

(introductory music)

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MARYN: Welcome to Indie Birth's series of podcasts here on iTunes, *Taking Back Birth*. Hi, Maryn here, as usual going to blab today about doing the deep inner work of birth preparation along with the topic of autonomy in birth. So I'm not sure exactly how this will come out. I don't really have any notes to follow today. I'm following the flow of my own pregnancy, which has me just blabbing about stuff without a whole lot of external organization. Of course, issues like autonomy and how to prepare for birth are things that are very much ingrained and a part of my life and something I'm always thinking about. But we'll see how it comes out.

So like most—many of these podcasts the topic is revealed to me really. I often ask for suggestions or maybe I have a list I consult. I certainly do. But in the end, what usually wins out is just what's brought to my attention. And I love how the universe works because that gives me an opportunity to respond to maybe the outside world, what somebody said, or what a group of people brought to my attention. So that's the case with today as usual. I hosted a free Indie Birth workshop here in Sedona yesterday. And I have done that a lot as many of you know. I have probably taught over 20 of them as has Margo. And this is a signature free workshop that we created and invented, and people all over the world are encouraged to teach themselves in their own communities. So if you hear me talk about that or have in the past or if you hear anything today that makes you think to yourself, "I want to teach that. My community could really use that," then please be in touch. And I'll tell you how to get in contact with that material. Mainly, it's going to be through our Wise Woman Circle. We have all the materials available to members. And so, again, this is a great way to teach in your community, to spread a really powerful message, and really to have the work done. We have the whole presentation done. Obviously, teaching guide. And you really just learn it and then show it and do it in your community.

So I'll talk probably a little bit more about the detail of the workshop, just as it makes sense too. But that was yesterday. And I never stop learning with doing these workshops. So it's a three-hour free workshop, like I said. And it's different every time. Even though from my perspective, I have the same materials to teach more or less. Sometimes I show some different birth videos. But ultimately, the workshop has been the same for a couple of years. But I'm always just floored by the different energy that's in the room and how that changes the feeling, how that changes the conversation, how that changes the rabbit holes that we go down or not. So some groups of people don't

do that. They're just really okay and seem satisfied, I think, with the information presented. And then other groups are different. And they have lots of questions.

And so something I've been finding here is that because I've done this workshop so much, I think, it's starting to attract people that are more mainstream. And I don't say that judgmentally. I think that's actually a really awesome thing to kind of have maxed out the people that were already on board, right? Because that's ultimately who shows up first to things like this. But really I think we've passed the threshold—or maybe Indie Birth has just opened up in a way that it has become accessible to more people. And so that's the gist of the crowd that was here yesterday. A crowd that wasn't necessarily home birth. A crowd that really wasn't aware of their choices. And that's something I think we're always struggling to illustrate better. Hence, this podcast.

So in the workshop, we go through the hormones of labor and how that ultimately affects our experience and, hopefully, people understand that it also affects the big picture, the bonding, the attachment, kind of the world view for this child that has been born and this new family. And that's something I think is hard for people that are newly exposed to grasp right away. So something very powerful are the videos that we show. And I show proprietary videos here. The other people teaching this class around the world aren't showing my videos because they are of my clients that have allowed me to use them. And so that feels great. And it's super personal. And I was there at these births, so I know the background. I know what happened. And watching these births is not lost on anyone. The power of these births is not lost on anyone. And I would say that is kind of across the board whether these people have been exposed to these ideas or, like yesterday, if they really hadn't been. The births, the videos, really reduce people to tears. It does connect them with this deep knowing.

So that's satisfying. But there's still so much, I think, that's left unclear, at least from my perspective. So, again, this one idea—I'm going to kind of talk about two—is that our births can have autonomy in them. I mean they can be completely autonomous experiences, which really is a huge concept to grasp for people that are new. And then, of course, there are really degrees of autonomy. I'm sure some people would say there's not. There's kind of autonomy or there's not autonomy. But I would say that it's easier to phrase as a process. And so some people might recognize that they want control over this part of their birth or experience, but that, ultimately, they don't want full control for all the reasons. And so I think this is just something I would love to become clearer about especially with groups that come in and really are new.

So what is autonomy in birth? Or really what is autonomy in life? It's being completely in charge of your experience. And I would say owning it. However, it's not something that we can just think to make it happen. So people watch these videos. They're learning about the hormones, and they think, "I want that." That's autonomy. Because I want it,

then it must be true. Then I must own it. But the reality is you must take responsibility for wanting that autonomy and for going after it or creating it. And that is something that happens inside of us. So we see this concept of freedom, and it seems very external. But to make it something that is our own, we have to live it. We have to find a way to integrate it. And so that's the piece I feel like is missing from this discussion. People watch these videos, like I said. And they think, "I want that." But then for many of them, there is no awareness or—I shouldn't say that. There isn't necessarily a clear indication that they see that there's a path between seeing and wanting and actually becoming.

It is a process to become autonomous in life and birth. And, of course, the life picture is much different and bigger and very few of us, self included, are freely autonomous. We don't really have complete freedom over every aspect of our lives. I think that's a great goal. But it's a huge undertaking. And so I'm not going to go more into how to become autonomous in your life because it's too much. But we know that this segment of life called pregnancy, birth, and then into mother we can start to make those choices. And if for no other reason, we might indoctrinate this lucky new being into a more autonomous lifestyle than perhaps we had the opportunity for in our own childhoods. But, again, it's not something we just wish to make true. And it's not like just understanding the way birth works and the physiology and the hormones makes it so that you own it. You can't just understand it. You also have to understand that, unfortunately, there are lots of obstacles to autonomy in birth. And that nearly everything we've been taught, everything that's presented to us, is there to take the autonomy away.

So how does one become autonomous in their birth process? Obviously, it's a huge discussion. And I think it's started with wanting to be responsible and starting this process in pregnancy. I said to these folks yesterday—and I truly mean it, and it's something I'd like to highlight more. I said to them after watching these beautiful births, "I want you to know that these births were beautiful as you can see. And birth really does work." That's one of the messages of this workshop. "But—there is a but. But these women did their work. That these beautiful, autonomous births were not an accident." Because babies come out, right? The baby is going to come out in most cases. But that doesn't mean that a woman owned her experience. But it's clear when people are watching these videos of the women here that have graciously allowed me to share them—it's clear that these women are owning their experience in a way that is unheard of. They are not just doing it alone for the sake of doing it alone. And in fact, they're not at all because they are supported by their partners and by me.

But you can tell by the look on their faces and the way they receive their own babies and how connected they are and the way they birth their own placentas confidently. That these women own it. And so I want to give them every last shred of credit. I don't want people to think that that just happens. That by understanding hormones or not being conscious about who your care provider is that in all likelihood you're going to end

up with an autonomous experience. You're probably not. So that's kind of complicated and, yet, super simple.

But I think it is the next step in the conversation. So, again, yes. Birth can look this way. Yes. Birth works. And our bodies know how to do it. And they always have. But because of the culture and the society and the fear-ridden culture we live in, we need to claim back this experience in a way that takes deep inner work. So please don't think that it's easy. Please don't think that it's just choosing a care provider. I mean maybe it's me. And you think somehow then that makes you an autonomous birther. Or it could be any other person or a doctor or eating all the right things or whatever it is that you think will take care of this for you because birth works. The inner work is so important. We have too many fears and overwhelming cultural concerns. And collective thought forms and collective fears. Many of the fears that invade a pregnant woman's consciousness are actually not her own. They're actually not. They're actually part of this collective that we can feel. And when we're pregnant, it's that much easier for us to feel and take on some of these things. So I've noticed that, of course, even for myself. That things creep in. And I can kind of look from outside myself and say, "Hey, that's not even mine. That's not even a fear that is in my body. It's not something I'm worried about. It's not my intuition. It's purely an outside force." And we have to recognize that.

So that's what we have to contend with nowadays in claiming our autonomy. It's not just something, like I said, we can say we're doing because we chose X, Y, or Z. It's not something that one type of birth brings to people. So free birth it seems can be one of those things that people think is autonomous. There's no way you could have a free birth unless it was an autonomous birth. And I very much disagree. If autonomy comes from the inside and it's an inner process and it's hard work, then women will do it or they won't do it. It hardly matters what kind of birth they say they're having. And in fact, I think for lots of people choosing to birth completely alone many of them are feeling abused and sad and lonely and ostracized. And their only choice is to go at it alone. And so is that autonomy? No. Probably not. Although you can't really say either for any one person, if it's something that happens on their inside. If it's their internal process, then it's not really something we can judge.

I would just caution against seeing that label slapped all over births. And people just not understanding what it means. I guess it's a lot like our culture in general, right? That hard work is kind of frowned upon, and everything is not only external but immediate gratification. So if you want, you shall have. And what about everything that happens on the inside? Are we paying attention to that? So those are the questions that I would like to ask and the conversations I would like to progress to, again, even with groups of people that are new to this. And so the reason—not just because I love to talk about these things—but the reason is I want to see change faster. Yeah. And on one hand, that's really impatient of me. Change really can't be had especially on people's internal

process. It really can't be had any faster than it's meant to happen. But I still can't help it. So I have this group of people here. They're all wonderful women that have found their way to this class for some reason. And it's really hard to watch them leave and still not have connected the dots. And so I realize I'm only a part of that picture. Everybody has to decide when to take responsibility and when to seek more resources and information, when to start to put together the puzzle for themselves. Again, it's not something we can do.

But as somebody that offers this free information, I guess it would be very gratifying to see people slowly start to connect the dots and to see that what they're learning isn't separate from their choices. So, again, learning about the hormones is all so touchy feely and wonderful. And don't our bodies work great? We produce oxytocin without even knowing it. That kind of thing. But how do people leave this workshop with the non understanding that they're not going to get that with a birth center probably. And they're even more probably not going to get that in a hospital scenario.

So it's been tricky because I think it's not wise to ostracize people, right? That's not a great way to get people information. And so for so long, it's been less about those barriers of place, right? Or choice of birth. It's been less about midwife versus hospital versus free birth. It's like whatever. If you're making powerful choices, you can do those anywhere. But, again, for people that are new, it's having to make it really clear that the want is fine. The want or the desire for this sort of birth is a great first step. But, again, there has to be action that comes behind it, or it's just this empty thing. And I feel sad almost for people that aren't seeing that yet and are really close to birth like some of the people here yesterday. I can see the desire and the deep connection to some of this information. And yet, with the lack of changing the plan or changing the circumstance that they've chosen already for this birth, it's very unlikely that they'll have that kind of experience.

So that's hard. Of course, I think we want everyone to have the best chance at a really powerful birth. But as I'm talking about it, it's clear to me that the work, the journey, is so much longer than the birth. And I tried explaining that as well to this group yesterday because somebody actually asked about prenatal care. And it gave me the opportunity to say everything I believe about prenatal care to a point which is this is such a powerful time that we are preparing ourselves for the kind of birth we want to see. We are becoming autonomous in our pregnancy choices, if we're not there already, right? We're using these nine months to claim our bodies back, to claim this baby, to claim this pregnancy as our own. We don't just start to make those choices the minute we go into labor.

So that's a harder thing, I guess, because most people that were here at least are past that point. Some weren't. Some were pretty early pregnancy, and it would be really cool

to see some of those people start to investigate some of these concepts. It would really feel, again, gratifying and meaningful to see this class start to affect people in the bigger picture rather than just for their births. So, again, the demographic I feel like I used to get were people that were home birthers and—or birth center or something were they had made a lot of choices already. And for a lot of those people, this free workshop would propel almost immediately into the next level whether it be traditional midwife attended birth or leaving the doctor, leaving the hospital. A handful of people chose free birth. And so that's all really encouraging to see that they could feel the continuum and the linear—well, it's not really linear. But kind of the bigger picture, the organic process of this whole thing. So being with people that are not at that point feels like a regression to me. Maybe that sounds kind of obnoxious. But that's just how it feels teaching it. It's different to teach a group that is entirely new. And on some level, yeah. I feel like I've been teaching this for years. Shouldn't there be more people coming out that are ready? But it's the opposite. Getting more people that are new, more people that might be ready in another couple of years or another couple of births. And, again, just wanting to move that faster but knowing that there's only so much we can do.

So thanks for listening to my brainstorm out loud. Just maybe how to proceed in the future with this workshop and some of the discussion or exercises that perhaps I could introduce to start to link up, again, this concept of free, autonomous, beautiful birth with the fact that there is a journey to that place. It's not just handed to you. It's not gifted to you by anyone else. It's not a label you get just to put on without hard work. And that it's really, really a beautiful owning of the entire experience, not just the birth. And until people see that, I'm sure you'll agree, then the birth scenario usually doesn't change very much other than, like I said, babies come out. The pure power and ownership of the experience isn't something that most people are going to have access to. So rather than feel frustrated about that, I'm going to continue to think about how to help people connect those dots, how to help them maybe earlier on their journey, if they're interested in becoming autonomous in the process, and going from there.

So if you have thoughts about these things, please drop me a note at maryn@indiebirth.org. I always love hearing responses to some of these questions on podcasts. And really, I think it takes a village. So I'm here blabbing because I can. And this is a thing I do. But really I love that so many people are thinking and concerned about these issues. And, again, if you'd love to teach this free Indie Birth workshop in your community, just get a hold of me. And I can let you know how to do that. It's been really life changing, I'd say, for the community as a whole even though in moments it can seem not that way. It can seem like change isn't happening fast enough. If I zoom out over the years, I can see that there's been a huge change. And, again, it's a great teaching tool for ourselves to know how to talk about these things as the demographic opens up, as more people without a lot of knowledge or experience want to come in.

The fact that they want to come in is super exciting, isn't it? So let's work together to be the support and be the place where people come to get really awesome truth, really great quality information, and they're ready to own it. Thanks for listening. Have a great day.

(closing music)