

'Honor her memory... by fighting like hell': Barbara Ehrenreich dies at 81

Julia Conley, Common Dreams

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Barbara Ehrenreich

Barbara Ehrenreich, whose books about economic inequality include *Nickel and Dimed*, *Bait and Switch*, and *Fear of Falling*, died on Thursday, September 1 at the age of 81.

Her death was announced on Twitter by her son, Ben Ehrenreich, and daughter, Rosa Brooks.

"She was never much for thoughts and prayers, but you can honor her memory by loving one another, and by fighting like hell," Ben Ehrenreich wrote.

Ehrenreich wrote on her personal website that she went through a "political, as well as a personal, transformation" in 1970 when she gave birth to her first child in a public health clinic in New York where she was "the only white patient at the clinic" and learned how many poor women are treated when seeking healthcare.

"They induced my labor because it was late in the evening and the doctor wanted to go home," she later said. "I was enraged. The experience made me a feminist."

"I have never seen a conflict between journalism and activism. As a journalist, I search for the truth. But as a moral person, I am also obliged to do something about it."

She wrote columns for *Ms.* and *Mother Jones* and published several books about the healthcare industry, feminism, and the economy before writing one of her best-known works, *Nickel and Dimed*, an examination of the working poor in the United States.

Ehrenreich took low-wage jobs at a restaurant, a cleaning service, and Walmart between 1998 and 2000 and experienced firsthand the struggles faced by millions of Americans attempting to afford housing, groceries, and other necessities while earning minimum wage at corporations headed by wealthy executives.

"The 'working poor,' as they are approvingly termed, are in fact the major philanthropists of our society," Ehrenreich wrote in the book.

In a review of the book, *The New York Times* said *Nickel and Dimed* helped solidify Ehrenreich as "our premier reporter of the underside of capitalism."

"We have Barbara Ehrenreich to thank for bringing us the news of America's working poor so clearly and directly, and conveying with it a deep moral outrage and a finely textured sense of lives as lived," Dorothy Gallagher wrote for the *Times*.

In some of her other books Ehrenreich delved into the shrinking of the U.S. middle class, the history of communal celebrations, and Americans' "obsession with wellness" and the prolonging of life.

"We've lost a gifted writer and a relentless fighter for the working class," said progressive organizer Aaron Huertas.

Ehrenreich also established the Economic Hardship Reporting Project, which supports independent journalists editorially and financially.

"I have never seen a conflict between journalism and activism," she wrote at her personal website. "As a journalist, I search for the truth. But as a moral person, I am also obliged to do something about it."