

(introductory music)

MARYN: Welcome to *Taking Back Birth*, a podcast for women who know the truth about birth and those who want to explore the path of radical birth love. I'm your host, Maryn Green. *Taking Back Birth* celebrates the power you have to make decisions in alignment with your own truth. Decisions not subject to anyone else's authority. Decisions that create experiences that will change your life. *Taking Back Birth* is a production of the Indie Birth Private Contract Association and indiebirth.org. No material on this podcast should be considered medical advice. Birth is not a medical event.

Margo and I are in the same room which I was trying to remember—has only happened—I don't know how many times on a podcast. Your birth story with Aero was one. I don't know what other ones we have.

MARGO: I don't know. Not very many. That's for sure.

MARYN: The walk and talks don't count because we weren't together.

MARGO: Right. And I was out of breath.

MARYN: And it was freezing. You were trying not to slip.

MARGO: That's right. Cool. Yeah. This is one that I feel like I have been thinking about for a couple years. I remember having kind of like a dialogue with someone in our Wise Woman Circle about, I think, some of the things we'll talk about. So yeah. It's been awhile, but this has been on my mind.

MARYN: Right. Well, you should start us off then.

MARGO: Okay. A water birth. It's a thing that I feel like a lot of people ask me about especially when they're pretty new to the idea of birth. It's kind of like an entry point. And I think it's because it feels so novel and—yeah. Just so novel and they've maybe seen photos or videos or heard about this water birth thing. I feel like it's kind of in the same category as placenta encapsulation or now vaginal steaming. It's like this—it's a—what's the word? Like a hot topic or at least it has been. So yeah. Even on my website, I was editing earlier today. I have on there, "Yes. I do water births," because it's a thing I feel like a lot of especially more mainstream people kind of ask. Like, "Oh, do you do that?" And they want to hear about that, and baby is born under water. And they all ask kind of the same questions about like, "How does the baby not breathe underwater," which I guess we could talk about. But yeah. And I think a lot of the births I saw with you during my apprenticeship—a lot of them were water births. We should add that to our stats form.

MARYN: Yeah. I would be curious to see how many. And I agree with a lot of what you've said—or all of it really. It seems like it's synonymous with home birth for people that are new. They just think if you're going to have a home birth you're going to have a water birth. And I think it's fun to think about—well, I guess we'll talk about why that is or what people think that is or how that's different somehow from just birth and maybe how it's not as pretty or romantic to just think of having your baby on your bathroom floor kind of thing. But yeah. As a student myself, I feel like I saw mostly water births, which I think I have said on other podcasts contributed to—well, a lot of good things as a student. But a lot of learning that took more time, I felt like, because I just never saw the birth process really. just all underwater. And then the baby was out. So it made it hard as a student to learn what that looks like when someone is not in water.

MARGO: Mm-hmm. Yeah. There's so many different directions to take it. I guess what I was going to say after that was just that I feel like in the last couple years I've seen a lot less than I saw as a student.

MARYN: Why do you think that is?

MARGO: I guess that's what we'll talk about. Well, I mean I think part of it perhaps is—I mean it sounds kind of like self centered or something. But I have had two land births. And I talk about it with my clients prenatally. I have three pools that I loan out, and they can get liners for if they want to use them. Pretty much everyone that I work with has one. But I feel like just the images that they're seeing and the stories that they're hearing and the midwife that they chose, like myself, I show them photos and videos of my births, and I had both of mine on the ground. So I don't know if there's just an element of seeing is believing and just imprinting what it might look like.

MARYN: That's so influential. And I feel the same since my last two were documented land births as well that somehow—I don't know what it is. People feel like they have permission to do that. Or I don't know. Just seeing how a person does that. How do they move around? Or what position would they choose on the ground? And yeah. Not wanting to be in a pool or just knowing that it's open to do whatever they want to do.

MARGO: Mm-hmm. So yeah. I guess that can be a good segue into one of the reasons I think water birth has become so popular—and I think it's, again, just not having the imaginal power to kind of—yeah. Imagine what it would look like outside of the hospital. So we see the lithotomy position in a bed. Birth happens in that spot. That place and in that way.

MARYN: Right. That's the way it looks.

MARGO: And so I think people when they haven't had a lot of exposure to other ways that it can look think, "Well, there needs to be a way that it happens at home." There

just needs to be a home birth version of that. I'm not saying everyone chooses it for this reason but, of course, that's always an (inaudible).

MARYN: Well, it's like an underlying thing maybe in our culture. It's not like people are consciously thinking that.

MARGO: Right. Like in the hospital, you have a baby in the bed. And when you're at home, you have a baby in a pool.

MARYN: Right.

MARGO: Or in the bed. When I talk to high schoolers, they often—I usually half way through remember like, “Oh, they don't even know that part.” I say, “Where do you think a baby—like what position is someone usually in?” And they all say, “Oh yeah. On their back with their legs up.”

MARYN: Oh man. Right.

MARGO: And then when I say, “No. Most of the babies I see born are born on the floor,” and they go, “What?” Like how—like they don't even know how to conceptualize what that might look like.

MARYN: Yeah. Yeah. Well, in that way then, of course, water birth is an awesome option, and that would be a great thing for teenagers to know about. I wonder too if it's just a way of hiding away the real images of birth like the poop and the blood and the—people are sort of protected from anyone seeing that. Us, partners, whoever. And I think that does feel better and safer to some women, and there's probably more to that too. Just that container. That literal container.

MARGO: A literal container. And, of course, I think there's lots of other resources that talk about all the benefits of water birth, the things that people love about it. So we don't necessarily need to go there. But there are good reasons, and some people really love how it feels.

MARYN: Yeah. I mean there are. But by the same token, people should just choose what feels best to them.

MARGO: In the moment.

MARYN: Yeah. Not because there is an alleged benefit on a list. I mean I think water birth is awesome. I've had a few myself. But I don't know. Not for that reason. Not for any of the reasons that they highlight on the list that also feels very almost medical in a sense because we're all so different. And women that hate water won't experience those benefits and et cetera.

MARGO: Yeah. Well, in a word, I think you were going with what your thread a moment ago like in addition to it being kind of like a more hidden private place like just the way that medicalized midwifery has made that kind of a necessity for a lot of people which has—which makes sense. But I think also has drawbacks. When I was at the birth center for a couple weeks during part of my apprenticeship, I did a vaginal exam on somebody in a pool. It is possible.

MARYN: Sure.

MARGO: Or checking the baby for cord when their head is out. It can still happen in the—I think there's a false sense of security for some—in some cases. But I think that that sometimes informs this trend as well as midwifery has gotten less good at leaving people alone and giving them privacy and letting them be undisturbed, honoring that space, women have sort of taken this as a kind of a way around that.

MARYN: Yeah. It makes me think of that one water birth video we show in the free workshop, which is no longer on YouTube. The birth center one.

MARGO: Oh yeah.

MARYN: And it is a water birth, but there are six hands for the birth of the baby and gloves and all kinds of stuff. And when I watch that one, I just wonder if that woman feels cornered. So in that case, water could maybe feel like you're trapped. So it comes back to the original point of people knowing what they want and not really choosing based on location.

MARGO: Yeah. The other thing that kind of popped into my head—these are all variations on the same theme. But things I think that are interesting to think about like I think another part of it is, “Oh, I'm having a home birth, so I'm going to use this fantastical tool to make it possible. I need a thing to make it so it's okay and doable.” And this whole narrative around the liquid epidural. And I remember during my first birth thinking, “Whoever made that phrase up, I'm mad at them right now because this is not that.”

MARYN: Yeah. Yeah. It can definitely disappoint.

MARGO: Yeah. And that's another aspect that I think I like to talk to people about ahead of time. It might be amazing, and it might provide a lot of relief and feel really good for all the reasons we know it can. But it also might be a—don't put all your eggs in one basket. And I think that's what I've seen. I've seen some people do. They're like, “Oh, I'm having a home water birth. Everything is good.” As long as I've got that thing in my plan, I'm golden.

MARYN: Right. Yeah. And people that have had babies, I feel like if they say that that's often what they do because they know how they do it or they know what they want. But for first births, it's a great tool. And that's how I put it. Sure. Let's have a pool. We'll help you set it up. Where do you want to put it? But it's a tool. Don't think about the baby being born and necessarily no one cares. We don't care. You can do what you want. And I think related is many people will choose to put the pool in a very open space. I mean some don't. Some go in their bedroom. But kitchens or family rooms. And I found those are the ones that often end up in the bathroom corner. Yeah. Because they're—it's like a stage or something. I mean the pools are big. They're not things you normally have. Yeah.

MARGO: So they need a big room often. Yeah.

MARYN: It's like weird to all of a sudden have this giant pool in your kitchen.

MARGO: It is weird. Yeah. I guess that's another aspect we've talked about is when we're talking about home birth and women feeling private, safe, and unobserved and in their power and in their normal environment, what does—what is the impact of having an inflatable pool of a sudden appear? I didn't do it at all with my second birth. And I think it was really good to not be like, "When am I going to blow it up?"

MARYN: Have another thing.

MARGO: "Am I in labor?" And it being a thing that had to change too. I have to change something in my environment because I'm in labor instead of I'm just going to live my life and continue my life while in labor. And I did use my bath rub which was really nice. And I did enjoy it way more than I enjoyed the pool with my first birth. Yeah. What does that stress do? And often I feel like it stresses partners out.

MARYN: Right.

MARGO: This is all sounding like I hate pools, which is not true. But it's good to have the flip side of (inaudible).

MARYN: Yeah. I mean I don't think we hate them. I think it's really just—

MARGO: I have said that though in moments.

MARYN: Well, I mean yeah. I guess I'll be honest. I wouldn't say I hate. But I don't need people to have a birth in a pool for any reason other than if they want to. I don't think it's the greatest. I don't think it's the worst. I don't notice any difference in babies transitioning. I don't notice any difference with how people seem to interpret labor sensations. So it's just always comes back to do what works. But frankly, it's a hassle

for a lot of people, and that's how I wound up feeling—and I think that's something I probably pass on a little bit.

MARGO: Me too.

MARYN: Because I'm not as helpful. Like when I was a student, we had all the equipment. The sump pump. All of it. And as a student, I got to do it all. I got to—

MARGO: It was part of the job.

MARYN: Yeah. I was—yeah. Cleaning up pools, which is not fun. So I kind of swore—and, again, maybe selfishly just as a midwife I wasn't going to promote it that hard. If you want it, then you're going to do it just like if you want an ultrasound. You should go do it. But it's a lot of work, and it falls on someone. And if it's the partner, I don't know if this is what you were trying to say. But it's a big responsibility to figure out the timing and then figuring out how to empty it and all that when you're having a baby.

MARGO: And the temperature. Keeping it hot. I know—

MARYN: Yeah. It's not nothing.

MARGO: - Russell was very annoyed with how many times he had to heat it up and bail it out the first birth. Yeah. But like you said, it falls on someone. Someone's energy is going to go to that. And I can even think of some recent ones where I was being helpful and thinking like, "Wow. I could have made her a meal." I mean I did. But maybe I would have made her another meal or done something with the other kids or—I don't know. Cleaned up better if I hadn't had to spend the time on that. Which isn't to say it was not a good choice, it's just—

MARYN: Again, if someone wants it, I'll do whatever they want. But the last birth I had one set up was Belgium's. So she's the fifth baby. And so I intended to use it, and I remember so clearly my son, at the time, was like—I don't know. How old was he? Five or six?

MARGO: Mm-hmm.

MARYN: Five? And he was super helpful, and it was a brand new pool. I remember exactly where we put it. And they set it up. Jason and Egan set it up. I got in for maybe one contraction, and I felt like a caged animal. And I never got in one again. It just doesn't work for my brain. It makes me feel trapped and—

MARGO: Wet.

MARYN: Yeah. Wet.

MARGO: Soggy.

MARYN: Well, and it's like—okay. This sounds extreme, but I'll share it anyway. It's almost like I have a little PTSD around being in a pool myself because the feeling in my other labors was so artificial. I can smell the pool. And I can remember being in it and how it feels. How that weird plastic against your skin. And somehow associating that with the pain of labor in my brain. That sounds crazy. So I felt like I didn't want to experience that way anymore, and I had a lot more freedom with my body to not be in there. There's only so many things you can do in there.

MARGO: Right.

MARYN: And so that's why it didn't work for me.

MARGO: And the getting in and out, in and out. Like you said too, the first birth, which I think, again, pretty much every person that I work with has a pool of some sort. But yeah. There's only—like you said, there's only kind of so many positions. And when people get hot or cold or want to get out, it's just—it does—I mean it's funny because one of the things we talk about I think with water birth is that it promotes mobility because you're more weightless and easier to switch positions. But in other ways, it inhibits mobility. You can't walk around in the pool. I mean you could get up, but then you're going to be cold and blah, blah, blah. So it's like in some ways it promotes mobility. Like you can change positions, but I mean I personally have experienced being able to change positions on land quickly too even though I was an enormous pregnant person.

MARYN: Yeah. And I guess that reminds me of labor too when people like kind of hang out in the same position in the pool or the pool in general for hours. I mean you can get dehydrated and just kind of—I don't know. Weakened in a certain way from just being in there. I don't know.

MARGO: I feel like it's a morale bummer too. If someone thinks they're getting in the pool because they're going to have their baby in the pool, that time they're in the pool—this is the time I get in. And it's coming out, and then it doesn't. And then they need to get out. They need to fix the pool up again. It can be such an energetic bummer too.

MARYN: Yeah. I know. It's such a funny thing. I mean labor is a funny thing. But that's a feeling I often have around it is someone—especially first births is someone is in it for awhile. Like you, as the midwife, start to feel like, "You should probably get out." There's just something about the energy that gets super stagnant in there."

MARGO: Well, because they're in the same five square feet.

MARYN: Well, right. And even Michel Odent and all his water birth stuff, the point was—the point was to have the woman get in, sort of in almost transitiony like six, seven centimeters, and get in to have a baby within—I don't know what, right? Like an hour or two probably.

MARGO: Mm-hmm.

MARYN: So it really makes you think just how does it work or not for someone mentally, emotionally when it's like hours and hours in and out of water.

MARGO: Floating around.

MARYN: Yeah. When we're not—we may like water. And, again, I totally honor people that are like, "I'm a water person. I must have a pool." But if you're not, then to spend many hours of the day even one day in water seems strange.

MARGO: It does.

MARYN: Because we're not water creatures. I mean we are when we're in utero. But you know. It's interesting.

MARGO: My leg fell asleep. It hurts so bad.

MARYN: I know.

MARGO: Ah, no. Don't shake it.

MARYN: Oh dear.

MARGO: That's funny. Yeah. It's like it turns into a birth broth. Just like a sad—it is not the same energy of being like, "Okay. Let's try the toilet for awhile. Now we're going,"—and someone getting up and going in the other room. And like, "I want to walk the stairs." It's not the same as like, "I'm going to get in the pool. I'm going to get out of the pool." It's just a lot. yeah.

MARYN: Yeah. I can't really think of a birth. Maybe there is one. But especially a longer first birth kind of thing where someone had a pool and then at the very end ended up birthing in it. It's like why the end when you've been doing this for awhile you need that shift in energy and gravity to be like, "Okay."

MARGO: It's usually not the thing people choose at that point.

MARYN: Yeah. It's very interesting. I mean the people that usually love it are the ones that—yeah. Just have the kind of labors—

MARGO: Get in and have a baby.

MARYN: Yeah. They get in. They're in there a couple hours. They have a baby. I know with my first water birth I didn't get it at all because I didn't know anything. But I thought it was cool because I was having my first home birth. And it was just assumed that I would have a baby in the pool. I don't even know that anyone asked me. No one forced me. But I remember being in the bathroom on the toilet and feeling like the baby was going to come. And it actually was the sac, but he was behind it. And like I jumped into the pool because that's—

MARGO: That's what you do.

MARYN: That's what I was kind of taught in the brief time I had with my midwife. When the baby is coming, you get in the pool which, of course, for pain relief is absolutely silly. It didn't do anything. And the pool was too hot. People have heard this story before. So Jason was throwing ice in, and it wound up just being kind of funny and dramatic and perfect.

MARGO: When you could have just had him.

MARYN: I could have just had—but I was freaked out. I had never had a baby at home, and there was something like so real and raw about feeling all of it and just being on my bathroom floor.

MARGO: Right. Instead of in that safe place where you're supposed to have a baby.

MARYN: Right. Right. Right. Right. Right. It felt scary. And, of course, I flip flopped now. I'd much rather be on the safe space of my floor but yeah. It's interesting to think of how people might perceive it all.

MARGO: It is so interesting. Hmm. I'm trying to think if there is anything else.

MARYN: Yeah. I mean I don't know. There's always stuff I guess. And we all know there's people that are like super into it as a—call themselves water birth midwives, for example. And that's cool. I mean I don't really understand or resonate with that because I feel like I want people to do what they want to do. But maybe those people only get people that want water births for some reason.

MARGO: Mm-hmm.

MARYN: And I know one of my mentors, whose done lots of breech births et cetera—she says that she won't have it any other way, if she gets a say, for something like to happen in water.

MARGO: For breech.

MARYN: Yeah. Where I do not have that comfort level, and I don't know that I ever will or would. But that's not something I've been exposed to, so everybody is different.

MARGO: Yeah. Yeah. I guess that was the other part maybe. I don't know that this is too different than what we've already said but for the sake of saying it since that's—this is probably the only time we'll ever talk about it on a podcast. I think there's also this assumption—I mean like I said the liquid epidural thing and also that a water birth is inherently peaceful and calm and there's candles. It's part of the romanticism of home birth.

MARYN: The Enya music and stuff. Yeah.

MARGO: Exactly. And so, again, I think it can be either disappointing or just huh. That's not what I quite thought it would be like. It was just—I was just wet. I could have done that without the pool.

MARYN: Right.

MARGO: And so I just think it's an interesting thing especially—and I guess we didn't talk about this. But there's such a huge market. Hundreds of dollars for pools. And—

MARYN: Yeah. It's not a cheap thing.

MARGO: - pool rentals and—yeah. So I definitely try and keep it low key. I do have—like I said, I have pools for people, but they're the economy model. And I don't know that I will replace them once they're gone.

MARYN: Right. I know. It's always—I don't even buy them. I just take inherited pools from clients that buy them and want to give them away because they don't really want them hanging around their house. And I think that's also funny because I feel like the pools kind of get the energy of the people that own them. And I've had a few that no one else ever birthed in. No one ever births in them because they were just made for that person or something. But yeah. Lots of things to think about.

MARGO: Mm-hmm.

MARYN: But, again, yeah. I'd always recommend people figure out what they really want and kind of try to feel it in their bodies. And if you're on the water birth track, maybe you feel kind of like pressured or—I don't know. Maybe your midwife has the list of supplies you're supposed to get. Does that feel right to you? Because it is. It's a lot of extra stuff to get ready when you're having a baby.

MARGO: Just ultimately maybe a distraction from what is most important. Yeah. I guess my parting words would be to just be really open minded about how it can look and watch lots of videos and check out birth photography and see the many different

ways the babies can come and know that you'll know the right way in the moment. But I think if you haven't thought about it and tried to expand your horizons in the moment—the only time I've ever seen someone give birth on a bed, I think, was at the birth center. And I think it was because they were people who hadn't really thought about where will I have the baby. Obviously, I'll have it on the bed.

MARYN: Right.

MARGO: So we have the intuition, but I think we have to give ourselves permission and practice using it before that moment comes.

MARYN: Yeah. Totally. That reminds me. I met with someone yesterday who is having their first baby. And I was like, "Next time when I come to your house, let's do your house tour," and I kind of tried to explain what that meant. She's like, "Oh my house isn't that big." I'm like, "No. I mean just let's go room to room. I want to hear your thoughts on how that room feels." And she does want to set up a pool, so let's talk about where that could work. Or maybe the benefits or drawbacks or time of day that you would feel better here or there. It does pay to think about it. And then in this person's case, blessing the space and saying prayers around the house. I don't know. Just starting to feel it in whatever way it ends up happening.

MARGO: Mm-hmm.

MARYN: Because likely, it will be in that house. And that's really cool.

MARGO: It's super cool. We could do a whole podcast on that part of where babies are born whether it's the pool or not. The spot that they're born. It just feels so special and cool. I guess I'll say 20 seconds worth of it. But with Aero's birth, I set up that whole spot in my room. We had a light, so that we could get good photos. Which is actually ultimately good because the photos in there didn't turn out. But we had a GoPro set up because I was like that's where I'm going to have the baby.

MARYN: I know.

MARGO: Where else would I have the baby? And then I had the baby next to the toilet, which is hilarious. I mean I'm a midwife, and I know that that's where a lot of people have their babies. But I was like why would I be near the toilet. That doesn't seem like it makes any sense to me like how I felt. And I even thought if I have the baby in the bathroom, I had a spot where I thought I would do it. And alas.

MARYN: Yeah. That's a great way to end. Do we ultimately have control? We don't. We're just open to it. Well, unless your house is really small like mine because I feel like I didn't—I don't have a lot of options. So you can have a house like that too where you're like, "Well, it's pretty much going to be here unless I,"—

MARGO: Unless something funny happens.

MARYN: Unless I go outside and—but yeah.

MARGO: Yeah. But you didn't—I mean maybe that is a fun thing to talk about. Even you had multiple births at your house, they've all been—some are different. A little bit. At least pointing a different direction.

MARYN: Right. Right.

MARGO: Which is cool.

MARYN: Yeah. Well, right. And Ever was downstairs which is weird because now the downstairs is kind of different, so it's even hard to imagine the room she was born in. It doesn't—it's not the same room, so it feels really weird. It's like an imaginary location that I never thought of that. I mean I just went down there to get away from people. That's all.

MARGO: And to get to the bath speaking of water.

MARYN: I took a bath. Yeah. I never intended to birth her in the basement.

MARGO: Yeah. And well, like—yeah. I wonder too if with my second birth—with Aero—if I had had a bigger bath tub, if I would have just let him come out in the water. Something about it just felt really weird. I mean it was just not big enough. But if it had been, I still don't know that I would have done it that way because I like being—I liked being able to be up and on the ground.

MARYN: Yeah. And well not to go on tangents but water birth in bath tubs is quite a different topic for most normal size people. I don't understand although we just witnessed one, so people do it.

MARGO: I've seen it. Yeah.

MARYN: Yeah. People do it. And when it happens, that's where it happens. But I've always thought, "How do you get your legs wide enough?" For me, just the way my body is, I couldn't do it in a bath tub unless I was forced to. But I get the getting in and not being able to get out because I feel like that—

MARGO: Right. Getting stuck. Yeah.

MARYN: That's kind of a theme of—well, when a baby is coming regardless of whether it's in water or not.

MARGO: Mm-hmm. Well, this was fun.

MARYN: This is awesome. We might do another round or two here if we have time. But if not, this could be it. This could be the only podcast we're on together for quite awhile. So thanks for listening. And if it's sometime soonish, we have our Birth Warrior project, doula training program here at Indie Birth, so check out indiebirth.org/birthwarriorproject. It's probably our most—I don't know. Like loved and influential course at the moment, so we'd love to see more of you all around the world who want go get involved in birth in some way. And it's a great start. All right. Thanks for listening.

(closing music)