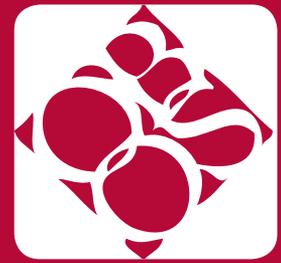




# OUR BODIES OURSELVES

SPRING 2009 NEWSLETTER



## TRANSFORMING WOMEN'S LIVES AROUND THE WORLD

### ◆ Remembering Pamela: The Passing of a BWHBC Founder By Norma Swenson

Now we can only read about her life, and look at pictures of her, listening to the words of those who knew her trying to describe the exceptional, elusive magnetism that was hers. I find myself wanting to read more of whatever words she wrote.

Pamela, as she preferred to be called, was so articulate when she spoke, deeply philosophical at times, and very serious, yet often at the end would add some twist of ironic humor, and start to smile and laugh herself, looking you in the eye with her blazing blue ones, and inviting you to join her, to take the long view, and not take ourselves too seriously. Her sense of humor is what all of us remember.

Her presence was itself a gift in our "office life," as those of us who worked together in the early days of the Boston Women's Health Book Collective struggled to keep hold of the tail of the tiger we seemed suddenly to have caught. The women's health movement was just becoming something larger than any of us could have imagined, and even then Pamela seemed to understand that. She treated our work with enormous respect, always, even if she was never paid a tenth of what she was worth, willing and proud to drive a car in permanent preparation for body work that was never actually done. Her tone about the outrages against women we learned about every day was always so matter-of-fact, without a shadow of a doubt. "Of course," she seemed to say, "We have to respond, and we will!" She was truly like the sun, steady and radiant no matter what, yet capable of pure indignation when called for – a flash of certainty and encouragement. Sometimes we needed that.

We all speak of Pamela's spirit, her thoughtfulness and her willing cheerfulness, but sometimes we may forget just how beautiful

she was outside as well, with and without hair. She was simply gorgeous, and though we are glad to have the pictures, they will never do her justice. She could easily have been a movie star, and become a world-famous icon. What she lacked was the needy ego



Our beloved Pamela Morgan, who died November 17, 2008 at age 59. Pamela was a co-founder of the Boston Women's Health Book Collective, contributing author to *Our Bodies, Ourselves*, administrative manager, and program staff member who helped launch a health education project for women in prison.

that might have made that possible, because she was certainly a performer of great skill and flair. Because I had once aspired to be a dancer myself I was electrified to discover that Pamela actually was a dancer, and a performing artist one could see in action! I lost no time visiting what I think was Henri V or Chez Henri at the time, a special restaurant on one of Cambridge's shortest streets, to watch her flamenco performance. When I wasn't overcome with envy, I was simply overwhelmed by her flair and precision. I never imagined she would give it up. Then once more, by chance, she mentioned casually that she would be performing at Symphony Hall as part of the Pops Holiday celebration. I couldn't be there, but I did watch it on TV and easily picked out Pamela. Probably that was one of the last times any of us saw her dance.

Likely our most significant working connection with Pamela came about through the work Judy Norsigian and I did at MCI Framingham (the Massachusetts Correctional Institution for women). We had learned from one

of the Brandeis students incarcerated there that not only were conditions predictably deplorable, but more importantly there were no educational programs, especially not about women's health. She encouraged us to try to do something, and so we did. I won't take time here to detail the days and nights we went there and what we did. In the end we knew we could not give the quality of time the project deserved, but through...*(continued)*

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## Remember Pamela continued...

Pamela's intervention and support we were able to help establish a much more permanent program with dedicated leadership that did make a difference in the lives of women about to be released back into the community. For many years afterwards Pamela made sure that those women and that issue were never forgotten. Her work and inspiration were such an important part of the contribution BWHBC made to women's health education in prisons.

Some people have already written about the place Pamela insisted on giving to her family life and her community. I do not know another woman who has done a better job of constructing such an exquisite balance among all the competing demands of an activist spirit, a loving wife and mother, her friendships, and the world around her. She understood she was a privileged woman in so many ways, and she used that privilege with such skill and grace by doing it all, superbly. All that would have been quite enough. Then in the end, she showed us still another enormous gift: How to let go of life with as much commitment and wisdom as she had lived it. Pamela is and always will be unforgettable.

Norma Swenson, co-founder Boston Women's Health Book Collective  
 Co-author *Our Bodies, Ourselves* (1973-1998 editions)

## Reaching Out to the Birthing Community



Micky Jones and Judy Norsigian in Nashville (Dec 2008), where the "Our Bodies, Our Babies" event featured *Our Bodies, Ourselves: Pregnancy and Birth*. Micky is the owner of 9 Months & Beyond, a La Leche League Leader, Hypnobabies childbirth educator, certified lactation educator, certified labor doula, international board certified lactation consultant, and mother of three. Micky is a tireless supporter of *Our Bodies Ourselves*, and her pregnancy and birth activism is greatly appreciated.

## Choices in Childbirth

After the publication of *Our Bodies, Ourselves: Pregnancy and Birth*, OBOS executive director Judy Norsigian toured the country, talking about what we had learned as we worked on the book and discussing our current maternity care system with mothers, midwives and other providers. Her many discussions about the problems women faced finding high quality, women-centered care motivated her to collaborate with physicians, midwives and childbirth advocates to create a statement outlining the need for changes. The Choices in Childbirth statement calls for three strategies to help preserve women's choices and improve access to evidence-based maternity care:

1. That communities preserve the option of vaginal births after cesarean (so-called "VBACs").
2. That options for hospital-based midwifery care (utilizing Certified Nurse Midwives and Certified Midwives) be made available in all communities across the country.
3. That Certified Professional Midwives (CPMs) be licensed and regulated in order to make the option of homebirth as safe as possible.

The statement, which is posted online at <http://tiny.cc/bTLHP>, has attracted hundreds of signers, and will hopefully be one more step in preserving safe choices in childbirth that respect the diversity of women's needs.

## Voices from Our Partner in Israel

The following article is written by members of Women and Their Bodies, a partner organization of *Our Bodies Ourselves*.

Women and Their Bodies (WTB) is the first organization in Israel to systematically seek to empower Jewish and Arab women to advocate for their own health – encouraging health literacy in a simple, direct and deeply empathic and understanding way. Continuing the spirit of the original *Our Bodies, Ourselves*, our local editions are written by women, for women, offering local resources and up-to-date research, professional and medical data, with a variety of political aspects of women's health. The forthcoming Arabic and Hebrew publications and online information center also integrate narratives expressing the voices and experiences of a wide range of women in Israel: new immigrant, Bedouin, Druze, religious and secular, disabled, single mothers, and always of all ages. We have been working with the close support of the OBOS translation/adaptation team in Boston to culturally adapt and locally produce *Our Bodies, Ourselves*, and are currently mobilizing over 300 Jewish and Arab-Palestinian volunteers from across Israel.

Working through the recent war in Gaza and the south of Israel has been an immense strain for WTB as a joint Arab and Jewish women's organization. Though a large percentage of our activists do believe in bi-national cooperation as a means to end the regional conflict, we still found ourselves struggling with underlying feelings of fear and distrust. Many members spoke of the rampant rates of post traumatic stress disorder among Israeli citizens living in the south-west of Israel, while others spoke up for the terrible loss of hundreds of families within Gaza. Open discussions raised the need for cooperation

in times of extreme structural inequality and racism within Israeli society. For example, though the Arab-Palestinian minority forms 20% of Israeli citizens, all Arab parties were nearly banned from participating in the February national elections. Another pertinent issue ignored by most of mainstream Israel is that there are over 16,000 couples of which one partner is an Arab-Palestinian citizen of Israel, yet their spouse (most often the wife) is denied official residency status and lives within Israel without basic medical insurance. These issues and many more continue to be openly discussed among WTB's staff and volunteers.

## Book Discounts

Did you know that the *Our Bodies, Ourselves* library is available to clinics and other groups providing health counseling services at 50% off the cover price?

Please contact Wendy Brovold at 617-245-0200x13 or [wendy@bwhbc.org](mailto:wendy@bwhbc.org) for more information.

Despite the past months' regional strains, our work has been advancing rapidly, particularly in community education and outreach. WTB's workshops are based on the data and narrative materials collected for the publications in Arabic and in Hebrew, yet function as forums in which women share their personal experiences and knowledge. In each workshop, participants raise topics that often are silenced by public media and/or cultural norms, and gain insights and strength to improve their own health and sexuality. In many cases, these workshops, offered in Hebrew and Arabic, offer important insights on local cultural interpretations of constructions of "older women." For example, during workshops on menopause, participants found local terminology to be terribly biased and negative towards women beyond the years of fertility: in Hebrew, the commonly used terms for menopause

translate as "the age of wilting/of loss" and in Arabic "the years of despair," terms that completely negate the potential growth and change during midlife. Through the workshops, suggestions have made for more positive terms which will be used in the adapted publications: "Emza Ha'hayim" in Hebrew and a wonderful term newly circulating in feminist circles in Arabic – "San' al Aman" – which translates as "the years of security/safety." In this way, our combined work forms a unique link between local community education and feminist health literacy, while mobilizing women towards grassroots social change and empowerment. Please contact us directly at [nashim.nissa@gmail.com](mailto:nashim.nissa@gmail.com) to receive updates and hear more about our work.

*Women and Their Bodies is a member of the Global OBOS Network of women's groups translating and culturally adapting Our Bodies, Ourselves for their own community, country or region. They work in close partnership with the Global Translation/Adaptation Program, receiving ongoing technical assistance from program staff through the project life cycle. If you would like more information on the Global Translation/Adaptation Program or would like to donate, please contact: Sally Whelan, Program Manager, at [sally@bwhbc.org](mailto:sally@bwhbc.org) or Ayesha Chatterjee, Program Associate, at [ayesha@bwhbc.org](mailto:ayesha@bwhbc.org)*



Members of Women and Their Bodies, the first organization in Israel that helps Jewish and Arab women to advocate for their own health.

**Women and Their Bodies has mobilized over 300 Jewish and Arab-Palestinian volunteers from across Israel to culturally adapt and translate *Our Bodies, Ourselves*.**

**Library Journal has declared *Our Bodies, Ourselves: Pregnancy and Birth* one of the Best Consumer Health Books of 2008.**



# OUR BODIES OURSELVES

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## Nominate Your Hero

When you hear the words “Women’s Health Hero,” who comes to mind? Your 9th grade health teacher who taught you about sexually transmitted infections? The midwife who sat with you through 15 hours of labor? The young Nigerian activist you read about who’s working to end gender discrimination in her country? Or maybe the neighbor who counter-protests at the abortion clinic every Saturday morning?

Whoever your heroes are, we want to know about them! We’ve created the Our Bodies Ourselves Women’s Health Heroes awards to honor those who make significant contributions to the health and well-being of women. It’s a great way to publicly recognize people who make a difference in your life or the lives of others.

## Our Bodies Ourselves Women's Health



**Nominations are being accepted April 1 through May 1.**

**For more information, to nominate your hero or to view entries visit  
[www.ourbodiesourselves.org/heroes.asp](http://www.ourbodiesourselves.org/heroes.asp).**