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# Communicating a New Consciousness: Countercultural Print and the Home Birth Movement in the 1970s

WENDY KLINE

**SUMMARY:** This essay analyzes the production of three influential home birth texts of the 1970s written by self-proclaimed lay midwives that helped to fuel and sustain a movement in alternative birth practices. As part of a countercultural lifestyle print culture, early “how-to” books (Raven Lang’s *The Birth Book*, Ina May Gaskin’s *Spiritual Midwifery*) provided readers with vivid images and accounts in stark contrast to those of the sterile hospital delivery room. By the end of the decade, Rahima Baldwin’s more mainstream guidebook, *Special Delivery*, indicated an interest in translating home birth to a wider audience who did not necessarily identify as “countercultural.” Lay midwives who were authors of radical print texts in the 1970s played an important role in reshaping expectations about the birth experience, suggesting a need to rethink how we define the counterculture and its legacies.

**KEYWORDS:** reproduction, home birth, midwifery, feminism, counterculture

Many of us felt as if we had been given a trust and a job to do: we were on a mission to raise people’s consciousness and empower them to make their own best decisions. I always joked that what God said was, “This stuff needs to be known. Rahima has a big mouth. We’ll tell her, and then she’ll tell everybody!”

—Rahima Baldwin<sup>1</sup>

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When Rahima Baldwin graduated from Mills College (an elite women's college in the Oakland foothills) in 1970, the last thing on her mind was childbirth. She wanted to become a college professor, not a midwife, and she had been accepted into the graduate program in comparative literature at Stanford University, as well as the early childhood program at Mills. Then on May 4, 1970, the Ohio National Guard opened fire on Kent State University students, killing four and wounding nine others. Mills College canceled final exams, much to the relief of Baldwin, who found it "nearly impossible" to focus on coursework with "all that was going on just down the road in Berkeley, in Vietnam, in Ohio." Suddenly, going to graduate school seemed like "getting on a train that was going to end up in a place where I no longer wanted to be."<sup>2</sup>

But where and who did she want to be? That wasn't yet clear. As a child, Baldwin had always felt a spiritual longing, one that wasn't fulfilled by her experiences at the Baptist church that her family belonged to. "In Sunday school I wanted God and they wanted me to make projects with construction paper. I was never satisfied," she recalls.<sup>3</sup> Living in the Bay Area as a college student, she discovered a multitude of nontraditional spiritual organizations, and joined a Fourth Way group, a spiritual movement based on the teachings of George Gurdjieff. According to Gurdjieff, "most people" spend their lives "in a state of hypnotic 'waking sleep,'" oblivious to their true natures. The Fourth Way included practices in focusing attention and energy with the goal of "waking up" to higher states of consciousness.<sup>4</sup>

Instead of going to graduate school, she opted to seek guidance from spiritual rather than academic mentors. Her quest took her and her husband from Turkey overland to India and finally to a Sufi community in England. Along the way, she sought spiritual guidance from the Hindu guru Muktananda at his ashram (later visited by Elizabeth Gilbert and popularized in her 2006 memoir *Eat, Pray, Love*). Upon Baldwin's depar-

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Collection at Smith College and to Raven Lang, Ina May Gaskin, Joanne Santana, Pamela Hunt, and Rahima Baldwin for their sharing of documents and memories. Earlier versions of this article were presented at the Communicating Reproduction Conference at the University of Cambridge in 2011, at the University of Wisconsin-Madison in 2012, and at the meeting of the American Association for the History of Medicine in 2013.

1. Rahima Baldwin Dancy, email correspondence with the author, March 10, 2014.
2. *Ibid.*
3. Rahima Baldwin Dancy, interview with the author, May 15, 2014.
4. See <http://www.potrereview.net/news10942.html>.

ture, Muktananda placed his hand on her head, and shortly thereafter, she received a vision that she would become involved in the work of childbirth. In Europe, she met childbirth educator Sheila Kitzinger and obstetrician Frederick Leboyer, both of whom had helped to reform European birth practices. Such a varied assortment of mentors undoubtedly contributed to Baldwin's vision of childbirth she would promote in *Special Delivery*, her childbirth guide published in 1979.

Baldwin returned to California in 1973, both physically and spiritually altered: now a converted Sufi, she was five months pregnant, and determined to alter childbirth practices in the United States.<sup>5</sup> What she discovered, however, was that she was not the only one who had changed over those three years. A countercultural revolution had continued to ripple through parts of the country, challenging some of the most basic assumptions about how to live, work, and birth. Baldwin returned ready to "share with everyone that birth at home was possible. I even had a book proposal ready—writing came naturally to me," she recalled. "But I was amazed to discover that while I had been out of the country, other people had been discovering the same things." Three books promoting home birth, *The Birth Book*, *Two Births*, and *Childbirth Is Ecstasy*, had all just been published, signaling the growing interest in alternatives to a hospital birth in the early 1970s.<sup>6</sup>

Where should we place activist authors such as Rahima Baldwin who demanded the right to birth at home and whose published experiences helped to popularize the practice of midwifery in the United States? As historian Gretchen Lemke-Santangelo argues, "hippie women ... have long been ignored and marginalized, relegated to the sidelines of both the counterculture and the women's movement."<sup>7</sup> This essay explores why and how home birth and midwifery gained increasing popularity among and beyond the counterculture by examining the creation of three influential texts that spanned the decade: Raven Lang's *The Birth Book* (1972), Ina May Gaskin's *Spiritual Midwifery* (1975), and Rahima Baldwin's *Special Delivery* (1979). The authors' exposure to alternative forms of birth—abroad, in the mountains, or even in school buses—convinced them that birth outside of the hospital should be a viable option for families. They believed that childbirth preparation involved the sharing of stories,

5. She and her husband also returned with Sufi names. Rahima means compassionate and Wahhab (her husband's name) means generous.

6. Rahima Baldwin, unpublished article on founding of Informed Home Birth, Informed Home Birth Records, Sophia Smith Collection, Smith College, 98-S-34 box 4, p. 4.

7. Gretchen Lemke-Santangelo, *Daughters of Aquarius: Women of the Sixties Counterculture* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2009), 181.

holographs, and artwork, along with exercise and diet. Birth was not something to be endured, but a transformative, consciousness-raising event to be celebrated. Their “how-to” guides challenged the medical model of birth and the assumption that all births should take place in a hospital under the direction of an obstetrician.<sup>8</sup>

What had changed in the first few years of the decade, while Rahima Baldwin was out of the country? In 1970, the rate of hospital births in the United States reached an all-time high of 99.4 percent. But by 1977, the percentage of out-of-hospital births more than doubled, with approximately fifty thousand babies born outside of the hospital.<sup>9</sup> Some of this increase came out of the counterculture, and some from segments of the white middle class, who from their economically privileged position viewed home birth as a legitimate choice for those seeking more control over the birthing process, rather than as a low-cost alternative for the poor or geographically isolated (as it had been perceived before).<sup>10</sup>

This demographic shift raised concerns among members of the medical community. Dr. Warren Pearse, the executive director of the American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists, publicly noted in 1977 the “rising tide of demand for home delivery,” describing it as an “anti-intellectual–anti-science revolt.”<sup>11</sup> His comments were in reaction to an explosion of new alternative organizations, publications, and conferences cropping up at the time, mostly among the white middle class. In March of that year, for example, the newly formed NAPSAC (National Association of Parents and Professionals for Safe Alternatives in Child-

8. Historical monographs on the history of birth and alternative birthing practices include Paula Michaels, *Lamaze: An International Study* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014); Richard W. Wertz and Dorothy C. Wertz, *Lying-in: A History of Childbirth in America* (New York: Free Press, 1977); Jacqueline Wolf, *Deliver Me from Pain: Anesthesia and Birth in America* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2009); Judith Leavitt, *Make Room for Daddy: The Journey from Waiting Room to Birthing Room* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2009); Leavitt, *Brought to Bed: Childbearing in America, 1750–1950* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986). Important works by sociologists and medical anthropologists include Robbie Davis Floyd, ed., *Mainstreaming Midwives: The Politics of Change* (New York: Routledge, 2006); Barbara Katz Rothman, *In Labor: Women and Power in the Birthplace*, 1st ed. (New York: Norton, 1982); Wendy Simonds, Barbara Katz Rothman, and Bari Meltzer Norman, *Laboring On: Birth in Transition in the United States* (New York: Routledge, 2007); Deborah A. Sullivan and Rose Weitz, *Labor Pains: Modern Midwives and Home Birth* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1988).

9. Judith Rooks, *Midwifery and Childbirth in America* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1999) 60.

10. Debra Anne Susie, *In the Way of Our Grandmothers: A Cultural View of Twentieth-Century Midwifery in Florida* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1988).

11. Warren Pearse, “Home Birth Crisis,” *ACOG Newsletter*, July 1977.

birth) held a major conference in Chicago, titled “21st Century Obstetrics Now!” The organizers predicted a radically different future for birth in America, one that supported a *Washington Post* article’s claim that “homes [were] the new maternity wards.” Dr. Mayer Eisenstein, vice president of the American College of Home Obstetrics, noted that the 1977 NAPSAC conference “could not have taken place five years ago. If it would have, it would have had a handful of people instead of the more than 1000 people here. There wouldn’t have been the absolute demand and enthusiasm and energy that has been generated.”<sup>12</sup> According to NAPSAC organizers, “childbirth of the future will not primarily be in hospitals, but in the home, and the primary health professional for most women will not be the physicians, but the midwife.”<sup>13</sup>

Thirty-five years later, it is clear that NAPSAC’s prediction did not come to pass. Nonetheless, it is important to analyze the unprecedented resurgence in home birth practice in the 1970s in order to understand the appeal of this alternative to hospital birth. What explains its growing popularity, and how did the practice spread? Certain aspects of this recent history are well chronicled, by both activists and academics (primarily sociologists) who recognize the significance of this cultural moment. Documentary films, scholarly books, and professional gatherings regularly take note of the home birth revival that began in the 1970s.<sup>14</sup> As Judith Luce, Stanley Sagov, and Archie Brodsky explained in *Home Birth: A Practitioner’s Guide to Birth Outside the Hospital* in 1984, a number of social forces contributed to the renewed interest in home birth, including the women’s health movement, feminism, the prepared childbirth movement, the movement to breast-feed (in particular the growing popularity of La Leche League), the health consumer movement, and the holistic health movement.<sup>15</sup>

12. Mayer Eisenstein, “The American College of Home Obstetrics,” in *21st Century Obstetrics Now!* (Chapel Hill, N.C.: NAPSAC, 1977), 2:372.

13. David and Lee Stewart, “Foreword and Introduction,” in *21st Century Obstetrics Now!* (n. 12), 2:iii.

14. For example, the recent documentary *Birth Story: Ina May Gaskin and the Farm Midwives*, directed by Sara Lamm and Mary Wigmore, won the audience award at the 2012 Los Angeles Film Festival. *Midwifery Today* holds regular conferences on these issues, resulting in publications such as *Birth by Design* (London: Routledge, 2001), which features the work of sociologists Robbie Davis-Floyd, Barbara Katz Rothman, Raymond Devries, and midwife Betty-Anne Davis. Under the leadership of Saraswati Vedam, senior members of maternity care and health organizations have convened three Home Birth Summits to “find common ground and spark constructive action towards safe, culturally competent, and respectful care for women who desire home birth.” See <http://www.homebirthsummit.org/>, accessed November 4, 2014.

15. Judith Luce, Stanley Sagov, and Archie Brodsky, “Why Home Birth?” in *Home Birth: A Practitioner’s Guide to Birth Outside the Hospital*, ed. Stanley Sagov, Richard Feinbloom, Peggy

Historians, however, have remained relatively reticent about the 1970s home birth revival, as they have about many aspects of what may be, according to Beth Bailey and David Farber, “our strangest decade.” Unlike scholars examining the 1960s, they argue, “historians have been slow to put the 1970s into the narrative of American history.”<sup>16</sup> Michael Willard adds that “we continue to see the 1970s as the betrayal of the 1960s, as the time when America lost its innocence, or faith, or passion.” Yet many of the visions and goals articulated in the 1960s became reality for more Americans in the 1970s than they had in the previous decade. The challenge for historians “lies in figuring out how to take Seventies culture seriously.”<sup>17</sup> The growing interest in revitalizing home birth in the 1970s is an ideal launching point for exploring cultural meaning in the 1970s, as it embodies the struggle of a new generation to make sense of the physical and spiritual world around them.

Perhaps historians have also been reluctant to integrate home birth into larger studies of American society because of its association with the counterculture. Those who advocated alternatives to hospital birth and the promotion of midwifery in the 1970s have been portrayed as part of an anti-intellectual, countercultural hippie fringe.<sup>18</sup> New scholarship demonstrates the extent to which historian Theodore Roszak’s portrayal of the counterculture as anti-intellectual and anti-science back in 1969 has served to marginalize a generation of thinkers and thereby downplay the contributions they have made to current attitudes and practice.<sup>19</sup> In fact, much of the push for a more “natural” approach to birth was grounded in science as much as it was in spirituality. What these authors conveyed in words, photographs, astrology charts, and audio cassettes articulated a blend of ancient and modern, philosophical and practical. They did not reject technology or science so much as they demanded that it be integrated with experience, mysticism, feminism, and faith.

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Spindel, and Archie Brodsky (Rockville, Md.: Aspen Systems, 1984), 3. For more on the connections between La Leche League and home birth, see Jule DeJager Ward, *La Leche League: At the Crossroads of Medicine, Feminism, and Religion* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000).

16. Beth Bailey and David Farber, eds., *America in the Seventies* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2004), 1.

17. Michael Willard, “Skate and Punk at the Far End of the American Century,” in Bailey and Farber, *America in the Seventies* (n. 16), 181, 182.

18. Theodore Roszak, *The Making of a Counter Culture: Reflections on the Technocratic Society and Its Youthful Opposition* (Garden City, N.Y.: Anchor/Doubleday, 1969).

19. See David Kaiser, *How the Hippies Saved Physics: Science, Counterculture, and the Quantum Revival* (New York: Norton, 2011), Timothy Moy, “Culture, Technology, and the Cult of Tech in the 1970s,” in Bailey and Farber, *America in the Seventies* (n. 16), 208–27.

## Lifestyle Print Culture

*The Birth Book* and *Spiritual Midwifery* hit the market at the beginning of a boom in lifestyle literature—what sociologist Sam Binkley refers to as the “countercultural lifestyle print culture of the 1970s.”<sup>20</sup> Narratives on diet, exercise, sex, birth, massage, and even Volkswagen repair emerged as an alternative to the “stale living patterns of the postwar mass consumer.”<sup>21</sup> Much of this came from the West Coast, where small, unconventional presses emerged with minimal production budgets and stunned the New York–based book market by capturing a wide readership. Technology aided this industry, as the availability of computer typesetters inspired authors and editors to “undertake their own production, editing, and design.”<sup>22</sup>

While the content differed considerably in these texts, the message was similar: relax, live in the moment, simplify your life. At stake was the idea of a more “authentic, innocent, and original source of the self” that could be awakened by certain practices (living communally, gardening, or birthing at home). Sociologist Binkley terms this “loosening”: letting it all hang out would “release a primordial vitality,” allowing one to “become an artist of oneself and of one’s identity ... through the crafting of a distinctly loose style of life.”<sup>23</sup>

An oft-cited and heavily analyzed example of this countercultural print revolution is *The Whole Earth Catalog*. Started by Stewart Brand in 1968, the publication was an “ad hoc collection of product reviews, commentaries, and ecological screeds gathered from experimental lifestylists and back-to-the landers.”<sup>24</sup> But the vast majority of the almost two million people who purchased copies of *The Whole Earth Catalog* in its first three years were in fact urban dwellers who never abandoned society. Historian Andrew Kirk argues that *The Whole Earth Catalog* “became the foundation for the rise of a new creative class of entrepreneurs and innovators”—not social dropouts.<sup>25</sup> “Dismissing the counterculture as the apolitical sellouts of the 1960s and 1970s misses the rich contributions this cultural mode made to politics and culture,” Kirk argues.<sup>26</sup> A close investigation of the radical

20. Sam Binkley, *Getting Loose: Lifestyle Consumption in the 1970s* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2007), 5.

21. *Ibid.*, 101.

22. *Ibid.*, 108.

23. *Ibid.*, 3.

24. *Ibid.*, 5.

25. Andrew G. Kirk, *Counterculture Green: The Whole Earth Catalog and American Environmentalism* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2007), 154.

26. *Ibid.*, 186.

home birth literature of the early 1970s reveals a similar trend, suggesting the importance of revisiting how these works were made and promoted in order to understand their significance to 1970s culture.

The cover of the first *Whole Earth Catalog* was a result of Stewart Brand's quest to uncover a photograph of the earth from space. "Those riveting Earth photos reframed everything [in 1968]. For the first time humanity saw itself from outside," Brand reflected. "The photograph of the whole earth from space helped to generate a lot of behavior—the ecology movement, the sense of global politics, the rise of the global economy, and so on. I think all of those phenomena were, in some sense, given permission to occur by the photograph of the earth from space."<sup>27</sup> Juxtaposing the *Whole Earth* image with the circular image on the cover of Raven Lang's *The Birth Book* illustrates how these images compelled the viewer to think both globally and microscopically (see Figure 1). One zooms directly in between a woman's legs to underscore the origins of birth, while the other zooms out to call attention to the cosmic insignificance of human life. Both suggest the extent to which countercultural thinkers were blending art and science to question their place in the universe.

### *The Birth Book* (1972)

If it were not for her unpleasant experience giving birth at Stanford University Hospital in 1968, Raven Lang may have never become a midwife, started the Santa Cruz Birth Center, or published *The Birth Book*. A twenty-five-year-old high school teacher, she and her husband could not afford a private obstetrician, but discovered that Stanford had a three-hundred-fifty-dollar package that covered prenatal appointments and the hospital delivery. She read everything she could on natural childbirth—Grantly Dick-Read's *Childbirth Without Fear* (1945) and Marjorie Karmel's *Thank You, Dr. Lamaze* (a personal account credited with introducing and popularizing the Lamaze method to the United States in 1959)—and optimistically awaited labor. When contractions began, she stayed at home as long as possible, and arrived at the hospital already halfway dilated. "And so I labored for about four hours and then they basically gave me an episiotomy in order to get him out because it was a very busy night and they had to move people in and out of the delivery room," she remembers.<sup>28</sup> Like many women in the late 1960s and early 1970s who spoke out

27. Stewart Brand, "Photography Changes Our Relationship to Our Planet," Smithsonian Photography Initiative, <http://click.si.edu/Story.aspx?story=31>, accessed December 4, 2012.

28. Raven Lang, interview with the author, August 12, 2011.

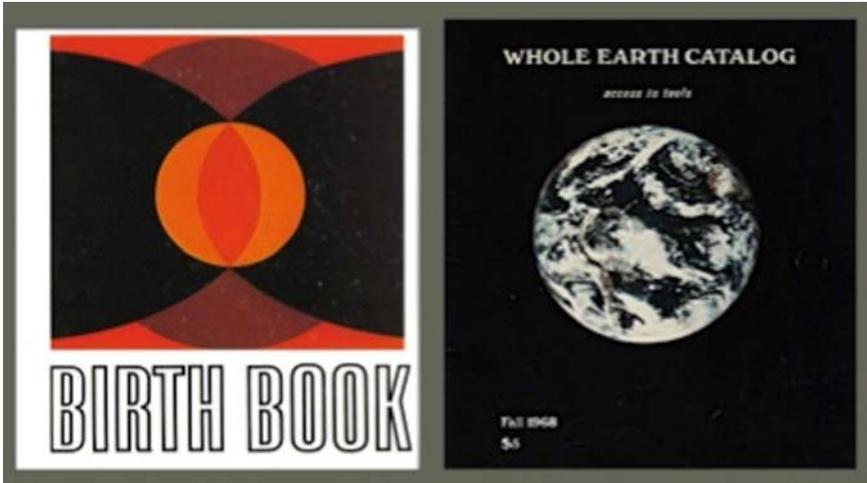


Figure 1. Cover of *The Birth Book* by Raven Lang (1972) and *The Whole Earth Catalog* by Stewart Brand (1968). Just as the photograph of the earth from space encouraged viewers to look further outward than ever before possible, Raven Lang's artwork motivated viewers to look further inward. Despite the abstract nature of Lang's cover art, converging circles and shadows suggested the private, privileged nature of what lay within the books covers, inviting the viewer to partake in the communal experience of birth.

against hospital birth experiences, Lang believed that the treatment she received in the hospital was not in the best interest of her or her baby.

When Lang returned home from Stanford Hospital, she found a strong desire to talk to people about what had happened to her. "I kept wanting to uncover it—you know, look underneath all the rocks—turn over every rock because something didn't make sense to me. And there was nobody to talk to."<sup>29</sup> Lang felt completely isolated as a young mother. She did not know many other women with children and had never seen a woman breast-feed. "It was a different world," Lang recalls. "When you think about how different that is in such a short time, in just one adult's life span. You know, when I went to my last post partum visit at Stanford I went with a series of questions that the physician couldn't answer, and I then realized that my experience in birth would lead me on a journey that I would have to delve into and figure out for myself." Seven months later, she learned from a friend that there were some women living close by in the Santa Cruz Mountains who were helping each other have their

29. Ibid.

babies at home. She told her friend that she wanted to meet these women as soon as possible.<sup>30</sup>

Shortly after, lay midwife Diane Scamzer drove her VW bus on the curvy road that led to Raven's house in Ben Lomond.<sup>31</sup> Raven, who did not identify as part of the counterculture at the time, was astounded by what she saw. "[Diane] was definitely a hippie of the first order," Raven later recalled. She carried her little blonde boy, the same age as Raven's son, into the house, and proceeded to remove her shirt and breast-feed. She stayed for hours, then hiked down the road to a house with a telephone to check on a woman in labor. When Raven learned that the woman was ready to deliver, she begged to come along, and Diane consented. "And then when I saw this woman give birth on her own power, every question I had asked in the post partum visit at Stanford was answered by this woman. I thought, oh my god, this birth compared to mine was like day and night."<sup>32</sup> Witnessing a natural birth in a woman's own home, with no intervention, no haste, and no incisions, further confirmed her belief that what had happened during her own delivery was unjust.

Though home birth seemed like a reasonable endeavor to Lang, she discovered there was very little practical support within the community. When she approached her psychiatrist friend, Dr. Bob Spitzer, asking if he had any books on obstetrics she might study, he was shocked to learn of the growing interest in home birth. Why would a woman want to have her baby at home, when she could do it in the hospital with a doctor? Perhaps, he thought, "these women could be just another variety of California 'kook.'" He sought these women out, hoping to dissuade them of their interest, but discovered that they all had remarkably similar stories. "They were not 'kooks,' but for the most part were intelligent women who were not unaware of the medical danger involved," part of a new movement under way to uncover the potential benefits of home birth to mother and child.<sup>33</sup>

30. Ibid.

31. Lay midwives were those who had not participated in a credentialed midwifery program. In the early 1990s, most lay midwives opted to identify themselves as "direct-entry midwives" in order to "emphasize both their professional competence and their unique point of entry into midwifery." See Christine Barbara Johnson, "Creating a Way out of No Way: Midwifery in Massachusetts," in *Mainstreaming Midwives: The Politics of Change*, ed. Robbie Davis-Floyd and Christine Barbara Johnson (New York: Routledge, 2006), 375–410, quotation on 393. I have chosen to use the term "lay midwife" because that is how they commonly referred to themselves in the 1970s.

32. Lang interview (n. 28).

33. Robert S. Spitzer, *Tidings of Comfort and Joy: An Anthology of Change* (Palo Alto, Calif.: Science and Behavior Books, 1975), 219.

Spitzer became convinced that home birth was a legitimate endeavor, but he was one of few local doctors who supported the cause. One general practitioner, Peter Nash, had previously attended home births, but had been dissuaded from continuing the practice by the local obstetrician–gynecologists, who decided as a group to refuse prenatal care to any woman expressing interest in having a home birth.<sup>34</sup> No childbirth education classes existed.<sup>35</sup> Raven decided she would fill that gap, posting notices in local laundromats and food co-ops. Though she did not have a phone or any way for interested couples to RSVP, she waited expectantly in her living room on that first day. When six couples showed up at the appointed time, she realized that this “was the beginning of my career in birth.”<sup>36</sup>

Raven spent the next few years teaching and participating in births, some in hospitals, some at home. The first time a young pregnant woman asked Raven to be her midwife, she said no. Lay midwife Diane had moved away, just as local interest in home birth was growing, leaving a dearth of practitioners. Still, Raven was hesitant. She wanted to know more about the mechanics of birth, but there were very few books available, other than standard obstetrical textbooks, and the aforementioned *Thank You, Dr. Lamaze* and *Childbirth Without Fear*. As the authors of *Our Bodies, Ourselves* were discovering in Boston in these same years, much of the material on reproduction and women’s bodies needed to be written by participants in the movement. Until the publication of *The Birth Book* in 1972 and *Our Bodies, Ourselves* in 1973, readers in the United States had almost no access to basic information, images, or personal accounts of women’s reproductive experiences.<sup>37</sup>

In the mountains of Santa Cruz, Raven Lang began doing her own research, collecting individual accounts of births that she attended, mostly of young women in their twenties, pregnant for the first time. “People would write their birth story and give it to me and I would read it to my next class and I would see the effect,” she recalled. Sometimes she would invite couples back to the group after they had given birth to recount

34. In her study of nurse midwife Ruth Watson Lubic, Julie Fairman notes the negative reaction of many obstetricians to out-of-hospital births in New York City in the mid-1970s, due to “competition and conflict.” See Julie Fairman, “‘Go to Ruth’s House’: The Social Activism of Ruth Lubic and the Family Health and Birth Center,” *Nursing Hist. Rev.* 18 (2010): 118–29, 121.

35. Suzanne Arms, *Immaculate Deception: A New Look at Women and Childbirth in America* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1975), 204.

36. Lang interview (n. 28).

37. See Wendy Kline, *Bodies of Knowledge: Sexuality, Reproduction, and Women’s Health in the Second Wave* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010), chap. 1.

their experiences. “They would tell the person all about their birth and I would see the effect that it would have. And I would see the effect of a good story vs. a difficult story or a bad outcome. . . . This was just womanly wisdom being passed on, that was how it began. And then people had photographs taken. And then I said I’m going to make a booklet.”<sup>38</sup> The information and images were powerful, and she imagined that with the right packaging, such a book could change the way people thought about where and how to give birth.

Lang’s visions came not only from what she witnessed in the cabins, tepees, and forests of Santa Cruz. Prior to her work as a high school teacher, she attended the San Francisco Art Institute. To help pay for her tuition, she worked in advertising. “What I learned in advertising was how to make books. I learned how to lay them out, paste them up, and get them to the printers.”<sup>39</sup> Armed with powerful evidence that birth could and did take place outside of the hospital, and her own experience with bookmaking, she set out to capture it in print.

The first challenge was financial. “I didn’t have that money. When I say I was poor, you have to look under that. I mean it was, we had nothing.”<sup>40</sup> Instead, she bartered and borrowed. Client Janet IZard offered her typing skills in exchange for delivering her baby (“this book could not have been done without you,” Lang wrote in the acknowledgments).<sup>41</sup> Her psychiatrist friend Dr. Robert Spitzer lent her the money for the first printing. He was involved with Science and Behavior Books, a small publishing house that specializes in counseling psychology. Realizing that she had enough material to publish an entire book (rather than just a pamphlet), she again sought out Spitzer’s advice.

Initially, Spitzer was hesitant, pointing out the second challenge to publishing *The Birth Book*. The graphic photographs and strong language would be off-putting to some readers. Lang sent copies to her art school friend Kate Bowland (who would move to Santa Cruz to midwife alongside her). Bowland remembers that the photos were “stark and graphic, shocking to my Midwestern sensibilities, yet absolutely intriguing.”<sup>42</sup> Spitzer agreed. According to Lange, “he took a look at it and said ‘well you’re not going to be able to use these photographs because they’ve got vulvas and

38. Lang interview (n. 28).

39. Ibid.

40. Ibid.

41. Raven Lang, *The Birth Book* (1972; repr., Felton, Calif.: Genesis Press, 2007), 2.

42. Kate Bowland, “I Never Intended to Be an Outlaw,” in *Into These Hands: Wisdom from Midwives*, ed. Geradine Simkins (Traverse City, Mich.: Spirituality and Health Books, 2011), 65–78, quotation on 66.

butts and you can't do that and you have to take out these words 'fuck' and 'cunt.'" But Lang was adamant. "I wasn't going to have somebody put blinders on our eyes and gags in our mouths with the making of this book. It was like no, this has to be what it is. These people have got to be given their voice. No censorship. No censorship about their body, about their language, no. This is who we are." With funding, Lang determined she could publish it herself, convincing Spitzer to loan her three thousand dollars, the cost for the first printing.<sup>43</sup>

Next, she tracked down Charlie Hochberg, a "really wonderful young man" working at a little photo shop in downtown Santa Cruz. Together, Lang and Hochberg worked side by side on the lighting and development of the photographs. Lang got an architect desk and worked on the layout and designed the front cover. Her client patiently typed up the text. Within two weeks, *The Birth Book*, now a 161-page treatise rather than a brief pamphlet, was ready for the printer.

Complications lay ahead, however. She settled on a print shop in nearby Felton that agreed to do a first printing of three thousand copies. When she went to check on the images, she discovered that everything was "coming out funky." The tone differentiation that she had labored over with Charlie in the photography studio seemed to have disappeared. "I chose these people because they had quality half tones. I mean I could've chosen somebody cheaper, but I wanted the halftones to be high quality because I felt that the images were as important as the text." Every morning for two weeks she appeared at the print shop, peering over images, pointing out weaknesses and discolorations in the print. After the initial run, the binding on multiple copies came unglued, and the owner realized that faulty equipment had damaged the books. He agreed to sell them to her at a massive discount, fix the problems, and do another run.<sup>44</sup>

As soon as it was finished, Lang went to New York City to promote the book. "I went from bookshop to bookshop to bookshop because I thought 'this is where to go.' And not one person bought the book. Because I wasn't a 'real publisher.' They only dealt with real publishers. They don't deal with home made. That was devastating." She went to plan B, sending copies to friends and contacts in the alternative birth world whom she had met over the past four years. "I realized that this was going to have to be a grass roots book. And that's when I got yellow pages from as many places as I could and looked through clinics." She would send clinics involved in women's health a copy of the book with a note asking the clinic to share it with clients. "Because I was really a proselytizer at that point it was like

43. Lang interview (n. 28).

44. Ibid.

GET THIS OUT.” Within the next ten years, she had five printings and sold approximately fifteen thousand copies.<sup>45</sup>

Most readers would not have seen anything quite like *The Birth Book* in print. Poetry, photographs, nutritional information, historical background, even a recipe for placenta stew made its way onto the book’s pages. “This book is a collection of intimacies,” Lang explains in the introduction. “Each experience is but a moment in time that the writers are sharing with the reader.” Though Lang had struggled to learn more about the birth process when first attending women in labor, she did not see her work as a textbook. “It is not a manual for doing home birth yourself,” she explained, “instead it is a book proselytizing for family-centered birth and self directed birth.” As with *Our Bodies, Ourselves*, *The Birth Book* placed personal stories and photographs at the center of the narrative, destabilizing assumptions about the clinical nature of reproduction and women’s bodies. Birth was not a medical event but a natural process that had been taken away from women.

Yet home birth also made scientific sense, according to Lang. Drawing on the work of zoologist Konrad Lorenz, she argued that the birth experience had long-lasting effects on the psychological makeup of the child and the nature of the mother–infant bond. In the hospital, the use of narcotics and the practice of separating the infant after birth could negatively affect the development of this bond. Though Lorenz had studied the process of imprinting in animals and assumed that this was an instinct shared by humans, Lang believed that more research needed to be done. “Effects of maternal separation and deprivation in the human have scarcely been investigated,” she argued. Drawing on her own hospital experience and the stories of Santa Cruz mothers, she stressed the importance of the immediate bonding between mother and child. Is it possible, she asked, that hospital rituals (such as the removal of the infant from the mother immediately after birth) were responsible for the onset of neuroses in adulthood? “Could the separation of the baby from its mother be related to a sense of non-acceptance later in life?”<sup>46</sup> Certainly, Lorenz’s research suggested that it could, an argument taken up by child analysts in the United States after World War II who focused on the importance of mother love for child development. In that context, Lorenz’s theory of imprinting was used to reify traditional gender roles (because mothers played an important biological function in the development of their children and therefore needed to stay at home).<sup>47</sup> In *The Birth Book*, however,

45. Ibid.

46. Lang, *Birth Book* (n. 41), 40–41.

47. Marga Vicedo, “The Father of Ethology and the Foster Mother of Ducks: Konrad Lorenz as Expert on Motherhood,” *Isis* 100 (2009): 263–91.

Lorenz is used not to reify the status quo, but to justify home birth. “If there is anything valid in home birth beyond a couple’s right to be free to choose the manner in which their child shall be born,” Lang argues, “it is in the areas of imprinting, where the mother’s love as well as the love of all present, are important in the developing relationship between the child and these people, as well as the child’s own sense of self-love.”<sup>48</sup>

Yet despite Lang’s scientific rationale and a growing interest in home birth in certain communities, finding a skilled attendant who could deal with emergencies was becoming more difficult. Obstetricians in Santa Cruz County, for example, met in 1971 and made a collective decision to refuse prenatal care for anyone planning a home birth, in the hopes of discouraging the practice. In response, Lang and the other women attending births in the area decided to start their own prenatal center. “Some were scared because it wouldn’t be legal and we’d be up for lots of criticism and a possible bust,” Lang explained in *The Birth Book*. “But after reading Jerry Rubin’s *Do It*, we decided it was the only solution open to us.”<sup>49</sup> Rubin, founder of the Youth International Party, proclaimed in 1970 that “anybody who wants to teach should be allowed to ‘teach,’” and Lang interpreted that to include teaching how to deliver babies.<sup>50</sup>

On a “warm spring day,” in 1971, seven women opened up the Santa Cruz Birth Center at a private house in the center of town. By the time Lang published *The Birth Book*, the center had been in operation for one year, with workers attending fifty home births, moving five times, and operating on a budget of a hundred fifty dollars. The women taught each other along the way. “Each member of the birth center possesses some book on obstetrics or midwifing which has been begged, borrowed, or stolen. We still tackle new educational things at each meeting, and we are still struggling. It’s not the easiest way to go, but it’s a lot of fun. It’s a real thing,” Lang declared. They were actively practicing what Jerry Rubin promoted in his 1970 treatise. “I see it as part of the revolution,” Lang explained: “a self determination which leads to self actualization, and that in itself is inspiring and gives us strength. We have already become a model for other communities.”<sup>51</sup>

Thus, the publication of *The Birth Book* was a way to extend that sense of community beyond the Santa Cruz Mountains. Dr. Bob Spitzer, who had provided the capital for the first printing, expressed that sentiment in the book’s last pages. “This book captures the trust in naturally unfold-

48. Lang, *Birth Book* (n. 41), 44.

49. *Ibid.*, 3.

50. Jerry Rubin, *Do It!*, quoted in Alexander Bloom and Wini Breines, “*Takin’ It to the Streets*”: A *Sixties Reader* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), 281.

51. *Ibid.*, 3–4.

ing life processes and also a sense of community,” he wrote. “This trust is evident in how the writers share with you, the reader, their innermost thoughts and their bodies.”<sup>52</sup> Despite the abstract nature of Lang’s cover art, converging circles and shadows suggested the private, privileged nature of what lay within the books covers, inviting the viewer to partake in the communal experience of birth.

Though not a best seller, *The Birth Book* worked its way into readers’ hands, getting passed from midwife to client and back to midwife again. Midwife Carol Leonard was just beginning her practice in New Hampshire in 1976 when some of her clients gave her the book. “I begin shaking as I look at the black-and-white photographs of women attending other women in childbirth in their homes in Northern California,” she writes. “So, there are other women doing what I am doing! I am not crazy! I can’t believe how euphoric I feel, knowing that I am not alone.”<sup>53</sup> Leonard’s reaction was exactly what Lang was hoping for. Books had the ability to travel across boundaries far more fluidly than their authors. Allegedly tracked by the FBI for her radical sentiments, Lang fled California shortly after she published the book, settling in Vancouver for the next few years. But her book established her authority in the rapidly growing alternative birth movement.

Lang became somewhat of a celebrity in the alternative birth communities cropping up in the early 1970s, in part because of her defiance of California law, which did not recognize direct-entry midwifery until the passage of the Licensed Midwifery Act in 1993. Between 1974 and 1993, some forty to fifty midwives were prosecuted in California for practicing medicine without a license.<sup>54</sup> “We were the prosecution capital in the U.S.,” one midwife argues.<sup>55</sup> Many medical professionals, including obstetricians and certified nurse midwives (who held degrees both in nursing and in nurse–midwifery from an accredited program), became very nervous about the emergence of unregulated, unlicensed lay midwives practicing home birth. Most certified nurse midwives worked in hospitals, and many expressed concern that lay midwives practicing home births would denigrate the entire profession. A group of certified midwives in Northern California wrote the Executive Board of the American College

52. Robert S. Spitzer, M.D., “Words from Dr. Bob,” in Lang, *Birth Book* (n. 41), 158.

53. Carol Leonard, *Lady’s Hands, Lion’s Heart: A Midwife’s Saga* (Hopkinton, N.H.: Bad Beaver, 2008), 70.

54. As Robbie Davis-Floyd and Christine Johnson explain, the current status of lay or direct-entry midwives “fluctuates wildly from state to state.” As of November 2014, certified professional midwives are legally authorized in twenty-eight states. See <http://pushformidwives.org/cpms-by-state/> and Davis-Floyd and Johnson, *Mainstreaming Midwives* (n. 31), 9.

55. Karen Ehrlich, interview with the author, August 6, 2011.

of Nurse Midwives in 1973 to report on the increasing popularity of home births in the area, requesting that the board issue a position statement on home birth, which it did. From 1973 to 1980, the ACNM's official position was that the hospital or maternity home was the "preferred site for childbirth because of the distinct advantage to the physical welfare of the mother and infant."<sup>56</sup>

But not everyone was convinced that a hospital birth had a "distinct advantage"—not even all doctors. Those physicians who practiced home birth encountered increasing resistance from the profession as the practice gained popularity in the 1970s. Many, including Santa Cruz physician Peter Nash, were threatened with the loss of hospital privileges if they continued to attend home births. For example, one home birth physician was contacted by the chief of obstetrics at the hospital where he held privileges, and "informed that he was in jeopardy of losing these privileges unless he refrained from participation in homebirth." As a result, he stopped.<sup>57</sup>

### *Spiritual Midwifery (1975)*

Although future midwives and authors Raven Lang, Rahima Baldwin, and Ina May Gaskin all lived in Northern California in the late 1960s, none of them knew each other personally at the time, and Lang was the only one who would remain in the area to proselytize home birth. Ina May was one of many young people drawn to San Francisco in the 1960s intrigued by its countercultural ferment. She was raised in Marshalltown, Iowa, where she graduated from high school in 1958. After receiving her bachelor's degree from the State University of Iowa, she traveled to Malaysia with her first husband (whom she married at the age of nineteen) to volunteer for the Peace Corps. They planned to head directly to San Francisco after two years in Malaysia, but when they discovered she was pregnant, they decided to return to the Midwest for graduate school. "We thought, well, you don't just go out pregnant and decide to become a hippie with no way to make a living." With a master's degree, she could work as a teaching assistant for better pay. After obtaining a degree in English from Northern Illinois University in 1967, she took off with her husband and young daughter for San Francisco to "become hippies," as she remembered later.<sup>58</sup>

56. Executive Board Meeting, October 27, 1973, American College of Nurse Midwives Records, MSC 330a, box 37, National Library of Medicine, Bethesda, Md.

57. Johnson, "Creating a Way" (n. 31), 379.

58. Ina May Gaskin, conversation with the author, March 26, 2013.

Ina May found work in Chinatown, teaching English to local residents while her husband stayed home with their daughter. "I absolutely loved that job," she recalled.<sup>59</sup> Like so many who flocked to San Francisco in the 1960s, her world was soon turned upside down. She and her husband began attending Stephen Gaskin's "Monday Night Class," a series of lectures initially held at San Francisco State University that covered everything from meditation to discussions about politics, religion, and psychedelics. By 1969, this class had grown to several thousand people, many of whom began to see Stephen as their spiritual teacher. Like Ina May, Stephen was married with a young daughter, and the two couples formed what they called a "four-marriage," but by the early 1980s Stephen and Ina May had settled into a traditional monogamous marriage.<sup>60</sup>

In 1970, Stephen was invited to deliver a series of lectures at schools and churches across the country, and over two hundred of his followers decided to join him in school buses for this so-called Astral Continental Congress, a call for a spiritual and social revolution. The Caravan, as it came to be called, generated more and more media attention as its collection of school buses wound their way through forty-two states spreading the inchoate messages of peace, spiritual, and social revolution to students and churchgoers. At the end of the tour, Stephen and his followers decided to purchase land in Tennessee and create a commune on a thousand acres, based on the principles put forward by Gaskin.

Perhaps the most remarkable aspect of the caravan that would eventually bring them to Tennessee was the eleven births that took place on buses en route. The first birth happened in a parking lot at Northwestern University, while Stephen was lecturing inside an auditorium. No one on the caravan had any training in obstetrics, but one woman, Joanne Santana, brought along an English translation of a midwifery manual that she had recently purchased at New Age Natural Foods in San Francisco, and Ina May put it to use while helping to deliver the child. "It was just our speed," Santana later recalled about the manual. "It's like 'put warm brick in baby's bed. Remove brick before putting baby in bed.' It told you how to do you know a birthing pack, how to sterilize your instruments, how to deliver a breech birth, how to stop a hemorrhage, things like that." Santana had used the book for the birth of her second child at home in San Francisco on July 4, 1970, just a few months before the departure of the caravan. The following Sunday, she brought her newborn son Anthony with her to hear Stephen Gaskin's sermon at Sutro Park, where she spotted Ina May sitting under a palm tree. "And I went over to the palm tree

59. Ibid.

60. Samantha Shapiro, "Mommy Wars: The Prequel; Ina May Gaskin and the Battle for at-Home Births," *New York Times Magazine*, May 23, 2012.

and I told Ina May, 'well, I had the baby.' And she's holding Anthony and she said 'where'd you have him?' And I said 'I had him at home.' And she said, 'well how did you do that?' and I said 'with a midwife.' And you could just see her eyes light up and the wheels start turning and she said 'oh it would be really nice to have one of those, you know.'<sup>61</sup> The seed was planted.

Like Joanne, Raven Lang, and 99 percent of all U.S. laboring women in the 1960s, Ina May's first birth experience had taken place in a hospital. "Fear of having a repeat of what I experienced during my first birth in a hospital was what prompted me to figure out a way to learn to be a midwife," Ina May later declared.<sup>62</sup> Back in Illinois while in graduate school, she had delivered her daughter in a hospital, an experience that traumatized her. "During birth at the hospital, I was left alone and treated like I had done something nasty. Then I was approached by a gang of masked attendants who came in the room and treated me like a ritual victim. They used forceps, and then I wasn't allowed to see my baby for 18 hours," remembers Gaskin.<sup>63</sup>

Thus, for Ina May, the possibility of creating and sustaining alternative spaces for birth was grounded in her own experience. Just as for Raven Lang, the brutality of her own hospital birth—juxtaposed with the messages of spiritual renewal and social change in counterculture's capital, San Francisco—triggered the determination to revolutionize birthing practices.

Once settled on The Farm in Summertown, Tennessee, Gaskin and a few other women created a more formal practice of midwifery, consulting the local doctor who regularly delivered the nearby Amish babies at home, as well as poring over medical textbooks to learn their trade. As the population grew (up to fifteen hundred in 1982, with about fourteen thousand visitors per year), so did the number of births. Over twenty-five hundred babies have been born on The Farm by these midwives, whose favorable statistics (including a 1.8 percent% cesarean section rate) have caught the attention of consumers and birth practitioners around the world.<sup>64</sup>

Many more births have been affected by Ina May's home birthing philosophy than those born on The Farm, however. *Spiritual Midwifery*, a guide to birthing for consumers and birth practitioners published on

61. Joanne Santana, lecture, The Farm Midwifery Assistant Workshop, Summertown, Tenn., March 26, 2013.

62. Ina May Gaskin, "Birth Story: A 'Pregnancy' 30 Years in the Making," *Huffington Post*, May 10, 2013, [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/ina-may-gaskin/post\\_4689\\_b\\_3253016.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/ina-may-gaskin/post_4689_b_3253016.html), accessed May 29, 2013.

63. Ina May Gaskin, quoted in Katie Allison Granju, "The Midwife of Modern Midwifery," *Salon*, June 1, 1999, <http://www.salon.com/1999/06/01/gaskin/>, accessed May 29 2013.

64. See [http://www.thefarmmidwives.org/preliminary\\_statistics.html](http://www.thefarmmidwives.org/preliminary_statistics.html), accessed May 30, 2013.

The Farm, has sold over half a million copies, has been translated into six languages, and is still in print. *Spiritual Midwifery* started out as a section of The Book Publishing Company's first publication, *Hey Beatnik!* (1974). The earlier book provided an in-depth report about everything happening on The Farm, including its philosophy, farming, construction, soy dairy, grain mill, Farm Band, Motor Pool, school, and midwifery. This first version of *Spiritual Midwifery* was only 17 pages long (it would grow to 480 pages by the revised edition in 1977) and was a mixture of birth stories from multiple perspectives (father, mother, and midwife), photographs, instructions for prenatal care, and delivery. Significantly, it was the only section of *Hey Beatnik!* that included personal stories. What is clear from the stories chosen is that Farm members really believed that successful birthing required coming to terms with one's place in the universe, along with more mundane factors such as diet and blood pressure. "Putting out energy from one end of your tube (in the form of truth or love)," explained Ina May, "makes it easy to put out energy from the other end (in the form of a baby)."<sup>65</sup>

*Hey Beatnik!* was a popular book, lively and colorful, reflective of the energy and spirit of several hundred young hippies creating a new communal life, completely separated from judgmental parents or the increasingly destructive drug culture that had taken over Haight-Ashbury in San Francisco by the 1970s. Paul Mandelstein, who created the Book Publishing Company on The Farm, cobbling together his print shop from used equipment he picked up in Atlanta, remembers *Hey Beatnik!* as "an amazing project." Because The Farm was a commune, no one was paid a salary, instead working on the book "for the love of it and to do the best" job they could. Over twenty artists contributed illustrations, and the array of colors that enlivened the book's pages were remnants of ink cartridges donated by a Seventh-day Adventist printing company in Nashville ("they were vegans and so were we," Mandelstein explained of the donation). One distinctive characteristic of both *Hey Beatnik!* and the first edition of *Spiritual Midwifery* was the typeset, which was usually purple instead of black. "We didn't like black because we felt it was the dark aura, you know how hippies were back in those days," he chuckled later. "Of course over time we realized it was harder for people to read and we gave up our very conservative ideas about that."<sup>66</sup> By 1977, the typeset was in black.

Shortly after the publication of *Hey Beatnik!* Ina May started receiving letters asking for more information about home birth, along with more

65. Ina May Gaskin, "Spiritual Midwifery," in *Hey Beatnik!* (Summertown, Tenn.: Book Publishing Company, 1974), n.p.

66. Paul Mandelstein, interview with the author, April 16, 2013.

birth stories, and she realized she had material for an entire book. She wanted to write the kind of book she had never had when she was first pregnant. “I remember being given a little book on pregnancy in 1966 when I was pregnant the first time and I just threw it aside because it was like a machine manual,” she reflected later. “I didn’t want to be told ‘this is the first stage’ and ‘this is the second stage’ and you know a description that a man would write about birth—what would *he* know?”<sup>67</sup> Looking at the birth stories written for *Hey Beatnik!*, she was struck by how good the writing was, and decided to make these stories the centerpiece of *Spiritual Midwifery*. Midwife Pamela Hunt remembers, “we’d go out and pile on Ina May’s bed and ... we ... started reading through the [birth stories] and you know I’d get to one and say ‘oh this one’s great—here, read this Ina May’ and ... she’d read one and she’d start laughing and we’d all say ‘yeah, we gotta put that one in.’”<sup>68</sup> Stories on breech births, hospital emergencies, and even stillbirths fleshed out the narrative, a sobering reminder of what could go wrong mixed in with the delight of a successful and empowering home birth.

Some of the letters Ina May received made it clear that people were using her section in *Hey Beatnik!* to deliver their own babies. “And then I knew I had to write in a lot more detail than that because you know there’s hardly anything in there.” She began reading all that she could on the medical and technical aspects of birth, drawing on her newly established connections with nurses and doctors whom she’d encountered both while traveling on the Caravan and on The Farm. They were “very helpful in helping me write up those parts, you know about the gauge of the needle used for this and that and sterilization.” But much of the material she got out of medical textbooks. “I knew that in the medical books it was a combination of life saving information with crazy stuff. And so I got the good stuff and left out the other and said things my own way.”<sup>69</sup> With this material, *Spiritual Midwifery* became both a practical how-to manual and a spiritual guide.

Four editions and several more printings later, the book continues to get attention. Farm publisher Paul Mandelstein believes that he was the first publisher to sell more books to alternative markets (especially health food stores, but also public health departments) than to traditional book stores.<sup>70</sup> It was not the most successful book of the Book Publishing Company (that award goes to *The Big Dummies’ Guide to CB Radio*, which sold

67. Gaskin conversation.

68. Pamela Hunt, interview with the author, March 29, 2013.

69. Gaskin conversation (n. 58).

70. Mandelstein interview (n. 66).

over three million copies). But it is certainly the one that characterizes what was unique about *The Farm*. Along with Raven Lang's *Birth Book* and *Our Bodies, Ourselves*, it introduced the concept of birth stories as a legitimate authoritative source of knowledge, affirming the possibility that birth could and did take place outside of the hospital.<sup>71</sup>

### *Special Delivery* (1979)

Shortly after the publication of Raven Lang's *The Birth Book*, Rahima Baldwin returned to the United States from her two-year spiritual journey, five months pregnant with her first child. She had her book synopsis in hand, determined to publish on the topic of home birth. But after discovering this new publication, she realized she would need to completely rethink what she could contribute that would be unique. Settling in Los Angeles, in addition to other forms of culture shock, she had to figure out the practical aspects of giving birth at home. Baldwin and her husband had not found much active support for their decision to have a home birth, and instead signed up for a Lamaze class of nineteen hospital-bound couples. "We and they were alternately appalled by each others' views, but we managed to get through the six weeks of classes." One can imagine some eye rolling between the nineteen other couples, trying to stay focused on breathing exercises, as the young Baldwins challenged the normalcy of a hospital birth. "We remained amazed that no one objected to the descriptions of hospital procedures which came up in class," she recalled.<sup>72</sup>

After querying everyone she knew, and spending several hours on the telephone, Baldwin discovered that there were three chiropractors in the Los Angeles area practicing home births, so she chose one of them. It did not, at that time, occur to her that anyone other than doctors delivered babies in the United States. She assumed that by simply opting out of hospital birth, she would experience greater control over the process. But the chiropractor whom she chose did not check his attitudes toward his labor patients at their front doors. His standard procedures included x-raying all full-term first-time mothers to determine whether the pelvis was large enough to allow the baby's head to clear. And when her water broke on her way home from a late-night Halloween party, he scolded her for dragging him out of bed prematurely.

71. For more on the emergence of the birth story as a new literary genre, see Mary Lay, *The Rhetoric of Midwifery: Gender, Knowledge, and Power* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 2000).

72. Rahima Baldwin, *Special Delivery* (1979; repr., Berkeley: Celestial Arts, 1986), 29–30.

Seth was born at 10:34 the next morning. Baldwin had imagined that she would be surrounded by loving friends at his birth, but had only two close friends in the Los Angeles area she felt comfortable inviting. She had also dreamed of having a photographer capture the moment of his arrival, but felt too insecure. “So we never even got a single photo of Seth’s birth, which we regretted later,” she wrote.<sup>73</sup>

Despite these snags, Baldwin gained confidence from giving birth at home. “I had no idea how I would experience giving birth, whether it would be ecstatic or religious or ordinary or what. Although I was unprepared for the intensity of transition, the birth itself was permeated by an incredible calm. In between pushing contractions and after Seth was born, the room was completely filled with a calmness I could almost see and touch.”<sup>74</sup>

But she was also dissatisfied with some aspects of her experience. “Even though I had an awareness of the new being during my pregnancy,” she reflected, “I had never really gained awareness of myself.” She vowed that before she gave birth a second time, she would do all that she could to make it a fully empowering experience. She began by training as a child-birth educator with the Childbirth Education Association of Los Angeles (which offered a “modified Lamaze technique”).<sup>75</sup> When Seth was nine months old, the family relocated to Cuernavaca, Mexico, an hour south of Mexico City to establish a Sufi center. While in Mexico, Baldwin became further radicalized about birth, meeting a group of Americans who had opted to give birth at home without an attendant. On November 11, 1975, Wahhab Baldwin caught his daughter Faith Rainbow as she emerged from her mother’s birth canal, a Mexican midwife and many supportive friends looking on. “I knew exactly what I was doing,” Rahima remembered. “My eyes were wide with amazement and I could feel myself opening—it’s such a powerful sensation. I was grinning; it was incredible.”<sup>76</sup> This time around, she felt she had given birth exactly as she had wanted to.

Shortly after Faith Rainbow was born, the Baldwins returned to England, where Rahima discovered Margaret Myles’s *Textbook for Midwives*. Originally published in 1953 by a Scottish nurse midwife, the book had already gone through eight editions by the time Baldwin first encountered it, and is currently in its fifteenth edition. Myles’s *Midwifery* was a crucial reference tool for many midwives. In 1981 British midwife Margaret Reid interviewed forty-nine American lay midwives living in ten states.

73. Ibid.

74. Ibid., 30.

75. Ibid., 107.

76. Ibid.

“By the time they set up in practice, most midwives will have read Williams’ *Obstetrics*, or similar, and virtually all will possess a copy of Myles’ *Textbook for Midwives* ... (the older editions of Myles, with its sections on homebirth, were greatly coveted).”<sup>77</sup> Kate Bowland, Raven Lang’s Santa Cruz colleague, initially carried it to births, flipping to the index to search for answers to questions she encountered on the job.<sup>78</sup> When Rahima discovered it, she couldn’t put the book down. “I was totally engrossed and fascinated that all of these things could be known and understood,” she reflected. “But in between chapters I would fall apart and say, ‘But I don’t want to be a midwife. Not me! Anyone but me!’”<sup>79</sup> The more reading she did, however, the more she realized it was in her future.

By the time the Baldwins moved back to Los Angeles in 1976, communities of home birth supporters were much more visible. Rahima became involved with the newly established organization Association for Childbirth at Home International (ACHI), run by lay midwife Tonya Brooks, who had recently moved to the area from Boston. Brooks ran weekly classes for couples interested in home birth, and for a brief time Baldwin taught a series of these. But when the family again relocated in 1977, this time to Boulder, Colorado, Baldwin was ready to assume greater responsibility and leadership within the alternative birth movement.

In August 1977, Baldwin put up signs advertising a new series of home birth classes and waited to see what happened. “Suddenly it exploded,” she remembered. She had ten couples every six weeks. “Everybody was eager to have their babies at home.”<sup>80</sup> Reminiscent of Raven Lang’s experience in Santa Cruz, Baldwin felt stunned by the groundswell of interest in alternative birth. “I wasn’t prepared for the response I found in Boulder—everyone was having a homebirth—the fact that skilled attendants were scarcer than hens’ teeth didn’t matter, they would have their babies at home by themselves if necessary.”<sup>81</sup> There were “no midwives to speak of,” she recalled, and so she incorporated basic midwifery training skills into her classes.<sup>82</sup> “‘Skilled attendants’ consisted of an osteopathic physician for a short time before he was put in jail, a few labor and delivery

77. Margaret Reid, “Apprenticeship into Midwifery: An American Example,” *Midwifery* 2, no. 3 (1986): 129.

78. Bowland, “I Never Intended” (n. 42), 70–71.

79. Rahima Baldwin, unpublished article on the founding of Informed Home Birth, Informed Home Birth Records (n. 6), 3.

80. Katherine Czapp, “Interview with Rahima,” *Special Delivery*, Summer 1987, 2, Informed Home Birth Records (n. 6), box 1.

81. Baldwin, unpublished article (n. 79), 1.

82. Czapp, “Interview with Rahima” (n. 80), 2.

nurses, and ‘us’: women who for the most part had had their babies at home and were studying midwifery on the side.” She met regularly with her midwives study group, going through midwifery texts together, making Play-Doh models of pelvises, and sharing birth experiences.<sup>83</sup>

Baldwin then set out to expand her reach. Despite the existence of home birth publications such as *The Birth Book* and *Spiritual Midwifery*, young couples yearned for more information and support. “There was such a hunger for information on homebirth that couples like Dianne and Marc were even traveling an hour and a half each way from their home in the mountains to my classes,” she wrote. “At the same time, I started getting calls from friends in other states—how could they get the information I was teaching?”<sup>84</sup> She received a telephone call from a woman who was on her way out of the country and so could not attend Baldwin’s classes, wondering if someone could tape them instead. “And so I got the idea for the tape series because clearly people needed that information. I borrowed \$1200 from my mother and put together the tape series as the first thing, and called it Informed Homebirth.”<sup>85</sup> In August 1977, she launched Informed Homebirth as a nonprofit organization registered in Colorado. She had already written a manual for her classes, which she began to sell along with her cassettes (initially for sixty dollars), advertising in magazines such as *Mother Jones*, *Mother Earth News*, *New Age Journal*, and *Mothering*.

Cassette recordings of Baldwin’s classes further transformed the home birth market. Just as *The Birth Book* provided readers with a sense of authenticity and immediacy with its minimal production budget, Informed Homebirth allowed Rahima to literally speak to listeners from afar. To produce the tapes, Baldwin borrowed a friend’s reel-to-reel 3M tape recorder and recorded each of her twelve lessons in her basement. The recorder had no pause button, so she had to do each tape from beginning to end without any mistakes, and have them end on cue. “And I guess they did,” she reflected ten years later. “I couldn’t stand to listen to them! I’d say, ‘Argh! Who is that woman? Get rid of her!’ But people still find them valuable. I find them dated because I’ve changed a lot since 1977. I was going to drop them a while ago, but the teachers said, no, they’re still valuable, don’t do that.”<sup>86</sup> Baldwin continued to make the tape series available at least through 1991, but by 1978 her primary marketing focus became the production of the book she had first imagined writing back in 1973.

83. Baldwin, unpublished article (n. 79), 9.

84. *Ibid.*, 1.

85. Czapp, “Interview with Rahima” (n. 80), 2.

86. *Ibid.*

When Baldwin first developed her childbirth classes in Boulder, she found she had to produce most of the written material herself. "I'd sit down every week before Thursday night and write 20 pages, and I ended up six weeks later with a manual!" In this way, her writing process resembled that of other health feminists in the 1970s; the groundbreaking women's health manual *Our Bodies, Ourselves* began as a series of lectures for a course called "Women and Their Bodies."<sup>87</sup> According to Baldwin, "a fellow in Boulder who saw it and had connections with publishers said, 'This is really good, and really important. You should get it published.'"<sup>88</sup> He gave her some contact numbers, and she set about looking for an interested publisher. Celestial Arts, a publishing house in Berkeley, California, with a women's book division called Les Femmes, offered her a contract.

What is perhaps most striking about *Special Delivery* is the extent to which Baldwin aimed to market the book as something *other* than countercultural. In the first few years after the publication of *The Birth Book*, several more countercultural books on birth and midwifery hit the market, including Gaskin's *Spiritual Midwifery*. Although Baldwin found *Spiritual Midwifery* personally inspirational, she felt that like *The Birth Book*, it had limited appeal to a mainstream audience. "The impulse behind writing *Special Delivery* was to provide parents with all the information they needed for a home birth in a form that wouldn't put them off by being 'too hippie,'" she explained, "a complaint many had about the wonderful book *Spiritual Midwifery* by Ina May Gaskin. Although this book was avidly devoured by those of us who were attending births (I can even remember reading it and saying through my tears, 'I'll never be a spiritual midwife like them!'), it wasn't a book I could unreservedly recommend to straight couples or that they could recommend to their mothers." By 1978, when Baldwin was writing her book, she had moved to San Antonio, where some of her clients were military wives. Some of these had come to her "after finally getting disgusted with the medical establishment," and "they needed a book that was practical and more 'middle of the road.'" Baldwin recognized that there was a bigger market of potential readers out there. "With the publication of *Special Delivery*," she explained, "home birth became more accessible to a broader spectrum of people."<sup>89</sup>

Baldwin waited to revise her manuscript until she had received an official contract, which meant that she had only six weeks to complete the book. Baldwin recalled,

87. Kline, *Bodies of Knowledge* (n. 37), 15.

88. Czapp, "Interview with Rahima" (n. 80), 3.

89. Baldwin, unpublished article (n. 79), 5.

I had two manual typewriters and Wahhab and I pounded away from 9 in the morning until 11 at night. The children were three and five and somehow amused themselves those six weeks! Wahhab was always really supportive of my work—he helped write *Special Delivery*—we wrote and rewrote back and forth for the whole six weeks and he did the photography and sometimes photographed births.<sup>90</sup>

The resulting publication was a mixture of birth stories (including of both of the Baldwin children, Seth and Faith Rainbow), practical information about the physiology of birth, prenatal care, complications, and spiritual and psychological aspects of pregnancy and birth. Unlike *The Birth Book* and *Spiritual Midwifery*, *Special Delivery* contained very few graphic photographs. Readers were more likely to encounter a clothed woman doing prenatal exercises or a line drawing of the position of a fetus than a vulva. “This is a practical book,” Baldwin wrote in the preface, “including many pages in workbook format, self-quizzes and other aids for helping you to understand all aspects of birth.”<sup>91</sup> In the hopes of creating a more personal touch, Baldwin wrote the book in dialogue form (“you can palpate or feel the position of the baby yourself,” she wrote).<sup>92</sup>

Despite its emphasis on the practical, *Special Delivery* also reflected the impact of feminism and health on birth practices in the United States over the course of the decade. Female bodies, argued health feminists, had been subjected to male medical authority; women could not achieve full equality without the right to reclaim their bodies. By the end of the decade, thanks in part to guidance from books like *Our Bodies, Ourselves*, along with advocacy and education, women were more savvy when it came to interactions with medical practitioners.<sup>93</sup> For Rahima Baldwin, this was evident in a “new consciousness in birth,” as indicated by “women’s desire to assume active responsibility for their bodies.” Instead of “showing a blind dependency on experts, passively allowing doctors to impose their authority on them,” Baldwin continues, “couples are informing themselves as much as possible and selecting birth attendants who will help them in their actions—attendants who are not only medically skilled, but also sensitive and aware of the emotional and psychological qualities of birth.”<sup>94</sup>

90. Czapp, “Interview with Rahima” (n. 80), 3.

91. Baldwin, *Special Delivery* (n. 72), vii.

92. *Ibid.*, 17.

93. See, for example, Carol S. Weisman, *Women’s Health Care: Activist Traditions and Institutional Change* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998) and Sandra Morgen, *Into Our Own Hands: The Women’s Health Movement in the United States, 1969–1990* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 2002).

94. Baldwin, *Special Delivery* (n. 91), 1.

Women (and frequently the fathers of their children) were aided in this process by a resurgence of interest in the practice of midwifery. Exact numbers are difficult to come by, as many midwives remained underground, but in 1975 health authorities reported the existence of at least 2,350 lay midwives in the United States.<sup>95</sup> In response to the increased interest in home births, many states repealed permissive lay midwifery laws in the 1970s, with only eleven states “explicitly sanctioning the practice of midwives other than CNMs.”<sup>96</sup> But the circulation of books such as *The Birth Book* and *Spiritual Midwifery* (and later, *Special Delivery*) helped to facilitate greater awareness of the underground movement, and gradually geographical “pockets of consciousness” spread across the country.<sup>97</sup>

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In 1987, Rahima Baldwin’s organization, Informed Homebirth, celebrated its tenth anniversary. A new updated edition of *Special Delivery* had just been published. Baldwin reflected on what had changed over the past decade. “We’re listed in *American Baby*, we get called by *Better Homes and Gardens*,” she remarked. “When somebody’s writing an article on birth, they call me to consult on it!”<sup>98</sup> According to Baldwin, alternative birth had become mainstream. “We’re much more accepted. . . . And homebirth isn’t so threatening any more.”<sup>99</sup> Baldwin analyzed this cultural shift with a touch of nostalgia, feeling that something had been lost in the process. Couples now shop around for the birth attendant who best fits their desired birth plan. With the rise of birth centers and the increasing professionalization of midwives, the graphic photographs and poetry of the 1970s have become relics of the past, replaced by websites and birth plans.

Yet what is captured in the construction of these three alternative birth books represents a remarkable challenge to the authority of obstetrical knowledge and practice in the 1970s. Raven Lang, Ina May Gaskin, and Rahima Baldwin were all self-taught midwives who refused to abide by the rules and regulations of the medical establishment. They believed that something fundamental had been lost when birth practices moved from the home to the hospital earlier in the twentieth century. Except in rural areas and the South, where midwives were viewed as a public health

95. Rooks, *Midwifery and Childbirth in America* (n. 9), 64.

96. *Ibid.*, 63.

97. Kate Bowland used the term “isolated pockets of consciousness” to describe the early years of the movement in an interview with me, August 8, 2011.

98. Czapp, “Interview with Rahima” (n. 80), 7.

99. Baldwin, unpublished article (n. 79), 16–17.

necessity, home birth midwives had virtually disappeared by midcentury, and a laboring woman's autonomy disappeared right along with them.

Living in the San Francisco Bay Area in the late 1960s, all three of these women were well versed in art, literature, spirituality, and politics. Like many of their cohort, they rejected the traditional career paths of their parents' generation, insisting that true fulfillment could come only from returning to a more primordial, authentic sense of self. What better way to cultivate a sense of authenticity and an affirmation of the natural than to begin with birth? The out-of-hospital births that they experienced and facilitated convinced them that they could—and should—help to promote birth alternatives for more women and their families as a way of reclaiming autonomy and spirituality. The inclusion of vivid individual birth stories provided evidence that whether or not organized medicine approved of white middle-class women opting out of hospital birth, it was already happening.

Home birth was never going to appeal to a majority of Americans. Not everyone agreed with what Lang, Gaskin, and Baldwin had to say, including a number of feminists who dismissed natural childbirth and communal living as a step backward for women's liberation. "We were about home birth," Baldwin points out, "while the feminist movement was about getting women *out* of the house."<sup>100</sup> Others viewed this as largely an exclusive movement of white privilege that ignored or, worse, co-opted a tradition practiced by generations of African American women in the South.<sup>101</sup>

But many agreed that the American way of birth in the 1970s was ripe for reform. "The response was enormous," Ina May recently said of *Spiritual Midwifery*. ... It wasn't just a few hippies that were interested in better birth—it was all kinds of people."<sup>102</sup> Like the readers of *The Whole Earth Catalog*, most who read *Spiritual Midwifery* or *The Birth Book* had no intention of giving up their earthly possessions and joining a commune. Yet some began to integrate the philosophies promoted in these books into more

100. Dancy interview (n. 3).

101. This is not to suggest that there were not women of color practicing midwifery in the 1970s. But as with many reproductive health movements happening at the time, women of color did not believe that their perspective was always included or listened to by white women. As Makeda Kamara explains, "Our reasons and aims were informed by different experiences. Ours was forged as a struggle against genocide, unequal health care, unconscionable acts against Blacks and other people of color for 'medical' science and freedom. ... Many of us no longer felt safe using the existing medical institutions available to us." See Makeda Kamara, "The American Public Has Been Hoodwinked," in Simkins, *Into These Hands* (n. 42), 155.

102. Ina May Gaskin, quoted in *Birth Story* (n. 14).

general lifestyle changes, and to question the medical monopoly on birth along with, for example, the effect of pollution in their drinking water.

The publication of *Special Delivery* at the end of the decade enabled this countercultural birthing philosophy to extend beyond the bedroom and into the birth center or hospital. “Although Baldwin is a strong advocate of home birth,” wrote a reviewer for *Library Journal*, “her book has a great deal to offer to every pregnant woman, *wherever* she chooses to deliver her baby.”<sup>103</sup> One didn’t have to be a hippie to experience birth as revelatory rather than oppressive.

Just as the first photograph of the earth from space changed the way people thought about their relationship to the environment, the graphic images and stories of home birth infused the process with political and spiritual meaning among a generation largely ignorant of midwifery’s rich history. Countercultural home birthers were not simply rejecting the hospital as a capitalist tool; they were questioning its ability to actually produce healthier citizens than those born at home. Though their model would never become mainstream, their message inspired many consumers to question the authority, and even the legitimacy, of the medical profession in late twentieth-century America.



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103. *Library Journal* blurb on the back cover of Rahima Baldwin Dancy, *Special Delivery: New, Updated Edition* (Berkeley, Calif.: Celestial Arts, 1986).