

## Kathryn R. Mahaffey



Kathryn R. Mahaffey passed away peacefully in her sleep June 2, 2009 after decades of work that advanced the nation's health and environment. She is remembered as a beloved wife, mother, scientist and community member who served as a source of inspiration with her principled and tireless intellect. She was the rare scientist who knew how to apply the lessons from academic research to protect the public health. Her work changed the face of epidemic heavy metal poisoning, endocrine disruptors and many other environmental pollutants that afflict children, pregnant women and at-risk populations. Literally millions of children have avoided the tragedy of lead and mercury poisoning as a consequence of her work. Dr. Mahaffey was the first to ensure that the number of lead poisoned children in the US was determined accurately through the National Health and Nutrition Examination Survey in the 1970s, an action that enabled the nation to track a more than 90% reduction in children's blood lead levels.

Dr. Mahaffey conducted path-breaking scholarship on mercury poisoning, helping to disentangle the web of bioaccumulation that had stymied

previous efforts to seriously address the problem. She was a principal author of the eight-volume Mercury Study Report to Congress that broke new scientific ground while focusing national attention on mercury exposure in the U.S. Most recently, she helped organize an international conference in Japan on reducing exposure to mercury from eating contaminated fish, while balancing key nutrients such as omega-3-fatty acids. As a public health activist, her work won cheers from children's health scientists and attacks from those who considered the facts to be injurious to their interests.

Dr. Mahaffey joined the public service in 1972, working first at the Food and Drug Administration, followed by the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health, the National Institute of Environmental Health Sciences and numerous positions at the Environmental Protection Agency. Most recently she was a distinguished professorial lecturer at George Washington University, where she taught toxicology. She was also engaged in helping to design new studies, such as the National Children's Study.

The recipient of numerous awards from government and academe, she received the prestigious Arthur Lehman Award for regulatory toxicology from the Society of Toxicology and the Bronze Medal for Commendable Service from EPA for her work on mercury. She was also appointed to many panels by the National Academy of Sciences. She most recently filed a scientific critique of a government report on risks and benefits of fish consumption; in her comments she demonstrated that an attempt to abandon fish advisories, which have helped reduce mercury exposure, was without scientific foundation.

A prolific writer, Dr. Mahaffey published over a hundred manuscripts in the peer-reviewed scientific

literature, eight reports to Congress, fifteen book chapters, and seven books.

Her personal life was brimming with the same intensity she brought to science, with achievements in music, sewing, knitting, furniture and interior design. A love of cooking and people made her parties special and memorable. She was a loving friend and family member who endeared people with her unique blend of intellect and tenderness.

She founded and led the Green Group at the Westmoreland Congregational United Church of Christ, Bethesda, Maryland where she also served as a trustee. As a gifted volunteer math tutor and leader of the math club at the Marie Reed Elementary School (one of the poorest elementary schools in Washington DC) she invested many hours with underachieving students.

A native of Mahaffey, Pennsylvania, she graduated from Penn State University and held a doctorate in nutrition, physiology and biochemistry from Rutgers University. Her upbringing in rural Penn-

sylvania significantly shaped her beliefs that people and the earth are part of an interconnected system requiring essential protection.

Kate Mahaffey is survived by her husband, David Jacobs, her daughter, Harriet Meehan, her son, Bert Kramer, her mother, Harriet Mahaffey, her two sisters, Rebecca Latimer and Deborah Westover, her two step-children, Paul and Robin Jacobs, and her two grandchildren, Lillian Meehan and Evalyn Meehan.

A memorial service will be held on Tuesday evening, June 9, 2009, 7:00 PM at Westmoreland Congregational United Church of Christ, 1 Westmoreland Circle, Bethesda, Maryland. In lieu of flowers, contributions can be made to the Kathryn R. Mahaffey Memorial Scholarship Fund, which will enable students to pursue careers in science and public service. Checks can be made out to the Westmoreland Congregational United Church of Christ, with a notation on the check stating "Kathryn Mahaffey Foundation Fund".