

Winter 2011 Newsletter

Our Bodies Ourselves Celebrates 40 Years!

Cabaret and Global Symposium raise funds and awareness

Board members **Heather Nelson** and **Nancy Allen** produced a cabaret fundraiser, **Our Bodies Ourselves 40th Birthday Bash!**, on Sept. 22. The event, held at OBERON in Cambridge, raised over \$3,000 in funds and was an evening to remember!

Our Bodies Ourselves also hosted a **Global Symposium** on Oct 1. at Boston University. *See page 2 for highlights from the Symposium.*



Above: The cast and crew of the Our Bodies Ourselves 40th Birthday Bash!

Left: SisterSong's Loretta Ross (Symposium keynote speaker) with OBOS co-founder Elizabeth MacMahon-Herrera.

Help Make *Our Bodies, Ourselves* Available to More Women & Girls

Young women are bombarded every day with sexualized messages that can damage their health and self-esteem. And even though they have access to unlimited amounts of health information, it is often inaccurate or misleading, particularly when it comes to reproductive health and sexuality.

That's where *Our Bodies, Ourselves* comes in. The newly revised ninth edition provides access to life-changing health information, includes dozens of real-life experiences, and provides tips on organizing for safe, comprehensive reproductive health services.

Here's how you can make the new *Our Bodies, Ourselves* available to more readers:

- Tell your friends and colleagues in nonprofit health and medical institutions about the **special 70-percent clinic discount** on the new edition. For more details, visit: ourbodiesourselves.org/publications/clinics.asp
- Contribute to Our Bodies Ourselves so we can make **free books available to women with limited incomes**, via prisons, local health clinics and hospitals.
- Active in your college alumni association? We have a project underway to **provide incoming freshmen with a free book**. Email us (office@bwhbc.org) with "college freshmen" in the subject line for more information.

With your help, we can educate and empower a new generation of readers! ♦



Global Symposium Spotlights Challenges to Securing Health, Human Rights

Our Bodies Ourselves founders honored along with women adapting the book worldwide

by June Tsang, Program Associate, Our Bodies Ourselves Global Initiative

“I did training for more than 5,000 women across the country, and all their stories and all their experiences are in Our Bodies, Ourselves. Along with the stories and political activism, we started brokering power at the personal as well as at the political level. As of this moment, we have something to celebrate.”

Those words were spoken by **Renu Rajbhandari**, a prominent women’s rights activist in Nepal, during our 40th anniversary symposium, *Our Bodies, Our Future: Advancing Health and Human Rights for Women and Girls*, on Oct. 1. Co-hosted with Boston University, the event marked four decades of activism and celebrated our evolution from a small group around a kitchen table in the United States to a vibrant network of social change activists *at the table* in countries around the world.

Held in conjunction with the release of the ninth edition of *Our Bodies, Ourselves*, the symposium was also an opportunity to meet 12 of our global partners, including Renu, and listen to their extraordinary journeys of claiming and transforming this landmark book for the women and girls of their countries. Renu referred to the effort as a “transcreation.” Many women talked about the cultural, political and social challenges to their activism and the relationships and networks they have built in order to effect change.

The book’s impact and legacy was described by many speakers, including local luminaries. In a video welcome, Massachusetts **Gov. Deval Patrick** recalled how he was 15 years old when *Our Bodies, Ourselves* was first published; it was considered “racy,” yet filled with information that made him “a better person, and certainly a better partner.”

Robert Meenan, dean of Boston University School of Public Health, offered a formal welcome, followed by an all-star cast of women’s health advocates, including **Byllye Avery**, founder of the Avery Institute for Social Change and the Black Women’s Health Imperative, and **Adrienne Germain**, president emerita of the International Women’s Health Coalition. **Marie Turley**, executive director of the Boston Women’s Commission, brought greetings from **Mayor Tom Menino**, who had declared Oct. 1 Our Bodies Ourselves Day in the city of Boston.

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Top: Recent Wesleyan University graduate Elissa Martel, former OBOS board member Ester Shapiro, and Amy Allina of the National Women’s Health Network. Middle: OBOS co-founder Wendy Sanford with Micah and Judah Rome, sons of the late OBOS co-founder Esther Rome. Bottom: OBOS global partner Asia Kapande from Tanzania, with OBOS co-founder Joan Ditzion.

Global Symposium Spotlights Challenges

(continued from page 2)

These terrific presenters, and our energetic emcee, **Jaelyn Friedman**, executive director of Women, Action and the Media and a contributor to the new edition, spoke about the personal impact *Our Bodies, Ourselves* has had on their lives and the important role played by organizations like OBOS in realizing health equality and human rights, while at the same time reminding the audience of the sizeable challenges ahead.

They symposium paid tribute to the 14 OBOS founders who changed the world of women's health 40 years ago. **Sam Morgan Lilienfeld** and **Judah Rome**, sons of deceased founders **Pamela Morgan** and **Esther Rome**, shared memories of their mothers – not only as feminist moms, but as powerful and positive role models.

“My mom viewed birth as an experience that has the power to change and define the life of a woman,” Sam said, “and her spirit of embracing and celebrating these major life events, which we sometimes may welcome and sometimes greet with trepidation, is something I've always admired.”

In his remarks about Esther completing the manuscript of *Sacrificing Ourselves for Love* just before her death in 1995, Judah said: “Watching my mom through the final months of her life was very painful for me, but it taught me how to live.” He told the audience he had hoped that her legacy would live on, adding, “I can tell from the energy in the room that it does.”

Our courageous global partners have used *Our Bodies, Ourselves* to develop and bring culturally unique health and sexuality information to their own communities. In addition to the challenges they encounter, they also discussed their success negotiating with power brokers – from men and matriarchs in the family, to religious leaders and heads of institutions.

Their stories of transformation, in Tanzania, Turkey, Japan, Israel, Serbia, India, Nepal, Senegal and Latin America, were reminiscent of the journey taken by OBOS founders 40 years ago. The parallel between the two groups of women was palpable and confirmed that not only has the book gone global, but it continues to inspire movement building by and for women and girls in every region of the world.

Loretta Ross, national coordinator of SisterSong Women of Color Reproductive Justice Collective, closed the day, firing up the audience by reminding everyone of the very real threats to women's reproductive and sexual rights in the United States and around the world. Even so, she said the global partners' activism and their use of the human rights framework made her “excited and optimistic” about the future.

As the day started with reminiscences of the 1960s and 70s, it ended with a freshly-stoked fire in the belly. OBOS is at the forefront of changing the lives of women and girls and will continue this work in the U.S. and around the world -- into the next 40 years and beyond. ♦

Please visit our website for more information on how you can support OBOS's ongoing efforts and help the Global Initiative with its vital work.

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On the Forefront of Advocating for Improved Public Policies

Our Bodies Ourselves has long worked in collaboration with other organizations to improve public policies affecting women's health. Our current activities focus on the following:

- Calling for **policies that preserve or expand access to sexual and reproductive health services**. The new health reform law requires health plans to cover certain preventive services – including contraceptive services – without copayments, coinsurance or deductibles. However, religious groups have been lobbying intensively to allow for exemptions. We have joined with many others in protesting attempts to undermine women's access to contraception.
- Serving as **co-plaintiff in the ACLU lawsuit against Myriad Genetics regarding the patenting of human genes**. OBOS is one of two women's health advocacy organizations involved in this role. Plaintiffs recently petitioned the Supreme Court for review of the case, and the outcome will have substantial implications for public health. Visit ACLU.org/brca for more details.
- Advocating for **improved maternity care policies, especially expanded access to midwifery care** in all settings. This includes calling for wider availability of vaginal births after cesarean (VBACs), as well as reducing the number of labor inductions lacking medical justification. We are also collaborating with other consumer groups to ensure that Certified Professional Midwives (CPMs) become licensed and regulated in Massachusetts within the next year, which will increase the safety of home birth for families choosing this option.
- Serving on the Steering Committee for the third Tarrytown Meeting in 2012, the final in a series of meetings **bringing together prominent health advocates and academics who are seeking increased public engagement and more responsible governance of new human genetic technologies**. Recently, Judy Norsigian, OBOS executive director, served as lead debater for the Yale Political Union at an event addressing whether parents should be allowed to genetically modify their children. With Sally Whelan, program director of OBOS' Global Initiative, they engaged students in a wide-ranging conversation about human germline genetic manipulations, embryo stem cells, and related topics that are the focus of the Tarrytown Meetings convened by our close partner, the Center for Genetics and Society.

- Establishing **better informed consent for women who undergo multiple egg extraction techniques** – whether for themselves or as part of so-called egg donation arrangements that frequently involve paying large sums of money to women struggling economically. We are also working with the Infertility Family Research Registry at Dartmouth-Hitchcock Medical Center to increase participation of IVF clinics in their NIH-funded voluntary registry. Without more participation, critical research about the long-term safety of assisted reproductive technology practices will not be possible.
- Urging **better FDA oversight of silicone breast implants**. In August, we joined other consumer advocates and public health experts in asking the FDA to rescind approval of Mentor Corporation's silicone gel breast implants, since Mentor's own study lost track of more than 80 percent of 40,000 augmentation patients. We continue to hold community screenings of the documentary *Absolutely Safe* (often accompanied by filmmaker Carol Ciancutti-Leyva) to reach more women about the lack of adequate safety data for silicone breast implants. A recent presentation at the National Women's Studies Association conference in Atlanta resulted in several dozen professors committing to use this film in their courses and communities.

As always, OBOS deeply appreciates the interns and volunteers who make this advocacy work possible. Student interns Eliza Duggan and Hannah Lucal have helped recently with the above-mentioned efforts. ♦



Photo by Leslie A. Zukor

Judy Norsigian, Humanist Heroine

OBOS Executive Director Judy Norsigian was named the **2011 Humanist Heroine by the American Humanist Association** at the AHA's 70th annual

conference in Boston. An abridged version of her conference presentation, addressing numerous challenges facing women's health advocates, appears in the Nov/Dec issue of *The Humanist* (<http://bit.ly/sLqcOt>). ♦

Forty & Fabulous: *Our Bodies, Ourselves* Receives Rave Reviews

Library Journal selects new edition for 2011 Best Books List

From *The Washington Post* to *The American Prospect*, from *Newsday* to *New Mexico in Focus*, and from *Ms. Magazine* to *WebMD*, the new 40th anniversary edition of *Our Bodies, Ourselves* has been the subject of rave reviews and feature stories in more than 60 media sources across the country.

In October, NBC Nightly News celebrated how *Our Bodies, Ourselves* has changed women's lives. The segment featured a book event in Cambridge and formal interviews with [Judy Norsigian](#), [Susan Love](#), [Faye Wattleton](#) and [Veronica Arreola](#), a new book contributor. Longer interviews with Judy and Susan are available online (visit ourbodiesourselves.org/about/mediacoverage.asp for links).

One of the most recent honors comes from *Library Journal*, which selected *Our Bodies, Ourselves* as one of the Best Books of 2011 (Consumer Health category), noting, "The 40th anniversary of this women's health bible finds it aging superbly."

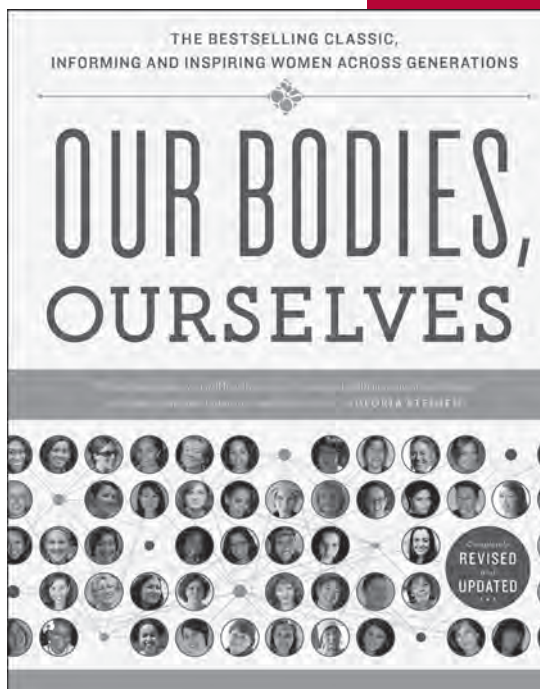
We couldn't agree more. Many kudos are owed to the book's editorial team and to the more than 300 contributors who reviewed and revised each chapter and submitted photos and stories. And to our readers -- **thank you** for continuing to share *Our Bodies, Ourselves* with your daughters, family members and friends. We couldn't have turned 40 without you! ♦



Post a Review!

If you're recommending the new *Our Bodies, Ourselves* to friends and family, please take a moment to review it on [Amazon](#). Your recommendation can make a difference to potential book buyers seeking accurate health information. Thanks for taking the time to share your comments!

A sampling of reviews:



"Still feminist and frank. And definitive."
– *Newsday*

"This is still the bible for women's health; an outstanding resource that belongs in all health collections."
– *Library Journal Starred Reviews*

"Here are the cliff notes to this review of the new *Our Bodies, Ourselves: Get this book.*"
– *Ms. Magazine*

"Our Bodies, Ourselves...stands in stark contrast to the larger culture, which has nipped, tucked, Photo-shopped and hyper-sexualized women's bodies to the point where the female form has become virtually unrecognizable."
– *Washington Post*

"... a rich, reliable, multi-layered resource, helpful to women no matter where they are on the reproductive spectrum."
– *Viv Magazine*

"The book is enormous. To sit down and read 994 pages requires weeks, if not months of commitment. Yet, every word is worth reading."
– *About.com*



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Your Support Needed!

We owe much of our success and momentum to you, our loyal friends and supporters. Today we ask for your help in sustaining our legacy of educational activism and inspiring a new generation of women's health and human rights leaders in the U.S. and abroad.

As co-founders of the Boston Women's Health Book Collective (now known as Our Bodies Ourselves), **we urge you to give as generously as you can--\$100, \$250 or more--to our Annual Fund.** Your gift today will enable us to continue working on behalf of women and girls everywhere. **To donate go to ourbodiesourselves.org/about/support.asp.**

With much gratitude and best wishes for a happy and healthy New Year,

Ruth Bell Alexander, Pamela Berger, Paula Doress-Worters, Vilunya Diskin, Joan Ditzion, Nancy Miriam Hawley, Elizabeth MacMahon-Herrera, Pamela Morgan (1949-2008), Judy Norsigian, Jane Pincus, Esther Rome (1945-1995), Wendy Sanford, and Sally Whelan

P.S. In appreciation of a donation of \$150 or more, we will send you a signed copy of the new edition of *Our Bodies, Ourselves*. Please keep it for yourself or pass it on as a holiday gift to family, friends, local libraries or community health centers.

2011 By the Numbers

Pages in New Book: 928, including contributors and index

Media Mentions: 61

Book and Outreach Events: 50

Campus Visits: 31

Global Projects: 6; expanding access to recently developed health materials* in Armenia, Turkey, Israel, Tanzania, Nigeria and Nepal

Staff Members: 2 full-time / 6 part-time

Interns: 9

Global Materials Completed to Date: 37* resources, published in **27 languages in print, digital and interactive formats