

(introductory music)

DISCLAIMER: *Taking Back Birth* is a production of the 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, everyone. Maryn here with little baby Deva on my breast. Deva's birth has obviously passed, but this podcast was done just hours before she entered the world. So the deal is my friend, Scott, who is the director of the new film, *Of Woman Born*, which we'll definitely be talking more about—it was his idea actually to talk to someone in labor. And he had, I believe, over 400 questions. Wow. That he had fielded over the years as he was, I would assume, doing research for the film, which is all about an undisturbed birth featuring Indie Birth faculty member, Emily Graham. So Scott has this idea to ask me a couple of questions before my labor began to such a degree that I wouldn't be able to talk. So that was very considerate of him. This interview was really fun to do. It's not often, I think, that I've been interviewed. Definitely not on my own podcast. So this was just a really fun thing to do. And I really thought his questions were insightful and, personally—now that the labor and birth have passed, I can say with hindsight that the questions really helped me focus in on what was important to me during her labor. And you can read more about her birth story if you look up the *Indie Birth of Deva Catherine Sage*. You can also watch her birth footage at thebirthmovie.com.

But anyway, Scott's questions really gave me something to focus on and reminded me what I thought was important as I was just hours away from birthing Deva. So enjoy the interview. I do apologize for the quality of the call not being the best. Remember this was just impromptu, last minute, and we did the best we can. So hopefully the messages come through and you enjoy this chat between Scott Kirschenbaum and myself.

SCOTT: Thank you for a tremendously enjoyable Indie Birth conference. It was great attending for the first time. And I felt that since you are about to go into labor to perhaps do a little interview with you about the experience before labor. Some months ago before I started filming Emily for the documentary, *Of Woman Born*, I reached out to a number in my network. And I posed for them one question. And the question was if you could ask a soon-to-be in labor woman any ten questions, what would they be? So I thought it would be nice to try some of these questions with you right now.

MARYN: Yeah. Thank you. And that's impeccably good timing.

SCOTT: Just to get some context, where would you say you're at right now in terms of your—the lead up to labor?

MARYN: Hmm. Well, I think with an eighth baby there's not a defined roadmap. I mean there really isn't for any labor. But I think women that have had a lot of babies it's a lot trickier to predetermine where things are going. But at this point, I would say I hope for a baby as soon as tonight and, if not, then hopefully within the next 24 hours or so. That's the hope. But, of course, I have no idea.

SCOTT: Okay. And are you at home right now?

MARYN: Yeah. I'm just at home.

SCOTT: Okay. What would you—what would you want to remember most about these hours before this labor? What's most resonant for you right now?

MARYN: I think just the anticipation of not being on the other side yet and not knowing this baby or how the birth will go. Just kind of still dreaming about it and living in the moments prior which is a unique place to be.

SCOTT: Sort of—I guess possessive about your body. Are you wanting other people to touch you right now? Or are you wanting hands off? How are you feeling in terms of your relationship with your body?

MARYN: Having the kids around is already getting challenging. Just the constant chatter and wanting to touch in that way. It's pretty irritating. I feel like if I was in my room alone or with Jason I wouldn't mind that. But yeah. The energy of children is something that is really irritating in even early labor to me and, I think, lots of other women.

SCOTT: Mm-hmm. And why did you choose to have another kid?

MARYN: Honestly, all of my children have made their choice to come, and one made the choice to not come. And so it's really just been more of an acceptance of those wanting to come than me wanting something or producing it from nothing. It's more of like an honoring of souls or something like that.

SCOTT: Are you carrying particular energy right now within you? Like sadness or excitement or—you mentioned anxiety. But are you feeling pretty peaceful because you've birthed so many times before?

MARYN: No. I don't think that the guesswork or the anxiety in this period of labor has ever gone away for me. And by this period, I mean obviously I'm not in the kind of labor where I can only focus on that. So having so much time between contractions right now, I think lends itself to some anxiety because you kind of get back into the world. And you can think about things and worry even. So I find it a hard place to be before the ball really gets rolling, so to speak.

SCOTT: Yeah. I would imagine that a number of your listeners (*audio cuts out*) organization and I would—I guess they'd probably be curious if you, yourself, have any rituals or traditions in preparing for labor. And also how you feel about this community, looked at as kind of a birth aficionado and how that idea sits with you?

MARYN: Well that I try to ignore almost always. Just because you've done it a lot before and seen hundreds of women do it doesn't really make it any easier. There is no map for this birth and this baby. So I'm on my own just like every woman is. And as far as ritual, just making sure things are ready and towels are washed. And that was something I did in a panic this morning, so it happened. But it didn't feel perhaps as ritualistic as it could. And maybe tonight, just depending on what's going on and if I'm alone and up all night, I might do some other things. Even just light some candles or do a prayer or something like that. It really will depend, I guess, where—what I'm up to this evening.

SCOTT: Who would you like to be at your labor?

MARYN: I would like my husband here although he doesn't normally participate fully in the way that somebody might expect meaning that he's comfortable kind of watching. And that's okay with me. My children really want to watch, so we'll just see, again, how the timing goes and how that looks—for the birth itself is probably fine. And finally, my friend, Margo, is here which is, of course, great timing since she doesn't live here anymore. And I'm looking forward to having her here. Not to do anything but just to hold the space as a friend. And so we'll see.

SCOTT: Who—I guess it's so fascinating because you're—you have such great experience with this, and you're variable about your approach to labor and your appreciation for birth and the birth world. (*audio cuts out*) first inspire you to commit your life to teaching about birth and being a—labor and being a mother. Was it your mother or your grandmother or someone else?

MARYN: Hmm. I don't know that I could pinpoint it to one person. My grandma, on my mom's side, did have—she did birth eight children, and so that was always something, obviously, I knew. And my mom did her own part by having two natural births in the seventies and eighties. My sister and I. And so I grew up with both of those stories, which were really positive. But then as far as homebirth goes, that wasn't really the influence. I would say it's really been my children more than anything calling in the kind of births that they wanted essentially and having the grace to lead me to people that showed me how it could look from our first midwife to lots of other midwives I've worked with as an apprentice or even had at my own births. Birth is just not something we ever figure out, so I think some people, like me, just keep doing it and then keep witnessing

other women trying to figure out what this is all about. But really I don't know that that's possible.

SCOTT: And in terms of your preparation for this labor, is there one thing you've tried to do differently with—in the lead up to having this baby? Or has it felt like the same sort of flow that you normally go through?

MARYN: I think my flow has been similar, but I think the flow that the baby needs really flavors how we prepare or don't. And I really didn't prepare or haven't prepared at all for this birth just because it became really obvious to me after my last birth, which was a late miscarriage, that it's predetermined, I think, what the lessons are. I think why these souls come it's so different. So just kind of giving yourself to that makes the most sense to me and, like I said, kind of maybe not prepare. I feel like this baby knows what's up, and I feel like I know what I need to know within myself. So it just felt busy to kind of do any other preparation.

SCOTT: Mm-hmm. And have you found a way to communicate with your baby inside the womb?

MARYN: Sorry. A way to what?

SCOTT: Have you found—do you (*audio cuts out*) in which you communicate with your baby inside the womb? Do you have your own private way of communicating?

MARYN: Yeah. And, again, I think it's been different with each of them. Some maybe dreams. But this one I haven't felt that dreams has been the way. Just kind of the energy of the baby and—I don't know if you're familiar with journey work, shamanic kind of stuff. But that's been a way to connect with this baby and kind of get a feel for the personality and have some questions answered that I have had along the way. But it's mainly just different from baby to baby.

SCOTT: Do you feel like you've already met this baby? Or that you're about to? Do you feel like you already have this singular connection with the baby?

MARYN: Yeah. I feel super connected to this baby. Obviously, we haven't met in this form yet. But spirit to spirit, I think we have. And this baby has wanted to come in for awhile, I think, even before the last. But that just wasn't how it worked out. So this baby has been waiting, I feel like, awhile and has kind of this almost impatient energy. Not in a bad way. But just that he or she has been really anxious to join us here. So it's finally time. And even a little bit earlier than I thought which I kind of suspected just because that's been the feeling all along.

SCOTT: (*audio cuts out*) inside a (*audio cuts out*) ready to sort of separate from being the vessel to your baby and instead become now sort of the two individual (*audio cuts out*) people?

MARYN: Right. How do I feel about that? I missed the beginning of what you said.

SCOTT: Yeah. I mean you have this profound experience of having a body living inside of your body, which I certainly can never have. And do you think you'll miss that experience? You always, I guess, yearn for the times when you were pregnant after you've given birth. Or separate and become (*audio cuts out*)?

MARYN: Right. No. That's a very applicable question for me, personally, I think because I am one of those people that really misses being pregnant. And that's not everyone. There's plenty of women that just—the whole goal is to get the baby out and here. And while that's certainly a goal, I do enjoy being pregnant. And I always mourn it a little bit. So after all these babies, I feel like I can try and prepare myself better for that because it's a huge shift on every level and just taking time to integrate that and accept that is the best I've figure out what to do with it.

SCOTT: Mm-hmm. And what would you say is your, I guess, dearest wish for this birth? Because you have had so many experiences in labor, is there one thing that you haven't experienced? Or is there a form of transformation that you are really trying to call for?

MARYN: Yeah. That's a great question. Well, I have thought about my intentions for this birth. I think that's different than preparing. And what has come up for me is just to try to remain in a joyful space. There's a certain amount of knowing that you have after all these babies about what's to come next and how it feels and those sorts of things. But to remain joyful about the ultimate goal, which is the baby being born, and I think just to feel it. And I've had that as an intention before. I think it was my third baby that was my intention. Just to feel it. Just to notice everything and not judge it. And I really enjoyed her labor. It was probably the first labor I enjoyed of my first three. So I think that's a powerful intention, and I'm hoping that it feels good with this one.

SCOTT: And if you could have anyone in the room with you right now—or when you're in labor maybe that hasn't been in the room with you before or that has already passed away, is (*audio cuts out*) want to call in to your—to this labor?

MARYN: I feel like the energy of the baby that didn't want to stay will be there and has been there all along through this pregnancy. And so that's feeling really emotional right now. Like not in a negative way that I'm afraid but it's quite a paradox to have lost a baby and then only by losing that baby have you made space for this new person. So

it's definitely been on my mind. And I feel like the energy that he left is still around and will be with me to watch this baby come in who he made room for.

SCOTT: Is that particularly present for you right now? That you lost your last baby? Sort of deeper motivation and (*audio cuts out*) how you want to bring this new life into the world?

MARYN: Yeah. I definitely can't separate that experience from this one. And I've said on many of the podcasts this last nine months that I think there are things I'll want to talk about on podcasts once this baby is out that I just haven't been able to do yet because these stories are so related. And part of me doesn't really even fully understand what that means yet. It's just this is part of that story. And this story is still in play. So it's been very present. I am feeling pretty emotional about that. But, again, not in a scared way. It's just more like the last time my body did this. That's what it was working on. And so kind of like this beautiful thing that we do. This life. This death coming from the same place. Pretty high emotional stakes when you're about to go into labor anyway.

SCOTT: Mm-hmm. Absolutely. Is there any—speak to yourself—I'd say maybe late contractions or early pushing, if you can fast forward to that, what would you want to tell yourself at that moment?

MARYN: Well, I'm hoping that I can remain present and just remind myself that this is it. The hardest moments of labor that we can easily dread especially when we've been through them are also the last. So, again, it's this bittersweet time where it's really hard for most of us. But we're just about through. So that's always a time I wish I could capture more because it's so quickly over. And you go from one side of the threshold to the other. And just like that, you're not pregnant anymore, and the whole world is different. So just enjoying those moments would be something I'd like to do.

SCOTT: Perfect. Is there anything that you want from those who are in attendance? What is your absolute favorite thing that someone who is around you can do for you?

MARYN: During labor you mean?

SCOTT: Mm-hmm.

MARYN: Yeah. I am a pretty solitary laborer. I don't feel like I probably ask for anything or really want anything. I think just knowing people are around is helpful. And I feel like with almost all my labors I've had a woman there. And there's a point that comes in labor where I have looked at her and said something to the effect of like, "I can't do this." And every time I hear myself and I know what I'm really asking or looking for which is just her reassurance. Not that I really think I can't do it. So I don't know if

that will come up this time. But that's something really powerful that I think women can do for each other.

SCOTT: Mm-hmm. And when the baby does arrive is there something you—do you want other people around when you're having your early interaction? How present do you want your husband to be when you do (*audio cuts out*) I assume—you would like to catch your own baby? Is that correct?

MARYN: Yeah. Yeah. I usually do. That's been how it's worked out.

SCOTT: In terms of those first minutes, do you like to have 10 minutes alone or 20 or how long before you want to reconnect or rejoin the rest of the people in the room?

MARYN: I have enjoyed having Jason there and the kids. And, of course, you can imagine with a bunch of kids it's certainly not quiet. And they're really excited. They can't wait to see this baby. They can't wait to find out if it's a boy or a girl. They can't wait to do all of it. So I'll feel okay about that. I think the birth is the hardest part with people around. And then as long as I'm holding the baby and all of that, I'm not going to pass the baby around, so I don't mind if they're there. And I think it's actually really important for them as a bonding experience too. So hopefully, that'll happen.

SCOTT: Mm-hmm. Any particularly unique narratives going on in your mind right now leading up to this labor? Are you feeling motivated at—to do this on your own terms? Is there just one thing that's going on in your mind that maybe the world has not been privy to over the last days?

MARYN: Well, I don't feel like it's terribly unique, at least for me. I think being a midwife and being in your own births is unique. I mean I can't say it's harder or easier. I don't really know. But I think the really boring way that my mind usually turns is kind of like how is this going to unfold. How long will this take? And as much as I hate that I do it, I still do it. I still think, "Oh geez. Am I going to be up all night tonight? That's really not what I want. Or will this stop? And maybe it'll start again tomorrow." So just kind of that overactive analyzation, which isn't particularly, like I said, interesting. But that's just I can't help it. So obviously, I'm not in the labor enough to not do that. But it's sort of aggravating at the same time.

SCOTT: Mm-hmm. And do you—I mean do you have—this particularly strong connection right now with your uterus or your body? Do you kind of just internalize deeply? Or you still feel like it's best to just go about your normal routine until labor really takes over?

MARYN: Yeah. I think that's good general advice. I certainly would give that advice to other people. So sometimes I think about that like, "What would I tell someone else

right now?" And yeah. I would tell them just try and ignore it and go about your business and try to sleep tonight. But truthfully when I am having contractions, only every 15 to 20 minutes, they are really strong. So that's all well and good until that happens. So it's just a balancing act until the body decides to kind of move it ahead more. You're just in limbo trying to be in both worlds.

SCOTT: Mm-hmm. Just to check in, have you had any contractions so far on this call?

MARYN: Yeah. In fact, I'm having one right now.

SCOTT: That is tremendous. Wonderful. I mean you play this—and I—since you are having a contraction, let you go soon and return to the process of your labor. You're such a significant figure for a lot of women in the birth movement. And it's fascinating because birth is this individual experience. And I wonder in what (*audio cuts out*) you're seizing this sort of freedom and liberty in a—but it's not something you can easily share with other women.

MARYN: Right.

SCOTT: And so I'm just—how you juxtapose that individual experience with your public face and self at Indie Birth.

MARYN: Right. Well, in all honesty, right? This interview won't be published until after. So giving a play by play of labor or even announcing that there is a labor publically is not something I've ever done and won't do. I just don't want that pressure. And I feel like the friends I have that are close, they know. And I'm able to communicate with them. But I feel like there definitely is a time to be private. And although I don't mind sharing, it's usually maybe kind of after the fact which I think feels good.

SCOTT: I guess—so maybe one last question here. What—at this moment, what would you like to say to yourself three months from now?

MARYN: Honestly, I'd like to just laugh about this more because this is my life, right? This is what I talk about. This is what I teach. And it's all really humorous in a sense. Women have been doing this forever. And on one hand, we don't have it figured out at all. And on the other hand, it changes our lives, and we're never the same. It's just funny. And I wish I could keep the humor about it. I don't know that I'll feel that way later tonight or tomorrow. But it's over so fast. And no matter how intense it is—I talked to a friend today that had a baby two weeks ago. And already she's forgotten. We have this amazing way of dealing with this experience. And then we really easily forget how physically intense and emotionally intense it is. So I'd like to just remind myself to smile and laugh through this. That it'll soon be over. And that's kind of crazy really.

SCOTT: Absolutely. I find it so interesting the word intense comes up often in conversations around birth. And it's usually framed in this derogatory or negative way. But to me when I think of intense, it sort of summons that yes. It is painful, but that pain can also be a form of exuberance.

MARYN: Right. Right. Right. And honestly, that's kind of one of the other humorous parts. Like we can use all of these words that kind of reframe it. But when you're in it, it just really can hurt too. And so it's just this way of making this experience both ordinary and special that I think is funny.

SCOTT: Mm-hmm. Absolutely. Well, thank you so much, Maryn, for speaking with me. And I just want to wish the birth that you feel you need to have right now. And (*audio cuts out*) and a safe and beautiful labor, and I can't wait for you to meet your new child.

MARYN: Thank you, Scott. Yeah. This has been really fun. And if nothing else, a way to kind of take my mind of serious things and remember that the world goes on. So thank you for coming up with such fun questions. And I look forward to sharing this with Indie Birth soon.

SCOTT: Absolutely. All right. Well, may your next contraction be a little bit less painful and may you ease your way into birth nicely.

MARYN: Awesome. Yes. Thank you.

So there ends the interviews between Scott Kirschenbaum and myself just hours before Deva was born. For more information on Scott and his film, *Of Woman Born*, you can go to the ofwomanbornfilm.com website or find their Facebook page, *Of Woman Born*. This film is set to release in 2018. And we will be the utmost supporters here at Indie Birth to make sure that everyone gets a chance to see how amazing and beautiful and artistic and undisturbed birth can look on film. So congrats to Scott and Emily and his crew. We'll be looking forward to sharing more with you about this film in the near future. And remember to check out the Indie Birth site. Remember you can read Deva's birth story on our site and watch her actual birth footage shot by Margo which turned out remarkably well although certainly not a professional grade film. It's quite beautiful, if I do say so myself. And you can watch that thebirthmove.com. Just put in your email address, and you'll be sent the link to the entire 16 minutes. We'd love if you would share Deva's birth film as well. Grassroots effort here at Indie Birth to, again, normalize undisturbed birth, physiological birth, so that more women and people around the world get to see how beautiful, powerful, and normal it is. Thanks so much for listening. Have a great day.

(closing music)