



“I’ve Got Something to Say”

## **Clara Lemlich Awards**

March 20, 2012

The 8<sup>th</sup> Floor 17 West 17<sup>th</sup> Street NYC

## The Clara Lemlich Awards

The Awards honor women who have been working for the larger good their entire lives, in the tradition of those who sparked so many reforms in the aftermath of the Triangle Shirtwaist Factory Fire over one hundred years ago.

We honor -- in the words of the poet Marge Piercy -- people who  
*jump into work head first / without dallying in the shadows.... who do what has to be done, again and again.*

“I’VE GOT SOMETHING TO SAY” shouted the 23-year old Clara Lemlich in her native Yiddish during a tense, crowded meeting of garment workers in Cooper Union’s Great Hall in 1909. Rising from the audience, she interrupted Samuel Gompers and the other union leaders on stage. Her speech inspired the crowd, leading to an unexpected vote to strike, and to what would become known as the Uprising of 20,000.

Born to a Jewish family in the Ukraine, Lemlich migrated to the U.S. in 1903, found work in the garment industry, and soon became active in the International Ladies' Garment Workers Union. The 1909 strike led to reforms – but the Triangle Shirtwaist Factory was a hold-out and did not implement safety improvements.

The fire that took 146 lives on March 25, 1911 was seen across the country as a tragedy that could have been avoided, and it sparked a movement that pushed politicians to accept a new notion about the responsibilities of government. Lemlich continued to be active in the labor movement until she was pushed out for her leftist politics. She continued to work for women’s suffrage, led a boycott of butcher shops to protest meat prices, campaigned for unemployment relief, and fought for tenants’ rights.

One hundred and one years later we are proud to honor her legacy and to honor those who follow proudly in her footsteps.

## Program

*Bread and Roses* A song with Jacqueline Steiner, Henry Foner, and Richard Corey

*Welcome* Donald Rubin and Evelyn Jones Rich

### *Presentation of Honorees*

Judy West *jazz singer/tenant organizer* Eleanor

Tilson Jackie Steiner *musician/anti-fascist*

*activist* Amy Muldoon

Betty Reardon *feminist peace educator* Jane

Margules

Juanita Nelson *war tax resistor* Evelyn Jones

Rich

Connie Ling *garment worker organizer* Rose

Imperato

Connie Hogarth *agitator for civil rights and the environment*

Tanya Beltran

*LaborArts* Rachel Bernstein

*Poem* Esther Cohen

*Which Side Are You on* A song with Steiner, Foner, Corey

## 2012 HONOREES

### Judy West



Growing up during the Great Depression convinced me that an economic and political catastrophe of this magnitude should never happen again. From that young age, and for the rest of my long life, I have been active in a score of movements that define "power to the people".

I participated against war, racism and against the stacked economic system.

I was a singer and a marketing and media executive in advertising until 1973, when I opened "SEIZE THE TIME" book and record store with the Black Panthers. My last job was as Public Relations and Political Director for Local 802, AFM. Since my retirement (in 2000) I have been the Labor Coordinator for Tenants and Neighbors and now for Tenants PAC.

### Jacqueline (Jackie) Steiner is a folk and classical singer, a



writer of topical songs, and an editor. From 1946 to 1948, she was executive secretary of the Joint Anti-Fascist Refugee Committee/Spanish Refugee Appeal in Boston. During that period, she joined a group of musicians who met regularly at the home of Bess Lomax Hawes and her husband, Butch Hawes (both former Almanac Singers)

**Betty A. Reardon**

is a feminist peace educator and activist



who has been working in education and human rights activism for over half a century.

She is best known as the Founding Director Emeritus of the International Institutes on Peace Education (IIPE), a global

consortium for continuing peace education held annually since 1982 in various world regions. She was also the founder of the Peace Education Concentration and the Peace Education Center at Teachers College Columbia University. However, she herself attributes both the means and the ends of her work to her years in classroom teaching from middle through graduate school and adult non-formal education; and to her activist work in the international movements for peace, human rights and gender equality.

Recognized world wide as a leading theorist, designer of pedagogic materials and processes in peace education, she has integrated feminist and human rights perspectives on global issues into all her work. She has argued the need for feminists and peace activists and researchers to take into account the integral relationship linking patriarchy, and war and to recognize human rights as the fundamental foundation of peace.

Her work has taken her to all parts of the world. She was the initiator and the first Academic Coordinator of the Hague Appeal for Peace Global Campaign for Peace Education.

served as a consultant to several UN agencies, her activities as an NGOs representative to the UN included working with the process that produced Security Council Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security.

Published widely in the field of peace and human rights education, and women's issues, her most recent publication is *The Gender Imperative: Human Security vs. State Security* (Routledge 2010).

### **Juanita Nelson**



has devoted her life to activism in the areas of social justice, passivism, non-violence and peace. Over seven decades she has led by example, challenging racial discrimination and US government support of war as a response to perceived

national and international threats.

Nelson challenged Jim Crow on a train ride from her native Cleveland to Georgia at the age of 16. As a student at Howard University, she teamed up with friends including Pauli Murray and Maida Springer and was arrested sitting in at a lunch counter in 1943, seventeen years before the Greensboro, North Carolina sit-ins.

A founding member of the Cleveland Chapter of the Congress of Racial Equality, (CORE), Nelson met her life-time partner,

## Connie Ling



was born in the Philippines and lived in Hong Kong before coming to the US in 1967. After working in non-union garment shops, she got a job in a union factory as a sewing machine operator in 1970. Shortly after starting work, she was asked to be a shop representative because, as she says, she 'had a big mouth' and was not shy about speaking up for herself and her co-workers. In addition to representing workers, she served as a translator to help them access community resources and gain more of a voice in politics. In 1982, Connie was asked to join Local 23-25 of the International Ladies' Garment Workers Union as a staff member to help represent and organize workers in Chinatown. She was instrumental in helping organize the 1982 Chinatown Strike.

With three children in public school, Connie served as President of the Parents Association of the Dr. Sun Yat Sen Middle School (IS 131) and was very active in her local School Board. She was also active in the Hok Shan Association in Chinatown, helping seniors, supporting political activity, and working on voter registration drives.

Connie was a founding member of the Chinese Chapter of the Coalition of Labor Union Women (CLUW) and the Asian Pacific American Labor Alliance (APALA). She continues to be politically active and supports voter registration drives in her community.

Her environmental focus of the past few years has centered around climate change and the dangers of global warming. She is one of the founding members of the Climate Crisis Coalition, launched in 2004 in Lenox, Mass.

She is on the board of the national organization Defending Dissent (formerly the First Amendment Foundation). Defending the Bill of Rights and particularly the First Amendment had become more urgent than ever in these times.

After many years living in Westchester, she and her husband, Art Kamell, moved to Dutchess county, in a house facing the beloved Hudson River and Storm King Mountain. Neighbors are Pete and Toshi Seeger and with their inspiration, she has become closely involved in the Beacon Sloop Club, an offshoot of Clearwater. She is an active member of the Dutchess Democratic Committee and the Fishkill Democratic Committee, and has helped reactivate the Southern Dutchess NAACP. With the Mid-Hudson Progressive Alliance she has helped organize and lobby on issues such as ending the wars and funding human need priorities. The current focus is on health care reform, particularly working for a single payer system.

In 2009 she was given the Ossie Davis Lifetime Achievement award by the Westchester Human Rights Commission.

Overriding everything she does is a belief in nonviolence, alternatives to war and working to leave a healthy earth for our children and for seven generations ahead.





## Won't You Celebrate with Me

By Lucille Clifton

Won't you celebrate with me

What I have shaped into

A kind of life? I had no model.

Born in Babylon

Both nonwhite and woman

What did I see to be except myself?

I made it up

Here on this bridge between

Starshine and clay,

My one hand holding tight

My other hand; come celebrate

With me that everyday

Something has tried to kill me

And has failed.