

*Comments by Willy Lensch, chief of staff to HMS Dean George Q. Daley, presented on behalf of the dean*

Harvard Medical School's Countway Library reception October 26, 2018

I am so pleased to welcome you to this exciting event, especially within my favorite building on campus.

I believe that it was the author Jorge Luis Borges who said that he imagined that Heaven would be a kind of library. I strongly concur with his sentiments. I am a fan of libraries and the work they do.

Today we honor and celebrate the Nobel Peace Prizes awarded to visionary physician activists.

More than 50 years ago, a group of physicians, most of whom were right here at HMS, recognized the overwhelming danger that nuclear weapons posed for this world and dedicated themselves to finding a way to make sure they were never used.

Using skills they had in large measure—a capacity for caring and expertise in researching the health effects of nuclear weapons—these physicians showed the world the monstrous consequences of thermonuclear conflict.

They also motivated their medical peers to action.

Their work, as we know, resulted in two Nobel Peace Prizes.

But time has shown us it produced much more:

- a series of papers in the *New England Journal of Medicine* that have set the standard for science-based activism
- the development of pivotal physician activist groups—Physicians for Social Responsibility and the International Physicians for the Prevention of Nuclear War
- the co-founding of the International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons
- and the genesis of a global call to action on denuclearization efforts such as the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons

The work of these visionaries continues.

Among us are members of the board of the International Physicians for the Prevention of Nuclear War. They continue to work to prevent the proliferation of nuclear weapons.

Likewise, there are members of the Greater Boston Physicians for Social Responsibility here. They, too, remain vigilant, active and motivated to stem nuclear escalation.

Also among us are medical students. The next generation of physician-activists. These students and their peers will carry on this vital work and shoulder this commitment to build a world safe from the threat of nuclear destruction.

The nuclear explosions in Japan in August 1945 occurred within 3 days and 3 hours of one another. In that short span of time, the world learned what devastation a nuclear bomb could cause.

Since then, physician-activists have tried to prevent such an affront to life from happening again, and to promote healing. These actions are fundamental to medicine—and to art.

I will end by noting that I recently had the pleasure of chatting with Martha Katz. I admire her work on behalf of our common interests in health, peace and the mutual welfare of the planet on which we live.

Martha told me of her experiences in Japan, which brought to mind a koan, that I will share today.

It is one that is rather famous and concerns a goose living inside of a bottle. The goose was placed there as a gosling and fed until it was fully grown and filled the entire space. Its owner wished to remove it from the bottle but without hurting the goose or breaking the bottle. The question was how to achieve this. What is the answer?

The story goes that the Tang Dynasty Buddhist Master Nansen Fugan considered this unsolvable riddle. He then clapped his hands and exclaimed, “Look! The goose is out!”

What I take from Master Fugan’s answer is that among the multitude of ways to approach a seemingly insurmountable problem, the first should be to simply decide that it is solvable. Otherwise, we might accidentally give ourselves permission to leave it unresolved.

I now invite you to experience the performance of THREE, a work that reminds us of those fateful 3 days in 1945 and encourages us to remain committed to healing and peace.