AIMS For a better birth...

# What AIMS did for me: Ann Roberts

AIMS Journal, 2017, Vol 29 No 3



*Ann Roberts shares her story of how AIMS helped her back in 1983*

I first contacted AIMS 34 years ago (1983), when I was pregnant with my second baby, having had a typical conveyor belt 1970s induction with my first baby 8 years previously. My first baby's birth was a “natural” one, but not a fun experience. Routine care included: induction close to my due date, shave, enema, ARM (artificial rupture of membranes), syntocinon drip, episiotomy.

We survived all that and, having declined pethidine, managed to breastfeed twice that evening for the allowed 2 minutes each side; but then my precious baby was taken away to a nursery for the first 2 nights – I was devastated and couldn’t understand how this could happen. I wandered the corridor waiting for her to wake and feed, terrified someone would give her a bottle. Miraculously we survived our 5 day stay and came home fully breastfeeding.

Eight years later, pregnant with my second baby, my eyes had been opened by the Pithiviers (Odent) documentary. At 11 weeks I decided to decline an ultrasound, knowing nothing about it, I just reacted to the authoritative tone of the "Attend this appointment with a full bladder" instruction. It brought back memories of the way I had been treated when I had my first baby – I felt inexplicably anxious and helpless as I made my way to the hospital.

On arrival I was greeted by a young Senior House Officer with a letter from “my” consultant explaining why I should agree to this ultrasound “you are unlikely to know when you conceived” was among other unconvincing reasons to undergo this new procedure and it finished with "although we think it right to explain to women why we do the things we do, you should not expect to make management decisions about your pregnancy in an independent way". WOW.

I was left alone in a small room to digest this, cried, left the hospital distressed but unscanned. I contacted

AIMS at once having spoken to a friend who had recently organised a home birth with their help. Beverley Beech herself offered support, by letter and phone call. I declined any further appointments with the hospital and organised a home birth. That baby was born at home, as were my subsequent two babies, with all my antenatal care at home or via the GP surgery; none had any ultrasound. I never entered a hospital when pregnant again.

I wrote about these experiences for the AIMS journal at the time, and later wrote articles about the home birth service offered by community NHS midwives which was fantastic. I have been a member of AIMS ever since, spending time with midwives at meetings, at conferences and of course reading the wonderful journal. I have also continued to campaign for homebirth, and against routine (and overuse of) ultrasound.

My third baby sat on Caroline Flint's lap at lunch when she did a day with the midwives for the Association of Radical Midwives. When my fourth baby reached a year old I trained with NCT and became an antenatal teacher – 26 years and counting! My mission has always been to empower women and their partners to understand that they have choices and can make informed decisions about their care.

My four children are all grown up now – and I have two grand daughters – I don't think things have got any easier for women and the devastating news from IMUK about the NMC decision over their indemnity makes me fear for my daughters' birth experiences in the future.