

(introductory music)

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

**MARYN:** Welcome to Indie Birth's series of podcasts here on iTunes—*Taking Back Birth*. Hi, Maryn here today with another different variation on how to explain what new paradigm birth might look like. Talking about birth outside of the system and hopefully providing more information in another resource for those that are interested. So I always say the same thing—these podcasts come about as a request usually whether it's intentional or not intentional from other people. And this week it was coming in contact with more than one local person and having this conversation. So I figured if I had it twice in one week here where there's not even that many people then perhaps it would be useful to make into a podcast and have available.

So I want to talk about what I call black and white birth versus another version. And I guess I'm primarily talking to people that are curious about homebirth, about birthing with a traditional midwife, basically anybody that wants to know more about birth that isn't the western medicalized version that most people are familiar with. And as I say always, that version isn't really confined to a particular place or person any longer the way maybe we used to think it was so always hospital births, always doctors. Not really the case which maybe is a good thing and maybe not a good thing.

Midwives at home are definitely practicing medicalized birth and a version of this black and white birth so I always say that I'm not here I don't think in the world to convince anyone. So if you're listening, it's because you already have this inkling in yourself that things could be different, and that's the great thing about podcasts. You're really not going to get people that don't have any idea what you're talking about. You have to have the interest to at least listen.

So black and white birth. What do I mean by that? That's my way of describing what the system would like you to do and believe about birth and really about life. So that is the medical paradigm for lack of a better title and really this system of birth condemns all places, all people, and all practices that are in them. And I think that's what extremists do to control people. If we use any other example of that, it sounds like a dictatorship, right, that there's only one way and that everything outside of that is evil or bad.

So this system—this black and white birth system—plays on in securities of all people and ultimately our own fears and death of course is the fear that all fears are rooted in which we'll talk about more. So we see this way of thinking everywhere, this black and white. There is a right way according to them or the system, maybe it's not even a them, but it is a belief system so I can understand the days that I don't want to get into the us versus them thing, but I think there are differing belief systems. So this black and white system is everywhere. Politics is a great example. Definitely not going to go there in this podcast. Even food choices. Extremists who have one way of eating and think

everybody on the whole planet should eat that way. There's many examples of that, and I don't have an opinion on whether that particular way of eating for example is right or wrong for that person because I don't know them. They're not me. So does a fruitarian diet work for some people? I'm sure it does, but is it something that every person should adopt. No, because we're all so different.

So birth is like I said no different. This way of thinking is everywhere, and like I started saying earlier, you might come in contact with someone that thinks the same and wants to know about what I call more of a gray area of birth and life. And I think that's the belief system that I hold and probably many of you hold, but I think we have to be aware of this black and white system in the beliefs that they have and the way that we label that and the way they might label that. And I say that not so that we can dwell on it and criticize it in a negative way and just keep saying, "Well, that sucks. That's horrible. We shouldn't view birth in a black and white way." We have to acknowledge that that is a system and the reason we are talking about it is so that we can understand it more so we can better explain and describe what we believe.

So that's the reason for me at least in getting clear on these issues because when you do talk to people that are more mainstream in their beliefs we have to be able to reach them without being I think aggressive or obnoxious. And for me I've just found that when we talk about belief systems sometimes it's a little bit easier to do that. It's less personal. Hopefully you can't hear the rain coming down on my car. It's actually snow here, but it's hard pellets of snow here in Sedona, kind of odd, but maybe serendipitous because we really never get this kind of weather. And I've chosen today to sit in a quiet car.

So onwards. So let's contrast this black and white birth with this paradigm that I believe in, that many of you practice and believe in. This paradigm there is no right way, and again, I think extremists will perhaps take a very cursory glance and maybe see what Indie Birth is even about and make up their own story that we're extremists. That we're crazy, natural birth people, and we'd do anything to have a baby at home, and it's all about us and blah blah blah blah. But that's actually not when you get into it at all what I believe. I don't believe there's actually a right way to do things. I do believe there are scientifically proven more beneficial ways to bring babies into this world for sure, but it's really hard to talk about right and wrong like that. So I think there are scientifically beneficial ways—it's the best way I can say it—that make sense for the survival of our species, but I think there is still a big but because we are human and we're multi-layered and multi-faceted, I still think there's the but of what's right for that woman. When she's given that information about let's say undisturbed birth—yes, I think most women when they're really given that will eventually find their way to finding that truth within themselves, but I still think there will be people that won't for whatever reason because humans are complicated, etc. So I think I have to stand by the fact that there isn't a right way for anyone to do this other than again the scientific evidence we might have, but that's pretty specific. There are many other choices kind of that happen outside of what

that even means so obviously does a woman hire a midwife? Does she hire a licensed a midwife? Does she hire a traditional midwife? I don't know that there is only one right way. I think there are many ways it can look, and I think it's more about all of us getting clear on what we need because until then we're all just parroting another person which is never a great thing regardless.

So this paradigm whatever you want to call it—I tend to call it the new paradigm—and it is newer perhaps but it's also old so you can come up with your own way, this Indie Birth way or whatever you want to call it is about your choices. We're not extremists. I think that's actually threatening because it really opens up a can of worms for people that are used to being told what to do. They don't necessarily like this feeling of, "Oh, well, if there's isn't a right way, then how can than that be?" There's too much to think about. So we can look at birth and life a lot of different ways, and finding our own power is a threat to the system. So that's pretty much what I just said, but I think that's a really valuable thing to keep in mind when you're counseling people maybe as a doula or maybe you're just a friend and another friend wants to know about homebirth but has a lot of fears and maybe her family is really unsupportive. So you kind of have to tread lightly.

Just recognize that the fact that you've found your power or are in the process of is a threat to them personally. Unfortunately even though I'd love if this was all something we could keep nonpersonal, it's not. But it's mostly a threat to that system of black and white because we can create birth and what we need and want however we want, however we want it. We can choose our prenatal care and make that how we want it, and that can look so many different ways. It can include testing or not. It can include nothing clinical, and the same for our births. We can go outside of the bounds of all labels even with something like unassisted birth which is not my favorite term because I feel like it's still such a label. Why is it either alone or with a medical professional? Why aren't there in between choices? And of course, there are. They're just not labels for them as easily.

But in the system there is anything you want, anything you're able to create. Again we can use testing and technology how we want, and no one is asking you to sell your soul to the system or beliefs. You don't have to sign on a dotted line that you'll never do this or never do that. You don't have to say that this kind of birth never works or this kind of practitioner is evil or this location for birth is always horrible. We can I hope in this new paradigm keep our minds open that birth again can look a lot of different ways and just to repeat if you are somebody that is supporting women in any kind of role or you're one of these women that are looking for how to create this support and you're dealing with unsupportive family or friends that they may not be open to really hearing all of this because they might just not be open. But if they are, it's talking about these kind of things that if you're choosing to birth at home with whoever—licensed midwife, a traditional midwife—that you should have full creativity with what that means to you. So people in the black and white system are very concerned about ultrasounds and

medical tests and I don't think those things should be routine, but in a system that we're creating, we ideally have access to them if we want them.

So a smart, intelligent, conscious person could still look at a choice like ultrasound and ultimately decide that it is the right choice for them. And I think that's completely different than being forced into it or scared into it or told you have to do it or threatened or just doing it because you don't know any better. So again I think the system that is being created now is much more—a million times more, a billion times more—supportive to pregnant women and their families, but it's just so outside of the understanding of the black and white system. So again they may not hear you, but I think it's a good route to try in conversation. "Oh, so you're scared I'm having a homebirth. You think that means what?" What does that mean to someone? Oh, that means to most people that you don't have access to things you need or you wouldn't get help if you needed it. And I think it's correcting these misconceptions that is helpful. So again not convincing, but just correcting the misconception that in this world we get to choose what we want, and it doesn't mean homebirth at all costs.

But it means whatever the person chooses so it's hard I think for the black and white paradigm to have respect for what we do or believe and maybe we just aren't looking for that anymore. We may not get that because they may be able to believe something like, "Oh, well, she can have tests during her pregnancy if she'd like," but if a different woman chooses absolutely no interventions or testing is it as respected? Well, no, we all know that it's not, but that's the black and white system. It's either yes or no. It's either right or wrong. It's either black or white.

So when you're invested or interested—you don't even have to invest yourself but you're out there and you're just interested in Indie Birth or homebirth or unassisted birth or birthing with a traditional midwife—what do you have to want? I think you have to want to explore such things. So that was the common thread like I said I saw this week locally with the people that I was able to engage in these conversations with. They weren't people that were not open. You have to be a tiny bit open, and these people were, and it was nothing I did. There was already something in their hearts or in their minds that said something about this black and white thing isn't sitting right with me. It doesn't feel right. Maybe I'll ultimately go that way, but there's something I feel like I'm missing. And I think that's exactly a great place to be. And excitedly, I think there's lots of people there, more than we think.

So those people they do have to want to talk about the bigger things. So if that's you, just kind of think about that for a minute. You're probably interested in really getting to the bottom of some of these issues and if you've listened to a lot of podcasts I think that's proof of that because to a lot of people these would be super boring. But these are for people that want to know more. They don't want to just be told they need an ultrasound. They want to know what the research is around ultrasound, and they want to know how to learn to listen to themselves better. So it starts to get pretty messy, and I think that's a hallmark of this new paradigm, and we could even say the Wise Woman

Tradition if we wanted to kind of blend it with some other philosophy that's similar. It's a messy tradition. It isn't cut and dry, and it's not for everyone because it is hard work to not be told what to do. You really have to want it, and you have to understand that sometimes you don't have clarity, and you have to understand that there may not be answers. Sometimes there aren't answers whether it's numbers. Sometimes we even ask ourselves, and there aren't answers.

So we invest our time and our hearts and our energy and our passion in the system which frankly is not something the black and white system is willing to do. That's just not how it's set up whether you want view it as a financial reason or just a simple foundational belief that birth is just physical. There is no reason to go into all of those things.

So I was going to give some examples of this, of kind of the black and white birth scenario versus this new paradigm, this gray area where we create what we want to see. And I was thinking because somebody else had mentioned it once again that using a Doppler to listen to the baby's heartbeat in labor was kind of a good example so let's say you've hired—well, you're probably going to have to hire a traditional midwife or somebody outside of the rules and regs to live out this scenario because if you didn't you really wouldn't get a choice as to when they listened or how they listened. The rules and regs would state that.

So let's say that you're already out of the box and you've hired somebody to create this gray system with you, and you don't know kind of how you feel about using a Doppler in labor or maybe you're exploring that. You know that maybe that's not the best thing. You're not really sure if you even want to listen to the baby, and so that's an example of birth not being black and white and not having even your own agenda or rules in your head beforehand. Birth doesn't really work by rules so sometimes we even set ourselves up for being in a situation where it's black or white. Rarely I'm sure it is very obviously do we make choice A or choice B. But more of the time, I do think it's messy.

So the Doppler in labor just struck me as a messy choice because hopefully you have a midwife that would be supportive of maybe not listening but then when do you listen? Is there something that could happen in labor that would make you want to listen? Is there something that you would trust her to know that she would say, "Can I listen?" Overall do you trust her? I think trust is a huge part of this new paradigm of birth. In the black and white paradigm, I don't see that trust features very much at all. People that look up to their doctor or midwife to tell them what to do, I don't see that as trust. It's more of a devotion or lack of responsibility, but I think in the new paradigm it's about trusting the people that are supporting us even if they might know more on paper about birth or midwifery. They don't know more about you. So you still have to cocreate this, and again it can be very messy. You may not have these answers even before birth. What would I do? But in the moment, you figure out how it's going to go and what you're comfortable with, and you have the freedom to do that which I think we all know in this black and white model there's not really that freedom. You've made a lot of choices

before birth. You go in, and usually when things happen—and by happen I mean—something more negative during the birth, then the care provider wins. There isn't really discussion or any of that for most people in that system. It's submitting to whatever that person thinks, and so that's where it's really defined roles.

I will say for the midwife that being in this new paradigm is—well, first I'll say it's awesome. I'm thrilled to walk with the women I do who want these kind of births. It's truly fulfilling and soul-enriching, and I could go on and on. So truly grateful, but I'll say it's not easy. It's not easy the way maybe the black and white paradigm is. I guess I can't really say other than the couple of years' experience I had working in that paradigm, but I'm certainly not a doctor and never have been and never will be. So I don't know the pressure they feel, and I wouldn't pretend to. I think that's really an entirely different topic. But it's not easy being with women in these gray areas when there aren't defined yeses or nos. So for midwives it means spending a lot more time with people and being fully invested in their education and confidence although I can't be more invested than they are. But I have to be pretty invested because without the education and building that trust then a lot of this paradigm is missing.

So again this paradigm, this gray area, is deep. There's a lot of depth. We include all angles and all things to consider. Again that's just messy. We always say "but." I think I said that earlier in the podcast. There's always a "but." It's never really this or that. So why does that not happen in this black and white birth paradigm? Well, I think full disclosure is very risky for that paradigm. It could easily bring that paradigm down if women realized how powerful they were. And by that I mean if they were really honest about what they knew and what they didn't, women would start to trust themselves more. So technology in birth is just a time honored example of that. If there was really full disclosure about something like ultrasound and not only the risks but the benefits for most people in a routine setting, then women might start to back out of that kind of thing more. Because we all know one intervention leads to the next.

But if the black and white paradigm were to do that, then that would again expose the fact that they don't know everything, and that should be no surprised to anyone. I don't know everything. You don't know everything. No one knows everything, and I think it would be safer in a lot of ways to agree we know nothing about birth, but that paradigm does not operate on that. It's black and white. It's the expert and the patient. But if we expose or if women started to expose what the black and white paradigm didn't know, then that would be another really positive moment for women feeling powerful. What are they trying to control and why do they go so overboard trying to look like heroes? Because that's how it's set up.

So another great example when you're talking with people maybe they have questions or again maybe you're one of these people you have questions, and that's great. So common questions that come up all the time for me in interviews and just at classes and probably for you if you're a doula or whatever. Just something like how do you prevent tears? I think that's a great example of the black and white mentality. Someone may not

know they're coming from that place, but they're asking these questions they've read on the internet or whoever told them to ask and so that's what they're asking. That's fine. Everybody has to start somewhere.

But you hear a question like that and your bells go off because that person would love an answer that's very black and white. This is how we prevent tears, and it always works. Or well we can't prevent tears so we do episiotomies, done. But in the new paradigm there's so much more information, and again I think these podcasts are very reflective of that. I know these are well-listened to so it's really encouraging to me that people do care about this bigger picture, this gray area. So if someone asks about tears or how to prevent them, it's not a yes or no. It's not a simple answer to me.

It's a long spiel, and sometimes if I am in the situation where it's not even appropriate to go into all that or I don't have the time, it's more highlighting the necessary parts and saying, "This is a bigger topic. If we work together, this is something we'll talk more about." Because you can't possibly address some of these things in 30 seconds. So I'm not going to be able to here either, but tear prevention—there's about ten steps before we talk about that from nutrition, to not inducing, and that's something that just boggles my mind really because in the black and white paradigm it's more about the end result. So how do we prevent tears? Then the next question do you suture? As if those are the only things to worry about, as if nothing else exists, and it isn't a billion times more interesting than that. I mean in a really positive way. I would love talking about that stuff, and many of you probably do too. Who wants to give a one word answer when there's so much information available to people to make them powerful and for them to realize their power?

Now the same goes along with hemorrhagic drugs so obviously I'm using some of the questions I get when people come for consults, and that's another one. Do you have drugs for hemorrhage? Well, that's kind of beside the point because obtaining those or using them is not hard, but there's about 20 questions that come before that. Why would we? What does it mean? What is a hemorrhage? How do we prevent that? Have you had hemorrhages before? What did that mean to you? How did you feel? I mean there's only like a billion questions so for people that again aren't open—they're just bored, or they think maybe I'm trying to avoid their question, but people that aren't that way and they're feeling slightly open or like I said aware that there's another way will be open to hearing these longer explanations. That's the new paradigm. It's not black and white. You have choices, and things are complicated in a good way.

So black and white I think you would agree is definitely based on fear, and I would say even back to my other examples of food extremism or politics that to me that way of being is so fearful. Why would you care what anyone else does? Why would you care what they eat? Well, it's just something about control and wanting people to be like you because that reflects back on how you feel about yourself. So I think it's no different in birth. My college professor—bless his heart—I went to school for music as many of you know so he was an oboe professor at the Eastman School in Music. He would always

say when we were preparing for recitals or when we performed, he would say, "Fear is not an appropriate color." That's something I'll never forget. I think that applies here too. Maybe it's because fear isn't a color. Fear is black or white. It doesn't feel good. It's a downward spiral, and it's really just not an appropriate way to behave in your life. Everybody can behave the way they want to, but projecting your fear onto other people especially about birth I think is just wrong. You keep those things to yourself and work them out or whatever you want, but fear is not an appropriate color.

That just again seemed to me to speak so well to this black and white analogy I've created. So if it's not a color, then what is? Well, this gray area. I could replace gray with multicolored. That would be way more pleasant to envision wouldn't it? So instead of the new paradigm, it's like this multicolored palate that we have to choose from for birth, and it does include death. So it does include black and white. It's just not solely based on those colors, and death is part of life so this is another part of this new paradigm that sometimes makes us the most unpopular person in the room. But I'm okay with that. Not everyone is ready to admit and talk about death as a part of birth, and if they're not ready, they're not ready.

But death is part of life and is inevitable for everyone so it's silly to me that we don't talk about it. We don't need to dwell on it, right? I mean you have a beautiful pregnant woman, and you're not going to focus on that all the time, but yet you want to be working with people that have this understanding that this palate is all colors. A full life experience involves all of those things. So death in the black and white is a measure of success so just think about that or failure, right? Death is really a sign of failure. That's what I meant to say. Just think about that.

I hear midwives say that kind of stuff too, and for some reason, I guess feeling ultrasensitive about things like death sometimes, really bothers me because sometimes babies don't stay. We all know how common miscarriage is for one, and that's nobody's fault. So of course, acting like it is up to a human being to decide is really arrogant, but it is part of that black and white model. So death is seen as failure on behalf of the provider or possibly even the parent where I really don't see it that way. Not to say there aren't situations that perhaps we could help or not by being there or having skills, but in the end, death is something I don't think is up to a human soul to decide for another soul. But again, not the most popular coffee table topic or whatever you want to call it. So you have to have the people that are ready to hear, and if you're one of those people that are kind of ready to take this step, then it's acknowledging that as well.

It does scare people away though I think from the new paradigm so perhaps together we can work on how to bring that in in a way that maybe doesn't feel as threatening or scary although I'm not sure that's possible because I think our cultural beliefs and practices around death are really the problem not what we're saying. It's just the way it's viewed. But that has to be included so that comes up so much when people are talking about homebirth and especially when they're uneducated, just birth is safer in a hospital, and they have tools, and yeah, but, people die in all places. Babies die in both



places, and of course, I would argue that homebirth is safer for the physiological reasons. But I wouldn't even get into that argument because I still think it comes back to what you believe is safest for you and understanding that life is life. We don't control it, and we do the best we can.

So why would anyone actually subscribe to this multicolored facet of birth belief? You might. I certainly do, but I can see why people find it difficult and again that's part of putting this podcast out there. Having these difficult conversations and finding ways to simplify them without cheapening the discussion and the topic is hard. So I think there are people that do want this, and again, that's who I'm speaking to or maybe you're working with, but they have an inkling that something else matters, and it's beyond them. They have questions that come into their mind whether they're more positive or negative doesn't matter, but what if we can't birth in the future? I mean generationally speaking. Michel Odent has his most recent book—gosh, I'm going to blank on the name of it—but *Birth and the Future of Homo sapiens* or something along those lines, and he does make a case for not having the oxytocin reserves in our genetics to continue to birth in the future.

So sometimes it's stuff like that that gets people like, "Oh, wow, is that true?" Yeah, it's true. I'm not making that up. What if all births become C-sections in a couple of generations? And then the more positive things. You know, people learn a little bit about this and they think, "Wow, what if I could give my baby a different start than I had? My birth was rough. I never was breastfed. I have health problems now. I didn't feel bonded to my mother. What if I could try something different?" And I think that call to do that for future generations is embedded within all of us, that call to do better for our children and to have them be healthier and happier is part of our genetic code. So it's just a matter of people recognizing that this is a really legitimate way of going about that.

Another reason I think many people can see very clearly how damaged the world is, right? Even something like politics that gets people all angry and hating each other and abusive, not to mention all of the other ungodly abuse and horrible things that are happening in the world every day. Without dwelling on that, we realize that humans are mostly traumatized and abused and damaged and dishonored and disempowered, and it happens maybe before birth? But certainly from the moment of birth because of many of these black and white practices. Now that might be a stretch. I'm not asking everyone that's investigating homebirth to kind of get that all at once. I think it takes time and resources and a devotion to uncovering this truth, but I think that is a valid truth for many people. I know that that's super important to me in even doing the work that I do that my children and your children and our grandchildren and etc., etc. can be more functional and happy in this world than we are collectively speaking. That seems like a very worthy goal. I don't think as humans we were made to suffer, and there is a lot of suffering.

So whether or not you agree it begins at birth, I don't see what harm it could do to focus on our birth practices being more gentle, but again easier said than done. People have

to trade in their fear for the hope of a gentle birth. So to kind of close it up here, I will be bold and say eventually this multicolored paradigm, this new paradigm of birth will need to become the only way. Honestly that's very black and white, isn't it? So that's pretty funny. I see this has to happen for things to change like I said for people to maybe evolve in a gentler, more loving way. I think it really does so we have to create what we want, stop looking for answers from others, begin looking for our own messy truths, seek truth, and again just be okay with being uncomfortable sometimes when we don't know or don't have the answers, and we can't say that anything will work out the way we want it exactly. So people looking into this paradigm hopefully they know that that black and white thing isn't true, that there is no certainty in life. There is no one that can save them. There's only them, and what they have inside of them, and whatever they create to be able to walk their life path. So on that end, I think I'm pretty much done here. I think if you're new to listening then you have many podcasts to go back and listen to—over 90—and many of those will help exemplify some of these points, give you other resources, connect you with other people.

The Indie Birth community is really growing, and that is a goal for this year for me personally and Indie Birth as a whole, but it's already happening. We're barely into the new year. It's just happening because people are making it happen. It's not me or Margo. It's just people like you that are listening and connecting online or in classes or meeting here locally and wanting to build this web of women and people that get it, that get this. So I'm definitely still not trying to convince anyone, but sharing these experiences with you, encouraging you to question them no matter where you're at, encouraging you to share your own experiences, and what you value and what is true for you is very, very valuable to everybody.

So thanks for listening to me blab about black and white birth versus something else we're creating here at Indie Birth and all over the world. For sure, check out the Indie Birth site. We do have a conference coming up in March. It's a midwifery conference, and I've been asked many, many times if it's just for midwives and students. It's really not. If you're a person, a woman, just somebody interested in birth, you like these podcasts, and you can swing coming to Sedona in March 2017, I think you'll love it. They'll be lots of like-minded people so creating community on the ground is important, and I love the online community. I love everybody listening, but there is something to be said for connecting in person, seeing each other's faces, and all of that. So if you're interested, check out [IndieBirthConference.com](http://IndieBirthConference.com). Have a great day. Bye.

(closing music)