

# WILHELM REICH INFANT TRUST



## Mary Boyd Higgins

13 October 1925- 8 January 2019

Mary Boyd Higgins was born on 13 October 1925 into a well-to-do family in Indianapolis, Indiana. Educated at Vassar College, she graduated in May 1946 with a degree in Theater (Dramatic Production). In January 1947 she moved to New York City and became involved in the theater scene, with a goal of becoming an actress. She also lived in Paris for a year, 1950-1951, and upon her return continued piano studies with a teacher in New York City. Her piano teacher first gave her Reich's *The Function of the Orgasm* to read, a book she felt "made a lot of sense." Later when in some personal difficulties she called the Orgone Energy Clinic in NYC and began therapy, 1953-1956, with Dr. Chester Raphael.

After Reich's death, his daughter Eva became the Trustee of his estate; however, after a year she stated she no longer wanted the job. For several weeks no one stepped forward, causing a perilous legal limbo for the fledgling Wilhelm Reich Infant Trust created in Reich's Will. Ms. Higgins had never met Reich in person, though she had attended his 1956 trial in Portland, Maine. But because she deeply felt the injustice of how Reich was treated, she volunteered for the job as Trustee. Dr. Raphael at first opposed this, thinking it was far too great a responsibility. But Higgins persisted as no one else offered, and eventually it was decided she should try it. In later years she said, "I had no idea how huge a task I was getting into. It's so much more than a full-time job." After meeting with Eva Reich, who legally transferred the role, Higgins became Trustee in March 1959—a job she continued to execute faithfully for almost 60 years. She also said in later years, "You can see how bad things were at that point, when no one who knew Reich wanted or was willing to take this job. So that in the end it was taken up by a total stranger."

The Trust faced many legal challenges under Higgins' leadership. The first was that Reich's entire archives had been stolen by Aurora Karrer, a woman Reich was romantically involved with leading up to the time of his imprisonment and death. Karrer flatly denied having anything that belonged to Reich; two lengthy legal battles were required to force her to return the vast majority of the material—though some items, most notably Reich's diaries from 1922-1934, remain missing.

The FDA's Injunction against Reich was breathtakingly sweeping in legally sanctioning the destruction of orgone energy accumulators and the burning of Reich's soft cover scientific journals. It did not, however, sanction the burning of Reich's hardcover books, instead only demanding they be withdrawn from circulation until "all reference to orgone energy was deleted." Nonetheless, when FDA officials arrived at the Orgone Institute Press warehouse in New York City in August 1956, they insisted that Reich's employees also load the hardcover books onto a truck and throw them into the fire at the Gansevoort Street Incinerator Plant. Tragically, Reich's employees did not push back on this egregious violation of an Injunction whose provisions were already draconian enough.

In 1960, FDA officials discovered another New York City warehouse still contained some of the journals slated for destruction and the banned books, and they alerted Higgins of their plan to destroy these materials also. Knowing of the previous episode, she met them at the warehouse with her lawyer. When the FDA agents again tried to take the hardcover books along with the journals, the 34-year old Higgins said “Put those back, they don’t belong to you.” They meekly complied. So often, all it takes for evil to happen is for good people to stand by and say nothing.

Ms. Higgins repeatedly credited several figures as crucial in helping the Trust in its early years. One was Tom Ross, Reich’s longtime caretaker at Orgonon, from whom Higgins says she learned an enormous amount about Reich’s way of working and thinking. More than that, Higgins credited the human warmth, hospitality and support Ross and his wife Bea offered her. Lawyer Leonard Kolleeny served as the Trust’s legal counsel, almost entirely pro bono, for decades. New York publisher Roger Straus knew little about Reich’s work but committed to help Higgins bring his works back into print, beginning in 1960, because of his hatred of censorship. Dr. Chester Raphael offered her a lot of help as well, especially in editing Reich’s works for publication and in opening the Wilhelm Reich Museum—in the former Orgone Energy Observatory building. Richard Wolfe, Rare Books Librarian at Harvard’s Countway Library of Medicine, also helped Higgins arrange the safe preservation of Reich’s archives there, beginning in 1973. While these men (with the exception of Ross and Raphael), knew little or nothing about Reich’s work, each was struck and inspired by the force of Higgins’ personality and the depth of her commitment to protecting Reich’s legacy, according to the instructions left in his Will.

Over the sixty years since becoming Trustee, Higgins worked long and hard to learn copyright law, museum design, and a hundred other areas of expertise. Among her many accomplishments are:

- Opening and maintaining the Wilhelm Reich Museum and maintain the property at Orgonon.
- Creating a complete catalog for Reich’s Archives—many thousands of items—and assuring their safe preservation.
- Bringing back into print and keeping in print all of Reich’s previously destroyed and banned books. Without her labors and the help of Farrar, Straus and Giroux, many of us might never have been able to read Reich’s work.
- Publishing previously unpublished manuscripts from archives, and English translations of German-language works that Reich had prepared for publication but never completed (e.g. *The Invasion of Compulsory Sex-Morality*, *The Bion Experiments*, *The Bioelectrical Investigation of Sexuality and Anxiety*, *Early Writings, v. 1*, *Genitality*). Additionally, protecting Reich’s works from plagiarism, attempts at pirating his books, etc.
- Creating a new journal, *Orgonomic Functionalism*, as the venue for publishing archival manuscripts. In addition, organizing publication of The Reich-A.S. Neill correspondence (*Record of a Friendship*) and four volumes of selections from Reich’s diaries and letters: *Passion of Youth*, *Beyond Psychology*, *American Odyssey*, and *Where’s the Truth?*
- Arranging and supervising new foreign translations of Reich’s works into more than 20 languages.
- Initiating in August 1980 annual summer conferences devoted to different aspects of Reich’s work. These went on continuously through 2007, then occasionally between 2008-2014. The conferences have picked up again on an annual basis since 2015.
- Assisting the Kickstarter campaign that launched the new documentary film by Kevin Hinchey and Glenn Orkin, “Love, Work and Knowledge: The Life and Trials of Wilhelm Reich.”

When asked once if she recalled anything in her upbringing or education that might have prepared her to be such a fierce defender of Reich's legacy—indeed to devote most of her life to that effort—Higgins replied: "Growing up, I was very aware and was always haunted about what happens to unusual, creative people, how generally they are destroyed....I sensed it personally and I read a lot of books about unusual people. That's something I understood very early and to this day understand. And that played a role in my horror of what was going on with Reich, and my feeling for this country. I was horrified by what was going on.

"And I think I brought something else to it. I certainly didn't bring any knowledge of science. In fact I had avoided science...it didn't interest me at all. It really wasn't until I began to study Reich that I began to realize that science and art, the humanities...were joined. But I was capable of standing on my own. I didn't need a lot of people to approve of me. And I think that has served me very well....These things don't look like anything if you were to put them on a curriculum vita—I have nothing on my curriculum vita that would mean anything....But I have these human experiences which have enabled me to do the best I can with it. And I think everyone, whether they know it or not, functions on that basis."

Mary Boyd Higgins suffered a stroke and died peacefully a few days later in the company of a dear friend on 8 January 2019. This unique and remarkable woman will be greatly missed.