

The Golden Brick Award, Honoring Susie Wilson

by Peggy Brick

***Editor's Note:** Following is a transcript of the remarks given by Peggy Brick on December 9, 2011 at the CFLE National Sex Ed Conference, in honor of Susie Wilson, recipient of the 2011 Golden Brick Award. This transcript was originally posted on <http://www.sexuallysmarter.blogspot.com/> Susie Wilson is a founding member of the Sexuality and Aging Consortium at Widener University.*

Susie Wilson! Visionary! Reformer! Advocate! Catalyst! Sexuality Educator par excellence! What a joy it is for me to celebrate you with the Golden Brick Award, one of many awards recognizing your unique contribution to the sexual health and happiness of adolescents in this confusing society. What a legacy you have created and continue to create!

For thirty-three years you have led us, inspired us, and pushed us to act in behalf of the sexual rights of young people. From that fateful day at a New Jersey Board of Education meeting when you were the only Board Member to ask questions following a research report on pregnancy and sexually transmitted diseases among New Jersey teens until today when you continue to ask probing questions and promote sexual sanity on your New Jersey Newsroom Blog, you have never stopped. Tireless, determined, unflappable, you have persistently articulated your outrage at the forces that would demean adolescents and deprive them of the education they need. Writing, speaking, organizing, fund-raising, coalition-building, you led the way for thousands of us educators in schools and agencies throughout the state and the nation. You are the model of the multiple roles a leader must play in this seemingly endless battle in behalf of young people of this nation.

I refresh my memory by reviewing the manual created in 2003 to celebrate the Network's "20 Years of Great Sex (Ed)". Here is evidence that shows you really are a miracle worker. On the front cover: a list of 37 collaborating organizations and I'll bet you had personal contacts with the leaders of every one. And the back cover lists 60 state and national foundations and government agencies that had supported the work of the Network. Sixty! However do you do it? Oh! You have connections – living there in Princeton with your dear husband, the well-known, politically sophisticated, and ever supportive Don Wilson. Sometimes it seems you know everyone important! How wonderful that you are fearless in promoting your cause, our cause, with so many important people in such important places.

Perhaps most exciting for me is the way you created an organization that honors young people by respecting their ability to take responsibility and make wise decisions. Susie, you have accomplished with teens the "Critical Consciousness" Paulo Freire, educator of Brazilian peasants, calls for in his book [Pedagogy of the Oppressed](#). While American teens are not oppressed in the same way as were Freire's peasants, they are oppressed by an exploitative sexual environment against which they must struggle for knowledge, rights and values. I believe the projects of the Network for Family Life Education, now [Answer](#), promote Critical Consciousness." [Sex, Etc.](#), being "by teens, for teens," is a perfect model. Teens identify the issues that concern them, take varied positions on controversial topics, and write on subjects almost no one else has dared to tackle. How brave you have been: validating adolescents and strengthening their ability to make positive life decisions. Best of all, over the years you recruited a superb staff who have taken your vision and implemented it in ever more creative

ways. How proud you must be of Answer today, a powerful force for a truly comprehensive sexuality education.

Susie, thank you, too, for the many ways you have validated individual professionals working in the field. So many of us have “Thank You, Susie” stories to tell. One of hundreds examples is my own enlistment in the cause. When in 1980 you accomplished the New Jersey Mandate for Family Life Education, I was on the Board of Planned Parenthood of Bergen County – later merged to become this famous PPGNNJ now celebrating your achievements! We had a sexuality department that was soon renamed: The Center for Family Life Education. In order to implement the Mandate, teachers everywhere needed some education and soon I, was teaching hundreds of them in a graduate course, “Family Life and Sexuality Education” at a variety of high schools, credited by Jersey City State College.

When I retired as a high school teacher and became Director of Education at Planned Parenthood we began developing our sex positive teaching manuals, and 26 years ago we held the First Annual Family Life Education Conference – all thanks to Susie Wilson’s Mandate! But for me there’s even more. For my retirement, you designed a Center for Family Life Education needlepoint; for my 70th birthday party you travelled from Princeton with a huge poster board covered with photos and articles you’d dug up of long forgotten workshops and conferences; and when I founded the Sexuality and Aging Consortium four years ago, you became a Member, my trusted advisor, and a key contributor. Susie you’re a genius at celebrating people and empowering them.

I wonder how many of you have a “Thank You Susie Wilson” story you’d love to tell. I know she’d love to read it; send it to: Susie.Wilson@comcast.net!

With thanks from us all and from thousands of unknown adolescents nationwide, here’s a Golden Brick for Susie Wilson.

Editor's Note: *The Golden Brick Award, established in 2005 and named for Peggy Brick honors outstanding leaders in sexuality education. Past recipients include Eva S. Goldfarb, Sue Montfort, Carole Adamsbaum, Robert T. Francoeur, Joan O’Leary, and Peggy Brick.*