

(introductory music)

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MARYN: Welcome to Indie Birth's series of podcasts here on iTunes, *Taking Back Birth*. Hi, I'm Maryn. And I'm here today with a special birth story guest. So I have Annika and baby Ruby here with me, and today we're going to hear Ruby's birth story.

ANNIKA: Hi, everybody. This is Annika. Some of you may know me. Some of you may not. I am one of Maryn's apprentices here in Sedona. It's kind of funny to try and find a place to start with these things, but I'll tell you a little bit about myself. I'm an Arizona native. I grew up in Flagstaff. I grew up with a love of birth stuff from the time that I was a really little girl watching all of the very medicalized birth stories on Discovery Health Channel and just being completely enthralled and obsessed with it. And, of course, not knowing what context those came from or anything deeper than that but just really enthralled with the idea of birth, in general. And then I kind of left that interest for awhile and studied other things and even went through college studying three or four different things and finally came back to it in the past few years. And it is on my path more than ever. And I began my apprenticeship and got pregnant pretty much right away. It was indeed a surprise. And Ruby has shown me so much and has been such a teacher already, but nothing could have stopped her in coming in. That's for sure.

MARYN: I like the timing of when she came in too just personally when you found out you were pregnant. When was that? That was super cool.

ANNIKA: That was super cool. Yes. So I found out that I was pregnant in the days after the Indie Birth conference and on the same date that Deva was born actually. Right after watching Deva come out, 12 hours later, I took a pregnancy test in Maryn's bathroom. Are you laughing? Are you laughing at that, Ruby girl? And so that was a really just wild thing in and of itself. Very special souls. Soul family come in together in very specific ways I feel like. Ruby knows we're talking about her. She's like off the boob ready to pay attention now.

MARYN: Yeah. She's totally listening. Yeah. I chose that. So what?

ANNIKA: Right. But I guess I'll—I mean I can talk about even in November I was feeling like a soul around me after I met my partner, Matt, the September previously. And we started hanging out more. I could definitely feel somebody around me. A little spirit baby. And she came to me in dreams. And at first, I thought her name was something different. Maybe even somebody else different. I've thought maybe even a threshold like—yeah. Guardian soul coming in to help usher her through. And I thought I might be

pregnant in November. That didn't happen. But I remember it being notable in that it was the first time that I felt really comfortable with the prospect of possibly being pregnant and feeling like I was actually ready for that and whatever that means. And so my bleed did, indeed, did come. And that next March I was feeling like it was possible that it was there. After I ovulated, I realized that oh, that's a possibility. That could of happened.

And we had the Indie Birth conference. And I remember just feeling really potently—just really powerful ancient knowledge during that conference. Of course, I would have felt that if—even if I wasn't pregnant. But getting to experience that and feeling the depth of where it was coming from, I definitely, in hindsight, realize that—wow. That was very finely orchestrated as well. And so it was—yeah. It was a couple days after the Indie Birth conference that Deva was born. And it was a big shock but not really also. I remember sitting outside of Whole Foods talking to Maryn and just kind of being in tears even before I had taken a pregnancy test, before Deva was born, everything. Just thinking about how big it was and how overwhelming everything felt. And everything that went along with it. So that was pretty monumental.

And it—for those of you who don't know me, I am a lady of size. I am a large woman. Have been my whole life. And so some of the first thoughts that I was blessed to have and that I think a lot of women of size come to are feelings of fear. It's kind of what we're programmed with. Not—I mean women in general in birth. Definitely. But especially women of size. We're told that we are high risk no matter what anything else says or no matter what we believe inside of ourselves. And we are treated as such unless we consciously choose differently. And so I dealt with a lot of those beginning fears.

MARYN: What kind of stuff comes up for people that don't know? What would you read if you were in that category to scare you?

ANNIKA: Right. So one of the first things I did was go on Facebook and find some of the biggest plus size mommy groups just to get my feet in. What is happening in this community? And what can I find maybe that's helpful for me was honestly my first thought.

MARYN: Sure.

ANNIKA: And to my dismay and sadness, honestly, is that most of the women in the particular group that I had joined were coming out with C-sections.

MARYN: Wow.

ANNIKA: Almost all of them and lots of women being diagnosed with quote on quote gestational diabetes, which is a whole other topic on itself which Maryn has a great podcast on. And women diagnosed with preeclampsia after only having their blood pressure taken. Things like that. Or being told that their baby is gigantic, and then the baby is born after induction three weeks early. And it's only five pounds.

MARYN: Yeah. That's so sad.

ANNIKA: So I've been seeing—I saw a lot of things like that in these communities. And I needed to deal with my own fears around that. And so I did as much research as I could on what is called gestational diabetes and what that actually means and what it doesn't mean and all the stigma around it and what's really real about those things. And I had to deal with even feelings of shame because as a woman of size you're often labeled even as being reckless to get pregnant.

MARYN: Why? Where does that come from?

ANNIKA: Just that your baby couldn't possibly be healthy and you couldn't possibly have a nice birth unless you're smaller.

MARYN: Wow. That's deep, huh?

ANNIKA: Which Ruby was ready to prove completely wrong and blast out of the water.

MARYN: Totally.

ANNIKA: So it definitely—but I mean I still felt those things. Even with all this knowledge, even if with the experience that I've had, I still had to experience the fears that I was programmed with and move through anyways as Ruby has her own bowel movement happen. She's moving through as well in case any of you heard that.

MARYN: What would you attribute these quote on quote risk factors actually to? These are women that—I don't know. Aren't eating maybe because they're scared to and then their nutritional status is not great. Or what are those outcomes actually about when you were doing your digging and trying to figure out what was what?

ANNIKA: Right.

MARYN: What's your perspective on that?

ANNIKA: A lot of what I found is women's care providers recommending that they restrict in a lot of big ways. And so a lot of these women either didn't gain any weight through their pregnancies. Some even lost weight. Some said, "I only gained five pounds. It was really wonderful."

MARYN: That's so sad. Starving themselves. Oh my gosh.

ANNIKA: Right. And then they get surprised when they get major issues or when they are diagnosed with what really is preeclampsia and everything that goes along with these health issues when their blood volume is constricted so much.

MARYN: That's a self-fulfilling prophecy in a lot of ways.

ANNIKA: Exactly. Right. And I honestly think it goes deeper than we can really deal with in one podcast, and it's on an individual level.

MARYN: Yeah. We should do another one just on that.

ANNIKA: Right. Yeah. Women of size in general—we are programmed our whole lives to believe that our bodies are worthless and don't function right and to hate our bodies. And so why would we believe that it would function any different when it comes to pregnancy and birth than what we've believed our whole lives. So it was a lot of stigma to break through for myself inside as I was moving into acceptance. I remember sharing with you before I even knew for sure that I was pregnant that one of my—even if surface types of fears was that I wasn't going to be able to see my belly grow in the same way a thinner woman would. And it did take awhile for me to be able to see my belly growing and the shape of it changing. But by the end of my pregnancy, there was no way you could really mistake that I was pregnant. I looked like a big, pregnant lady.

MARYN: Totally. You had a great belly.

ANNIKA: And I loved it. And so yeah. You have a whole bunch of things that come up. And yeah. I would love to do another podcast on that sometime soon where we can really dig into some of those things. But yeah. It definitely played a part in a lot of pieces of my pregnancy. And throughout, I had moments where I second guessed myself in thinking, "Am I nuts? Am I totally reckless? Is that what I'm doing?" And then every time, I would check in with Ruby, and she's like, "No. This is what I want. Stop it. You're fine. We're fine. Chill out." That was generally her message through the pregnancy. Quit micromanaging me was another one.

So yeah. I guess I can progress through the pregnancy. So I did have a little bleeding in the first trimester and a little bit into the second trimester. Spotting every few days. Or it would last a few days here and there. And never really figured out on a physical level what that was about. I ended up going to get an ultrasound at the ER which was an interesting experience all in itself. It was kind of a cool experiment to go get to be in that paradigm for a minute.

MARYN: Totally.

ANNIKA: And get to call the shots and make sure that they knew that I knew what I wanted and that they weren't going to order what I was going to do. And it was kind of funny to see them kind of squirm a little bit until they figured it out. And then they came and asked me what I wanted. So it was really interesting. But nothing showed up on that ultrasound. Everything just looked perfect and good and no hematoma whatsoever which is what I was curious to see if there was. And there wasn't. So I believe that physical conditions can cause bleeding. And then also sometimes there's mystery bleeding, and I might never necessarily know what that was really about on a deeper level. I think that was more about what things that I was struggling with as far as acceptance of the circumstances.

MARYN: Yeah. I remember you saying that.

ANNIKA: Of the pregnancy. Yeah. And once I realized that and kind of leaned into and let it go a bit and just leaned into the fact that Ruby is going to be here if she wants to be here. And if she doesn't want to be here, she won't be here. And I don't really get to be in charge of that. And just trusting. That was a really huge thing for me coming back to over and over. If I don't trust myself, if I don't trust the rest of life, if I don't trust anything else, I do trust my baby. And that's what I kept leaning on over and over and over. I trust my baby and what she's telling me that she wants and needs whether she stays or goes. And so the bleeding did stop. I didn't have any more spotting after about 16 weeks. And continued growing and eating as I needed to doing the very best I could to keep up with the calories and the different food groups and the protein that I knew my baby needed in order to grow despite what many plus size women would be told to do differently. And it was a mind fuck to—please excuse my French—to be gaining weight when my whole life I had been told that I shouldn't gain weight.

MARYN: Right.

ANNIKA: I remember at a particular mama circle getting really emotional about my changing relationship with my belly because my whole life I was taught to hate my belly. And I think this is a pretty universal thing for a lot of women in our culture, not just bigger women. But if you have a belly, it's supposed to be something that you hate and you want to get rid of.

MARYN: Well, yeah. We're sucking it in all the time. I mean pregnancy is one of the only times that most women feel they can let it out regardless of their size.

ANNIKA: Exactly.

MARYN: Right.

ANNIKA: And so I remember being really—going through a lot as far as accepting my belly and trying to change my entire way of seeing it and experiencing it which I did by the end. I loved my belly. And I have videos of Ruby ruying around in there. Kicking and sticking her butt out and just being her. And so it was a beautiful thing to watch my relationship with my body and food change throughout this pregnancy because I had to. I didn't weigh myself at all through the pregnancy. And for some women, they might want to doing whatever is right for them. But for me, I knew it would just add in a whole level of mind games I really didn't need to participate in. So I kept growing. And we ended up moving four times through the pregnancy which is interesting. I find that pregnancy often brings up a lot of root chakra issues, foundations, like living space and finances and feeling okay to survive which makes sense because that's the area that pregnancy is mostly happening in. That and sacral. So that was a big thing during my pregnancy.

And as we started getting closer, it was pretty wild to just think, "Wow. This is actually happening. There is a baby in there. And she is going to come out. And there is going to be a person in the world that used to be inside of me." And still even now that she's out, it's like, "How did that even happen? How was that you?" And so as we got closer, I started to feel what I call the birthing tides coming for me. You start being kind of taken out into different brain wave patterns even. If they were to put electrodes on me at that time and for other pregnant women too, I bet they could definitely tell a difference. Just the different head space that you're in. And so I started feeling that coming around 37, 38 weeks. And then by about 40 weeks, I started having contractions really early contractions though. Just little tightenings that didn't really seem to be going anywhere but just kind of signaling, "Oh, something is going on down there."

And at that point, I started also releasing just tiny bits of mucous. Not really anything significant. Just really small little bits here and there. And my due date was technically December 3. Guess date. And that came and went. And the two weeks after my guess date, it's a really interesting place to be in because really it's like our babies don't work in time. They don't care what date it is. And getting out of my brain to release that was a journey like it is for any other mama. And some days were fine, and I could just deal with it and live my life. And other days, it was like, "Ruby, why don't want to be here?" I remember just sitting in bed and crying and be like, "She doesn't want to be here. That's why she's not coming yet. She doesn't want to be born." Maybe I was right. She didn't want to be born yet.

MARYN: Yeah. Then.

ANNIKA: Right. And so a couple days before she was born, I think on the Sunday before—she was born on a Tuesday. And that Sunday I texted Maryn saying that I was feeling really sad and just kind of off. And Ruby was a little—moving a little bit less. But

throughout the whole pregnancy, Ruby had really strange patterns where she would move a ton for a day or two or a few hours and then have sections of hours or sections of a couple days even where it would be like near silence. And most people would suggest, “Oh, you should do kick counts.” It’s totally reasonable to do that and to check in in that way. But every time I thought about it or every time that I would freak myself out and be like, “My baby is not moving,” I would—she would just tell me, “Stop micromanaging me. I’m just me. Stop. You don’t need to do all these things. You don’t need to go down the rabbit hole.” And so listening to her and listening to my intuition, I didn’t. Some other women might need to do those things, and their intuition tells them differently which I—they need to do that then. But for me and Ruby, no.

So that day when I was feeling kind of sad and down and she wasn’t moving very much, in my head, I was like, “Well, that’s just kind of Ruby. She’s just kind of doing her own thing.” And I said, “But it would be nice to check in with her listening to her heart beat just to see. Just to kind of say hi and check in in that way.” Not because I was concerned with anything necessarily but just to say hi. And so that Monday I woke up feeling really peaceful actually. And I had honestly a pretty stressful pregnancy due to the foundational finance root chakra issues that I was talking about before. And I hadn’t had a lot of days that were super peaceful. And so this was definitely a new feeling. And so I woke up, stood up, and I started having bits of tightenings when I would stand up straight. And hewn I started walking around the kitchen, I would have to stop for a moment and just feel it and let it flow in.

And I said something to my partner, Matt, about it too. And I don’t usually like to say to things to him too quickly because he gets excited. He’s like, “Oh yeah. Is that’s what’s happening?” And I just—I didn’t need that yet. So I tried to just keep it low key. But I was still thinking, “Okay. Probably in the next couple days here.” But I had also kind of been saying that for the past two weeks.

MARYN: Right. Right. At some point.

ANNIKA: Right. I remember you kept telling me like, “Well, at some point, it will mean something.” Yeah. Maybe it does. And so I started losing more little bits of mucous, and I got ready to go across town to come visit Maryn at her office. And I remember us listening. And Ruby’s thing is that she would always try to hide. She was a very mysterious little baby in there, and she would always try to hide and get in funny positions where you had to really work for it, if you wanted to hear her. But we eventually did a little bit. And we were going to try to do—we did an acceleration test, right?

MARYN: Did we actually do it? I don’t remember.

ANNIKA: It wasn't really effective because—that was one of the days that she wasn't really moving very much at all. So she was just sitting there which you can't really do it when she's just sitting there sleeping.

MARYN: Oh Ruby.

ANNIKA: I know. You tricky babe. And so we found the heart beat, but we couldn't really do the test. And honestly, I was like, "It's all right. She's fine." And she's doing what she's doing. So I think we just kind of let it go. And I remember getting some bigger contractions standing at your kitchen island talking with your kids doing stuff. And then I left and went to the grocery store, and I remember sitting in the grocery store parking lot just sitting on my phone thinking about dates. And thinking about babies in general and just how it's so funny their timing. And then I looked over to a lamp post over to my left that had a sticker that said 19, which was the date of the next day. And it just occurred to me like, "Oh, that's the day she's going to be born, I think." And indeed it was.

MARYN: Indeed.

ANNIKA: And so I went home. I was having contractions probably every 15 minutes at that point. But they were still pretty light, only 30 seconds long. Definitely in early, early labor. I could tell that it was going to progress at some point. And it definitely—the contractions didn't get closer together, but they definitely got harder through the evening. Still was able to deal with it. But it was quick intense like menstrual like pains for sure. And I tried to some time on the birth ball and ate some pasta. I remember feeling very fondly that that was going to be my last meal at the grocery store. It was like—

MARYN: The last meal.

ANNIKA: Right. It was prosciutto stuffed into ravioli or something like that. It was like, "Oh, that sounds like a great birthy marathon prep meal." And so Matt made me some food while he went around the house as quickly as possible like a little tornado as he does and clean the house pretty fast. Just last minute things and got everything ready. And we tried to go on a walk that night. That didn't really work. We got 30 seconds away from the house, and the contractions got so bad that when I did that that we had to go back. It was too much. I was like yelling on the street corner next to some vacation rentals. So we walked back to the house, and I had decided to try to just lay down and sleep because I was feeling super tired anyways. And I did. I was able to fall asleep after awhile even though at the end of pregnancy sleep is kind of weird and hard to pin down sometimes anyways.

MARYN: Yeah. That's so hard.

ANNIKA: And so I would wake up for contractions. Each one. Half awake. And I got about three hours or so of uninterrupted—of—I mean of interrupted sleep with the contractions. And at that point, I was having three to five contractions an hour. And I woke up at 3:30 and was just like, “I can’t just be asleep. I can’t deal with this anymore. I can’t lay down for these anymore.” And made myself toast with peanut butter and banana because I was like, “I’m going to eat. Not matter what.” That is my number one rule. I have to eat and drink. I had prepared myself for a marathon, super long labor because that’s what I had—some of what I had seen.

MARYN: I was going to say I think you have a unique perspective, of course, having seen births and seen first time moms more likely than not have it be something that we’re needing them to eat and drink and rest and all the things that you were doing so well.

ANNIKA: Totally. Exactly. Right. So the whole nine months of my pregnancy I had been attending births with Maryn where we did see a lot of first time moms actually with all types of labors. But a first time mom having a longer labor is usually what’s going to happen more than something else. And so I was preparing myself for that. At the same time, my biggest fear going into labor for pretty much my whole pregnancy was that not that myself or my baby weren’t going to be safe or we were going to have bad outcomes in that way but that I wasn’t going to be able to handle the pain.

MARYN: Right.

ANNIKA: That was a fear that I dealt with the whole pregnancy and the main thing going into the birth. And so I was just thinking, “Okay. Well, how am I going to do the best for myself in order to be able to handle this?” And eating and drinking were the main things. So I had my snack at 3:30 in the morning and continued to labor by myself while Matt was asleep. And he can sleep through anything. So I was—I mean I was moaning with each contraction too. And I was finally, by 6:00 a.m., I was finding it pretty hard to cope by myself and just in my own headspace of three hours of sleep. And I remember having used the toilet. I didn’t feel like I could poop enough honestly. I couldn’t get anything out, and I realize now that that was pressure already that she was right there kind of.

MARYN: Right.

ANNIKA: And I remember standing at the threshold between the bedroom and the bathroom with all the lights off, being a little overwhelmed by that last contraction, and then closing my eyes and going into a headspace and saying, “Okay. Okay. Okay.” And then I kind of treated that like a mantra and ended up going, “Okay. Okay. Okay. Okay. Okay.” And that’s kind of when things clicked into another space. And so at that point, I called my mom to drive down from Flagstaff, which is about 40 minutes to our house.

And I had a contraction on the phone with her, and I was crying. And I said, “I just want my mom,” which I think is kind of a unique thing in that not—women don’t—a lot of women don’t necessarily have that type of relationship with their mom where they could call on them to be at their undisturbed birth.

MARYN: Totally.

ANNIKA: And so that was really special. And at that point, I just knew I needed her there. And Matt kind of woke up, and he was like, “You could have woken me up, babe, if you needed me.” And I said, “I want my mom.”

MARYN: And not you. Go back to sleep.

ANNIKA: I mean that was kind of—yeah. I just wanted my mom there. And my mom had had three unmedicated births as well, and so I could—I knew that I could count on her to know and to be able to be the rock in that way. And so she started heading down. And I continued to labor. And by the time she got there, I was coping a little bit better. And by that time, the sun was up. And I had Matt put up all of our shades. I wanted it to stay dark in the space. And she made me an omelet, had some breakfast. I think I had texted you, and we had thought that it was pretty early still because the contraction pattern was still quite erratic which continued to the end pretty much. It was every 12 to 15 minutes. There would be a cluster of contractions with one really, really strong, really hard one that was 30 seconds long. And then every minute after that for six minutes, there were little ones that were less intense but still pretty dang intense. Just short. And so I didn’t really understand what was going on or really where I was in labor because it was so hard. But it was a really strange pattern to where I was like you can’t get a baby out with 30 second contractions. Ruby proved that wrong for me.

MARYN: Right. Right.

ANNIKA: And so I had eaten breakfast. And at that point, I couldn’t sit down. I couldn’t lay down for any of the contractions. I had to be up. And my mom was doing counter pressure on my back which was super, super helpful in helping me cope. I think a lot of laboring women may have this when they find their one position or their one space where they can do the contraction. They have to go back to it each time. And so in between contractions, I would just sit. And then for each cluster of contractions, I needed to be in the threshold of a doorway.

MARYN: Right.

ANNIKA: With hand on each side just kind of bracing myself there which is interesting because birth is a threshold. And I always called myself a dweller of thresholds with all

of the different things that I do. And it was just fun that that was where my laboring space was.

MARYN: That is cool.

ANNIKA: And so yeah. Throughout the morning, my mom was making me electrolyte drinks. And it finally got to a point where I was like I can't go through an entire day and night of this until she is born if I don't sleep. I was really feeling exhausted and just very tired. Not exhausted really. That's more full body than what I was experiencing. I was feeling tired. I was feeling sleepy and in need of rest. And at that point, I thought, "This isn't happening soon. I'm not having contractions longer than 30 seconds." And I think I had texted you at some point. I was still trying to be in my midwife brain too and texting you everything that was happening as if I was at somebody else's birth.

MARYN: Yeah. Totally coherently, by the way.

ANNIKA: An hour and a half before Ruby was born I gave you a run down.

MARYN: I think this is early.

ANNIKA: Yeah. I'm totally early still. I was sure but still like, "Why is this so hard?" And now I can see that it was very close.

MARYN: Yeah. That must have been a struggle to be trying to integrate that in your brain that wasn't fully working anyway.

ANNIKA: Right. And I remember you saying—because I said I think I'm afraid to go to the next level without any sleep. But I don't know if I can sleep. I've been trying to rest because my mom said, "Okay. You need to lay down on the couch in between contractions." I was just like, "Okay," because laying down was completely awful, awful.

MARYN: I bet.

ANNIKA: And so I ended up trying to lay down in between contractions. Didn't really work and said to my mom, "Okay. I need a smoothie. I need something else. I need some more sustenance." And she made me a really awesome smoothie and brought it to me. And I chugged half of it down. Thankfully, I wasn't having a labor where I was nauseous or intolerant to any foods. It was just like I could suck it down. I'm so grateful for that. And then chugged another quart of electrolyte drink. I think I went through a gallon of electrolyte within three or four hours. It was nuts. And so I chugged down my smoothie and another electrolyte drink. And I could feel my body just kind of relax but then also the very next contraction is was like pow, pow. Like holy crap. My body was like, "Okay. Okay. We have fuel. Let's do it." And I said to my mom, "I need to sleep." And I think you texted me back that, "You must rest. You must sleep. I know it may

seem impossible or really hard, but you must.” And then you added on a few minutes later, “You can do it. Whatever it is.” And later we find out that the whatever it is was giving birth without sleeping.

MARYN: Totally.

ANNIKA: And so then I was like, “Okay. I’m going to sleep.” And I was very determined. And I had eaten, and I had hydrated myself. And I had decided I was going to have some of the really strong pain CBD tincture that a girlfriend of mine had made for my labor. And so I took a big dose of that and was going to take a shower and then get in bed, and I was going to sleep.

MARYN: That is so funny. I wish I could have just been there like a fly on the wall to see you trying to sleep while your body was about to push a baby out.

ANNIKA: In transition basically.

MARYN: That must have been so classic.

ANNIKA: I was determined. And so I get in the shower. And at this point, contractions are really intense.

MARYN: I bet.

ANNIKA: If I wasn’t already in transition, this is what really sent me there. And so I got in the shower. And it seemed, in some ways, better being in the shower. It felt good to be in the shower. That’s for sure. But at the same time, the intensity of the contractions was still there. They spaced out a tiny bit in the shower but only for the matter of minutes that I was in there. I was probably in the shower for maybe 15, 20 minutes before the hot water ran out. And so I remember my mom coming in and just being like, “Is the CBD supposed to make things go slower or make things go faster? Something is wrong. Is it supposed to make it easier or harder?” And I was like, “It’s supposed to just take the edge off.” And she was—she later tells me she was kind of like, “Uh-huh. Okay,” because I guess that my sounds had definitely escalated since I had taken that and gotten in the shower. And looking back on it now, the combination of those two things really allowed my body and just my mindset to just relax and really go inward because I had been trying to keep tabs on myself.

MARYN: Sure. That’s the hardest thing to do. It really is.

ANNIKA: Right. Yeah. And I’m not a midwife yet, but I was totally in midwife brain because that’s what I’m used to being around birth.

MARYN: Totally.

ANNIKA: And so after I got in the shower and had the CBD, I totally got into that zone. And as I was getting out of the shower, my mom said, “Do you want to put on a house dress,” because I had been wearing a nightgown all morning. And I had kind of planned that I wanted to wear one of my grandmother’s house dresses while I was laboring. And I was really disjointed and thought—and was trying to tell her which one. And I couldn’t really get the words out. And they couldn’t find the one that I had finally said with my words, and I was kind of just like, “Ugh. I don’t really care.” And I remember in my brain—the midwife far, far, far in the back of my brain was like, “Oh, okay. You’re not putting back on clothes. Okay. Here we are.” And so I get out of the shower.

And the plan in my brain was still to go try to get into bed. And at that point, I also told my mom, “No more texting for me. No more texting for me.” And she was like, “Okay. No more texting.” And that was also a signal in my brain. “Okay. No. We’re not doing. We’re going here. We’re going there.” And so I labored on the toilet for awhile still feeling super intense pressure and just—I kept telling my mom, “My butt hurts. My butt hurts.” And it really does. Thinking that I had to poop more. But it was just a baby. And so labored there for a while. It got super intense to the point where I was just like I can’t be on the toilet anymore. It’s super intense. And so I got up and went into the bedroom. And I was kind of angry at that point and just like disgruntled and didn’t know what I wanted. And I can see now that I would—the adrenaline was starting to ramp up for that transition point and pushing. And so I was ordering people around and told Matt, “Put the towel down on the bed. Put a chux on it. No. Put a chux on it.” And even though I was in that funny disjointed place, I very much was directing everything which I think was really cool.

MARYN: That’s amazing. I’ve seen women do that in labor in all scenarios whether it’s with their kids or whatever. There is a part of your brain that can still control your environment to a certain point, and you can be really clear and direct. And for some women, they are not even like that in real life. It’s a fascinating labor director thing.

ANNIKA: Totally. Especially when it’s in an undisturbed environment when a woman feels safe to do so and really take charge of that experience. It’s incredible. And I don’t—if you had asked me after the birth if I felt powerful and in charge and taking charge, I would have said, “Absolutely no.” After the birth, I felt kind of traumatized by the pain which I can talk about a little bit later and how intense and fast it was. But when I look back at the actual—my actual actions and the processes that I went through it was an incredibly powerful labor and birth.

MARYN: Oh, I bet.

ANNIKA: And so I ordered him to put down the chux pad onto the bed because I felt like I needed to pee so bad. I had a gallon of electrolyte drink.

MARYN: Sure. And a baby on your bladder.

ANNIKA: Right.

MARYN: Or past your bladed maybe.

ANNIKA: And I wasn't thinking about that at the moment.

MARYN: Right.

ANNIKA: And so I thought, "I just need to pee," but I couldn't get myself to pee on the toilet. And so I thought maybe a different position would help. And so I was going to pee on the chux pad on the bed. And they were like—my mom—I could feel my mom and Matt kind of judging me the slightest bit. They didn't say anything, but I could feel them being like, "On the bed?" And I was like, "Yes. Put the chux down." And so as I was mounting myself onto the bed, the—all the curtains were shut. But this was at a time of year where there weren't many birds out. But I heard this really obnoxious bird that I had never heard before ever in our neighborhood or even in Sedona. Just a really unique bird sound. I couldn't mimic it to this day even if I wanted to. Matt or my mom said something about the bird like, "Oh, do you hear that bird? That's interesting." And I was like, "They know. They know. Something's happening," kind of in my funny, crazy labor brain.

MARYN: Sure.

ANNIKA: And I was trying to get comfortable in that position and trying to pee in that position. And I couldn't get anything out at all. I had them stack up pillows, and I was just kept saying, "More. More. More." But I kept just falling all over myself in the middle of really intense transition contractions and just sick of it and pissed off and like, "I don't know what to do," and trying to pee. And every time I needed to pee I realized it was a contraction starting. So I was like, "Okay. That's what's happening." And so I just got sick of it. And in between contractions, which at this point, were almost on top of each other. The large gap wasn't there anymore. But they were only 30 seconds long each but with very little break in between. And I wasn't in a mind in order to be able to call you. And I remember getting up for the bed about to go run back to the bathroom to reclaim my throne at the toilet. And Matt said, "Can we call Maryn yet," because he had been asking all morning.

MARYN: Right.

ANNIKA: "Can we call Maryn? Can we call your mom? Are you ready yet?" And I kept saying, "No. No," because I kept thinking, "I don't want her to get over here too early and then have to wait around and then go back to west Sedona."

MARYN: Right. It's one or the other sometimes.

ANNIKA: Right. And so I—it's interesting that he would ask that because literally a second prior to that I thought in my head, "Okay. Maryn should probably come over now." And then he asked me immediately after without me saying anything. And so as he went to go get the phone to call you or go find my phone wherever I had disposed of it, I ran back to the bathroom to get back on the toilet. And I had a really super intense contraction where I felt my energy shoot upwards. It was that hitting me like a truck almost. That intense. That I tried to get away from it. I jumped up off the toilet even and kind of screamed. And I just remembered what we—I recognize the feeling that I was experiencing from witnessing other women give birth. And in those moments, I've—I watched you say to these women, "You're safe, love. You're safe. You're safe." And the first time I heard you say that to a woman, I thought it was interesting. I was like, "Why would they think they're not safe?" But I had observed that and just, "Oh." And I understood intellectually after observing it.

MARYN: Right.

ANNIKA: And then in that moment when that contraction kind of hit me like a truck, I realized, "Oh, that's—it's scary," because you have the combination of that with the adrenaline that you're getting when you're about to push out a baby. And it can feel really scary because you are absolutely not in control of it. Absolutely not.

MARYN: Right.

ANNIKA: And there's no—you're on the front of the train trying to hold on for your dear life basically.

MARYN: Totally. And that's the moment that people say all kinds of stuff that when you're witnessing you're like, "Uh huh."

ANNIKA: Here we are.

MARYN: Or you kind of chuckle inwardly like, "Yep." But they mean it when they're like, "I'm dying," or whatever variation it is. I'm always like, "I can't do it. It's not happening or whatever it is." I don't know what you said. Maybe you said nothing. I don't know.

ANNIKA: Well, I screamed and then started realizing that all my energy was going upwards. And that's something that I saw in labors with some of the folks that I had witnessed that fall when they were—even people who were uncontrollably throwing up because all of the energy was going up instead of going down.

MARYN: Right.

ANNIKA: And so I was like, “Okay. No. We can’t have that.” So everything needs to go down. And I had started to get the tiniest bit nauseous. And I was like, “Nope. Nope. No.” Not doing that. And so I was like, “Okay. It needs to go down.” And at that point, my mom was in front of me while I was on the toilet and just kind of swaying with me and holding my arms and letting all my weight be on her and just move me in circles kind of and just trying to breathe all of that energy down. And the next contraction I had the same getting hit by a truck feeling in my pelvis. And I screamed again and then kept saying over and over, “I’m safe. I’m safe. I’m safe. I’m safe.” And that was really—the power of those words was incredible in that moment. I could not even describe how much that was powerful in those moments to remember that I am safe and that this was happening and that it was okay.

MARYN: That is was good. Yeah.

ANNIKA: It was good. And it was okay that it was happening. And so Matt found the phone, and he had you on the phone. He had you on speaker I think. And he was trying to describe what was happening. And he was saying, “You should come over.” And I think you asked like, “Okay. What’s going on?” And my mom was—started trying to explain and was saying things about 30-second long contractions. And the last thing that you knew because I hadn’t texted you in an hour and a half maybe was that I was having clusters like 12 to 15 minutes apart. So it was like what the heck? I’m sure you were like, “What is going on?” And I think you said, “Let me talk to her.” And I was sitting on the toilet and heard you say that. And I was like, “I can’t talk.” I tried to start saying words. And then I could feel another contraction starting to come on. And my mom was like, “Here. She’s having one now. Listen.”

MARYN: I will never forget that.

ANNIKA: And I screamed out because that was the first contraction that I had where she—I could feel her coming right into my pelvis. And it felt like bones breaking to me. And I’m sorry for any first time moms who are listening to this. I don’t want to scare you. You may experience it completely different than I do.

MARYN: Sure.

ANNIKA: To me, it felt like bones breaking with her coming into my pelvis. And after that contraction, I remember you saying every so calmly, “Okay. Well, I’ll come over, and we’ll see what’s going on.”

MARYN: Well, and I don’t know if I told you this. But obviously, you were having a baby. And Amelia was standing next to me when I had it on speaker. And we heard Annika go like having a baby. I mean I hung up, and Amelia was laughing. And she’s like, “You’re

not going to make it,” or something along those lines. So it was sort of more than obvious at that point. But what was there to say? Okay. Time to come over.

ANNIKA: Right. And so there was that contraction on the phone with Maryn. And then maybe—and at that point, I—my mom reminded me, “Touch down. See if you can feel her.” And I was kind of scared to touch my own body for some reason which is something that I kind of want to unpack and think more about. Why was I super hesitant to feel my own body? And so I did. And I could—I didn’t feel her head yet, but I could feel the tissues there starting to bulge and could tell that she was going to be crowning at the next contraction. And so at that point once I realized that she was coming, I found this whole new power in myself where I felt like, “Okay. I’m kind of more—

MARYN: It’s so crazy how that is.

ANNIKA: Not in control but like, “Oh, this is happening.”

MARYN: Totally. And that’s something I feel like—not to get in the way of your birth story but just for consistency’s sake. It’s so common. I was saying that on Deva’s—when I was reliving her birth story.

ANNIKA: Right.

MARYN: And I had just witnessed a birth. And it was like yeah. Why is it the baby coming into the pelvis is the earth shattering? And then it’s like night and day. And women regain control and composure. Not that it’s about control but just emotional stability which is neither bad nor good. But it’s just an interesting contrast. Those two physiological things happening with how the emotional state changes.

ANNIKA: That’s exactly it. Yeah. Because yeah. That contraction with you on the phone everything shattered. My entire identity. My entire life that I had been living. My sense of anything.

MARYN: Right. On every level.

ANNIKA: Every level.

MARYN: Shattered.

ANNIKA: Leveled.

MARYN: Gone. Broken.

ANNIKA: Broken. Yes. To make way for she who is Ruby. So I—so maybe 20 seconds or less later, the next—the second of the three fetal ejection reflexes came. And pushed her head out. I had no control over it. No pushing on my part whatsoever. It was just my

body moving with a force that I honestly didn't know it was capable of without me trying to direct it. And that was a really intense feeling. I honestly can't remember it enough at this moment to be able to describe it really well.

MARYN: You forget it, I feel like.

ANNIKA: It wasn't painless. It, for sure, wasn't painless which I know that some women do experience when the head is being born. It's not very bad. But it wasn't painless. It was quite intense, but I can't remember it enough to describe it right now. And then not very long, less than 10 seconds later, she was born. But in those 10 seconds, it was like I was hovering above the toilet. And that's not where I had quote on quote planned—

MARYN: Right. Planned.

ANNIKA: - to give birth. Whatever that means. I had this picture in my mind of I was going to be on a futon mattress on the floor in front of my altar with the candles and the things and my affirmation paintings and everything. And I was going to be in running squat. And I was going to catch her with my hands onto the mattress. And she ended up crowning into the toilet. And I kind of half stood up hovering above the toilet after her head was born. And Matt had really quickly put out the chux pads on the floor, and my mom and him were like, "Do you want to get onto the floor to birth her," because they knew that I wanted to be in that position for birthing. And I was like, "No. I can't move. It's okay. I'm going to have to do it here." And this was all within 10 seconds before she was born. And I thought that I wasn't going to be able to reach her fully enough to catch her well with my belly in the way in that position. And so I told my mom, "I need you to help catch her." And so my mom put her hands between my thighs. And I had this funny sensation when her head was out that my mom was pushing up—pushing her up into me or pushing on her head.

MARYN: Yep.

ANNIKA: Which is really interesting because during my own birth when I was born, they held me in because they were suctioning my nose because there was meconium. And so they had held me in and kind of stopped me from being born at the moment that I wanted to. And so I thought that that was really interesting that I thought that she was holding her in. And I said, "Stop. Don't push her back in. Stop pushing her in." And my mom said, "I'm not." I had just felt her I think just sucking back up the tiniest bit.

MARYN: Yeah. I feel like a lot of people say that.

ANNIKA: Yeah.

MARYN: Especially in the situation where I mean, obviously, no one is touching them like a water birth or something. They'll be like, "Don't do that." "What? No one is doing anything. It's just your baby."

ANNIKA: Right. Yeah. It just feels so intense. To have a baby in you but out of you.

MARYN: And moving.

ANNIKA: And moving and somebody else is affecting something. And little did I know it was Ruby. I did know. Just not in that head space.

MARYN: Right. Of course.

ANNIKA: And so I thought that was really interesting. And so within 10 seconds from the second to last contraction, I had the third fetal ejection reflex contraction. And she just shot out into me and my mom's hands, and we were just kind of in awe while Matt looked on and just like, "Whoa. That just happened." Because honestly before those last three contractions, I didn't know in my labory, fuzzy brain that that's where I was in the labor. And so it felt incredibly fast and incredibly, "What the hell just happened?" And so at that point, though, I was like, "I know how to do this." I went immediately into apprentice midwife brain. It's like, "Okay. Get the bowl." Ruby came out crying. She was doing fine. I knew that she was totally fine. Even if she wasn't crying, I would have known that. You want the (inaudible) there. And she wakes up just for this moment right now to get on my nipple. That's so funny. You were born.

MARYN: Yay.

ANNIKA: And so then within 5 minutes after kind of turning her on her side and letting her get all the gunk out, I turned her over. And my mom put my glasses on me, and I got to see her. And it was amazing and kind of like, "Who are you?" Of course, I know you, but there's this totally other worldly feeling of like, "How are you? And where did you come from?" At the same time as like knowing her so intimately. It's a very interesting paradox to be in. And so my brain just stopped. Sorry. So I was holding her. And then I could feel the placenta there. And I was—it was a part of the birth that I was really looking forward to. And it was where I regained my control that I didn't have at all throughout the whole birth.

MARYN: Totally.

ANNIKA: Like okay. I'm going to direct perfectly this placenta birth.

MARYN: That's what I love about it too. You're like there. You're grounded again.

ANNIKA: Yeah. It helps you kind of ground back in to being on earth and doing the things. And so they brought the placenta bowl over and set it right in front of the toilet.

And I didn't want to push it into the toilet because I was about to—I was going to ingest it later. So I just squatted down with Ruby in one arm and—

MARYN: Like a pro.

ANNIKA: Yeah. And just direct it on out which I had done with other women before. So I knew what it—the perfect feel of tension and not for the cord. And it just plopped right into the bowl. Perfect. And then I sat on the chux pad on the bathroom floor just to get Ruby on her first latch which she did great. And I was like, “I want to,”—in my brain, I was like, “I want to sit here and wait for Maryn so that she can see this in its full glory.” Bathroom covered in blood and just the full on. And so my mom went and got me some electrolyte tea. And I had some cheese. My mom's dog, Lucy, was not interested in the baby or the blood or anything. Or the placenta. She wanted the cheese. And so yeah. We cut the cord maybe like four hours later, and I think that was a little soon for me. It was a little emotional. And throughout my postpartum, I kind of struggled with it happened so fast. And it felt really hard to integrate although I feel like that's probably similar to how a lot of women feel in general after birth. It's a lot to integrate no matter what.

MARYN: Right.

ANNIKA: And no matter how your birth was or what the nature of it was those veils just open really fast and then they close just as fast. And it's just this feeling of powerlessness in their closing.

MARYN: It's so true.

ANNIKA: And you can't slow it down. And you just have to absorb and process as much as possible, but there's all kinds of other stuff going on and sleeplessness going on. So there's a lot of moving pieces. And I mean it's just a powerful time in general. I mean I can talk about it for hours, honestly.

MARYN: Yeah. I mean I feel like there's a couple topics that would be good for more podcasts, so we could focus a little bit more. But yeah. I mean you have such an interesting perspective being a first time mom and being a birth worker. So I don't know if you want to—I mean you're welcome to talk about whatever. But those seem like the things that make your story even more unique.

ANNIKA: Right.

MARYN: Because those are both unique places to be. Most people having their first baby—well, I mean in general, have the baby in a hospital or do something so managed. And so to have such a free experience, I'm envious of. I didn't—I mean my story was just different. So I always admire first time moms that just go for it. And then

knowing stuff too, I think doesn't make it easier. Anybody that thinks it does it really doesn't. Once you start to learn about birth, I think in a lot of ways, it can make it sort of harder to find your own story amidst all of the knowledge. But you also did that really well and feel like—I mean it looks like you and Ruby just claimed that for yourself outside of anything you had seen or learned which is really super cool.

ANNIKA: Yeah. Well, I think that it was really interesting. In preparing for birth, I was—I thought I was going to have the time and all of these moments through my birthing process that I was going to be able to reflect and make all these choices about where I was going in the birth next.

MARYN: Right.

ANNIKA: Have these moments where I was having trouble mentally or emotionally coping. And that wasn't the case at all. My birth just went. And I had no choice in it. And I was taken for a ride which has its great parts and its not so great parts. Nothing could have stopped that train.

MARYN: Right.

ANNIKA: Mental stuff, emotional—none of it. I couldn't have stopped it if I wanted it too. And so I keep coming back to those fears that I had about not being able to handle it and worrying that I would want to go to the hospital and get an epidural when in my mental mind I—that's the last place I would want to be.

MARYN: Right.

ANNIKA: And I felt like when I was—after the birth, when I was trying to find places to claim the powerful birth because I didn't feel powerful after birth.

MARYN: Right.

ANNIKA: It was very intense.

MARYN: Right.

ANNIKA: When I was trying to claim that, in my mind, finding those places where I could latch on to, I was reminding myself I didn't ever once say I can't do it. Or I didn't ever want to say I want an epidural, or I want to go to the hospital. And I'm not saying that it's—I'm not judging women who do.

MARYN: Right.

ANNIKA: Those are incredibly coping mechanisms even if you don't or even if you do get those things. Women need what they need. But for me, those were some of my

biggest fears is not being able to do it and that coming up for me in the labor and birth. And I didn't have one thought of leaving. After I experienced that, I was like, "Oh my god. To the women who can go out of their front door and get in the car and drive an hour,"—

MARYN: That's brave in a lot of ways.

ANNIKA: That's super brave.

MARYN: Right.

ANNIKA: I don't even know how one gathers themselves to do that. So wow. And so yeah. I lost my train of thought just now. The train of my birth just derailed me.

MARYN: Well, and you're nursing a baby. And yeah. I mean it's all par for the course, I think, this many months postpartum. Which how many months are we?

ANNIKA: Almost four. She'll be four months on the 18th.

MARYN: Yeah. So out of the sort of haze of the fourth trimester, but we were saying before the podcast that no matter whose birth story it is, no matter what baby it is, every time you tell it, it's a little bit different. So I just appreciate Annika being here today and sharing so much of her heart and her beautiful journey, which selfishly I'm so sad to have missed. So this is really nice, I think, for us to do. I feel like getting to relive it with her and hear the detail that I wasn't blessed to actually see. But obviously, it's perfect and beautiful, and Ruby came with such a great story that I think is beyond inspirational. So let's look forward to do some other chats perhaps on these other topics. I think that's really needed, and I think our relationship is fun and would be fun for people to hear.

ANNIKA: Yeah.

MARYN: The perspectives that we have working together. So let's wrap it up with that. And yeah. Thanks, everybody, for listening. You know how to reach Annika most likely. You can what? Get her on Facebook. Or how would you like people to contact you if they want to ask you anything?

ANNIKA: Yeah. Find me on Facebook. I'm probably—I'm listed as one of the admins in the Indie Birth Community Group, I think.

MARYN: Mm-hmm.

ANNIKA: So you can find me there. Sometimes I take breaks from Facebook, but I'm usually on Messenger still. Otherwise, you can reach me by email at annikanatseway@gmail.com.

MARYN: Awesome. And I can always pass on messages as well. So feel free to email me. I'll get it to Annika. Thanks so much for holding space for this very special story today. We appreciate you. Visit the indiebirth.org site for new content. And we'll talk to you soon.

(closing music)