

(introductory music)

MARYN: This spin off of my *Taking Back Birth* podcast is called *Walk and Talk*. It was about time that me, Maryn, and Indie Birth cofounder, Margo, got together in an informal regular talk show type format to talk about whatever is on our minds. We'll talk about the ideas and topics that bring us together as midwives, women, and best friends. Stay tuned as we literally walk and talk about whatever comes up for us in this episode. We welcome your ideas or suggestions too so be sure to leave us a review on iTunes and let us know what subjects you want to hear.

Good morning. I don't know what that noise was but anyway.

MARGO: It's a beautiful day.

MARYN: It is a beautiful day.

MARGO: I'm going to put my phone back in my pocket. Yeah. Like I was saying, the snow and ice has melted out on my favorite creek side trail.

MARYN: Awesome. Maybe that means we'll get back on track with these walk and talks. We had to take the winter sort of off.

MARGO: Well, next year I'll get myself a really fancy—I think they're called balaclavas or something. I don't know. The face warmer.

MARYN: I know what you mean.

MARGO: I almost bought one, and then I knew I was coming to Arizona for the month. So I was like, "Oh, by the time I get back, it'll be warmer," and then it kind of wasn't. So I'll just buy it as soon as it gets cold this year.

MARYN: Or you can just come back here again. Forget that.

MARGO: Yeah. I was thinking yesterday, "I really should just live in Arizona from January 5th through April 1st."

MARYN: Yeah. Well, you're welcome to.

MARGO: Put that on the list. Yeah. Cool. Shall we talk about birth media stuff?

MARYN: Yeah. This is one of our passions, I think.

MARGO: Yeah. It's one of the things that makes us different than a lot of the other birth groups around. So yeah. Where should we start?

MARYN: Hmm. Well, I mean a little bit of history, I guess, around this and us is we got interested, I'd say, right? In taking photos at births when we started with a professional photographer who came with us. What was that? Like six years ago?

MARGO: Yep.

MARYN: That's right. So she started by photographing True's birth, which was my sixth baby. And then we ended up working out a cool arrangement with her where she wanted to take photos for us at least for a couple births kind of for free for people that wanted it. So I feel like that was the beginning of this whole thing.

MARGO: Yeah. It felt so exciting at the time. And we really—that was the early days of our Facebook following.

MARYN: Right.

MARGO: And that was sort of the first time I think we saw the power of sharing those photos with the world.

MARYN: Sure.

MARGO: And I'm sure in six more years we'll look back and go, "Oh man. We were small scale then too," but yeah. Back then, it was very like, "Oh, we put up a photo every now and then." And it would often go sort of all over the world. We were like, "Holy shit. That's a thing."

MARYN: Yeah. Like that one.

MARGO: Yeah. This was before birth photography was really a thing maybe outside of some of the bigger metro areas. And I don't remember seeing a lot of high quality birth photography. And I remember seeing almost no photography of births like the ones we were going to. It would often be dark and grainy and all those things. So we did a discussion on this two years at the birth conference. We don't need to redo that, but phones have gotten so much better. And the interest in high quality birth photography has grown so much so that now we see a lot.

MARYN: Yeah. I mean I was thinking too that six, seven years ago there was no Instagram. And Facebook, of course, was still heavily policing birth photos, so what we were able to post back then was really pretty minimal. And so even [cross talk].

MARGO: Well, even up to the last—yeah. I mean even up to two months ago, which is—I don't know if we've talked about that on here yet. Have we?

MARYN: No. We should talk about that on here though.

MARGO: We should.

MARYN: Because there's—

MARGO: Yeah. [inaudible]. Sorry. Yeah. So yeah. We got sort of fed up with being blocked and banned and policed and micromanaged by Facebook mostly. Also Instagram. But they usually just took stuff down, right?

MARYN: Yeah. Mostly Facebook. I mean it was becoming sort of personal, right? You'd log on. They wouldn't even tell you what photo they removed, and then you wouldn't even—be banned for—I don't know. 7 days. 14 days.

MARGO: Right.

MARYN: It was starting to get really inconvenient.

MARGO: Ridiculous. Yeah. Especially when so much of our work, unfortunately maybe, is done there or a lot of our advocacy work and getting people free resources is often through Facebook.

MARYN: Yeah. So that was becoming quite a bummer. And I know for me at least it seemed like accounts were definitely flagged, and so I would post stuff that really wasn't even revealing and would get banned. So yeah. So we got sick of that. And—yeah.

MARGO: Our friends over at These Are My Hours have also been working on it too because they were trying to quickly figure out how to share more photos and a video from their birth documentary. And they were on a timeline of like, "How are we going to do this if they keep getting reported," and all that. They connected us with a really cool lawyer at Facebook. And then she connected us with some other team members. And we had a couple meetings with them. And they were—they turned into fan girls.

MARYN: Yeah. I mean I think that's what made the difference. And timing. It's like these kind of things I think just take repeated effort. So the people that had sort of tried before us their efforts were part of this because I don't think it would have happened just one shot deal. But yet, oh dear. Sorry. There's a dog yipping.

MARGO: That's all right.

MARYN: Yeah. But I mean they had been talking to a guy at Facebook which honestly I think was sort of part of the problem of not getting past this issue. They're male lawyers. And so when he referred us to these two ladies that aren't lawyer but worked for Facebook in this department, I feel like that was the key to success. The repeated effort and women talking with women about how to change this.

MARGO: Yeah. Yeah. And I know they talked to some other birth people, birth photographers, and that sort of thing. I think we were the only midwives they talked to.

MARYN: Yeah. I'm pretty sure we were the first people they talked to. But yeah.

MARGO: And they were super responsive. And it was funny because it was like what we had to say was new information for them even though we didn't think it would be. We don't really want to be showing this to anybody who doesn't want to see it. That's not our point. That was their aha moment.

MARYN: Yeah. It wasn't a shock and awe sort of campaign. We actually use this to educate people.

MARGO: Yeah. And that we use our—fine with this idea of—and I think they had been toying with the idea, but we suggested what if we use those sort of filters. If somebody doesn't want to see it, then they don't have to see it. Or they can click on it and see it, if it's something that's more graphic which maybe is still something they're going to be rolling out. I don't know. We haven't talked in a little bit. But for right now—

MARYN: Well, they're supposed to. Mm-hmm.

MARGO: But for right now, they've sort of listed our [inaudible], and we're able to post anything we want which is really exciting. And has, I think, changed things a lot just in the last couple months even having that [cross talk].

MARYN: Yeah. It totally has, but I have to say it's been surprising to me that nobody has sort of obviously noticed. I mean I don't know. Just very, very raw, intimate shots that were removed within seconds six months ago are now getting just so many views. And I just think it's funny that even our community hasn't said like, "Hey, how come you're allowed to post this now?" Or like, "Hey, this just is different. We haven't seen this kind of stuff coming from you guys here on Facebook." But no one has said anything, so maybe that's just part of the organic way this is rolling out. I don't know.

MARGO: It's good proof that there was no reason to ever ban it in the first place.

MARYN: Sure.

MARGO: We really haven't had people being offended or angry or anything. And it's been so nice to be able to share those beautiful photos and eventually some videos. I know that's something we're headed towards.

MARYN: Right. Yeah. I wanted to add too that I think the coolest part, at least for me, when we were working with these women at Facebook, and they, at the moment at least, haven't birthed themselves. So I feel like an important part of reaching them on a level they could understand was not only just like, "Oh, we're women. This is normal

and natural." But that for our daughters and our future generations, it's important that we start to reverse this view that women and our bodies and birth are disgusting. Or it's graphic. Or it's obscene, or it's whatever. Porn. I felt like that really did reach them in a way at the heart level that they could understand.

MARGO: Yeah.

MARYN: Because I really don't think changes would have happened otherwise if it just had been a matter of more aggressive policy of like, "You're not letting us. And we should be able to and blah, blah, blah." I feel like it was really a heart-to-heart connection with them that even not having birth they understood. And I just think that's so, so much about the power of women connecting and working on things together that affect all of us. I mean whether they birth or not really is irrelevant.

MARGO: Yeah. And I wonder if they'll use that cute photo they sent of them wearing our T-shirt.

MARYN: I know. That's so cute. Yes. Yeah. They became aligned with a lot of what we do which is cool. [inaudible] feel less like a—like we're really on the total fringe. I mean Facebook is about as mainstream as it can get. So yay. That's an awesome thing to share.

MARGO: Yeah. And I know we wanted to talk about kind of just different perspectives on birth media. So I wrote a long time ago a piece about birth photography and sort of why it matters, why it's part of the story telling of birth and how we should be careful about the kinds of images we share and conscious of what's in the photo. So doing some contextual analysis as we talk about in sociology world of what is this photo telling us. Not that there's anything wrong with everyone sharing their birth photo. But if you are—this is where it gets tricky because a lot of birth photographers like a lot of doulas feel like their only allegiance is to that individual which is true. And as midwives too, that's part of it. But what makes us different, I think, is that we have this bigger picture, political understanding, of how these pieces of media impact people. So I remember getting in trouble a bunch of years ago when I brought up like, "Hey, there's a really great photo. Technically speaking. But can we have a conversation about the oxygen tank?"

MARYN: Right. Behind the birth pool at home?

MARGO: Yeah. And not even anything crazy, just like at least have a conversation about it since you placed it—you placed this photo in front of me.

MARYN: Right.

MARGO: And I would like to discuss it. People being like, "You're shaming them. Or how dare you bring anything up about anyone's birth photo. It's just this family wanting to share their story." It's like yes. But that family's story is part of a larger tapestry of birth stories.

MARYN: Right. And I don't think you were even commenting on their story. It was more like generalities of like let's talk about this at a home birth.

MARGO: Totally. Which I think is really powerful. And I think there's a layer of accountability there, and we talked about this at the conference two years ago. As far as in all the political movements right now, the fact that we all have a camera in our pocket at all times—and now people are able to live stream things immediately, it adds a layer of accountability even to us, as midwives.

MARYN: Right.

MARGO: And it's funny because, of course, doctors won't allow that at all at the moment, but I'm sure there will be a something around that in the coming years. I would imagine. Because they used to say you couldn't have a camera. They used to say no cameras allowed.

MARYN: Right.

MARGO: And then they couldn't say that anymore because everyone had a camera. And they were never going to let them tell them no. So I'm interested to see how all this evolves. But yeah. So that's something I care about. And someone recently on Facebook, a midwife, was saying, sort of in a more general way—she said, "Oh, I really hate when midwives post photos of their clients." It was the blanket statement.

MARYN: Mm-hmm.

MARGO: And then went on to say, "It's not about you. There shouldn't be a photo of you holding the baby or you weighing the baby or doing anything with the baby," which I agree with. But I thought she really missed the larger point, which is that not all birth media is disempowering.

MARYN: Right.

MARGO: And like we've said, the clients we work with are excited to have their photo shared. They feel like they're being a part of the change in that way.

MARYN: Sure. Sure. And I think we have the double mission of not just inspiring women to share their stories because that's important. And yes. They are so thrilled to be a part of this revolution. I mean we have women—most of our clients, I think, asking us, "Please film my birth. Please take photos." And then being fine to use them. I think

the other side that maybe addresses the midwife in photos, which I'm certainly guilty of posting, is because I feel like we have an obligation as we're teaching midwives to show part of our own role at birth. And no. That's not to mean that birth is about us. It's not really about us at all. But when we're in a position to show midwives what it can look like when the status quo, for example, is listening with a Doppler all the time or reaching in there and pulling a baby out or doing all of these things that even midwives have come to see as normal, and we can post photos that are the opposite of that and talk about why. Explain what we're thinking or what we were doing or why we're working on changing something that we've been taught. That's the part that I feel like maybe those older midwives have completely missed the boat on. Maybe they felt like they didn't have to explain those things to the new generation because midwives were midwives. And they weren't medicalized professionals. But because that has changed so much, again, I feel like that's an obligation that we have. And I guess people can think like, "Oh, there they are. Posting the photos of themselves again." But if they read what's being read, they can resonate with it or not. But I know we get lots of great feedback especially on Instagram from student midwives or people that [cross talk] saying, "I didn't know that was a thing."

MARGO: Totally.

MARYN: "It made me think about that."

MARGO: Yeah. I mean to me it's like a snapshot into an apprenticeship. What would an apprenticeship be like?

MARYN: Exactly.

MARGO: [cross talk] to be talking about those things. And yeah. And those things as being so normal to us. We realize over and over and over again are not what's being taught out in the world. Someone just the other day in one of our free groups, the Midwifery for the People group, was saying how thankful she was for a thread that I think a mom started because she said she's working so hard to unlearn all of the medical garbage from her MEAC program she was in and completed.

MARYN: Yep.

MARGO: And she's trying to figure out how to get back to where she wanted to be to start with and that we're one of the only resources around who have space for that, who are putting in the time and energy to make those learning opportunities possible for new students and then also practicing midwives, right? So this is something—

MARYN: Yeah. That's amazing.

MARGO: Yeah. And the birth media is such a huge part of that. And in our Wise Woman Circle, I did a call—I think it did it twice actually around birth photography basics so that people could feel a little more empowered about getting their own. So that's sort of the part of the story we skip which was we went to some births with our friend, Jenny, the professional photographer. And then she couldn't really do that for free anymore. And we moved ahead. And I was bummed because I really—we were both bummed I think because we really loved having those to share and had to figure out a way to continue in a different way that was more sustainable for everyone.

MARYN: Right.

MARGO: And so my partner, Russell, had a pretty nice—basic—but nice camera that he had gotten for his work and was just sort of laying around. And after I had my baby, I started playing with it more and got some good practice getting really cute photos of my daughter. And one of our lovely former clients gave me some tips, and I was off and running with that. So that's developed a lot over the last two years.

MARYN: Yeah. For sure.

MARGO: So getting better at taking our own photos. This last trip getting you set up with gear to do the same because now we're realizing how priceless those images are and how we're really one of the only places—centralized places that people can get that because—yeah. It's just not—birth photographers are amazing, but most of them take a variety of clients. A variety of—a variety of kinds of births. And so you don't get the same underlying tone and message that you get when you see the collection that we put out.

MARYN: Well, their intention is different. As you mentioned, they're being hired as a professional to just do what the parents want. So that's different than us having a relationship with these women, and we've had a lot of conversations, I think, with our clients about this as they're seeing other photos come out. People they even know. Like, "Oh, that's So-and-so. What a beautiful photo." Almost immediately when I started going back to taking births after Deva was born, all the women that have seen her birth—they were [background noise]. They were like, "Oh, I want that." So I think it's influential for women to see each other in a different role than a birth photographer plays in a lot of ways.

MARGO: Right.

MARYN: I think the other cool thing too is the video like I, for one, haven't capture any amazing, cinematography level video, but even getting the birth of the placentas is going to be really fun to share at the retreat in my one session because all the videos that I'm going to show are women birthing their own placentas with no interference.

Maybe a little talking through. But something like that. Where are people seeing placenta births? There really aren't very many out there at all.

MARGO: Mm-hmm.

MARYN: So we can pinpoint these concrete things we want to spread and teach and go for it, which is super fun.

MARGO: Yeah. I just wanted to say more about your point too. Like you're saying, the intention is different. With our clients, the intention is, yes, to capture really awesome photos for them and memorabilia for them but also for this larger purpose of trying to bring other women into their birth space because that's what we would have been doing back in the day. We would have gone to births. We would have seen so many before our own. And the women that I am working with—I can think of the next one who is due is so excited. She wants a really good video. I'm not sure if she will eventually share it or not but probably I would think. And she just wants to pay it forward because the few really good ones she's seen have influenced her so much.

MARYN: Yeah. That's so cool.

MARGO: Yeah. It's for me, but it's also for everyone coming after me.

MARYN: So cool. Yeah. I mean that makes me think of one of the women we took a video of this past winter came to my free workshop last weekend. And I, of course, asked her permission, "Can I show your birth video at this workshop? Do you want that especially while you're sitting there?" And she said, "Yes. Most definitely." And it was so amazing to watch her watch her video, but then also be there for these other women to ask questions of. Also say to her the obvious like, "Wow. Thank you for sharing that. It was so beautiful." And she said to me too she really feels good about herself when she is able to do that. She's like, "I never imagined that I'd be sharing these sorts of things. If you had asked me years ago, I would have been like I'm not sharing that kind of stuff."

MARGO: Right.

MARYN: But now when her photos appears on Instagram, for example, she always messages me, and she's like, "Oh my gosh. I always look forward to what you're going to write." She's like, "Because I never really know what it is, but I feel like I'm learning to about all these things. And it's so cool to be a part of it." So I guess we've said that. But come on, Case.

MARGO: Yeah. Yes.

MARYN: Yes. Yes. And yes.

MARGO: This is definitely part of our mission, part of our work, part of this conference coming up. [inaudible] is going to be there talking about how to harness the power of social media. I'm sure I'll be talking about this in my session, the *Getting Shit Done* one.

MARYN: Mm-hmm.

MARGO: Encouraging people to really, really figure this piece out somehow. And I think it's—on the midwife's side, it's always helpful too, I guess, as a reflective and reflection tool.

MARYN: Mm-hmm.

MARGO: I recently had a birth where we got a video, and it was just of the baby coming out because it was surprising. It took us all by surprise, so I didn't get anymore more than just that. And I didn't take it. My lovely apprentice, Alicia, did. It was a really awesome learning tool for me to be able to rewatch. The baby took a few contractions to be born after the head was out. And yeah. It was so helpful because my memory, in the moment—my in the moment memory was definitely different than the on camera reality.

MARYN: Mm-hmm.

MARGO: And that is also a really great tool for us to watch and talk about in the Wise Woman Circle that she was excited for me to share and fine with me sharing in there for educational purposes. And yeah. It's just like why not. It's like any of these things. I feel like oh, this or that has become the thing midwives can't do or don't do, or there's dogma around it when our point always is there's a way to do it that is for the highest good always.

MARYN: Sure. Sure. And this way—I mean midwifery in general but especially I think the kind of things we're trying to work and, in part, these are things that don't fit into the model that exists. So research, for example. We're not ever going to see research on undisturbed birth or when women birth their own placentas, the rate of bleeding—we're not going to ever have that information in a way that comes from that system. Unless we do it ourselves, which of course is a whole other conversation. But for the moment, I feel like these are the tools we have to sort of prove that this is viable. Women birthing in a way that is powerful for them with them making these choices. Midwifing in a way that's outside of this medical model. This is way we're illustrating it. Literally.

MARGO: Yeah. Amazing.

MARYN: Yes. Well, I have arrived home as perhaps you have.

MARGO: I am on my stoop.

MARYN: I am in my front yard watching a dog juniper berries.

MARGO: Nice.

MARYN: Well, that was a good chat.

MARGO: That was. I'm very sweaty, and I have to go to my dance class.

MARYN: Oh, dog. All right. Well, have a good day. Thanks for listening, everybody. Last minute chance to come to the Indie Birth Retreat, which is only in about two short weeks in May in Minnesota. So go to indiebirthconference.org. And you can get one of the few remaining tickets to hang out with us, to be around a camp fire with Gail Hart, to meet Angela Gallow, lots of fun and amazing things. I think it will definitely be an intimate weekend that changes a lot of people. I'm expecting that, so we'd love to see you there.

MARGO: I sort of can't even handle how cool it sounds. Our last conferences have been cool and informative. This year is like a real, a serious experience. So if you're free, you should definitely not miss it because it's going to be off the hook, I guess, is what I would say.

MARYN: Totally. And this is not one more thing to say is—this is not your normal conference. We've done that the last couple years. If you didn't know more this is in a conference room with chairs, and this is the talk that's happening. It's 12:00 kind of thing. This is not that. This is a whole weekend of, like I said, doing fun things, connecting with people. Yes, learning, but a little bit more informally so lots of space to ask questions and get to know people, which is, I think, what we were missing the last couple of years. So it's going to be amazing.

MARGO: And eat food. And do a zip line perhaps. Explore.

MARYN: Yes. All kinds of things. So yes. indiebirthconference.org. Really it's like this will probably be the last walk and talk we do before then because it's going by so fast. But we'll see you there, if you would like to come.

MARGO: Cool. All right. Bye.

MARYN: Talk to you later. Bye.

(closing music)