

00:00:00 Participant Narrator:

Well, I have been thinking about this and I'm glad I asked you when I could start because it actually goes back to my grandmother telling me about her birth because she was tied down to a table when like a lot of women were back then. [S2 affirmative]. And so I just carried that with me when I was young. And then, and I'm in part, I think it explains in large part why I wanted a home birth. And I feel very fortunate to be able to have had a home birth. I have a good friend who was just a year or two older than me who gave birth at the same time I did, within days and it did not go well. And so I didn't take it for granted that it was going to go well. I just knew that I needed to do that for me and for the health of my baby [S2 affirmative].

00:00:47 PN:

Um, but, so there was that just the distrust of the medical profession, and then my mother died of cancer in 1989 and that whole process really drove deeply for me the distrust in hospital setting, in simple things, even like having an IV. I mean, back then if an IV ran out, you, you could have an embolism with air going in and that happened to my mother and I was there and I was able to catch it quickly, but it still happened. And so there was a lot of distrust, uh, and I needed to do something, um, very different from a hospital. I knew that from the very beginning. So connected with a doula early on and [husband] and I took birthing classes together and even like really intimate things, which I realized in hindsight, and we realized it probably at the time too, but like having him stretch that tissue, like to, to open the opening more because I was so small.

00:01:58 PN:

And [S2 affirmative] you know, they wanted, that was part of this birthing class actually. I don't know if they do that anymore. But they wanted him to be realizing what this meant for my body to have to do and, you know, to be listening to me and attentive to me just, um, putting apricot oil on my belly when my skin would stretch and crisp and crack. You know, it was in February [S2 affirmative] so it was really dry when I was full term, [baby] was full term. And um, so then, yeah, I woke up at two in the morning and I heard a voice tell me "I'm coming." And um, about six in the morning I threw up 'cause the pain was getting so bad. [laughter].

00:02:45 PN:

And, yeah. And then just, just worked with it. My doula came fairly early in the day and she helped my dog, Avia my good, she's my good friend Avia. So that Avia could be present through most of it 'cause she was very anxious for me. She could tell I was in pain, but yet she couldn't be there when things actually started. And I broke and water, you know, and, and the birth actually started. So yeah, the doula was there. I remember at one point when I was having really heavy contractions, I was hanging onto one of these windows, that's right behind me, with my claws just like, ah, [laughter] and, and my body was just falling downwards and I was trying to hold on and she said, it's gotta get out the way it got in [laughter].

00:03:38 PN:

Yes. Okay then [laughter]. She just kept trying, cracking these things. Like they weren't jokes, but they were like, you can do this because yeah, you know how your body knows how [S2 affirmative] and bear with it. She gave me like no sympathy, which is probably good, right? I mean there was no like, oh my dear God, this hurts so much, I don't think I can do it. It was, you

absolutely can do this and you're going to do this so [S2 affirmative], breathe and figure out where you need to be. Try the shower next. At one point I remember [husband] standing in front of me because she also wanted [husband] very involved in understanding what my body was going through. And [husband] had a cotton shirt on and I just grabbed the shirt and I didn't know it, but I grabbed hair. [husband] is very hairy. [laughter]. I grabbed hair, I just [laughter] pulled. He never flinched. You should have seen it. There were two holes, I mean two like missing chunks of hair on his chest. Never said a word. Just let me have that contraction and keep going. [laughter]

00:04:47 Speaker 2:

Good for him.

00:04:49 PN:

Yes. So we had bought this house in September that year. So I was fairly pregnant then. And we bought it because it had a corner bathroom partly, I mean it's on the dead end of a dirt road out in the middle of the country near the trails where we hike. But that bathroom, that tub, I thought ,I am giving birth in that tub and you know what, I wanted nothing to do with that tub at - when the time came, [laughter] like, don't even talk to me about that tub, don't out tub- water in that tub. And my doula was insistent at one point. She's like, well just get in the shower because water sometimes helps. And I'm like, oh my god, [laughter]. And so I stood in the shower and just got more and more pissed. I'm like, this isn't doing anything, get me out of the shower [laughter].

00:05:43 S2:

Little counterproductive [laughter]. Yeah.

00:05:46 PN:

But for a first birth, the only one, it was like eight hours later at ten twenty two at night, I gave birth and wow. I mean the universe, it's almost like it stops breathing. It was, um, I felt in a different place, like time had stopped and [S2 affirmative], and everything had gone well. They had used a, an ultrasound, a doppler thingy on me, which I didn't want to have done. Um, 'cause I was in grad school with a guy who was studying the effects of ultrasound on, on infants in the womb, anyway, [S2 affirmative] so I didn't want that done either. But they, he was in the birth canal for a while and they wanted to make sure his heart rate was fine. So my placenta wouldn't come out, that had my doula up the wall because of course my, um, birth person, my, what are you call them [midwife] again? Midwife, thank you.

00:06:55 PN:

She was there, she'd been there for probably three hours. She's like, it's fine. Just let her lie here on the floor. She put [baby] on my chest and she didn't even clean him off much, which I'll tell you about 'cause that is one thing that stuck with me. And I wondered how that has stayed with me because it has in different ways. But, um, he just, he laid on my chest for a long time, not making very many sounds. He was breathing just fine and, and then they wanted to clean him. They took him away from me for just a minute, like not very long at all. And they didn't get him clean. And I started crying like, you have to bring him back to me because I can't take this. And

she said, I did that on purpose. It's okay. She said, I do that to see if a mom is gonna bond right away or if it's gonna take a little while.

00:07:54 PN:

She said, it's okay. I don't really need to do anything with him. He's right here. And she put him back on my chest. And it was probably like 30 or 40 minutes later, the placenta came out and my doula was, she was down at the mailbox, she was out for a walk on the road. She thought I was bleeding and that I was gonna die because you can't tell apparently, but yeah. Yes. My midwife thought I was fine and I did, thank God, end up being fine. And that placenta is still in a, in a tub in the freezer because I wanted to bury it on one of [baby's] birthdays out in our yard. But of course it's always really cold [laughter] in February, February. And I also thought he would have interest at some point in the closure of it and the beauty of that cycle.

00:08:42 PN:

And he hasn't, ever, [laughter] wanted to have anything to do with that. [laughter] So now that I'm retired, [laughter] I think I'm gonna find my own and maybe this interview will be it where I will find a space that I want to have closure and [S2 affirmative] do my own ceremony around that to really just, um, kind of root that birth here in this place in beautiful Michigan where I gave birth to my child [S2 affirmative]. But, um, yeah, all of that went well. Then they gave me a cloth to clean him off. And this is the part I was gonna tell you about because his left eye, I didn't know how hard you could push and there's all that white stuff and it's all over his eye. It even had his left eye like cemented closed. And I didn't wanna push. I didn't have a baby before. I didn't know [laughter].

00:09:43 PN:

Yeah, yeah.

00:09:44 PN:

And so I was just superficial with it. Like, okay, let's leave it alone for now. It's gonna be okay. But then his eye didn't open, and so I'm just connecting with him through his right eye and talking to him. And I had a song that I had been practicing that, to be honest with you, I'm not even sure I remember. But I, I wanted to just connect with him and talk and welcome him here and tell him he's safe. And yeah, so I let that eye go and finally she did clean it out and it was really lovely to see that left eye open and see both of his eyes. And as I say it to you, it's not a big deal. But I have felt guilty, I'll be honest, I have felt guilty that I didn't get that eye cleaned off well enough so that he could see me through both of his eyes and so that I could see him because it's more of a complete connection.

00:10:51 PN:

[S2 affirmative]. But I, I think it's okay. Um, at any rate, uh, it has come back to me in different ways 'cause sometimes I look at his left eye, you know, how our left and our right eyes are different. Our left is so receptive, and our right is very often when you look at people and you just look at one eye, you can often see a very different person, a more outgoing, assertive, sometimes even angry or hurt outward right eye. And the left eye tends to be more tender and [S2 affirmative] sometimes hurt too. It's where people tend to show their pain that they hold,

they think they hold in the left eye can be so revealing. And so I didn't get to see that left eye right away. Um, but yeah, I think it's okay. I'm glad I said all that out loud. I don't why that's been holding in ,in a more strong way than, than it feels like saying it out loud. So then, yeah, my midwife gave me scrambled eggs. Oh my god, those are the best scrambled eggs I've ever had. [laughter]. And by two in the morning she left us in our bed with an infant, and I felt panic [laughter] like [yeah] dear God in heaven,[laughter].

00:12:16 PN:

Yeah. I was pretty panicked. And [husband] was too. Um, so we took turns sleeping so that neither of us crushed him. And, and he stayed in bed with us for many, many weeks until he started getting really active. And then we created a bed next to our bed that he could be in and he could just roll in if he was rolling around and roll into me. But yeah. Oh my god, those first many weeks, I, it's easy to romanticize them. And I was telling myself the other day when I talked to you not to do that because there aren't words to explain the tiredness, [laughter]. There aren't words [laughter].

00:13:06 PN:

And I've been tired before, you know, I've been so tired at work, like before retirement a week ago, that I just cry every night. I just cry myself to sleep because I'm so tired. I mean, working 12 to 14 hours every day for the last three years. And on weekends as well. I'm gut wrenchingly tired. But it didn't compare to how tired I was.

00:13:30 S2:

No, it doesn't, it really doesn't [laughter].

00:13:34 PN:

Because it's here, you're giving energy and the milk and, uh, it just doesn't stop. It's just you drop, you drop and you feed. It's like, that was an hour and a half ago, aren't you good for? No. That was thirty minutes ago. Really? You oh, [laughter]. Oh my God. And so that's

00:13:55 S2:

So true. So true.

00:13:56 PN:

You could just feel the energy leave you, right? Like [deep breath]

00:13:58 S2:

Yeah. Yeah.

00:14:02 PN:

But you give so happily and willingly, but nonetheless, you're giving all the time. And to try to get something done while he was napping was like, okay, this might push me over a ledge if I actually try to do dishes while he's napping. [laughter].

00:14:21 S2:

It's so true. It's so true [laughter]. That could be the thing [laughter].

00:14:28 PN:

Oh, God, that could be the thing.

00:14:33 PN:

So all [That's so true.] all of that's the undercurrent. But to be honest, I vividly remember, and sometimes they were only moments, but sometimes they were entire days where I was in tears out of just the beauty [S2 affirmative] of having a baby. And the bond, [baby] and I have always been close. I think it might be because of that. I have always felt toward him the minute I did, that my midwife took him away from me, like give him back [laughter]. I mean, I have fallen asleep with him when he was just weeks old, and I swear to God, Liza, if there is a heaven, the doors of heaven opened. And I don't even know how to, how to express it. There aren't words. It, it's such a beautiful place [S2 affirmative] where you are one with this child. It's a gift. It's a gift beyond anything I ever knew existed. [S2 affirmative] and wow. So one time, which is related to this, [baby] was on the futon, this was, we had moved him into the bedroom next to our room for part of the time.

00:16:00 PN:

I, he was two, but mostly he was still sleeping right next to the bed. But it was up to him. He liked [S2 affirmative] some more independence. And I don't know why [baby], [husband] and I were both there with [baby], he had just woken up. And those were always precious moments, wake up, right? It's like you're back, "Hi [laughter], so glad to see you." And we each said hello to him and he started to hum. And I swear to God it was like, if there is a sound of an angel, that was it [S2 affirmative]. And I didn't, I couldn't swallow. I didn't know what to do. My heart started to beat. And I looked at [husband] and [husband], [husband], thank God for [husband]. He was just so there with [baby]. He was totally present. And I don't know why I couldn't hold it. I, I didn't know what to do.

00:17:06 PN:

I didn't have to do anything, but I couldn't settle. I couldn't settle with it. And I laughed. It just, it was a nervous kind of like giggly or, and he broke. It stopped it. And I sometimes, I'll never forgive myself for that because who knows how long it that would've gone on and where it would've ended. I [S2 affirmative] maybe just, it would, he would've stopped when he stopped anyway, or just a minute later, who knows. But there were times like that, and they weren't every day, but they were so deeply touching when they happened [S2 affirmative] that I carry that as my memory of his birth and his early life. That it was just, wow. Yeah. No words.

00:18:03 S2:

So when you think of those kinds of times, how do you embody them? And by that I mean, who are you in that moment? Right? He's humming [yeah]. [husband] is present. And who are you?

00:18:16 PN:

Well, in that instance, boy, I have other answers to that in other instances, but [S2 affirmative], I think what was so kind of bizarre about that is it was, it was almost an invitation from just my soul to be present and not the rest of me [S2 affirmative]. And I didn't know how to do that partly as the mom, because [S2 affirmative] all of it was about the body being present for him [S2 affirmative]. For safety, for food, for security, for fun experiences, for loving eyes, for a beautiful sound, a voice and song, for color. I was everything. My body was everything. And in that moment, I honestly think there was more of a disconnect from body and a commune [S2 affirmative] that was happening. And I, I didn't know how to go ahead and breathe into that and disconnect my body from the presence that was happening.

00:19:28 S2:

That's exactly why I ask [PN name], because I think for, especially for breastfeeding moms, for all, for all moms, but especially breastfeeding moms, um, to be fair, I think in those early days you are often presented with opportunities like you're describing but because your whole life is doing something for the baby, it is, I think, more challenging for the moms to really be present in those moments in the way that you described [husband] being. And, and this is no, I mean, it's not to, to, um, downplay his presence [yeah] and, and what, you know, his ability to do that. But just that, I think there's an added challenge for moms who have spent those first couple weeks doing something. That is what being a mom is, is doing things: diapering, feeding, cuddling, comforting, napping, moving the baby, bathing the baby. And I think it is hard to know you're maybe before you were a mom and you were just you, that might have been easier. But those, that early training sort of, of being a mom [yeah] is hard to drop. It's hard to [it is] it's hard to set down [yeah]. And it's hard to come back into yourself as not an active parent in that moment. Just a person. Right?

00:20:46 PN:

Yeah. Exactly.

00:20:48 S2:

So that's why I ask that, to see if that was something you found as well.

00:20:51 PN:

Yeah. That puts it very well. I was rooted in doing something, being [S2 affirmative] present in an active way. And it took me really off guard because it was asking me to turn that around completely different.

00:21:07 S2:

Yeah. And it can feel like, um, almost like a, a type of abandonment. Like you're not caring because you're willing to stop being a mom for the moment and just be you. And I think for some, some parents they experience that as like, um, something they shouldn't do for, you know, they shouldn't do that [laughter]. And it can be filled with, with sort of a guilt about it.

00:21:33 PN:

And the flip side of that is feeling not needed in that way in the moment, which is like, wait a sec, [laughter], this isn't our, get go here, this isn't our relationship. Like, you need me [laughter], lemme tell ya [laughter].

00:21:53 PN:

Well 'cause that was a dynamic that was playing out for us, which is why that dawned on me because there were times I gained almost 50 pounds when I was pregnant with him. A lot of weight, I've never weighed that much in my life [S2 affirmative]. And so I wanted to work out, I wanted to go downstairs, get on the, we had a Nordic track, which is a gentle way to work out, you know? [S2 affirmative] I would get down there, I would get 10 minutes into a workout, scream, scream as if his life was ending scream. I mean, and it was so reproducible. It's like, yeah, okay, he needs me [laughter]. Ok.

00:22:37 S2:

And how did that feel to you? Did that feel, um, demanding or did it feel reaffirming like, yeah, he needs me. I'm needed.

00:22:47 PN:

Um, I'll be honest, it felt more demanding as time went on, especially [S2 affirmative] and I needed the workout and I needed just a little bit of time. 'Cause I'm a very, very type A person. I have got to be doing things and usually they have to be hard things. Whether it's hard physical things or hard mental things or hard emotional- I need to be doing hard things. Ah. And then it would just, and I'm not someone who stops what I'm doing easily. I feel robbed. And that's partly why we had just one child because I, I know I do not split my attention well. And so, when I start on a task, and this bites me in the ass all the time, all the time, but I need like a finish [laughter], whether it's the dishes or pulling that patch of weeds or getting, you know, whatever for work done, which I gotta separate myself from now, but I do things in batches.

00:23:45 PN:

I'm not good at being interrupted. And so his need of me, which I experienced as very real because that scream was almost like someone was branding him with a hot iron was like, and then I get up here and then it's consolation time and trying to understand like, what, what is scaring you. I mean, for the first several weeks it was, I'm really frightened for him [S2 affirmative] that he would get that frightened [S2 affirmative]. So I did the ceremonial things I could do. I reached out to friends, you know, Steiner friends and friends who'd had children. They were Stein, my Steiner friends were like, you know, like try different things, music, soft, like get a waterfall in the room, just try, none of it worked, none of it. And there's, I did nothing that I did to try to console him or keep him into a quiet, a sleep state worked [S2 affirmative] and I couldn't control that [S2 affirmative]. So, so yeah, I started getting really frustrated with it. That was hard, but not, you know, I never got mad at him. Well, I did get mad at him. [S2 affirmative], I would come up and I would say stop [laughter] the older he got [S2 affirmative].

00:25:09 S2:

Yeah.

00:25:11 S2:

So how long would you say that went on for?

00:25:13 PN:

You know, as I was telling you, I am wondering too. If it was just like three months or [S2 affirmative], I think it was probably just three months, but I was ready to pull my hair out. By the end of it, I started to wonder, is this room possessed? I mean, what [laughter], seriously, he's physically, there, there's not a bee or a mosquito in the room. There's not [S2 affirmative]. [S2 affirmative]. He's comfortable. He's not too, oh my God, that was rough. Yeah you look at life through a completely different lens. Yeah. [S2 affirmative]. You're thinking, you know how, I think women do this way more than men and that mothers, maybe it's hard wired, that we're supposed to think about a lot of, I call them tendrils, but a lot of what ifs, because you gotta play out all these potential implications to keep a young child protected [S2 affirmative].

00:26:03 PN:

Because it is not just that one little thing. It's tripping over that cord is gonna pull that thing out of there and then that's gonna shock him if he steps over that way, I mean, or sticks that thing in it. I mean, it's just, you know, your mind. So it's just total. Yeah. Yes. Oh, that's true. And I like how you put it earlier that you maintain yourself, but yes, finding yourself as a new mom, looking through that whole new lens, whole new context, figuring out how to maintain yourself is so healthy and so necessary, and yet, as, you know, ridden with guilt. Or it can be. Especially when they're really young and they're screaming, it's like, wow, [laughter].

00:26:50 S2:

Yeah. And especially, I love how you talked about that, that time after your midwife left, because there is a piece, and, and I, I'm interested, we'll talk more probably in the second interview about how it might, I mean, you wouldn't necessarily be able to speak to this difference, but how it's different in a home setting because of course when that happens in a hospital setting, there's still nurses and what have you. Even once the birth is over, you have a period of time where you have sort of semi privacy, right. You're on your own, but there's a call button [yeah] if something happens. Right. And you don't have that in a home setting in the same way I'm sure that you can call your midwife or your doula. I mean, as a doula, people call me. But, um, but there's a different level of sort of immediate responsibility.

00:27:36 PN:

For life and death. Right. It's like

00:27:39 S2:

Quite literally.

00:27:40 PN:

Yeah [laughter], yeah. Is the baby breathing.