

## **Rebecca's Birth**, by *Lonnie Friedman*

One morning thirty years ago, as we walked Zahava to pre-school, we told her that we had a big surprise for her. Her eyes widened and with a huge smile on her face, she guessed “a puppy?” “No, not a puppy.” But her second guess was right on. Though a baby sister wasn't her first choice, it was definitely a close second.

To announce the pregnancy to the rest of the family, I baked fortune cookies and stuffed them with homemade fortunes. After dinner, we took turns reading our fortunes aloud: “You will hear the pitter-patter of little feet” “Your family will be expanding!” “Will it be a boy or a girl?” Sonam finally cracked the code and congratulated me.

Six years before Rebecca was born, we'd intentionally had Zahava at home with midwives. We wanted a natural childbirth, without medical interventions. Zahava's birth was a profound experience. But after the birth, my placenta wouldn't deliver, and I had to go to the hospital for a D&C.

The six years between births had made us more cautious, and having Zahava made us more appreciative of the preciousness of life, especially that of our own children. So with the second birth, we wanted a little more back-up. We decided on a birthing center, instead of a home birth. The birthing center was in a house adjacent to the hospital, just minutes away from medical help should we need it.

As my due date came and went, and a week, and then a second week went by, the midwives suggested that if I didn't deliver in the next day or two, that I give birth in the hospital instead of the birth-ing center. So I choked down a few tablespoons of castor oil, to precipitate labor, which it did.

With contractions started, we encamped at the birthing center: Paul, Helen, Maria, six year-old Zahava, my five year-old nephew, Pintso, and I. We'd decided that the kids could attend the birth if they wanted. Over the next few hours, the kids watched cartoons in the living room, while I labored in the bedroom.

With the groaning and hard work of labor, I was having second thoughts about the kids being present for the birth. But when it was clear that the birth was imminent, Maria brought the kids in. With wide eyes and amazement, they watched their sister/cousin being born. As Rebecca was handed into my waiting arms, they snuggled up next to me, caressing and exclaiming at the baby's fingers, toes, and cheeks.

Rebecca's passage into the world was such an exquisite moment: so fleeting, yet so powerful. The beginning of immense hope and potential, a moment leading to so many firsts: first words, first steps, first days of school, first graduations, first loves.... And as one of the fortune cookies predicted, “You're life will never be the same again.”