

Grover Wehman-Brown 0:02

You're listening to masculine birth ritual. My name is Grover Wehman Brown. Today we are talking with J Carroll about their experience of pregnancy and birth. J is a trans masculine, queer single parent by choice. In this episode, J and I talk about embodiment, how they were supported by their queer community and their family of origin after birth, and how gender influences parenting culture when you're non binary. If you like what you hear today, please write us a review on Apple podcasts, share the show with your community, or go to [patreon.com/masculine birth ritual](https://patreon.com/masculine%20birth%20ritual) to become a monthly Sustainer. Even \$3 A month really helps support the show's ability to keep having these conversations. Thank you to the 39 current Patreon supporters for making this work possible. Here's my conversation with J. Hi, J!

Thanks so much for talking with us today. What pronouns do you like to be called by?

J Carroll 0:58

I use them?

Grover Wehman-Brown 1:00

Okay, and what parental name do you use?

J Carroll 1:02

I use Baba.

Grover Wehman-Brown 1:04

Me too. Cool.

And what gender words do you generally use to describe yourself?

J Carroll 1:12

I use different ones depending on the situation. But I think my default is kind of like trans non binary.

Great, thank you. What city do you live in?

Oh, I currently live in Boston. But I moved here about a year ago. I was living in Seattle before that I was in Seattle for about eight years. And I birthed in Seattle. Okay,

Grover Wehman-Brown 1:34

cool. Thank you. And you're a single parent by choice?

J Carroll 1:37

Yes. Yes, I am.

Grover Wehman-Brown 1:39

How did you decide to become a single parent by choice.

J Carroll 1:44

I, I just wanted to have a kid. I just did I want to have a kid since I was little. That was I was a kid myself. I always just like, pictured myself as a parent. And that never changed. Even as I went through gender changes and sexuality changes. It just was always just like, I knew that I wanted to be a parent. And then yeah, actually, I like, I credit a little bit to my therapist. I told him this before, but he kind of I was talking to her about being a parent. Well, why can't he do it? And I was like, yeah, why can't I like, why can I do it right now there's like, there's never really a best time to become a parent. Like, there's always gonna be a reason not to. And a reason to, because I just was like, yeah, why not? Like, I'm just gonna do it. And yeah, so I just was like, I'm gonna have a kid and I'm gonna be great.

Grover Wehman-Brown 2:33

Yeah! Congrats. How old's your kid?

J Carroll 2:36

He's two and a half.

Grover Wehman-Brown 2:37

Awesome. And how was your birth experience having him?

J Carroll 2:44

Yeah, I had a pretty great birth experience, which was I was I feel very fortunate about had a really great birthing team. And I thought it was a little tough to find them at first. I feel like when I was going through, like gender changes now, it was like really easy to find, at least for me at that time. I notice a lot of people it's not but for me at that point, then what was happening in my life, I was easy to find, like people who had recommendations for doctors recommendations for folks to get surgery with, when I was going to have a kid. Nobody had recommendations for like, midwives or doulas or things like that. People had a great life, because just like it just wasn't happening that much. Or I didn't know other folks who were doing it, or I knew some other trans folks who had had kids, but they just use like their straight doctor, or you know, or just kind of, maybe that wasn't as important to them. So I don't know, I feel like it was kind of hard to find my people, but when I found them, it was it was amazing. So I had an all clear birthing team. And so I had a midwife who was clear, and then midwifery student who was with her and she I don't know how to identify, but I certainly have ever asked him about that. But I think queer, trans non binary type of person, and then my Doula identifies as trans. So this was like a really, super queer burden experience, which made it really Yeah, I felt safe with them, because they mentally understood what I who I was and my situation, but they were also in that community as well. So it made me feel safe with them and willing to just talk about all the things that I may have been not willing to share with some other folks who didn't have those identities. Right. Yeah, so I was like, I was able to birth at home, which is my preference. So that was really wonderful. And I had, like I said, my queer birthing team and then a bunch of other queers in the room, and then my mom and my sister were there as well. So it was Yeah, everything kind of went really well. And yeah, I was able to kind of just like be the way that I wanted it. And I was I was worried about having to go to the hospital or birthing at the hospital because I wasn't sure what doctors or nurses were going to do with me as a person. And they were probably an agenda me wrong and transgender, my child and all kinds of things. I just was hoping that that didn't have to happen. And it didn't we did not actually didn't have to go into the hospital. Right after he was born after like, because he was having some some trouble breathing. But by the time we got to the hospital, it was resolved. So we didn't we didn't spend too long there, which is good.

Grover Wehman-Brown 5:39

Yeah. Great. All your birthing team was your mom, your sister, your doula. And your midwife? Yes. What kind of things did you do to prepare for your birth? And like, yeah, both in terms of technically, and just in terms of your own vision for how your birth would go?

J Carroll 6:06

Yeah. It was, I mean, I was hard finding a, like, a birthing class that I felt comfortable with. Because, again, lots of just like, gender things and lots of straight couples, sis couples, and I was like, I just, I don't feel really comfortable going into birthing classes where they're just going to use words that don't feel right to me. But I ended up finding one that was, I thought gonna be like, very straight insist, I was like, Alright, I guess I have to go to one just to find out some information. And I was like, pleasantly surprised that the instructor was like, very knowledgeable about, just like, queer and trans things and love for the class. I emailed her just like, hey, here's my situation. Like, I'm trans. I use these pronouns. Like, I know, I don't use mother and like, kind of explained it to her. And she was like, great. Like, that's, I can totally do

that. Like, I want me to do like, what? No, and there's, you know, there's ways that I can be helpful or, and she just was like, very, yeah, more than just like accepting, but she was like, understanding and wanting to make space for me. So I was, that was saying, I don't know about other couples in the class, but. But the teacher was anyway, the instructor was, and yeah, so my sister came with me to those classes. And we had a lot of fun with it. Because I don't know those. Those courses are always a little bit silly in a lot of ways. But so we have, I have, like, remember a very big picture of us, like doing the breathing techniques, and just like kind of laughing at each other while we were doing that. So I'm glad that she's able to do it with me. So I did that I did. I did some prenatal yoga. So I don't know I like I enjoyed going to those. But I was felt a little bit awkward at them. Because I don't know, they were just like, I was one in particular. Like, I went to the same course. But there was one night where she was like, instructors. Let's come on, let's just come into the circle. And like we're just gonna have like a ladies moment. I was like, Yeah, I'm gonna not do that. So yeah, I don't know, just like little. And they were like, trying to stay in touch, like after people gave birth, and they're like, hey, like, Let's do like a mother's thing. I was like, Can I just like does not, like not feel great for me. So I was like, I'm just going to come and like, do the yoga and like, just try to not not listen to anything else that they're saying. Like, you got to take some of the good things you can't like everything not everything can be perfect. So you just gotta take some of them take the good things and leave the rest right. Yeah, so we did that. And yeah, I don't know I use like those I use like an app to like track the the growth of the baby and they're just like, so super straight and like, ridiculous. So I was like, I don't know, I like I wanted to use those tools because they were helpful and like just kind of you know, helps you kind of with the process of being pregnant but just like are generally not tailored to me as a person. So that was I don't know again you take you take the good and you just kind of kind of ignore the rest as best you can. Yeah, and then I did i i do some stuff with crystals. Like I'm not an I'm not like like I don't know if I'm like I just I don't know I do my own kind of thing with with them. I don't know that I'm doing them like the way that you're supposed to with crystals. I just like kind of but I don't like to. I haven't like read a lot of stuff on I just like to it feels good. I don't really have a lot of like strict rules for myself. I just kind of like to Yeah, just kind of hold them and play with them. Um, in these kinds of things and so yeah, I don't I did a lot a little bit of that like during pregnancy and I did some had some during the birth and my Doula did some stuff with crystals too. And so he had he brought some like during the birth. Remember like this one that was like a big? What was it? Smoky Quartz I think it was like just like a big like my I just want like, like grip onto it during some contractions and stuff. So that was super helpful to have that around.

Grover Wehman-Brown 10:32

Yeah. Can I ask another question about that?

J Carroll 10:36

Yeah.

Grover Wehman-Brown 10:37

Do you have a sense of what that connection is for you? Or does for you why crystals as opposed to some other material that you might connect with?

J Carroll 10:48

Yeah, sure. So. I think for me, it feels crystals in general, and rocks. And I'm still really grounding. Because they come from the earth, they've been on the earth for a long time. And they just like this really solid object that I can touch and hold on to and grasp and like feel the feel the ridges and the way that the light hits off of them. It just I don't know. There's many things about them. That feels like grounding to me. And so if I'm feeling like I'm in my head too much, or just like kind of having some feelings, or anxieties or whatever is happening, emotionally, think like, holding on to the crystals brings me back to my grounding space. Yeah, great. Thank you. Yeah.

Unknown Speaker 11:30

And any other things that you did in preparation?

J Carroll 11:35

I read a bunch of books. I read, I feel like I forget some of the things that happen. But I read like, I read some of the grad dad stuff. Like the zine and the book.

Grover Wehman-Brown 11:51

Can you say more for the listeners about what that is?

J Carroll 11:54

It was like a complete compilation of folks that identified as dads, who were just really like, how to write about how they did their parenting and such various different forms and ways and whatnot. So it was all like, I like it, because it was little snippets of chapters, it wasn't just one person writing a whole book where you kind of got to see a little bit of each person. And I think it was, like, helpful for me, I don't identify as a dad, but just kind of have some, like, most of the parenting books I was reading are very focused on mom. And so to have a little bit of like the dad side of it was was helpful just to see like, what other parenting techniques and styles were out there who various genders. Yeah, I read, like, my mom bought me like, What to Expect expecting, but like, I was like, Thanks, mom. And then like, Michelle, says, Did you I mean, I think I opened it and then read like a page and was like, I can't do this.

Grover Wehman-Brown 12:52

My wife and I read like, like, the first chapter or something, and it involved so much screaming and yelling out loud that like, going, like, "really?!" It was, like, one of the more sexist and disturbing pregnancy books we read.

J Carroll 13:09

Yeah, yeah. Yeah, trying to think what else I read. I read a lot of like, things online. Oh, there wasn't one I read that I was like, somewhat helpful, because it was written by.... I think she identifies as a lesbian. And I can't think of the name right now. But it was like, somewhat helpful. But pregnant books. Oh, I didn't. I wasn't talking about that. But I did read that too. Yeah, it was like somewhat helpful, because again, it wasn't like, exactly how to identify but it's like having somebody that talked about like, female partners was helpful or just like, not just just like not being super cis-het was like, Cool. This is great. Like more so. A little bit closer to my life.

Yeah, and then I read... what's her name is blah. What was her name? She's queer. She's a single parent by choice?

Grover Wehman-Brown 14:13

Michelle Tea's blog?

J Carroll 14:14

Yes, yes. Yes. Yeah. Yeah, like she's I know her name. Yeah. So yeah, I read that. That was just like as a single parent by choice that was helpful to me just like, I don't know her journey. Yeah. But yeah, I never found anything that was that I read for online or like that that was that felt totally at home or totally, you know, like, completely who I was. And yeah, although Okay, so here's the thing. So I, I did a lot of reading and posting on one of their Facebook groups. And it's changed his name so many times, but it's like, birthing and breast or Chen Feeding trans people and allies I think is like the current iteration of the name. But yeah, it's like a highlight. There was like a lot of info on there. And it's like a very active group. So I posted a couple times a couple questions and people were super fast to answer, don't respond and just like give me their their anecdotal evidence, because I think that's, that was the hardest part of pregnancy, like, we're like, nobody has any solid research or answers and like, ask someone about even like, my midwife is a super knowledgeable about like, queer and trans issues. I would like ask her a question. And she was like, I don't know. Because no research on it. Like, you know, I can tell you what, I think I can tell you what I've heard from other people. But like, there's nothing no research on that. So we don't know. So I would ask questions on there. And people would be like that. There's no research, but here's what like 20 other folks have experienced. So maybe that's helpful. So yeah, so that was that was super helpful. Yeah, I don't know. You asked when you ask the second time, like what other things are good. You listed a couple and when I was going to answer one of them, I forgot what it was.

Grover Wehman-Brown 16:08

I was asking about clothes. Oh, yeah. Clothing.

J Carroll 16:15

Yeah, so I or I'm only people that wear the same pair of pants every day. Like I just buy a pair pants and like wear them and so they get a hold on them. So that was useful during pregnancy had just bought one pair of like maternity jeans. I like found them out the gap. And they just like fit well enough that I felt comfortable in and they were like, you know, like women's maternity jeans, but they like, yeah, fit me. Okay, where I felt like myself wearing them and felt okay, in the way that they presented with them. And then yeah, I just I wore like T shirts or button down shirts. And eventually I had to just like get bigger and bigger sizes of button down shirts and make it okay. And like yeah, T shirts are like, you know, generally pretty baggy. Yeah, uh, friends. Kind of like so at some shirts for me. So I went, you know, go to Goodwill and buy, like, you know, large T shirts or like, Now there was a couple sizes too big. And then they would they like sewed the side of that to, like, cinch them and so they would fit a little better for me. So that was cool. But yeah, and that Yeah, so I guess I'm like, I was so I'm gonna I'm an attorney. Because I was going to court when when I was pregnant. And yeah, like wearing court clothes was a little bit tough.

But yeah, I would just wear I had like, I forget where I got it from, it was just kind of like a like a band

that were kind of over my belly and then just wear pants. And that's like wear belts over the button that didn't close and then just wear like, the larger button down shirt. And then like the my blazer would kind of cover like the bagginess on top. Yeah, like many times, like, up until, like, way later on. Like I didn't I didn't get read as pregnant and just got read. I think they just got read. It's like I don't really know. Like, I always wonder like, what I how I was read because I don't feel like I pass on a daily basis when not when I'm not pregnant. Not I don't I don't want to pass on my goal. I'm not trying to do that. I don't I don't identify as a man. But I didn't like I feel like people didn't make me as pregnant even though. I don't know what the right is my gender as pregnant.

Grover Wehman-Brown 18:33

Yeah. How did you feel about that? nonrecognition?

J Carroll 18:39

Um, I don't know, in some ways, it was fine with me because I think it was like nervous about what people would say or do or whatnot. So you just out in public. And so I like feel like I just they just ignored it that was better. In that way felt good about it. But I think yeah, I mean, it's, you know, of course, it's isolating. I think being like being pregnant. In June, no matter who you are, your identity is is isolating.

And being a parent to a young child is isolating. So and then you add on top of it, you know, different identities. And it's yeah, it's even more isolated. Because there's no like, there's not a lot of other folks that look like you or that you can like talk to about your own personal situation. I mean, of course, there's many people out there, but there's just not a lot like of media to look at about it.

Grover Wehman-Brown 19:32

Yeah. Um, can you tell us a little bit about your cultural background? How you grew up religion or other important cultural things? Sure. Sure. So,

J Carroll 19:50

I grew up Catholic, once like Catholic school, like we're like a uniform all through high school. I just like never thought anything of it. Yeah, that was just like what we did and my family. And like, yeah, it's just it's kind of, like all of my like, you know, extended cousins and whatnot. Always just kind of did that. I don't. I'm not Catholic now. So that's but yeah, I guess other like cultural identities. My, I have a strong like Irish and Italian grandparents. I have a kind of a matriarchal family. And my grandmother is Italian. And so she's just like, I think they're more challenging than Irish, even though it's like, we're not to say that. So yeah, just like kind of that Irish and Italian mix of things. I grew up in New York, and then right outside of New York City. So yeah, just kind of that like New York. Kind of fast paced, very direct, very loud, very loud family. Were very, like, my grandmother's, like, golden rule for us was like, our family comes first no matter what. And so that is something that like, I, as a kid, like, took very seriously because like, that was always like, you know, if even if you've ever put a friend before your family, and that was like, the ultimate like, you know, rural breaker, my grandmother. And so I still feel that way. Like, I still have that, like, that's really close to me, like my value of mine, but my definition of what family is, is extended. And so you know, like I have like many friends who are definitely I consider family and so I like they fit into that, like family comes first. And so I feel like very Yeah, like very loyal to, to family is a thing and just like, coming together around food is like a big cultural thing. We've had like a big, like, big plate of pasta and go to grandma's house and have some pasta. Yeah.

Grover Wehman-Brown 22:05

So you're still in relationship with your family? Yeah,

J Carroll 22:08

yeah. I'm super close with my family. Yeah, kind of the reason why I moved to Boston because I wanted to be closer to them. My My brother lives in Boston and my extended family, my grandparents and aunts and uncles and cousins still live in New York. So it's pretty close by Yeah, my so my mom. So the year, the first year of my kiddos life. My I lived with my mom, my sister, y'all like lived in a house together. It was like very simply, that was like the modern, modern full house. We like to call ourselves but yeah, so it was like me, my mom, my sister and shared an apartment. And then my mom and I

moved to Boston at the same time. So this past year, she lived with us as well. And then just recently, like, two weeks ago, my mom bought a condo and we moved into an apartment. Yeah, so and like, so. Like very close with my family. Like, yeah, I talk to my mom every day talk to my grandmother every day. Like talk to my aunt, like a couple times a week. Yeah, we're all just like, pretty close. Little, little knit group.

Grover Wehman-Brown 23:25

Nice. It's really sweet. Yeah. How was your community response when you got pregnant and when your baby was born?

J Carroll 23:35

Yeah. So I think like I had a pretty great group of people out in Seattle that were like just like, you know, close little queer community queer family. And they were all like, super stoked about it. Like they just I feel like people love babies. And so it's like yeah, they were like everybody was like very excited about it. I had like just like a PBL typically called baby shower but like I certainly know it's like a baby party like when I joined pregnancy and I just I don't know I like didn't I didn't really I was like not planning on having any kind of party type thing at that time but my friends were like we got to have a party and like every so decided about this and so we like had this party and there was so many people there I was like overwhelmed with just like the amount of like love in that room and like I was just like overwhelmed with just like them yeah, like the care from my community and beside people coming together and like wanting to be there to support me and wanting to support this cumin coming into the world. Like I had it at my at my apartment at that time because like the smaller apartment and because I didn't expect that many people just like you couldn't even walk in the room so that way that was there. So I just Yeah, I felt like very Yeah, very fortunate to like have all those folks there that like we're not parents and didn't weren't planning on being parenting time soon, but we're like so excited that that was successful. I wanted to do and that's what's happening. And then yeah, so when I was pregnant, I was like, I need to find other pregnant folks. So I just posted, like, asked around and posted a few groups and just being like, Hey, are you other queers that are pregnant. And so there was a few people that I just met, I met through that. And we formed a pretty good little group. And they were all people that were like, friends of friends like that I kind of had met before, but didn't realize you're pregnant. And so they were like, I don't know. And then maybe one or two that I've never met before, like, ever remember, even, we're not friends of friends. But yeah, so we like came together. And we met up a few times when we were pregnant and had like, a, like a Text group that we were all just like, venting to each other. I'm just like, this is terrible, or like, amazing, you know, like, all of the feeling all the time. And then yeah, after after our kids are us are... kids are born, like within a few months of each other. And we like continued those, like those meetups with our kids, and continue with the text conversations of like, what do I do about this sleep thing, what I do about this feeding thing, or like this might look at how awesome my baby is just at this great thing. And so, yeah, it was, like, really wonderful to have that community of folks around me. Just like other queers. Yeah, and I think of that group, I was the only one that identified as trans there was one other masculine person who, who was like the one doing the birthing. And then the other folks were all femme identified. But I was definitely one person identified as trans and not using a

lot of the words that sis folks use. Yeah. But yeah, they were like an invaluable resource. And that was the hardest part of moving to Boston was like missing those people in my community in general, but specifically, like other queer parents, yeah, and I'm forming like group here now. It's like just it just takes a little longer. Yeah. I'm a toddler schedule makes things a little tougher. You know, ya

Grover Wehman-Brown 26:58

know, and after your baby was born, did you find that a lot of those people from the baby shower those people that parents were still around in your life? Yeah, they definitely weren't, which

J Carroll 27:13

was wonderful. Yeah, like I like they did like, you know, like a meal train and whatnot. Like, you know, you can be fluid in all kinds of things like way back in the birth, but also, like, months after that. So yeah, I think my mom was with us for a little bit. But before she was living with us, I updated folks to watch it watch was working. So thing was like, I think like three months before my mom was, so my mom watched him. After she was living with us. He watched him my work, but I had like three months of time where I needed to find people to watch him. And I was like, literally three months, I want to like put him in a daycare. That seems like kind of internal, a hard transition, and like only do it for three months. And so, yeah, so one of the folks who was like in that, who also had a kid around the same time, she watched him for a month. And are they just like a month apart? And so yeah, so she, she watched him for like, a month or so I was working. And then she was like, okay, like, it's a lot to have two babies. So like, I was like, yeah, totally, I appreciate you doing that. But I also understand that like, it's a lot, so that you have just like put out to like the, like, probably that same group, people that were at the baby party was just like, hey, like, is it possible that like, I can make this happen for like to find people to watch him for like two months? And yeah, so like, people just like all kind of made it happen. And like, I think he was like, he probably was a different person, like each day or two months. But it was like, it just kind of it wasn't I was working part time. So it wasn't every day, but probably about three days a week, or two months, or just like he was kind of just with a different career. Every day just either either I would like drop him off, or they would come pick him up or kind of just depending on different circumstances. It was like really wonderful to have those people who were just like, yeah, like, I'll come hang out with a baby. Why not like so yeah, so it was like, really wonderful to have that community still still be there for me. That's impressive. Yeah, it was impressed. I mean, it took a lot of coordination on my part, but I was just like, it was worth it because he wasn't a daycare, and he was like with these wonderful careers. And like, you know, they all did it for free. So it's wonderful that way too.

Grover Wehman-Brown 29:38

Yeah. That's awesome. Yeah. How did it feel in your body? Like do you have any words for how it felt in your body to be like, pregnant and laboring and giving birth

J Carroll 29:58

lots of different times. Use true. Lots of different words. Yeah, I mean, this is maybe not what you're going for, but painful. For sure. That's honest. I think yeah, I mean, I love even just like, I mean not just word for pregnancy, I'm a small person and to just like I, I like, I thought my rib was broken because of like, just how much it hurt for this, like tiny human to be moving my organs around and pushing up against my ribcage. And yeah, it was it was painful and tough. And I was I was sick for the first couple of weeks. Like, no, no, the first trimester. So it was like pretty sick, like did not feel good at all. So that was pretty terrible. And yeah, giving birth is painful. Like, but also like, like wonderfully amazing to like all like being pregnant and giving birth and labor and like, you're all Yeah, it's very, like a very life changing experiences to like, have these things happen. And I don't know, kind of this thing was like I something that I'd wanted for a very long time. And so it was like, it was actually happening just like very surreal to kind of like otherworldly in some ways, just like this. Like you're like in your body is moving, but like, you're not the one moving it. Like some other being is inside of you like moving your body around and is like very bizarre, and wonderful and confusing. Feelings. You know, from like, just like talking with or hearing stories from other trans folks. Like for some folks. It's very a dysphoric process, but it wasn't for me, that's not a feeling that I had about it. Because I think, I don't know, one of the things for me is that I don't, I don't see being pregnant and birthing and laboring as a feminine thing. So I think in that way, it wasn't dysphoric for me, because I didn't see it that way. For me, it's just like this. Like, my body is able to grow a human. And, and I am not feminine, so it can't be a feminine ailment. And then thing, right, like that is so yeah, so those are just like I didn't have those dysphoric feelings about about the process or about birthing or laboring and

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