AIMS For a better birth...

Marsden Grigg Wagner

AIMS Journal, 2014, Vol 26 No 2

23 February 1930 – 27 April 2014

Marsden Wagner, who died at the age of 84, will be known to thousands of childbirth activists and midwives as a champion of quality midwifery care. He trained as a perinatologist and a perinatal epidemiologist and became the World Health Organisation (WHO) Regional Officer for Europe. He was responsible for organising three international conferences on appropriate technology for birth, and insisted that there was consumer representation at each one of them. I was invited to two of those conferences to represent consumers in Europe (there were consumer representatives from North and South America too).

At the WHO International Conference on Appropriate Technology for Birth, Marsden suggested I chaired a session with President of the International Federation of Gynecology and Obstetrics, Professor Roberto Caldeyro-Barcia, who then told me that he wanted me to open the session and introduce the speakers as I would be far better at keeping the medics to time. Marsden was an outspoken critic of the medicalisation of childbirth and a fierce defender of midwives. He travelled the world giving evidence on behalf of those midwives who were, and still are, subjected to the international witch-hunt, and who were providing skilled, respectful care to women. He also pointed out that often it was when a baby diedthat doctors and others would pounce, assuming poor care – standards that are not applied when a doctor is involved in a baby's (or even a mother's) death in hospital.

Marsden was a wonderful supporter of AIMS and always responded immediately to any appeal with words of wisdom and suggestions. His championing of normal birth began when he was invited to observe a homebirth and he then realised the power that women have to birth and how the medicalisation of birth has diminished that power and perverted normality.

He was a witty and sharp observer of the hypocrisy of many of his medical colleagues; and took great delight at conferences in finding out the statistics for various interventions and pointing out to the assembled audience how those interventions could not be justified – they hated it. He often commented that the doctors wanted to kill him. His warmth and willingness to comment and leap into the fray will begreatly missed by everyone who knew and worked with him.

His book *Pursuing the Birth Machine* and the articles 'Fish can't see water: the need to humanize birth in Australia' (*www.birthinternational.com/articles/birth/18-fish-cant-see-water*) and 'Bad Habits – a poor basis for medical policy' (www.aims.org.uk/?Journal/Vol11No4/ badHabits.htm) should be read by everyone

involved with childbirth.

Beverley A Lawrence Beech



Marsden Wagner with Ina May Gaskin speaking on preventable maternal deaths at the 2004 Tatia Oden French Memorial Foundation event on maternal mortality and cytotec in Oakland California.