



## Mrs Mary Cronk MBE

Joy Horner – Midwife and Antenatal Educator

Mrs Mary Cronk died on the morning of the 21<sup>st</sup> December 2018. She was known globally as an experienced midwife and breech birth specialist.



Mary was a close friend as well as former independent midwife colleague of mine. I first met her at a local [Association of Radical Midwives](#) meeting at her home near Chichester, and of course attended her “day at the breech” courses more than once. I admit to being a bit awe struck at our first meeting but I needn’t have worried. Mary the person was approachable and willing to help anyone who needed her. Mary has been described as feisty and her tough interior certainly came to the fore when she needed it/ needed to, but mostly she was friendly and personable.

Mary told me that when she gave birth to her first child she was confined to bed with a back injury. She described how she felt the “[iron enter her soul](#)” when midwives refused to bring her baby to her for nursing.

This iron sometimes became visible when Mary defended the rights of her clients against the likes of “Mr hi-an-my-tee” or “Midwife sinister”. See her [assertiveness phrases here!](#)

Her plain speaking and common-sense approach enabled Mary to help thousands of families to achieve empowered births.

I was lucky to have worked with her from 2005 when I became an independent midwife eager to learn from her decades of midwifery experience. Her practice was built on the firm foundations of a thorough knowledge of anatomy and physiology and by listening to and believing in the women she served. Even though she was very experienced, after 50 years as a midwife, I was taken with how humble she remained, never mentioning that she’d been awarded a MBE for her services to women. She served each family lovingly and to the best of her ability. Although she was regarded as a

midwifery legend by many, she remained very much a “professional servant” to her clients ([Midwife -Mother relationship by Mavis Kirkham](#)).

Mary Cronk was perhaps best known for facilitating and teaching about breech birth. Her seminal article '[hands off the breach](#)' helped to turn back the tide against supporting vaginal breech births. She taught breech skills to many midwives lucky enough to work with her (Jane Evans and myself included) and asked those she taught to promise to ‘share the skills’ by teaching others.

Mary Cronk, Jane Evans and Brenda van der Kooy taught workshops together called “a day at the breech.” These workshops equipped many midwives with the knowledge and confidence to safely facilitate breech-births. In 2008 I started teaching breech workshops alongside Mary. Our last teaching engagement together was at Worthing hospital in 2014.

Mary's dedication to midwifery notably included her work with the [Association of Radical Midwives \(ARM\)](#), [Association for Improvements in the Maternity Services \(AIMS\)](#), [Royal College of Midwives \(RCM\)](#) and the [Nursing and Midwifery Council \(NMC\)](#).

Images courtesy of Joy Horner

Mary freely shared her midwifery knowledge by answering queries from midwives and members of the public, by email and phone. Even in 2018, the year she died, Mary helped a woman in my area have an empowered breech caesarean birth after discussing her options with her.



Images by Kate Evans <https://www.cartoonkate.co.uk> Twitter  
@CartoonKate

I was so lucky to have known the woman behind the name. When I lived close to Mary I would often pop in for a cuppa and a chat. I heard tales of her early nursing days, of her sailing the Mediterranean with her husband Joe and their 3 small children, of the 2 women who gave birth in Mary and Joe's house, and of the unusual cases she'd cared for over the decades. I moved to Somerset in 2010 and my visits became less frequent (a round trip would take 6hrs) but we still kept in touch regularly.

In the past few years her body was crippled with arthritis and she had several hospital admissions. Although she detested being a patient, she bravely endured the discomfort and her sharp mind and intellect remained intact. She remained at home and was cared by her loving family.

She will be remembered by family as a mother and grandmother, by many as their midwife or as a friend, but what makes this remarkable woman unique is that she will also be remembered by those who didn't meet her, who's lives have been forever touched by her teachings. Luckily Mary's legacy lives on in all who knew her and benefitted from her wisdom. Mary's teachings will continue to inspire people and will continue to change lives for generations to come.

She will be sadly missed.

Joy Horner RM

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