AIMS For a better birth...

# Memories of Beverley



*Debbie Chippington Derrick, AIMS Volunteer who worked closely with Beverley from 2005 when she joined the AIMS Committee, through to 2017 when Beverley stepped down from AIMS, shares memories of Beverley from people who knew her through her AIMS work.*

Beverley's involvement in trying to improve maternity services had a very wide reach and there were so many threads to it, as the voices of people who knew her testify. Her ability to cut through the bullshit and say it as it was brought many up sharp and often forced them to reevaluate what they understood or believed. She made very strong personal relationships with people, hearing what they needed, and providing it or helping them be able to find it; again this comes through clearly in the memories included here.

She did like a good fight and found it difficult to walk away from what she saw as an injustice. She always wanted to be able to do something, and that also comes through strongly in many of the personal accounts included here.

## Supporting women

The core of Beverley work at AIMS was supporting individuals to make informed decisions about what was right for them, but even more so it was about helping them to have those decisions respected. At one time she single-handedly ran the AIMS Helpline, answering phone calls, letters and then later emails. This is still the work of the AIMS Helpline today. It is common for people to find AIMS when they know what they want and they are struggling to have respected and supported what they already know is right for them.

**Davina Ramshaw** wanted a VBAC and Beverley helped her to find a way to achieve that.

> I was so sad to learn of Beverley's passing. She was the first person from AIMS I spoke to, and she gave me time and attention when I was in despair after a caesarean birth. She told me about Peter Huntingford who later helped me achieve a vaginal birth. That experience greatly enriched my life, and I have never forgotten that it was Beverley who set me on that path. I am sure there are many families who owe a similar debt to her work and endeavours. She truly cared and worked so hard for so many years . I did meet her at an AIMS conference and she made sure I felt welcome amongst a crowd of confident women where I felt a bit out of my depth. Please extend my family's condolences to her family and let them know that all over this land there will be women like me, who will never forget her and her influence on the world of maternity services.
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> There will be thousands of parents who owe Beverley the same debt of gratitude and whose lives have been changed because she was able to help them find a path to what they knew was right for them. Sometimes this led to those she had supported taking up the mantle themselves.

## And creating a new birth activists in the process

**Sandar Warshal**, who spoke to Beverley then became actively involved in the work of AIMS and was AIMS Secretary for 15 years.

> I rang BB in 1983 in a panic. I had a bad high-tech birth in 1980 and was being threatened with an induction for the next child. I told her my very long story and she asked, "What do you want?"
> I was startled by her question and galvanised to think about the answer. I wanted to ignore the advice I had been given re. the health of my baby and proceed in having a natural birth. When I said this, she was completely supportive but remarked -You must take responsibility for your decision- which was what I wanted. I trusted my own instincts and distrusted the medical advice I had been given.
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> After the normal birth of my healthy baby, I went along to an AIMS meeting to see who this

amazing person was. I foolishly offered to staple some papers together and was instantly drafted on to the AIMS committee. I spent 15 happy years as Secretary.

Working with BB was inspiring. She listened to people patiently. She assumed they were as bright as she and that they were capable. She encouraged us to take on a task and complete it without overseeing it herself.

BB was a very collegiate leader. She listened to her fellow activists and let us get on with the job. If children or work commitments made it hard to do a project, she was always understanding and flexible. It was certainly better to be working with her than against. She was withering in her judgements of people who did not support women or respect their wishes.
She supported and encouraged frightened and overwhelmed people. Her passion for justice never faltered.

One day BB decided we should put on a Water Birth conference-at Wembley! She named high profile speakers and told me to invite them to our event. They all said yes! This was before water birth was mainstream and, on the day, it was thrilling to see hundreds of midwives, professionals and women flooding into the conference centre.

The same was true of the Home Birth conference -again a ground-breaking event which was oversubscribed.

BB saw trends before many others. She warned us that midwife units would be closed and that we must prepare to fight for them. She contributed to Parliamentary investigations working tirelessly for change. She submitted papers and evidence in support of an enlightened Maternity Service. When it was obvious that many of her ideas were largely ignored, I could tell her that all 5 of my grandchildren were born in water, tended only by midwives in hospital.

When I visited her a few weeks before her death, she said with an evil chuckle, her only regret was that she couldn't pursue her claims against a health authority which had closed a valuable birth centre.

The list is endless of her progressive ideas and commitment to change. I am certain that her vision will be carried forward by other enlightened feminists. The grandchildren who hear of their safe and happy births will want no less for their children. Women the world over are changing their view of what is acceptable about control over their bodies.

I am honoured to have spent so many years working with such a determined and effective campaigner. I will miss her very much.

**Emma Barker,** who made contact with AIMS and Beverley when trying to plan the right birth for her

twins, then went on to edit the AIMS Journal and write a book on birthing twins.

> It was with a howl, akin to childbirth fittingly, that I read the sad news about the sudden demise of one of the most powerful voices in women's rights and childbirth. Having worked with Beverley Beech as editor of AIMS journal for a couple of years, I came to admire her more and more as a force of nature. Along with the brilliant committee that stood around her, she single handedly made it possible for more women in this country to have more rights in their birth than they can ever know. Only recently, the "Am I Allowed?" book was mentioned with my god-daughter who after a successful homebirth last month, said that that was the phrase the women in her NCT group still asked her about a home birth.
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> I came to Beverley when I was ringing around for the birth of my twins, where she was the first person to speak to me as a human being as I explained that I did not want to have a C-section and a normal birth at the same time - what was being proposed at the local Chelsea & Westminster hospital, as well as giving birth in an operating theatre with 12 people present. "We won't be exactly being selling tickets during labour... but..." joked the Doctor, and I didn't see the funny side. Nobody cared until after two weeks of ringing around, I finally got Beverley Beech on the phone. Like the starfish analogy so beautifully described by Debbie Chippington Derrick in the AIMS journal, Beverley took up my case, put me in touch with the late great Mary Cronk midwife, and the independent midwives - and helped me achieve the crowning glory of a brilliant birth. So brilliant I wrote a book about how brilliant birth can be: "Stand and Deliver - and other brilliant ways to give birth". It was all down to Beverley taking that call on the AIMS Helpline.
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> Nobody can ever underestimate how Beverley and AIMS have educated birth practice in this country and reminded women that they have autonomy over their own bodies. We all have a debt of gratitude to this woman; our daughters and our sisters will never know her transformative impact on birth practice in the UK, Europe and the world.
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> The battle does not stop with her death, but I will never forget how hard she fought on so many women's behalf, turning up in court, fighting the good fight every time she heard injustice was in danger of triumphing.
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> May she rest in peace as we all continue her good work, in the memory and inspiration she left behind us.

**Annie Francis,** now retired midwife, was helped by Beverley to find the support that she needed for a vaginal breech birth. Annie then went on to train as a midwife, and to be influential in midwifery practice, setting up Neighbourhood Midwives and being involved with the Better Births review.

> I first met Beverley when I was pregnant with my first child 38 years ago and long before I

retrained as a midwife. I had recently discovered - very late in the day - that my baby was in the breech position and I had been told by the consultant obstetrician that I should go down the caesarean route as the safest option. Beverley reminded me in her wonderfully forthright way that it was my baby and my body and that I had a say in what decisions were made about the mode of delivery. She gave me the confidence to explore other options and I ended up changing hospitals at the 11th hour and going on to have a very straightforward vaginal breech birth.

Of course I joined AIMS immediately and, after having 3 more children - all born at home - I qualified as a midwife in 1998 and often bumped into Beverley at different meetings and events. Her indefatigable campaigning for continuity of carer and for all childbearing women to be given evidence based information and to be at the centre of any decisions about their care, was inspirational to witness. She never wavered from her passionate belief that the maternity services were over medicalised and in need of urgent reform. Her courage and leadership will be sorely missed by many.

**Ruth Weston** was supported by Beverley when making a complaint about her maternity care. Ruth has gone on to be a very strong Birth Activist, locally and nationally and produces a regular blog focusing on issues in maternity care - we thank Ruth for allowing us to share her words which were first published in that blog.

There is a series of stories in the Judeo-Christian tradition of a prophet Elijah who was a fearless defender of his faith, who single handed faced down Kings and Queens and their henchman. Even his enemies held him in fear and respect. His apprentice and successor is heard to cry out bereft at his passing, "My Father, my Father, the Chariot of Israel and the horseman thereof."

In Beverley Beech we have lost a fearless defender of women's rights, a champion for quality maternity care, a leader who inspired others to speak out, who faced down Ministers and National NHS leaders alike. In Beverley Beech we too have lost the cavalry as we do battle in the face of falling care quality, and savage cuts to maternity.

My first encounter with Beverley was over the phone when I finally decided to make a complaint about the lack of care I received for my home waterbirth. I don't remember the advice, I do remember her being forthright and cynical of the responses I was getting. I smile now because her forthright and cynical manner and the robust response she advised and which I thought was 'over the top' at the time (although she was right) is probably exactly how women find me when asked for advice today. Twenty years listening to women talking about the poor care they have received and the poor response to their complaints does that to you, I have found. How can a service dedicated to caring for women and babies be so callous and self serving?

Our paths crossed many times after that, we gave speeches at the same conferences, or met at AIMS or other campaigning meetings. She was a kind and good mentor and opened doors to enable me to speak out, deftly cut through the flannel to the real cause of opposition I might face, and was generally a solid ally in the cause of women's rights to good maternity care. She was my hero, with her unquenchable passion for justice, her toughness and endurance, her willingness not just to stick her head above the parapet but to dance along its walls!

The last time we were together - or at least it is the last memory I wish to hold of her, was one dark February evening. We were sat in the corner of someone's living room attending an ARM meeting. I love the dynamism and nurturing of ARM meetings but they can be long! So I had brought my latest crochet project which was to put tassels along the bottom of a poncho. It would take me at least two hours. Beverley watched me for a few minutes, then took over counting out the strands ready for tying on, a Grande Dame sat on my other side quietly began cutting the lengths of yarn. We enjoyed this quiet sisterhood of industry for about 40 minutes until the poncho had its fringe. But our efficiency and industry now left us with idle hands and the rest of the meeting....

In recent years I had lost touch with Beverley as my illness confined me for some years to a small circle. Like many readers I will regret the loss of 'one more conversation'. Her final message to me was typically solicitous and accepting: if or when I felt better, to get in touch as there would always be something I could do.

In the old story, the apprentice utters his cry of despair, but then picks up Elijah's dropped cloak - his mantel. 'Taking up his mantel' in every sense of the word, Elisha continues the work of his master. Beverley Beech, quintessential 'angry woman', Lady of the Anonymous Brown Envelope, irrepressible advocate for birthing women, our tribute is to take up your mantel and carry on your work. This we shall do.

**Emma Ashworth,** who has been an AIMS Trustee, AIMS Journal Editor and is the author of The AIMS Guide to Your Rights in Pregnancy and Birth which followed on from Am I Allowed. The words below

were first published in the same blog as Ruth's and we are including here with Emma's permission.

> It was 2012, and I had been hosting screenings of Freedom for Birth, and I'd noticed that Beverley Lawrence Beech was interviewed for the film. Beverley was the honorary chair of AIMS, a charity that I wanted to start to volunteer for, and I'd read her amazing book, "Am I Allowed?", so seeing her powerful contribution to the film pushed me into attending my first AIMS meeting.
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> Like most people, I was star struck on the day, but Beverley and the other AIMS volunteers made me feel so welcome, so I stuck around.
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> Over the next 5 years, until Beverley's resignation as Chair, I was witness to her kindness, her passion and her incredible commitment to the lives and rights of birthing women. One evening, the AIMS team was gathered at a volunteer's house and we were discussing our birth stories. Beverley shared hers - like so many of us, the reason that she went into birth work. The power of our experiences can drive our lives to places that we never expected to go, and for Beverley, it led to her changing the births for many thousands of women for the better.
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> Beverley taught me to be brave. She taught me that it really is ok to speak out, and to stand up to what society perceives as "authority" when we believe that something is wrong. This was the beauty of Beverley. Not only did she make incredible change herself, she assiduously supported many hundreds of others to step forward into their own power and strength.
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> Beverley's death is a terrible loss, and a great sadness. We step forward with her voice in our heads and her passion in our hearts.

## Supporting and working with midwives

Beverley was strong in her support of good midwifery, as well as fast to condemn poor midwifery practice which failed to be truly 'with woman'. She encouraged and supported those working to support good midwifery care.

**Lesley Page**, Professor of Midwifery

> Thinking about Beverley and the immense contribution she made to the lives of women, their babies, and families around the time of birth I am drawn into a kaleidoscope of vivid memories. I loved the many hours I shared with her on conference platforms, both in the UK-and sometimes in more exotic locations overseas. I loved it because she was so honest in her opinion and spoke from heart and head about what was needed, what went well and

what went wrong. There was none of the 'diplomacy' that often obfuscates the truth.

Also, sharing travels with Beverley always added zest to work that was challenging, intense, and incredibly important. From this work with like minded communities came fun too. After a few days working 'down under' there was just time to catch a swim when we passed the beach on our way to the airport. Getting on the plane clutching damp swimsuits, with sand between our toes added delight to a wonderful visit.

In Brazil our long days were often topped up with Samba dancing or a wonderful dinner.

I had to fly out of Brazil ahead of Beverley. Travelling alone I made sure I had her phone number. It was the year 2000 and the guidebooks were full of exhortations to avoid falling into the hands of police or immigration officials. Arriving at the airport I was shocked to find I had lost my exit visa. When in my panic, I phoned Beverley, she was excited that she might need to get me out of custody. When I called back to tell her it was sorted, she was, rather than relieved, disappointed that she would not be able to campaign to get me out of prison!

The thing is, that Beverley was a tireless fighter for one of the most important causes in our world. The right for women, their babies and families to have the best care around the start to life, care that will give them every chance of health, wellbeing and happiness throughout their lives. We will miss her so much -but we can always ask -what would Beverley do?

**Caroline Flint**, Midwife.

What a loss you are. You have been there for so long, so strong, so knowledgeable. Whenever a woman rang me to ask advice on her pregnancy or labour or her rights, I immediately either gave her your number or rang you myself, secure in the knowledge that you would have the answer. Assertive, looking at the problem in an entirely new light, aggressive and so, so funny B Beech! I shall miss you beyond measure, you were such a unique personality, and now you have tasked me with taking all these geezers to court for malfeasance in public office. While you dally in golden glades I shall be toiling away in your memory; well you deserve a lasting Legacy - this will be it!

I'm so glad that your dying was so loving and kind - you deserved it, you did so much for so many, Thank you B Beech x x x

**Sheena Byrom**, midwife and founder of All4Maternity.

I met Beverley many years ago at a conference where I heard her speak up and out for the rights of women and families to have respectful maternity care which included informed choice. It included the right to choose a normal physiological birth because this was

becoming increasingly difficult at the time. Beverley spoke up for midwives, for students, to have the time and resources to support women's choices and for their autonomy. I remember feeling heard, feeling relieved.

Over the past decade Beverley also supported me with personal challenges. Her courage and compassion made an impression on me and gave me courage too. I will never forget her. Beverley's life and work positively impacted maternity services in the UK. RIP.

**Dianne Garland,** Freelance Midwife, and Beverley often found themselves speaking at the same conferences. Having been supported by Dianne at a conference myself when my forthright views on support for HBAC were under attack, I know the value that Beverley also placed on supporting others in this way.

I am fortunate to have known Beverley for many years. In writing a few words about our "encounters" I hope her calmness, kindness and patience will shine through.

I remember being with Beverley in Porto Portugal at a birth conference many years ago. We had met at the airport and flown out together. We had both done as requested, and already emailed our presentations in advance for translation. I was due to follow Beverley with my talk, but disaster struck; my slides had not arrived and were therefore not yet translated. Beverley was her usual calm and relaxed speaker, giving some extra births stories to the audience throwing the translators into disarray as she left her original slides. Needless to say when I eventually did my presentation she sat in the front row, smiling and nodding in all the right places.

We once had a terrible train journey back from the midlands after another conference. We got as far as Birmingham and the train just stopped, no sign of any journey heading south. Cool, calm and collected Beverley chatted and suggested we either got a hotel for the night (along with hundreds of other stranded passengers) or consider a taxi back to London. As the only one who had a "modern" phone she organized a taxi to take us to the start of the northern line (I think it was High Barnet). We started to leave the station and found two other passengers also stranded trying to get back to London. "Join us in our taxi " suggested Beverley. Four complete strangers bundled into a taxi with suitcases on knees for the journey. We laughed and once at the tube station said our goodbyes. We must have looked a sight, two mature ladies, a very young rugby player size gentleman and a young man who had been in Birmingham for an interview. Needless to say they knew more about Maternity and Midwifery than they did at the beginning of the journey !

Well done to Beverley for all that you did for families. I shall miss your laughter, kind, supportive words and your smile.

**Denis Walsh**, Retired Associate Professor in Midwifery

> Beverley was fierce advocate for optimum maternity services for women. I shared a platform with her at several midwifery and maternity care conferences and meetings from 1995 to 2016 when I retired. To be blunt, she had a reputation of being 'bolshi' and difficult among obstetricians and some midwives. But in retrospect, I recognise this as a gendered trope about women of a certain age, written about so eloquently recently by Victoria Smith in her important book: 'Hags: the demonisation of middle-aged women'.
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> Beverley's 'bolshiness' was what men act out all the time but are called 'passionate', 'committed' or 'eccentric'. Beverley was passionate and committed to the cause of women's agency in maternity care and she did not 'cow-tow' to authorities and hierarchies when engaging with others on a topic so dear to her heart. She was fearless, unrelenting and extremely hard-working for this cause, and though Conference Chairs tried to ignore or side-line her voice from time to time, she would not be silenced.
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> We've lost a true social justice warrior in her passing but her legacy will live on.
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> Her support of good midwifery included reaching out a supportive hand to those whose support of women was being attacked. There have been quite a number of midwives who have had their practice of supporting women's informed decisions reported to the NMC, the very organisation which should have been upholding this practice. Many of these midwives were put through years of untold stress and damage, and costs.

**Debs Purdue** was reported to the NMC and struck off as a midwife for supporting a woman. This was later overturned by the High Court, but what she had been put through destroyed her as a midwife, and had untold consequences for her personally.

> I met Beverley in Scotland about 28 years ago. She had travelled up, I think it may have been for a conference with Mary Cronk, but certainly we met at Nadine Edward's house after a conference or meeting - I forget where it was held. It may have been the beginning of the insurance issue for Independent Midwives, but I forget.
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> During my Independent Midwifery career, Beverley supported me with 'offloading' stories, and during my NMC hearing in London. We talked infrequently and I liked her enormously - her sense of humour, her loyalty and her support.

> It wasn't until Mary Cronk's funeral that I got to know Beverley much better. Various midwifery friends and Beverley stayed with me in Iwerne Minster over a few days, hot-bedding - I think Helen Shallow and she shared a double bed! Not proud 'our Beverley' of mucking in - but she was a sailor! She stayed on for an extra night at our invitation.
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> She assisted my husband and I financially, *with a loan* to secure a house that we had lost because sale had fallen through.. From then, she visited us about twice year and we were able to thank her and got to know her. We never made it to London, to see her at her home, until she was near the end of her life. She joined us though, in the City for 'Proud' Cabaret to see our daughter strutting her thing, and on another occasion to just play.
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> In early December Beverley came to stay for 3 nights and we were, at last, able to take her to Rick Stein's in Poole to thank her formally for her support, friendship and generosity. We were able to take her to the Royal Steam Yacht Club for a drink first, as we have friends who are members. We had a lovely evening. Sadly, she broke the news of her illness two weeks later and we were privileged and grateful to see her on 23rd February to talk, and say goodbye.
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> Best wishes and love to her family.
> Beverley, thank you for being my friend.
> Love Debs (and Basil)

Beverley went beyond the UK in supporting those providing good midwifery care who came under attack. There are many articles detailing the saga of the cases brought against Agnes Gereb, her imprisonment and fight for justice in the AIMS Journal including Hungarian State Injustice, The latest from Ágnes and Dr Ágnes Geréb Update (August 2018).

**Agnes Gereb**, obstetrician and homebirth midwife, Hungary

> Beverley has always stood up for women. When I got into trouble - perhaps because I stood up for women - she stood by me personally and on behalf of AIMS. In her own outspoken style, she made her point to Hungarian society.

## Supporting and working with obstetricians

Beverley understood the value of good Obstetric care, care which was there when women needed or wanted it, and which supported midwives to truly support women. Again when this came under attack Beverley stepped in to take action.

**Wendy Savage**, Obstetrician who came under attack for her respectful care of women which was enabling them to make informed decisions about their births [a review of the book about what happened can be found here).

> I met Beverley in 1985 after I was suddenly suspended from my post as senior Lecturer and Honorary Consultant in Obstetrics and Gynaecology at the Royal London Hospital. She along with the late Sheila Kitzinger and Luke Zander, a GP in Lambeth doing home births and giving women their own Antenatal notes, joined with the two support groups started by women and GPs in Tower Hamlets to organise my defence which was ultimately successful.
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> Beverley was a fearless and creative campaigner and indefatigable in seeking out justice for women trapped in an often seemingly unresponsive system. She helped women who wanted to have their babies at home fight the system and was not afraid to confront Social Services. I heard her speak persuasively at several international conferences at the end of the last century. We, with the late Dr Marsden Warner, did a gruelling Australian Tour speaking in 5 cities in 6 days about the unnecessary rise in the caesarean section rate. Recently Beverley accompanied me to a showing of a film about the damage being done to the NHS being shown in South London by a Keep Our NHS Public group and I had hoped of getting her involved in that campaign, but things were dashed when I heard of her diagnosis just before Christmas last year. We will miss her, but AIMS will continue.

**Susan Bewley,** Obstetrician

> I can't think of a time that I didn't know Beverley although as a junior doctor (who thought she was a feminist and on the side of women) I still remember being very frightened of this formidable woman who challenged everything I was taught and held dear! Funnily enough, although I held her in great regard and would keep seeing her over the decades throughout my career and small amount of out-of-work activism, I don't think I had anywhere near enough of an idea of the extent of her (and your, and AIMS') activism until the latter years. I remember (pre-covid) being at a meeting where she was furious about how a disenfranchised and marginalised pregnant woman was being mistreated by social services, where AIMS was clearly putting much more effort into individual casework than other organisations manage. She was a touchstone for what was right, not what was expedient.

## Networking and working with other organisations

Beverley built relationships, and influenced people working in other organisations. She worked with organisations within the UK and beyond. She was a founding member of ENCA as Elisabeth Geisel

explains and was involved in the development of the RSM (Royal Society of Medicine) Maternity and the Newborn Forum.

**Liz Thomas**, Policy and Research Manager, AvMA, talks about the association between AvMA and AIMS, and Beverley's influence.

> I wanted to say how very sorry we were to learn of the death of Beverley Beech. AvMA and AIMS have had a very long association over many decades. Beverley was a veritable titan in the battle to empower women and reverse the medicalisation of childbirth. I am sure she will be greatly missed but have no doubt that the legacy she built through AIMS will continue. On behalf of Paul Whiteing CEO, our Trustees, and my colleagues at AvMA, I would like to extend our condolences to Beverley's family and friends and the team at AIMS. Our thoughts are with you all.

**Belinda Phipps**, former CEO NCT

> Beverley was queen of the killer question. Countless times when there was a debate about how a birth room should be arranged or how a mother should be treated Beverly would cut across this and remind everyone we should ask the mother and listen to and act on her answer. My favourite moments were when an obstetrician was putting forward his views and the simple idea that you should ask the woman and trust her answer was a jaw dropping moment for them.

**Elizabeth Duff,** Senior Policy Advisor, NCT

> Beverley used to represent AIMS at meetings of the Maternity Care Working Party, originally established to enquire into the sharply rising rate of caesarean births, and chaired by the NCT president. The remit of the MCWP also included providing informed advice to MPs and peers on the All-Party Parliamentary Group on Maternity. Beverley's voice at meetings was, as ever, assertive, well-informed and passionate in speaking for women who had experienced poor treatment during pregnancy and birth.
> A particular memory was of Beverley sharply taking issue with another member who referred to 'shared decision making'. Beverley said: 'It is the woman's decision, and - if she wishes - her partner's. It is they who will be taking that baby home and caring for it'.

**Mary Newburn**, former Head of Policy and Researcher at NCT

> I worked alongside Beverley when I was with NCT. We collaborated on several projects, The Charter for Ethical Research in Maternity Care, and The Normal Birth Consensus Statement, are two examples. We were both advisers to researchers and professional

> bodies and sometimes joked about doing a 'good cop, bad cop' double act. Once Beverley had lambasted a group for being out of touch and implicitly for their paternalism, I seemed like a pussycat. Campaigners need to work together, sharing policy insights, human rights knowledge, and key aspects of emerging - and changing - evidence, and we did.
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> Beverley represented the UK on ENCA for many years, The European Network of Childbirth Associations. I attended one of the annual meetings with her in Utrecht. As well as knowing about differences from literature, it was invaluable to begin to have more direct conversations across Europe, with activists and potential influencers. It brought alive an understanding of variations between our cultures and histories of childbirth. We learned more about the varying roles of midwives, access to home birth, the size of maternity hospitals, funding of public services, and the treatment of women.

Beverley was on the RSM Forum for maternity and Newborn Forum committee. The group was and continues to be a mix of health professionals and consumers, and the forum continues to provide a place where a wide range of maternity issues can be explored and debated.

**Jane Sandall**, research midwife, worked with Beverley on this forum.

> I guess for me I worked with Beverley on the RSM Forum for maternity and newborn committee and what a stellar group that was, with Luke Zander, Beverley, Roxanne, Wendy Savage. What did we achieve? We gave a space for events on place of birth, politics of maternity care, always debates on evidence and always lively. There is nothing new under the sun about having a group of health professionals and advocacy groups working together to improve reproductive rights, and choices.

**Luke Zander**, GP also worked with Beverley on this forum, but was also involved with AIMS and others when the Albany Midwifery Practice was so abruptly closed.

> As a General Practitioner with a particular interest and involvement in the development of community based Maternity Care, I had many opportunities to experience and greatly value the significant role that Beverley played in protecting and furthering women's interests in the care the maternity services provided.
> In the multidisciplinary Forum on Maternity and the Newborn at the RSM, she was a powerful and influential voice, and in our shared engagement in the Albany Midwifery Practice saga I was able to witness the strength and purposeful dedication she brought to many of the issues of concern.
> She has left a legacy that will be widely remembered and much appreciated.

## ENCA - European Network of Childbirth Association

**Elisabeth Geisel**, Hon. Chair of GfG (Gesellschaft für Geburtsvorbereitung e.V.), Germany

In April 1993, almost exactly 30 years ago, the German association of childbirth education GfG, organized a European meeting in Frankfurt for the weekend; guests arrived at the airport from Western and Eastern Europe. I was in charge to find participants from 15 different countries (mind you, this is without pictures or cell phones) and improvised a literal shuttle service. Agnès arrived from Hungary, Annia from Poland, Pierra from Italy, two from Russia, etc… But where was Beverley, the representative for the UK? What a relief to finally find a lady seated on a trolley, holding a journal high in the air in which she was calmly reading: The AIMS Journal -- brought along not only to while away the hours, but also to draw attention to her and AIMS.

These women were themselves representatives of local Childbirth associations, and came together to share about the necessity of developing common strategies to improve conditions in pregnancy and birth. At the end of the weekend, we had not only overcome the language difficulties, but launched a new network, and had a name for it: ENCA, European Network of Childbirth Associations. Beverley as an English native speaker played a decisive role in developing the first steps of ENCA and volunteered to host a second meeting in London in the fall 1993.

Over the next several decades Beverley and I met not only at the yearly ENCA meeting, but also to give talks somewhere in Europe. She always carried heavy suitcases full of AIMS-material which she displayed on an improvised AIMS-table. We travelled together, shared rooms, ideas, fun, and concerns. I learned the word “appalling” from her; we had so many reasons to be appalled. I appreciated a lot her patience, her sense of humour, her quick wittedness, and her knowledge of scientific evidence. That she was a great speaker goes without saying. Most impressive was her way of retaining her sovereignty and superior knowledge in the face of the arrogant chief obstetricians whether in Warsaw or in Athens or in Budapest… or anywhere! She was a Grande Dame – a Grand Lady!

**Thea van Tuyl** and **Hannie Oor** first met Beverley at an early ENCA meeting in 2001

Thinking about Beverley, she was a great, powerful woman who never missed a moment to be ‘a pain in the ass ‘ of many so called ‘pretend to be’ care-takers who were nòt woman-centred. She would stand up in the middle of a congress to ask for evidence if a doctor, obstetrician or gynaecologist made a statement that was wrong in her opinion.

We met Beverley in 2001 when we first visited an ENCA meeting. Since then we have seen her almost every year at the ENCA meetings. She was the most perfect activist of our ENCA-members. During these meetings she always wrote the minutes and she was very to

> the point with her explanations about our discussions and actions. She never felt this as a heavy task,… more a logical thing because her native language was English. Which for most ENCA members it is not. She always kept her note block and later her laptop ready to make the notes. The press releases she made were always sharp and assertive about the statements ENCA wanted to make after the meetings.

Personal memory of **Thea**:

> In 2002 she stayed at my home during the ENCA meeting in the Netherlands and I found out how she enjoyed the garden, the birds and nature. We also had a lot of fun, especially during the free moments around ENCA meetings. We tried to find the same hotel and spend a lot of time together.

Personal memory of **Hannie**:

> Beside our passion for woman centred care around birth, we had a connection with the ocean… She, as a sailor, me as a diver. I do remember our encounter in the Netherlands where I had the privilege to sail a day with her on a ship which she had to sail from England to the Netherlands. Just one skipper and her to cross the north sea!! Sailing with her across the Frisian lakes to Leeuwarden was a delight on a beautifully warm summer day. A precious memory!! Her humour, together with her specific high English pronunciation of what she said, was for me so lovely to hear and we always joked about that.
>
> We will remember her most of all for her passion and will to fight for the right things for pregnant women and young mothers. She was the voice of AIMS and she meant that her voice was heard in the UK, but also far over the borders. We loved her and she will be missed.

**Lucie Ryntová**, Czech Republic

> I had been meeting Beverley for over twenty years at ENCA meetings in many countries and will always be grateful for every minute I spent in her presence. It's impossible to sum up briefly 20 years of memories so I´ll just close my eyes and recall a few images.
>
> - I can see her standing behind the desk offering the great AIMS journals and publications that have inspired us so much.
> - I see her brilliantly leading our internal discussions and speaking accurately and courageously in the public panel discussions we often held in different countries.
> - I see her commenting sharply and wittily on activist topics, always defending rights of women and children.
> - I see her patiently taking down and editing our meeting minutes as none of us was

better at English than her
- I see her bravely discussing with doctors on excursions to hospitals in many countries where we had meetings.
- I see her laughing and being able to make light of difficult topics.
- I recall in details her active involvement at both ENCA meetings we hosted in Prague, in 2002 and 2014.

Beverley, I´d like to thank you on behalf of Czech women and chidren, for helping to change Czech maternity care for the better. Please continue to watch over ENCA from above and over all the people who are trying to create a better world for children and families.

**Maria Andreoulaki**, activist from Greece

I was heartbroken with the news of Beverley's passing; only slightly soothed by the fact that we were in contact until a few days before. I feel so lucky and blessed to have been around her.
There is a lot written about her tremendous contribution to the world. I don't need to add to that, so I thought I would share some personal moments with her, as I remember our times together.
I met her through AIMS more than 25 years ago, when, as a traumatized cesarean mother,I had written to her for guidance. She had sent me book gifts all the way to Greece, without knowing me and I would cry and cry reading the invaluable information that I found there. We got to corresponding and finally met through ENCA.

For some years we shared rooms in ENCA conferences. There was an ease about our co-existence - who's taking which bed, when lights should go off, alternating shower times, yawning away loudly, chitchat into the night and early morning. Then it was natural that I would invite her to Greece several times, where she put some fire in people's minds with her talks and actions. Having her in my home was a pleasure and honour. One time, as I was setting the table, she loved my linen tablecloth and imagined how good it would look in her new home, so it was hers! She sent me a beautiful flower dress when she got back home as a thank you, along with a photo of the tablecloth on her dinner table. She would visit sometimes outside birth work events, combining the trip with her sailing adventures. I was in awe to hear all about them!

As I age, I have decided that I will take no insults to my person anymore, as a woman, as a professional, as a citizen. Here is an anecdote to demonstrate Beverley's contribution to my decision (background information: in Greek we do not pronounce differently the ee to i sounds).

[in Beverley's words]: Once I was picked up from the airport by someone who asked me 'Are you Beverley Bich'? And I proudly answer right back at him: 'You're right, I am a bitch!'

Love knows no space and time limits, so I keep her with me and hold her in my mind and heart for guidance, for her passion in the joys of life, human rights, the open sea, daring, standing up against irrationality, supporting unconditionally and being assertive and fearless, all qualities that I keep practising with her as my teacher.

**Ana Maita**

A tireless crusader for human rights in childbirth, Beverley's spirited presence made a strong impression on anyone who ever met her. As a rookie activist coming from a former communist country I was in awe of her vast knowledge of Romanian womens' plight during the forced reproduction policy under the dictator Ceausescu. Although many decades my senior, our origin stories in birth activism were eerily similar, both having had sons along with a deeply transformative experience brought on by childbirth. We also shared a fiery temper which we kept in check as best we could to bring the change we felt was needed without conflict. I loved her big presence and her loud energy. No one filled a room like Beverley! With her staunch work ethic and her loyalty to women's wellbeing during childbirth as one of the most intense rites of passage in human experience, Beverley's memory will remain a boundless well of energy and inspiration for every HRIC activist who had the joy and privilege to know her. She will be sorely missed!

**Patricia Pineda**, El Parto Es Nuestro (Childbirth is Ours!), Spain

I cannot feel more lucky for having been able to hear her speak in public on several occasions. She filled the stage with her presence. When she spoke, the audience fell silent because the power she radiated was amazing. You couldn't do anything but listen, admire yourself and learn.
I feel really grateful for having met her in my life and having shared meetings and meals and conversations with her. I don't think she was aware of the amazing impression that being with her and sharing with her caused. She left a bright mark on me and I will never forget her.
We will miss her so much.

**Lucie Ambrožová**, Action for Motherhood, Czech Republic

I've met Beverley just online - during COVID years. But even through the screen I could feel the lovely, kind and strong spirit Beverly had. It was a pleasure to meet her, organise and cooperate with her activities within our European network of childbirth associations.

> She readily shared her knowledge and experiences with us - new members. I will be always grateful for every moment spent in her (online) presence.

## Working with policy makers

Beverley got involved in fighting for changes at the highest level. She was frequently bending the ear or writing to people of influence. I have attended meetings with her to speak to people in many organisations including the Department of Health. Beverley worked hard to make sure that the voices of women were heard by those 'in power'. She was involved with the World Health Organisation (WHO), involved in the development of the consensus statement on caesareans, and made relationships with people such as the late Marsden Wagner [https://www.aims.org.uk/journal/item/marsden-grigg-wagner].

She was involved in getting women's voices heard for three maternity reviews - Winterton, Changing Childbirth, Better Births, and was on the Maternity Transformation Stakeholder council until 2017.

**Julia Cumberlege**, Chair of both the Changing Childbirth and the Better Birth reviews knew she could rely on a Beverley for a clear communications of the issues in the maternity service

> When I first got involved in Maternity Services the person 'to go to' was Beverley - rather she usually got to me first. For years quite simply she was AIMS. Supportive, but that did not blunt her questioning, her research and if well founded her stringent criticism of what was wanting in maternity services. She was an effective campaigner for women and their babies and when we met I never took her comments, her ideas, her questioning as anything trivial or insincere as they were well founded and rang true. She is greatly missed.

## AIMS

Those involved in the work of AIMS will do our best to continue her legacy. Whether we knew her personally or only heard or read her words, her influence will remain with us.

**Nadia Higson**, NCT Antenatal Educator and current AIMS Coordinator, only became involved with AIMS shortly before Beverley stood down.

> I knew of Beverley many years before I met her, as a dauntless campaigner whose name almost always appeared in any discussion or new story relating to the maternity services. I also knew her as an inspiring author, both of the seminal book "Am I Allowed" and many AIMS Journal articles. Her writing always felt like a breath of fresh air - she was never afraid to "tell it like it is."
>
> It's a source of regret that my time as an active AIMS volunteer only briefly overlapped with hers, but we did work together on the two 'Celebrating Continuity' conferences which

> AIMS co-organised, in London and Leeds. I had the privilege of sharing a hotel room with her in Leeds, and still remember a wonderful evening enjoying a curry and her stimulating conversation.
> I hope that AIMS can continue to embody her fighting spirit for generations to come.

**Jo Dagustun**. AIMS Campaigns Team

> I remember the day of that beautiful photo well. It was at an AIMS AGM: it so happened that I was stepping up as an AIMS Volunteer just as Beverley was stepping down, having done her time and excited to keep up her focus on maternity service improvement with a change in energy and in pastures new.
>
> Sitting next to Beverley during the formal meeting, I suggested an amendment to her final statement, which she graciously accepted. In a small way, I am hopeful that my AIMS volunteering honours the work of Beverly and the work that all other AIMS volunteers have done - generally unsung - over the past 60+ years.
>
> Thank you, Beverley. And here's to the continuation of an ongoing thriving dynamic, diverse and collaborative maternity improvement community, in your - and in all women's - honour. Creating the conditions of support for women throughout their maternity journeys, to be the best they can be, for them and their families.

I have already written about a few memories of Beverley in the last Journalhere, but I could go on for pages. There was never a dull moment with Beverley and travelling with her was always an adventure, even when her knees were playing her up and I had to wheel both our suitcases. When travelling on trains I began to want reassurance she did actually have the right ticket to travel on the same train and I even started to play it safe and arrange to buy both our tickets. I think there were at least two occasions when she did not have the right ticket and got thrown off; but the idea of not travelling together just because we had booked different trains would have been intolerable. But that carried over into much of the work that she did, especially within AIMS, doing work together with those who were available to travel with her.

Thank you Beverley for the shared journeys.
Debbie