark. I didn't feel observed. And I birthed my baby on my own terms in my own time with my own hands. And I felt a lot better about that which—and then afterward, I completely birthed my placenta all by myself which really was without a doubt the most healing part of that birth.

MARGO: That's awesome.

MARIA: Yeah. Definitely.

MARGO: That's something you don't hear a lot. Again, we don't talk about even in sort of the natural birth world, so that's a really awesome thing, I feel like, for people who are listening to hear how important that can be. And yeah. That's awesome.

MARIA: So I guess looking back on them, the two births have really changed my life. I mean I learned so much through both of them. With my first birth, I learned not to give my own power away. And I learned that—to use that truth in everything in my life and not just with my pregnancy and birth. I mean just with everything. I've started to take a lot more responsibility and authority over me and my body and my family. And I think we're all better off for it. And then in my second birth, I learned the hard way how to trust my intuition. Seriously, those were a long 5 days. And I mean, truly, I used to be all, "Oh, evidence based care. Evidence based decisions for your birthing time." Now I'm like, "Blah, blah, blah," because the evidence ran out after 72 hours. And I totally—still had a decision to make. And my baby and my body told me we were good, and so I just went with it. And I still do look up the evidence all the time. And I mean I'm a research nerd, so I don't base my life on—but I just—yeah. I just don't base my life on studies and numbers anymore. And I've made a kind of conscious effort ever since to make as many decisions as possible in my life to be intuitive decisions. And I really feel like I'm happier, and I trust myself now.

MARGO: That's beautiful. Yeah. And I don't think I have come up with a title for this episode of the podcast, but now I kind of want to call it, *When the Evidence Runs Out*, because that's such a good point. We only—

MARIA: I love it.

MARGO: - have so much information. We only have so many studies. And even, I think ACOG came out recently with a position statement on some—I don't remember. I pay very little attention to what they're doing honestly. But I did read it. And it was interesting. And they, in there, said—oh, it was on client consent and what to do when—

MARIA: Mm-hmm. I read that.

MARGO: Yeah. When a mom declines consent for what they consider a medically indicated blah, blah, blah. And what we're supposed—what they're supposed to do with that. And even they say, "Well, you're supposed to still honor the mother." But and they said in the piece, and you read it, that their knowledge is limited. They don't have—we don't have the full scope. We don't have the full picture. We don't even have—we have no idea how much we know or don't know. And so yeah. I think I'm also really into researching. And it's hard. It's a piece of the puzzle. And when you're—yeah. It's hard. And so I love that you said that. And in my experience with my story, I definitely was outside of the considered best practices. But, again, there's such little information. And the evidence can't ever get to this amount of detail that would be applicable to you because you're healthy. You're well fed. You're a well nourished woman, who is not—who is observing all the good hygiene protocols once your waters open. And like there is like (cross talk)—

MARIA: Right.

MARGO: -no—there is no one who is willing to go 5 days for this study.

MARIA: Right. True.

MARGO: (cross talk) even.

MARIA: Except me maybe.

MARGO: How can we ever know? As opposed to someone whose water breaks because they had an infection of some kind?

MARIA: Right.

MARGO: There's so many different variables that you can't—yeah. And then when we get to this sort of boundary of where the knowledge is, like you're saying, you're 72

hours. And you're like, "Well, crap. Now they haven't—they don't have any information for me about this."

MARIA: Yeah. And I think that—

MARGO: It happens often.

MARIA: Yeah. I mean whenever I read that same ACOG thing that they put out I think that what struck me as most powerful in that is that it—I think it was ever written. Now I'm paraphrasing, so don't quote me. But it was written that it is unethical to persuade a woman otherwise.

MARGO: Right.

MARIA: But I feel like I—and even in my experience with my first birth experienced that with midwives. Not even OBs. And I hear about it all the time. So I mean it's completely unethical to try to persuade someone one way or the other. It's not supporting them, and it's not giving them resources or supplements to try to persuade someone to do something that you think that they should do. I just don't feel like it's fair to women and fair to each other to be doing that. And fair to our babies, that's for sure.

MARGO: Totally. Well, that's a fabulous story. I had one question. And then—before we wrap up here. Did you do Hypnobabies with your second birth?

MARIA: Well, after my second birth as soon as my baby came out, I looked at my husband and said, "I should have done that effin' Hypnobabies." So the answer is no. I mean I had a toddler running around. And so Hypnobabies does take some time. And I just didn't really have the time to do it. But I, immediately after my birth, regretted it. But looking back on it, I truly don't regret it anymore. I mean I explained that my first birth felt very out of body experience. My second birth felt the complete opposite. I felt very present and in my body. And while that made it much more difficult and much more intense, I'm so glad to look back on that experience because I felt so much more in control. And even though—I mean truly I wasn't in control. I let go of control. But in that same sense, I was in control of letting go. Do you know what I mean?

MARGO: I do.

MARIA: It just felt so much better even though it was so much more intense. So I know in the future I probably won't be doing that again. But yeah. No. I won't be doing Hypnobabies again. But I appreciated my first birth experience because it really was so calm and beautiful. So I have two really differing experiences to look back on, and I love that.

MARGO: Yeah. Well, before we say goodbye, I was just wondering if you—it's hard because how do ever sum up all of this stuff. But if could you just give one or two

pieces of advice to people who are listening, what would you say to them since they are listening?

MARIA: Yeah. Sure. I hope they're listening. I suppose my goal in sharing these particular stories would just to be—encourage other women to listen to their intuition and to use their tools to guide how they want to be treated in their births. And then to recognize that nothing else really matters. I mean really nothing else matters. Just you and your baby and taking responsibility for your birth doesn't have to mean an unassisted home birth like I experienced. But no one else will take that responsibility for you, and so they especially won't do it from a place of love. I mean we're really the only ones qualified to decide what's right for us and for our babies. And so my life goal, I feel like now, is to share this space and create—or share my stories and create a space in my local community and with friends and family for women to have more options and resources and so that they can recognize their own intuition and recognize their own power and totally take hold of it and run with it because it feels really good.

MARGO: Yeah. Well, awesome. Thank you so much, Maria, for being here today with me.

MARIA: Thank you.

MARGO: Perhaps we can do this again sometime.

MARIA: Please.

MARGO: So grateful for you coming on and talking about your births.

MARIA: Yeah. Me too.

MARGO: (cross talk)—yeah. So for those of you listening, listen in again and check out what we are doing at indiebirth.com. We've been doing lots of fun things lately. Different social media stuff, some live events on Facebook for people to check out, and, as always, we're reachable by email, margo@indiebirth.com or maryn@indiebirth.com. And we love to hear from you and get feedback and ideas for new resources that people are looking for. And so yeah. Get in touch and keep listening. And yeah. We'll see you around. Thanks everyone.

(closing music)