Joyce Roberts: Midwifery Scholar, Educator, Legend, and Friend

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Joyce Roberts: Midwifery Scholar, Educator, Legend, and Friend

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Joyce Ellen Roberts, CNM, PhD, FACNM, FAAN, was born July 18, 1944, along with her identical twin sister Judith Lambrecht, and died January 16, 2022. Joyce had a stellar professional career as a midwifery scholar, educator, and leader. Her contributions to midwifery are legendary and include pivotal research that positively influenced clinical practice, leadership to advance the quality of midwifery education programs in the United States and internationally, and wise and supportive mentorship of countless midwives in their professional careers.

Joyce earned the Bachelor of Science degree at the University of Wyoming, practiced as a nurse in Wyoming, Iowa, and California, and was a nurse educator at the University of Wyoming and San Diego State College. She earned the Master of Science in Nursing degree in 1972 at the University of Utah. In her maternal-newborn studies, midwifery became the foundation for her cherished professional career and integral to her persona.

Joyce initially practiced midwifery at Cook County Hospital in Chicago and later at the University of Illinois Chicago (UIC) Hospital. She had a profound and lasting impact at the UIC College of Nursing, where she served as midwifery faculty beginning in 1972, as the Director (1981-1984, 1997-1998) of the Midwifery Program, and as Chair of the Department of Maternal-Child Nursing from 1991 to 1994.

Joyce earned her PhD in Nursing from UIC in 1981. Her dissertation documented the effect of maternal position on first-stage labor and initiated her research career studying labor management. Her research portfolio included studies examining fetal descent, perineal outcomes, second-stage labor management, pain management, psychological trauma, hypertension, maternal fatigue, informed consent, clinical decision-making, maternal attachment, and more. Joyce disseminated her work widely in high-impact nursing, midwifery, medical, and interprofessional journals and through oral presentations in the United States and internationally. She collaborated with and mentored countless master's and doctoral students in research and publication. Joyce is credited with fostering the academic success of at least three generations of midwifery researchers.

Joyce consulted on research into midwifery clinical practice and midwifery education in Sweden. She served on research review panels for the Medical Research Council of Canada, the Australian Research Council, the US National Institutes of Health, the National Institute for Child Health and Human Development, and the Division of Nursing of the Health Resources and Services Administration. She also served on the editorial boards of the journal BIRTH and the Journal of Maternal-Child Nursing & Women's Health.

As a midwifery educator, Joyce profoundly influenced the lives and careers of innumerable students and colleagues at UIC, University of Utah, Health Sciences Center at the University of Colorado, The Ohio State University, and University of Michigan. Her extensive teaching and administrative expertise combined as key strengths to nurture and grow the many midwifery education programs she led and helped establish her as an expert consultant. Joyce modeled superb clinical skills and taught evidence-based practice. She treated students as professional colleagues, asking for their advice, and mentored countless people in career decisions. Joyce brought her deep understanding and wisdom related to rigor in education and policy to the national accreditation of midwifery programs. She served as Site Visitor, Chair of the Board of Review, and Chair of the Governing Board of the American College of Nurse-Midwives (ACNM) Division of Accreditation (now the Accreditation Commission for Midwifery Education) over 15 years.

Throughout her career, Joyce dedicated herself to advancing the goals and activities of ACNM, including serving as Chapter Chair, Chair of the ACNM Bylaws Committee, and Regional Representative on the ACNM Board of Directors. Joyce served as the ACNM President for two terms from 1995 to 2001. As President, she was wise, exceptionally poised, and exceedingly articulate as she dealt with controversial issues among ACNM membership. She was also sensitive to issues with other organizations. These included initiating a process for exploring direct entry midwifery education pathways and advocating for ACNM recognition as the representative of the profession of midwifery in the United States.
Beyond ACNM, Joyce was recognized as an expert and advocate for women and infants in the United States. She served as the ACNM representative to the Committee on Perinatal Health, Toward Improving the Outcomes of Pregnancy, convened by the March of Dimes Birth Defects Foundation, and to the American Academy of Pediatrics and the American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists. She was appointed to the US Secretary of Health's Advisory Committee on Infant Mortality.

Joyce's official honors were numerous, including induction into the Sigma Theta Tau honor society and fellowships in the American Academy of Nursing and ACNM. She was recognized as a Distinguished Alumni by the University of Utah and the University of Wyoming. In 2008, Joyce was honored with ACNM's highest distinction, the Hattie Hemschemeyer Award1 (since renamed the ACNM Lifetime Visionary Award), for distinguished service to midwifery and maternal-child health.

In retirement, Joyce enjoyed her cherished family: daughter Renee Miles, son-in-law Jeff, and granddaughter Samantha, whom she had the privilege of “catching” 27 years ago. She loved nature, and living in a wooded area allowed her plenty of time to commune with her favorite oak trees. Watching rodeos was also a favorite pastime, harking back to growing up in Wyoming; she would follow her favorite horses, bulls, and riders. Joyce volunteered at and supported a local ministry that aided people affected by addictions, injustices, poverty, trafficking, and war, allowing her to deepen her faith.

Colleagues and friends remember Joyce as an extraordinary listener, warm and compassionate, and a devoted friend. She made time to get together with friends and colleagues, including the dear “old Chicago midwives.” Joyce will be sorely missed and keenly remembered for her brilliance, generosity, and fierce dedication to midwifery.2

References
2 Stanton ME. In Memoriam: Joyce Roberts. Quickening, Feb 25, 2022.