

(introductory music)

MARYN: Welcome to *The Birth Warrior* podcast. In each episode, we feature the stories of birth warriors. Women who have persevered to find their own truth in pregnancy and birth. As you hear these women share their stories of love, autonomy, connection, and power, it is our deepest wish that you will be inspired, empowered, and supported to find your own truth. We are honored these women have stepped forward to share their personal stories and to help us remember that we all have the power to choose what is right for us. *The Birth Warrior* podcast is a presentation of The Indie Birth Association and is not intended to be medical advice.

TINA: Okay. Here we go. Welcome, everybody, to *The Birth Warrior* podcast presented by Indie Birth. I am your host, Tina Fulton, and today we are going to be talking with Emmy Kissinger. Hi, Emmy.

EMMY: Hello. So good to be here.

TINA: So excited to chat with you today. So let's start with just telling us a little bit about you.

EMMY: All right. I am in the Midwest. I'm a mom of two awesome kids. We have two dogs, two cats, and four chickens, so we've got a lot going on. I'm a part time school psychologist as my day job, and then I'm also a freelance writer in the women's wellness niche. So it's an awesome journey. Busy, busy but really fun.

TINA: Fantastic. So I did—excuse me. I did read your blog. And I loved, loved your stories.

EMMY: Thank you.

TINA: And so I was wondering if you'd like to talk a little bit about your first birth.

EMMY: Yeah. Okay. So my first birth was kind of like your typical—I saw the documentary *The Business of Being Born*. I kind of knew that there were some potential difficulties that might come up if I decided to birth at home—or at the hospital. And I—my heart was really telling me that I should birth at home. But I was just graduating grad school. We had just changed locations. And I was just starting a new job. All of these things. And I just kind of went along with my husband's intuition instead of my own and decided to birth in the hospital because we found a midwife who was available. And it was your very typical—I very much prepared for my birth superficially focusing on what I would wear, whether there would be a birth photographer. All of these different things rather than doing the internal work that I needed to do. So when it came to the actual birthing day, luckily, the day—the night before my scheduled induction because I was just about 42 weeks.

And I woke up in labor in the middle of the night and was just terrified by the sensations I was feeling. I didn't know what I was going to do, how I was going to handle that, and decided I must be in the most active form of labor. And it must be baby time. So we'd better go to the hospital right now. We got there. Labor totally slowed down for the entire day. And then from there, it was decided to break my water because I had been laboring at that point for 23 hours. And they were—it was either—my choices were C-section or breaking the waters. So we opted for that. At that point, the contractions became something that I didn't even know how to wrap my head around because I don't think I was quite there yet emotionally ready to manage those sensations I was feeling.

So everything just sort of felt chaotic, felt out of control, and I didn't—I hardly remember it honestly because it was so—such a different place than I had ever been in my life. So then heart decels started, rushed in for emergency cesarean. I was totally sedated because I guess I was so out of control that they couldn't really manage me as a patient at that point. So I was completely put to sleep. My husband, sister, birth team—no one was allowed in the delivery room or in the operating room because it was an emergency at that point. And so it's hard for me to talk about because I've had to do a lot of healing work around the fact that no one was there to greet my baby when he came into the world. It's a really hard thing.

TINA: Mm-hmm. That's a big thing.

EMMY: Yeah. So I was asleep for about—somewhere between two to four hours before I got to meet him.

TINA: Right.

EMMY: Yep. And he did skin to skin with dad during that time.

TINA: Mm-hmm. Wow.

EMMY: Yeah.

TINA: I'm sorry that happened.

EMMY: Thank you. It was a pretty defining moment in my life. (inaudible).

TINA: Yeah. Right. Right. Wow. Just sitting with that for a minute. I'm sorry.

EMMY: No. It's okay. That's the first time I probably ever been able to tell that story without just breaking down shaking tears because I've really had to work through the consequences of the way I was thinking about taking charge of my own life.

TINA: Right. Right. Well, thank you for sharing such a deep thing.

EMMY: Mm-hmm.

TINA: So where did you go from there?

EMMY: From there, I went—literally, I went home and realized that kind of everybody was super excited to meet the baby. And then I was just alone.

TINA: Right.

EMMY: I was there recovering from my C-section. My husband had just started a new job. My mom came over to help a couple of nights, and then I was just alone with that baby. And I loved him. We had—and we still do—probably have a little bit unhealthy of a bond because once we met then we just sort of clung to each other. We're like we're never going to let go.

TINA: Mm-hmm.

EMMY: We're together now, and we're staying together. So very much started to learn about all of the breastfeeding and the attachment parenting and those sort of things and realized that that was where my core values really aligned.

TINA: Mm-hmm.

EMMY: And the breastfeeding journey was really challenging so that also was a struggle. Because at that point, I just—I didn't really know how to ask for help at all. I didn't really realize there were people that would help me necessarily. So that was a good ten weeks of pure suffering every single latch being really challenging. So from there, really realizing that that experience had kind of broken me in half, broken me open, and required me to start learning, start educating myself. And by those things, I don't mean your traditional, "Oh, I'm going to learn about medical technology." I had already done all of that. I had done the Bradley Method series prior to my first birth. And I just—I had to learn about myself. I had to learn how I worked and how I was going to take charge of my own life and make decisions for myself so that I could feel confident and comfortable in the way things were going.

TINA: So do you feel like that initial postpartum was the defining moment or the catalyst that turned you away from the medicalized system? Or did it happen during the baby's birth?

EMMY: Yeah. I would say—so I started to get a little bit connected with ICAN. So International Cesarean Awareness Network. And I attended one of their conferences, and I heard Pam England speak when I was there. And that was kind of the moment that I realized, "Okay. Something really, really hard happened to me. And I can accept

that, and I can move on from there. But I am going to make different decisions so that I feel confident.”

TINA: Right. And never happens again.

EMMY: Yeah. Exactly. Exactly.

TINA: So how did you find Indie Birth?

EMMY: My sister is a midwife’s assistant. And she just kept recommending it over and over again. And I didn’t listen. And thinking that maybe that was a little bit too woo woo for me probably, but then once I got pregnant with a sweet little baby that I actually miscarried. But during that time, I met with a midwife, and she had recommended the Indie Birth podcast. So at that point, I was like, “Oh, well. Maybe I’ll try it.” And from there just diving in and learning everything about listening to everything Maryn has to say.

TINA: Mm-hmm. And then how did you use the Indie Birth resources then?

EMMY: Yeah. So I did the *How to Have an Indie Birth* course. I watched—had my husband watch the video about—that Margo did interviewing the dad who had been part of a homebirth and just listening to all that information and being able to share that—those insights with my husband and talk more in depth with my sister about all of that great information that was shared, I was really able to feel confident in my decisions then when my next pregnancy came around. I would say Indie Birth was sort of woven into every single thing—every single decision that I made.

TINA: Mm-hmm.

EMMY: Do you want me to kind of talk about some of those decisions that I made?

TINA: Absolutely.

EMMY: (cross talk) that I felt like were big ones, I guess.

TINA: Yeah. That would be fantastic.

EMMY: So the first decision, obviously, was to just be back at home which I felt 100% confident I could do that. And I was able to visualize that and talk about those stories and tell those stories to my baby kind of every day throughout my pregnancy just to prepare. Initially, right when I found out I was pregnant, I found out that the local doula and local midwife potentially might be out of town when I was going to have my baby. So then the decision was okay, so I birth in a hospital 50 to 60 minutes away because there’s a VBAC ban here where I live.

TINA: Oh wow.

EMMY: Mm-hmm. Or I could go unassisted. And those were pretty much my options. So I decided 100% that I would just go unassisted. It probably wouldn't be a big deal. And at that point, I contacted Maryn and did a little consultation with her to find out if she would potentially be willing to answer questions or things like that throughout my pregnancy and birth if I needed her at all for those things. But, again, too my sister was a midwife's assistant, so I felt confident that she would be able to be there and be helpful to me if I had any questions. But then my midwife ended up being in town, so that was amazing. And I feel so blessed that she was there. Then another big decision that I had to make along the way was because I was a VBAC my midwife thought that maybe she would feel more comfortable if I potentially went to a birth center that was about—a few hours away just so that she could have another person there. More hands.

And I was like, "I don't know. I'll think about it." And I left her house, and I thought, "No. I have a vision for how this is going to look. And I'm really that it will look that way." And so comfortable if other—if you need to have an extra set of hands there. But, again, I feel 100% strong that in my conviction that this is where I need to be when I birth my baby in my own space at home and not traveling a long distance also was a big piece of that. And then when I actually did give birth, there ended up being quite a bit more bleeding than I expected, and I didn't really know what that was all about. So I called my midwife and she came over. And she just said it could be a couple of different things. But what's kind of—what's your heart telling you? And my heart was just telling me to just wait a little longer, see what happened. So she went home. And I took a shower, and I cried. And I just kind of surrendered to the fact that maybe I was going back to the hospital, and maybe I was going to have a C-section again. And I didn't know what was going to happen at that point. But then I just decided to take a little rest, do a little meditation, laid down on my bed. And my waters released, and pretty much history from there. She was born within a few hours. But I was thankful that she provided me the information and then allowed—and then I just was—felt confident to make those decisions on my own from there.

TINA: Great. So did you enter into a traditional relationship with your midwife? You went for prenatal care. All of that kind of stuff. Or did you manage any of that yourself?

EMMY: I would say I really managed most of the care myself. I did meet with her a couple of times. Maybe three or four times, and we would always just talk about whether I felt like I needed to come. And I would say yes or no based on—I really went to her more, I think, for emotional support and that processing of my first birth because I knew that I still had some things weighing on me from all of the events of the first time around.

TINA: Mm-hmm.

EMMY: So I just wanted to have kind of a spiritual person to connect with as I kind of went through that journey.

TINA: Right. Right. And did your—does your midwife have a license? Or is she unlicensed?

EMMY: I don't actually know.

TINA: So it didn't really matter to you.

EMMY: No. It didn't really matter to me at all. She has many, many recommendations within the community. And my sister had also worked with her, and I felt very confident that she would not ask me to make any decisions I didn't feel comfortable making or push me into making decisions I didn't feel comfortable making. She was there to stand by my side and be a support person in whatever way I needed her to be, and I trusted her to be that person.

TINA: Fantastic.

EMMY: Mm-hmm. Very lucky here.

TINA: So tell us about the birth itself.

EMMY: Ahh. Twila Astrid.

TINA: I love her name, by the way.

EMMY: Thank you. She has been a ray of sunshine ever since I conceived her. Okay. So woke up at 5:00 a.m. Or no. Woke up around 12:00 and plugged my contractions into a little app. And it said, "Go to the hospital now." I thought that was so funny. So turned off the app because I didn't want to count my contractions throughout my whole—I just wanted to know whether I should tell my sister to come or not. And I messaged my sister, and I was like, "Oh, look at this." And she's like, "Oh, I'm going back to sleep. Your last labor was so long. There is no way I'll miss the baby. So see you tomorrow some time." So then I just kind of was too uncomfortable to stay in bed. So I woke up and watched a little bit of TV for awhile and relaxed with a heating pad. The contractions continued to come on and get a little bit stronger. And so I kind of picked up the house and got—ate a little bit and prepared for baby to come that day. And it was a really special day because that was actually the same day I had given birth to my little miscarriage baby the year before. So they share a birthday which was really, really neat.

TINA: That's very special.

EMMY: Yeah. And I then texted my midwife because of the bleeding that I was having. And she came over, just kind of—we talked about things. My contractions did slow down when she was there. And so I was like, “I think you should go.” So her and her assistant or apprentice—they scooted on out of the house. And we—then my husband and I just kind of hung around, and my contractions continued. But we decided we were just going to go out for breakfast to kill time because I was planning on this being a really long labor. And I didn’t want to just hang around all day waiting. So that’s when things kind of started to get a little bit more intense, and I took that shower. And I kind of laid down and then waters released. And my sister walked in the door at that very moment. And she’s like, “What?” And so my husband is scrambling around trying to get the birth pool set up. And I was like, “Wait. I don’t think I need the birth pool. Why don’t you start smoking lunch out in the smoker instead? I think we’re going to need food more than we’re going to need a birth pool.”

So he ended birth pool mission. And I bounced around on the ball. And I took a bath. And then I labored in our bedroom for a little while. It’s just—looking back it’s hard to remember but it felt like such a short period of time. So then decided to labor in the living room for a little bit, and my sister had contacted our midwife, Brenda, at that time. She showed up. And then we’re kneeling by the couch, and I was in a place of very extreme sensations. And midwife knelt down next to me, and I said, “Brenda, I don’t think I can do this.” And she said, “Then your body can. And if you can’t, that’s okay.” And so she then kind of looked underneath of me because I was kneeling by the couch. And she said, “Would it help if I told you that your baby is on the descent?” And I said, “Yes. That would help a lot especially since I’m thinking that I have a lot—long, long time to go here.”

So I kind of reached down then, touched my baby’s head, which was the coolest thing ever. And my husband was there, and my sister was kind of behind. And our little boy, Fox, who was three at the time, he was there too. And he was a little bit nervous, so he was kind of standing a little bit further away because, in his words, “The noises I was making are noises he never wants to hear again,” which is really funny. But I’m really glad he was there. And then she just sort of slipped out into the world. She just kind of fell right out onto the ground. And I looked down at her, and I didn’t have my glasses on. But I was thinking—I thought it seemed like she might be a girl. So I was like, “Oh my gosh. She’s a girl.” And I put my glasses on and confirmed that. I was just over the moon excited just because I had been thinking she was probably a girl the whole time. and I hadn’t had any ultrasounds to confirm or deny that. So that was such a magical moment especially because, again, with my first birth everyone knew that he was a boy before I did which was really hard.

So then we just did skin to skin for awhile. I decided that I wanted to kind of sit up because my legs were started to hurt in the position that I was in. So I birthed my

placenta there in the living room and kind of walked into the bedroom and laid on the bed. Facetimed some of my family. I was like, “Look. She’s here.” That was special. And took a bath and relaxed and all of those midwife herbs and everything are the best thing ever. Sitz bath. Amazing. Yeah. It was a magical experience. Best day of my life for sure.

TINA: Was there any more of that bleeding?

EMMY: So we were thinking after the fact that it was—I was probably just having that bleeding because my body was opening so quickly. She was born at—it was like 10:59 in the morning or something like that. So my labor from start to finish was only around nine hours which wasn’t surprising to me because my grandma had said that once her water had broken things had moved really quickly. So I was thankful to have that information for my birth. Yeah. Yeah. So no. There wasn’t really a lot of bleeding after—at all or anything like that. No.

TINA: Great.

EMMY: It was good.

TINA: How about your postpartum time? How did you plan for that?

EMMY: Very carefully. I kind of knew exactly what I wanted. And my husband’s idea of what it should have looked like was a little bit different than mine. He really wanted to take a full week of us just nesting alone, but I’m kind of more of a person who I wanted to show off my new baby and tell everybody what I did. So we had I think a couple days or at least a day or two with no people around really except my sister, who helped us out. And then we started inviting family in for a little—short little stints at a time and meet our sweet baby Twila. And most of the time I just had my husband put up a bird feeder out the window, and then I just looked out the window, held my baby, nursed, relaxed, and had a beautiful time. It was blissful.

TINA: It sounds amazing.

EMMY: Yeah. Yeah. I would do it over again in a heartbeat.

TINA: Okay. Well, speaking about doing it again, is there anything you would do differently do you think if you did have another baby?

EMMY: So the only thing that I would potentially do differently—and I’ve told my midwife this many times is that I would have liked to have caught her. I think that would have been really cool to have been able to catch her on the descent, but I was so far into the stars that that was not even close to a reality at all. But she had told me that that was pretty normal. That moms sometimes are kind of in that state of mind. So potentially, if

that was a possibility, catch her a little bit more. Maybe have my hands there when she—when the baby wanted to come out or something like that. But yeah. That's the only thing that I would maybe shift if I could.

TINA: Great.

EMMY: And that's not a source of trauma at all. So it's great.

TINA: Perfect.

EMMY: Yeah.

TINA: Well, I think that is about it. I guess my last question would be do you have any advice for other moms, other dads?

EMMY: Yeah. I would say get really, really comfortable with listening to your heart just on a daily basis for little decisions so that when those big decisions come up you can follow your intuition, follow your gut instinct, and do what you feel the right thing is to do. And then—one other thing—so one thing I have learned from the *How to Have an Indie Birth* course, they had talked a little bit about *Childbirth Without Fear*. And so I am a person who was raised to be terrified of pain and to avoid pain at all costs. If your shoulder hurts, you take Advil. If there is the potential of getting hurt, you don't do that particular situation. You live in fear. And so having that information, I use that throughout my pregnancy any time—I had a leg cramp in the middle of the night or some sort of discomfort just kind of taking the power away from that fear so that I could sit with it. And then when birthing time came, I didn't—I don't—I mean there were some intense feelings, but I wouldn't say painful. And I don't think that I had really any fear about the experience whatsoever. And that was—I feel like that's kind of how I got to that place, if that makes sense.

TINA: It does. It does. Well, thank you so much for sharing your amazing story with us.

EMMY: Thank you for having me.

TINA: Absolutely.

MARYN: To learn about the support, classes, webinars, consults, and more that we offer women and midwives, be sure to subscribe to our newsletter at indiebirth.org. For more information about our midwifery school, visit indiebirthmidwiferyschool.org. Thanks for listening.

(closing music)