

(introductory music)

**DISCLAIMER:** "*Well, Actually...*" is a free podcast that explores the logic behind physiological birth practices and is a production of the Indie Birth Association and indiebirth.com. No material on this podcast should be considered medical advice. Birth is not a medical event.

**MARGO:** All right. Hi, everybody. Welcome to "*Well, Actually...*", a podcast with me, Margo Blackstone, as part of the Indie Birth Association. Today I have another lovely guest on that I'm really excited to talk to you. And today that guest is Jessie Harrold, so welcome.

**JESSIE:** Thank you so much. Thanks for having me.

**MARGO:** And I'll tell you all a little bit about Jessie if you haven't heard of her already. Jessie Harrold is a doula, coach, women's mentor, author of the recent book *Project Body Love* and her upcoming title, *Mother Shift*. Her work weaves between the worlds of science and magic, the personal and the political exploring life transition and rites of passage, ecofeminism and mythology, neuroscience, and attachment psychology, ancestral skills, and restoring the wild feminine. She serves women and mothers one to one as a doula and life coach, teaches two online programs, *reWILD* and *MotherSHIFT*, and leads wilderness quests and pregnancy retreats. She lives in a tiny ocean side cottage in Atlantic, Canada where she writes, works, mothers her two children, and tends to her many gardens. And I sort of am super jealous of your really awesome sounding life right now as I read that. It sounds like we have so many things we could talk about.

**JESSIE:** Yeah.

**MARGO:** But I think what we were wanting to focus in on today is your *MotherSHIFT* online program and what that's all about and why you've created that and what your feeling is important for women in this period of becoming mothers and figuring out what on earth that means.

**JESSIE:** Yeah. Exactly. It's a huge transition, isn't it?

**MARGO:** It's a huge transition. I just have gone through it again now for the second time. And so it's something that's really been on my mind a lot, and so I'm curious to hear sort of how you—maybe how did you come to be interested in this and get into this work.

**JESSIE:** Yeah. I want to say that it started actually before I became a mother. So I was a doula for—pew—four or five years before I actually became a mother myself. And so I had this experience of watching a lot of other women become mothers, but I

was kind of out of there by about the six week mark. So I probably—I didn't really feel the fullness of the transition, but I could sense the weightiness of it. And before I got pregnant, I actually approached the woman who would become my doula and my mentor and a dear friend of mine now and said, "There's more to this. I know there is more to this than just conceiving and being pregnant and birthing this baby." And I wanted to know what was going to happen to me when I had a baby. I was really terrified. I was a feeling a little bit ambivalent even before I even got pregnant. And it was really the sort of transition into motherhood. This kind of gazing down the precipice of becoming a completely different person. I could sense that was going to happen right from the beginning.

And I think we have sort of a dialogue in our culture around not losing yourself, quote on quote, in motherhood or not changing, quote on quote, just because you're a mother. And I kind of had the sense that it was inevitable. And so it was then that I think I started to really formulate some of my ideas around this identity shift. And that mentor said to me that the transition to motherhood takes two to three years. And that's—that was something that was completely new to me at the time. I think it's still very unusual when we talk about the postpartum period or the transition to motherhood now. That it takes that long. And to me, that wasn't actually a scary proposition. That was kind of relieving that I could really screw this all up and not feel like I fit in this role and not know what the heck I was doing for at least two to three years. It felt like a huge permission slip, right?

And so it was very much the transition to motherhood that I made that got me curious about what this looks like for other women. And a lot of my doula work then kind of shifted into, "Okay. What happens in that first postpartum year? What happens in that first postpartum two to three years?" And over and above what we, thankfully, are talking more and more about the fourth trimester. We're talking about more about some of the physical and emotional healing and integration that women do in the postpartum period. But I think we're not—we're kind of still leaving it at that fourth trimester mark and not really extending the conversation beyond that and not extending it beyond kind of the physical and immediate mental requirements or changes that occur for women. And I'm really interested in expanding that conversation into this identity shift that happens to us and kind of dismantling the idea that we should not change when we become mothers because I think we just—we do. And fighting that shift is something that I think gets a lot of us into a lot of struggle and difficulty. So I'm really interested in kind of having—opening up that conversation a little bit more.

**MARGO:** Yeah. Oh, there is so much there. Yeah. And I do different amounts of this on this podcast, but it totally is making me think of my own story. And mine's a little bit different than yours in that I—well, it's similar and different. So I was going to births for about four or five years before I had my daughter too, so that's kind of a cool similarity.

I had two miscarriages before I had my daughter. And so during that year before conceiving her, life was totally consumed with, "When am I going to get pregnant? When am I going to stay pregnant? I want to be a mom so bad." And I had no inkling of how much it was going to change my life. And I don't know that it was a I'm just going to stay on with who I am. I think I was really young, and I think I didn't quite know who I was still. And so it felt like, "Oh, it's no big deal. I'll have a baby," and I think this would be a cool thing for us to talk about something that really marked my experience having my daughter, who is now five, was that I had seen a lot of people go through the first six weeks as a midwifery student. And I saw a lot of really bad ass moms, who maybe have had a couple babies, and they just—a lot of them made it look really easy actually.

And so I had this sort of Pollyanna thing going into having her where I thought, "Oh, if I do the exclusive breastfeeding and the cosleeping and all of that, this is just going to be my dream fulfilled that I've been longing for for these years of watching other people have their babies. And now it's my turn." And then that so was not the experience. It was like, "I thought I was doing everything right." Whatever that means. And still struggled a lot. And I really resonate with this concept of it taking two to three years. That's definitely when I found my footing again. It was around that two-year mark and then really more solidly by three. So it's no coincidence that I then had my next baby, who is now almost three months, after that point. I really—I did not feel solid in any way, shape, or form until at least three. So yeah.

**JESSIE:** Yeah. Definitely. It's interesting you talk about that kind of watching women in the first six weeks. You kind of triggered a memory for me which was that I was doing a lot of breastfeeding support even over and above the support just for my clients. So I—and it was really—I found it fascinating that I noticed that a lot of the challenges that the women that I was supporting with were having around breastfeeding actually when we started kind of—when I started digging deeper and asking questions about what was going on, they so often were rooted in this deep identity shift. So I'll explain. So I had one woman that I was working with who was having—she had this lovely, big baby, who was born just hearty and very keen at the breast and everything was going well. And then a couple weeks later, she was like, "Well, actually it's not going well at all. And it seems like my supply—my supply seems to have gone done." All of these kinds of things had gone on. And I went to her house, and we sat. And we chatted. I said, "What's your life looking like right now?"

And this was her second babe. And her first one was a little bit older. And she was kind of on the fly almost all the time. And it was doctor's appointments, and now she was—had her maternity leave. She was off work, so she was catching up with friends, going out for coffee. And she was on the go for the first couple of weeks. And so you talk about that sort of super start mom image that we often see in the media especially like, "Oh, you're back at the farmer's market or whatever with a seven-day old baby in

the baby carrier," which looks like, I think, to a lot of us a sign of success, right? You're back in the world. And anyway, so I was sitting with her, and I thought, "I actually think that what's maybe going on here is that you're transitioning again into motherhood and sort of releasing a part of your sovereignty and autonomy the way we all do when we have a baby and there is someone who needs us so very much in those early weeks and months and years really."

And ultimately, all of the issues that she was having with breastfeeding had more to do with her desire to kind of get back to normal and appear to be sort of a successful productive mom again and to be as present for her first child and all of these kind of markers of quote on quote success that we're kind of helping her to maintain the identity that she had before having this baby. When really what might have served her a little bit better was some time to rest and time to be in that liminal space of not a mother of just one anymore. Now I'm a mother of two. And what does that mean for me? And what does it mean for me to be back at—as you kind of described with your babe, back at this sort of newborn phase after having experienced a little bit of the sort of light at the end of the tunnel that you get at that two to three-year mark where you're able to leave them a little bit more and have a little bit more of your own time and freedom and space. So yeah. So it was interesting that it was that—it was those kind of breastfeeding experiences that highlighted to me that challenge with the identity shift was showing up in these really pragmatic and tangible ways around milk supply and healing and things like that.

**MARGO:** Totally. Yeah. That is something I've definitely seen too. Yeah. That resistance or maybe the desire to cling to that prior way of life. And then that somehow supersedes the actual—the concrete reality of having a newborn. And then when problems come up, people are confused why that might be, but it makes perfect sense when you look at it that way.

**JESSIE:** It does. Yeah. And I think that the reason that I like to look at this as an identity shift or as a rite of passage is that when we think of rites of passage we have to consider a period of release and loss and grief. And I think that's not something we kind of give ourselves permission to talk about when it comes to our mothering experience. It's sort of this—supposed to be this one tone positive thing that we have a baby. That's great. And so it can be challenging to say, "Oh, I'm not the woman I was before. I can't do the things I could before. I don't even value the things that I valued before." And this kind of sense of who am I now but a loss of who I was then. And that is really uncomfortable, so I think it's—it makes sense that we try to bypass it by just getting back to normal, whatever that looks like. But I think it's something that we really need to talk about more often because it's integral to our ability to then shift into this mother self. Yeah.

**MARGO:** Yeah. Yeah. That's beautiful. So what are some other aspects that you feel like are not being talked about enough that maybe your awesome resources are tapping into and looking at that my listeners might want to ponder and know a little bit about?

**JESSIE:** Yeah. One thing that I've noticed as I've been researching this book that I'm writing on sort of this postpartum experience is that we sort of have a—almost like a blame the mom kind of mentality when it comes to that postpartum period like, "You should just be doing things better. You should just be getting more sleep or just be,"—even some of the really beautiful holistic resources that we have around that practices support women in the first 40 days. It still lays a lot of the onus on women. Yeah. And what you can be doing right or better or—et cetera, et cetera. And I think I'd like to kind of also highlight the fact that we are living in a culture, in a time that is sort of unprecedented when it comes to shaping our postpartum experience. So just so many things. Our technology. Both our birth technology and sort of what's happening to women in their birthing process that's deeply impacting the postpartum period.

But then also just the straight up technology of the fact that we have phones attached to us all the time and people to compare ourselves to 24 hours a day and Pinterest. Things like that. I think that are really deeply shaping our postpartum periods. Also that we—I think we are all very aware of that lack of the village that we were supposed to have to support us through this time. So that's looking really, really different for women. The state of our maternity leaves and the support offered for women in that regard. The list goes on. And I think it's so important to kind of frame up our experiences that way. And when we're kind of, I guess, noticing what the postpartum period is looking like for women right now in our culture with rates of postpartum depression, anxiety through the roof, I think we have to really realize that we're kind of—we're mothering in a time that is unprecedented. We don't even know how to do this in a way because we've never had to do it before. This is a completely different time.

And so I am really interested in kind of opening up that—it feels like a lot of permission and compassion when we say that sometimes our responses to the postpartum, whether we're struggling or we're actually experiencing postpartum mood disorder are just a pretty appropriate response to a culture that's deeply broken. And so I think to kind of, I guess—yeah—highlight that a little bit and to remind new mamas that their experience is probably very normal given what kind of the culture that we're raising our babies in and to have so much compassion for it's hard because we've never done it like this before. We've never mothered like this before.

**MARGO:** Right. There's sort of no template for how to make it work in this circumstance.

**JESSIE:** Yeah. Yeah. Definitely.

**MARGO:** That reminds me on Facebook the other day one of my memories popped up from a few years ago probably when I was home with a very small child, my daughter, at the time. It was something I had read from the work of Katie Bowman, the—who know her? She's a biomechanist, and it was just a snippet about how—she said that in most traditional cultures or—I'm trying to remember the word she used. But pre-colonial kinds of cultures, we typically had, I think it was something like—I'll get it a little bit wrong. But something like 12 to 15 people a day typically would help hold the baby. The baby would typically be held by about a dozen adults in any given day. And so that load was shared in a way that's so different than what we're looking at now. So it must have really resonated with me while I was sitting there holding the baby for the twelfth hour or whatever that day and hadn't had another adult and like, "Wow. What a contrast," to even think about, "What if there were four other adults around even that I trusted?" And not to necessarily leave, but just to have a hand with things. That's been something that's been really different with this postpartum experience for me with my almost three month old is that while I've gone back to work earlier—so he was at a birth with me at six weeks. He was six weeks.

**JESSIE:** Oh yeah.

**MARGO:** I have had my partner around though almost—I mean probably 95% of the time whereas last time he was working full time, 12-hour shifts, 4 days a week. So I was home alone with a brand new baby, and I had no experience with a newborn and all of the things. So both have been challenging, but I would say this one's been less challenging even with just one extra adult around even though we have two kids, not one. So yeah. It's like part of it is definitely that village aspect and—yeah—wondering how we can envision. Yeah. What would that even look like at this point with the way that our capitalist structure and single family housing—how can we get that back is always something I feel like I come back to as a question or create something new but that fills that same purpose.

**JESSIE:** Yeah. yeah. Absolutely. As you were saying that, I'm kind of—I'm thinking about one of the things that I notice happens with so many women that we don't often talk about is the shift in—well, I mean I think all of our relationships with others shift significantly especially after the first babe. But our relationships with our mothers become just highlighted in a really different way and sometimes in a contentious or challenging way in that early postpartum period and sometimes not. But as you were saying that, I was thinking about that—how many women I'm noticing now are making choices that are very, very different from what our mothers and their mothers' choices were in birth and motherhood. And I think part of that is we have access to so much information and a lot of better information. It's not that we're just solely referencing kind of the women in our own tiny community or the mother before us when we're thinking about how to raise our children.

And so it's fascinating to think—and I hear this also when women are kind of looking for community is that it's so important that that community is minded and that—right? And that that sometimes even those familial relationships that we would typically rely on feel really different. And I—I mean I can't speak to how that must have been in generations past, but I find it interesting now and maybe it's sort of the exponential change in the way we do everything now, not just parenting but everything has changed so dramatically since—when our parents were raising their children. But it's just kind of an interesting thing to think about in the way that we want that support and we want that village and also I feel like we have so much more access to information and opinions about that information that it might be harder to really connect with the people that we want to support us.

**MARGO:** Yeah. Absolutely. Yeah. I think I see that a lot as well. Luckily, a lot of the people I work with right now as home birth clients have—and I don't know why. But lately, I've had a lot of like-minded moms of the moms and grandmas, which has been really nice, and that always makes me feel a little bit more relieved as the midwife that they're probably going to be okay as opposed to people who are like, "My mom is not really into this whole breastfeeding thing and thinks I should sleep train." Doesn't get what they're trying to do at all. That, not only is not helpful, but, like you said, it can be contentious and add a whole other layer to—of difficulty to figuring out who they are as a mom because—and I feel like I've experienced this myself a little bit. And it's come up in some different ways. But my mom feeling almost like a—like it's a judgment on her that I'm doing it differently. Like you doing it that way must mean that you think I was a bad mom.

**JESSIE:** Right. Yeah. Oh definitely.

**MARGO:** And that feeling. She's been overwhelmingly supportive and awesome and wonderful. But there definitely have been moments where I've wondered or things have even been said that made that clear. Like, "Oh, this is,"—there's a little bit of discomfort around the fact that I make different choices. What does that mean then about how you think you were mothered by me?

**JESSIE:** Exactly. Yeah. I think that's a thing. I remember having this conversation with a group of women after an infant massage class that I had taught. And they were all like, "Yeah. Yeah. This totally happened to me, and I've never really spoken about it to anybody." And I think it's actually—I've actually started incorporating it into my prenatal preparation like, "How will your relationship with your mother or kind of the mother figures in your life shift as a result of this babe?" I mean I think we also kind of do a disservice to the way that our intimate partner relationship shift also. I think that's something that is quite a—kind of a surprising conversation for a lot of people prenatally like, "Your equal relationship is going to not look very equal for the next two to three

years. It's going to look very, very different." And I think that's another—thank goodness feminism. However, the kind of eighties second-wave feminism that a lot of us are waving our banners about doesn't really work in the new motherhood phase where the workload is not divided equally. And there are many, many, many, if not most, things that a partner can't do actually with the babe in a lot of ways. And, oh, so many huge shifts to those relationships.

**MARGO:** Yeah. I'd love to talk more about that maybe and how that ties to the ecofeminism. That jumped out at me in your bio. I also identify—I identify as an ecofeminist and some other things. But that's something that's really interesting to me, and I have a women's study degree. So by the end of my four years, that was sort of what I had landed on as feeling right to me before I was ever interested in birth work. So it was cool when I started getting into that to see the connections there more. But yeah. That was definitely shocking to me to feel that division of labor in that way.

**JESSIE:** Mm-hmm.

**MARGO:** And I still have people—and every app, every whatever, that's targeted at me right now as someone who is in the fourth trimester still being like, "Oh, yeah. It's this,"—I use an app that keeps track of my baby's naps like a psycho about it. I could say more about that. But it also gives you other little tips and things. It was like, "Split the night shift. Have dad take every other night or half the night." And I was like, "Then I have to pump. I don't even,"—I'm a smart person, and I can't even figure out how that would work. How would that—I'd have to set an alarm maybe, and that sounds like I'm going to get just the same amount of sleep. What terrible advice. So yeah. I'd be curious what else you'd like to say about that piece of it because that definitely was shocking. My partner is also a feminist and just that's been the source of a lot of tension in our relationship in a lot of ways. Just me being like, "I breastfeed all night. Like you better do this then for us." Trying to balance the scales.

**JESSIE:** Yeah. It's so difficult. Yeah. Yeah. I think it's—it's interesting. I don't know where I read this, but in my understanding of matriarchal societies is that it wasn't necessarily that the women were the boss. But that they—the load—the workload was not the same. Women and men did not the same things. The women did one set of duties or activities, and the men did the other set of duties. And there was not overlap, which when you think about it the overlap is a little inefficient maybe. Quite possibly. Just being the devil's advocate. But yeah. And so I feel like that early postpartum sort of creates that non overlapping roles in a way. And that—yeah. It's really, really challenging for people who kind of pride themselves on equality, which I think a lot of us do. And the fascinating thing is—and you alluded to it is it's actually much easier for the birthing mother to do the mothering things. It is not easier to have someone else feed this baby. Not at all et cetera, et cetera. There's so many other things.

And I think one of the conversations that I—it's a hard conversation but that I have with couples prenatally is around just kind of allowing the non birthing partner to kind of understand a little bit more about what that transition to parenthood might look like for them. And that it might seem obvious but a mama has started that transition from the moment she got pregnant. There is this sense of—it's almost like a bit of a jolt especially depending on how intense your morning sickness might be. It's a real kind of jolt into a new reality, and it continues as your baby grows and as your life slows down and shifts even during pregnancy. And a non birthing partner is not experiencing any of that. Maybe kind of vicariously but not in the embodied way that a birthing partner is or that a birthing woman is. And so I kind of want to give partners a lot of permission to think of their transition as something that starts maybe when the baby is born but maybe not even then.

Maybe that connection or that bond or whatever you might want to call it doesn't even start then. It's also a two to three year process that doesn't start until much later. And it doesn't—I don't think it—it just—I think we kind of—we put a lot of expectations on non birthing partners to sort of get it or to be—to kind of be fully embodied in that role a lot more quickly than they are. And also as birthing people, our jobs, our roles are really well defined. Like, "You've got boobs. You're going to use them." That's—and so those—it's very, very clear what we're here for. It's not as clear to the non birthing partner what their role is, and they have to actually kind of figure it out and try it on for size. Am I just a really—am I a good baby wearer? Maybe I'm a good baby wearer? Maybe I put this baby to sleep? Maybe—there's infinite number of ways that they can support. And I think as with the transition to motherhood it—the transition to parenthood in general takes a lot longer than you think it will. It's a lot longer than what you're comfortable with usually.

And I think that—I always tell this story of a woman that I know who has a bunch of kids, and she and her partner were talking about adopting another child. And they were kind of just in the daydream state of like, "How—would we want to adopt a baby? Or would we want to adopt an older child?" And she was very excited to adopt a baby. And he said, "No. No. I'd like to adopt a four year old or maybe a five year old because that's when I feel like I have got a role, a very clear and defined role here." And I always kind of try to remind people of that. That it takes longer, I think, for that transition to happen because the role is less defined. And it—yeah. There's just this sort of unequal parenting relationship that happens just by necessity in a lot of ways that most people are not prepared for.

**MARGO:** Totally. And that idea that, "Oh, I'll see you for your six or eight-week visit or whatever, and you're good at the six-week visit. That means you'll be good a month,"—it's presupposing that parenthood looks the same month to month. Like you're describing here, it's so different month to month, year to year. Yeah. Yeah.

**JESSIE:** Absolutely. yeah. I feel like there's like a number of veils that a woman kind of walks through especially in those—that first year. I feel like there is the six to eight-week veil when she's like, "Okay. I think I got this breastfeeding thing, and my baby is a little bit more interactive maybe." And there's some part of her that she's getting kind of figured out. And then I think there's another at about three months and six months and ten months that—just one step at a time she's kind of getting the ground underneath her a little bit more. But yeah. You're right. I don't think it just happens at six weeks or at the end of that fourth trimester. Not at all.

**MARGO:** Right. There's one—yeah. I guess I'm trying to think of how I would describe it. It feels like culturally we're like, "Oh, once you've got it, you've got it," instead of like, "There's new layers and different ways that you have to think—things you have to figure out along the way." It makes me think too with my partner, who he was able to go down a lot and how much he works—oh no. My connection was unstable for a moment. Okay. So he just has been able to spend a lot more time with our daughter in the last year so around four, which is really cool. And he really didn't spend much time with her as a baby and didn't—yeah. I mean he was at work. So now with this baby and him being around, it's like he sort of hasn't done this level, if it were a video game. I don't know why I'm thinking of video games. He has not completed this level before whereas—and it's still a struggle for me going through it again the second time. It's different, and it's intense in its own ways. But I'm a little bit more sure footed than he is because he didn't do this part last time. Even though he's great with the older kid, he didn't necessarily complete this lesson last time. So yeah. It's just amazing to see all the different ways and shapes it can take.

**JESSIE:** Yeah. Absolutely. I love your video game analogy. That's right. Yeah.

**MARGO:** Yeah. Well, let's see. What else shall we talk about? So you have a book coming out on this subject it sounds like.

**JESSIE:** Yeah. Well, I'm currently researching it. Yeah. I just published my first book earlier this year, and so this is the book number two and kind of talking a little bit more about this postpartum shift. Yeah. So it's very exciting. I'm learning a lot about—yeah. Those kind of cultural perspectives and sort of what is the kind of—what's the word? What's the dialogue right now around that postpartum period? And I think it's so wonderful to see it expanded really in the last couple of years, I want to say. I don't think anybody was talking about the fourth trimester two or three years ago even. And that's wonderful. It's amazing. And I think we just need to keep expanding the conversation beyond that. We were going to talk about ecofeminism.

**MARGO:** Yes. Talk about that.

**JESSIE:** Yeah. I love that you kind of—you drew that birth analogy because I feel like I totally—although I've always been sort of connected to the earth in a lot of ways and [inaudible] person, I feel like birth really cemented that for me too. Like there is something about witnessing women in their just most wild nature, right? It's just the most elemental experience. And I feel like there's—I think that that's kind of where this curiosity about ecofeminism came from and this—I think this parallel that ecofeminism draws between the woman's body and the earth as metaphorically a woman's body and the way that we've treated both. And I think there's nowhere that it becomes more evident than in birth that women are of the earth, and I think it's—yeah. And I see what we've kind of—what we've done to birth, and it's just the parallels to the way we've distrusted women's bodies and the way we distrust the earth are, to me, completely parallel and completely linked.

**MARGO:** Yeah. Yeah. Me too. It's definitely a really cool parallel, as you said. And for me, birth is very much political. I came into birth from a political kind of activism standpoint. That is what I had been doing, and I was a rowdy 21 year old when I started going to births. And mostly around environmental issues. That was sort of the thing I was most interested in working on with the activism I was doing. And so yeah. it felt really natural for me to take that and then apply it to what I was learning about birth. And then the other way around, like you said, cementing sort of that other piece of it. I knew we were connected. I was really interested in fertility and that sort of thing before I was ever interested in birth. But yeah. Then going to births and seeing just the primal experience that that is and how powerful and amazing and just being like, "Obviously, this is why we've tried to hide how cool this is," because if everyone knew how cool this was and epic and amazing we would not—we would never be—we would have never treated women this way in our culture.

**JESSIE:** I totally agree. I totally agree.

**MARGO:** Yeah. Yeah. And just the disconnect from the earth too and from nature, I think, is a huge piece of what's gone wrong, if we can judge it as so, I suppose, with birth. And then that extends into the realm of the movement specialist folks. And we're not moving enough. We're not outside enough. We're not still enough.

**JESSIE:** Yeah. Yeah. I was just going to say I feel like one of the other clear links, at least that I see in my practice, is that—yeah. A lot of us don't know what's going on below our necks. And we're so caught up in what we're kind of taking in and putting out via our eyes, ears, nose, and mouth that we actually don't have a relationship with our bodies at all. And I think the beautiful—one of the most beautiful and immediate lessons of pregnancy is that you get that relationship very quickly. You get schooled by your body pretty quickly, right? That this is a physical, kind of animal process. However, I think that it deeply impacts our birthing process. That we're just—I've seen

this kind of disconnection and how it plays out in women's births. And even just our comfort with talking about how our bodies feel or—yeah. It's this level of—I'll even say disgust that sometimes I witness women have when they are either experiencing the birthing process or talking about the birthing process and not wanting to talk about placentas or not wanting to feel their baby's head emerge. And I think, "Oh my goodness. How did we get so incredibly disconnected from our wild nature and the fact that this is a completely normal, natural process?"

And yet, birthing is sometimes the very first time a woman has really reengaged with her body. And I think we also kind of need to situate that within our culture and say, "We've also,"—it's not just about the phones that we all carry and this or those—amount of information that we take in and put out. But it also has to do with the way our culture kind of denigrates women's bodies full stop and expects us to look a certain way or be a certain way that's fundamentally impossible for us to live up to. We've got the [inaudible] to thank for the myriad ways we're divorcing ourselves from our body's language. And so I feel like there's a lot of things that have kind of created this situation where birth can be sometimes the first time we connect with our bodies. Yeah. That's one of the things that I teach in the MotherSHIFT course is like—I call it the gifts of motherhood. That there are certain things that we—that yes. There are losses that occur when we shift into motherhood.

And also there is this kind of exploration of new territory that we get to do. What's important to us now? And also the experience of embodiment, I think, is something that we can take from motherhood. The experience of our intuition is something like—our—we kind of become heightened in those ways. We have this heightened awareness of our bodies and of our intuition in motherhood. And I think we can kind of foster that a little bit and use motherhood as an opportunity to grow those valuable, powerful gifts that we have.

**MARGO:** Yeah. That's so exciting.

**JESSIE:** Mm-hmm.

**MARGO:** An opportunity.

**JESSIE:** Absolutely. I think it is. And I think when you were talking about if only we knew that birth was created such power for women and helped them to kind of witness what is possible for them, I think in the same way we need to start talking about that in the postpartum period. And it's not just something to survive. It's a time of tremendous potential. And there's tremendous shift that happens, and it's scary. And it's big. And it can be challenging and sad sometimes even. But also if we're able to kind of really embody and embrace the shift into motherhood, there's just—there's so much power to be had in that process.

**MARGO:** Yeah. That's sort of the mama bear awakening thing is really something to behold, I think.

**JESSIE:** Oh, totally. Totally. Yeah.

**MARGO:** Yeah. I know I've experienced it differently both times. But most recently, it's been sort of a—just a fierce willingness to cut things out that I don't—I literally don't have time for that. I don't have energy. I don't have an interest. Things that I'd be—would have been willing to do even while I was pregnant. I'm just like, "I can't do that anymore. And I won't do it anymore." And just, "Argh." There's a punch behind it that didn't exist, I feel like, when it didn't need to exist, I guess. So it's really cool to see the different ways that that sort of manifests.

**JESSIE:** Yeah. That's the one thing that I find is kind of fascinating is that I work with women through other rites of passage as well. And I find that motherhood is often the catalyst for those changes to all kinds of areas of our lives. It's a real perspective shift. Yeah. And it feels like it just focuses your—it's what's important to you and who you are so much more deeply. You don't have time for the rest of it. And it's pretty cool because I think it just—it can shift so many things in our lives. I see women starting creative practices or either leaving relationships or finding new relationships or all kinds of monumental changes because motherhood has kind of caused them to really look at what matters most.

**MARGO:** Mm-hmm. Yeah. I wrote a post on Instagram probably two weeks after my son was born that was talking about that. and just how it felt really like there were both sides of the spectrum going on. There were these micro moments where I was like living in the micro seconds of feeding and gazing at this baby and trying to catch a nap. But then there was also this expansiveness of like, "What am I doing with my life? What am I doing with my,"—yeah. Just there's such a—for me both times, I've had a really serious plunge into my own mortality.

**JESSIE:** Mm-hmm.

**MARGO:** That's what came up for me both times. The first time was shorter lived but more intense. And this time it's been kind of like prolonged. Maybe it's my new normal. I don't know. or I'm just like, "I don't know how much longer any of us have got. What am I doing here?" And just—it feels very big instead of—yeah.

**JESSIE:** Yeah. Really existential.

**MARGO:** Very existential. Yeah. It's definitely been an existential experience becoming a mother. Yeah.

**JESSIE:** Yeah. It's such an interesting experience to think that—yeah. I mean it's not as though we're sitting there—well, maybe with my first baby I was. But plotting out the next two to five years of our lives. But you're right. It's like these strange things that happen. And I wonder if sometimes if it's—I mean if it has anything to do with the fact that we are in those micro moments. That we're so completely present and, oddly, spacious in a way that we don't necessarily experience in our day-to-day life. There's just kind of this empty time in a lot of ways when you're nursing or you slow down everything. And I think, in a way that serves to put everything into a completely different sense of focus. You get these moments of clarity, right?

**MARGO:** Yeah. And the hormones, I'm sure.

**JESSIE:** Oh yeah.

**MARGO:** I've got to figure this out. Or my most recent thing has been that—well, my daughter turned five this week. And she asked me, "Are you going to be at a birth on my birthday?" And she was devastated that I might be gone on her birthday. And I was like, "I'm not going to go to births anymore." I don't know if that's true or not, but I think I am very seriously considering taking a break until they're a little older. Because—yeah. It's just like these little people are so important all of a sudden. And it's really—the priorities shift and—yeah. Just leaning in to that and feeling into how do we all meet our needs in these years when it feels like the needs are sort of endless from everyone.

**JESSIE:** Yeah. Yeah. Absolutely.

**MARGO:** [crosstalk].

**JESSIE:** Yeah. It's huge. It's huge. And it's kind of counter culture to say, "Actually, I'm going to choose not to be my most productive self in the next," and sort of extending that once again. Once again extending that beyond the six weeks or the three months or whatever but saying, "For the next five years, I'm opting out of the hustle, and I'm going to focus on these babies."

**MARGO:** Totally. And your—our emails back and forth came at such a good time I feel like for me because that was something I've already mulling and—yeah. I feel like that frame of reference is, as you said, a nice permission slip to be like I could make myself maybe do this. But will that feel good? And is that really in everyone's best interest?

**JESSIE:** Yeah. Yeah. I saw this beautiful pie chart somewhere. I don't even know. But it was—it kind of showed the sort of slice of the pie that is your kind of active—really active parenthood. And vis-à-vis the slice of the pie that is your career. And I've seen that kind of vis-à-vis your whole life and to remind me, "This ends. It's going to be okay." But it was fascinating to see it juxtaposed with career and realize, "Oh, actually

I'm going to be at this career thing a lot longer than I'm very actively mothering." I mean we never stop becoming mothers but—or being mothers, but that's a huge wake up call. And I think it's a—yeah. I mean it's certainly a wakeup call that I have to—I have tension with it almost every day. Trying to make that choice between mothering and work, which is personally fulfilling, and it's challenging. But I think it's beautiful when it can be our own authentic challenge, autonomous challenge, as opposed to a challenge that comes because our society is not allowing us that time to birth another way.

**MARGO:** Totally. Yeah. And I feel like that conversation is largely missing. I feel like in the attachment parenting world there is a lot of focus on just being stay-at-home mom. And if you want to work a little bit, that is almost, "Oh, well, why do you want to? Just enjoy your babies." And for some of us, I really enjoy writing and thinking and podcasting and doing these things. And so it's always this juggle. But the pie chart made me think of some thoughts I've had recently too. Which it's been such a blessing this second baby to have the five year old because I know—I feel like I can have a extrapolation of what it's going to look like.

**JESSIE:** Totally.

**MARGO:** I don't really—but like, "Oh, once she's three, she'll sleep through the night," because that's how long it took her. She was two or three. And I'll be able to feel good about leaving her for the day at maybe daycare. We have this wonderful Waldorf daycare. And those sorts of—and she'll have days where she doesn't want to play with me. She just wants to play on her own in her room. And I have hours and hours on end. So being able to know that that is down the road makes me feel so much more like, "Yeah. I can set this aside probably most—for the most part at least because eventually he's not going to want to nurse six hours a day." My first baby [crosstalk] life. I guess I have to figure out how to work now. But now I have the gift of seeing like, "No. It's going to be different."

**JESSIE:** That's totally the gift of second and multiple time mothers. Because I feel like the first time around, you know that intellectually. But you don't actually know it know it. I remember feeling the same way when I was like 36 weeks pregnant with my second baby. And I'd gone on this solo retreat and a cabin in the woods. And I remember laying there on the last night that I was going to be there, and I thought, "This is the last time I will sleep alone for the next three years. Probably. Maybe more." Now I can report back. We're four years in, and I am not sleeping alone. But it's with the first child not the second. But I remember just kind of having that moment going, "Okay. I'm up for it. I'm okay." If I had thought that thought my first pregnancy, that would have spun me down into a down spiral of devastation and fear, I think. There was something very different about knowing that it would—this too shall pass, and this too shall pass, right? Kind of goes both ways.

**MARGO:** Yeah. Totally.

**JESSIE:** I love what you were saying about wanting to kind of have that personal fulfillment that work can bring or that whatever can bring. And that's something that I think we forget that—I think what happens to a lot of women is they become mothers is that they become creative not just in the childbearing way but creative in all kinds of different ways. I think it just unlocks this huge amount of creativity. And so it—there is this very real tension of the work of mothering and that kind of all consuming work. And then also having this experience of yeah. Maybe having your values shifted around your profession and your work. But then also having this enormous creative flow open up. And that maybe sounds crazy when we're sleep deprived and all of these things going on. But I think there is something about the spaciousness and the focus that we have on our values and on our lives in that early postpartum period that we don't have at other times. And so it really does create this huge kind of outpouring of potential that can be hard to just—in the very pragmatic day to day can be hard to manage. Yeah.

Yeah. I remember my mother telling me when I was trying to get the children—I think I was a year postpartum. And I had to go back to work full time. And so my kids were going to full time daycare, and my mom was visiting. And I was trying to kind of do all of this beautiful attachment process as we were trying to get out the door and like, "Okay, honey. I hear what you're—I know that you're feeling scared or whatever it was." I don't remember what it was. And we were having this whole conversation. I remember—which is something that I endeavor to do as often as I possibly can. And I remember my mom kind of looking at me and going, "I think this attachment parenting thing is not for people who go to work every day, honey." I was like, "Oh, yeah. Okay." It was challenging, right? It made it really, really challenging, I think because we were literally detaching from each other. And how do we still kind of have that bond and have that attachment when we're physically apart? But yeah. It's a definite challenge.

**MARGO:** [inaudible]. So will you tell me the commercial version of what you're offering with this MotherSHIFT program?

**JESSIE:** Yeah. Sure.

**MARGO:** And where people can get more information about it.

**JESSIE:** Yeah. Definitely.

**MARGO:** So much cool stuff to cover.

**JESSIE:** Yeah. Yeah. And we've covered so much of it too. And I love that—I mean a lot of it is just having more of these conversations. And every time I run the program it's just this—it's the sense of the permission to just kind of show up in all the messy states

of that postpartum transition and be heard and held in that experience and have the opportunity to talk about it. So it's a three-month program. It's a full trimester of support. And it—and really because this shift takes two to three years, it's really for women any time. And I've even had women who have two, three, and five year olds in the program who have still gotten so much out of the experience. And starts on September 24 and goes until December 10.

And yeah. So it's like a weekly virtual women's circle. And it's very light on content beyond that because I know that nobody wants to be sitting at their computers reading. So it's a very experiential kind of program in that regard. Yeah. And people can head over to my website. It's [www.jessieharrold.com](http://www.jessieharrold.com). And click on MotherSHIFT and you can kind of read more about it there. But it's all the stuff that we've been talking about. This kind of identity shift into motherhood. It goes through those phases of loss and grief and who am I now and who do I want to be now that I'm a mother. Who am I as a woman who is also a mother?

**MARGO:** Hmm. Yeah. And I'll post the link too on the podcast page, so that people can look over there and check it out.

**JESSIE:** Cool. Thank you so much.

**MARGO:** Yeah. Are there any other sort of concluding thoughts or things? We could talk all day I'm sure.

**JESSIE:** I know.

**MARGO:** I have to go to the chiropractor and do some postpartum self care. otherwise, we could continue on and on.

**JESSIE:** Totally. Absolutely. No. It's been a great conversation. It's so nice to kind of get some of these ideas out into the open and chatting about them more and, hopefully, the women listening, people listening, will resonate with what we said.

**MARGO:** Yeah. Well, thank you so much for being here. And for folks who somehow have not heard what our Indie Birth website is, it is [indiebirth.org](http://indiebirth.org). You can check out all sorts of articles, over 100 podcast episodes between Maryn and I, and a bunch of different educational offerings and goodies there. And until next time, thanks for listening.

(closing music)