

Physicians for Social Responsibility 2019 VISIONARY LEADERS AWARDS

Mary Olson—attending for WNC PSR, November 7, 2019 Washington DC

It was an honor to attend the award ceremony held by Physicians for Social Responsibility (PSR) on Thursday November 7 in Washington, DC. I was there to honor my teacher, mentor and collaborator in very important work early in my career, Dr Helen Caldicott. I was also pleased and proud to represent Physicians for Social Responsibility of Western North Carolina (WNC PSR) at the event.

Unfortunately, I had a local transportation delay and arrived at the venue just as Dr Caldicott finished her afternoon keynote address. It was a happy accident however that I walked in the door immediately adjacent to her exit of the podium—allowing me to deliver a congratulatory hug, even as I was walking in to the event.

Following Caldicott a panel of five visionary leaders were moderated by Dr Heidi Hutner:



From left:

- *Kelly Campbell, Executive Director of Oregon PSR;*
- *Lindsay Harper, Executive Director of Georgia WAND Education Fund, Inc.;*
- *Catherine Killough, Advocacy and Leadership Coordinator at Women Cross DMZ;*
- *Jacqueline Patterson, Director of the NAACP's Environmental and Climate Justice Program;*
- *Moderator Heidi Hutner, filmmaker and professor at Stony Brook University;*
- *Helen Caldicott, former PSR President, anti-nuclear activist and pediatrician.*

Each panelist made an opening statement about their work and commitments, and were then posed a series of questions from moderator, Dr Heidi Hutner. This style of discourse is less linear than some and lead to very rich and personal interactions among the speakers. I was deeply moved by the depth and breadth of the work these activist leaders have undertaken, and their obvious passion for our collective well-being.

The audience was then invited to join in the questions and discussion. By the end of the session it was abundantly clear that these women are creating a path towards a sustainable future and truly inspired by their visions of peace and a just and healthy future.

The panel received a standing ovation from a room full of long-time PSR activists from across the USA as well as staff and Board Members of allied national organizations. I was pleased to greet old friends

Chuck Johnson (MA), Alfred Meyer (NY), and Robert Gould (CA) as well as see many other PSR activists I recognized across the room and also Jeff Carter, Executive Director of PSR.

Before the evening reception began several people I had not seen in a long time who have been active in stopping the expansion of nuclear power in Virginia gathered for a bite in the Food Court of the Ronald Reagan Building where both the afternoon and evening sessions were held.

That evening there was a delicious combination of celebration with food and drink, and a formal awards ceremony. Jeff Carter, Executive Director of PSR MC'd the event, sharing the award introductions with key PSR staff and friends, including Dr Ira Helfand, Co-Chair of International Physicians for Prevention of Nuclear War and long time PSR leader.



I was deeply impressed that Dyanna Jaye, Co-Founder of the enormous youth-led SUNRISE Movement, came in person to receive an award for the Movement. Sunrise is a primary supporter of the Green New Deal, which it helped to formulate. It was truly inspiring to see a younger leader who has such confidence and success.

Left--Dyanna Jaye

Well-deserved Visionary awards went to **Marylia Kelley**, Co-Founder and Executive Director of TriValley CAREs (Communities Against a Radioactive Environment), and **Kelly Campbell and Regna Merritt**, Chapter Leaders of Oregon PSR. Significant that all of the evening's honorees were women.

The reason I made the trip to DC was because PSR presented one of my mentors, **Dr. Helen Caldicott**, with a **Lifetime Achievement Award**.



Earlier in the day I had raised my hand, along with the majority of those present, when a moderator asked if Helen had inspired our activism on nuclear matters. Before I ever became an activist, I feel that Helen's work actually saved my life.

As a young assistant in research working for a professor at Yale Medical School in 1984, I was contaminated (unintentionally) with a radioactive-tracer substance (P-32) at much higher levels than most labs use. It was Helen's book **Nuclear Madness** that helped me make sense of my situation when many around me were under-informed about radiation, or seeking to limit their liability. Helen's uncompromising voice of the truth about radiation restored some equilibrium in me when I was a terrified young woman who was isolated and alone. Finding Helen's book was for me a life-saver.

Less than 10 years later, when I had joined the staff of Nuclear Information and Resource Service, I was deeply honored to help Helen with her 1994 update of the same book. In the following decade, Helen and I collaborated on many projects including two symposia on radiation at the New York Medical Society as well as a conference here, at UNCA. Before that, Helen and I tackled the question of computers in nuclear systems and the 1999—2000 transition (Y2K), and also worked together on the fight to stop a global nuclear waste dump proposed for Australia called the Pangea Project.

It was my honor, and to me, my duty, to be present to honor Helen Caldicott as PSR recognized her enduring contributions towards sanity in the Nuclear Age.