Grover Wehman-Brown:

You are listening to Masculine Birth Ritual. My name is Grover Wehman-Brown. Our interview today is with New Papa Jacoby Ballard. Here we go.

Hi Jacoby.

Jacoby Ballard:

Hi Grover.

Grover Wehman-Brown:

How are you?

Jacoby Ballard:

I'm all right.

Grover Wehman-Brown:

Good. To start off with, can you tell us a little bit about yourself, what work you do in the world and what brings you into conversation on Masculine Birth Ritual podcast?

Jacoby Ballard:

Sure. I've been a social justice educator for about the last 15 or 20 years, and I'm a yoga teacher, meditation teacher, and a lot of my work is around the intersection of social justice and yoga, embodiment, contemplative spiritual practice, and also trauma. Cause a lot of us come to social justice work from experiences of trauma and wanting the world to be different. But if we don't heal and examine that trauma, then we're bound to play it out again. So I do a lot of, I teach in traditional yoga settings and studios. I've also taken the tools of yoga and Buddhism into high schools and elementary schools and college settings and conferences and social justice organizations in order to make the work that we do more sustainable and to keep the change makers healthy.

Grover Wehman-Brown:

Yeah, great. And you are a new parent?

Jacoby Ballard:

I am. Giuseppe is eight weeks old.

Grover Wehman-Brown:

Eight weeks. That's sweet.

Jacoby Ballard:

Yeah.

Grover Wehman-Brown:

Congratulations.

Jacoby Ballard:

Thank you. Thank you.

Grover Wehman-Brown:

So can you tell us a little bit about how your position in the world and the kind of gender words you use to describe yourself?

Jacoby Ballard:

Yeah, yeah. I identify as genderqueer sometimes a trans man or trans guy, although that doesn't totally resonate. But I also want to recognize that I'm often read as masculine in the world. And so I want to be responsible for that as well. I grew up in a rural town in Colorado with a single mom. Pretty working class or lower middle class upbringing. And the whole town was in that same economic strata at the time. I'm white and queer identified, able bodied. Yeah.

Grover Wehman-Brown:

And where do you live right now?

Jacoby Ballard:

I live in Salt Lake City, Utah.

Grover Wehman-Brown:

Great. Thank you. And what pronouns do you prefer people use when they're talking about you?

Jacoby Ballard:

I usually use he/him, but I've started to use they/them a little bit more. When I initially came out 15 years ago, I wanted all the pronouns used and people just kind of tended to use what was most comfortable for them, and that was most uncomfortable for me. So I quickly learned to challenge them by choosing he pronoun, knowing that I would get misgendered a lot anyways.

Grover Wehman-Brown:

Yeah, I resonate with that. Thank you. And do you have a preference, he/him or they/them?

Jacoby Ballard:

Not really.

Grover Wehman-Brown:

Okay.

Jacoby Ballard:

I mean, guess if I'm in a straight setting, if I'm downtown at the Trader Joe's in Salt Lake City, I would prefer he/him just for my own safety and Mormon culture. But if I'm amidst queer community or in social justice settings, or even more and more in yoga settings, they/them feels great.

Grover Wehman-Brown:

Cool. Great. Thank you. You brought your child into the world through your body.

Jacoby Ballard:

Yeah.

Grover Wehman-Brown:

I'm wondering if you can tell us a little bit about that experience. How did you decide to do that and what was that experience like?

Jacoby Ballard:

Yeah, I think in a previous partnership, we were planning on having a child as well. And it was pretty clear that my female body, woman identified partner was going to be the one carrying. And then in this partnership that I'm in now and I've been in for the last 10 years, she didn't feel like her body would be able to carry and she didn't really want that experience for her body. She has chronic pain and felt like that would exacerbate things anyway. And yeah, I have the equipment to grow a child and I've done a lot of work, internal work on my gender identity and a lot of processing trauma and coming to be pretty settled and grounded in who I am. And so I felt like carrying a child, I called it a germination rather than pregnancy. Because that was a word that resonated more, is kind of non-gendered. And I'm also an herbalist. And so it kind of had a sweetness of identifying with my plant friends.

So I felt like germination would probably bring things up, but that I felt pretty confident that I could handle it and that I had resources in my partnership and in my community to be able to deal with whatever arose. So we had waited some years timing wise, my partner's a professor and she was finishing her dissertation and knew that she couldn't be stewarding a young child at the same time I was trying to birth her dissertation. So she got her PhD in the fall of 2016, and then we started making plans to have a child from there.

And rewinding a little bit had, I've done a number of yoga retreats with my friend Eric. And at one of our last retreats we did together, we were in an airport in Houston, and we were just kind of updating each other in our lives. And I was telling him that we're planned to have a kid in the next three, four years and have a list of people that we're going to ask. And was just talking a little bit about that and how it can be hard to ask male bodied, cisgender men, male friends for that. It just adds a different dynamic to the relationship. And sometimes the relationship can hold that and sometimes not, or fear of rejection. And then how would that impact my relationship with these guys? And so at that moment in the Houston airport, Eric was like, "Can I be on that list?"

And so when he said that, he immediately moved to the top of that list because him volunteering that necessary genetic material just simplified the process. So yeah, last winter we started trying, and the first try was last February and we called it try zero because we didn't really know what we were doing in terms of temperature and tracking ovulation and making sure my body was in a nourish state to be able to conceive and try zero didn't work. But then the next try did last April on Earth Day.

Grover Wehman-Brown:

Wow.

Jacoby Ballard:

I feel really lucky that it was so simple. And we did a really old school style with the syringe and at Eric's house in Long Island. And yeah, it was really sweet because he and I are friends and he's friends with my partner Leslie as well. We'd all traveled together for various yoga retreats before. We meditated beforehand and just had a lot of intention going in. And I think one of the things that I'm most proud of and that we continue to offer up to Giuseppe is just kind of welcoming whatever being comes. I know that's been important both for me and my gender identity and different traumas that I've gone through. Ways of the world hasn't welcomed me. And also that of my partner who is disabled. And when she was born, she was not welcomed. There was an idea that something was wrong.

And so from that night of insemination up to the current day, we've been tried to catch ourselves on any kind of expectations that we have of the child of if one of us says, "I can't wait to go hiking with this being," then the other one will usually say, "Or get them into the outdoors in whatever way is possible." Or one of us says, "I can't wait to hear what his voice singing sounds like." The other one might say, "I'm excited to hear whatever sounds he can make and however he expresses themselves."

So in that night in Long Island, we were just welcoming whatever being came. And that was really special to set that intention and really healing, I think, for my partner and I. Then, so when we conceived, we were living in western Massachusetts, which is there's tons of queer providers, big queer community. We had a lot of friends and felt like we could really have a lot of great providers. And just before we conceived, Leslie got hired for a 10 year track job in Utah. So yeah, we started our germination process in Massachusetts. And then once we moved to Utah, really found all of our birth workers. And it's really interesting because I came into it thinking that it would be really hard to find a resonant team and that there would be a lot of transphobia that we would encounter.

And one of the ways that Leslie headed that off, since I was going to be the one carrying and often am seen as a guy and genderqueer identified and queer identified, she would call the provider. So it was everyone from the midwives that we interviewed to the massage therapist, acupuncturist, chiropractor, doula. She was the one that made the call to interface and was always very forthcoming. My partner is trans and he's carrying the baby, and these are the things that we would need of you in your role, or you and the office staff or whatever. Do you think you can step up to that?

It's so funny in Utah because I think there's so much homophobia within their Mormon church, people that either are not Mormon and want to be allies to the queer community or people who are Mormon and don't believe in that aspect of their church, really, really want to be allies kind of bend over backwards. And so that really worked to our advantage in this case. Most all of the midwives really wanted to work with us. When we had to make the calls to the ones that we didn't choose, they were very disappointed.

Grover Wehman-Brown:

Wow.

Jacoby Ballard:

Yeah.

Grover Wehman-Brown:

Great. So it sounds like you had an unexpectedly positive experience picking out care providers.

Jacoby Ballard:

Yeah.

Grover Wehman-Brown:

Then as your germination was turning into birth, how was that process and how did you feel in your body while you were germinating this person?

Jacoby Ballard:

I thought that that would be the time when I would have a lot of gender dysphoria come up. But I think being a yoga teacher and being someone who the body and anatomy and physiology is my work and is a language that I speak, it was really just fascinating all the changes in my body and knowing now the baby's the size of a raspberry, or now this being is the size of a butternut squash. Now today I'm developing kidneys, was just fascinating. So all the way through the birth, I didn't have any of that come up.

The birth itself, so we wanted a home birth, and luckily we found a midwife who has the only accredited birthing center in the state of Utah. And part of what that means is that she accepts insurance and she accepts our insurance. And that insurance covers not only the birth that take place in her birthing center, but that she also delivers at home. So we got insurance to cover most of a home birth. And we really wanted to do a home birth because I mean, one, I just have a lot of trauma from the medical industrial complex and don't want to deal with a lot of nurses and providers coming in and out and saying the wrong things and just all the feelings that I would have about that. And being at home, it felt like a more familiar and comfortable environment, but also more controlled.

And we took a birthing class leading up to it that was recommended by our midwife. And one of the classes we saw a video of saw videos of lots of births, but one of the births we saw was our midwife delivering a breach birth. And that was really good for us to just know and have confidence in her to be able to stay calm and grounded, even in a complicated situation like that. And that played out in my birth as well. I could see just how she's just so familiar with birth and she knows all the signs and knows her role so well and how to communicate with the birthing person. But it was really good to see that of her beforehand before we got into it. And I guess the other thing I would say is that because I'm a masculine presenting person, and I think because most people really want to be allies around here, I didn't receive unsolicited commentary about my body at all. Probably so much less than a woman identified person even.

Grover Wehman-Brown:

Or just a person who doesn't pass.

Jacoby Ballard:

Right. Yeah, sure. Yeah. I think my gender kind of silenced people or also they read me as just a kind of a chubbier guy, and I had just moved here, so lots of people didn't know me and didn't know that that's not the usual state of my body. So I didn't have to talk about it with many people that I didn't want to talk about it with. And I feel really lucky for that because we were ready, Leslie and I had prepared a kind of FAQ document that we called the Germination Proclamation that kind of instructed our families and friends on questions to ask or information that they might want to know that I didn't want to answer in person. We provided there. And then we also, if we would've been in a more familiar place like Massachusetts or Brooklyn where we've spent a lot more time, we would've had a postcard pamphlet to be able to hand out to people that would be a simplified version of that. But we didn't end up needing that because most people just didn't know and didn't say anything.

Grover Wehman-Brown:

Wow. I love that. Germination Proclamation. That's amazing. Genius.

Jacoby Ballard:

Thanks. I mean, we intended it for our blood families to be able to get them up to speed and language to use, and that I'm not the mother or that Leslie is still parent, even though her genetic material is not involved. I can send it to you, Grover, we put so much love and care into it. All of our social justice organizer friends, when they received it, they wrote us back and we're like, oh my goodness, this is such a resource. You should publish this. This is great.

Grover Wehman-Brown:

Yeah. You should. Would you be willing to share part of it with the listeners or even just the structure?

Jacoby Ballard:

Yeah, totally.

Grover Wehman-Brown:

Okay.

Jacoby Ballard:

Totally. We would love to make it a public document. We just haven't had the time to do that as new parents. Yeah. So then the birth itself, the day before he was born, I was feeling kind of crampy and just my energy was a little bit lower, and it was just a remarkable change. And my partner recognized that, and she scurried around running around the city doing things that needed doing, making sure we had all the necessary pieces for our birthing tub and my phone had malfunctioned, making sure that I had a new phone so I could talk to people afterwards. And we've been using a lot of donor milk. So she went to get some of that from a friend of a friend. And I was taking walks and took some baths.

And we went to bed at 1:00 AM that night on January 15th. And we have separate bedrooms and we always have, so that we have our own space. And because sleep can be hard with someone nearby for both of us at different times. And so she went to bed in her bed and I went to bed in my bed and she said, since it was 1:00 AM she'd love to be able to sleep till 9:00 AM, get a full night of sleep and recognition that she won't have the hormones coursing through her body that I would have, and as a first time birther, this could be a very long process. So she needed to rest up.

And I started having contractions a couple hours later at 3:00. And I really, I was trying to not wake her because I haven't done this before and I didn't know how long it would take. And so just was holding off waking her up and had just labored by myself for about the first three hours and then contacted our doula at 6:00 and she said she'd be over at 8:00 And then Leslie woke up at 7:00 and came in just to check on me. And she was maybe going to go back to sleep. She still had her eye pillow on. And then she witnessed a couple of contractions and she was like, "Oh, nope, this is go time. I'm up."

And she called the midwife, and we had talked to the midwife the night before too. And she's just so even keeled and was like, "All right, so great. It's great to hear that things are happening. It might take a few many more hours for things to really get going before I should come over, so just let me know." And right then as she's saying that to Leslie, I'm in the background and she heard a couple of contractions of mine and she was like, "Oh, actually, I'll be right over." So she got here like 8:30 and continuing to have contractions. And it was like this snowy morning was the night before it had been a blizzard when Leslie was running all around town.

Grover Wehman-Brown:

Because that's quite a vision. If your birth was a movie, snow blowing all around as she's cutting through it, knowing the baby's coming. Exactly.

Jacoby Ballard:

Yeah. And so then I started having pushes, and it was pretty remarkable experience in my body to just feel like there's this thing happening that I had, I guess I had thought before that about pushing that I would be, now I have to. It would be a mental decision rather than something that just came over my body, which was really... I'm just looking back as a trans person, there's a lot of complicated feelings, I think for a lot of masculine identified or genderqueer people or trans guys about carrying a child. And just the experience of pushing, I feel made it all worth it to me. So it's this pure experience of the power of my body and just energy moving through me that I wouldn't give back for anything.

So I was, at some point, our midwife came over to me and she was like, I had been standing up for a lot of the morning while I was having contractions and pushing, and she came over and was like, "So Jacoby standing up is a perfectly good way to give birth. And if you want to sit on a birthing stool, then you want to do that right now."

Grover Wehman-Brown:

Wow.

Jacoby Ballard:

Yeah. And so then I sat down. It was probably, I mean everyone around me. I don't in a mind to count or anything, but people around me said it was about five pushes before the baby came out.

Grover Wehman-Brown:

Wow.

Jacoby Ballard:

Yeah, it's like 15 minutes. And we had asked our whole birthing team to not make any sex declaration, and also not to say the baby's healthy because we again wanted to welcome whoever the baby was. So if they were disabled, if their spine was outside their body, if they couldn't hear or whatever, health is not really a concern for us. We wanted to welcome whatever being it was. So baby came out, and the arrangement with my partner is that I was going to carry the child and that she is going to feed the child. She's spent many months inducing lactation, taking hormones and pumping. And so we had arranged with the birth team that once the baby came out, that rather than going onto my chest as is done in a lot of other births, that it would go onto her chest to facilitate the breastfeeding relationship. So baby was scooped up onto her, and at some point she kind of came over to me and we were holding the baby between us.

And then we started getting showered with urine. And we looked down at the baby and we were like, oh, you're making your own announcement. Hello. And he was purple and crying and peeing and squishy and slimy and hard to hold onto, which I didn't imagine. I thought that he would be, I don't know, just very easy to hold. And then we were in the bed within, I don't know, probably the next 10 or 15 minutes kind of cuddling up as a family.

Grover Wehman-Brown:

Wow. Very sweet.

Jacoby Ballard:

Yeah.

Grover Wehman-Brown:

Wow. And how was your body in the hours after he was born?

Jacoby Ballard:

I had a little bit of tearing, but not too bad. I did have to have a stitch, which I mean, the whole process of having a midwife, having a provider down by my genitals by my parts felt weird throughout the process. And definitely when she was stitching me up also felt weird, but it was pretty easy on my body. And I've heard that quick births tend to be easy on the birder's body and harder on the baby's body cause the baby doesn't get time in the birth canal to unfurl and stretch out when they've been in fetal position for so long. And so he had his whole head, his head, his forehead, his eyes were all bruised because Adrienne, our midwife, said he literally slammed into my pelvis because it was happening so fast. And he's had a lot of congestion around his face that did make it hard for him to latch and to eat and to breathe. And so we've been working with a cranial sacral provider to kind of spread things out.

Grover Wehman-Brown:

And how do you feel now eight weeks out?

Jacoby Ballard:

Oh, I feel really grateful that we brought this life in to the world and grateful that we did it together. And I feel like a lot closer to my partner that this is something that we have to do as a team. And we've learned how to do it pretty seamlessly. And I feel just so enamored with this little being and just the little changes day by day that happen. And also really, it's so amazing that the biology of even his cry that our midwife says that babies have individual cries that are going to make their specific parents perk up and pay attention. That maybe if your baby was crying, I wouldn't respond in the same way.

Grover Wehman-Brown:

Oh yeah, absolutely.

Jacoby Ballard:

It's so amazing how our nervous systems are tethered to each other like that, or also his cuteness, and he submits the brain waves that sooth and compel people around him. It's really beautiful to see and experience that this is how the parent baby relationship works and has worked for millennia.

Grover Wehman-Brown:

Yeah. That's amazing. What else are you enjoying about having a tiny, tiny human?

Jacoby Ballard:

I love taking him out in the world and taking him for walks and just having him at a baby carrier with his chest against my chest, or having him fall asleep while I'm at a coffee shop or at a bookstore. And also, I mean, it's so interesting as a queer person where I feel interacting in those kinds of public settings, I've had experiences of either being stared at or totally dismissed or not noticed at all. But with having Giuseppe on my chest, so many people interact with me that wouldn't interact with me otherwise. And in lots of ways it's refreshing and beautiful. And then the inevitable question of is that a boy or a girl as a way to create connection between us is annoying.

Grover Wehman-Brown:

Yeah. How do you respond to that?

Jacoby Ballard:

Often when I'm with my partner, because it's a sensitive question for me, and that's been asked about me a lot of times, my partner will answer that, and her kind of go-to recently has just been, "We don't know. We're waiting to find out." And a lot of times people are like, I don't know, have this look come over their face that's like, oh, I see you're trying to be progressive. And then they're like, "But really, what is it?" And I don't know, I would love any tools from anyone else on your podcast or queer community more broadly on how to deal with that question in a way that... Because I don't want to alienate strangers that are, they're really just trying to seek commonality and connection. But also, that question is not a way to do it with me.

Grover Wehman-Brown:

Yeah. Yeah. I mean, I think your partner's response is a great one, and people feel put off by it. We tried doing various side steps just, what is it? It's a baby. No kidding. But what is it? This is Lyrin. Keep trying. And then we might say, well, we call her she for now, but she'll let us know what her gender feels like when she grows up or something. Something like that. By that time, we're usually all up in our feelings and things have gotten tense anyway. I didn't have the skills in staying super calm and not feeling, it's not just personal for me, but it just reminded me that we were just on the precipice of a whole 15 to lifetime of that. Just of intense gender stuff that we just had to deal with that would be coming at us.

And it's totally sad to say, but it only gets more intense in my experience because there's the tension between sending your kids to an uber liberal bubble school where they'll use whatever gender words or pronouns or talking about gender in any sort of revolutionary way. But those are often expensive or require a lot of labor from parents and are usually predominantly white. For us, it was this tension between do we send her to school with the people or do we send her to a liberal bubble? And these days we are choosing school with the people in public school and Spanish speaking schools when we have the options. And so it just means dealing with the existing status quo of gender basically.

Jacoby Ballard:

Totally. And we really do want to leave it open for him. We often also say he's a boy for now until he tells us otherwise. But we also don't want to project our gender politics onto him either. If he's a straight guy, if he's a cis gender boy, we're going to love him still. So at the time, like your daughter. If he's like, "I am your son," then absolutely, we would call him that. But for now, we're trying to not use or use as few gendered terms about him as possible.

Grover Wehman-Brown:

Right. Yeah. So listeners, Jacoby and I, before we started recording the call, I shared that when my kids were babies, we referred to them with gender neutral words like baby, kid, child. But as my oldest daughter started to really assert her own gender, it was clear didn't want to be called by those gender neutral terms. She wanted to be my daughter and was proud to be my daughter. So talking about when kids start to assert that and welcome the gendered language, and she sort of rolls her eyes at my agenda, my gender neutral agenda or gender [inaudible 00:34:30] agenda, whichever it is, and now I'll just share back.

So one thing that I found as my daughter got older is that not only but our family's agenda of being gender expansive, not a priority for my daughter, but also that I quickly had to school up on the complexities of what mainstream gender stuff is so that I could parent her well. Because I wasn't a traditional girl, I was always a genderqueer weirdo kid, sort of outside the culture of girlhood. And so I read the book Queen Bees and Wannabees recently, which I never ever thought I would read, but I trying to understand what's happening in my daughter's life as she's part of girls only cliques and just stuff that I'm like, I thought feminism would've won. So that wasn't happening by the time my kids were here, but that's not true. So becoming really competent in mainstream gender, which is weird for me.

Jacoby Ballard:

Yeah.

Grover Wehman-Brown:

Yeah. And I find that my friends who have boy children experienced that too. A lot of them of being like, wow, this is a lot coming at me. How I can't ignore that this is what the rest of the world is anymore. So how do I deal?

Jacoby Ballard:

Totally.

Grover Wehman-Brown:

Yeah.

Jacoby Ballard:

Yeah. I'm grateful for people like you that are a few years ahead of me to bounce things off of and have community engagement on all those questions that it will arise.

Grover Wehman-Brown:

Well, your baby's eight weeks.

Jacoby Ballard:

Yep.

Grover Wehman-Brown:

You soak that up. That's amazing. But speaking of enjoying that, you've mentioned in our pre-recording that parenting is sometimes challenging or different than maybe than you thought.

Jacoby Ballard:

Yeah, totally. I mean, just the very fact of being responsible for this little being and making choices about his health and his care. He had a lip tie and a tongue tie, and so it was best for us and for him to get surgery on that. And it was a really slow, what felt slow, it was a four week recovery that feels like when a child is three weeks old, it feels like forever. And in order to maintain that, we had to stretch it, stretch the wound site eight times a day every four hours. And he would wail just be like, why are you doing this to me?

So those little things are hard and challenging. And then, I think, just getting to know each other and not knowing what will soothe him or what his preferences are in terms of temperature or lighting or what scares him. Our doula who is not only our doula for birth, but also a postpartum doula for us, said that it's like having this new tiny roommate, and if it was an adult person that was pooping on your couch and screaming at all hours of the night that you would throw them out. That gave us a really good perspective of just new parenthood is really hard. So we're trying to keep this human alive and learning so much. We are learning so much as parents and he's learning so much as a new human in the world.

Grover Wehman-Brown:

And are you one or both of you at home with him right now? I don't mean in this moment, but I mean [inaudible 00:38:45].

Jacoby Ballard:

Yeah. We left him at home. My partner who's a professor, her school gives a one semester parental leave, which is really, really lucky. So she doesn't have to be on campus again until August. Which I can't imagine having for her as a chest feeder to have less leave than that, it feels like. So when we tell people that we sometimes have a little bit of shame or recognize our privilege in that, but also one of our friends reminded us that it's not that we're privileged, it's that should be a right for everyone who brings a new being into the world. And it's not something that we're doing wrong or something that we should personally feel shame about, but it's something that needs to change in this country's policies. And then I'm a yoga teacher, so a lot of my work is independent contract work. And so I've kind of arranged it to give me a couple of months to not work, and I'm just now starting to get back into teaching and I can take that pretty slowly. And that feels really lucky too.

Grover Wehman-Brown:

And do you feel physically recovered enough that physically you can do and teach yoga?

Jacoby Ballard:

Yeah, through my germination, I was teaching until week 38 of my germination. And so through that process I got a lot more stronger in just offering vocal commands, vocal directions to my students and not just demonstrating all the time. And so I do that some now too, getting back into classes, but also my body has healed pretty quickly and I didn't have many birth injuries at all. I think Giuseppe really took the brunt of the difficulty there. Every now and then something hurts or feels weird or feels off or that I shouldn't do it, but I feel mostly able to be back.

Grover Wehman-Brown:

Great. Is there anything else that you want listeners to know about your birth or germination or this experience in general?

Jacoby Ballard:

I guess I just really learned from offering out our germination proclamation that it really was an instruction manual for communities and families of how to love us in this moment. That was really helpful to everyone from uncles to comrades to see. And I think that that would be helpful for any parent, regardless of your gender, sexual orientation identity. In a lot of ways it was kind of putting forth it like a manifesto of how we're going to be in the germination period and how we want to be as parents and how we want to ask our communities to rally around us. And so since then people really have shown up in the ways that we've asked them to that I think if we hadn't given them clear directions, even our most beloved and closest friends might had some missteps.

Grover Wehman-Brown:

Right. Yeah. Great. Thank you. That's amazing wisdom. I'd like to end the show by asking people to do a little visioning with me. Are you up for that?

Jacoby Ballard:

Sure.

Grover Wehman-Brown:

Great. So if we pretend that we are, let's say, 30 years into the future, and we have been really nailing it at collective liberation, what do you hope that you find if you were to sit down next to somebody who has a similar gender and sexuality and experience of what you currently experience as race and class in the world, who was recently had moved a human into the world through their body, what do you hope their world looks like? And the sort of conditions that they have had this experience in, are?

Jacoby Ballard:

I want them to have had all of the care that they wanted and needed to care for their body in the process before and during and after. And for finances to not have been a barrier around that and for their gender identity or sexual orientation or race or any other positionality to have been a barrier to receiving good care so that their body could be most prepared for the marathon of labor and the marathon of parenting. And I would want a world that knows and recognizes that there's millions of ways to bring new beings into the world. And so to have a lot more openness and not expectations of a mom and a dad or even a mom and a mom or that there's just so many ways.

And so that people, the birther and the person bringing the child in into the world in their surrounded community can really define that and tell the story for themselves without all of these projections and expectations put onto them. And then that they get however much time to just be with the new child as feels good to them without worrying about bills that need to be paid or worried that they can't afford anything that's necessary for their lives, that they can be with their child until they feel like they're grounded enough and the child is secure enough. Maybe it's a world where work and productivity is not as valued as it is now.

Grover Wehman-Brown:

Yeah. And can I ask one final question about your own spiritual practice work and your teaching work?

Jacoby Ballard:

Sure.

Grover Wehman-Brown:

What would you recommend for somebody who's listening to this, who is considering germinating a being, what would you recommend as tools to use or resources to seek out in the spiritual preparation for this experience? Assuming that they don't already have a spiritual right or practice or collective community practice that they do on a regular basis.

Jacoby Ballard:

I mean, I would say that our practice that Leslie and I both have a Buddhist practice of loving kindness that's really served us and helped us get to the place of welcoming Giuseppe, whoever he is, into the world. And that also kind of awakened us to our own barriers around loving and caring for people in the world around us. And then I also think that being in your body is really important. And I think sometimes within trans community, there can be this expectation of disembodiment that that's an inevitable part of our gender experience. And I don't think it has to be. My yoga asana in a practice, I think really prepared my body because I was accustomed to being in hard positions. I was accustomed to surrendering in the midst of difficulty. And then I was also familiar with what kinds of movements and postures are going to prepare the parts of the body that need to be active for the birth. So I did a hundred squats a day to prepare.

Grover Wehman-Brown:

Wow.

Jacoby Ballard:

But things like that to think about ways of embodiment that help you feel in your body through the process, and also are aiming you towards the most useful birthing experience as possible.

Grover Wehman-Brown:

Great. Thank you. All right. Thank you, Jacoby.

Jacoby Ballard:

This has been great. Thank you, Grover.

Grover Wehman-Brown:

Thank you for listening to Masculine Birth Ritual. You can find more about Jacoby's work at jacobyballard.net. That's J-A-C-O-B-Y B-A-L-L-A-R-D.net. And find them on Facebook at Jacoby.Ballard. I highly recommend listening to Jacoby's interview and meditation practice offered on the Healing Justice podcast. FYI, that podcast may have a new name if you're listening to this episode after the fall of 2019.

And finally, this is the last episode of Masculine Birth Ritual. I've been so honored by the birth stories and teachings the guests have brought to this podcast by how many listeners follow the project on Instagram and share the episode with your friends and colleagues. This podcast reached farther than I imagined it would and got so much solid support financially from patrons on Patreon and from volunteers who transcribed episodes. A year ago when I started this podcast, I very much wanted to provide stories and perspectives that I needed when I was pregnant, but had a hard time finding. I feel proud that there are now 16 new stories or conversations for folks to draw from out in the world.

I know that at least one birth worker changed the name of their practice to be more inclusive of trans-masculine people birthing. I've been blessed to connect with a broad community of queer and trans-affirming doulas and midwives, and want to especially encourage people to follow and financially support the QTPOC Birth Work Project, a collective that is training up Black, indigenous and POC doulas to support queer and trans, Black and POC people in birth. Thank you, Vanya, Mack, Ryan, Elliot, Sara, J, Perez, Takeya, Rae, Greta, Charlie, Amanda, Rachel, and Jacoby for sharing your time and wisdom with us.

I personally don't have the capacity to produce this podcast after the 16 episode season, but I hope that you all and all marginalized people continue to share birth stories, resources, and care with each other. You can keep up with my writing and contact me at groverwehmanbrown.com. I will keep the Masculine Birth Ritual social media pages and website up for at least a year after this episode releases in August 2019. I will have the last episodes transcribed and posted within the show notes for each episode, and turn the Patreon off at the end of September 2019. Thank you all for being and tending to each other. May you be safe, may our communities thrive, may you feel the future emanating from you each day. Be well.