

Midwifery_For_The_People- Jennifer_Summerfeldt_FINAL_CUT

Midwifery for the people is a podcast about re-imagining the way we approach the entirety of the birthing year. Margo's goal is to combine her radical imagination with her knack for strategizing to bolster the birth revolution and a larger global revolution of feminine consciousness. Midwifery for the people is a production of the Indie Birth association and Indie Birth dot org.

No material on this podcast should be considered medical advice. Birth is not a medical event now here's your host, Michael Blackstone.

Hello everyone. And welcome back to another episode. And I have, I think this is the first time I've had somebody return to the podcast which I think is pretty cool. We have returning guest, Jennifer Summerfeldt, and I'm super excited. We're gonna have a conversation that is different than our last one.

I'm sure it will be just as good if not better though. It's the episode that we did together previously is one that I refer to a lot here at Indie Birth and that people have found a ton of value in. And so I'm gonna ask Jennifer to just give a brief introduction in case you don't already know who she is.

Yeah. Sure. Thanks for having me back on your podcast. I love what you're doing with Indie Birth and it's a real pleasure and honor to be here and have this conversation with you. For those of you who don't know who I am, I'm up in Canada, I work as a perinatal mental health therapist. I run a practice where we serve moms across Canada.

We offer online trauma informed and nervous system informed or polyvagal informed for those of you who know what that is therapy. I specialize in birth trauma, recovery, and geek out on anything and everything to do with trauma, neuron-biology, consciousness, and healing. Prior to this work I'm also an author of healing after birth and midwifery for the soul.

And prior to this I was, I guess you could say a trained, direct entry midwife never worked as a midwife or registered midwife and was on the frontiers of what we

now know as free birth culture. And I had some of the grandmothers in the field and the grandfathers in the field. Train me, which I feel really grateful for.

And prior to that, I was in grad school studying sports psychology and peak performance. And so I have merged all of that together. So my passion for birth really came out of the work that I had done as an elite athlete and as a sports psychologist or training sports psychologist. And I just applied a lot of those principles to my own birth preparation when I was 23 years old.

So 22 years ago, and it worked and then that kind of opened me up to a whole other paradigm of birth that I'm sure we're gonna talk about today. That's who I am and where I am. Yeah, that's really exciting. And I guess to give a little bit of context to this conversation it's coming from you reaching out after I had sent out a recent post where I was talking about birth liberties and the rise of, oh, it's so hard to even find the words sometimes, like what is going on out there in the world, but the rise of Instagram.

Births who are attending births are speaking really passionately. And as if they have a lot of expertise when they don't actually. And so you reached out saying, this is really interesting. Here are some things I've seen. And of course I wanted to hear your perspective no matter what, but you also made this really cool point, which was that you have been in this world for 22 years and have some longevity that I don't have.

I've only been around the birth space for the last 10 years. And like you said, specifically have some really cool training and connections and roots in some of the grandmothers and grandfathers of the free birth movement. And so I think you come from this really unique vantage point to speak to some of this that I don't necessarily have.

And so I think it'd be, it's gonna be really fun to talk about all of this with you. Yeah. So yeah, let's maybe start at the beginning. You said your first born initiated you into this world of midwifery and you were applying some of your grad school stuff to your preparation for that.

Tell me a little bit about that. What did that look like? yeah, I'd love to, so yeah, we're getting into my origin story and the origin story. It I have rushed it in the

past and I'm learning how to have a slower conversation around some of these really monumental experiences that have initiated me and imprinted me.

And now I'm starting to realize the value of it and I didn't back then. I do think that I've come into this work in a very unique way and that I've always instinctively listened to my body and my inner knowing without realizing that's what I was doing. And when I was pregnant with my first, it was an unplanned, unexpected pregnancy.

I was just finishing up grad school and struggling and long story short, never actually finished my thesis. I got burnt out and struggled with some depressive episodes and then I found myself pregnant and I was like, oh my goodness. , okay I'm going to adjust to this. It didn't even occur to me that I wasn't going to embrace this next phase of my life, but I had no bloody clue what that meant.

I hadn't been initiated into the world of, let's say the feminine mysteries or even felt connected to my health or my menstrual health. I was an athlete and I was in sports psychology, which was very dominated by the masculine. You could say. And so I was in my head a lot and I was active a lot.

And I was the furthest thing from feminine. And so motherhood was never on my radar. I never thought I'd be a mom. I remember telling people growing up, I'm never gonna be a mom. I remember telling the father of my children when we had first met, Hey, I'm a feminist, you can stay home with the kids.

I'm gonna work. I'm gonna have my master's, I'll make the money . And I really believed about it until I had a child. And I think it's important to understand and paint the picture of who I was before I was initiated into birth. And so one of the things that I carried with me was a trust in my biology and the performance of my biology because of that athletic background.

And so just like most people I don't know about maybe not so much today because of there being so much information available on social media, but back then, of course, no social media, I don't even think I had, I didn't have home internet yet. No cell phones, I love those days. we go back to it. So what did I do? The first thing I did is I grabbed a copy of what to expect when you're expecting, because I wanted to join the club and I do hear this still comes outta mom's mouths. I find. Yeah. And so of course reading this book by the way, I

went to a walk-in clinic that was my first OBS physician visit that told me I was pregnant and out of the blue, I said to this very old family physician and I don't even know where I got this idea from, but I had said, Hey, what do you think about water birth?

And he looked at me and point blank said if you wanna kill your baby, And oh, wow. Yeah. And this, the reason why I tell this part is because it's gonna come back around, it's important to pay attention to what imprints us. And we're really impressionable, especially in those early days, especially when it's new to us.

So I'm reading what to expect when you're expecting. And it's just horror stories. Yeah. And all I experienced was fear. And when I started to imagine that experience in the hospital with all of these potential things happening to me that are for the safety and well-being of the baby. So they say I just knew in my system that is not the experience I wanted to have and that there must be something else out there.

Because the whole book was about not trusting your biology and not trusting this process. And I instinctively knew that. So I happened to already be somewhat in the granola field because I was working in the natural health food store. I was a foodie since I was 16. I was a vegetarian and I liked healthy food.

And so that kind of bridged those worlds. And in that food store, there was a copy of May Ga-Skins no, her spiritual, midwifery. And somebody there said, you need to read this book. I went from what to expect when you're expecting to spiritual midwifery, to very contradicting pieces of information or literature.

I went from the horrors of what could happen to, orgies and psychedelic and all kinds of wording that, I was quite uncomfortable with at that time. So I got initiated. You could say quite quickly just based on the literature I was reading, but again, I knew, although I didn't want to have a birth orgy.

I knew that I wanted to have a home birth there was something about what I was reading in spiritual midwifery that resonated. And I was like, okay, so what's the climate of midwifery where I'm from. So I was in Alberta at the time that's up central Canada. And at that time, midwifery was they were registered, but there, it wasn't regulated, so they didn't have hospital privileges.

Okay. So you had to pay for a midwife out of pocket and you could interview your midwife. And so I did, I interviewed midwives by the way, I was seven and a half months pregnant. I fired my obstetrician because she started to get mad at me for being a vegetarian and taking a whole bunch of supplements and herbs.

And she thought I was just quack and I was advocating for myself without realizing I was advocating for myself. So I fired them and I, yep. And I had no money. We were 23 years old and, servers and coming outta school and, it's not like we were affluent to afford a midwife.

And at that time it was \$2,000. I'm Canadian. And I sold my motorcycle and my, I sold my motorcycle for \$1,800 and I profited and I paid for my midwife. And so that's the story of how I first hired my midwife. And now at that time, I wasn't aware of the different paradigms of midwifery. I just wanted a home birth.

And like most new moms who, have been indoctrinated with this is, the mainstream way of giving birth as you go to the hospital and you do all that stuff. I had a lot of questions, of course I had questions about safety. What, if this happens, what if that happens?

And those are pretty typical questions that still come up for new moms who are considering home birth. . And so I asked all those questions. I felt satisfied by them. And the thing that I had going for me was I knew how to prepare my mind. So much of sports psychology is, about preparation of the mind so that you can peak perform.

So I decided this birth was gonna be a peak performance birth , for those of you don't know, I was I was scouted for the Olympics and I had an injury that prevented me from moving forward. And so I have a pretty tenacious athletic spirit in me. And so I decided this would be my Olympics and it was, and I struck gold.

My first birth experience was incredible. I of course it's unlike anything. I could have expected. It threw me for a loop, but I had a four hour labor and, that's pretty unheard of first time around. Amazing. Yeah. And I just still, to this day, as I'm telling this story, I remember it.

I can feel it in my body. I know where I was. I know what room I was in. I know what house I was in. I can remember the smells of it. And I remember there was this point where the intensity was so extreme and outta body almost experience. And I knew I needed to. Go deeper in. And I knew I needed to get a grip on my mind and my fear.

And so I just started to repeat a mantra in intuitively and I just, with every breath, went deeper into each contraction until the point where everybody around me just disappeared. It didn't matter who was there and because the birth was so quick, my midwives actually didn't have any opportunity to intervene in any way aside from assist the delivery.

And as my son was being born and I tell them, I tell all my kids, their birth story on their birthday as my son was being born. And his head was emerging in water. I said to my midwife, is he gonna die? And she looked at me and she said no. And I said, but that whole imprint came in of that doctor that initially said that.

And I said, but will he be, will he breathe? And she said no, they're going from water to water. It's totally safe. He's fine. And I got over my fear, but that fear showed up. , which I talk a lot about when I'm working with moms, because we don't always realize what we're being imprinted.

When we're listening to certain stories and how they might show up in our birth experience. And it's not necessarily that we have to prevent them from showing up. That would be great, but we need to know what to do with them if they do show up. Yeah. So that was my initiation. Soon as he was born, I felt elated.

I had all the beautiful juices of the hormones running through me and I declared that nobody's taking care of my child, but me. So there's no way that I'm letting my husband stay home and I'm gonna go back and do my thing. This overwhelming instinctive nature to take care of my offspring absolutely floored me because it was very much in contradiction to what my personality was, to what I had always thought growing up all of a sudden, because I believed that I had an instinctive birth experience where my hormones were intact.

This natural behavior just came out of me. And and that was there the entire time. So that is the birth that initiated me into the world of. Would I say, human rights and childbirth and midwifery care and alternative birthing practices, and

then eventually into undisturbed, physiological, instinctive birth, and then eventually into the free birth movement where I was learning how to hold space for those moms.

So I'll just pause there for a moment, 'cause there's a lot more and I could just talk for hours that was really beautiful. Thank you so much for sharing that with us. Like I think there are so many nuggets of wisdom in there and before we even hopped on and we were just, conversing by email, like yeah, the origin story.

And I think like you even maybe directly said not knowing in the moment, the importance of all of that and what it might turn into and here 22 years later, like how profound and cool those memories and that story really are. I have to know what sport, oh yeah. I was a fastball player.

Volleyball was my love, but the sport that I went somewhere with was fastball. That was a back catcher. So I knew how to squat amazing.

Yeah. Yeah. Amazing. Yeah, I guess tell me a little bit how you, you just gave us the fast forward through some of these other pieces, but how did you go from, I guess I had one other question for you before we keep going. Do you have any inkling of where that question came from when you asked the doctor about water birth?

Like where that seed maybe had been planted? Cause I think that's such a fascinating thing. I know it is that the same thing in my origin story of not, it was not the same, but in, in like people are like how'd you even hear about midwifery? And I'm like, I wish I could go back in time and figure that out.

But yeah, like when I replay that time period in my mind, I, I don't know if I had already come into spiritual midwifery, but I don't think so because this was the walking clinic that said yes, you're pregnant. So I don't think I had already come into into the, that book. It still baffles me where I would've heard or maybe seen in a movie, but why would I seen it in a movie?

This was year 2000, but it speaks too to that imprinting. Yeah. In, in, in a positive way too. Yeah. So there's so many women who have come to me and said, I got

interested in midwifery because of, yeah, just. Small little glimpses, but often aren't even accurate portrayals of home birth or midwifery.

But call the midwife the show right now, people are into, or, yeah. Anyways, so I was curious if you had any inkling 'cause think that's so cool, but so tell me, okay, good. Then you had this beautiful four hour home birth what happened next? How did you proceed to, having you had you went on to have two more babies?

Correct? I did. I did. And

All by the way, unplanned so yeah, I again, was tuned into following what I would now call as my kind of instinctive nature you could say and would feel into what felt right versus what was socially expected of me or culturally expected of me. So right from the beginning, I knew that I wanted to parent differently.

And so , I did all those things and I came across books and I read a whole bunch of natural parenting books and I, decided to co-sleep and I child led what weaned and I, did all the things that were counterculture and the family would push back on and didn't understand, why we were doing what we were doing exclusive breastfeeding and, cloth diapering.

And and one of the things that I think shocks people is that my children have never seen a doctor or a pediatrician . So I even was radical in the sense of why do my kids need to go see a pediatrician unless they're really sick and I can't deal with it. So totally as a community, a moms, I did meet a community of moms.

We just took care of our own children. And it was really incredible. And I look back on those days wow, what an opportunity that we had in a time when we had a bit of freedom to be able to do those things. So yeah, I was pretty radical, but didn't realize how radical I. I was just listening, I guess you could say to what intuitively felt, that included, coming across books like books about the educational system and then choosing to home-school my children for as much as I could. So that naturally lends towards also getting into birth work and midwifery care and childbirth education and childbirth advocacy.

All of that kind of got lumped together. , it wasn't until I was pregnant with my second. So this was 2001 the twin towers nine 11 happened and we relocated

back to my hometown in Manitoba. And again, I had to hire a midwife at eight months pregnant and with my second. And it was during that time that I met my still friend all these years later we decided to open a parenting pregnancy birthing store.

So we opened earth mother when I was pregnant about a month. Okay. No, hang on. We came up with the idea when I was pregnant, we opened it after I had given birth. Okay. So we opened a brick and mortar store with literally like \$1,200 to each of our names. . I still laugh at it. And we became this community hub for alternative parenting in Manitoba 2001.

So go back in time, we were about 10 years ahead of the curve. Yes. Like we, we designed a wrap people weren't wearing wraps yet. So we really missed out on the trend. We should have waited, but anyways that was called earth mother. And then through earth mother, we started to take training to be a doula.

So that kind of, we would bring educators in, we would bring prenatal yoga instructors in, we would bring people to teach childbirth classes into the store. And then we started to take our own training. And so I, at that time first trained with Donna because that's what you did.

And then I realized, yep. Yeah. And then I realized, oh, this is lacking. This is really dry. This is not the kind of doula work I wanna be doing. Yeah, no, not insulting doula, but just, wasn't my cup of tea wasn't for me. Yeah. And so then I went on and trained with Gloria Le. And so I don't know if any of you in America knew who Gloria lame is, but Gloria was a pretty well renowned radical midwife here in Canada and BC who bucked the system and decided not to be registered as registration was coming into form as midwifery is becoming more professional here in Canada And so we trained with Gloria and of course it was like, yes, this is what we're looking for. . And I say, we, because my business partner and I were together, so we did a lot of that together. So trained with Gloria came back and started to attend births kind of Gloria LA me style, which by the way, is very hands off.

Very undisturbed and little did I know that Gloria was not liked by the registered midwife. So this introduced me to the politics of midwifery and sent me down the rabbit hole of understanding the whole political platform when it comes to all the different ways in which midwives become midwives.

And it was like, oh my gosh, can't we not just simplify this? So yeah, sure enough. All the support that we were receiving from the local birthing community and home birthing midwifery community just stopped overnight because we had trained with Gloria. And so now we were blacklisted in Manitoba as being dangerous birth attendants or doulas, sorry, we weren't even birth attendants.

We were just doulas. And we were really advocating for moms to, basically get the support that they needed to have as much of an instinct of physiological birth as possible. And sometimes that included them not calling their midwives. And so you could imagine that didn't go over very well.

So that was Manitoba. I was young. I was 25 when I started to do that had two children and thought I was an expert

and probably was a bit of a loud mouth. I think I was more rebellious and courageous back then than I am today. I didn't really realize that we weren't liked until I realized that we weren't liked. And but that didn't stop me because what I kept doing was listening to.

what my system knew was truth and not what society or culture was telling me what truth was, but what actually felt like truth in my system. And also what supported physiology, what supported the biology. That's what made the most sense to me, I, I had a background in kinesiology, so it just made sense that we worked in a way that was supportive of the biology , and the psychology.

So I would just listen to that call and sure enough the next person on the list was Janine PVA baker, and I had the pleasure of spending a retreat weekend with Janine. And why I'm gonna tell this story is because she literally had hot off the press, a VHS copy of . Yeah. Yeah, VHS copy of clear road to birth.

So all of you birth nuts out there if you haven't seen a clear road to birth, that actually was the video that initiated free birth movement. I can't wait to hear more about this I'm okay. On the, of my seat. All right. Okay. I can't see you. , I'm talking to an M Yeah. So anyway, so we're all sitting in the, in this room together, like how it can be when all these birth junkies get together.

And you're all so excited and she pops in a clear road to birth and we're watching it. And my jaw just drops because I'm being introduced now to a whole other

paradigm, which is this paradigm of unassisted birth where, where's the midwife, right? , it's this idea of we're working towards eliminating the midwife and it just blew my mind.

It was like, what? So something about that video was so imprinting and guttural and incredible. And I knew there was truth in it. And I didn't know, I was at the beginning of my understanding of what that really meant to have a free birth, but you could say that it radicalized me even more so I'm gonna, I'm gonna bless and blame Jeanine Parvati for that initiation and bless her soul.

Yes. At that time, like in a retreat weekend with her , you're learning about unassisted birth, free birth what was the messaging around, like you just said, eliminating midwives. Was she still attending births at that time? Or was she, no, she was really switching gears.

So I remember Janine's she was wild and I loved her character. And I remember her saying with passion that, if you bring fear into the birthing room, you are disturbing that space and you need to go check yourself. And she was a real advocate and, radical when it came to talking about how most of the midwives are trained in a fear paradigm.

Yeah. It's almost impossible for them to not show up with fear and protocols are what they use to appease that fear. So they're constantly interrupting the process. So she just felt like if you don't show up, then you're not embedding fear yeah. Into that environment. And it was like, I'm 25.

I think I might have been 26 at that point. And I was just like, oh yeah. Okay. That makes sense. Yeah. Needless to say, what we're talking about is is an, it's an enormous amount of responsibility to own your birth, but I'll get into that later. . Yeah. So if clear, wrote to birth, I don't even know if you can still see it.

I've never seen it. Yeah. I love calling the copy down. I'll see it. If there's, if I find it, I'll put a link in the show notes. Oh, that would be fantastic. Yeah. I would like to watch it again. I just remember there was a physician giving birth on it. So there, is this like amazing thing where she's a physician and she's birth unassisted, yeah. But yeah, it, so of course that really initiated me again and and sorry, fast forward at this point in time, I had given birth twice, both midwifery assisted, both at home, both in water. And what I do wanna say with my second

birth very quickly. And again, I know this is an origin story and I'm sorry if I'm talking too much.

No, but I think it's important to understand these very important moments that happened. So one of the moments that happened in my second labor was I hit the four hour mark when my first son had been born and I knew I wasn't even close. and that really frustrated me. And I was so frustrated because I was really uncomfortable.

I was in my head, I felt like I was being watched, that point in labor where you're not deep in it yet. You're still very aware of your external reality. You still wanna control the external reality. You can really feel the presence of everybody else around you. , you're, you're still very much in between worlds.

So I knew I was there and actually my midwife had done an internal exam at that time and it hurt like hell. And she said, oh yeah, you're only like five centimeters. And I was like, pissed right off. So so here I am 25 years old and I kick everybody out. I literally said everybody leave and I look back on that time and why this is important is because now I work with moms and I work with moms who have had disappointing, traumatic or challenging childbirths.

And one of the things they always say to me is I knew what I needed. I didn't know how to ask for it. And I'm mad at myself that I didn't ask for it. Yeah. So there's a lot of loss of voice that happens. So there's an instinct, there's an intuition, but then there's not following through with it. And I was just like, get outta here. I know where I need to go. I've done this before. I had a map. I knew where I needed to get to, and I knew these people were distracting me 'cause my midwife called all her backups thinking I was gonna have a 30 minute labor. And so I'm in a room with three other midwives.

One is an obstetrician from China. Who's terrified of water birthing, but needs to get her hours in in Canada. So you could just feel and palpate the fear and also the impatience. And so to all of you out there, if you feel that kick everybody out, so that's right. So they left except my one midwife, including my, the father of the children at that time he left too.

And and that my one midwife stayed and I was pissed about that, but I didn't have any me to tell her to go. She just sat in the corner. She was quiet. So she

didn't bother me and sure enough, I turned my attention inwards, turned that around, had a conversation with my son and an hour or something went by and I was in such an altered state.

When I woke up, I was in transition and beginning to bear down and within an hour, my baby was born. Like I said, I knew where I needed to go and I had the courage to listen to my intuition and just tell everybody to. Get the F out. So get the F out, get the F out okay. So fast forward, I've now learned from Gloria and Janine PBA, and so it doesn't end there.

So now we come back, we start attending births again, and now we're more comfortable with, supporting moms to have an instinctive childbirth, and they all have midwives, or they have obstetricians. And we just are being doulas that are holding the space and supporting moms to stay at home as long as they can before.

Let's say they go to a hospital or before they call their midwives. And again, sometimes that resulted in the mom and partner not calling their midwives and having an unassisted birth. So I got to see what happens when you don't interrupt birth. And I got to see what happens when you're not pretending to be in a position of power in a birth, because at that time, I wasn't pretending to know anything other than I trust birth.

I believe in your biology that it's, possible to do this. You are the expert, I'm not the expert and I'll just be here to hold space for you. Yeah. And so it was quite simple. maybe naive. But I feel blessed because I've. Really was able to be present to the unfolding of what it means to have a physiological birth.

Yeah. And an undesired birth. And so then I went on to then I must have had an internet by then because I came across WIO from the matrons , an article she had written and that article just blew, opened my heart. And it was like, who is this person I have to learn from this person.

And so again I found a way to jump on a plane and attend one of her retreats. My children were young. I actually sold a business idea that made enough money for me to pay for that retreat. It's yeah, it was very frugal, I guess you could say. And I was just absolutely blown away by that retreat.

It really imprinted me on a whole other level. It brought this work into the realm of the mystery and the realm of the spiritual for me. And it became my spiritual practice. So WIO became my teacher for quite a long time. We're still very good friends. And so I was immersed in that paradigm for a long time.

And I also went to a conference with Michelle O Don. So I was able to hear Michelle O Don live. I was able to engage with him and ask him questions. I remember a question. I asked him in the audience amongst all these registered midwives and I just point blank said, I'm confused. I'm curious.

How do registered midwives or obstetricians respond to the information that you provide? Because it's very contradicting or it's contradictive to what registered midwifery is trained to do. And, but what you're offering here is actually very scientific and seems to make sense that it would be better if we found a way to support what it is that you're proposing here, that how to support an undisturbed birth and how to reduce stress in labor and pregnancy.

All that stuff. And I remember there wasn't much of a response and the whole crowd was just like silent, , it was just like the silence of how dare you. And so that was like one of my, one of my. Moments of, recognition to say that I got to speak with Michelle Odont. And I did email him a bit back and forth during that time period as well.

So those people really formed I guess you could say informed and formed who I am today and not just how I show up at a birth, but also how I show up as a therapist because that's not separate. Yeah. So again, I'm just gonna pause there before I jump into kind of the next phase okay. So I had a question and I, what am I trying to say?

I don't want you to put words in anybody's mouth. That's what I'm asking you to do, but I guess from your experience, doing the training with Gloria and then sitting with Janine, was Gloria, she was just training you as a doula, right? Not as something more than that. It wasn't, but yet she was attending versus a traditional birth attendant at the time.

Correct? Okay. Correct. Just making sure I have the history there. Yeah. Clear. And Janine had been attending births in the midwife fish capacity and was moving towards not that's right. And. Okay. Yeah. And then you were, what were

you doing during this time? Cause it sounds like this unfolded over a few years, you were doing this doula role, this firmly doula only role.

Yeah. Yeah. It didn't even occur to me. To be promoting myself as a traditional birth attendant at that time, it really was even when I trained with WIO it was holistic doula work. So it was always under the frame of being a doula. And sometimes that meant the mom decided to just stay home and right.

And because I wasn't coming in with any sort of midwifery skill, knowledge quote, in air quotes. Sure. It seemed reasonable. My whole thing was I support the mother and the family. And so at that time it seemed it did seem reasonable and not too risky to be supporting what, however, it seemed, whatever they wanted.

Yeah. Whatever they wanted, if the mom was, okay. I will be honest at that time I had a very us versus them mentality. So I definitely biased towards instinctive physiological birth is the better way. And sure. Hospital birth is going to result in complications and problems and they're not going to, possibly trauma and they're not gonna support you in the ways that you want.

So I had a pretty big bias. Sure. I remember struggling in my early twenties to understand why somebody would want an elective cesarean. I've since come, I don't know if the word is around, but I have a huge capacity to now understand the full spectrum and have room for everything. But at that time I remember being.

Quite opinionated yeah, sure. The twenties. Yes.

Yeah. And it was motivated by, it was motivated by love. Like it was motivated by, oh, totally. I want you to have the best experience possible because it's amazing. And motivated by reality. It sounds like you saw an experience or, women in your community having those.

I did not positive experiences, so it's such a, that's something I think a lot of doulas grapple with is, do I support women who are gonna plan a hospital birth? Am I willing to do that? Or am I not? And and then yeah, what is my role? And, yeah, there's a lot there, but there is a lot there indeed.

So I just wanna be forthright about that because who I was then is different than who I am now. But it's all part of the journey. It's all part of the journey. . So then is the next part of your journey that you did some aping? Yeah. The next for what's next? Yeah. The next part of my journey is I came back after a beautiful retreat with WIO and I found myself pregnant again

and it took me a long time to get to know my cycle. , it's hard if you don't do it before having it's totally hard if you don't that I'm teaching my daughter. that's very good. Yeah. I have a 16 year old daughter, so anyways, so I yeah, I came back got pregnant and was very much okay, now I'm gonna have the free birth now.

I'm, yeah. Now I'm like really enmeshed and immersed into this whole birth culture. And this is going to be like my birth, the pinnacle. Yeah. So my, my ego got wrapped up in that birth in that pregnancy more than my other two. I have to say, like, when I look back on it now I see a huge difference.

And and that was because I was being so molded and shaped by this paradigm, this emerging paradigm. And I loved it and I loved what it stood for and I really wanted to be a part of it. And I wanted to have that kind of birth, and also that was like when orgasmic birth was just coming out too, I think.

Okay. Around that time, so there was this whole movement and and I. Okay you tell me if we're going too deep into all of this, but it is a good, long story. I also just pause there for a moment. Yeah. So at that time I invited WIO to come to Canada to train a bunch of us to in the paradigm of she didn't call it quantum midwifery.

At that time, she emerged into that, but in the paradigm of alternative midwifery care, you could say, okay, and beyond the doula role, yes. Now it was, let's do like a year long program. And I filled her class. There was, I think, 13 of us or something who were gonna take this program and she was gonna be here and I wanted her to attend my birth of my third and low and behold in may they turned her away at the border and they discovered some equipment and they considered her to be practicing medicine without a license in Canada.

And it was a huge shit show. And this was may, my daughter was born in July and lie and I was absolutely devastated. So I wanted to have a free birth, but I

really wanted my teacher to be at the birth. Yeah. So I, yeah. So my, my, my fellow sisters, we were, they were doing my, prenatal care.

I was doing my own prenatal care. I occasionally hired, saw a local granny midwife in the community who did some prenatal care, but I didn't really do a lot of prenatal care with my third. And it was very much, it was very free birth. Like it was like, I'll just do prenatal care if I feel like it thing.

And then, so when my, when WIO was turned away at the border I was crushed and it became really real that I was gonna be birthing alone. . And I do think I wanna tell this story because I think it actually connects to what, what you and I were brought together on about.

So there's a difference between birthing alone and free birthing. And I had to come to this to really understand it. There's a difference between the ideology of free birth and the idea of free birth and, WPA would often say there's a difference between ideologies and ideas. And I would spend a year just contemplating.

What does that really mean? How does that show up in my life? And what I realized was I wanted to have an undisturbed birth. I wanted to have a wise birth keep in my space. I wanted to be nurtured, tended to loved. I wanted to be seen and witnessed in my power and when she was removed and could no longer be present for that, I realized that I wasn't gonna have any of that.

And I felt a gaping hole in a massive amount of responsibility land. And so now I have a couple months to prepare for the reality that I am birthing alone. And I don't have a birth keep, and I don't ha and, maybe I have my community, but low and behold, my community actually wasn't there when I gave birth.

And so I had to face the reality of birth and death because when you decide that you're going to own your birth and nobody else is responsible for your birth, so you can't pass the buck, you can't look outside of yourself for somebody to do anything. to save you or change the situation that it lands on you.

It's a massive amount of responsibility and weight . And my argument is that I don't think that this is

I don't think that the new age of free birthing society or whatever it is that we're, that's coming out recently is speaking about that in the, in, in a very profound way in which it like the gravitas of it. Yeah. If you, are you following what I'm saying? Totally. Yeah. I totally agree. Okay. And I think that your story is such a good one and I can't wait to hear the rest, but yeah.

Demonstrating that, like that shift of from having, I'm curious if you could speak more to it, even that shift when you realized Opia, wouldn't be able to be there with you, like what did that whole what was that whole that was left and, what was that the whole was that I, oh, sorry, go ahead.

Yeah. Oh yeah. I heard you the whole, okay. So the whole was first of all the dream of having this wise keeper present. And witnessing, the coming into of my power and the birth of my daughter. She wasn't gonna be there so that there was a hole there like a love hole almost.

And then there was also the hole that I realized I was still placing expectation and trust in somebody else outside of myself, to make sure that my, my space would be safe, that my birth, that my birth would be okay. Yeah. Without me even realizing it, I was still doing that. And I'm not saying there's anything wrong with doing this, by the way.

I'm just noticing the difference when you have somebody who can hold space for you and show up with the knowledge and wisdom of birth keeping, there's a huge responsibility in that as well, but there's an ease that can happen. There's an ease on the mother. There's okay. In the same. And what I say to people now, it's like in the same way that if you're preparing for a vision quest and it's your first time, and I have a friend who brings people on through vision quests in the Blackfoot tradition.

And, they prepare them mentally and physically to go into the wilderness to be without food and water for three to four days to face their demons, to face their fears. But she's on the sidelines. So even though. She's not there with the person per se. She is in the background ensuring that they're okay, that they don't need an intervention.

They might need an intervention, I see the role of the birth keep in the same way. Totally. And so there's comfort is comfort, knowing that you can lean on

that person who holds some wisdom. Yeah. And when that is taken away, the only person I could lean on was myself. And you could say I could lean on the mystery.

I could lean on God or a great spirit, or right. I could lean on all of the mothers who've gone before me, which I ended up doing by the way. And so it was a spiritual experience, but it,

I don't know if it is exactly what I wanted. I just had to face it. Even though I was being a loud mouth about it. yeah. It sounds like you realize, by having that, your birth keep now not part of the situation that you had to face, the fact that you had been still placing some responsibility outside, whether or not that it was something that had wasn't conscious and then now has been made conscious and now what, and exactly and that's not good or bad, but it's just really an interesting.

observation. Yeah, absolutely. And and it required a lot of inner investigation. So the, those remaining two months I did a lot of inner work to prepare myself basically constantly flowing fears. And again, I had been imprinted by a story and that story was sticking and my fear kept coming back to what, if this happens for me in, based on that story.

And I'm hesitant to tell the story right now, but the point is that the story imprinted me to me and jump let's jump forward to the day that I'm finally entering labor with my third and I am free birthing. And I'm about, about two weeks post date, maybe I don't know for sure, but maybe.

Yeah. And I know I'm carrying large. And so that morning, what was so beautiful, so I'm gonna tell you, it's so beautiful about this experience and what was so hard about it, 'cause both of those existed. What was so beautiful about this experience was I woke up and I knew it was just me.

Actually, my husband was in Toronto at the time he was a flight attendant, so he wasn't even home. And I woke up, I had some bloody show I knew today was gonna be the day I called my friend. I said, can you come take my children? She took my children. I called my husband at the time. I said, Hey, you might wanna jump on a plane and come back.

So this is about a three and a half hour plane ride. I'm pretty sure I'm going into labor. This was about six in the morning. And then I felt this overwhelming sense of freedom. And the freedom was, I don't have to call anybody. I don't have to do anything for anybody. Like I'm alone.

And I'm totally free to be in this experience with nobody watching me, observing me or expecting anything from me. And that ex that moment, I remember the feeling of that moment was just so incredibly liberating. That's. And so I knew I was super early, in the labor. So I went to bed and I actually slept from about six till noon.

And then I woke up at noon with a huge rush of a contraction. I was like, okay, this is happening. And my husband arrived at about like 1:00 PM. So from about, I was in a good active labor for about an hour and a half before he showed up. And then when he showed up, I was full on active labor.

So the space was still, it was so quiet and, my husband at the time had so much faith in my ability to birth, which I give him credit for. And he just held space quietly, like silent. It was almost church-like and and I was in, we had an indoor hot tub that we had bought and, okay, so this kind of comes back around.

So indoor hot tub that we had bought. And so it had been sitting there. At the right temperature, 'cause it had a temperature regulating thing on it. Yeah. So I was in the hot tub and it was just really nice and contractions were strong and next thing you know, I am like being blown wide open and I can tell she is huge and she wants to be coming down.

Like she's trying to come down the birth canal. And I started to feel an enormous amount of panic overwhelm my system. And at that moment I heard like you're either gonna be stuck in fear or you need to go deeper into the pain. And I brought my attention, my inner attention. So deep into the crux of the pain point.

Like I just tracked my whole system and I went right into where I was feeling the most amount of pain, which was deep in my pelvis. And I went right into that and I blasted into a psychedelic experience and I hadn't done psychedelics by the way at that point in my life but I know now know it was a psychedelic

experience and I blasted into it and all of a sudden my pelvis blew up into like it blew up basically into.

Dancing particles. It was just a bunch of dancing particles and there was so much space and it was like stars, twinkling everywhere. And in that moment, I understood that we don't give birth through matter. I understood that we birth through the quantum realm and that matter physical matter actually takes on a different form and all it is space.

And as I understood that, how you get those downloads where you just know her head started to emerge and her head was emerging. And here's something super interesting instead of just being in the instinctive position I was in, I wanted to be in the position that I thought was the best birthing position.

So my brain took over and that compacted her shoulders, the position I went into compacted her shoulders, and we had a bit of a shoulder dystocia freak out. And so I write about this in my book. So I'm just going to throw out a little bit of a trigger warning. I'm gonna give you the remainder of this story which, and results in a healthy baby.

But I just wanna put that there in case people wanna skip this part. Sure. Her head emerges, her shoulders are compacted. One contraction or I change positions. I go into all four. I'm still underwater, two contractions nothing's budging, and her head has fully emerged. I stand up three contractions.

So now I'm out of water. And my husband looks at me and literally this was the only thing he said to me the entire time. And he just was like, okay, Jen, you're gonna push and you're not gonna stop until she pops out of you. And I took that as this is serious yeah. And I, and of course at this point in time, now I'm already being trained more in the midwifery paradigm.

So I know more, and I know not a good thing to have her on the perineum for three contractions. So I stand up and I call upon every birthing woman, all my ancestors, everybody, all the universe, all the power of the universe to download through me in that moment. And I pushed I don't know how to, like the Mo like I was moving mountains and literally my almost 11 pound daughter blows through pops.

We heard a pop pops out of me head first into the water. Brien torpedo and my husband or Nope, actually he didn't, I scooped her up, so I like scooped her up. I was like, oh my gosh, you can't go in the water. But of course she went in head first it's okay. So I scooped her up and I like sit down and, she's here and very limp and her eyes open, but she has not taken her breath and she's just looking around and now I'm like, okay, I need to call her spirit in.

So I call her in and I give her a couple mouth to mouth, like over her nose and everything. And , she takes her breath and she comes too. And soon as she comes too, like I knew she was here, she just needed to come out of her shock and I stand up and the placenta plops outta me.

So she like, it was like, it all came out at once and okay, so my daughter is born. Why I say it was the most beautiful and scary was that at, I had this experience of understanding the quantum field and a psychedelic experience or a DMT experience that allowed me, that really created the spaciousness for my daughter to emerge.

And then my brain took over and my fear took over and tightened up. And that was very scary. But that, I knew soon as she was born that we were fine, even though in any other circumstance, had there been a registered midwife there, they would've freaked out and probably cut the cord, probably done resuscitation on her in a vigorous way.

And we'll never know. I know that not doing that. And just giving my daughter a couple breaths, turned her around. The remaining of the story I wrote about in my book, because I got very sick and that's separate from that kind of birth experience, but has a lot to do with, do not have a indoor hot tub.

That's sitting at body temperature for a week yeah. To give birth in . Because I got a serious bacterial infection. Oh, no. Yeah. So I'm just gonna pause there 'cause that's a lot of a story. and that required me finding my power without the assistance of anybody else coming in to take charge of that birth experience on some, on one hand, it's the most incredible experience ever.

And I'll never, ever forget it in it forever shapes who I am today. On the other hand, I grieved missing out on having a space, keep there. Yeah. Yeah. Both and

like you just described experiencing both the psychedelic quantum experience and then the being in your head, like within moments of each other.

It's really, it was fascinating. Yeah. Super fascinating. Yeah. Visceral. And it was fear, but it was, yeah, it was not embodied fear. It was mental fear. And again, what came through was the imprint of that story and the story was a story of a shoulder to Sotia and so again, I find it so fascinating how some of those stories hook into our system, not all of them, right?

Yeah. I have a similar experience. It's not necessarily even based on one story, but both my birth and I have it on video both times. I ask Maryn who's present after the head is out. I say, are they okay? Does the baby look okay? And both times I like went and I had been studying midwifery for years before having my daughter and then was a full on midwife before my son and both with my son in particular.

I even made a little plan in my head as the head was out. I was like, I'm gonna crawl over there so she can reach in and get the shoulder out. So like I have, yeah, that, I'm definitely I've and it's interesting 'cause I don't have that fear throughout the pregnancy necessarily. But in that moment, both times, I've just, it's just pops out of my mouth.

Fascinating. Isn't it? Yeah. Totally fascinating. Anyways, just a sidebar. Thank you so much for sharing these wonderful birth stories and this like evolution that occurred over them. I think it's so valuable. And yeah. So you were not apping at this point, you were studying with FIO, but you had not AppD, not I had not app yet.

The program. So what happened with that program is we managed to rally up the group to cross the borderline in Manitoba, into grand forks every two weeks. To study with her. Okay. So she moved up to that area for the entire summer into the fall. But because I was supposedly due every week I was afraid to cross the border and give birth in the states.

I don't know why I was afraid of that. I would've been surrounded by women.

So I kept staying back. So I missed out on almost a good, like six weeks of that program, which also was really disheartening for me. Yeah. So when did you

start apping after the third birth? Yeah I recovered from the postpartum sickness that was also very horrendous and traumatic.

But again, like I said, I write about that in my book. So you can always read about it there. And just side note, before I get into the apping sharing my birth story in the book healing after birth still to this day, I question whether or not it should be in there, , how come part of it is. I feel so vulnerable sharing that I had a free birth that then resulted in trauma.

And and, it's interesting just tying it into today's current censorship climate that we're in. It, it also concerns me about how radical it is. A lot of people who read that book are reading that book because maybe they were attempting a home birth with a midwife and they got transferred and had an unwanted cesarean, or they were in the hospital and they had UN unexpected interventions that caused harm.

But there are a few people who are reading that book who were free. Births right. just because statistically it's less common. Yeah. Although I think a lot of I've recommended it to a lot of women who have had free births that either transferred or didn't and found it traumatic as well. Thank you.

Okay. That's good to know. Yeah. So I just wanted to say that it's still a very vulnerable story to share and knowing that it's out there in the public in that way, Still to this day makes me feel nervous, but yeah, I started to apprentice after that birth and my daughter was one, so we first went down to Mexico and I did an apprenticeship down in San Cristal de CASAA.

And oh, wow. And yeah, and that that was very challenging. And, in the end I would say it was more more like a, I was a doula than I was in apping midwife. Just a really good doula. really good to I learned a lot though when I was there, there weren't a ton of births, but I learned a ton about culture.

And also what happens when you are attending births in a country where there isn't a lot of fear about legalities or regulation. Okay. Yeah. You have a lot more flexibility and freedom to do a lot of different things that you might not be able to do under regulatory body, in, in systems, that are regulated. So I appreciated that. So that was my first apprenticeship. And. One of the best stories though, I will say outta that apprenticeship was how I advocated for a mom to not be

transferred. And who ended up having a 10 hour NCE period where she had been pushing for four hours and she no progress.

And basically was told that the baby's not gonna be born and her PE LV tree is too small. And I said, look like, mom and baby are fine. Can we just stop all of this and just let this mom rest and recoup, and mom didn't wanna go to the hospital. So mom wanted that. I advocated for that.

I became her kind of primary caregiver for that 10 hour period where she basically slept and then woke up and an hour later birthed her baby. I love that story. Yeah, so then my second one was at CASAA de Minto in yeah. So really high paced clinical birthing center and. Attended a lot of births there as like backup and a couple primaries.

And again, it was just so challenging for me to merge these paradigms. I was trained in paradigm and I'm coming into another paradigm and I just cannot rectify it. So I just didn't I didn't thrive in those environments and I knew that this kind of midwifery was not what I wanted to do. I thought I wanted to go back and become a registered midwife, but I couldn't, I just couldn't because it contradicted everything I understood to be true those were my two apprenticeships. And then I came back and started to, apprentice with birth where moms would ask for me to attend as a birth keep or a birth attendant. So very hands off and really no equipment. And I would often just preface by saying I'm not here as a medical expert.

If you're looking for medical expertise, that's not my role. And transferring care would be the best option. If you're looking for somebody who trusts birth and can support you in that process, that's my role. So that's, that is what I started to do very underground in a new community and alone pretty much.

And so I'll pause there, 'cause that kind of answers your question as to when did I start apprenticeship? Yeah. That I feel like I have so many questions, but let's see

you were in a new community, you said yes, we left Manitoba and and then we went to Alberta, so I didn't know anybody and was now needing to build a whole new kind of, I guess yeah. Build up new community and that was hard yeah. And

through that process of apping and then coming back, you realized you didn't wanna do the registered and advice thing.

Yeah. And so this other what were you calling? Were you calling yourself a birth? Keep, I think at that time more of a free birth attendant or traditional birth attendant. Cool. Yeah. Or I was always in conflict about it all. I don't like getting in trouble.

and I don't like being a rebel even though I am. Yes. That's a strained experience then okay, so you started offering this and that was at your plan, just long term I guess tell me more. Yeah, I think at that point in time, I, was my primary focus was raising my children.

My secondary focus was my passion to work as a birth worker. Yeah. Continue to teach childbirth classes, continue attend births as a doula or as a free birth support person. Cool. And, continue to support undisturbed, physiological birth. That is what I saw myself doing. And was really stepping into that identity.

Yeah. And, like I said before, I feel like my ego got the best of me on my third birth. And that ego just carried throughout where I was really building up this identity of who I am as this like birth keep person who's, radical free birther, blah, blah, blah. And I feel very far away from that person now.

And so it was slow going. And of course, because I had already been nipped in the butt a couple times in Manitoba. I didn't, I really didn't want to be disliked again in another community. So I was very quiet about it all. And I was trying to like be friends with the local midwives , and, dance around all of that.

And and so I had to attended, a handful of births there in that capacity. And and then that's where I had my next initiation, which really has initiated me into who I am today and the work that I do today. Yeah. Let's talk about that. And I guess before we do the handful of births that you attended in this kind of capacity , I'm curious, and this is something that we've been talking about a lot lately.

Like, how was that for you? I've never done that, like I, I did the apprenticeship and then switched into the primary student role and then became a midwife. I haven't ever attended a free birth, even though there are clients who've been like, oh, I had a free birth and Margo was there.

I'm like, no, Not how I would describe that, I was there as a midwife. So I just, I guess I'm curious your perspective on before this initiate aiding event occurred did it, was it, what was that like? What I will say is the more knowledge I obtained and the more kind of my brain was being or had been taught about midwifery model of care, the harder it was to yeah.

Continue to just be empty. And I see be the doula. Do you understand what I'm saying? Yeah. I really like how you put that. The it's hard to not show up with the, with an agenda or something. Yeah. It's hard to not show up with the skills that you have. It's hard to not show up with holding the presence of maybe somebody who has a bit more knowledge than what they might have had before.

There's something a little bit more liberating about, I'm a doula and oh, you didn't wanna call your midwife. Okay. I can support you in that. There's even something, a little badass about that because I'm not trying to be anything other than what I am in that moment.

And the more I wanted to identify with the I wanted to be. A midwife that supported undisturbed birth. I think that's what I really liked about Indie Birth. When I learned about what you and Maryn are offering, it was about like training midwives in this paradigm, but you're still a midwife to my knowledge at the time, at least 'cause I knew midwives who had taken your program.

And so I liked that idea, but I knew that with the training that I had, it wasn't ever going to be qualified in Canada. So in order for me to even entertain the idea in Canada, it meant going back to university and I was like, I'm not doing that. Yeah. So you just bring more with you and you can't hide it.

You can't hide that. You're bringing more. Absolutely. Yeah. And I guess for anyone who's listening and is trying to figure out their path, we get this question a lot how do you be a midwife, but not show up with stuff, like you'll see stuff and you'll have those skills.

And it's you can't and that's the constant tension. And also the art and beauty of midwifery is, you do your best, but yeah, you can't be who someone you're not. And so if you don't wanna be that person, if you wanna be the person who can show up, totally just ready for whatever and meaning ready to witness

whatever, but not have any expectations around skill then. Yeah. Definitely stay in the doula role. I would agree with you. And I think one of the challenges I faced is that I was bridging two worlds and I hadn't claimed one. I hadn't fully claimed one. Yeah. Which brings complexity into the birth space.

And I had more fear because I felt more responsibility. Even though I would. And so now we're touching on kind of, what's frustrating me with the free birth movement. And maybe I don't know enough about what's actually going on currently in the free birth spaces. Because I'm only hearing it hearsay or on the edges, 'cause I'm not on social media, but my sense is this is my sense, my sense is that there's a radicalizing of claiming this role as a birth keep or a traditional birth attendant.

And maybe bringing skill or no skill, like maybe bringing certain equipment or not, or maybe understanding certain ways of assessing or not. But that. What's the, what do I wanna say about this?

It's I've just dropped into a blank space. So I need to give it some, I need to give it some space to really be able to speak to what it is that I wanna say without it coming across as if I'm slamming traditional birth attendance. Yeah. Cause that's not at all. What I wanna do. There's a space for this there's value there's art in it.

There's it. It's shamanic. And I know that and I, you know it

and I think my concern is I've gone through a lot of initiations and I haven't even told you the final initiation that really initiated me into where I am today. But it's not shamanic. Midwifery is not intended to be something that we brag about or have a big ego about it's. It's quiet.

And, I remember WIO always saying to us and and I know she is a big teacher of this kind of paradigm. But I know that, she would say to us that the community will call you when you're ready, the community will deem you the midwife. You don't deem yourself the midwife. And, so if you're on social media and you're declaring something as a birth, keep, that's not the community deeming you, the midwife, it's too loud, there's too much attention kind of being directed towards it, which to me just raises a red flag.

And maybe, I don't know what that red flag is yet. And I think it just needs to be quieted down. It needs to be humbled to show up as a shamanic midwife is a humbling experience. It and yeah. Recently I've been asked to attend a couple births and I don't know how I feel about that yet.

which is so different than that, yeah. That different, that energy energy that I see out there. From births or that I hear even from young trained midwives, that have done our program who are unlicensed or whatever. Like just that eager that over eagerness of someone asked me to go to a birth and hell yeah, I'm gonna be there.

And I'm gonna do it. And the, just the ego piece and the, and like you said the humbling part, I guess that's where that's one of the biggest parts that I struggle with is, apprenticeship. Isn't just about seeing birth. It's not just about seeing complications. It's about that humbling of the ego and go, and, the initiation into the mystery around, like sometimes there are things we can do to affect the outcome for better or for worse.

And sometimes there's not , and having to hold all of that is something that takes a lot of time and is probably never done. . And so to go to a weekend training, someone just told me this a few weeks ago on a call, she said there was a weekend radical birth keeper training that I didn't even, I couldn't find information on it, but she said there were some people near her that had gone to it and came back and had been now offering traditional birth attendant offerings and services after a weekend.

And she said, she found that really troubling. . I said, yes, too. I find that quite troubling. Just for so many reasons, not that. . Yeah. Yeah. There's just so much to say I think this is where we wanna go in our conversation. Just took us an hour and a half to get here, but great.

Good hour and a half. Yeah. Yeah. And thank you for the time to lay that all out. I appreciate it. Of course, okay. Let me tell you a bit about the experience. Yeah. That initiated me and I might get emotional. It is the first time I've shared this experience publicly and it's 12 years ago, almost 12 years ago. And because of this experience, I have learned so much and it has humbled me and it broke me and I don't wanna make it about me either, because I also understand the impact that this has had on the mom and the family.

It's, of course I'm sharing from a birth attendance experience and point of view. But yeah, I was, again, invited to attend a birth. And what started to happen is that, when people would listen to me talk, and I used to do this to my teachers they would put me up on a pedestal or they would, drink every word that I would say as if it was gold.

And a lot of the words I were saying really came through my own teachers, so I was right. Relaying the information that my teachers had told me, not a lot of it was unique information that was coming through my own personal lived experience, which now is more the case. And so at that time, I didn't recognize this.

I didn't recognize that I, my words have power to influence the decision that somebody else is going to make about their birth experience

and that how I was talking about it, although incredibly inspiring made it so that other people wanted what I was talking about, but it was coming from outside of themselves. So they placed me in a position of power to bring them that experience.

yeah, makes sense. And it does. Okay. It's really, people should rewind and listen to that again, because I think that's so important. Yeah. And, I had heard about this, but I had no lived experience of it to really understand, what that meant and what charisma means. How we can influence people to think a certain way.

We can influence people to feel a certain way. And so I was influencing people to want to have a certain kind of birth experience. And I don't think there's anything wrong with that per se. But what I didn't have this skill to do was have very transparent conversations with them about what it actually meant if they were making that decision, what my responsibilities were and weren't, and if they understood that stood that right.

So true informed consent, but not just Hey, yeah, here's a waiver by the way, and I'm not really responsible for your birth, you're totally responsible for your birth. Do you understand what that means? Oh yeah, I do. I do. I just want you at my birth. So I'm willing to say yes to anything, I had to learn, in retrospect, what it meant to pay attention to red flags and warning signs, and then how to have the courage to have those conversations. And a lot of the teachings that I

had been taught by all my teachers, I would bring into the birthing space, but in a very literal sense.

It's super literal sense. And and so that would mean sometimes I wouldn't listen to my intuition or my instinct because I was listening to what the rules are , based on even the radical role. Exactly. Yeah. Yeah. So all of that played into this experience and, it was a young mom and she was very excited to have me attend birth and she wanted a free birth and an unassisted birth, and she wanted to take responsibility for her birth experience.

And I wanted to be in the club. Yeah, absolutely. Like you said earlier. Yeah. Yeah, absolutely. And and that was very real. But there were a lot of signs in the prenatal period that would've indicated that maybe maybe they don't fully understand what that means. And there were some indications that were presenting prenatally that.

had, and I actually said this, if I was a registered midwife, I would have to tell you to go get, go seek out a second opinion on this, go see an obstetrician, have that assessed. But I leave that up to you because this is your birth and you get to take responsibility for your birth and they would choose not to and that's how it would proceed.

So certain signs and symptoms were presenting that I knew were maybe variations of normal, maybe leaning towards abnormal and needing some assistance or secondary opinion. But again, because I wasn't taking responsibility, I didn't want to impose that because I didn't want to be in a position of power, but the thing is I was in a position of power.

Right. yeah. And right. So can you see the complications of this so tricky and it's so tricky and then I didn't want to quote, diagnose because diagnosing would be practicing medicine, so I could only say, yeah, that's presenting and here's have some people handle it and I encourage you to look it up and do some research and make a decision that's informed for you, which is constantly giving the power back to the family and the mom to make their own decisions.

But what was presenting was concerning to me and I was seeking secondary opinions and I was talking to my teachers about it as well, because I was

concerned, but I didn't have the courage to say I am very concerned yeah. And I'm therefore uncomfortable to attend your birth. Yeah.

I encourage you to do these things. If you don't wanna do those things, that's totally fine. This is your birth. You get to make the decisions, but I will not be attending. And I didn't say that because I believed you never abandoned a pregnant person. And and so then, when labor presented, I showed up and certain things were presenting that were concerning, and I knew that I didn't have the scale or the equipment to prepare for any of the potential risky outcomes.

And so at one point throughout the labor there was a long convers. longish conversation about transfer of care. And the person was very adamant that there would be no transferring. And I went into the fears of that. What about that? Are you afraid of, or, we just 12 years ago, so my memory of this could be faded.

But my understanding was that we had the conversation and there was no transferring. The person did not want to. And so I said, I can no longer support you in the middle of labor. And that was the hardest thing that I could have ever said to anybody. And I was alone. I didn't have backup.

So hard. And I just I just said, I can't support you. I'm too concerned. And I'm bringing my fear into this and I don't have the equipment to handle anything. So I'll be leaving. And the mom knew in that moment that they needed to go to the hospital and within 10 minutes they were at the hospital and the baby was not alive when they arrived at the hospital.

That was the most terrifying experience in my life. And I did not go to the hospital with them, for my, for. Of my own liability. Sure. And and then, and we can decide whether or not we wanna include this in your podcast. and then and then I stayed back and I had a psychotic episode. I had a psychotic break.

I I actually didn't know where I was and lost my sense of self cracked. Psychologically imagined having to jump out of a window to save myself for fear of the police coming to take me away. Yeah. I went down every dark rabbit hole imaginable in a very short period of time, all the while cleaning up the space, cleaning up the birthing tub cleaning.

Yeah. Waiting for them to call me. And it just that was the moment where, my, my PTSD really started to present itself was from that moment on. And so there's, a longer point to this story, but the pieces too that came out of that was not only was I alone. I didn't have a community, I didn't have a governing body.

So I had to deal with the family directly. So I became the target of all the grief, all their rage, all the anger, all the blame. And I held it because I thought that was my duty. Was to receive this. And I was terrified. Of course I was terrified that at any moment I could be turned in to the authorities.

Yeah. And I had three young children and I was going through a divorce, so it never happened. The authorities never came. And this mother and I have had a handful of conversations since that have been positive, but still frightening for me. Yeah. And they have been healing. I would say those conversations have been healing.

They've been very hard and I still live with it. I still live with it regardless of the amount of therapy hours I went to. All of that story. Yeah. Can I ask how it still shows up in your life and maybe this would be a third podcast we could do together? Yeah. I have a story too, but okay.

I'm curious. I never felt safe in that city ever since that entire extended community that I was a part of really turned on me. So I lost my only sense of community that I had at the time. So that was devastating. I completely abandoned birth work. Ironically, I went to a birth 24 hours later as a birth attendant.

And it was just like straightforward, it was just like, it was like robot mode, and I barely remember those people. That's how much my, I was in such a traumatic state at that time. I think about it often when I'm asked to go to a birth I'm terrified to attend a birth still.

I worry every time I get public, so anytime I'm in the public realm, I worry that something will come back to haunt me. I worry about writing, the public things that I've written. I worry about the work that I do. , it's like it and I have done a lot of therapy and healing work on it, and it's still sometimes there low grade in the background because it was horrendous for me and for the family. So huge. Yeah. Being alone, not having community, not having a buffer, not having a

college to mitigate for you. So now even as a therapist, I'm always worried. Will I get in trouble? There's that I know what to do to turn it around, but it shows up, right?

Yeah. Yeah. What it did do though, is it initiated me into questioning every single thing I had been taught because it broke my paradigm. I felt completely betrayed by the paradigm I had been trained in. I felt betrayed by my teacher and WPI and I have worked through that. I felt like I needed to question every teaching.

And what I found is that at the core of the teachings were still, it was truth. Yeah. The teachings weren't wrong, they were still true. And they were still my spiritual guide, which is midwifery for the soul, talks about that. And so to me, it initiated me to really hone in on what is true.

And understand these teachings at a whole other level. Yeah. Per level. Yeah. So I, so I'm absolutely grateful for the initiation. And it keeps me humble in the work that I do. It opened me up to question everything that I understood about birth. It has allowed me to be very compassionate to every mom's birth experience regardless of where they gave birth and what it looked like.

It helped me understand that there is no one paradigm for birth. That birth is transformative regardless of how or where or with whom it is an initiatory experience whether it is within the undisturbed paradigm or whether it's in the medical paradigm if you want it to be right, it's an initiation and it also makes you face death.

And we are a death phobic culture. And, that's what I loved about Mexico was there was more tolerance for death, so there was less fear and so I really it it wised me. Absolutely. And it still continues to and I still. Still feel nervous talking about it, yeah, absolutely. And I really appreciate you sharing that here and with me and with our listeners and I totally get it. I attended a birth where the baby died in 2020 at the very beginning of COVID. And I have not talked about it publicly and probably well for 10 more years either. because it's so enormous.

And a question that comes up for me and it's one of the, I brought up Mexico. It was one of the reasons I went to Ecuador this fall I wanted to experience what it would be like to be a midwife in a culture that is, has a healthier relationship

with death. And less of a belief that the medical paradigm guarantee I'm guarantees.

A live baby because that is so true here that, that's what people believe, even if they say they don't. And so that's a question I've been wrestling with, and I actually took this whole year off of attending birth because I'm wrestling with this question of yeah. How do you practice midwifery?

Any kind? Even if I was a licensed midwife, even if I was a nurse midwife, like how do we attend birth in this culture? That is so afraid of death when it is statistically quite likely, whether it's a miscarriage a second trimester, a stillbirth in mid-pregnancy or a stillbirth at the end of pregnancy, or even in labor and or in the Neal period.

There's just , it happens so much more frequently than anyone is willing to talk about. It feels and not to just pick on the free birth community, but I feel like that's a place that, that shows up even more, which is so interesting to me, it's this radical perspective. And yet misses this piece around well around one and 200 births, and then still birth.

So not trying to wash that away with if you just don't mess with it, then that's less likely, right? Like how many of those babies didn't make it because of interventions? It's yes, that's true. But they're still at the end of the day, no matter how many of the radical rules you follow and the dogma that you go along with.

And no matter how wild the pregnancy or birth experience , that's still the possibility and yeah, so it's all so interesting how it all weaves together. Yeah, I would agree with you. I think that is the missing piece in maybe the more radical birth culture that I was a part of is very honest, humble understanding of death and taking a look at, preparing for that possibility.

How do you prepare for that possibility? I do have, some people in my in my doula mentorship program, maybe we can chat a bit about that when we close, but who are wanting to get into birth, keeping work or birth attending work, or they're being asked as doulas to go to unassisted births or I should say free births.

And I said, first of all, know the law, talk to a lawyer, right? Know where the gray areas are, know what you legally can or can't do as a birth attendant or birth keep I think it's super important that you really understand that, which is something I ignored by the way, because I didn't want, I didn't wanna be told I couldn't do it.

So I think really being honest about that and looking at it and understanding it and talking to a lawyer about it and not hiding it, because if you're hiding something, then it's gonna come out in the shadow. So there's that I tell them have very transparent conversations with the families that you're with.

And if you can't have a transparent conversation, if you can't say to them, Hey, look, I'm uncomfortable right now. And they don't know how to receive that information, or they get mad at you. That's a red flag. Totally. And then have an honest conversation about the risks. And that's and that is the risk being ultimately death.

This is not about trauma. This is not about creating fear. There's this whole idea that, oh, we don't wanna talk about the things that could go bad because that's gonna create fear there's truth in that. But then there's a way to talk about it. That's just weighted in reality, right?

Yeah. And what I always like to do when I imagine what it means to embody, let's say shamonic midwifery. And I say that in the most authentic way possible because I think it's the best way to describe this. What it is that I'm talking about, which would be. If my relationship was a direct relationship with the natural world, the universe, the mystery, the ancestors, right?

Like nature itself, the biological organisms, like that is where I take my guidance from not rules and systems and cultures, and that have been curated for us. Okay. So if that is my direct experience of how I show up as a human being, and that's where I'm taking my information from, and I have that relationship and I've cultivated that relationship.

I understand that death is a part of what it means to be a biological organism. And I don't have a judgment about that. It's just fact, biology is born and biology dies. That's a fact. And so if I was working with a community that accepted that

fact, and we did everything that we could, that would mitigate the risk of it because we're motivated because biology is motivated to thrive, right?

Biology is motivated to live, to be alive and to thrive. Like it has an innate intelligence, not your ego brain, our bio our biological organism and all biology is motivated to be alive. We're going to do things instinctively to support that process and to ensure that is hopefully the outcome, right?

And the body itself, the, this biological organism itself has intelligence. Therefore it too is going to do everything it can to give birth to a living organism. And I know this sounds like really scientific versus, this living soul. And that's true too, but right. So it like, it wants to live.

Biology wants to live. Yeah. So birth is the process of wanting to bring forth life. It wants to do that. And sometimes it aborts that process. Sometimes that doesn't happen. And there's a reason why that doesn't happen. And maybe the reason is necessary, right? It's not gonna thrive. Maybe the biology won't thrive.

But because we have a meaning making mind we put a lot of meaning onto it and therefore we create a lot of rules around it because the ultimate failure is death. And so I would love to live in a paradigm, which I doubt I'll experience in my lifetime. I'd love to live in a paradigm where we had the freedom to be that kind of shamanic midwife, where our relationship was to truth itself and to biology and to the natural environment and to the ancestors and to the mystery.

And that the community trusted in that. Yeah. And that there's so much freedom when we're behaving in that this is the irony, this is the paradox there's freedom when we're no longer in the constricted restraints of fear of death. And even attending a birth where, it's a stillborn, where the baby dies. Post-birth death is horrendous. We grieve it's a loss of life. There's an instinctive response to that. But imagine how much more liberating it would be if there wasn't an ideology around it, that should never happen. And if it does, you should be hung metaphorically or literally right.

Both as the mom and the midwife exactly. Or whoever's there. Yeah. You wouldn't be afraid or take a year off. A hundred percent and that's the dream and that's, there's, I've, I feel like I've had glimpses of that, with certain clients and certain relationships and like you said I doubt I'll get to really fully

experience that in my lifetime, but I think that's the vision that we hold, here at Indie Birth and yeah, I feel you keep shamanic midwifery.

And I don't know that I've talked about it here on the podcast, but I'm doing training with ISA gutti who runs the sacred stream. And I'm actually studying shamanism this year. That's what I'm doing with my year off is to deepen that relationship and have more of those tools to use with people and with my own work.

And yeah, so that's just such a beautiful vision that you've presented and why I think we are simpatico I think in a lot of ways it seems like it's one and the same. And I guess with this last little bit of time we have here, because I think my family pulled up in the van, but I think they're gonna play outside.

Luckily. I would love to hear and I don't know how you could do this in a brief way. So don't feel like it has to be brief okay. How has this then impacted and inspired your work that you're doing now around maternal mental health and childbirth and trauma recovery? All of that, because I think you're bringing such a unique history and lived experience to that, that I, a lot of the people who are in the maternal mental health field don't have, especially as the birth keep or birth attendance, experiencing a variety of traumas as well.

Yeah. I'll try to keep it brief. It definitely began with my own healing journey because as I mentioned, that experience really broke me in a good way. Yeah. Cracked me open. So I had to face my, I had to face my inner demons and I had to do my own healing work, which was not just around that experience itself, that was the catalyst.

And that was a humbling, very hard journey. And that opened me up to researching trauma through the neuron-biology lens. So because I geek out on biology and physiology, always have I also was like, Hey, look, I believe biologically that. We're in, I can give birth. And so I also believe biologically, we can heal like this whole mental health paradigm that somehow makes it seem like something's happening to us outside of our control and it's all out there, and then it's there's this brain imbalance issue. And and there's still so much stigma around it. I wanted to break all of that because I knew that is just not true. That is just another story we've been fed and that I believe that we can heal and that includes healing our brain.

And so I just started to study as much as I could and applied that to my own healing with my own psychologist at the time that I was very picky about and had a lot of results personally with the trauma healing modalities that were available at the time, like EMDR and body release work and stuff like that.

But then I also hit a point where I recognized that wasn't enough, so that helped with my nervous system and it helped get my brain back online, but it didn't resolve my soul pain. And, that's a whole other level of healing, which has then been the second half of my healing journey.

and and so I just I just knew I needed to merge my knowledge of birth and my passion around reducing harm in birth. That's always been my passion, it's been, how can we reduce harm in birth? Like there, there's no reason why women, or, should be being violated during labor and delivery.

There's no reason we should be having so much traumatic birth experiences. And so I, combined the two, my understanding of trauma, mental health, and then with my understanding of birth work and then my understanding of holding space, which is really what therapy is and bringing that into the healing realms.

And then that motivated me to complete my master's, which I had never completed back then. So I finally completed my masters so that I could actually be quote legitimate to do this work having some sort of legitimacy really was important to me at the time, even though I'm still somewhat out of that on the edge of that.

And and so that's what brought me here today and then I needed to write about it. And so I obviously have written a lot and now I mentor, I have a staff and students therapist who I mentor to offer. Offer kind of trauma informed and nervous system informed therapy for moms.

So I try to share my knowledge with them, but obviously it's not easy 'cause there's a lot of years of knowledge there. So that I'm not, yeah, I'm not the only one who's offering this. I wanna be able to right. Spread it. And then most recently, with my passion with birth work and doula work and understanding the nervous system and the polyvagal system and understanding how, oh my God, this is the missing link, like undisturbed birth.

What it's about is it's actually supporting the nervous system of the mom. That's what this is about. And I didn't have the language back then. So now it's look, there's a reason why we need to support the nervous system. And there's a reason why this paradigm of birth work is so important because it's actually supporting the polyvagal nerve so that the mom can go into like basically mitigate trauma.

So if we support the nervous system, we're gonna reduce trauma in birth. And so that's where my passion is right now, where. I've changed the sacred story keeping program, which a couple of your students have taken, which I'm grateful for to a three part mentorship program now.

Cool. So the foundational is do it yourself and then there's two more levels of mentorship that would go along with like how to embody this into the birthing space so that you can also support moms in the postpartum to again, mitigate trauma or postpartum mood disorders.

Cool. Yeah. I would definitely get links from you too, to add to the show notes, but just in case someone's listening on one of the apps out there, do you have links off the top of your head and also the names of your books again, would be great to share and your website, etcetera, et cetera.

Yeah. Thank you. Yeah, sure. So the two books healing after birth and midwifery for the soul healing after birth is more academic and specific to birth trauma, recovery and midwifery for the soul is more about my personal healing journey and how I incorporated the metaphor of holistic paradigm of birth into my own healing journey.

And so it's a lot about grief as well. It's poetic, so it's a very different cadence than the first broke. and then for doulas or even midwives who are interested in learning more about supporting the nervous system that you can go to N SI doula training.com. So nervous system informed and SI doula training.com.

And for the therapy side of things, you can go to therapy for moms.ca and we are challenged serving the us population unless I serve them as a coach. Oh, I'm still trying to figure out the logistics in terms of licensing stuff. So right now we serve moms across Canada except Quebec.

And and then when I have out of pro or out of country clients, we talk a bit about coaching instead of counseling yeah. And that's all I think for now. And I also have a podcast and you can get to that on those websites. Awesome. Thank you so much. Is there anything else you were hoping to share today?

That you have not shared yet that would help make this more complete? No, I feel like I've talked a lot. I've definitely shared my origin story. Success. Yes. I feel exposed and vulnerable. No, I'm just super grateful for what Indie Birth is doing and the integrity behind both yourself and Maryn.

And and I know that, to all your listeners as well, like I'm just grateful that there are people out there who, are super passionate about supporting families to have a, I always like the term soul directed birthing, which is a term from WIO. I can't claim that, but that really speaks to me and what I'm passionate about.

And so I just appreciate all the work that's being done out there. Thank you so much. And I'm sure I'll reflect more on this, maybe for the intro that people will have heard already at this point, but I feel compelled to share it here too, since I have you live I think your story is.

So relatable to so many of the women who reach out to us saying that they wanna be a midwife there's these things they're struggling with, or maybe they don't even know that they're grappling with these different paradigms and how to blend them or where to go next. And I just really think your story is so valuable able just as a place of learning and seeing that growth and that change.

And not that it'll look the same for everybody, but there's some real I think relatable and really cool teachable moments in there that hopefully, as people listen, can just help them make their own journey a little smoother and have less unexpected things pop up. And I don't know, just give some more frame to something that, there's not a lot of material out there about, that's one of our number one questions is like, how do I get from here to to where I wanna go, or how do I incorporate this passion and love for birth, in a way that has integrity and honors my place in life, even like you've spoke to having young kids and, I think it was just really rich.

So I hope people got a lot out of it. I know I did. And I'm just so grateful to you for sharing and creating this resource, but I hope to make any more of In a similar

vein, maybe I'll just have a whole series called origin stories. Yeah. But that's awesome. and I'm sure I'll have a hundred more questions for you.

Just like hearing about, getting to stay with Janine PVI baker, even those are such cool stories that, I, I didn't get into birth work until 2010. And so she would've died by then, right? Yeah. Yeah. And yeah. So it's really a nice piece of history and context too. So thank you so much.

Thank you. And I know we're wrapping up here. I just wanted to also comment on what you were saying about what, where do people go when they know that they want to practice in this paradigm, but they can't. they can't find the apprenticeships. Is that what you're referring to?

That's a piece of it, or they can't find the right apprenticeship or they can't envision the end result. Not that your story gave any like concrete answers around any of this, but no. Yeah. Yeah. That was a struggle. I asked all the time and I would get so frustrated. I would often I remember saying to WIO a lot you need a school where we can apprentice, like you can't just leave us out there.

I've always dreamed of there being a center where, like Casa deto, but under this similar paradigm right. Where you can approach, we're gonna do it. Are you? Oh yeah, we're doing it. Is that what you're moving towards? Oh my goodness. That's exciting even like very soon.

We've got cool things in the work because that's the same feeling. Okay. Yeah, I will. Yeah. Keep me in the loop. Maybe get me outta Canada. get outta will rescue you from Canada. Rescue me. That's really exciting. I'm super thrilled to hear that and sorry to have interrupted you. I would. No, that's great.

No, that's what we need. Like we just, we need that. Like we need these paradigms that are parallel societies. Yeah, where we don't have to sacrifice necessarily to be able to embody the skills that we know that are very valuable and very important in this work. So hopefully, yeah.

That's awesome. I'm so happy to hear that. And then yes. I also think that it's important that we keep the stories of some of these births from the past alive, yeah. I remember when Janine died and it felt like a great hole in the birthing community, and it also felt strange that I couldn't even attend her funeral.

That you just heard it through an email or something like that. I think that these pioneers are a part of our history and that's one of the things that I would wanna say to the younger free birth movement. It's you need to bring these pioneers into the work you need to, make sure that you're connected to the ancestry of it.

Yeah, I think that's so important. I agree. Cool. Thanks, Margo. You're welcome. Thank you so much, Jennifer. It was good chatting.

If you enjoyed what you heard, please hit the subscribe button and give this podcast a five star review for more enriching content and conversation around the primal physiological process that is pregnancy birth and beyond. Please head over to Indie Birth dot org. And if you are in the Duluth area, seeking prenatal and midwifery support, you can find Margo at Duluth midwife.com.

Thank you so much for listening until next time.