

(introductory music)

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**MARYN:** Welcome to Indie Birth's series of podcasts, *Taking Back Birth*. Hey, Maryn here after a nice week off at the ocean feeling renewed and refreshed and just sharing on a personal note because I think it'll probably affect this podcast and possibly many others. Just feeling a lot lately about what's next in life. And I had a pretty solid realization this morning that that feeling is directly related for me to being done with birth on a physical level myself. So that doesn't mean I don't entirely love birth and the process and serving women and doing these podcasts. But just on a physical level, the realization has come in quite clear that that time is done. So I'm sharing that because those are the kind of things I think I've shared here before. And many of you might identify with that. And also because I think it will shape my thoughts on things honestly. That's just the honest truth. Being a pregnant woman myself was so valuable all of the years that I was so blessed to experience that. 17 years pretty much back to back pregnancies and postpartum and miscarriages. So blessed.

But the thoughts and feelings that came out during that time was directly related to the fact that I was in it which, again, no regrets. And I think it's served its purpose. So I think it makes perfect sense to how moving on through that phase into the next phase of my life might change, I think, how I serve women even. I'm excited to go down this path honestly trying not to feel too terribly sad because this is a conscious choice and also just the way it is. Just the wisdom that has come through that this is done. That it's over. That my physical body is closed, so to speak. So there's a finality about that that feels perfect, and so I have no regrets even if I am left with a little bit of sadness. I think that's natural. So sharing that is kind of a big deal in my life.

And then kind of moving onward to the subject of this podcast, which seems unrelated, but I think it's probably not as I get into it—of pain. Pain in the birth process. And this came up as a potential topic recently at our workshop in the Los Angeles area, which was fantastic. And it wasn't something we were able to spend a lot of time on for all the reasons you can imagine. I do have a podcast out there that I recorded just a couple months after Cove's birth called *How I Rewired My Brain to Remove Pain From My Birth Experience*. So if you're interested in that whole angle, I highly suggest that you take a listen to that. I know it's been very effective for some women in having the birth experience that they want, and I stand by that. I had just the best birth ever with Cove which is part of my feeling finalized. I couldn't have dreamed of anything more perfect, more wonderful, more beautiful, and, on the subject of today's talk, less painful. Like

pain had nothing to do with my experience so much so that I'm almost not sure how I'm going to talk about this in a way that a ton of people can understand.

But yet what's coming through for me is that that's okay. If you're someone that resonates with what is being said here today then that's great. And there are probably many that won't, and so that's fine too. And part of my step into this next phase of my life, I think, is to be even more firm and more bold in my own truth with not a coddling of folks that don't resonate, right? Because there's nothing really you can do about that. It doesn't mean I don't have compassion for people's experiences or, as far as this topic goes, someone had pain in their labor. They didn't do it wrong. That's not what I'm saying, right? I'm just sharing my experience and, I hope, a new way of looking at things. Honest to goodness, that's the only reason I have any motivation to do this podcast, to be honest, because there's so many resources out there. Not just ours but plenty of resources in this day and age in which we live. And so I don't want to say the same old stuff about pain. And I don't want to give you a program to hypnotize your way out of pain. Do it, if that's what you want. Do it, if that's what you believe. But I really want to add some unique insight into these topics, and, again, it's just kind of weaving in to my own personal life right now which is why not. What is there to lose?

We are given this experience, I think, to find our truth and to share it. And not in a way that we want people to be convinced but just that we share it in a way that resonance creates connection. And someone listening today says, "Man, I've never thought of it like that. Or I feel that way too, but I've never heard anyone talk this way about this topic." That's my goal and will increasingly, I think, become more important and probably stronger message in these podcasts due to all that I've shared today.

So pain in labor. To be blunt, it either is or isn't. And so thanks to the woman that broached this topic at our workshop. Like I said, it wasn't enough time. But yet, there's plenty of time to say that, but it's not often the answer or the coaching or the guidance that people are looking for because we consider something like pain in labor to be a piece of the puzzle. It is, right? We birth, and there is pain. And that really fits into the whole fabric of our culture which is that we are uncomfortable with life and death. And that we think there is so much work to be done to birth. I'm the first to say that there is a lot of work to be done actually, but it's not the kind of work that I think people know about or sometimes are interested in, right? So we turn the focus to the external, to this idea of pain, to this idea of relief from the pain or tools or coping methods. And we entirely take the focus off of ourselves in the way that birth calls us to listen.

So maybe that made no sense, but let's go back to where I started. There either is pain, or there isn't. And how do we get to this place of pain? How do we possibly get to a place where pain isn't part of our experience? Does it have to be? And, again, in the podcast that I mentioned I go into depth with how I thought through those things, how I

attempted to ask myself some good questions, and to reframe everything I had been taught. And, honestly, everything I had experienced. So if you're coming upon this podcast, you don't know much about me, or you didn't listen to the other ones, I've had all kinds of births. I didn't have all blissful, painless births. I know about difficult labors. I know about pain in the way that I experienced it which, of course, is a huge part of this topic. How are we talking about the sensations? Is there words—are there words for what we're feeling in the birth process? Even that, right? If you've birthed a baby, just try. Try to remember what it even felt like. And chances are, if you're six months out, you start to lose the physical memory, the visceral memory, the sensations that you had.

So just think about that for a moment. If you haven't had a baby, then it's not going to mean much yet. But those of you that have I know I can't even the births that in my head I would consider painful. And I might have had descriptive words shortly after those births to describe what I felt. Pressure is always a great one, and that can go either way. Pressure doesn't have to be interpreted as pain. And there are so many words that we might spew out during our birth process to illustrate the sensations we're having. But then it all washes away, and no matter how painful our mind told us it was it's hard to recall. So you may not agree with that. That's totally fine. That's been my experience. And so therefore, assuming that that's a valid experience, how are we all talking about pain? What are we actually talking about when we can't actually recall what the sensations were? And we probably have limited vocabulary in all languages, I would imagine, to truly bottle up, to sum up our experience.

So that's why we are left with birth stories and a knowingness, right? We can watch birth videos of other people or maybe our own, and we can say, "Yes. That was this. Oh my back hurt. Oh that was intense. Oh that looked pretty easy." We start to have stories run into stories run into words run into sensations that we can't actually remember. And then we keep those, and we do what we will with them for our own purposes. But then I think an issue is that we take them into the world. And when they're not altogether positive, is that a problem? Is that a problem for our sisters that haven't birthed yet or will birth? These stories of, "Ugh. It was the worst day of my life. Oh, that was the most pain I have ever been in." Again, all of those things may have been 100% true for you or whoever that is in the moment. But our transmission, it feels to me, is a little scattered.

So what am I saying? I don't even know in some ways. I'm saying that pain is one way of describing what we feel in birth. And I feel like culturally we have agreed that that is the focus, right? Because we could just as easily have called the focus pleasure. We could just as easily have called the focus pressure, right? So there's so many ways. But we all know that pain takes up this huge amount of space in our culture when it comes to birth. And, obviously, right? That's why most women are birthing in an

environment where they know they can have pain relief without considering probably many of these thoughts and topics and feelings. What are we actually talking about? And what does it mean when someone relays their story a year after the fact? Does that have anything to do with your story or how you will interpret it?

Margo and I have a five-week called *How to Have an Indie Birth*, which at this point is definitely one of our older offerings although I think it's still pretty well loved. Just kind of old school on the technology end. But we do have—I think it's—let me think. Class three or four out of the five. I can't remember. That is solely focused on the sensations of birth. And we do talk about some of these things. Again, what are some words you've heard referring to the birth process? What are words you would have given your own process? And just considering those in more depth? What they mean, how they might feel, how different women will describe their births, right? And one women whose had X number of babies, she may describe her births all differently. Or the opposite. Someone may have had many babies, and, to her, birth feels like X. And it does every time.

I remember in my first couple of births, for whatever reason—I have no idea why this is. I felt a lot of the opening of my body in my legs. And actually, that just came like flashing right back in a kind of visceral way. I hadn't thought of that for many years. That's not been my birth experience for my last probably six babies. But it was for the first three. So if I had stopped having babies then or if you would have asked me then, that might have been part of my response. "Oh, man. Labor was really horrible and really tough. I felt it all in my legs, and I couldn't stand up. And it was like this burning pain that just spread down every time I had a contraction." Yes. My brain does remember that, and my body does remember it a tiny bit. But for some reason, birth didn't feel like that for other births that I've experienced.

So what is all good for, I guess, is my point. How much focus, how much attention do we want to put on the fact that pain can be a part of the birth experience? Pain really can be a part of any experience. And the point isn't to create an artificial situation or to, again, invalidate someone's experience. If someone comes or someone I'm working with and they want to talk about the fact that their labor was really painful, then we can go there. And we can go into more depth about possibly why that may have been. And as a midwife that's seen hundreds of births, I don't know the inner workings of every woman obviously. We're all so complex. But I can say that pain does, at least occasionally, make an appearance in birth, or at least that's what seems to come out of someone's mouth in response to what they're going through. But yet, 99% of the time women get through this pain. So is it pain? Or is it discomfort? Or is it just there are no words to describe the feeling of a body coming through your body? Let's just be real and say that we don't have any idea what it may feel like.

I think that's the part—that's the point of contention for me with this topic is I'm not trying to make it all rainbows and unicorns. It may shatter your world. You may break into pieces in all the figurative ways. But is that bad? Is that pain? Do you want to call it pain? Because it's your choice. You can call it whatever you want when your world shatters because a new soul has literally come through you and will change you forever. Do we have words for that? But can we start talking about that more? Can we talk about the unknown and the mystery and the fear that we feel especially birthing in the way that many of us choose to where we enter this void? We're in this—not depressing place of darkness but this place where the light isn't shining only because it's not something we talk about. Most people aren't choosing to birth in this autonomous way where this sacred aspect of birth is equally, if not more than, important as opposed to the physical side.

So we've got this sacred side that makes up so much of our experience. And are we willing to look at that and/or—or are we going to kind of diminish it to a series of words like pain that add fear. Add fear to our own process. Add fear to other women's process and diminish this whole birthing capacity we have to something that needs to be controlled. Because who doesn't want to control pain, right? I think people that are willing to walk into the place of unknown sensations are probably the people that wouldn't as readily call it pain. So they may not be looking to control it. And I feel like that was my realization with Cove's birth. Again, you may listen to that. But all these births I had had, and it had never dawned on me that I got to choose what I called it. And just simply changing what I called it was fantastic. It created the experience that I had dreamt of and that I believe I was meant to have.

So where does that leave anyone with pain? I don't know. If you've had what you would consider pain in your experience, yeah. Reconsidering that in the way that you can because, again, if you can feel the actual sensations months and years after then good for you. But I think that's really hard, right? So sometimes we are referring to other things, I think, when we say pain. We were alone in a way where we felt unsupported perhaps. We were scared. We didn't understand what we were going through, or there was something about our birth that had it take another turn. And suddenly we were unfamiliar or just plain old wasn't what you were thinking it was which I find is the most common reaction especially with people that haven't birthed before. They have their first baby. And it's hard work. I think that's different than calling it pain although it can be easy work. It is what it is. And then after the fact, many women will say, "That just wasn't what I thought it would be," right? What does that mean? I guess it all depends on your perspective and how you prepare or don't prepare or what you believe or, again, all of these millions of things that vary from woman to woman.

So I guess I'm in favor, at the moment, of considering anything as possible. I know that birth can be blissful. I know that it doesn't need to include pain. But I also know that

sometimes it does include pain, and that that's not necessarily bad. It's not like something to be ashamed of. There are lessons in whatever the sensations are. There are lessons in whatever our stories are for ourselves and for whom we share them with. So I think both of those things can exist together. That there is pain and that there doesn't need to be pain. And that sometimes there is pain. And how we are in it says a lot about us. And, again, as I mentioned, most women I work with I don't know that I've ever transported anyone for pain relief. People threaten it. They're miserable at times. They pack the bag. But they don't actually do it because it is manageable for most women. It is. And if it's not then, again, no blame. No shame. Maybe there is something else going on. Pain is an indicator occasionally of something being wrong although I think in a normal labor that's certainly not the case. And that's where this conversation started off as confusing because we're using a word that maybe doesn't even go with the normal sensations of labor.

It doesn't mean they're not intense. It doesn't mean that it isn't difficult. Whatever you want to say. But pain should maybe be reserved for situations where there is actually something wrong, right? It is painful to have a gallstone, for example, I'd imagine or those kind of things outside of the realm of birth where we know that pain is our bodies trying to tell us something. So I don't know. Maybe we can rethink, redream how we connect with other women over the sensations of birth. It doesn't mean we're not honest. It doesn't mean we hide our story or, again, act like it's all rainbows and unicorns. But we find different ways to talk about what we experienced in a way that is encouraging and inspiring and doesn't diminish the, like I said, hard work or easy work, whatever it is, for each of that we do in bringing a baby here. I mean that is just nothing to be written off as not a big deal. I do. I think it's an obviously super big deal to bring another soul earth side. But that's also where the gift of, I think, at least the experience that I feel I had is worth sharing because it's possible. Anything is possible.

And I'd love part of this new paradigm I guess with me just blabbing on here to discontinue the narrative of pain and pain relief and finding new ways to talk about it in an honest way. I'm also not suggesting that, again, we don't be real. And if we feel that it's our job, quote on quote, to help prepare people—which as a midwife, I'd say that's a little bit of it with some people. They're looking to you to prepare them in the ways that you can. And so I take that seriously, but I think the real preparation, of course, is what we each do on the inside. No woman no matter how many babies she's had can dictate to us what our experience will feel like, and that's really what we're asking in that. And so not only do we not know what it will feel like for her, we don't know how she would describe it or what other factors might influence what she's feeling from purely physical factors to spiritual, emotional factors. We just have no idea. So on one hand, right? It's sharing our stories when we just really don't know how they would be applied. Sharing them because yes. The positive ones I think definitely have a huge effect.

As I mentioned, my podcast in particular that particular episode I've gotten a lot of great feedback from women who said they took it to heart, and it changed everything for them. So that could be a coincidence. I'm totally open to that as well. That maybe my fantastic fabulous birth experience was purely chance. Totally possible. I don't really think that deep down, but I'd entertain that possibility for the sake of argument. So what else? What else? Anything else about pain in labor?

The person that asked that question, again, thank you. I don't know that this is really what you were hoping or asking for or would even find helpful. But this is what's being transmitted at the moment for me wanting to just kind of shake it up a little. Like I said, coping mechanisms. You can read all that stuff on the Internet. You can take a Hypnobirthing class. You can do all the things to prepare yourself for pain, but the wild card really, my friend, is you and your baby and your experience. So having tools to grab from may be helpful. And, again, as a midwife, a water birth pool. I think that's something that we routinely offer and talk about, and really that's a tool. That's a tool that may be very comforting to someone experiencing the wild sensations of labor and birth. And it may not be for others. But certainly, we do put stock in ways that someone might be comforted, comfort measures. That's—books probably have been written on comfort measures, and doulas make an entire living for the most part, right? Out of comfort measures.

And so, again, that's all well and good. I don't mean to offend doulas necessarily, but what is the real issue? What is it that we are trying to get away from? What part can we do internally? Not to get away from whatever it is but just to surrender. To surrender and accept what our experience is, to trust our bodies, to trust our babies, to know that whatever we're feeling (a) we may have a choice about and (b) if we feel we don't have a choice we'll survive anyway most likely, right? It's one of those two things. And so I guess I probably don't have too much else to say about pain in birth. That was quite a long monologue anyway.

So thanks for listening. I haven't given the whole spiel about iTunes reviews in forever. So I'm sure many of you will shut this off. But we still really appreciate those and love them, and it really helps our podcast find new listeners. There's so many people out there. There's so many people, and the really mainstream podcasts just have billions of listeners. And there's no reason why subjects like this can't get out more to people and maybe make a difference in their lives or just make them question things, right? That's what I'm all about. You don't have to take it, if you don't like it. Pick through what you like. Throw out what you don't. And if you have something nice to say, say it on an iTunes review or send us an email. But thanks for listening today. Have a great day.

(closing music)