

## **Zahava's Birth** by *Lonnie Friedman*

It was the late 70s. Paul and I were living in a trailer on prairie land in the San Luis Valley of Colorado. Our nearest neighbors were a fish farm where we both worked, two miles in one direction; and the town of Alamosa, seven miles in the other direction. In the winters, Alamosa was often the coldest spot in the United States, with frigid air tumbling down the surrounding mountains, and getting trapped in our valley. Paul often came home with icicles in his beard.

In the summers, hundreds of garter snakes slithered below our trailer, sliding into their holes when any one approached. Swallows nested above our front door, and swooshed over our heads as we came and went. There were the howls of coyotes in the evenings; and the ever-changing magnificent Mt. Blanca was the daily vista from our front porch.

Along with other transplanted hippies, we started a natural food co-op in Alamosa; and there we met women who were midwives and doulas. A generation earlier, my mother's dissertation on natural childbirth had been temporarily interrupted when she had her first child. By the time she had her fifth child, 10 years later, my brother slipped into the world without time to boil water or phone for help.

The day before Zahava was born, I fed the goats, went for a four-mile jog, and began to have light contractions. We'd decided to have a home birth with midwives attending. They came the next morning, boiled water, and helped me through the various stages of labor. It was the day I truly came to understand the word "labor" in reference to childbirth. I labored all day long: breathing, panting, concentrating; pushing and recovering.

For Paul and me, Zahava's arrival was such a beautiful moment of biology: a creation of love, a unique mosaic of genes, and the first grandchild to be born on either side. A truly heart-filling moment, of reaching down to caress her head, of peering into her eyes, and of falling deeply in love with our first daughter.

But after the birth, the placenta would not deliver. It had attached to the uterine wall, and I needed a D&C to remove it. So in our caravan of cars and trucks, with dogs yapping at the wheels, and Zahava nestled in my arms, we headed to the hospital.

After the D&C, the nurses wanted me to rest for the night without Zahava. They wanted to feed her formula, and leave her in the nursery. No way. If they wanted me to stay, they would have to accommodate us. Zahava would be sleeping with me, and breast-feeding, both firsts for that small rural hospital.

Zahava's birth, so prosaic in terms of the world, just one of the hundreds of thousands of births day in and day out, and yet, so earth-shaking in my world, changing my primary being from daughter, sister and wife, to mother.