

9 Women Who Excelled Are Honored by Radcliffe

Special to The New York Times

CAMBRIDGE, Mass., Oct. 30 — When Dr. Mary S. Calderone said, "Life isn't easy at all — there are hard, hard things you have to solve along the way," she might have been speaking not just for herself but for all nine of the distinguished American women honored by Radcliffe College for their lifetime achievements.

Dr. Calderone, who worked for many decades to make sexuality a major concern of health professionals, and six of the other award recipients were at Radcliffe Saturday, reflecting on their lives, work and concerns, and on the things that influenced them.

Together the seven women — two others, the historian Barbara Tuchman, who is 71 years old, and the artist Georgia O'Keeffe, 86, were unable to participate — presented a mosaic of their life experiences to an audience of 300.

Dr. Calderone Describes Her Life

With the same outspoken, articulate manner that enabled her to change the way many Americans viewed sexuality, Dr. Calderone described her childhood in Paris, her education at the Brearley School and Vassar College, and the influence of her father, the photographer Edward Steichen.

During and after college, she aspired to an acting career but eventually abandoned it and took a job selling toasters at an Abraham & Straus store. She quit that job, too, realizing, "I loved the toasters but I disliked the people."

Later, after a promising performance on an aptitude test, she entered Columbia University's College of Physicians and Surgeons. But she was still "not out of the woods," she recalled, adding that one professor told her, "It does seem to me that you're not quite at home with the lipids." These difficulties were compounded by a divorce, the death of an

8-year-old daughter and her own poor health. But determined to turn her life around, she took her medical degree from the University of Rochester and began her career in medicine.

Founded Council on Sexuality

In 1964, Dr. Calderone, who is now 79, helped found the Sex Information and Education Council of the United States, an organization that seeks to increase social and institutional awareness of sexuality. Her efforts at bringing attention to a once-shrouded

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aspect of health have been widely recognized. She is an adjunct professor in the program in human sexuality of New York University's department of health education.

The paths followed by the other Radcliffe award recipients were as diverse as Dr. Calderone's. Several of them — including the consumer activist Esther Peterson, 76; Jean E. Fairfax, 63, director of legal information and community services of the NAACP Legal Defense and Educational Fund, and Lucy Somerville Howorth, 88 — have spent part or all of their lives in government or public service.

With an average age of 78, most of the honorees were born around the turn of the century and lived their youths in the days of the campaigns for women's suffrage that led to the ratification in 1920 of the 19th Amendment.

Mrs. Howorth, a lawyer who has spent most of her life in the political arena, left her native Mississippi

after graduating from Randolph-Macon Woman's College in 1916. She went to New York City, where she worked in political organizations.

"It was in New York City at that time that I learned to be a whole human being," she said, recalling the political meetings and rallies she attended and her visits to settlement houses from 1916 to 1918.

She returned to Mississippi, attended law school and was appointed a Commissioner of Federal District Court in 1927. She was elected to the Mississippi State Legislature, following in the footsteps of her mother, the first woman elected to the Legislature.

Others Felt Parental Influence

As with Mrs. Howorth, parental influence was important in the lives and work of the other honorees. Dr. Helen B. Taussig, 85, a pediatric cardiologist who helped develop the "blue baby" operation, said that encouragement from her father helped her overcome reading difficulties that were the result of dyslexia. And Prof. Chien-Shiung Wu, 71, an experimental physicist who came to this country from China, said she originally planned to study education in college, but chose physics instead at her father's suggestion.

Similarly, the writer Eudora Welty said an important part of her creative success came from the support and "the sense of continuity" given to her by her family. Miss Welty, 74, received a Pulitzer Prize in 1973 for her book "The Optimist's Daughter."

In all the stories, fate also played a role. Professor Wu, an emeritus professor at Columbia University, wondered what would have happened to the theory of the structure of the universe that her experiments altered if she had stayed in China and become a schoolteacher.

As Dr. Calderone put it: "Serendipity has played a role in my life. I didn't engineer all of it." ■



United Press International

Among the recipients of awards at Radcliffe College were Prof. Chien-Shiung Wu, a physicist, seated at left; Lucy Somerville Howorth, a lawyer, seated right; Eudora Welty, the writer, left rear, and Dr. Mary S. Calderone, a physician.