



ACNM Remembers

Johanna Borsellega, CNM, MS, FACNM

July 4, 1941-May 17, 2015

It is with deep sadness that we must announce that our midwifery profession lost one of the earliest pioneers and clinical experts of modern midwifery as it is practiced in the United States today.

Johanna Borsellega was born in Brooklyn, New York July 4, 1941 and passed away in Tucson, Arizona, May 17, 2015, at the age of 74. She received her midwifery education at the Maternity Center/Kings County Hospital in 1964 and immediately became a member of ACNM and an active midwifery change agent.

After graduation, Johanna joined her classmate, Barbara Brennan, CNM, at Roosevelt Hospital in New York City as pioneers in the development of the first midwifery service in a US voluntary hospital. The midwifery service functioned within the Department of OB/GYN where Johanna and Barbara provided full scope patient care. As members of the Department they taught medical students which, at that time, was a responsibility new to midwifery practice in the US. Throughout her career, Johanna was committed to the establishment of services where midwifery care would benefit all women regardless of health insurance or economic status. Through their leadership, midwives gained access to both community-based public health clinics and private office clients, also a first.

Johanna Borsellega had an inquisitive mind and the ability to clearly understand organizational structures of health care teams that included the newly evolving modern professional midwife. With this knowledge she developed clinical guidelines that set standards for midwifery practice across the country.

After completion of a master's degree in nursing administration at Columbia University Teacher's College, Johanna was recruited to help establish, and quickly enlarge, the first midwifery service at Grady Memorial Hospital in Atlanta, Georgia. With Elizabeth Sharp, CNM, Johanna developed a midwifery refresher education course to convey the new policies, philosophy, and clinical skills of modern US midwifery to foreign-educated and non-practicing midwife candidates.

A much bigger challenge came in 1973 when Johanna Borsellega was recruited for a senior faculty position by the US Air Force (USAF) to assist with the development of a Department of Defense sponsored midwifery education certificate program for the Air Force. She accepted the opportunity in part because she believed that each woman cared for by a midwife in the Air Force would seek midwifery care in civilian life, thereby increasing the demand for midwives. Later, through Johanna's negotiation, this program offered a Master's degree via Georgetown University and eventually the degree program at Georgetown. All of these accomplishments happened in the first 10 years of her midwifery career!

The US Department of Defense recognized the clear thinking and creative problem solving talents of their new officer. Johanna quickly rose through the ranks, serving as midwifery consultant on behalf of the Air Force to the Department of Defense, Assistant Secretary of Health Affairs, and the Air Force Surgeon General, achieving the rank of Colonel. On numerous occasions she testified at US House and Senate committees regarding midwifery affairs. She influenced CHAMPUS regulations, making it one of the first health insurance programs to reimburse nurse-midwives for homebirths and was instrumental in the development of personnel regulations governing

midwives in the Department of Defense. Her negotiation skills and ability to work through the regulatory process for the benefit of women and midwifery are legendary in both civilian and military health care systems.

Colonel Johanna Borsellega used her skills for the benefit of our professional organization serving on both ACNM and the A.C.N.M. Foundation boards. She contributed to the development of the first “Function, Standards, and Qualifications for Nurse-Midwifery,” the accreditation process for education programs and the certification process. After retirement she found time to serve as midwife to Native American populations in New Mexico and Arizona. In addition, Colonel Borsellega was honored with numerous awards, membership in the FACNM, and the A.C.N.M. Foundation’s most prestigious Dorothea M. Lang Pioneer award in 2002, as its first recipient.

In private life, Colonel Borsellega was a very humble citizen, yet her pride in the Air Force was clearly visible whenever she recalled one memorable occasion. One day while stationed at an Air Force base hospital in the Philippines, where most hospital staff were dressed in Air Force blues, all eyes focused on a guest in a stark, starched, white uniform. A Navy Nurse Corps officer was visiting and looking for Lt. Colonel Borsellega. The guest was Lt. Commander Caren Prather, CNM, a newly certified CNM who was assigned to develop protocols for midwifery practice in the Navy. Working together, Lt. Commander Prather and Lt. Colonel Borsellega adapted Johanna’s pioneering protocols for midwifery practice for the Navy. Later, they were adapted for the Army.

Throughout her career, Colonel Borsellega responsibly followed all continuing education requirements for professional midwifery. Likewise, she satisfactorily engaged the challenges of nearly every Air Force course offered, often being the only female in the class. At the time of her retirement from the Air Force, Colonel Johanna Borsellega had almost all requirements on file to add a “star” to her Air Force rank.

After her death, at her memorial service, mass, and funeral for colleagues, friends and family, Colonel Johanna Borsellega, CNM, MS, FACNM, dressed in full formal Air Force attire with all her medals and awards, was saluted with honors befitting this midwife whose career introduced midwifery education and care in the Air Force, and who midwifed our profession both in military and civilian life where her influence opened midwifery care to middle-class women.

According to Captain Caren Prather, the memorial service, mass and funeral was a celebration of Johanna’s career and life. Graveside, she received color guard honors and, as the United States flag on her coffin was folded and presented to the family, a three gun salute was fired and she was lowered into the ground. The last words spoken were, “Colonel Borsellega figuratively and literally changed the world.”

ACNM now mourns the loss of this midwifery STAR.

The family of Johanna Borsellega created this tribute wall as a place to share memories of her:

<http://www.bringfuneralhome.com/obituaries/Johanna-Borsellega/#!/TributeWall>