

Obituary

Steve Baldwin

Steve Baldwin of the University of Teesside, a valued contributor to this Journal, died tragically in a train accident in Yorkshire on February 28th 2001

Professor Steve Baldwin was killed in the Selby train crash. His loss is unspeakably sad. Funny, astute, academically gifted and fantastically hard working, the world of psychology has lost a real champion.

He loved the sea and his choice of jobs frequently involved a coastline: Plymouth; Jersey; Aberdeen; Perth, Western Australia. He lived at Whitby in his last post as Foundation Professor of Psychology at Teesside University. He qualified as a clinical psychologist in the early 1980s and was immediately involved in the controversy of the Rampton Inquiry. It was while working in Jersey that he developed his passionate concern about the use of ECT with children. After two years working for an Alcohol Training Agency in Salford he moved to a position in the Department of Public Health at Aberdeen University. From there it was a short step to the University of Adelaide and then, as Associate Professor, to Edith Cowan University in Western Australia.

He worked hard and played hard, getting up in the early hours to run, write, think and then leave for work having achieved more before sun-rise than most do in a year. He could drink; he once scathingly downed a half bottle of absinthe after I told him how I'd found myself tripping after a few glasses. He still got up at 4.30 am the following day to go for his run. He ran on holiday, on beaches and on the farm roads around our house. God knows what the farmers made of this early morning apparition in torn T-shirt.

Steve was well known for his pioneering work in this country on the abuse of Ritalin by psychiatrists and internationally for his campaign against the use of ECT with children. He was a courageous and outspoken defender of children's rights, using the media to expose the cynical increase in the prescription of stimulant drugs to children whose conduct is considered intolerable. Like all critics of psychiatry he knew the danger of interfering in people's lives with medical treatments. In children he found a disenfranchised and powerless group to speak out for. He had just published another paper about Ritalin in *Critical Public Health*, had completed a book on ECT and a fine chapter for *This is Madness Too* on informed consent. Steve co-founded, with Peter Breggin and David Cohen, the journal, *Ethical Human Sciences and Services*, and founded, in the mid-1990s, *Care in Place*. He was a founder member of the *Clinical Psychology Forum* editorial collective in 1991. His editing for *Forum* was meticulous, spelling out exactly the changes wanted. Authors would receive polite letters including anything up to fifteen editorial points that needed to be followed up, from massive rewrites to single grammatical errors.

He was a prolific writer with books on a wide range of themes including community care, needs assessment and at least one classic, *Ethical Issues in Mental Health*, co-edited with Phil Barker. On his CV he identified himself as a film-maker as well as psychologist and travelled the world to film psychiatric

activists like Ted Chabasinski and Leonard Roy Frank. He made a marvellous film on domestic violence while in Australia, a piece of work which won one of the Queensland State Government's annual Domestic Violence Prevention Awards in 1999.

As a conference speaker, he could be mesmerising, effortlessly using two overheads and video while deftly dealing with questions from the audience. Even critical questioning would be embraced in a way designed to leave the questioner feeling a part of the session and not some unwelcome intruder. His students found him charming and critical in equal measure and he always had time for their questions and concerns. In his clinical practice he was committed to motivational interviewing and the work of Prochaska and DiClemente. He remained a behaviourist; even in ordinary speech he would talk of contingencies and reinforcers and his child clinic on Teeside worked on behavioural lines.

A doer of the first rank, he was surrounded by doers; within hours of the confirmation of his death I received calls suggesting a memorial conference and special issues of *Forum* and *The Psychologist*. Colleagues from the UK and the US expressed concern about his numerous unfinished projects and the need to continue his work on behalf of children. Emails described his utmost integrity, decency, and passion for the truth. He was called humble and a man who didn't blow his own trumpet. Steve was remembered as someone who risked professional standing because he knew he had to fight for the truth as he saw it. He was a person who saw his role as someone who put his intellectual abilities in the service of the oppressed. There is a desperate need for someone to continue Steve's work.

He was never intrusive and would shy away from fights with friends, preferring to simply stop referring to areas of personal conflict and reserve his energies for fighting the bad guys. When asked, he would offer sound and cautious advice. He was private to an extraordinary degree. Few people knew his home telephone number and only a few more got to know what country he was in at any given time. He loved beaches, running, fighting injustice, brightly coloured braces, Seinfeld, good cinema and Pearl Jam. He had a terrible haircut.

He is irreplaceable. After all that hard work he deserves to rest in peace.

Craig Newnes