

Description

Inspiring Women and a Wider World

Dr Alys Einion – Author & Associate Professor of Midwifery at Swansea University

We feature Alys Einion 's blog in our News and Views area to highlight Alys's wonderful contribution to midwifery. She is one of our editorial board members here at All4Maternity and The Practising Midwife and has achieved so much. Above ct and wearing whatever 'hat' you wear ordpress.com/



Today I am honoured to attend the

@Chwarae Teg #Womenspire18 awards, as a finalist in the Leadership category. It has surprised me and made me feel so proud to be recognised in this way by an organisation whose work I so strongly admire and respect.

All of my life I have had dreams and desires – to be a novelist (tick), to be a midwife (tick), to be an academic (tick). Somehow, I have found the drive and energy needed to achieve a lot. But most of all, I wanted to become the kind of woman I always admired, to be like the women who inspired me. Can it be that I have achieved that too?

It seems hard to believe, but if I take the advice that I give my students, colleagues and loved ones, I must own my own achievements and celebrate my values and abilities, and I am inspired to write this blog post not because I want to grow my ego any further, but because I want to share what it means to be inspired by women, and to inspire others.

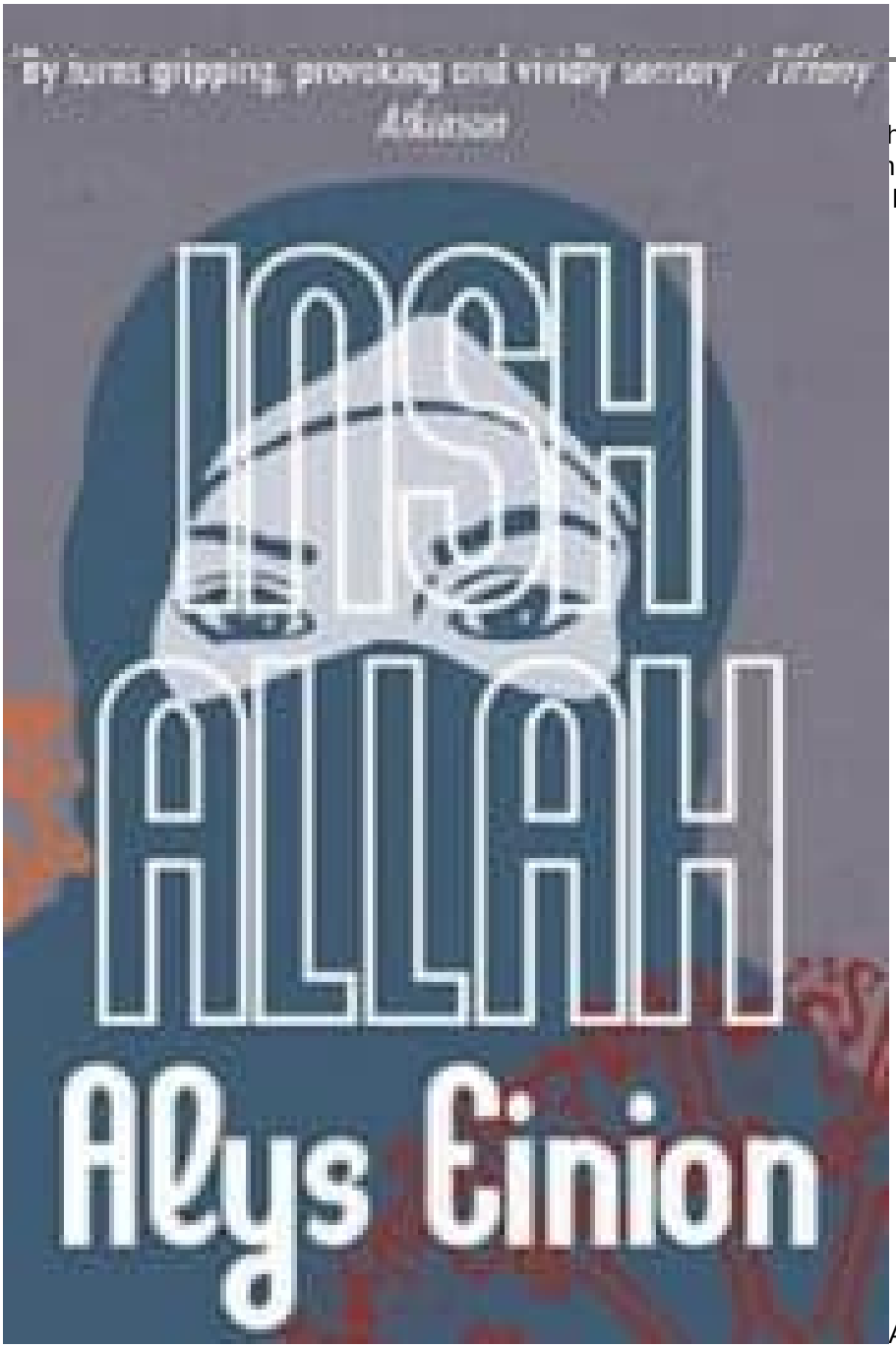


A couple of weeks ago, facilitating a class with my amazing, hard-working and inspirational students on the HE Cert in Maternity Care, I talked about the women who inspired me. One of these was Caroline Squire, who was a lecturer when I was a student midwife, and whose passionate feminism made her an instant role model for me. She called us all ‘colleagues’ and refused to play into the hierarchy that is so often found, both in healthcare practice and in academia. She was (and is) a social critic, an advocate for women’s equality and women’s empowerment in childbearing and in midwifery, and it was she who planted the idea of becoming an academic firmly in my mind. I wanted to be like her. She understood the systems within which women work and become mothers, and she inspired us all to commit to true values of empowerment and activism.

A few years later, after my first (failed) attempt at a PhD, where the biggest obstacle in my way, sadly, was that very same system, she contacted me and asked me to contribute to an academic book, The Social Context of Birth, now in its third edition. I was delighted (and terrified) and have continued to contribute my critical insight and, most recently, my research, to this book. Caroline was a fantastic editor and guide through the publishing process and the book remains the best text on understanding the social forces affecting birthing.

As I spoke with the class, as usual, I let my passion and my feelings spill out into my words, and made them visible and palpable. I have always believed that if I bring my authentic self to my work, sooner or later this will make a difference to somebody. And one of the students said, as I finished my explanation, “but Alys, that is what you are to us.” I was speechless for a moment, and overwhelmed. And frankly, overjoyed. I felt that, of all my achievements, this was the pinnacle.

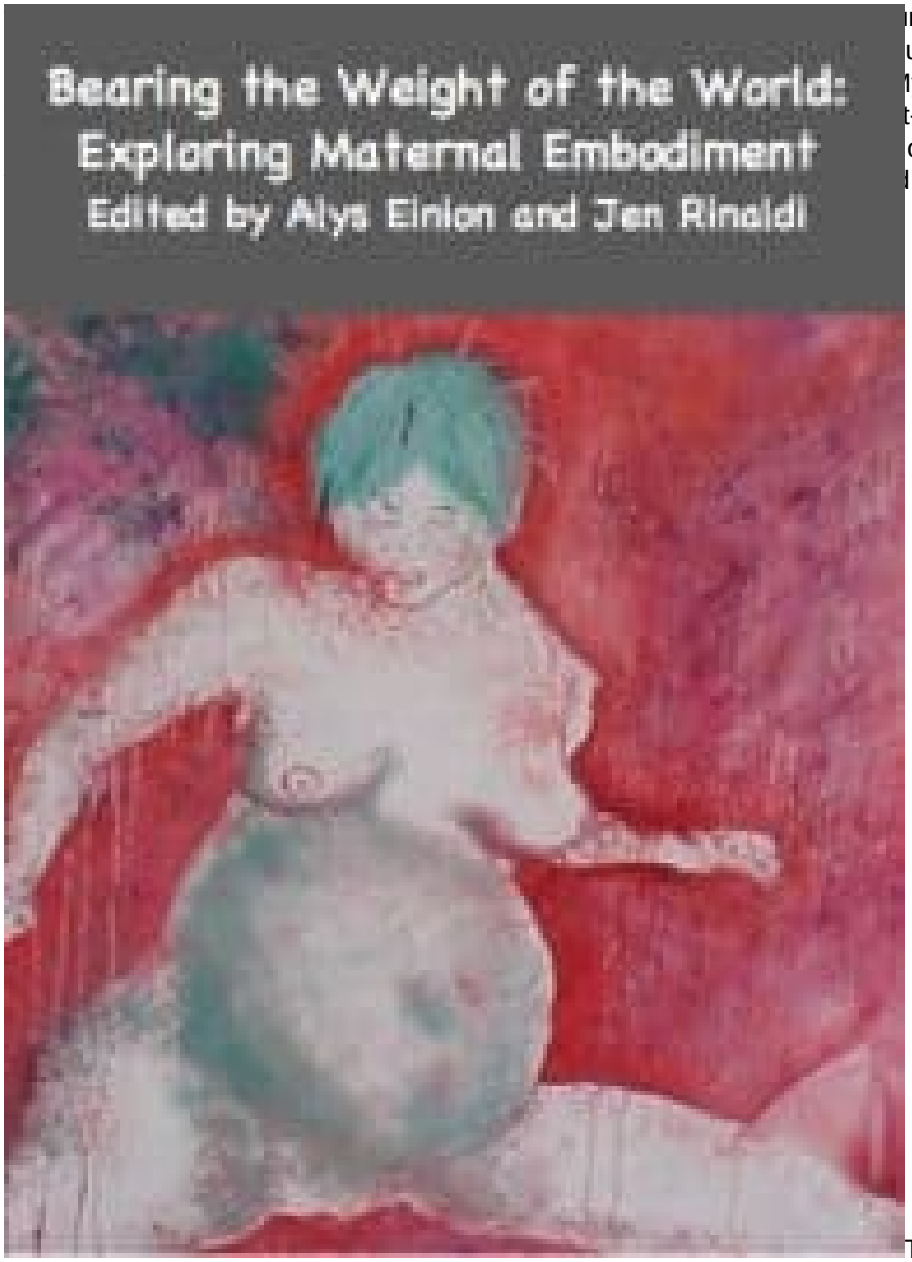
To find out that I inspire others is amazing, especially when it is something I am driven to do because of my desire to give every woman the chance to become what they want to become. I conceived of and started the HE Certificate in Maternity Care at Swansea University to provide an entry into the specialist knowledge of maternity care and reproduction for anyone. There are no entry criteria, and the programme has gone from strength to strength. We started with just 16 students, and this year, we are offering 60 places. The programme is now led by another inspirational colleague, Nicky Court, who has taken her leadership to new heights. The programme will be now offered on two sites –



he programme will have the option of
ore people will now access not only greater
be able to enjoy and be empowered by a

Also a few short weeks ago, I saw a student putting a book into her bag, and realised it was my novel, Inshallah, published by Honno Press (www.honno.co.uk). Shyly, I exclaimed at the fact that she was reading my book, and was delighted that she was enjoying it. This leads me on to more inspirational women who have affected my life. My PhD Supervisors, Tiffany Atkinson and Louise Holmwood-Marshall at Aberystwyth University both recognised my drive and my ideas and gave me both roots and wings. They grounded me in the research and writing process, and enabled me to write what would become my first novel. This was such a powerful and challenging time in my life. I was working full time, first at University of the West of England, and then at Swansea, and also working part time at the Open University to pay for my PhD fees, whilst also bringing up a child in an uncertain financial climate.

Completing the PhD was a great achievement. Then I submitted the novel to Honno Press, and Caroline Oakley, Editor,

changed my life. Direct, to-the-point and thoroughly inspirational, she told me exactly what was wrong with my work and


rn for the first time, and suddenly I
ublishing contract. Since then, Caroline and
y second novel, Ash, will be published this
t-held life ambition – is that I am published
other vital, creative and radical women
by them and now, I get to inspire others by

Three years ago, I stumbled across a call for papers for an edited collection by another feminist press. http://www.demeterpress.org, led by Andrea O'Reilly, who publish inspirational and radically diverse texts on motherhood and mothering, fathering, sexuality….. Having contributed to several volumes edited by amazing colleagues, I found myself with a book proposal accepted, and was lucky enough to find a Canadian Co-Editor, Jen Rinaldi, to help me bring together the work of powerful writers and artists in the book 'Bearing the Weight of the World: Exploring Maternal Embodiment' which will be published by Demeter Press later this year. Again, what a pleasure to be published by and with activists and critical thinkers who are rewriting the landscape of knowledge to promote better insight and equality! It seems like a dream, now, to be part of such work.

Some years ago I also had the opportunity to work with the amazing team at the Practising Midwife Journal – to curate ield of activists in the arena of women's ıe world has opened up wider and wider for ıere are out there, paving the way.



There are hundreds of other women and people of all genders who inspire me. There was the midwife who held the space for me and grounded me when I had my first child, who made me want to be a midwife. There are the writers and artists and speakers who have opened my mind and heart, such as Maya Angelou, Margaret Attwood, Scarlett Thomas, Sarah Waters, Anne McCaffrey, Ina May Gaskin, Jenny Hall, Alice Walker, Jeanette Winterson, Starhawk, Katherine V Forrest, Val McDermid, Barbara Erskine, Joanne Harris, Manda Scott, Susan Hill, Emma Donoghue, A.S Byatt, Alice Hoffman, Julie Felix, Sheila Kitzinger, Sheena Byrom, Hannah Dahlen, Frank Duffy, Carolyn Hillyer … the list goes on and on.

Then there are the women and men I work with, inspirational leaders themselves – Professor Hilary Lappin-Scott, Chantal Patel, Sarah Norris, Susanne Darra, Cath Elms, Professor Martin Stringer… and all of my colleagues, dedicated and driven to be the best they can be. There are organisations, such as Stonewall, whose work inspires me to keep on keeping on. Then there are my friends and family, trailblazers in their own ways – my wonderful, amazing sister, Carole Ann Mortimer, who works to support women in direst need and helps them to recover from the impact of domestic abuse, my son, Aran Henley-Einion, who is a gifted musician and unequivocally his own person, my dear friends Linda Reagan and Maeve Reagan, Jay McNeill, Lee Gale, and many, many others, friends of all genders who advocate for gender equality in every dimension, and who live their convictions so powerfully.

These are the people who inspire me. These and so many, many others have changed my life for the better. There are the hundreds and thousands of authors and activists, there are the students whose lives I am lucky enough to touch, just briefly, there are the clients in my hypnobirthing classes who inspire me to continue advocating for women's rights, there are the colleagues in the Staff LGBT+ network and the people on campus who might feel that their individuality is not only recognised, but celebrated at Swansea University, an employer which not only allows me to be myself, but rewards me for my diversity and my uniqueness. It is no surprise to me that Swansea University is a finalist for the Employer Award at tonight's Womenspire awards.

> If I can make a difference, just a small difference, in this great, wide world, then I will have achieved everything I set out to do.

If I can give one other person new insight, new knowledge, or a signpost to their own inner strength, then I have

accomplished more than I ever could have imagined.

All my life, people have said to me, ‘you will never’. You will never get a degree, never get married, never be successful or have a good job. To all of the nay-sayers, I only have this to say.
Watch me.
The Wider World Awaits.
Good luck to all the finalists at the Awards tonight.

@AlysEinion

Category

1. News & Views

Tags

1. inspiration

Date Created
6th June 2018