

# Selma Harrison Calmes, M.D., to Receive 2018 Wood Library-Museum Distinguished Service Award

Kathryn E. McGoldrick, M.D., FCAI (Hon)  
WLM Past President, 2001-2004

When the bibliophile and avid collector of anesthesia equipment and artifacts Paul M. Wood, M.D. (1894-1963) donated his personal collection to ASA in the early 1930s, what was to become the eponymous Library-Museum of Anesthesiology was essentially a one-man operation.

During the ensuing 85 years, however, the Wood Library-Museum of Anesthesiology (WLM) has enjoyed impressive growth and global acclaim, no doubt surpassing even the most expansive dreams of its founder. Today's WLM family, composed of more than 30 dedicated librarians, archivists, trustees, committee members and a distinguished honorary curator, is passionately committed to maintaining and advancing the WLM as a vibrant beacon of knowledge and service, firmly believing that the rich heritage of our specialty should not be relegated to the dust bin of insignificance or be abandoned to the predations of time.

In 2016, the WLM established the WLM Distinguished Service Award (DSA) to honor the leadership, engagement and example of our most outstanding volunteers. At the annual spring meeting, the Board of Trustees of the WLM chose Selma Harrison Calmes, M.D., as the recipient of its 2018 DSA. A graduate of Baylor College of Medicine, where



Selma Harrison Calmes, M.D.



she was one of only three women in the class of 1965, Dr. Calmes completed residency training in anesthesiology at the Hospital of the University of Pennsylvania. The vast majority of her professional life has been spent at the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA), where she rose to the rank of clinical professor and served as Chair of Anesthesiology

at Olive View-UCLA from 1988-2004. Since 2007, she is a volunteer faculty member at David Geffen School of Medicine at UCLA, mentoring medical students and others who write historical theses. From 2009-17, Selma served as anesthesiology consultant to the Los Angeles County Department of Medical Examiner-Coroner. In this latter role, she reviewed many interesting cases, including circumstances surrounding the death of Michael Jackson.

Dr. Calmes's service to the WLM dates back to 1984, when she began her first nine-year term as a trustee. In 2006, she returned for an encore, serving as a trustee until 2015, and as Vice President of the Board from 2014-15. She continues her dedication to the WLM, currently serving on the Paul Wood Fellowship and the Liaison Committees. Her contributions to the specialty of anesthesiology, however, extend far beyond her diligent work at the WLM.

In the late 19th century, Ralph Waldo Emerson exhorted, "Do not go where the path may lead, go instead where there is no path and leave a trail." Dr. Calmes responded energetically to that clarion call, educating us about the history of anesthesia, with a particular focus on the often-unheralded contributions that women physicians made to the relatively young specialty in the early 20th century. She documented with Proustian clarity the growing pains of the early



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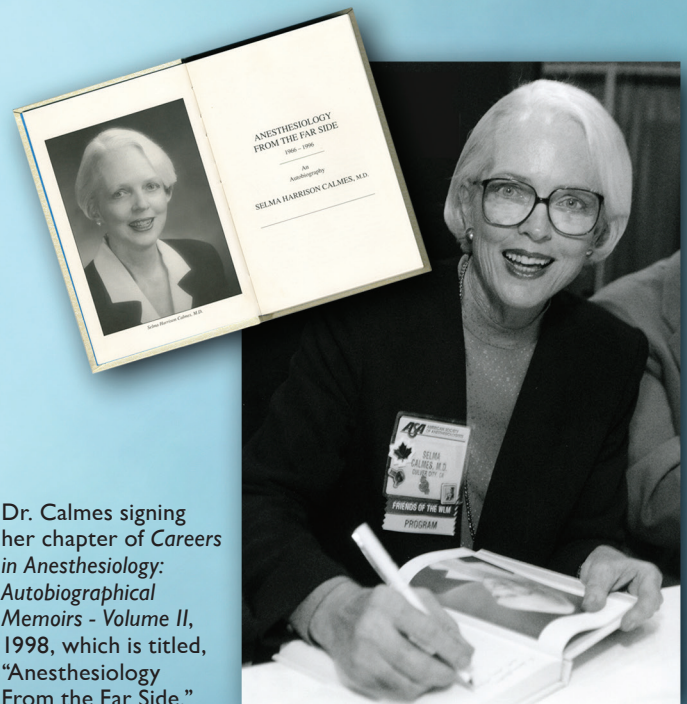
years, introducing us to heroines that included Drs. Mary Botsford, Isabella Herb, Julia Arrowood and Margo Deming. Boswellian in her devotion to her subjects, Dr. Calmes's portraits sparkle with precision and delicacy, providing us with accounts that are both immediate and shadowed by the passage of time. She reanimates these pioneers, enabling us to see their humanity and depth when confronting adversity.

***“As a woman who changed with the times and changed the times, Dr. Calmes’s achievements embody the resourcefulness and tenacity of her spirit. She has admirably chronicled the rich history of our specialty by personifying the mission of the WLM to ‘advance the profession of anesthesiology by preserving and sharing its heritage and knowledge.’”***

Dr. Calmes became a devoted admirer of Dr. Virginia Apgar as a result of stories told to her by a now-deceased UCLA colleague, Dr. Richard Patterson, who had worked with Dr. Apgar at Columbia College of Physicians and Surgeons. During the years 1990-94, Selma was an energetic and integral part of the successful political campaign to have Dr. Apgar, inventor of the eponymous Apgar score, honored with a Great Americans series commemorative stamp. Dr. Calmes provided the historical material required for advocacy, highlighting the fact that Dr. Apgar was an anesthesiologist, not an obstetrician, pediatrician or neonatologist – common misconceptions at the time. Subsequent to her acclaim as an anesthesiologist, Dr. Apgar received an M.P.H. degree from Johns Hopkins and developed an interest in teratology. From 1959 until her death in 1974, she worked with the March of Dimes Foundation, serving as Vice President for Medical Affairs and directing its research to prevent and treat birth defects. (March of Dimes, founded in 1938 by President Franklin D. Roosevelt as the National Foundation for Infantile Paralysis to combat polio, eventually expanded its focus to the prevention of birth defects and infant mortality). Notably, Dr. Calmes was afflicted with polio as a child, developed post-polio syndrome and has been a highly effective educator on the late effects of polio among survivors of that devastating disease. Importantly, in 2011, Selma spoke about anesthesia issues for polio survivors at the Karolinska Institute in Stockholm, Sweden, and at a meeting of European post-polio groups in Copenhagen, Denmark.

Dr. Calmes has an impeccable provenance as a scholar of anesthesia history. In 1980, she completed a National Endowment for the Humanities Summer Fellowship in Medical History at the University of Cincinnati under the direction of Dr. Sol Benison (1920-2006), a prominent medical historian. Where others snorkel when researching an historical event, Selma scuba dives, filling the role of consummate sleuth, and gracing her readers with careful and original scholarship. A member of the American Association for the History of Medicine, Dr. Calmes in 1982 co-founded, with Dr. Rod Calverley, the Anesthesia History Association and served as the first newsletter editor for that organization from 1983-85. In addition, she was twice the recipient of the David M. Little, Jr., Prize from the Anesthesia History Association, and has delivered several prestigious eponymous lectures, including the WLM’s Lewis H. Wright Memorial Lecture.

All at the WLM know Dr. Selma Harrison Calmes as a wise, kind and generous colleague who is a role model of excellence, integrity and perseverance. As a woman who changed with the times and changed the times, Dr. Calmes’s achievements embody the resourcefulness and tenacity of her spirit. She has admirably chronicled the rich history of our specialty by personifying the mission of the WLM to “advance the profession of anesthesiology by preserving and sharing its heritage and knowledge.” It is an honor to select Dr. Selma Harrison Calmes as the 2018 recipient of the WLM Distinguished Service Award.



Dr. Calmes signing her chapter of *Careers in Anesthesiology: Autobiographical Memoirs - Volume II, 1998*, which is titled, “Anesthesiology From the Far Side.”